Marion Barry: A Leader for Change in DC

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Individual Website

Last year I took a class that focused on poverty and equity in my community. From this class, I became interested in learning about the history of the area in which I live and the challenges faced by the residents. Living in the suburbs of Washington, DC, I decided I would research a local political figure, Marion Barry. I wanted to understand how Marion Barry was an impactful leader in DC and helped the African American community as well as the city of DC as a whole.

I conducted my research by first learning about Marion Barry through our school database such as U.S. History in Context with primary and secondary sources. Once I understood Barry’s past and where he came from, I read his autobiography “Mayor for Life”. This book provided key details and events from his life.  From our local library I read “Extraordinary People of the Civil Rights Movement” by Sheila Hardy and P. Stephen Hardy.  “Dream City” by Harry Jaffee and Tom Sherwood provided me with specific details about the history of DC politics, economics and social issues. In an effort to obtain additional information about Washington, DC, I contacted the Kiplinger Library at the DC Historical Society. The librarian there sent me related links that were useful in understanding DC at that time.  I read articles from the Washington Post online and gained insight to the climate and culture of DC over the years.

On April 16, D.C. Emancipation Day, I attended a discussion panel; Marion Barry: D.C. Emancipator, at the Historical Society of Washington D.C. Through this experience I was able to listen to first hand stories about Marion Barry and how he is known as “D.C.’s Greatest Emanicpator.”

I decided to create a website because this would allow me to display key information and photographs. I enjoy creating websites and had previous experience. Since Marion Barry was a leader of recent history, I felt a modern form of communication was appropriate. I chronologically grouped key events of the development of leadership with tabs, ending with legacy.

The ways in which Marion Barry changed DC is relative to the leadership and legacy theme because he motivated people in the community to not accept social segregation and discrimination but to share his vision and have hope that a better life was possible. Barry inspired others with his ideas to improve DC and his determination of equal opportunities for all people. He gained life long, unwavering support from the community, as is reflected in over forty years of public service, elections and comebacks. Marion Barry came to DC in 1965 and knew he wanted to change what he saw. He was passionate about resolving social, economic and educational issues and believed it was critical to involve the community in process. Marion Barry was an advocate for all DC residents who were denied access to opportunities for a better life.