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From Protest to Policy: Louis E. Martin and the Politics of Black Power

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The Fire Every Time:  
Reframing Black Power Across The Twentieth Century And Beyond

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## Introduction

In the post-civil rights era, an African American in the White House with direct access to the president posed a variety of significant advantages and reveals the unintended impact of Black Power in the era. According to biographer Alex Poinsett, before Louis Martin no African American had been granted direct and regular access to the president of the United States. While there were numerous African Americans who visited the president on a regular basis, Martin was the first African-American to enjoy regular access to the commander-in-chief. In an era when the commander-in-chief is an African American, the exploration of this topic may seem a moot point. However, considering the plethora of bureaucratic and racial challenges that the Obama Administration has faced in setting forth a fair agenda to address the needs of a diverse constituency, there are serious and interesting historical parallels worthy of consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Students of presidential politics then and now must engage the question of Black Power, not only in modes of protest and politics but also in the realm of public policy. We can trace the ongoing reverberations of Black Power policy agendas well through the early 1980s and into the present. In much the same manner as the modern civil rights movement, labor rights movement, and women's rights movement have been incorporated into the electoral political process, the ideals of Black Power, if not in its militant rhetoric, certainly in its objectives and emphasis on identity politics has been engaged by every White House since the Johnson Administration. Louis Martin

articulated his particular vision of Black Power in the form of a black policy agenda throughout many of these years.

Martin's unique vision, unparalleled access to the president, and unrivaled advising to mainstream civil rights organizations dwarfed the influence of his historical predecessors. Many historians and political scientists have put forth the significance of previous black advisors. During the 1930s Franklin Roosevelt had established a Black Cabinet and numerous other African-Americans have consulted with the president throughout history such as E. Frederic Morrow and Mary McLeod Bethune. None had been institutionalized in the executive hierarchy and bureaucratic process of the presidency quite like Louis Martin. Martin made the transition from being a key advisor to presidents on African American and urban affairs, to a special assistant whose advice and influence became part of the White House policy process and political strategy.<sup>2</sup>

He had gained much of his experience as a newspaper man, a black journalist, with roots and contacts extending from Savannah, Georgia to Detroit, Michigan. While in Detroit, Martin worked for the *Chronicle*, an African American newspaper that was devoted to covering many of the political and labor struggles of the era. From that experience he was informally initiated into the political machinery of the Democratic Party politics. He lived during the Sojourner Truth housing riots of 1942 and witnessed a series of battles (sometimes physical) between black laborers and the unions in Detroit over the question of the "craft union concept" which barred blacks from many profitable unions in the city. Martin was a vociferous critic of racial segregation in the pre-World

War II years and like Bayard Rustin and other activists of his generation, relied heavily on coalition politics between labor, white liberals, and black civic organizations.

In the post-World War II years and particularly in the Carter Administration, Martin came to be seen as a "man in the middle" a go-between a fiscally conservative president and a very demanding Black leadership. His office compiled and orchestrated a master list of black appointees that were well-worn from heavy usage. Later he worked with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (which he also helped establish in 1970) to develop a comprehensive directory of black appointees. This directory was more than a comprehensive list of blacks in every federal department, agency, and commission; it was a document of his networking ability to tap into black expertise, influence, and power in nearly every corner of the federal government.<sup>3</sup>

During the Carter Administration, Martin became the hub for some 150 blacks in federal government to voice concerns to the president. He was the first black insider to undertake a serious quantitative approach to making the rhetoric of Black Power a political reality throughout a policy agenda rather than mere political posturing. Martin also worked as a liaison to notify the black public of the president's commitments and accomplishments through the distribution of *Fact Sheets*.<sup>4</sup>

When Louis Martin joined the Carter Administration in 1978, his primary role was to address the president's priorities with black Americans. Martin arrived on the scene when various strands of Black Power were merging to present somewhat of a united front in electoral politics. Black hoped that the manifestation of power at the

polls would manifest in change throughout their communities. By 1975, nearly 3500 blacks had been elected to office across the nation.<sup>5</sup>

Martin oversaw an exciting time of 'black firsts' such a black female general in Army - Hazel Winfred Johnson and twenty black generals promoted by Carter. On a sheet entitled, "Top Blacks in the Administration," Louis Martin listed: Andrew Young, Clifford Alexander, Patricia Harris, Ben Brown, Jim Joseph, Eleanor Homes Norton, Joan Wallace, Percy Pierre, Mary Berry, Drew Days, Wade McCree, Chester Davenport, Azie Morton, William Beckham, Bernadine Denning, John Lewis, Carolyn Payton, William Allison, William Clement, Ernie Green, Weldon Rougeau.<sup>6</sup> These name represented a sampling of the intellectual fire power that Martin brought to the Washington policy agenda.

Despite Martin's involvement in three Democratic White Houses, very few works exist that examine his impact. The most popular and definitive work on the subject is Alex Poinsett's biography *Walking with Presidents* (1997). Poinsett provides the first and most detailed historical overview of Martin's significance in the civil rights literature and in policy history. Poinsett uses a variety of archival sources and interviews to argue that Martin played a key role in shaping the political possibilities of Black America through his advisory role to presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter. Poinsett's work on Martin signals his perspective on the interrelationships between the public policy and the latent Black Power Movement.

Martin never presented himself as a black radical nor publically endorsed the most radical elements of the Black Power Movement but he adeptly incorporated

elements and policy ideals into his own deliberations. He was a student of politics, carefully tracing the possible trajectory of black thinkers, artists and intellectuals during the most volatile period of the twentieth century. Martin kept the black agenda before President Carter, inviting black activists, actors, and professionals to a variety of events to expose the president to the multifaceted nature of Black Power and politics.

New works on Black Power have challenged popular misconceptions and academic distortions of the intent, reach, and relationship of the movement that allow us to fully appreciate Martin's dynamic role. Peniel Joseph's *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour* and *Neighborhood Rebels* have presented a new perspective of Black Power that illustrates how integrated Black Power was in the 1950s and 1960s, providing an integrated parallel to the traditional story of non-violence and civil disobedience, instead of a bookend to a period of interracial harmony. Also newer works like Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig's edited work *The Business of Black Power* have broadened discussions on the subject to include the rise of a politically conscious black business class and their endorsement of a brand of race-conscious capitalism that makes ample room for the perspectives of people like Louis Martin.<sup>7</sup>

This paper explores the role of Louis Martin during the Carter Administration to find out how the influence of Black Power shaped Martin's presence in the White House and his influence on public policy initiatives. The heightened visibility of black elected officials after the Gary Political Convention in 1972 endeared Martin to president whose own governance was deeply intertwined with the demands of a black policy agenda. Martin helps us better understand the role of Black Power in shaping public policy and

foreshadows the politics of white backlash which formally ended his role in the White House in 1981.

### **Special Assistant to the President on Black Affairs**

Louis Martin did not support Black Power as it was articulated by Stokely Carmichael and often distorted by the media. He was part of the older establishment with deep ties in the NAACP, Urban League and other organizations whose viability depended on white support and patronage and who were expected to publicly denounce Black Power. He argued for a strategy of power in which identity politics<sup>8</sup> was less a part of the political process but more or less the result of the policy outcome. His approach was a complex and deliberate outgrowth of coalition-based politics that had shaped his experiences in Detroit, New York, and Nigeria.<sup>9</sup>

Martin had missed the early momentum of the civil rights movement surrounding the sit-ins in North Carolina and Nashville because he had been serving in Nigeria as an editorial advisor to the Amalgamated Press of Nigeria in 1959 and 1960. His assignment was to advise the *Daily Service*, one of the agency's major papers. Martin lived in Nigeria in a time of optimism following the granting of independence by the British in 1960. However, he also recognized many of the problems that characterized the beginning chapters of African independence. He became acutely aware of the internal divisions between ethnic groups, the proclamation of independence and autonomy under the aegis of neocolonial hegemony, and the serious disconnect between what African Americans perceived Africa to be and what it really was. These

experiences may have imbued him with a certain sense of skepticism towards the factionalism he would encounter in the Black Power movement in particular and black politics in general following his return.<sup>10</sup>

In 1964, Martin repudiated the most militant elements of Black Power while addressing a crowd at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C.:

"There are a few Negroes who share the view that a separate state should be carved out of the United States...There are a few others who wish to take us all back to Africa...The most unfortunate aspect of all this silly, wild talk is that so much of it is being taken seriously. Further, the voices of sane, rational leadership among Negroes can hardly be heard above the noise and din raised by these emotionally disturbed, grown-up children who are masquerading as important leaders."<sup>11</sup>

Louis Martin's views reflected fractures of generational difference. Older civil rights activists, wary of the pace of change but also skeptical of youthful forays into separatist radicalism, cast a skeptical eye on Black Power. In 1966, Bayard Rustin wrote a widely read essay entitled "Black Power and Coalition Politics" in which he warned of coming backlash that would undermine efforts to pass economic legislation that would help both blacks and whites.

"I contend not only that black power lacks any real value for the civil rights movement, but that its propagation is positively harmful. It diverts the movement from a meaningful debate over strategy and tactics, it isolates the Negro community, and it encourages the growth of anti-Negro forces.

.... In its simplest and most innocent guise, black power merely means the effort to elect Negroes to office in proportion to Negro strength within the population. There is, of course, nothing wrong with such an objective in itself, and nothing inherently radical in the idea of pursuing it.

.... The relevant question, moreover, is not whether a politician is black or white, but what forces he represents."<sup>12</sup>

Rustin's essay was widely perceived as a rebuke to the separatist elements of the Black Power agenda. The work was published one year after Rustin's other influential piece, "From Protest to Politics," a work that prophetically warned of the movement's over-reliance on confrontation and the need to groom political candidates and develop a comprehensive policy agenda. One of the economic efforts under consideration was a bold budget presented by the A. Phillip Randolph Institute called the Freedom Budget. Rustin was invited to the White House on at least one occasion, and it appears that Martin accepted Rustin's approach based on his proposals for the presidential budget.<sup>13</sup>

While Martin clearly did not publicly endorse the Black Power movement, neither did he seek to completely discredit its ideas. For some historians the question of Black Power during the late 1960s and 1970s is a question of radicals versus moderation, however, if taken in context of the conservative opposition of the time, both Martin and Rustin proposed equally radical agendas, they simply posed them in a way that was more palatable for their white supporters. It is clear that Martin disagreed with the most outspoken elements of Black Power but his perspectives and solutions were framed in a generational response to the crises they both were threatened by. Both he and Kenneth Clark were more measured in their responses calculating the risks and possibilities instead of reverting to clichés.<sup>14</sup>

Following the Gary political convention in 1972, it became clear for Louis Martin

that while black separatism was not a viable political option it certainly had influenced the political dynamics within the Democratic Party. After all, Martin's position as special assistant to the president had first been offered to Richard Hatcher of Gary, who turned the position down. Martin joined the Carter White House during an era when many Black Power activists made it exceedingly clear that there were serious flaws in the civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965. Voting provisions had done little to address the dilemma of machine politics in the North, restaurants and schools closed rather than comply with new regulations, and it was apparent that many government bureaucrats who were supposed to be enforcing the laws were complicit in the process of non-conformity.<sup>15</sup>

As Peniel Joseph has written, "Black Power came of age at Gary." The old guard of the traditional civil rights organization was now forced to come to terms with the new perspectives, demands, rhetoric, and strategy of the avant-garde. Jesse Jackson and PUSH seemed to supplant the SCLC, the new Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) headed up by Roy Innis had little resemblance to the previous one.<sup>16</sup> The NAACP seemed once again out of place and a step late--it had boycotted the convention because whites were not allowed and in doing so had further undermined its position among a younger generation of black leadership and political activists.<sup>17</sup>

All of this happened in Gary, Indiana a city that at the time seemed to be brimming with promise but saddled with challenges. The mayor Richard Hatcher represented a new class of black mayors who had been given a mandate to address the problems of blight, white flight, and economic turmoil in what had once been vibrant

industrial centers of the nation. A diverse and often conflicted agenda emerged that included a list of reforms as diverse as community control of schools to nationalization of health care.<sup>18</sup>

We can be certain that the political proceedings had Gary caused a bit of concern for Louis Martin. As a power player in the Democratic Party machine, he knew that his position depended on an ability to corral the black vote, a skill that gave him credibility to white power brokers in party and the White House. Black Power advocates like Stokely Carmichael were upset because President Johnson had compromised with illegitimate delegates during the 1968 Democratic Convention, so egregious was the slight that some blacks left the Democratic Party to pursue alternative paths for political empowerment. These alternative paths posed a direct threat to the political math the Democrats needed to win the White House in 1976. According to Lee Sustar, "The Democratic Party establishment sought to harness the "Black Power" demand to its own ends. In 1967, Louis Martin, an African American deputy chair of the Democratic Party, recommended that the Johnson administration try to "achieve 'Black Power' in a constitutional, orderly manner." Johnson partially distracted by escalation in Vietnam and concerned with urban violence, announced a War on Poverty in 1964. The threat of an independent black political machine would directly challenge his power but more importantly the power of a broad-based progressive coalition needed to present a united front to the opposition.<sup>19</sup>

Martin would not have to be cautious for long, just two years after the Gary convention things began to fall apart for the independent political strategy of Black

Power. The second black political convention in Little Rock Arkansas in 1974 revisited previous themes of disunity but with greater intensity. The multiplicity of black ideas about what power meant and what was the proper road to liberation created a tangled mess of identities, political conflict, and opportunism.<sup>20</sup>

Louis Martin shifted the dynamism of Black Power politics to the reality of policy implementation as he came to understand how powerful bureaucrats were in federal and local government. It was the bureaucrats who had tremendous influence over the implementation of policy. In the worst-case scenario he was aware how African-Americans were discriminated against from educational opportunity, to job opportunities as his time in Detroit had acquainted him with. Martin was also familiar with what is termed today as institutional racism. He saw how upper-level government bureaucrats were not actively seek African Americans to fill key posts not necessarily because they were attempting to be racially hostile but because the cultural environment and institutional norms did not encourage that type of thinking.

One example of this challenge came during his time in the Kennedy administration. According to Poinsett, Martin and Sargent Shriver had decided to take a very proactive role in recruiting African Americans for the new administration. After compiling a list of names and a collection of resumes to demonstrate that the black talent did indeed exist for these positions, Martin recalled meeting with agency administrators to hear them respond that it would not be possible to fill posts with black candidates. Martin replied, "I'm sorry. I'll have to tell the president that you could not do it." Then the administrator would reconsider what he had said and take

Martin's suggestion more seriously.<sup>21</sup>

Louis Martin developed White House relationships with growing number of black professionals. Instead of relying on random black faces for input he made it his goal to recruit the brightest minds that he could find for expertise in realms of policy germane to the black experience or otherwise. He was influential in recruiting a Rhodes Scholar (Frank Lane), Phi Beta Kappa members and staffing seminal but low profile agencies with high caliber black talent (e.g, domestic policy council, office of management and budget).

By his own admission, Louis Martin pointed out these black candidates to the Carter Administration but often did not publicize their activities. In some instances this led to a "communication gap" between the public and the policy. Furthermore, Louis Martin's role unintentionally underscored the White House embracing a "new breed of Black professionals" who were willing to work under the radar and were less inclined to underscore their race a fact of policy. This may have helped the Carter administration assuage growing concerns of frightened white voters ambiguous, wary of the rising role of blacks in government but it failed to present the overall effectiveness of the first serious presidential attempts at representational employment to a disheartened black public.<sup>22</sup>

Despite these challenges and contradictions, Louis Martin made sure that the president was enveloped by black issues from a variety of experts and luminaries from academics with expertise in these matters including: Bernard Anderson, Andrew Brimmer, Jewel Plummer Cobb, Charles Hamilton (co-author of *Black Power* with

Stokeley Carmichael), Faustine Jones, Walter Leonard, Walter Massey, Bernard Watson, Clifton Wharton, and William J. Wilson. (Luncheon) He also showcased artists including Richmond Barther, Maragaret Burroughs, Ernest Crichlow, Lois Mailou Jones, and James Lesene Wells.<sup>23</sup>

### **Black Power/White House**

Louis Martin used existing contacts to embrace an agenda of Black Power more in line with the black middle-class and existing civil rights organizations. He learned from his own dismissal of Black Power a decade earlier but also the mistakes of the Nixon Administration in attempts to implement black capitalism without addressing racial stigma, lack of capital, and the need to offset historical economic disadvantage. Still smarting from a period of “benign neglect” proposed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nixon’s Irish-Catholic advisor turned African American specialist, Martin attempted to develop a cadre of expertise on African American issues using blacks inside and outside of academia.<sup>24</sup>

Leo Sullivan of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America was afforded two visits by Louis Martin. Sullivan was minister in Philadelphia, a city still reeling from police commissioner turned mayor Frank Rizzo's racist maneuvering, who in 1965 had called for a boycott of businesses in an effort to secure unemployment for blacks. Now he called on the president to augment his partially successful efforts with job training and placement programs to support his OIC with branches in 150 cities and 48 states.<sup>25</sup> Sullivan called for the Federal government to support 25,000 permanent

jobs for disadvantaged youth in the federal service. Sullivan would support 1000 businessmen to hire 75000 in an effort to reach a goal of 1 million. He urged for Carter to implement the President's Youth Initiative in spite of the current anti-inflation budget discussions. Sullivan's approach was in line with other thinkers who thought that an emphasis on youth could be a solution to problems of the race and poverty in the city and could avert the urban riots of the previous decade.<sup>26</sup>

Martin also tapped into his network at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to buttress the president's economic agenda. The NAACP supported the president's move to put more federal buildings in urban areas and to buy from high unemployment rate areas of the country and his position on the Panama Canal. Martin knew that in the aftermath of the Model Cities Program, Black Power could transform neighborhoods if harnessed properly however he was also aware of the shortcomings of black economic utopians models. Floyd McKissick's Soul City, an attempt to develop a communitarian capitalists approach to addressing the plethora of problems facing Black America in Warren County North Carolina came to a flop.<sup>27</sup>

In 1978, the NAACP was still the largest civil rights organization with some 435,000 members and more than 1700 branches but its youth credibility had continued to wane in the post-Gary Convention years. The NAACP wanted to advance an agenda that addressed economic troubles of black America and empowered black youth but on its own terms. Recognizing the mutually beneficial agenda, Martin arranged a meeting with them on December 7 of 1978.<sup>28</sup>

The NAACP sent a statement to the president via Martin, "One of the most important questions for us at this time is whether your austerity program for curbing inflation will have a chilling effect on domestic programs involving civil rights and the problems of the cities."<sup>29</sup> Economists were expecting a one percent rise in unemployment in 1979 and predicted that this would be disproportionately borne by the poor. A year earlier Carter had addressed the nation:

"When I became President, I inherited both a huge deficit and an economy wracked by stagflation. We had the worst unemployment rate since the Great Depression. And at the same time, inflation for the 3 years before I became President had averaged over 8 percent...We've moved forward firmly and strongly to tackle these problems. We have created in less than two years more than 7 million net new jobs and we have cut the unemployment rate by more than 25 percent. We've set forth now an anti-inflation program that recognizes the basic causes of inflation and attacks this problem on a broad front."<sup>30</sup>

Carter hinted that he would seek to reduce the national deficit by more than half and to reduce the scale of the federal government.<sup>31</sup> Black leaders urged the president not to cut budgets of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and other agencies that directly addressed many of the needs of African Americans who were being disproportionately impacted by stagflation.<sup>32</sup>

Martin met NAACP with the same responses he had made to the NBF; he gave careful reassurances of the president's budget plan and collected concerns to notify the president of. Both Martin and the NAACP must have realized that the political ground was shifting under their feet--a major realignment of power was taking place in which a

growing black electorate found themselves captive to problems beyond the political process and racing the renewed wrath of white backlash.<sup>33</sup>

### **Black Policy Power in the Era of Reverse Racism**

Some of the mythology of white working class oppression that emerged during the Carter years was the result of success of the Black Power era to convert rhetoric in to policy. 1970 marked an important year for the influence of Black Power on public policy. The Congressional Black Caucus was formed when 13 members of the House of Representatives "joined together to strengthen their efforts to address the legislative concerns of black and minority citizens." These members believed that they could increase the impact of Black Power on the legislative agenda by speaking with a singular voice on behalf of their African American constituents.<sup>34</sup>

One of Louis Martin's most lasting achievements was the creation of the Joint Center for Political Studies in 1970.<sup>35</sup> Two years before Gary and eight years before he joined the Carter Administration, Louis Martin and Kenneth Clark collaborated with Frank Reeves at Howard University Law School and used a Ford Foundation two-year \$860,000 grant in July of that year to establish the most significant black think-tank in Washington.<sup>36</sup> The Joint Center was created in the Nixon-Ford Republican interregnum between Democratic presidencies to address a variety of social issues facing black America that time. During this period a number of blacks were coming to terms with the dynamics of power in Washington and were developing lobby organizations of their own such as this one and TransAfrica founded by Randall Robinson in 1977.

The Joint Center illustrated the impact of Black Power and that blacks were coming to identify themselves as a political interest group that could make demands on the power structures not only through protests but through policy initiatives. This phenomenon was not new, but given the dramatic changes of the era, it represented an optimistic stride in progress for addressing the unique problems facing the black community in an opportunity to propose solutions on their own terms and based on their own research.

Despite these organization developments, the rise of the black lobby faced significant challenges in the Carter years. The growth of the neoconservative movement, liberals turned conservative, often targeted black special interest groups in racially-coded and appealed to a post-civil rights, working-class white immigrant segment of the population. As Matthew Frye Jacobson and others have concluded, the rise of black nationalism had provided a new language for identity beyond the generalities of "American."<sup>37</sup> This new language emboldened blacks but also countermobilized whites. According to Jacobson:

"The ethnic revival thus intersects the recent history of American conservatism in three crucial ways: first, white ethnic votes have contributed to the conservative electoral majority that handed the presidency to Republican Party in five out of eight elections from 1968 to 1996; second, unmeltable white ethnics are prominent among the *personnel* of the New Right coalition--particularly neoconservatives like Michael Novak, Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and Gertrude Himmelfarb, who brought to conservatism both an insider's critique of the left and an ethnic memory of the ghetto; and third, the European immigrant saga is made to carry tremendous symbolic freight in conservative

arguments concerning the amelioration of poverty, the role of the state, the importance of family, and the perversity of policies such as welfare and affirmative action."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore as Nell Irvin Painter has established, "Black Power took the concept even further, making black race a positive sign and white race the mark of guilty malfeasance."<sup>39</sup> In the aftermath of Nixon, the collaborative tendencies of the Carter Administration, though too slow for some blacks were too damning for some whites, prompting the "...white people--*Americans*--against an alien race of black degenerate families judged lacking those self-same virtues. How things had changed from a promising brother hood of the postwar era to a time of black/white tensions in the 1970s!"<sup>40</sup>

Advocates of the "reverse racism" thesis pointed to the Carter administration filing of briefs in support of affirmative action during the Bakke case.<sup>41</sup> In 1974, Allan Bakke, a white man, who made been denied acceptance into medical school based his disappointment on the fact that black students, who he deemed to be less qualified than himself, had been accepted. He argued that since 16 of 100 positions at the Medical School at the University of California at Davis were reserved for non-white students that he had been discriminated against.<sup>42</sup> It was a racial logic developed outside of the historical context that deeply resonated with many white Americans. Although the Supreme Court ultimately ruled against Bakke, the political tide against the Carter administration resonated with a "silent majority" ran into the arms of an increasingly militant Republican opposition.<sup>43</sup>

Louis Martin was granted the difficult task of navigating between a rising tide of white backlash and growing African American discontent with Carter's so-called tepid approach to black American issues. In order to continue to shore up Carter support among African-Americans, he knew that he would have to continue to push hard for political appointments and programs that spoke specifically to the historical injustices of blacks in America. At the same time, he had to carefully assuage the fears of white Americans who opposed the concessions the Carter administration was making to the black community.

On the heels of the *Bakke* case, the Supreme Court handed down its ruling in *United Steelworkers of America v. Weber* in 1979. Brian Weber alleged that a program to admit Blacks and women to half available positions in Louisiana aluminum plant was the equivalent of reverse discrimination and a violation of his civil rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The court ruled against him, in a decision supported by the Carter Administration, stating that the businesses could take race into consideration in addressing historical imbalances as long as such actions were temporary. This further infuriated whites in a shifting electorate who viewed themselves as arbitrary victims of liberalism and the institutionalization of civil rights advocates and programs as adversarial.<sup>44</sup>

The ironies of Martin's frustrations with the charges of reverse racism abound. The Small Business Administration's minority loan program which had been accused of giving an unfair advantage to blacks had given out thirty two loans for businesses with only seven going to minorities and the rest to whites, including none other than Tom

Brokaw, who according to America's Black Forum (AFM) was already making half a million dollars.<sup>45</sup> The so-called majority under assault pointed to the unfairness of the scheme undermined by the ineffectiveness of Carter's leadership.

Carter's last major policy initiative with the potential to address a black policy agenda came in the form the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act. The NAACP supported the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill although it was a weakened version.<sup>46</sup> The bill co-sponsored by Rep. Augustus Hawkins and Sen. Hubert Humphrey was the last significant legislative effort for the Democratic Party to develop a large scale economic package that preference racial economic disadvantage. The legislation attempted to deliver Keynesian methods to address high unemployment by developing employment targets for the private sector with the threat that the federal government would launch large scale public employment if inflation and employment targets were not met. It was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter on October 27, 1978, and codified as 15 USC § 3101 (15 USC § 3101).

Arthur Fletcher, a former aide in the Ford Administration doubted that Carter would have agreed to Humphrey-Hawkins without Louis Martin's influence. Martin, following the demands of black leaders, suggested much more than the Humphrey-Hawkins provided in a voluntary program in which no one who made less than 4 dollars an hour would be involved in other policy plans to address inflation a goal that was well received by black leadership but not achieved.<sup>47</sup>

During a broadcast discussing Carter's agenda, Fletcher pointed out that Carter had made a key mistake in promising too much to the black community than he could

deliver, presenting himself as a liberal and then proclaiming himself a fiscal conservative--"to talk liberal and manage conservatively." Fletcher called for Carter to put clout in the hands of the Black appointees that he had already appointed. "Give them not only the policy making powers but the resources that go with those powers so that it is very clear that they're delivering. When it's clear that they are delivering then they can go before Black audiences." Fletcher was referring to an occasion when Carter was booed at an NAACP function.<sup>48</sup>

Louis Martin supported and influenced other measures also. Perhaps one of his greatest influences was convincing the Carter Administration to increase number of federal judges by 30% with an eye to correct representation of minorities. Carter ultimately appointed a record number of blacks to federal office under the advisement of Martin--some 19 out of 110 federal judges--more than any previous administration occurred under Louis Martin's advice.

Unlike later administrations that would place token blacks in positions to placate civil rights organizations, or worse yet, to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the agencies they were appointed to, Martin's appointments via Carter's Omnibus Judgeships Act of 1978 were unapologetically committed to the advancement of an agenda that was complementary to issues faced by black America.<sup>49</sup>

For example, Martin endorsed A. Leon Higginbotham, (author *In the Matter of Color* examining race, slavery and law) to the 3rd circuit in Pennsylvania.<sup>50</sup> Martin went on to ensure that more than 1/3 of the senior level positions in the Department of Housing and Urban Development became filled by blacks.<sup>51</sup>

Louis Martin also influenced the implementation of the executive order on historically black colleges and universities. On September 9, Louis Martin and Stu Eizenstat drafted a letter from the president to heads of executive departments and agencies.

"The Order directs the secretary of education to carry out on my behalf a government-wide initiative to achieve a significant increase in the participation of historically Black institutions in federal programs. The Secretary of Education will help you set concrete goals and will monitor our agency's progress toward the goals. She will report directly to me on the results."<sup>52</sup>

On September 16, Jim McIntyre responded asking them to delete the phrase "...will monitor our agency's progress toward the goals" stating that it went beyond the letter of the Executive Order.<sup>53</sup> Despite the changes in this letter, it evidences the indirect but significant ways that Martin advocated within the White House for African Americans using bureaucratic channels. His advising, though relatively confined and not often included in political coverage, had a significant role in the shaping of public policy through the mundane bureaucratic process.

## **Conclusion**

Historians have tended to equate Black Power with the ability to invigorate the masses through rhetorical flourishes in the mold of Stokely Carmichael, catalyze urban masses *a la* H. Rap Brown, affirmations of black masculinity as evidenced by the Black Panther Party, or the respectability of black imagery and arts as evidenced by Amiri Baraka. While it is certainly true Black Power was all of these, Black Power was also the ability to transform the black pathos into public policy. Black Power was the

ability to not only *create* an agenda but to find meaningful ways to *implement* it throughout the bureaucratic structures hidden from public view.

Louis Martin, although a vocal critic, evidenced Black Power as the ability to operate in the shadows of Washington to deliver results in a meaningful and sustained way in the same manner that lobbies and other special interests groups deliver for their constituencies. These are the politics of Black Power that Lewis Martin excelled in. On some level Louis Martin's rising power in the executive branch evidences the successes of Black Power to provide a compelling alternative that pushed existing power structures to concede more demands to black America than it would have done otherwise. While references to Angela Davis, the National Black Political Convention, the Black Panther Party and others are scarce in the office memorandums of Louis Martin, it is clear that he understood the stakes of political power in black America and positioned himself and others with a similar mentality to express a variety of black ambitions and policy terms.

Louis Martin's perspectives on power were shaped by his experiences in the Deep South, the Midwest, the Northeast, and in Africa. And he was able to articulate the language of Black Power into the parlance of public policy from a regional, local, and international perspective that few men of his era could. He was sometimes distant from the protest marches but his affinity for coalition-building and relationships with key leaders made him a valuable linchpin between civil rights organizations and the federal government.

Some point to Martin's influence in shifting the support of the black vote from

the GOP to the Democratic Party as his key contribution to American history, I am inclined to believe that this is an understatement of his talents, his significance and the complexity of the African American electorate. As Black Power discontent reveals, blacks then and now never saw the Democratic Party as the end but as a means to broader social and economic goals. The life of Louis Martin urges us to move beyond partisan politics to a keen and lucid proposal of public policy, in the way that Bayard Rustin urged black activists to transition from "Protest to Politics" in his key essay in 1965. Martin knew Rustin and had invited him to White House on at least one occasion, a nod of respect between two men who had seen the significance of orchestration between protest and action across fifty years of public service.

The era of Black Power came to a close in 1980 after the election of Ronald Reagan, Edwin Meese of the Reagan White House announced that there would be no special White House assistant for black affairs. Yet even as the Reagan Administration made plans to move in the White House, Louis Martin was receiving and entertaining proposals from black leadership planning for the next step. Howard University presented a concept paper urging black communities to brace for changes and to develop leadership.

Many of the crises that Lewis Martin faced in the Carter White House resemble the political scenario today. In the context of growing political clout assumed by many with the historic election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States, the disappointments of black constituents and the intransigence of an entrenched conservative opposition make for an episode of *déjà vu*. In 2012, the United States is

faces a massive deficit, people are overwhelmingly unhappy with the performance of both Congress and the Supreme Court, partisanship is at an all-time high, the call for austerity measures threatens to crush the neglected needs of underprivileged America in the interest of the corporate good. Similarly, calls for austerity during the Carter administration presented a progressive administration with decisions that undermined the president's values and credibility with the black electorate. However there are racial dynamics at play that are often overshadowed in the histories of the Carter Administration by the economic woes of stagflation.

Critics of the Carter Administration lamented the so-called ineffectiveness of Carter's decision to deploy Muhammad Ali in Africa. However, revisionist studies of the incident seem to indicate otherwise. Grassroots conservatives pointed to the incompetence of government that coincided with the increasing participation of African American in public office. Was this a mere coincidence or a hint at how the incorporation of Black Power politics altered the perceptions of government among the white working-class vote causing irreparable political damage to the Carter Administration? This 'coincidence' should urge students of the Black Power era and the Carter years to question how significant racial perceptions of black empowerment and executive politics are played out in contemporary and historical depictions of the Carter Administration and how they persist in the present.

Finally, in reassessing Louis Martin and the role of Black Power during the Carter years, we must be careful to assess the limits of a black policy agenda, the effectiveness of the presidency, and the ability of a single person to change a political

and social environment. Advocates of the pragmatic aims of Black Power found a friend in Louis Martin and the Carter Administration but unrealistic expectations about the political climate of the nation and the budgetary possibilities of the era rendered many disappointments. Perhaps the greatest lesson from Louis Martin that we can glean for challenges in the present is to address bureaucratic challenges of federal, state, and local government like Louis Martin, with all the intensity of a protest march or a labor strike. For only in doing so, can Americans truly realize the path from protest to policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents : Louis Martin and the Rise of Black political power* (Lanham: Madison Books : Distributed by National Book Network, 1997), 40, 206.

<sup>2</sup> E. Frederic Morrow was the first African American to be appointed to the executive staff of the White House during the Eisenhower Administration. His position is widely viewed as a “token” appointment lacking any significant power to influence policy or the presidential agenda. See E. Frederic Morrow, *Black Man in the White House; A Diary of the Eisenhower Years by the Administrative Officer for Special Projects, the White House, 1955-1961*. (New York: Coward-McCann, 1963). Also see Nancy J Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln : Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> “Martin, Louis--Statement America’s Black Forum [0/A 6474] Transcript” (WJLA-Studios, December 4, 1978), 7, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Louis Martin, “Black Appointees [1]”, c 1978, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, “Black Appointees [1].”

<sup>5</sup> George Derek Musgrove, *Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics : How the Harassment of Black Elected Officials Shaped Post-Civil Rights America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 48.

<sup>6</sup> “(Top) Blacks in the Administration”, June 1, 1979, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; “United States Army to Get First Black Female General”, June 1, 1979, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Julia Dobbs, “Federal Judgeship Summary” (Joint Center for Political Studies, May 24, 1979), Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

<sup>7</sup> See Peniel E Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour : A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006). Peniel E Joseph, *Neighborhood Rebels : Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2–3. See Laura Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, *The Business of Black Power : Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility in Postwar America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

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- <sup>8</sup> Poinsett, *Walking With Presidents*, 119.
- <sup>9</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution : The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 525–526.
- <sup>10</sup> Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents*, 53–55, 78; Paul Nugent, *Africa Since Independence: A Comparative History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 29–30.
- <sup>11</sup> Louis Martin quoted in Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents*, 155.
- <sup>12</sup> Bayard Rustin, *“Black Power” and Coalition Politics*. (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1966).
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.; Bayard Rustin, *From Protest to Politics : The Future of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Commentary Magazine, 1965); Charles Fager, *White Reflections on Black Power* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1967), 59.
- <sup>14</sup> Carmichael and Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution*, 525; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland : the Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 133–135.
- <sup>15</sup> “Martin, Louis--Statement America’s Black Forum [0/A 6474] Transcript,” 4; Fager, *White Reflections on Black Power*, 61–63.
- <sup>16</sup> “Roy Innis: From Left-Wing Radical to Right-Wing Extremist,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 39 (April 1, 2003): 69–70.
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 276.
- <sup>18</sup> On the rise of Richard Hatcher, see Alex Poinsett, *Black Power: Gary Style; The Making of Mayor Richard Gordon Hatcher*. (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co., 1970).
- <sup>19</sup> Lee Sustar, “Racism and Politics in America | SocialistWorker.org”, January 25, 2008, <http://socialistworker.org/2008/01/25/racism-politics>; Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 280.
- <sup>20</sup> Joseph, *Waiting ‘til the Midnight Hour*, 289.
- <sup>21</sup> Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents*, 289.
- <sup>22</sup> “Martin, Louis--Statement America’s Black Forum [0/A 6474] Transcript,” 4–5.
- <sup>23</sup> Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents*, 183; Louis Martin, “Luncheon with President Carter”, February 27, 1980, Box 58, Folder: Martin, Louis Scheduling, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
- <sup>24</sup> Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 394–396; Daniel P Moynihan, “Memorandum for the President,” in *Daniel Patrick Moynihan : A Portrait in Letters of an American Visionary*, ed. Steven R Weisman (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 211–215, esp.214.
- <sup>25</sup> Louis Martin, “Meeting with Reverend Leon Sullivan”, April 16, 1980, Box 58, Folder: Martin, Louis Scheduling, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

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<sup>26</sup> Youth and the Needs of the Nation, Potomac Institute 1979, 7-8, Louis Martin Collection, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

<sup>27</sup> "NAACP Working Draft Statement", December 7, 1978, Box 58, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Rhonda Y. Williams, "The Pursuit of Audacious Power: Rebel Reformers and Neighborhood Politics in Baltimore, 1966-1968," in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel E Joseph (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 231-232; Zacharey Gillan, "'Black Is Beautiful But So Is Green': Capitalism, Black Power, and Politics in Floyd McKissick's Soul City," in *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Elizabeth Kai Hinton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 281-282.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Martin, "Meeting with NAACP Board of Directors", December 7, 1978, 150-151, Box 58, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library; Jeffrey Ogbonna Green Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 150-151.

<sup>29</sup> "NAACP Working Draft Statement."

<sup>30</sup> Remarks Before a Joint Session of the Georgia General Assembly, February 20, 1979 in United States. President (1977-1981: Carter) and Jimmy Carter, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Jimmy Carter, 1979*. (Washington: GPO, 1980), 299.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "NAACP Working Draft Statement," 2.

<sup>33</sup> "NAACP Working Draft Statement."

<sup>34</sup> Renard H. Marable, "Congressional Black Caucus and American Foreign Policy" (Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1994), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA288288>.

<sup>35</sup> The Joint Center as it is commonly called was renamed the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Joyce Jones, "The Silent Force," *Black Enterprise*, April 1995, 96-98.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2; Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 252.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 181-2.

<sup>39</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 378.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 378-380.

<sup>41</sup> Martin, "Meeting with NAACP Board of Directors."

<sup>42</sup> Philip F. Rubio, *A History of Affirmative Action, 1619-2000* (University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 260-262.

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<sup>43</sup> Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon and the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 225–227.

<sup>44</sup> “Martin, Louis--Statement America’s Black Forum [0/A 6474] Transcript,” 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> “NAACP Working Draft Statement.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>49</sup> According to John Herschel Barnhill, “Carter appointed 37 black federal judges; by contrast, all previous presidents plus Carter's successor Ronald Reagan combined appointed 34 black judges, and 11 of these were appointed by Lyndon Johnson. George H. W. Bush appointed 13. Only Bill Clinton matched Carter's total. Seven of Carter's appointees were black women. Before Bill Clinton, the total number of black women appointed by all presidents was 19.” John Herschel Barnhill, “Oxford AASC: Carter, Jimmy, Administration Of”, n.d., <http://www.oxfordaasc.com.proxy.kennesaw.edu/article/opr/t0005/e0216>.

<sup>50</sup> Dobbs, “Federal Judgeship Summary.”

<sup>51</sup> Randolph Kinder, “Letter to Louis Martin”, February 13, 1979, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

<sup>52</sup> Jim McIntyre, “Memorandum for Stu Eizenstat and Louis Martin”, September 16, 1980, Louis Martin Papers, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.