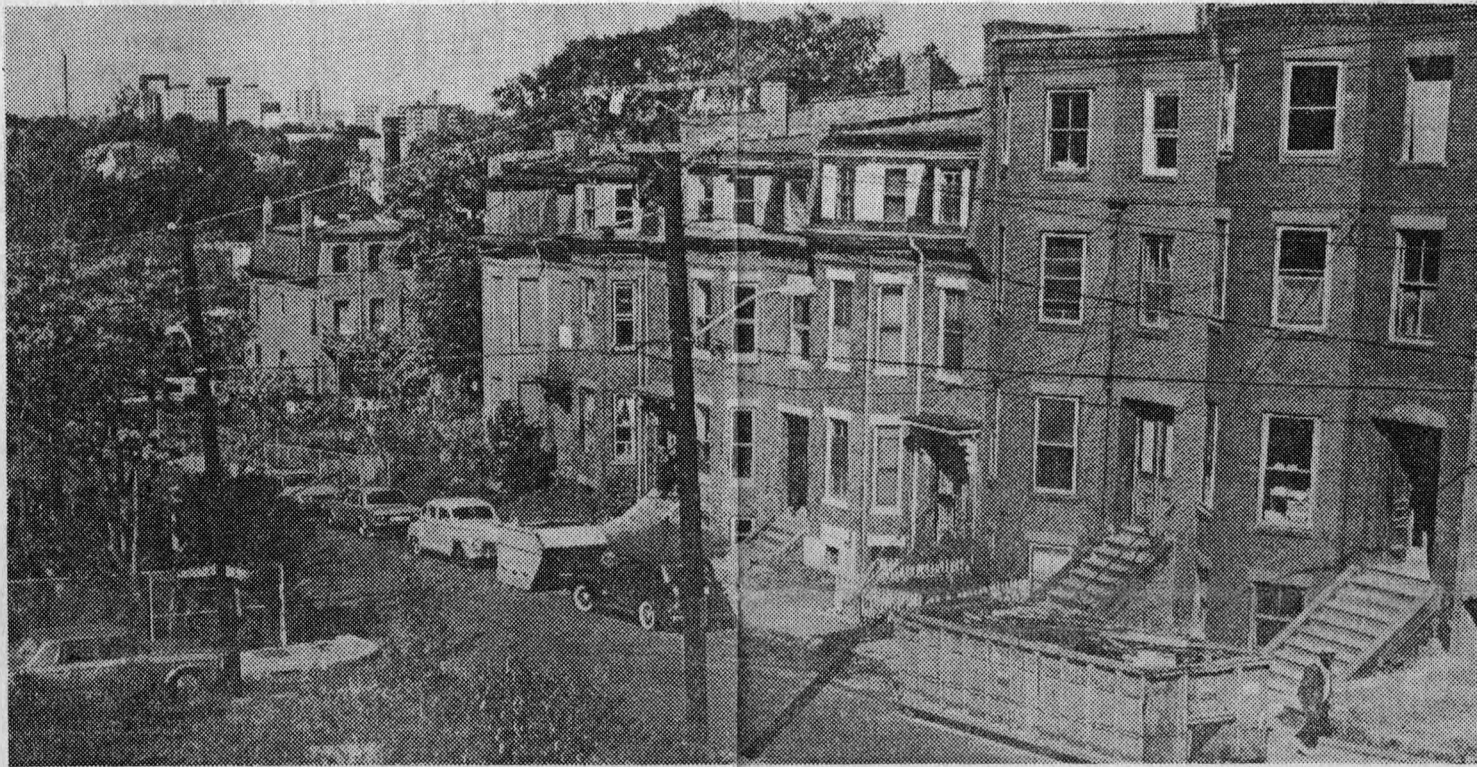
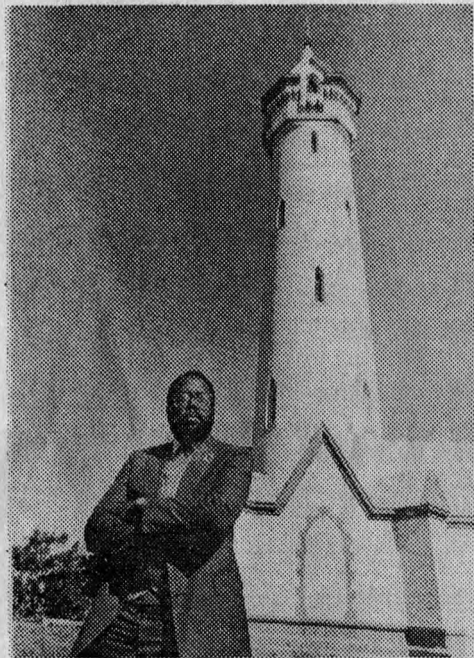


A PROPONENT

GRIP founder Curtis Davis: "We can take charge of our schools, our zoning, our police."



PHOTOS BY DUDLEY M. BROOKS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Boston's white-collar renaissance seems as distant as its skyline in row-house neighborhoods that would be included in new community.

AN OPPONENT

Methodist minister Charles Stith: "Now is not the time to leave . . . we've only just begun."



In Boston, a Dream of Independence

Minority Neighborhoods to Vote on Establishing 'Mandela, Massachusetts'

By Margot Hornblower
Washington Post Staff Writer

BOSTON—On black radio shows here, the new rap song goes like this:

*When the few control the many,
The rich get richer
And the poor haven't any.
Like a slap in the face,
It's reality.*

Mandela, Massachusetts, is the place to be.

A new city is forming in the consciousness of some of Boston's black population. It is named after imprisoned South African nationalist Nelson Mandela, and it would carve a hole out of Boston.

In a Nov. 4 nonbinding ballot initiative, voters in 10 city legislative districts will be asked if they want to form a separate city out of largely black and Hispanic neighborhoods in Roxbury, Mattapan, Dorchester, the South End, Jamaica Plain, Columbia Point and the Fenway—in effect seceding from Boston.

The 12.5-square-mile city of Mandela would include one-quarter of the city's land, one-quarter of its 620,000 population and 98 percent of its black residents. No one knows—in a low-turnout election, as this is likely to be—whether it will pass. If it does, a skeptical state legislature would have to agree before the new municipality could be formed.

Nonetheless, the issue, which has split the black community, is likely to prove a powerful referendum on the well-being of

the minority underclass in a city with segregated housing patterns and a history of racial tension. It is a potentially embarrassing conflict for Mayor Raymond L. Flynn, elected three years ago on a platform of sharing the wealth of Boston's downtown boom with its decaying neighborhoods.

"We've seen an economic renaissance in Boston that bypassed the working-class neighborhoods, including the area of Mandela," said Bruce Bolling, elected this year as Boston's first black City Council president. "Roxbury has struggled against redlining and disinvestment."

While Bolling rejects secession, he favors conducting the referendum as "an effort to ensure we get our piece of the pie. It is an expression, a poll. It forces you to look at the inequities and say we need fundamental change in Boston."

However, referendum organizers say it is not merely symbolic. "The city of Boston thinks we're kidding because it's not used to taking the black community seriously," said Andrew P. Jones, a founder of the Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP), which gathered 5,000 signatures to place the initiative on the ballot.

At a recent forum in a Roxbury community house, officials from the nearby cities of Cambridge and Brockton discussed municipal budgets, grantsmanship and development planning before a group of 50 black Roxbury residents.

"We can take control of our own affairs," Jones told them. "For years, this community

has been disrespected and neglected by City Hall. Half of our kids are dropping out of school. Our streets are dirty. We must seize control of what is ours, control of the land."

Jones, 34, a violinist who also works as a free-lance television producer, founded GRIP with a neighbor, Harvard-trained architect Curtis Davis, 33. A Richmond native who graduated from the elite Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and the New England Conservatory of Music, Jones said he was inspired by the 1983 incorporation of East Palo Alto, a largely black and Hispanic area near San Francisco.

Beginning in 1984, Jones and Davis hosted Friday breakfast meetings at the Harvard Faculty Club, bringing in experts to discuss the idea.

Roxbury was a separate city until 1868, Davis noted, adding, "If a group is dissatisfied and doesn't feel represented, the state constitution provides they can reorganize themselves for local government. We can take charge of our schools, our zoning, our police, our traffic, our sanitation. This doesn't have to be about race. It's about power."

Although Davis' theoretical budget for Mandela projects a \$7 million surplus, Boston officials say the new city could not support the current level of services without raising property taxes considerably. Flynn has called the proposal "ridiculous," saying the Roxbury area "gets a sizable amount of

services" while contributing only about 7 percent of the city's revenue.

In downtown Boston, swank office towers crowd the skyline. Glittering government-subsidized developments such as Copley Plaza, with waterfalls and pink marble corridors, offer luxury goods for the white-collar professionals who have flocked here as Boston became the nation's second largest financial center.

A short distance away, Roxbury displays arson-gutted buildings, weed-choked parks and dilapidated schools. One-third of Roxbury's land is vacant. One-third of its families are on welfare.

"You can hit a golf ball from the heart of Roxbury and bounce it off the Prudential Tower downtown," the city's top planner, Stephen Coyle of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, remarked last year. "That's how close it is."

While golf might not be a metaphor of choice among Roxbury's mostly low-income residents, it strikes a chord with city real estate speculators, who have begun to drive up Roxbury land prices.

Boston housing prices rose 95 percent in the last three years, faster than any city in the nation. Gentrification has pushed black and Hispanic families out of the South End and Jamaica Plain. Secession proponents say incorporation is the only way to prevent such displacement in Roxbury.

"This is the hottest piece of real estate in the country," Davis said during a drive through the area. Despite the obvious blight of several boarded-up public housing projects, an abandoned tire factory and the bedraggled meadows of Franklin Park, a Frederick Law Olmsted masterpiece, signs of promise abound.

The concrete skeleton of the Ruggles Street Station rises near Northeastern University, part of a \$763 million rapid transit

and light rail project that will come on line in February. Nearby, the new building of Roxbury Community College looms over Tremont Street. Refurbished brick row houses grace Columbus Avenue. The median strips along Blue Hill Avenue are newly planted.

Such new state and city investments—including an ambitious \$400 million housing and commercial development plan for Roxbury's rundown Dudley Station area—could blunt the movement for home rule. Flynn has enacted a program requiring at least half of city construction jobs to go to Boston residents and one-fourth to minorities. A "linkage" program requires downtown developers to develop sites in the neighborhoods, with minority partners.

Rev. Charles Stith, a Methodist minister who is leading the opposition to the initiative, points to Bolling's election, the presence of four blacks on the school committee, the recent selection of blacks as city school superintendent, treasurer, auditor and housing authority chief and says, "Now is not the time to leave."

"Obviously, black folks are capable of running our own city," he added. "That's not the issue. To those who say the time is up for attempting to live together across color, class, we say we've only just begun. Boston is our city, too."

However, former state representative Mel King, who ran against Flynn for mayor, is campaigning for incorporation. "We all want self-determination, and that's a very American dream," he said.

Many Roxbury residents seem confused by the proposal.

"I've been waiting to hear the economics," music teacher Betty Hillmon told panelists at a GRIP forum. "What is going to be my tax base? Am I going to have to get a pail of water if my house catches fire?"