

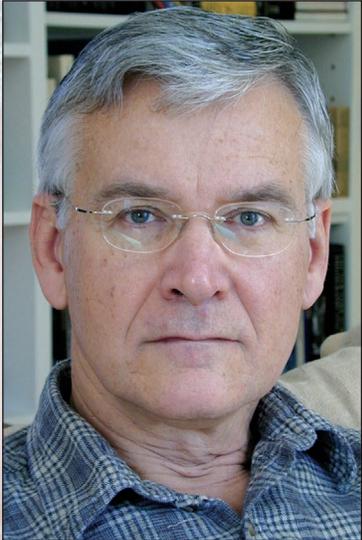


# Past Voices, Today's Voices:

Kressley Institute Continues DC's Organizing Tradition







**“When I left the Public Welfare Foundation in 2006, the board of directors asked me to select an organization to receive a special grant for a project that reflected the values we pursued during my tenure as executive director. ONE DC’s then nascent plan for a popular education institute was a perfect match. Building the capacity of people in marginalized communities to speak for themselves and take action against the causes, not just the symptoms, of social and economic problems was a task that had never been undertaken in Washington. The philosophy of popular education – “learning to understand reality so that people can write their own history,” as Paulo Freire described it – has been a guiding principle of my life. Unlike traditional education, which seeks to hide the reasons for social and economic problems, popular education reveals the root causes of those problems. While traditional education teaches us to adapt to the world as it is, popular education challenges us to understand that our lives and communities can be changed—that, indeed, a different world is possible.”**

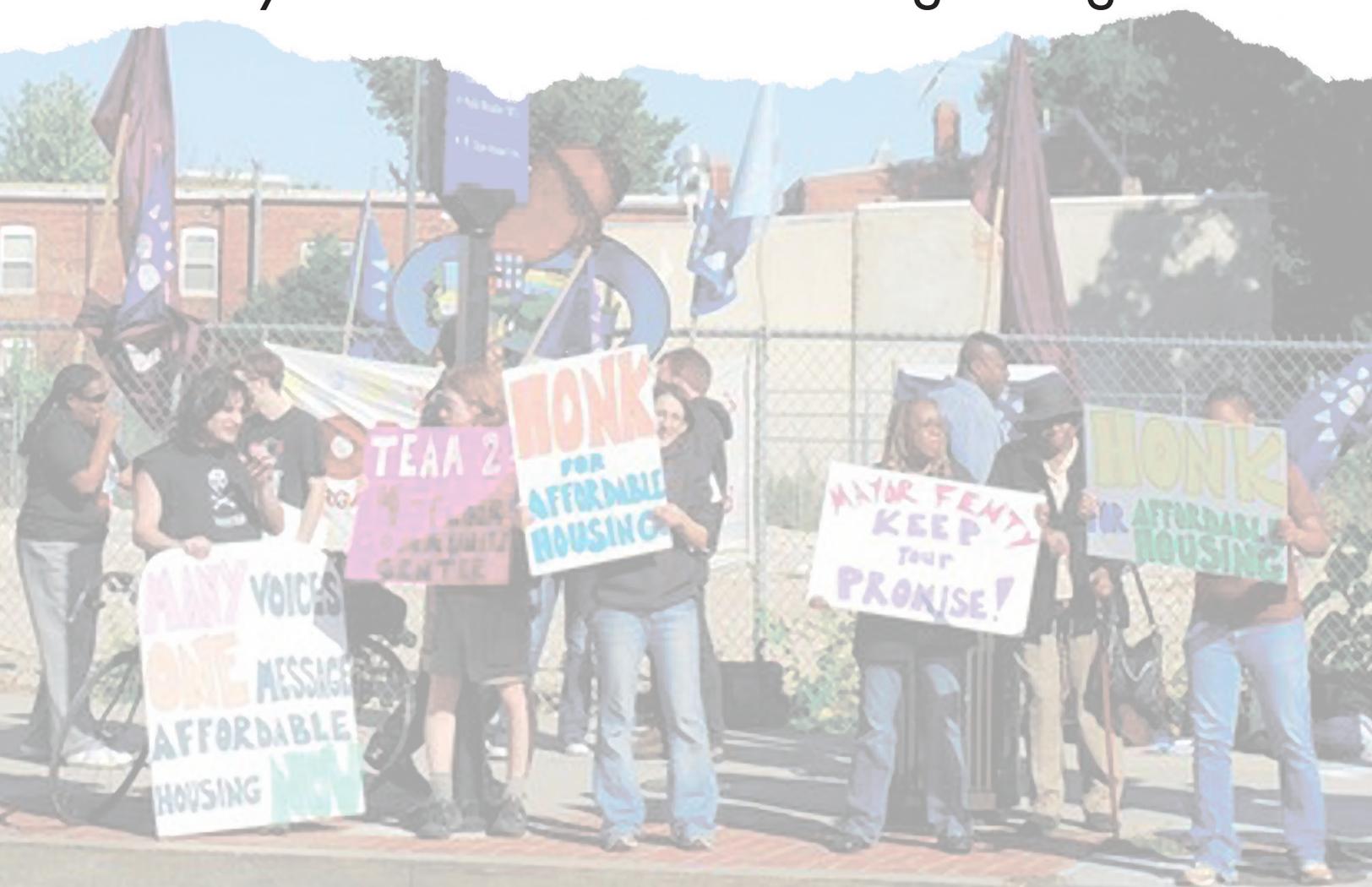
**-Larry Kressley, Social Justice Activist  
and Former Executive Director of the  
Public Welfare Foundation**

*ONE DC wishes to thank the  
Public Welfare Foundation for  
supporting the Kressley Institute.*



# Past Voices, Today's Voices:

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## Past Workshop Topics

- What is Organizing?
- DC History/Racial Justice
- Cultivating Local Leadership
- DC Power and Political Structures
- Campaign Strategy and Development
- Building the Base
- Organizing in Black and Brown America
- The Evolution of Leadership
- Cutting-Edge Direct Action
- Refueling the Soul – Self Care and Maintaining Yourself for the Long Haul
- The Treasure of Our History: Teaching People To Tell Their Stories
- Mobilization Tools

## About the Kressley Institute

**Progressive community organizing and popular education are at nascent stages in the District of Columbia.**

Given the city's long history of colonialism, direct federal control, and racial and class segregation, generations of residents have learned to live under a system that debilitated the natural process of building a true grassroots-led voice. Moreover, the culture of the city does not promote nor encourage an organizing approach that deals with the structural roots of community issues.



The Kressley Institute aims to address this challenge. Every June, the Institute brings together emerging and established organizers for a week-long intensive training to develop and deepen their skills. Organizers and activists from diverse backgrounds learn both the nuts and bolts skills required for organizing and the conceptual framework that shapes how organizers incorporate theory, values, and culture in their work. The popular education-based curriculum includes fun, interactive elements as well as valuable field experience.

In addition, this 6-day training program is followed by monthly check-ins as well as year-round technical support and mentorship.

There is no fee for the Institute, but slots are limited. We are especially interested in community leaders who may not work within formal organizing institutions, but are working at the grassroots level to build the collective power and leadership of their fellow community members.

*For more information about participating in the Kressley Institute, call ONE DC at **202-232-2915**.*

Mentorship is a unique and integral component of the Kressley Institute. During the week-long intensive, fellows and mentors pair up based on similar interests and other considerations. Kressley Institute mentors—all experienced organizers—commit to encouraging and uplifting their mentees while also providing troubleshooting, strategizing, and brainstorming support. Thanks to monthly in-person or phone meetings, fellows get to enjoy a personalized, mini-Kressley Institute experience all year long!



## Introducing... the Eprah Show!

### Move over, Oprah...and make way for Eprah!

Kressley Institute organizer/facilitator Ericka Taylor was transformed into the effervescent Eprah for the "DC Power and Political Structures" panel discussion. The talk show's audience members got the dish on city politics from:

- Dominic T. Moulden, Executive Director, ONE DC
- Ed Lazere, Director, DC Fiscal Policy Institute
- Debra Frazier, DC Activist
- Rick Tingling Clemmons, DC Activist

These local luminaries and community celebrities shared their extensive, firsthand insights about the District's power players and political structure. Dominic and Ed wowed the crowd with their know-how in the areas of housing, community development, and economics. Debra and Rick, both longtime DC residents, boosted brain-width with their accounts of living and working in the city—and fighting injustice from the inside.



Fellows got to learn who the decision-makers are and what the respective agencies do while laughing at the applause signs and earnestly using the imaginary microphones provided. Up next—an exclusive from *E Magazine*: "How to Organize Your Life, Your Style, And Your Community."

"Why does ONE DC host the Kressley Institute? Well, we believe that all people can change the world and their society – not just the "chosen ones," the well-



heeled, or the elite. So building an organizing culture through the institute is one way we can transmit our philosophy and our commitment to truly participatory democracy. We're spreading the message from the ground up—and we'll always be on the ground. We are dedicated to grassroots people power. Our people have powerful stories and relevant experiences...so they're the ones with the answers. We don't need to run to Capitol Hill or to the DC Council for answers."

– **Dominic T. Moulden**, Executive Director, Organizing Neighborhood Equity (ONE DC)



"I think that social justice work in general is not given the respect that it deserves... it is not seen as something that requires specific skills

and capacities. It is seen as work done out of the goodness of our hearts...but really, this work does require training and hard skills. I applied to the Kressley Institute because I started to feel disconnected from community work and grassroots social justice work...I was seeking a balance between being a community development professional and a grassroots professional. I was looking for insight and clarity. I was lucky to be a part of a family of activists who have always been a part of making change in the community. The Kressley Institute seemed like a logical next step. I would absolutely recommend the Kressley Institute to anyone who is looking for a new perspective on their work and anyone who wants to be recharged and reconnected to grassroots organizing and to be connected to others doing similar work."

**- Kristina Gray, Fellow**

"Today, my work at the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center is impacted by what I learned through the Kressley Institute—I have a sense of what it is to be a good organizer. I have a great support network of Kressley cohorts and I have a firm sense of why we do what we do."

**-Tina Pham, Fellow**

"Technical skills and ongoing training are a part of life and so it should be part of organizing. By profession and lifestyle we are animators and facilitators of social change so our strategies and skill sets should evolve with the times. Training is an important ingredient.

I got started in organizing in high school. I went to H.D. Woodson Senior High School, the only public high school in Ward 7. There was crumbling infrastructure at the school and it was surrounded by a community that had experienced quite a bit of disinvestment over the years. I had a lot of anxiety, frustration, and hope so I started putting my ideas with other folks' ideas...because I knew that me going alone to the principal or the city council was good but not as powerful as 10-15 people doing the same thing.

When I was in college I found out about Manna CDC [now ONE DC]. They gave a presentation at Georgetown University. I was excited to learn that, as a paid professional, you could organize people around issues to make systemic change."

I recommend the Kressley Institute because a) my city has historically been deeply committed to service provision and I feel like it's important to have training for those of us who are committed to effecting structural change on the grassroots level; and b) because ONE DC's values—its emphasis on carrying forward the legacy of Ella Jo Baker as well as its use of arts and culture in organizing—is a good infusion for the institute. You learn organizing in the technical way but also the qualitative stuff—including relationship-building and creativity.



If you're an experienced organizer, I still think there is nothing better than being in a room full of organizer peers, sharing strategies, sharing what works. That's a rarity. It's also good for forming strategic coalitions so that we can mobilize the bases we've already built for advancing the larger movement."

**- Jessica Rucker, Fellow**

Superflyheroine and crusader for community power leaps across inequities in her native DC. Photo by Xavier Ringer(2008).



## Jennifer Muhammad, Kressley Institute Coordinator

June 12, 2008, 4:15pm

By today most of the participants have begun to build relationships with both the facilitators and their fellow comrades. It was good to see people get comfortable. That is, until we decided to throw in

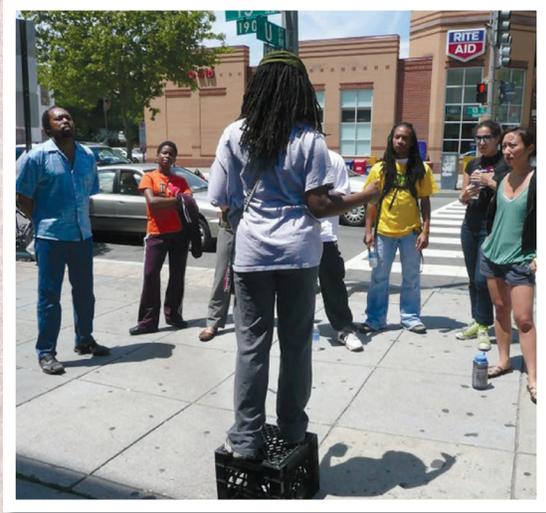
the “Streetspeak” exercise. Right after the session on community leadership we announced that we would be splitting up into groups and going out to address the public in just a few minutes. The looks on the faces of many participants became more perplexed and surprised as we explained further: “We’re going to do street speaking! You’ll each have three minutes to stand on a soapbox and discuss an issue that you’re passionate about!” The nervous reactions on the faces of once eager participants said it all: they were scared. We went on to say that each team would have a leader to support them and that we would be going to busy spots like 7th & Florida and 13th & U NW.

But one of the participants, noticeably shaken, raised her hand to say that such short notice was unfair. Other participants agreed... resistance was building. Then I got up and began speaking spontaneously and forcefully about the importance of healthy eating. I wanted to show them that even without practice or forethought they could speak about subjects that they’re impassioned about for just three minutes. That was the turning point! The group visibly relaxed—and decided to take on the challenge.

We split into small groups, grabbed the bullhorns, and headed out to our assigned locations. I went with my group to the busy corner of 14th & U. When the first brave soul began, she was so good that I think we all forgot about being nervous and listened, clapped, and shouted in support of the street speaker! We were so into the impromptu speeches that pedestrians also stopped to listen and chime in! Each and every Kressley participant who spoke was truly amazing. People spoke about issues that really touched their hearts...about growing up

in Washington, DC...gentrification...culture and heritage...working with teenage girls who deal with sexual abuse. It was phenomenal, touching, and liberating all at the same time. It even made me cry. It seems as though street speaking is a lost art, but we have to revive this way of building community. The folks waiting for the bus seemed glad and interested to listen to these spontaneous speakers’ stories and messages that had the potential to change lives.

As we headed back for lunch, the spirit and energy was so much lighter than it was when we left. Those who participated were proud of themselves and their colleagues and were surprised at their own courage, strength, and ability to share with perfect strangers...and possible allies.



## Organizing in Washington, DC: Past and Presence

“The history of local organizing in DC has been mixed. DC has not developed an organizing base like other cities around the United States. School desegregation and tenants rights were some of the issues that people organized around.

During the civil rights era there were sit-ins and people organized around race lines. Schools were where you saw racial politics played out. There were [things like] internal tracking where students were separated based on race.

Out of the civil rights movement, people learned to channel their organizing through direct service. History shows the fight in DC has been around getting equality in basic city services...getting access to the basic fundamental values that people fight for...police, fire, sanitation, transportation, and hospitals.

Gentrification in DC—while it has homogenized areas like Georgetown, Dupont Circle, and Tenleytown—in other parts of the city, gentrification has been more difficult. Working-class folks have been tied to government, so they are not as easily pushed out. People may not be organizing, but they are solidly staying in certain neighborhoods. They feel connected to their church, their community, and the places where they were born and raised. For example, people can walk through Columbia Heights and some people see all of this crime, but as a Black person, crime is not what we see...we don’t see danger, we see community.”

– **Timothea Howard**, Presenter



"We all learn differently... and it's not all about the institutional model. People have different perspectives and capabilities.

Community organizing and popular education level the playing field... it does not alienate those without a formal education. We need more organizers/leaders of color. The Kressley Institute is helping to train new and qualified leaders and organizers of color. There is great synergy among the ONE DC staff... feels like family."

- **Kelley Ford**, *Facilitator*



"The six days spent with every member of the Kressley Institute was inspiring and was a testimony to what

it means to collaborate by sharing ideas, listening, and understanding perspectives.

Inspired by the training session, I decided to run for an At-Large position on my community's newly established Neighborhood Association Board."

- **Tanetta Isler**, *Fellow*

"I applied for Kressley because I wanted my doctoral research to be grounded in issues of social change. I wanted to get some of the guiding principles of grassroots organizing. I also wanted to be exposed to local people and local aspects of organizing.

The benefits of being a mentee...men are expected to be silent about pain and disappointment. Having someone to go to about interpersonal problems and losses is important. My mentor has been helpful in giving me strong advice...so I don't have to be silent about my struggles."

- **Kalfani Turé**, *Fellow*

"I applied because I wanted to figure out a more effective way to do community organizing. I had tried self determination...but people no longer see themselves as assets...we need to take a deeper look at our own personal collective histories to see why economic, housing, and family problems continue to plague our community. We need a better way.

Prior to the Kressley Institute, whenever I facilitated something, I did it with my own creativity. Now I realize that community organizing is a science that demands real skills.

I have been through a lot of other trainings and workshops. This was one of the few trainings where everyone was deeply connected and engaged. The training was one in which everyone had a space and where everyone celebrated each other. I saw people challenge each other and even shed tears. The fellows have been so supportive—even outside of the monthly meetings. We want to see each other succeed...it feels like a movement. I have this mentor now that I can relate to and he can relate to me—now I am inspired and motivated again."

- **Tafari Tyrone Alvin**, *Fellow*

**There's a point in the Kressley Institute when the building walls dissolve...** and magically, you're in the field, talking to people outside of the confines of the classroom. Call it the alchemy of theory and practice, a learning laboratory to prepare you for the rest of your life as a community leader. Fellows get to engage in real-world organizing because they enrolled in the Institute in their impatience for change. For example, fellows participated in door-knocking in support of an actual Jobs for Justice campaign for a multiracial workers center in Brentwood. They asked residents about the availability of job training, living-wage employment, and worker justice in the neighborhood and in DC as a whole. They talked to residents about joining the fight for their rights as workers. In this portable classroom, fellows pound the pavement after hitting the books...so that injustice will just disappear into thin air.







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