

AN ERA OF RIGHTS: KANSAS CITY'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Historical Background

Kansas City and its surrounding region served as a hotbed for social justice movements that posed often underrecognized challenges to the cultural, legal, and political status quo during the latter half of the 20th century. National and local leaders such as Thurgood Marshall and Esther Brown contributed to a sustained legal campaign against racial segregation, culminating with the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. Sustained local activism expanded desegregation across many aspects of society, notably in parks and recreation, shopping districts, employment, and housing.

Beyond struggles for Black civil rights, the Kansas City area witnessed activism from diverse groups. In 1966, members of fifteen homophile organizations met in Kansas City to form the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO). This historic meeting launched the rise of a national movement to combat discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community. During the Termination Era, local Indigenous families established the Indian Council of Many Nations, which later founded the Heart of America Indian Center (now Kansas City Indian Center) to provide social services for Native Americans in the area. The fervor of the Chicane Movement of the 1960s and 1970s also reverberated in the area. In 1969, Kansas City's Latinx neighborhoods became part of a national movement when Chicane students organized a walkout from West High School to demand culturally relevant and bilingual education. Kansas City's history as a contested ground galvanized communities to rise up, challenge the status quo, and build an equitable urban landscape reflective of its diversity.

Project Description

The University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC) Center for Digital and Public Humanities and the Kansas City Public Library (KCPL) request proposals for articles examining myriad social justice movements in Kansas City from the post-World War II era to the end of the 20th century.

Proposals for this multi-faceted partnership will be considered for inclusion as articles/chapters in one or both of the following outcomes:

- An edited volume published by a university press;
- A digital project that combines scholarship with archival sources, oral histories, biographies, and other relevant documents.

Selected contributors for the edited volume will be required to attend a conference to workshop their papers in April 2026 and will present at a three-day public symposium in November 2026. (We will provide travel expenses for both the workshop and symposium). Selected website contributors will also be invited (optionally) to present their work at the public symposium. These efforts seek to encourage new research on understudied topics, bring this scholarship to larger public audiences, and facilitate community discussions about activism and civil rights. The project is modeled after previous collaborative and award-winning efforts, including the books

Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border, *Wide-Open Town: Kansas City in the Pendergast Era* and websites, *Civil War on the Western Border: The Missouri Conflict, 1854-1865* and *The Pendergast Years: Kansas City in the Jazz Age and Great Depression*.

Suggested Themes and Topics

We welcome proposals that contextualize the methods and strategies of Kansas City's social justice movements within national narratives and themes. Research topics should encompass political activism and community uplift on behalf of historically marginalized communities, including but not limited to women, Black Americans, Latinxs, LGBTQIA+ persons, working-class communities, or people with disabilities. How did diverse Kansas Citians challenge the status quo throughout the late-20th century? How is the Kansas City experience unique (or representative) when compared to social justice movements in the Midwest and nationwide?

Suggested themes and topics may include, but are not limited to:

- activist groups and individual activists
- direct action, protests, and boycotts
- student movements and educational activism
- interracial and interethnic coalitions and solidarity movements
- intersectional movements
- voting rights and electoral politics
- environmental justice
- labor activism
- institution and/or organizational building
- community organizing and neighborhood-level activism
- legal battles and challenges
- economic justice
- self-determination, Black Power, Chicanx Power, Red Power, etc.
- immigrant rights
- feminist movements and activism
- LGBTQIA+ resistance and activism
- Cultural and artistic expressions
- degradation of schools
- community development (investment and disinvestment)
- white flight and development of the suburbs

Instructions for Submissions

The symposium welcomes submissions from:

- Scholars, Researchers, Public Historians, Authors, Community Members, Kansas City Activists and/or their Descendants, Students, Artists and Creative Writers

Proposed Dates:

- Paper Workshop: April 22-24, 2026

- Public Symposium: November 10-12, 2026

Submission Details:

- Proposal Review Begins: July 31, 2025
- Format: A one-page abstract (500 words single-spaced) with working title; brief C.V. or resume.
- Honoraria will be provided for contributors to both the website and volume. We will offset travel expenses to the workshop and symposium for those involved in the volume project.
- Contact/submission instructions: Please address proposals and inquiries to:
kcmc@umkc.edu. Be sure to put An Era of Rights in the subject.

This project is supported by the Kansas City Monuments Coalition (KCMC), an effort funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Monuments program. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at mellon.org.

The edited volume and digital project are two parts of the larger KCMC. The University of Missouri – Kansas City was awarded a \$4 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to support the creation of the Kansas City Monuments Coalition. The grant, part of the Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project, was secured through the efforts of UMKC's History Department faculty and the Center for Digital and Public Humanities. The Coalition consists of sixteen organizations in the Greater Kansas City Area to preserve and commemorate a more inclusive history of the region. It will also support public programs in partnership with the Kansas City Public Library.