
Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission

Dwight D. Eisenhower and the District of Columbia

During two presidential terms (1953-61), Dwight D. Eisenhower used the power of his office to assist the District of Columbia and its people in important ways. For example:

- **He consistently advocated Home Rule for the Nation’s Capital.** Beginning with his first State of the Union address (1953), he urged Congress to establish authentic local government for Washington, D.C. He also advocated congressional representation for the District. Throughout his presidency, he steadily supported local D.C. Home Rule advocacy groups.
- **Eisenhower achieved direct D.C. participation in federal elections.** Though limited Home Rule was not granted to the District until the Nixon presidency, Eisenhower nonetheless succeeded in his campaign for the ratification of the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution — permitting District residents to vote in federal elections.
- **Ike worked steadily to eliminate racial segregation from the District** throughout his presidency in the face of intense opposition from powerful members of Congress. As early as the 1952 presidential campaign, he pledged to remove “every vestige of segregation in the District of Columbia.” He reiterated this pledge in 1954 in an address to the NAACP. During the 1950s, Eisenhower took specific steps to follow through. He pressured Hollywood film makers to force desegregation of D.C. movie theatres; convinced owners of Washington hotels to desegregate; and persuaded local electric and telephone companies to hire African Americans and then promote them to managerial positions. Eisenhower also worked behind the scenes to replace segregationist members of the District’s Board of Commissioners with civil rights advocates.
- **Ike advocated much larger federal payments to the District of Columbia,** endorsing payments “on a level commensurate with the Federal Government’s...demands upon the District,” as he stated in his annual budget message to Congress in 1954.
- **Eisenhower signed the National Cultural Center Act** in 1958, which authorized the creation of a performing arts center for Washington, which was named for John F. Kennedy after his assassination.
- **President Eisenhower placed the first African American** in the government of the city of Washington in 1954, when he nominated George E. C. Hayes to be D.C. Public Utilities Commissioner.

