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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Martin Luther King Memorial Library
other names Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library

2. Location

street & number 901 G Streets, NW not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code _____

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

David Maloney DAVID MALONEY, DEPUTY SHPD 9-10-2007
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 - Determined not eligible for the National Register.
 - removed from the National Register.
 - other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper Patricia Andrews Date of Action 10/22/2007

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/Library

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/Library

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/International Style/Miesian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Steel and glass

roof _____

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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Description Summary:

Located in downtown Washington, DC, the Martin Luther King Memorial Library is an International style steel and glass building designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1965-1966. Ground was broken on the building in 1968, one year prior to the death of the internationally acclaimed architect. The building opened to the public in 1972, after some construction delays and following Mies' death in 1969. It is a four-story (above grade) structure with black-painted steel and glass curtain walls, and with a characteristic Miesian ground floor loggia, created by recessing the first floor glass and brick walls inward from the perimeter columns. The building uses several design devices employed by Mies in earlier buildings: the recessed first floor loggia; applied exterior steel wide flange mullions and steel cover plates to express the building's structure and to support the glass windows; and an open and "flexible" floor plan.

General Description:

Setting

The Martin Luther King Memorial Library is situated on a 76,000 square foot parcel located on the north side of G Street, at the northwest corner of the intersection of 9th and G Streets, NW. The First Congregational Church building is located across a narrow alley to the west of the library and, together, the two buildings occupy the entire southern half of the city square (Square 375). The library is located in the immediate vicinity of several notable historic buildings, including the Woodward and Lothrop Department store, St. Patrick's Church at 10th and G Streets and the Mather building across G Street from the library. The Gallery Place/Chinatown Metro station entrance is located adjacent to the site, at the southeast corner of 9th and G Streets

Building Structure and Materials

The building encompasses 420,465 square feet, which is divided among four floors above grade, two full floors and a partial mechanical level below grade, and a mechanical penthouse. The International style building has a uniform, low-rise, rectangular mass, whose structure is composed of evenly-spaced steel columns, beams and mullions with large glass infill windows. The building is characterized by its ground floor loggia. Identical compositions and finishes are found on each upper floor elevation.

The building's substructure is of reinforced concrete construction and is independent of the superstructure. The curtain wall is comprised of welded steel components, glazed with bronze-tinted glass with the only deviation being the exposed brick walls flanking the front entrance and

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rear loading dock. Clear glass is used throughout the first floor. All exposed steel is painted black. Uninterrupted granite pavers extend from street curbs to the exterior of the building and in through the entrance doors into the lobby and first floor areas.

Exterior

Characteristic of Mies's work, the building's structure is clearly expressed in its design. The front and rear long elevations are divided into twelve evenly-spaced, 30 foot-wide bays, each containing three large panes of glass, while the shorter side elevations are composed of six bays. The divisions between floors are formed by spandrel beam cover plates that run the length of the exterior. This horizontality is offset by vertical cover plates between the windows. The non-structural column cover plates and wide flange mullions—a device used in many of Mies's other buildings—are welded to the spandrel beams and column cover plates. The steel mullions run from the underside of the second floor to just below the roofline, creating an articulated rhythm in the otherwise flat surface of the curtain wall. The ordered and harmonious exterior is further complemented by the dominance of two primary wall materials: steel and glass.

The first (ground) floor differs from the more homogenous upper three floors through the introduction of the integral, recessed loggia that surrounds the building's perimeter. The building was initially designed with the loggia measuring 30 feet in depth on the front and rear elevations, and ten feet on the sides. However, Mies willingly altered the plans in response to the library staff's request for more interior space by reducing the rear loggia to 10 feet, equal to that of the sides.¹ The sidewalk, composed of unpolished granite pavers of mottled black, white and grey runs from the curb to the face of the building, and then continues into the entry vestibule and lobby. This continuous paving provides both a visual distinction from the standard concrete sidewalks fronting the neighboring buildings and a platform on which the building rests.² In addition, the continuity of the granite from the inside to the outside reinforces the integration of interior and exterior space, a design feature of Mies's work.

¹ Jack Bowman, the architect in Mies' office who worked on the MLK Library, reviewed this National Register nomination form for the Committee of 100 and the D.C. Preservation League. In a letter to Stuart Gosswein (Committee of 100) dated April 20, 2007, Mr. Bowman wrote: "I was present when Mies made this modification. Personally I think it is a definite improvement. A dead isolated exterior space was converted into usable interior space and functional 10-foot wide walkway. Also this modification offered greater visual screening of the truck dock area. Finally, it reinforces the asymmetrical composition (due to the sloping site and requisite brick retaining walls) of the east and west elevations."

² The transcript from Mies's presentation to the Commission of Fine Arts includes discussion between the Commissioners and Mies regarding the selection and extent of paving in front of the library and underscores their support of Mies's holistic approach to architecture. In fact, when Mies indicated a preference for granite over terrazzo, and for it to run from the face of the building out to the curb, one Commissioner stated, "Well, I think whatever Mies would like. I think this design is very important, to have the materials that are appropriate for it because when you water down paving and the terrazzo, you are spoiling the strong simple design

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The library's primary orientation is to the south, and the main entrance is located between two projecting brick walls. Mies's initial design for the building, which is reflected in an architectural model currently located in the Washingtoniana Division on the third floor of the library, shows a veneer of green marble for the two bays to either side of the library's entrance. Mies used highly veined green marble in other buildings (i.e. One Charles Center, Baltimore), but its use here was considered too expensive. Instead, Mies employed a four-inch beige brick, another material frequently found in his architecture. The brick walls project slightly from the main façade, representing a deviation from both the 1966 plans and the model, where they are shown as flush. This revision accommodated the staff's desire for more useable space, including an exterior book drop, but more importantly permitted a more architecturally appropriate location for the stair exit doors which, by building code, were required to exit directly to the exterior of the building.³ The brick walls extend from the ground to the roof of the overhang and lend a formality to the entryway.

Framing the building at the northwest and northeast corners is a retaining wall rising approximately ten feet in height from the building's base. Here, Mies continued the use of beige brick with granite coping to match the pavers. A metal railing was added to continue the plane of the wall along the 9th Street side. This wall creates an enclosed area on the sides and rear of the building under the overhanging roof. Today, locked metal gates restrict access to these covered areas.

The walls on the first floor are faced almost entirely with clear glass. Mies's use of clear glass within the building's skeletal steel frame and the recessed first floor give the building a weightless appearance, whereby the upper floors seem to hover above the ground.⁴ The spans of glass are fitted into typical Miesian steel window framing members and are two panes high extending from the ground to the ceiling.

Beige brick is seen again on the north (rear) elevation. The rear center section features the more utilitarian functions of the library with four recessed loading dock spaces in the center flanked by

and I think we as the Commission can say that. In fact, I would phrase it that way." Commission of Fine Arts Transcript, February 15, 1966, p. 79-80.

³ According to his letter to Stuart Gosswein dated April 20, 2007, Mr. Bowman asserted, "I was assisting Mies when this exiting problem was addressed. The model mentioned above was constructed before a code analysis was made. In Chicago, the stairs could have exited into the building lobby, but in D.C. all stairs were required to exit directly to the outside. It would not have looked good to have exit doors coming out of the middle of the brick walls. We considered a number of options and Mies himself suggested the solution that was finally used."

⁴ Library Director Harry Peterson offered a more pragmatic reason for the use of clear glass at the ground floor: "There should be numerous windows on the main floor to enable the passersby to see what is going on inside and be encouraged to enter and use the facilities." Harry N. Peterson, "Statement of Program for Proposed New Downtown Central Library Building in Washington, DC.," July 1965, p. 29.

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ramps leading down to and up from the parking deck on the B Level. The rear elevation reflects the arrangement of the front with its openings located in the center two bays, flanked on either side by two bays sheathed with beige brick. Other bays are encased in glass beneath the overhang.

Interior

First Floor

The first floor of the library consists of a vestibule entry, a large main lobby area, four "core" areas and two subject area reading rooms. The transition from exterior to interior is minimized and the visual distinction between the two is blurred by Mies's continuity of materials. Passing through a glass wall by way of one of two revolving doors (revolving doors replaced original steel and glass doors), patrons enter into a shallow vestibule.⁵ This space is enclosed with glass in the front and rear and beige brick on the side walls. In addition to the beige brick and glass on the walls, Mies maintained the use of granite floor pavers used on the exterior, on the interior, as well.

Through a second glass wall via one of two sets of metal and glass doors (also replaced), patrons enter the building's lobby – a tall and spacious, unobstructed area measuring 60 by 180 feet and a hallmark of Mies's clear span/universal building space. The ceiling is approximately 20 feet in height and creates a continuous plane from the exterior covered area through the vestibule and into the library's main spaces. The ceiling retains the original acoustic tiles and flush fluorescent lights.

Here again, the architect continued the use of granite pavers for flooring and beige brick along the expanse of the north wall and as well as at the four service cores. The building cores, containing the elevators, stairwells, book dumbwaiters, and restrooms, are located at each corner of the open lobby area, and extend up and down through all floors of the building. Initially, the finish material for the core areas was slated as green marble, but again, economic considerations mandated the use of brick. Also repeated inside are the steel columns which are encased in concrete fireproofing within square steel plate enclosures. Continuing the rhythm of columns on the exterior, they are located on a grid throughout the library. In the lobby, however, they are engaged with the brick wall panels along the north and south so as to maintain the openness of the space.

⁵ The existing doors are replacements; the original doors were hinged glass and metal double doors.

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The original information desk (on center of the lobby space and immediately in front of the entry doors), and the circulation desks (to either side of the doors) remain, with their granite tops and bases intact. Two of the ten original card catalogs still stand behind the central information desk, but the remaining eight have been removed (ghosting is visible on the granite pavers where these card catalogs originally stood). Built-in shelves and cabinets behind the two circulation desks and two writing shelves with built-in trash receptacles and pencil and paper holders, all with granite tops, survive. Chrome-plated hardware is found throughout. An elegant round polished metal clock is suspended from the center of the ceiling above the information desk. Other than the built-in furniture, the original lobby furniture, consisting of an arrangement of chairs and tables into informal reading areas and located at the eastern and western ends of the lobby, has been removed. Presently a freestanding bookstore and stage exist in their place.

Later interventions to the lobby are limited. A bronze bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was put in place in the lobby in 1975, and a mural of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was installed in 1986 and hangs on the north interior wall of the library. A domed freestanding bookstore, "Books Plus," designed by local architect Arthur Cotton Moore, was built at the western end of the lobby in 1991. In addition, a temporary stage and chairs are currently situated in the eastern portion of the lobby. Nevertheless, the lobby retains its feeling of spaciousness.⁶

To either side of the main lobby, at the east and west ends are subject area reading rooms. Mies used glass throughout the interior almost as generously as he did on the exterior. In the lobby, glass spans the floor to ceiling height within channeled black steel frames to divide the lobby from its two flanking reading rooms. The reading rooms maintain the grand proportions of the lobby and are encased in glass on all sides, making them seem bright and spacious. Although the carpeting appears to be a recent replacement, the architect's original plans indicate that these areas were always carpeted. Columns are regularly spaced throughout, and rows of bookshelves line the window walls.

Details of the reading rooms include floor vents that line the window walls and the original furniture selected by the architect. The study tables and chairs reflect a sense of simplicity and modernity inherent in the library's design. In the Business and Technology Reading Room to the west, the southeast corner has been subdivided with a partition wall half the height of the ceiling. The resulting space serves as the Enhanced Business Information Center. The furniture in the Popular Reading Room to the east of the lobby has been replaced. Overall, however, the room retains its openness.

⁶ These additions replace what are shown on the architect's plans as carpeted seating areas with chairs and tables of Miesian design.

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In each of the service cores, the original black resilient tile remains in many areas but has been replaced in some instances with blue tile. The landings are also covered with resilient tile, but the stairs themselves are concrete with notched metal nosings. The simple square metal stair railings are original and reflect the overall rectilinear design of the library. Many of the elevator cab enclosures have been replaced and the floors in the elevators replaced by either blue resilient tile, or in some instances, polished cream, pink, and beige granite. This granite is also used in the newest of the elevator cab enclosures.

Upper Levels

The second through fourth floors follow the spatial arrangement of the lobby below. The central floor areas between the four building cores are column-free and used for workrooms, service areas, meeting rooms, and office and lounge space for staff. A hallway lined with beige brick surrounds the core. Painted black metal doors are framed from floor to ceiling and open into the core offices from the carpeted hallways. At either end are the glass-walled reading rooms. These areas are carpeted and contain, for the most part, the furniture selected by the architect. On the second floor, original Mies-designed furniture has been removed from the sitting areas outside each reading room. Slight alterations were made to the third floor west reading room where a section was partitioned to limit public access. However, it was done in a manner sensitive to the library's design and uses glass panels within a black metal frame, much like the reading room entry wall.

While the second through fourth floors all retain a remarkable degree of integrity, it is the fourth floor that exhibits the purest expression of Mies's design aesthetic. This is most evident in the Director's Office, Board Room, and Director's Reception Room, which still contains the original architect-designed furniture, including nine *Tugendhat* chairs grouped in sets of three around a *Barcelona* table. The reading rooms also contain much of the originally specified furnishings. Banks of payphones remain in the hallways, carpeted areas remain carpeted and tiled areas remain tiled, and the acoustic tile ceilings and eleven foot ceiling height are unchanged. Interventions include replacement of the original terrazzo floors in the restrooms with ceramic tile. In addition, a new office suite with partition walls has been added at the southeast corner. Otherwise, the plan, materials, and finishes remain virtually intact.

The library's sub-grade levels contain a variety of functions, many related to the operation of the facility. The A Level, just below the first floor, is very different from the public areas above. Because this area is windowless, the rooms and hallways have a much more enclosed feeling. Columns run in Mies's grid throughout this floor and the finishes are essentially unchanged. The concrete block walls are sheathed with beige brick in public areas but remain exposed in work areas. Housed in the A Level are two exhibit rooms, various storage rooms, work areas, and an

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auditorium. The auditorium contains 350 flexible seats, a ceiling-mounted screen, and projection booth. Again, consistent with Mies's distinction between public vs. private spaces, the walls of the auditorium are sheathed in beige brick. Just below on the B Level is the library's parking deck. With space for 100 cars, the concrete deck is accessible down two ramps that run parallel along the rear wall of the building. As with the rest of the library, steel columns wrapped in concrete punctuate the space at regular intervals. The lowest level, the mechanical level, houses the electronically-controlled air conditioning and heating plant for the facility.

Building Condition

Overall, the building has experienced minimal alterations. Alterations on the exterior include vertical banners affixed to steel columns along 9th Street, installation of gates along the rear and side walls, and installation of metal gates across loading bays. On the primary facade, revolving doors replaced the original hinged double glass doors and single hinged doors were added to provide wheelchair access. On the interior, the doors from the vestibule into the lobby were replaced, as were the floor surfaces in the stairwells and elevator lobbies. The lobby has been altered somewhat by the addition of the bookstore at the west end, but should not be considered a permanent alteration and does not appear to have compromised original building materials. The card catalogs have been largely removed, although two remain *in situ* to demonstrate their appearance. Similarly, the Mies designed furniture has been removed from both the lobby and the seating areas outside the second floor reading rooms, but examples remain in the Director's suite. Many of these alterations are removable and/or temporary and therefore affect neither the building's architectural integrity nor our understanding of the original design intent.

Indeed, the building retains a remarkably high degree of architectural integrity. The exterior curtain wall, floor plan, spatial arrangements, and layout remain essentially unchanged since the building's completion in 1972. The structure and skin, interior core, and other basic components appear to be in good condition and retain the presence and condition they embodied when first constructed.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
B Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1965-1972

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

#

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

#

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository: D.C. Historic Preservation Office; Martin Luther King Memorial Library

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The Martin Luther King Memorial Library (MLK Library) is a four-story steel and glass International style building in downtown Washington, D.C. designed by world famous German-born architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and completed in 1972. The modern building, designed for use as the city's central library, is the only example of the architect's work in the District of Columbia, and is the only library designed by Mies van der Rohe to have ever been constructed. The building, completed after Mies's death in 1969 is also one of the last buildings designed by him. Although Martin Luther King Memorial Library is less than fifty years old, the building is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C (and Criterion Consideration G) as the work of one of this century's most renowned and internationally recognized "modernists."⁷ The publicly funded building is also an important landmark of International Style architecture in the District of Columbia, a city known stylistically for its monumental federal architecture reflective of the Beaux Arts Classical tradition. The Period of Significance for the building spans from 1965 when the initial designs for the library building were prepared until 1972, when the library was dedicated and opened to the public.

Resource History and Historic Context:

Early Background of the D.C. Central Library⁸:

The Martin Luther King Library, completed in 1972, is the culmination of over 30 years of effort on the part of the D.C. Public Library to update and expand its inadequate central library quarters at Mount Vernon Square, built 1900-1902. The history of the development of the site goes back to 1937 when several civic leaders and officials of the D.C. Public library pleaded with the House District Committee for appropriations to construct a new main library building to replace the old one which had "outgrown its accommodations and is unable to furnish ample and efficient service to the public."⁹ Overcrowding had already become so severe that in 1931 the library was forced to move its acquisitions, cataloging, and preparation documents out of the

⁷ At least five of Mies van der Rohe's buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places; several of these were considered eligible at the time of designation under Criterion Consideration G (A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance). Listed Mies' buildings include the Buildings at 860-880 Lake Shore Drive; Promontory Apartments; S.R. Crown Hall; One Charles Center; and Farnsworth House. For a complete listing, consult the National Register of Historic Places.

⁸ The early history of the D.C. Central Library has been culled from the report, "D.C. Public Library Survey" prepared by Tracerics in September 1997 as the final product for a NPS-funded survey grant, sponsored by the D.C. Historic Preservation Office. The report presents a more in-depth discussion of this early history. The D.C. Public Library Survey report is on file at the D.C. Historic Preservation Office, along with survey forms and photographs of all of the city's libraries, and other research findings.

⁹ "House D.C. Body Listens to Pleas for New Library," *The Evening Star*, July 7, 1937. As quoted in "D.C. Public Library Survey Report, Tracerics, September 1997, p. 153.

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main library building to the abandoned Metropolitan Methodist Church at John Marshall Place and C Street, N.W. The 1937 bill sought government funding and/or grants through the Public Works Administration (PWA) for site acquisition and construction costs for a new central library facility.

In 1939, Congress appropriated funds to develop plans for a new main library facility to be located on Pennsylvania Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets, N.W., across from the National Gallery of Art. Construction of the new Central Library began in 1941, but was halted in 1942 by the Federal Office of Emergency Management. Construction was resumed on the building, but only after the Library's Board of Trustees agreed to allow the building's use as a federal office building during the war emergency. Hastily made alterations to the interior plans converted the building to office space, and construction was completed in May 1942. At the end of the war, 30,000 square feet of space was made available to the Public Library, and in 1946 and 1947, the administrative offices, acquisitions, cataloging and preparations departments moved to the new facility, while the library itself remained at Mount Vernon Square.¹⁰

Two subsequent plans developed to solve D.C.'s public library space problem failed to result in completed projects. One, pursued between 1951 and 1953, planned for a two-stage expansion of the old central library at Mount Vernon Square, which ultimately consisted of a large 300,000 square foot building on the Mount Vernon Square site. The Commission of Fine Arts objected to this proposal since the new construction was being proposed on open space as designated on the L'Enfant Plan. The D.C. Commissioners eliminated funding for the library expansion, apparently not because of these objections, but for budgetary reasons.¹¹

In 1957, another attempt to expand the Central Library was made when the D.C. Urban Renewal Office suggested that a new library facility be included in the proposed Northwest Urban Renewal Project. The D.C. Public Library's Board of Trustees accepted the idea; however, no plans ever materialized from this proposal since the Northwest Urban Renewal Project was halted during the planning phases for a new freeway in the area and was never revived.¹²

A third and final plan for a new central library facility, begun 1960-1961, resulted in the 1972 opening of the Martin Luther King Memorial Library at 9th and G Streets, N.W.

¹⁰ After 1946, other D.C. offices and federal agencies moved into the building, crowding out the library functions. The building is no longer standing.

¹¹ Traceries, "D.C. Public Library Survey" report, p. 155-156.

¹² Booz, Allen & Hamilton, *A Study of Central Library Facilities in the District of Columbia*, Unpublished report prepared for the National Capital Downtown Committee, Inc., July 10, 1961, p. 9, as quoted in Traceries, "D.C. Public Library Survey" report, p. 156.

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Plans for a new Central Library at 9th and G Streets, N.W.:

In 1960-1961, Booz, Allen & Hamilton—an engineering consulting firm—conducted a study of the District of Columbia's Central Library and the projected needs for future expansions. The study, sponsored by the National Capital Downtown Committee, Incorporated, analyzed the adequacy of the central library facility and made recommendations. Among other conclusions, the report found that the city's central library at Mount Vernon Square was obsolete and recommended construction of a new building. In 1965, after several years of lobbying and effort, the Library Board of Trustees managed to secure a Congressional appropriation for the purchase of a site and for the construction of a new library building at the northwest corner of 9th and G Streets, N.W. This corner site was deemed ideal based upon one of the recommendations included in the Booz, Allen & Hamilton study that suggested that a new library facility be "located as near to the heart of the business district as possible," and that it be "on a level, rectangular plot of land containing a minimum of 50,000 square feet of space."¹³ These recommendations follow the conclusions of other library planning studies sponsored by the American Library Association, chief among them Wheeler and Githen's *The American Public Library* which notes:

"The location of the library should attract and serve the greatest possible number of people...A public library building is first of all a public service plant and not a monument. The ideal site for a library building is where a large department store, a popular bank, the busiest office building or drug store could be successfully located. It is vital to secure such a site."¹⁴

The chosen site at 9th and G Street site, containing 76,000 square feet, met the requirements: it was located in the heart of Washington, D.C.'s commercial district; was convenient to public transportation, including a projected underground subway stop; offered the draw of nearby department stores and banks; and provided adequate space for a sizeable library building. So, in 1965, after additional appropriations made it possible¹⁵, the entire 76,000 square-foot site was purchased and plans for the design of the new central library began.

As part of the process, Harry N. Peterson, director of the Public Library issued a *Statement of Program for Proposed New Downtown Central Library Building in Washington, D.C.* in July 1965.¹⁶ This document outlined the design requirements, equipment, and principles underlying

¹³ Booz, Allen & Hamilton, p. v, as footnoted in Traceries, "D.C. Public Library Survey" report, p. 157.

¹⁴ Quoted in Harry N. Peterson, "Where to Build," *Library Journal*, Vol 77 (December 15, 1952), p. 2100.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the appropriation amounts, see Traceries, p. 158.

¹⁶ The *Statement of Program* was revised in August 1965 and approved by the Library Board in the Fall of 1965 (by November 1, 1965). See Letter to Mies van der Rohe from Harry N. Peterson, November 1, 1965.

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the organization of the new library building. Peterson referred to the American Library Association's general guidelines for library planning, but relied heavily on the 1961 Booz, Allen & Hamilton study. Peterson used the company's conclusions and recommendations as the basis for an elaborate building program. In his 93-page report, Peterson emphasized the recommendation that the new building reflect a "modern" functional design using the latest technology and advancements in construction materials and techniques; that the interior be designed for the maximum flexibility of space and the comfort of the library patron; and that the books be departmentalized according to subject with an emphasis on open shelves.¹⁷ Along with the program, Peterson developed schematic sketches of possible floor plans for the new building.¹⁸

Selection of an Architect:

Once the site had been selected and appropriations for construction of the library assured, the Library Board began to express interest in identifying an architect. Although the Board was ultimately left out of the actual selection process—the task fell to a five-man panel established for that purpose—the Board did voice its opinion that someone of renown should be selected as the architect of the new building.¹⁹ Two of the panel's members, James Blaser, Director of the D.C. Department of Buildings and Grounds and General Charles Duke, D.C. Engineer Commissioner, appear to have been the most actively engaged in the selection process. Mr. Blaser received his copy of Peterson's *Statement of Program* in mid-summer 1965, and, in an August meeting with Mr. Peterson, indicated that he would use it as a basis for discussion with the architect.²⁰ There were no names known to have been mentioned at this meeting, though in her student paper prepared in 1979, Merrill Ann Kaegi contends that Dr. Blaser and Brigadier General Charles Duke were likely already negotiating with Mies van der Rohe at that point.²¹

¹⁷ Traceries, p. 158.

¹⁸ In his *Statement*, Peterson noted that "the purpose of these drawings is not to design the building, which is the architect's function, but to offer a graphic presentation of service and functional requirements as a basis for planning." *Statement of Program for Proposed New Downtown Central Library Building in Washington, D.C.*, July 1965 (rev. August 1965), p. 64, as quoted in Merrill Ann Kaegi, "Mies Van der Rohe and the New Downtown Central Library, Washington, D.C.," unpublished paper for American University, Fall 1979.

¹⁹ According to an unpublished paper on the library, the contract for the library was still under the auspices of the Federal government, and was being let at a time of changing attitudes on the aesthetics of government building. In fact, in an effort to promote a more modernist perspective, the Kennedy Administration had made a wholesale change in the composition of the Fine Arts Commission. In 1965, the General Services Administration (GSA) established an advisory panel on architectural services, largely to ensure that new Federal buildings had "designs that embody the finest contemporary architectural thought." Although the library was a city building, and not a federal one, this new attitude may well have had influenced the selection of an architect. (See Pleasant Mann, "For Once In a Public Building in Washington, There is Excellence Throughout: The Martin Luther King, Jr. [sic] Memorial Library," unpublished paper, no date, Historic Preservation Office files.)

²⁰ Report of meeting between Mr. Peterson and Mr. Blaser and others, August 3, 1965, as footnoted in Kaegi, p. 3.

²¹ There is no evidence cited by Kaegi as to why she believes this. Kaegi, p. 3.

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On September 23, 1965, the *Washington Star* publicly announced the selection of Mies van der Rohe as the architect for the new Central Library.²² The article notes that about 25 architects had expressed an interest in the building, but does not clarify whether or not any of them were seriously considered. A September 30, 1965 *Washington Post* article indicates that it was not known if Mies himself was one of the 25 architects who had expressed an interest, but that James Blaser had made several trips to Chicago to negotiate with the 79-year old architect.²³

In general, the local press greeted the selection of Mies van der Rohe with great acclaim. The *Post* noted, "It is altogether out of character for the District government to hire one of the greatest innovators of this generation. General Duke, the District's Engineer Commissioner deserves great applause for his decision to bring the magnificent designer to the Capital."²⁴ In February 1966, after Mies had presented his proposed designs for the library to the Commission of Fine Arts, the local press hailed the design and choice of architect. *Washington Post* critic Wolf Von Eckhardt noted,

"It is true, of course, that the building is in itself a work of art, undoubtedly the best example of the art of modern architecture aside from Eero Saarinen's Dulles airport, we shall have in Washington...we are lucky...to have at least one building by America's greatest living architect in the National Capital."²⁵

Mies, himself, was apparently delighted with the commission. Despite international recognition and works in major cities, Mies had never designed a building in the nation's capital. Furthermore, although Mies had designed a library for the IIT campus in Chicago, the building was never constructed. Mies likely saw the D.C. commission as a last opportunity to have a library—a coveted design project—actually realized. Upon being awarded the commission, Mies wrote to Harry Peterson, "I am very pleased to have the opportunity to work on your library in Washington, D.C. I consider it a privilege, and you may be assured that I shall do everything possible to make this structure a significant statement."²⁶

²² "Architect is Named for District Library," *The Washington Star*, September 23, 1965.

²³ *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1965.

²⁴ *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1965.

²⁵ Wolf Von Eckhardt, "Glass Box' Library Deceptively Simple," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1966, C3.

²⁶ Letter from Mies van der Rohe to Harry Peterson, as quoted in Kaegi, p. 7.

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Building Program and Design:

Although 79 years old and suffering from arthritis, Mies van der Rohe was directly involved in the design phase of the library, along with his lead project architect, Gene Summers.²⁷ From the time he signed the contract in October 1965 until he presented the proposed design to the Commission of Fine Arts in February 1966, Mies was the principal contact person on the project. Throughout the fall of 1965, correspondence on the project was directed to Mies van der Rohe and signed by him, and, in December 1965, at a meeting in Chicago, Mies was present, along with Gene Summers, Harry Peterson, Mr. Blaser and others. At that meeting, Mies presented a scale model of the proposed building. The drawings for the library bear Mies's own signature, indicating that the architect was committed to the project and personally involved in its design.

Following this December meeting, the plans and model were presented to library staff, who were then given an opportunity to comment on the design. Their comments, dated January 25, 1966, were sent to Mies along with some suggested changes in early February 1966.²⁸ On February 15, 1966, Mies van der Rohe presented the scale model and the preliminary floor plans to the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA), winning unanimous approval for the design. Recalling the scene four years later, architecture critic Wolf Von Eckhardt wrote:

"...Mies, 80 years old at the time, badly plagued by arthritis, lifted himself on his crutches and stood before the Fine Arts Commission...before Mies could speak, they all stood up in turn to applaud him, happy and proud that Washington, which has no public buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright or any other great masters of our time, except Eero Saarinen's Dulles airport terminal, would now at least have a building by Mies."²⁹

On the design, Mies simply stated to the CFA, "We tried to get a clear picture of what a library is. Then we took the requirements and translated them into architecture."³⁰ Indeed, although Mies had clearly followed the 93-page program in designing the library building³¹, the resultant "black box" steel and glass building is quintessentially "Miesian."

²⁷ Mies van der Rohe came to Washington with Gene Summers to sign the contract in October 1965, and Mr. Peterson and Mr. Houck flew to Chicago to meet with Mies twice in the fall of 1965. (See Kaegi, p. 9). Then in February 1966, Mies returned to Washington to appear before the Commission of Fine Arts to present his design. After approval of the project by the Commission of Fine Arts, Mies reduced his personal role in the project.

²⁸ Kaegi, p. 11.

²⁹ Wolf Von Eckardt, "A Modern Master's Monument," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1972, p. C1.

³⁰ *The Washington Daily News*, February 16, 1966.

³¹ The design that Mies presented to the Library Directors in December and the Commission of Fine Arts in February deviated from the program requirements in one substantial way: whereas the program called for a building and separate adjacent parking on the site,

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Construction of the new building began in May 1968, with Blake Construction Company, Inc. serving as the general contractor for the project, and an official ground breaking ceremony held on July 31, 1968. Although the estimated completion date was set for May 1970, building construction was not actually completed until July 1971. The equipping and preparation of the library took place over the next year. The library was opened and dedicated in September 1972.

As completed in 1972, the building closely followed the original scheme that was presented to the Commission of Fine Arts. The exterior of steel verticals and horizontals spanned by rhythmic expanses of plate glass follows a precise and ordered design aesthetic that Mies followed throughout his career. The ground floor loggia recessed under the column supported upper stories—a device Mies first used at his 1949 Promontory Apartments in Chicago and again in his 1949-1951 Apartment at 860-880 Lake Shore Drive—is a dominant feature of his D.C. library building. The recessed loggia not only reduces the building's mass, but it also serves to visually draw people into the building, a stated desire in the library building program. Similarly, the granite lobby paving which extends outside the building to the street curb—a design element Mies first employed at the Apartments at 860-880 Lake Shore Drive (1949-1951)—and the juxtaposition of clear glass on the first floor and bronze-tinted glass on the upper floors, were implemented to integrate the exterior and interior of the building and to welcome the passer-by. At the time of the building's opening in 1972, newspaper commentary clearly recognized the effect:

“...from outside the library, the glass walls reveal bookshelves that permit one to view titles of books—titles which seem to beckon. Inside one feels at home, and not isolated from the outside world.”

Similar to some other of his steel and glass buildings, the library has welded steel wide flange mullions, in support of the exterior curtain wall, which run vertically from the bottom of the second floor spandrel plates to the underside of the roof cap angles. Mies had used applied vertical steel wide flange mullions for the first time at his soaring Apartments at 860-880 North Shore Drive, and again in 1955 at his lower, two-story Crown Hall building on the Illinois Institute of Technology campus. Mies used the mullions to express the “real” structure of his buildings³² and, in the case of 860-880 North Shore Drive, to emphasize the building's

Mies covered the entire site with a building, proposing underground parking instead. The building also introduced the very Miesian recessed first story—a feature that was criticized by staff due to the reduction of valuable floor space that it engendered.

³² Part of Mies's architectural philosophy “less is more,” involved expressing the structure of building and not ornamenting it in any way. However, in order for Mies to accommodate building codes that required that steel be fireproofed with a minimum cover of two inches of concrete and yet still expose his buildings' “structure,” Mies encased the poured-in-place concrete fireproofing with steel plate, then welded slim, vertical steel wide flange members to them from the bottom to the top of the building. Mies's critics later argued that his use of the steel mullions on the column covers was hypocritical, in that they were, themselves, ornamental and not functional.

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verticality. At the lower Crown Hall and the D.C. library, the welded wide flange mullions help to make the buildings appear lighter.

The major changes from the original scheme to the completed building are found in the depth of the overhang of the building and the use of exterior materials. As originally designed, the recessed ground level was meant to be of uniform depth on the front and rear of the building. However, because the library staff felt strongly (and the director agreed) that they needed more interior space within which to operate, Mies agreed through his assistant to extend the rear of the main floor. The depth of the overhang was made equal to that of the sides, which were already narrower because of the size of the lot. The front overhang is three times deeper than that of the other three sides.

The other substantial change involved the facing material of the four building cores. In the model, these areas were faced with a green marble; however due to the expense, Mies substituted beige brick for marble.³³

The interior of the library building was based upon the notion of "flexibility." In Harry Peterson's *Statement of Program*, he discussed the merits of the flexible interior, noting that it should be "efficient, flexible and expandable." Peterson stressed the need for lateral and vertical relationships between subject divisions, connected by a fixed core or cores, where patrons and library materials would be transported up and down. Ideally, all public library service divisions that contained related materials would be located near the same core.

The idea of flexible interiors was not new to Mies, and he responded to the program requirement as he had in previous building designs by offering an open plan. Mies incorporated the library staff work rooms and service areas in the center of the floors with building cores located at the four corners of this area. The two northern (rear) cores each have two small public elevators, one large freight elevator, and all four cores have staff elevators with pneumatic tube and dumbwaiter system stations. These service elevators met Peterson's goal of vertical flexibility.

The building contains four stories above ground and three below ground. The first floor consists of the entry lobby; the main lobby with card catalogs (partially intact) and information desks; and two large library subject reading rooms. The second floor contains subject reading rooms, and staff work rooms occupying the central area. The third floor contains subject reading rooms and closed book stacks. The fourth floor is given over to staff offices, including a director's suite, and meeting rooms. The three below grade levels include stacks and an auditorium;

³³ Mies was the son of a stone mason and actually liked the inherent quality of brick. He used bricks elsewhere in his work and is quoted as saying, "The old brick masonry has many advantages," Peter Blake, *Mies Van Der Rohe: Architecture and Structure* Penguin Books, 1960, p. 39.

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underground parking for 100 cars; and, below that, mechanical systems rooms housing an electronically controlled air conditioning and heating plant for the library.

As specified in Peterson's *Statement of Program*, the building was expandable. As built, the library could house up to two million volumes of books, but was designed to accommodate at least one additional floor. In a library conference session, Milton S. Byam, Director of D.C. Public Library and successor to Harry Peterson, indicates that one additional floor could be added to the building to accommodate an additional million volumes of books.³⁴ Harry Peterson, in press reports at the time of the building's initial design, however, is quoted as saying that the structure "will be so designed that one or two additional floors could eventually increase the library's capacity to 3 million books."³⁵ At another time, Peterson more generally noted the building's flexibility by commenting, "it permitted a large, logical organization of services and functions and was flexible so that future changes could be accommodated."

Building Use:

Although the building was clearly designed as a library and was laid out to function accordingly, the building's design was also dictated by Mies's "universal" building philosophy that negated defining a building by use. On challenging Louis Sullivan's adage, "form follows function," Mies van der Rohe once stated, "We do the opposite. We reverse this and make a practical and satisfying shape and then fit the function into it. Today, this is the only practical way to build, because the functions of most buildings are continually changing, but economically the building cannot change. Instead let us make room enough for any function." Again, according to Mies scholar Peter Blake, Mies believed that "the only function one could be sure of in any building built to last was *the function of flexibility of use throughout its lifetime*. So, the only kind of building which would make sense, in terms of functionalism, would be a building not adjusted to any specific function at all!"³⁶

Following the opening of the library and in reviewing the new building, then *Washington Post* journalist Wolf Von Eckhardt made the "universal" building connection, asserting: "The Martin Luther King Memorial Library is not completed. It never will be. Mies would not want it to be. He carefully designed his buildings as simple enclosures of space, envelopes, if you will, for the life and change within them."³⁷

³⁴ Milton S. Byam, "Martin Luther King Memorial Library," *Remodeling and Expanding for New Services*, Conference Session, no date. (Vertical Files, D.C. Historic Preservation Office.)

³⁵ Robert J. Lewis, "D.C. Library Design OKd," *The Evening Star*, February 16, 1966.

³⁶ Peter Blake, p. 77.

³⁷ Wolf Von Eckhardt, "A Modern Master's Monument," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1972, p. C-1.

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Naming of the Library:

Throughout the planning process and for much of its construction, the building was called the D.C. Central Library. In August 1970, however, a grassroots effort began in the form of petitions and letters to the Library's Board of Trustees to name the library in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. At a hearing on the issue in January 1971, Charles Cassell, a school board member and local architect said, "we are not asking politely, we are demanding that you name the library after Martin Luther King, Jr."³⁸ On January 14, 1971 the Board voted 5 to 2 to adopt the name, The Martin Luther King Memorial Library. It is not clear why the Board chose to eliminate the "Jr." from King's name in dubbing the library building, but it may simply have been a matter of phonetics. In 2005, the D.C. Public Library officially changed the building's name from the Martin Luther King Memorial Library to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library.

Furniture and Art

Throughout his career, Mies had insisted on a high level of detail ('God is in the details') and harmony of design. Most of his buildings included his own furniture designs, namely the Barcelona chairs and stools, designed for the German Pavilion at the 1929 International exhibit in Barcelona, and the cantilevered Tugendhat chairs and table, designed for use in the Mies-designed Tugendhat house (1929). Under the terms of his library contract, Mies's firm was not responsible for furniture design and layout.³⁹ Not surprisingly, though, Mies's office recommended certain custom-designed furniture pieces for the D.C. library building. Budgetary constraints, however, would not allow it, as indicated by this February 1969 letter from Harry Peterson to Jack Bowman (design assistant in Mies's office who replaced Gene Summers):

"I think we shall have to make some decisions regarding readers' tables for the new Downtown Central Library. When you went over the equipment listing for the new building last year, you made a sketch of a table which you suggested that we might have custom-made for around \$260.00...Did I tell you that the \$1,000,000 we requested for equipment in fiscal 1969 was reduced to \$823,000? In view of this, the custom-made tables may be beyond our means. Is there anything on the market that comes close to the design you had in mind?"⁴⁰

³⁸ Robert F. Levey, "New Library is Named for Dr. King," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1971.

³⁹ According to Board minutes, Mr. Peterson reported that although Mies was not obligated under the terms of the contract to do so, he would like to help in furniture selection. Trustee minutes May 12, 1966 as footnoted in Kaegi, p.20-21.

⁴⁰ As quoted in Kaegi, p. 21.

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On August 17, 1969, several months after this correspondence, and a year after ground was broken, Mies van der Rohe died. Mr. Jack Bowman from Mies's office continued to carry on the project administration, making important recommendations and decisions about the library's furniture. Two letters, written in May 1971 to the Acting Director (Harry Peterson, Director of the D.C. Public Library system retired in July 1970) justified Bowman's recommendation for a particular stock item and for the use of Mies van der Rohe designed furniture. In his "Justification for using Steelcase, Inc. 4200 Series desks and tables..." Bowman wrote,

The main feature of this series [Steelcase, Inc. 4200 series desks, reader tables]...is the reveal (a linear indentation) under the top panel and the chrome steel strip running directly under the reveal. We consider this feature essential..."⁴¹

In his "Justification for using Mies van der Rohe furniture," Bowman wrote,

"...This office has endeavored to produce a facility worthy of this concern. Our success will depend in no small part, on the quality, durability and appearance of the interior furnishings and their harmony with the building's architecture.

...All of the subject furniture which was selected for the library was designed by Mies in the late 1920s to implement the interiors of the buildings. This furniture is of both historical and artistic significance, and certain of the pieces such as the Barcelona Chair, Barcelona "X" table and the "X" chair are on permanent exhibit in the New York Museum of Modern Art...Mies's furniture has been designated only for those large or otherwise important spaces which offer a suitable setting and which are frequented by the public...We consider the utilization of Mies van der Rohe furniture in the designated areas of this building to be essential to the achievement of a consummate work of Architecture."⁴²

Clearly, these letters sent by Bowman were effective, as the building opened with the Series 2400 Tables located in the library reading rooms, and Mies-designed furniture in select areas. The Series 2400 tables have chrome-plated steel legs with a brushed finish and cream-colored laminate table tops. The stock chairs are covered with black naugahyde.

⁴¹ The letter, from which excerpts are quoted in Kaegi, 9, 22, provides two detailed reasons why the reveal is an essential feature. To summarize, the reveals are used throughout the building and the reveals express the structure of the table's frame. This feature—directly expressing the structure of a building—is a key element of the library and of all of Mies's buildings.

⁴² Memorandum from John Bowman in The Office of Mies van der Rohe to Joe Y. Lee, Director, D.C. Public Library, May 27, 1971.

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In total, the library was outfitted with 17 *Barcelona Lounge Chairs*, 26 *Barcelona Stools*, 10 *Barcelona Tables* (glass-topped), 4 Italian marble-topped tables and 14 *Tugendhat Lounge Chairs*.⁴³ The natural and black all-leather upholstery matched the duo-tone color scheme of the beige brick and black steel library building. As indicated on the floor plans, certain furniture groupings could be found on each of the above-grade floor levels. On the first floor, two groupings of Mies's furniture were originally located at either end of the main lobby. These furniture groupings—concentrated on a carpet and separated from each other by an expanse of floor—followed a pattern of furniture arrangement that Mies established in his other buildings. On the second floor, groupings were located in small reading areas in front of the specialized departmental research rooms and on the third floor, Mies's furniture filled the staff lounge area. On the fourth floor, Mies's furniture was the focal point of the reception area to the Director's office, and was also included in the board room, as well as in other staff offices.

Today, the Mies-designed furniture is scattered around the upper levels of the library building, much of it stacked in storage areas and no longer in use. The small reading areas with Mies's furniture at either end of the lobby area have been replaced by a book store and stage, and the small reading nooks outside the reading rooms on the upper levels have been eliminated. Only the Director's office reception area retains the Mies-designed furniture *in situ*.

Mies's attitude regarding art work deviated somewhat from that of furniture, in that he supported the notion of "found" objects of art, rather than "designed" ones. In his Barcelona Pavilion, Mies had designed a small base in a pool that he intended for a particular artist's work. On his last days in Berlin before leaving for Barcelona and still without a particular statue, however, Mies reputedly "grabbed a taxi...drove out to [George] Kolbe's studio, and borrowed the best substitute he could find."⁴⁴ Similarly, in a letter early in the project from Mies to James A. Blaser, Director of Buildings and Grounds regarding art, Mies wrote, "There will certainly be areas in the building where paintings, tapestries and/or sculpture can be used to enrich the areas; however, I believe that first should come the building and when the spaces are actually built, various objects can be tried. I do not believe in commissioning a painter or sculptor to do a piece for a specific spot in a building—it is much more reasonable to place a found object which is of the highest quality in its own right."⁴⁵

At the time of the opening of the library building, no art work—either commissioned or found—adorned the interiors. The lobby offered a clean, open expanse with smooth granite floors and tall ceilings. A wooden information desk on axis with the main entry occupied the center of the

⁴³ "Lounge Chair Specifications," "Stool Specifications," "Table for Books & Periodicals Specifications," April 9, 1971-May 5, 1971. (MLK, Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Community Archives, MLK Library Planning document, box 3, MLK Library Collection.)

⁴⁴ Blake, p.54.

⁴⁵ Letter from Mies van der Rohe to Mr. J.A. Blaser, November 10, 1965 (MLK Vertical files, Washingtoniana Division, MLK).

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lobby with wooden card catalogs ranged behind it and to either side. The two groups of Mies's furniture, offering informal reading areas, flanked either end of the lobby, with doors leading into the subject rooms to either side.

The first art work introduced to the library came in 1975, when Mrs. Ruth Resnick donated the Martin Luther King bust located in the library's lobby to the library, on behalf of her late husband, former New York Representative, Joseph Y. Resnick. Another King tribute came in 1986, when artist Don Miller was commissioned to design the colorful mural depicting the life and times of Dr. Martin Luther King that currently lines the rear wall of the library's lobby. The immense full-color, oil-on-canvas tribute measures 56 feet long by seven feet wide and was two years in the making. The idea was Miller's own; in 1984 he presented the idea to the D.C. Public Library Board and, after a series of presentations, was accepted by it. The project was funded by charitable donations.⁴⁶

The Books Plus Book Store, located at the west end of the lobby, was introduced in 1991, not as art, but more as a large piece of furniture to accommodate a bookstore. The bookstore, which generates income for the library to augment its collection, replaced the original informal reading area with Mies's furniture. The wooden domed structure was designed and built by local architect Arthur Cotton Moore, "to resemble a piece of furniture and not be disrespectful of the library's original design...The free-form, curvilinear design around a core is based on Rohe's early work."⁴⁷

Building Dedication:

The Martin Luther King Memorial Library was dedicated in September 1972. Local newspaper press hailed the building.⁴⁸ According to Wolf von Eckhardt, "Mies stuck to the cubist simplicity of glass and steel and simple brick that he had so painstakingly and masterfully evolved in the 1920s, most notably with his German Pavilion for the Barcelona Exhibition of 1929 and later for his campus buildings and apartment houses in Chicago and the Seagram building in New York."

⁴⁶ Stephen Monroe, "Images of a King: Well-known artist Don Miller explains why he toiled so diligently on the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial mural," *Washington Living*, January 1986.

⁴⁷ Quote by Arthur Cotton Moore, from Michael Cromwell, "MLK Library's Bookstore Finally out of the Shadows," *The Washington Times*, March 15, 1991.

⁴⁸ See Wolf Von Eckhardt, "A Modern Master's Monument," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 1972, p. C1 and Benjamin Forgey, "New Library Noble Work," *The Evening Star*, September 22, 1972.

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The Architect: Mies van der Rohe:

Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe is universally considered one of the most important architects of the 20th century, and is often classified as one of the western world's four great leading modernists (Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier being the other three). Mies's significance to and influence on the field of architecture is unequivocal. According to the National Register Nomination on the Farnsworth House, "Mies emerged [in Europe] as one of the most innovative leaders of the modern movement, producing visionary projects for glass and steel and executing a number of small but critically significant buildings. In the United States, after 1938, he transformed the architectonic expression of the steel frame in American architecture and left a nearly unmatched legacy teaching and building."⁴⁹ As both a practicing architect and teacher, Mies's work influenced multiple generations of American architects, garnering its own stylistic classification of "Miesian." His work continues to receive critical reviews by such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Canadian Center for Architecture, reaffirming Mies's primacy in the historical canon of architecture.⁵⁰

Mies was born in Aachen, Germany in 1886 as Maria Ludwig Michael Mies, the son of a stonemason. After World War I, he added his mother's maiden name to his birth name, becoming Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and commonly called Mies. In the earliest years of his career, and before establishing his own firm, Mies worked for several giants in the world of modernism in Germany, including Peter Behrens, Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer. In 1928, the German government selected Mies to design its pavilion for the 1929 International exhibit in Barcelona. Mies's resulting building, the Barcelona Pavilion, is recognized to this day as a masterpiece in modern architecture. Similarly, the Barcelona chair and table, designed for the Pavilion, remain icons within the modern furniture lexicon.

In 1930, Mies was appointed Director of the Bauhaus in Dessau, a position that he maintained until 1933, when the political situation forced Mies to close the institution. In 1932, Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock arranged an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art that included the works of Mies, along with other modernists like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius, thereby catapulting Mies into the American architecture consciousness. Alfred Barr, the director of MoMA, coined the exhibition's title, "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, and the accompanying catalog title, *The International Style*—a term that came to define a whole school and movement of modern architecture, ultimately with Mies at the helm. In 1937, with the prospect of a commission to design a house in Wyoming, Mies immigrated to the United States, becoming head of the Department of Architecture (which later

⁴⁹ Anthony Raynsford, Farnsworth House National Register Nomination Form, National Park Service, 2004, 8-6.

⁵⁰ Crown Hall National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, National Park Service, p. 11.

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became the College of Architect) at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). Between 1938 and 1958, Mies designed a large number of important buildings, including the IIT campus; the Promontory Apartments in Chicago; 860-880 Lake Shore Drive in Chicago; the Seagram Building in New York; and the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, to name a few.

By the end of this 20-year period, Mies was beginning to win honors of the highest degree. In 1958, he gained membership in the esteemed Academie d'Architecture in Paris; in 1959, he won the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects; in 1960, the American Institute of Architects awarded Mies its Gold Medal Award; and in 1963 Mies was awarded America's highest civilian decoration, the Medal of Freedom. He also earned Germany's highest civilian decoration, the Knight Commander's Cross of the German Order of Merit; among many other awards, and was conferred 15 honorary doctoral degrees from both American and German Universities. In 2002, the Museum of Modern Art sponsored a full retrospective exhibition of Mies work.

The Martin Luther King Memorial Library was designed near the end of Mies's life and survives as the master architect's only library building to be realized and his only building in Washington, D.C. The building illustrates many trademark characteristics of Mies's work and, through its exposed steel frame, epitomizes Mies's career ideal of revealing the structure in architecture.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

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"Comments on Preliminary Plan Prepared by Mies van der Rohe," unpublished report dated January 25, 1966 (D.C. Community Archives, Washingtoniana Division, D.C. Public Library).

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United States Department of the Interior
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Name of Property

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Kaegi, Merrill Ann, "Mies van der Rohe and the New Downtown Central Library, Washington, D.C., unpublished student paper for American Architecture Class 1870, American University, Professor Theodore Turak, Fall 1979.

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National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Nomination forms for Farnsworth House, Promontory Apartments, Buildings at 860-880 Lake Shore Drive, S.R. Crown Hall, One Charles Center.

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Martin Luther King Memorial Library
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 75,762 square feet

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8	3 2 4 4 0 7	4 3 0 7 4 8 2	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kim Williams, Anne Brockett, Emily Paulus, Architectural Historians
Organization D.C. Historic Preservation Office date 11/02/2005
street & number 801 North Capitol Street telephone 202 442-8800
city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code 20002

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- X A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- X A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

- X Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name District of Columbia
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

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Section 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description:

The Martin Luther King Memorial Library is located at 9th and G Streets, N.W. and occupies the entire Lot 825 in Square 375 in downtown Washington, D.C. The boundary includes the entire lot.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the entire Lot 825 upon which The Martin Luther King Memorial Library sits. The lot has been associated with the Martin building since construction began on the library building in 1969 and was dedicated and opened to the public in 1972. +

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information is common to all photographs:

Martin Luther King Memorial Library
901 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C.
DC Historic Preservation Office (DC HPO)

- 1) Kim Williams, photographer
May 2006
View looking northwest showing south elevation, including the ground floor loggia
1 of 7
- 2) Kim Williams, photographer
May 2006
View looking northwest showing east elevation
2 of 7
- 3) Kim Williams, photographer
View looking west from east side of 9th Street, NW
3 of 7
- 4) Alex Lima, photographer
View of first floor showing information desk and King memorial on back wall
4 of 7
- 5) Alex Lima, photographer
View of first floor reading room, looking from stacks southeast through glazed wall to the exterior
5 of 7
- 6) Alex Lima, photographer
View of 4th floor Director's Office suite with Mies' *Tugendhat* chairs
6 of 7
- 7) Alex Lima, photographer
Detail of the *Tugendhat* chairs in the Director's suite
7 of 7

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

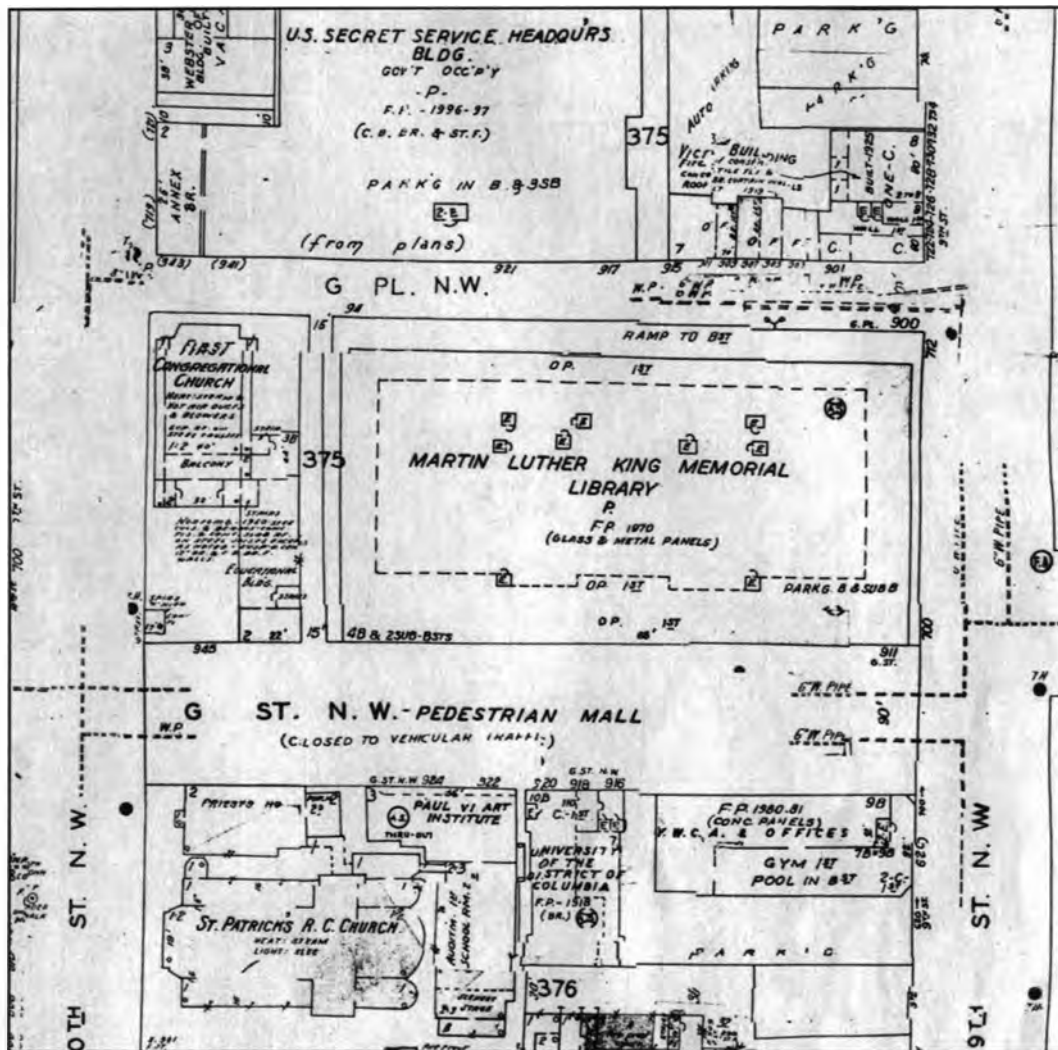
Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

SITE MAP



Martin Luther King Memorial Library
901 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.
(Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1991)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: King, Martin Luther, Memorial Library

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

DATE RECEIVED: 9/11/07 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/01/07
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/16/07 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/25/07
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 07001102

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: Y
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 10/22/2007 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Exceptionally important International style public building -
the only example of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's
work constructed in D.C.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept C

REVIEWER Patrick Andrus DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE _____ DATE 10/22/2007

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the
nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



2-98/88/6

Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Washington, DC

Kim Williams

May 2006

DC HPO

View looking northwest showing south elevation,
including the ground floor loggia.

1 of 7



2-98188/15

Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Washington, DC

Kim Williams

May 2006

DC HPO

View looking northwest showing east elevation

2 of 7



2-98188/10

Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Washington, DC

Kim Williams

May 2006

DC HPO

View looking west from east side of
9th Street, NW

3 of 7



Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Washington, DC

Alex Luna, photographer

May 2006

DC HPO

View of first floor showing information desk and
King memorial on back wall

4 of 7



Martin Luther King Memorial Library
Washington, DC

Alex Lima, photographer

May 2006

DC HPO

View of first floor reading room looking from streets
southeast through glazed wall to exterior

5 of 7



Martin Luther King Memorial Library

Washington, DC

Alex Lima, photographer

May 2006

DC HPO

View of 4th floor Director's office suite with Mies'

Tugendhat chairs

6 of 7



Martin Luther King Memorial Library
Washington, DC

Alex Lima, photographer

May 2006

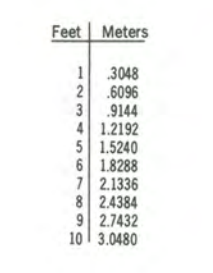
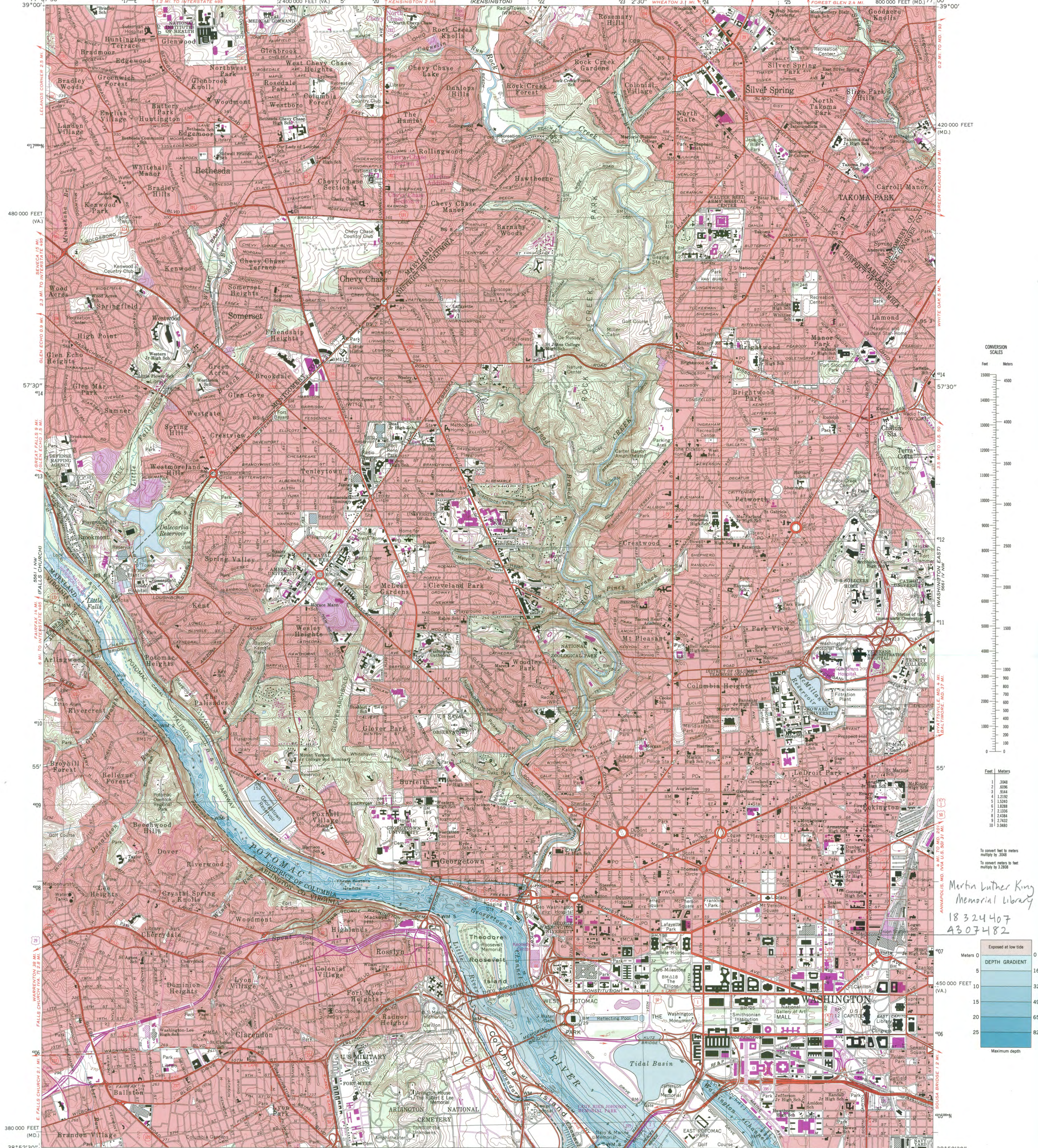
Detail of Tugendhat chairs

7 of 7

Martin Luther King Memorial Library
 18 324 407
 43 074 82 UTMS

UNITED STATES
 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

WASHINGTON WEST QUADRANGLE
 DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA-MARYLAND-VIRGINIA
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES
 (TOPOGRAPHIC-BATHYMETRIC)



To convert feet to meters multiply by 3.048
 To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.281

Martin Luther King
 Memorial Library
 18 324 407
 43 074 82



Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey and the National Ocean Service
 Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, NCS, and WSSC
 Compiled by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1955. Field checked 1966. Revised 1965.
 Bathymetry compiled by the National Ocean Service from tide-coordinated hydrographic surveys. This information is not intended for navigational purposes.
 Mean low water (dotted) line and mean high water (heavy solid) line compiled by NOS from tide-coordinated aerial photographs. Apparent shoreline (outer edge of vegetation) shown by light solid line.
 Polyconic projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks based on Maryland coordinate system, and Virginia coordinate system, north zone 18 1927 North American Datum.
 To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 8 meters south and 26 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks.
 Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown. There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map.
 Revisions shown in purple and woodblock compiled in cooperation with Commonwealth of Virginia Agencies from aerial photographs taken 1981 and other sources. This information not field checked.
 Map dated 1983.
 Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas.

NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
 HYDROGRAPHIC SURVEY INDEX

Survey Number	Survey Date	Survey Scale	Survey Line Spacing (Nautical Miles)
H-9478	1977	1:5,000	0.1-0.8
H-9488	1976	1:5,000	0.1-0.5

SCALE 1:24,000
 1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
 BATHYMETRIC CONTOUR INTERVAL 1 METER WITH SUPPLEMENTARY 0.5 METER CONTOURS—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
 THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 0.4 METER

BASE MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
 BATHYMETRIC SURVEY DATA COMPLIES WITH INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION (IHO) SPECIAL PUBLICATION 44 ACCURACY STANDARDS AND/OR STANDARDS USED AT THE DATE OF THE SURVEY
 FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
 DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
 NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852
 AND VIRGINIA DIVISION OF MINERAL RESOURCES, CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22903
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
 Heavy-duty _____ Light-duty _____
 Medium-duty _____ Unimproved dirt _____
 Interstate Route _____ U.S. Route _____ State Route _____

WASHINGTON WEST, D.C.—MD.—VA.
 38077-H1-TB-024
 1965
 PHOTO-REVISED 1983
 BATHYMETRY ADDED 1982
 DMA 5561 1 NE—SERIES 7833

UTM GRID AND 1983 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

ISBN 0-607-13544-2
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