

**ADDRESS: 1901 W OXFORD ST**

Name of Resource: Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Foundation

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Foundation

Nominator: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Staff Contact: Allyson Mehley, [allyson.mehley@phila.gov](mailto:allyson.mehley@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** The City of Philadelphia constructed the building at 1901 W. Oxford Street as a police station in 1908. In 1964, the Reverend Leon Sullivan, a civil rights leader, converted the building for use as the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). The nomination argues that the property satisfies Criterion A, owing to its role in the development of North Philadelphia during the Great Migration in the early twentieth century, and for its association with nationally significant figures like the Reverend Sullivan, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. The nomination contends that the building is a fine example of the Colonial Revival Style, satisfying Criteria C and D. The nomination argues that the property satisfies Criterion E, owing to its association with prominent black architect Walter R. Livingston, Jr., who renovated the building for the OIC. Finally, the nomination claims the property satisfies Criterion J, as the founding location of the Reverend Sullivan's OIC, which played a central role in the civil rights movement. The proposed period of significance is 1908 to 1970, from the date of construction to the moment when the Opportunities Industrial Center vacated the building.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the building at 1901 W Oxford Street satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, E, and J.



# NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

### PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

#### 1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 1901 W. Oxford Street, Philadelphia, PA

Postal code: 19121

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: 23rd District Police Station/Opportunities Industrialization Center

Current/Common Name: Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Foundation

#### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

#### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Community and Youth Resource Center

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*


Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1908 to 1970

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: c. 1908, alt. 1964

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Walter R. Livingston, Jr.

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: James G. Doak & Co.

Original owner: City of Philadelphia

Other significant persons: Rev. Leon Sullivan, Lyndon B. Johnson, Robert F. Kennedy,  
Richard Nixon 

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☒ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☒ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Please attach a bibliography.*

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Date January 20, 2022

Name with Title Derek Duquette/Duquette Historical Co. Email patrick@preservationalliance.com

Street Address 1608 Walnut St, Suite 1702 Telephone 215-546-1146x5

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19103

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: January 20, 2022

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: April 4, 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: May 12, 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Foundation

Address: 1901 W. Oxford St.

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19121

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

## **5. Boundary Description**

Beginning at the point of intersection of the Westerly side of N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, 50 feet wide with the Northerly side of Oxford Street, 50 feet wide and running thence;

1. Along the Northerly side of Oxford Street, North 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds West, a distance of 57.330 feet to a point, thence;
2. North 11 degrees 21 minutes 00 seconds East, a distance of 18.834 feet to a point, thence;
3. South 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds East, a distance of 5.330 feet to a point, thence;
4. North 11 degrees 21 minutes 00 seconds East, a distance of 101.730 feet to a point, thence;
5. North 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds West, a distance of 10.828 feet to a point, thence;
6. North 11 degrees 21 minutes 00 seconds East, a distance of 9.436 feet to a point on the Southerly side of Turner Street, 40 feet wide, thence;
7. Along the Southerly side of Turner Street, South 78 degrees 39 minutes 00 seconds East, a distance of 62.828 feet to a point on the Westerly side of N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, thence;
8. Along the Westerly side of N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, South 11 degrees 21 minutes 00 seconds West, a distance of 130.000 feet to the first mentioned point and place of Beginning.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1. Aerial image of 1901 W. Oxford Street, with property boundary in blue. City of Philadelphia, Atlas. <https://atlas.phila.gov/1917%20W%20OXFORD%20ST/property>. Accessed, 4/4/2022.

<sup>1</sup> Deed, Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority to Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community, 27 June 2014, CityAtlas, accessed 4 April 2022.



## **6. Description**

The building at 1901 W. Oxford Street is an excellent example of Colonial Revival architecture, which was popular at the time of construction (c. 1908). Historians generally agree that the Colonial Revival Style (1880-1960) first gained public interest following the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, an event which sparked nationwide interest in the United States' colonial architectural heritage. The following year, the architects McKim, Mead, White and Bigelow began a publicized tour of New England, studying earlier Georgian and Federalist structures to further inspire the emergent Colonial Revival style.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2. Photograph of 1901 W. Oxford Street from 1961. Image depicts view from 19<sup>th</sup> Street, facing west-southwest. Accessed from the City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.

The building exhibits many of the signature features associated with the Colonial Revival style. Despite its modernized steel front door, it is symmetrically balanced with windows on each side, all of which are adorned with three simplified fanlight windows. The fenestration of the

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2019), 438.

building on all sides is symmetrical. The windows of the first floor are standard four-pane, double-sash windows, and pediments with the entrance at the center and forefront crowned above the main cornice line of modillions with three simple, rectangular four-pane, double-hung sash windows. The windows on the second floor are also rectangular, double-hung sash windows, with additional two-pane windows connected above. The windows on the third floor, above the main cornice line, are smaller, four-pane, double-hung sash windows (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Photograph of the front-façade of the structure facing east across 19<sup>th</sup> Street, north of W. Oxford. Note the brick and stone masonry, the modillions lining uniformly above the structure's second floor, the double sash windows, and the symmetry of the windows on the third floor above the center of the structure. Photographs are attributable to the author unless otherwise specified.

This building also features strong ornamental features associated with the Colonial Revival style. The main cornice-line is comprised of larger, more separated modillions, while the cornice-line above the third floor is adorned with smaller, more tightly packed dentils (See Figure 4). At all corners of the building, including those from the protruding entryway, the edges of the structure are highlighted with quoins of masonry (See Figures 4&5). This highlighting effect also contributes to the visible distinction between floors, as the line of stone masonry divides the brick stories, in line with the window pediments for the second floor.





Figure 4. Photograph of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street, facing the northern two-thirds of the structure along 19<sup>th</sup> Street, north of W. Oxford Street. Note the contrast in the cornices above the second and third floors; above the second floor is lined with modillions beneath the cornice, and beneath the cornice above the third floor are more tightly packed dentils.

The materials used in the construction of this building are also true to the Colonial Revival style. The structure generally is comprised of brick and limestone, featuring a low-pitched, tin hip roof barely visible from street level. The use of stone and brick in the construction of Colonial Revival structures is indicative of high style as well. The original permit request for the building's construction confirms the primary use of stone and brick for the structure. The permit also indicates that the dentils and modillions were to be made of terra cotta and limestone.<sup>3</sup>

Curiously, from the street, the second-story windows are ornamented on their lower thirds with wrought-iron window grilles. This is curious because while the vast majority of the features that define this structure are fully in line with the Colonial Revival style, these lacy

<sup>3</sup> James G. Doak & Co., "Plan No. 14-20-A-C, Permit No. 6536, Application for Erection of New Buildings," September 20, 1908, Accessed from the Philadelphia City Archives on 11/16/2021.

grilles are more reminiscent of the Queen Anne style (See Figures 3&4). The temporal overlap between the Colonial Revival (1880-1960) and Queen Anne (1880-1910) styles suggests the slightest influence of broader Victorian architecture on this otherwise Colonial Revival structure. Perhaps amid a structure otherwise overwhelmingly dense, heavy, and strong in appearance, these grilles are the only indication of some nostalgia for the more ornate Victorian styles of the mid- to late-nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>4</sup> Inga Saffron, "One Building's Journey from a Place of Incarceration, to a Venue of Liberation," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 15, 2018, sec. Inga Saffron, real-estate, inga-saffron, [https://www.inquirer.com/philly/columnists/inga\\_saffron/opportunities-industrialization-centers-leon-sullivan-sultan-jihad-ahmad-foundation-20180415.html](https://www.inquirer.com/philly/columnists/inga_saffron/opportunities-industrialization-centers-leon-sullivan-sultan-jihad-ahmad-foundation-20180415.html).



Figure 5. Figure 5. Photograph of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street, facing southwest along 19th Street, north of W. Oxford Street. Note the wrought-iron grates ornamenting the windows along the second story of the structure, also visible in Figures 3&4. Though the majority of the structure is true to the Colonial Revival style, these grates are indicative of the earlier Queen Anne style.

According to the earliest available historic maps, 1901 W. Oxford Street is situated within a heavily developed urban neighborhood which was first developed in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The housing along the south side of W. Oxford Street was redeveloped into modern subdivided housing with yards in the early twenty-first century. According to historic aerials, some of the remaining houses to the south of 1901 W. Oxford Street are last visible c. 1996.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 6. Photograph from the southern end of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street, facing south from the northwest corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Streets. Although the neighborhood was first developed residentially in the nineteenth and early twentieth

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<sup>5</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas," phila.gov, accessed November 15, 2021, <https://atlas.phila.gov/>.

century, the residential neighborhood south of the structure has been redeveloped with modern housing.

The property at 1901 W. Oxford Street was originally developed as a police station around the same time as the adjacent firehouse. Both buildings were the result of the sale of the property to the City of Philadelphia between 1897 and 1901.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the construction of the fire station, the lot on which the former police station stands was part of the same lot and operated in the mid-nineteenth century as a stables. As of 2021, the firehouse adjacent to 1901 W. Oxford Street continues to contribute to 1901 W. Oxford Streets' integrity of setting (See Figure 7).<sup>7</sup>



Figure 7. Photograph of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street (right) and the firehouse (left) facing northwest from the southwest corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Street. In the nineteenth century these two properties sat on the same parcel which served as stables, but were subsequently sold to the city and redeveloped as a firehouse and police station and jailhouse.

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<sup>6</sup> Registry Dep't, Bureau of Surveys, "Survey of Lot No. 243, Plan Book No. 13N, Page 8," Date of Deed 12/26/1901, Accessed from the Philadelphia City Archives on 11/16/2021.

<sup>7</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas."



Similarly, according to historic maps, the Philadelphia Electric Company's "Oxford Substation" was erected in the early to mid-twentieth century on the northeast corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and Oxford Streets, appearing first in historic maps of the city c. 1926. Previously, the property was the Heidelberg Reformation Church until it was demolished for the construction of the substation. Because the substation was and remains a physical presence from the period of significance (c. 1908-1970), it also contributes to 1901 W. Oxford Street's integrity of setting (See Figure 8).<sup>8</sup>



Figure 8. Photograph of the Philadelphia Electric Company's substation at 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Street, facing east from the southwest corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Street. The substation here was constructed as the city's neighborhoods required increased access to electricity c. 1926. The row-homes visible beyond exhibit similar characteristics of Colonial Revival style, further contributing to 1901 W. Oxford Street's connection to the setting.

North of 1901 W. Oxford Street along N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street remains residential townhomes; some of which appear to be from the time the former police station was constructed, others of which are either new construction or modernized structures. Although some of these structures

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<sup>8</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas."



may be anachronistic to the period c. 1908, the general conformity to townhouses constructed in styles compatible with the former police station's Colonial Revival architecture (See Figure 9). As such, due to the retention of architectural character north of 1901 W. Oxford Street, this segment of the setting also contributes to the property's integrity of setting and atmosphere.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 9. Photograph of the neighborhood north of 1901 W. Oxford Street, taken from the northwest corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Streets. The substation stands at right, but the rowhouses further north on the right-hand side appear compatible with the periodization of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street. They exhibit similar architectural characteristics and remain largely true to their original appearances.

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<sup>9</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas."

## **7. Significance**

(Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.)

The community building at 1901 W. Oxford Street is eligible for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under criteria A, C, D, E, and J. For its significance as part of the urban development of North Philadelphia in the early twentieth century resulting from the Great Migration (1916-1970) in a prominent and popular architectural style of the period, along with its association with major historical figures including Rev. Leon Sullivan, Robert F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, the structure is eligible for listing under Criterion A. For its architectural integrity in the Colonial Revival style, based both on its own design and composition and its ongoing compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood, the structure is eligible for listing under Criteria C and D. For its association with Walter R. Livingston, Jr. as the architect who led the upgrading efforts to turn 1901 W. Oxford Street into the first Opportunities Industrialization Center, and as a prominent architect from Philadelphia in his own right, the structure is eligible for listing under Criterion E. Finally, as the founding location of Rev. Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Center and its central role in a civil rights movement and organization that were truly unique to Philadelphia, which remain renowned worldwide, and shaped American domestic policy across administrations, and which lives on as a community resource center in the twenty-first century, it is eligible for listing under Criteria A and J.

### **Criterion A:**

Records of the property at 1901 W. Oxford Street date back as far as November 1853 in the Philadelphia City Records, at which time the land was purchased by Benjamin Lowry and others from one Thomas Richards. Lowry subsequently sold the same lot to William S. Allen in 1866. Then, in 1872, Allen sold the lot to Joseph B Conrow, who developed the lot to serve as stable.<sup>10</sup> Following Joseph Conrow's death, the lot was sold at share auction in 1897 to one Mary H. Kirby. On July 3, 1901, Kirby confirmed her ownership of the property with the City Department of Records, ensuring ownership of the deed was appropriately transferred to her. Based on the timeline of events, it appears Kirby may have gone to this length because she was considering selling the plot, in part, to the City of Philadelphia. This purchase went through on August 15, 1901, and Kirby sold the property for \$25,000.<sup>11</sup>

The City of Philadelphia purchased plot 242 from Mary Kirby in 1901, and on September 25, 1908, the city's Bureau of Building Inspection received an application from James G. Doak & Co., a contracting firm, for a police station and jailhouse with a garage to be erected at 1901 W. Oxford Street. The proposed police station and jail were for Philadelphia's 23<sup>rd</sup> District Police Station in North Philadelphia. The application provided the cost estimate, measurements,

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<sup>10</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas."

<sup>11</sup> City of Philadelphia Registry Department, *Sale of Deed to 1901 W. Oxford Street*, August 15, 1901, Plan Book No. 13 N, p. 8., Accessed from the Philadelphia City Archives, 2021.

and designs for the station and garage. The Bureau of Building Inspection approved the application, and construction commenced on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1908, at a projected cost of \$60,000.<sup>12</sup>

The police station and jailhouse at 1901 W. Oxford Street was the station for Philadelphia's 23<sup>rd</sup> District Police from its construction between 1908 and 1910. The 23<sup>rd</sup> District Police merged with and relocated to a new station for the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> District Police c. 1956. Prior to their relocation, however, the 23<sup>rd</sup> District Police Station was situated within a section of North Philadelphia most directly transformed by both waves of the Great Migration (1916-1970), during which thousands of southern African Americans moved to northern cities like Philadelphia with dreams of more affordable homes and better paying jobs not readily available in the Jim Crow South.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the infamous film *The Birth of A Nation* was arriving in theatres around the country.<sup>14</sup> The film's popularity not only sparked a revival of the Ku Klux Klan (1915-1944), but inspired white segregationists nationwide to use violence to deny African Americans equal opportunities to quality housing. In Philadelphia, the response came in the form of increased white sentiments of anti-blackness and rumored myths of black criminality and invasions into white neighborhoods, which quickly established heightened tension between white and black Philadelphians.<sup>15</sup> For its situation within the setting in which Philadelphia was most directly transformed by the Great Migration, and its association with Rev. Leon Sullivan, Robert F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, 1901 W. Oxford Street is eligible for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

Prior to the first wave of the Great Migration c. 1916, the North Central Philadelphia neighborhood in which 1901 W. Oxford Street is situated was mixed demographically, housing both white European immigrants and African Americans who were drawn by more affordable, albeit crowded, housing. Despite the initial equitability of housing, as working-class white immigrants like the Irish and Italians gained increasing ethnic privilege in competition for jobs, these same groups obtained promotions quickly to positions in City Council and the local police department.<sup>16</sup> The labor market, dominated as it was by white-owned businesses, did not provide the same opportunities for advancement and pay increases for black laborers, especially working-class black laborers.

Indeed, the housing market exhibited comparable discrimination against new African American migrants. Between May 1916 and May 1918 over 15,000 black migrants arrived in Philadelphia at a rate of approximately 150 people per week.<sup>17</sup> As this influx of migrants grew, Philadelphia landlords capitalized on segregation by converting slum shacks and bandbox houses

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<sup>12</sup> [Cite City Record]

<sup>13</sup> Menika Belicia Dirkson, "Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City: Black Criminalization and Racial Capitalism in Philadelphia, 1914-1978 /" (n.d.), 43, <https://librarysearch.temple.edu/catalog/991037949882803811>.

<sup>14</sup> N. P. R. Staff, "100 Years Later, What's The Legacy Of 'Birth Of A Nation'?", *NPR*, February 8, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/02/08/383279630/100-years-later-whats-the-legacy-of-birth-of-a-nation>.

<sup>15</sup> Dirkson, "Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City," 26.

<sup>16</sup> Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies, "The Iron Age, 1876-1905," in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 488.

<sup>17</sup> Dirkson, "Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City," 43.



into overpriced, dilapidated, and cramped apartments in exclusively black neighborhoods, first in South Philadelphia, and then to the North.<sup>18</sup> As these African American migrants moved into North Philadelphia in the area around 1901 W. Oxford Street the demographics exponentially shifted toward the neighborhood becoming predominately black. This combination of overpriced and underdeveloped housing and lack of economic opportunity facilitated a poverty and vulnerability in Philadelphia's black community, particularly among its working-class laborers, that together with the rising anti-black sentiment exemplified by the 1915 release of *The Birth of a Nation* fostered some of the earliest tension between Philadelphia police and Philadelphia's all-black and integrated neighborhoods as early as the 1920s.<sup>19</sup>

In her 1926 report, "Survey of Crime among Negroes in Philadelphia," social worker Anna J. Thompson described how the over policing of black communities in the 1920s resulted in the overrepresentation of African Americans in arrest records and penal institutions.<sup>20</sup> Her investigation also found discrepancies in arrest records, including documents never identifying repeat offenders, which led Thompson to conclude that racial bias was prevalent among the white police force, especially when considering the contentious relationship between Irish police officers and black Philadelphians being a popular "joke" in City Hall.<sup>21</sup> When considering this scene of dense and dilapidated housing amid an atmosphere of anti-blackness and over policing, and situate the former police station and jailhouse at 19<sup>th</sup> and Oxford, by then a predominantly black neighborhood, the imagery of the Colonial Revival structure may have projected the power of the state and the subjugation of a community, rather than its intended projection of unity and strength in community.

The existing and rapidly deteriorating housing for working-class African Americans only worsened during the Great Depression (1929-1939). It was not uncommon for slum homes and apartments to collapse with adults and children inside. Furthermore, the visible blight that remained following such a collapse encouraged city, religious, and charity-based organizations to actively petition the local and federal governments to demolish slums, fund new public housing projects, and designate neighborhoods available for the construction of those developments.<sup>22</sup> However, middle-class African Americans wanted separation from the class stigmas associated with working-class African Americans, and some whites despised living near working-class African Americans altogether. These factors together created significant obstruction to the development of better housing for black Philadelphians, especially those of the working-class.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Dirkson, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Dirkson, 45–46.

<sup>20</sup> Dirkson, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Karl E. Johnson, "Police-Black Community Relations in Postwar Philadelphia: Race and Criminalization in Urban Social Spaces, 1945-1960," *The Journal of African American History* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 120.

<sup>22</sup> John F. Bauman, "Black Slums/Black Projects: The New Deal and Negro Housing in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 41, no. 3 (July 1974): 323–29.

<sup>23</sup> Dirkson, "Hope and Struggle in the Policed Inner-City," 46; Bauman, "Black Slums/Black Projects: The New Deal and Negro Housing in Philadelphia," 331–36.

With this context of the relationship between Philadelphia's police and black community in mind, the police station at 1901 W. Oxford Street was abandoned c. 1956, but the structure remained, standing in silent witness to the lived experiences of the working and middle-class African Americans who lived and commuted around it. Despite the property remaining owned by the city, it fell into disrepair and came to symbolize the very urban blight and decay that was associated with the neighborhood around it.

As the former police station sat empty, the community around it began to organize. At the helm of this movement toward organization was Rev. Leon Sullivan, a native of West Virginia, who was named pastor of the Zion Baptist Church in North Philadelphia in 1950 at the age of 28 years old. Throughout the 1950s Sullivan led a number of movements geared towards opening better employment opportunities for black Philadelphians and leveraging their labor and patronage to affect that change. In 1962, Sullivan met with a group of young men from Zion Baptist Church to initiate a new kind of experiment in racial economic emancipation, a cooperative investment program that would create a charitable trust to provide educational scholarships for children of the black community and to develop the psychology of giving before receiving. Thus emerged the Zion Non-Profit Corporation (now the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust), a charitable trust created with this mission of prioritizing the education of black youth.<sup>24</sup>

In 1963 Sullivan and his colleagues sought a first location to house their philanthropic vision. They agreed on 1901 W. Oxford Street, and Rev. Leon Sullivan and his newly minted Opportunities Industrialization Center initiated a lease on the building from the city for one dollar in January 1964<sup>25</sup>. Before the building could be inhabited, however, much work was needed to revitalize the space. In 1963, Walter R. Livingston, Jr., a black Philadelphia architect, submitted several permit applications to Philadelphia's Bureau of Building Inspection. The first of these was in October 1963, simply stating the intent of the building to occupy OIC's offices. In November, Livingston submitted another permit application, proposing new heating and plumbing, smoke barriers on stairs, new flooring and doors. The proposed cost for these improvements was \$12,000. In December, Livingston submitted an application to erect an open iron standard fire escape on the west side of the building, with the anticipated cost of \$1,000. Finally, on August 26, 1964, Livingston submitted the last recorded permit application for the addition of an exit door from the chemistry room, specifically flush steel doors. The estimated cost for these new doors was \$300.

Immediately, Sullivan and OIC invested approximately \$13,300 in updating and improving the building for their operations. But to fully appreciate that initial investment and the full significance of this structure, one must first understand the significance of both Rev. Leon Sullivan, the Opportunities Industrialization Center(s) (OIC), and the socio-political landscape in which they acquired 1901 W. Oxford St. on January 26, 1964.

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<sup>24</sup> Countryman, 111–12.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 112. Additional materials on Sullivan's earlier activism which led to the formation of the Opportunities Industrialization Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street is in Appendix A. Countryman's text *Up South* provides a thorough examination of Sullivan's activist history.

While much of the previous direct action of boycotting and protesting had opened many new working opportunities for Philadelphia's black community, to truly improve the economic conditions of the predominately black neighborhood in North Philadelphia, let alone around the city, Sullivan realized that the black community as a whole would need to come together to provide the training and education necessary to lift as many people as possible into these new opportunities. He discussed this quandary most closely with his friend and colleague, the Rev. Thomas J. Ritter of Philadelphia's Second Macedonia Baptist Church.<sup>26</sup> This was the dream that gave birth to the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC).

While Livingston made arrangements to improve 1901 W. Oxford Street, Revs. Ritter and Sullivan contemplated how to organize the funds necessary to put OIC into operation. Fortunately, through the connections Sullivan and Ritter had made through their activism and organizing throughout the 1950s through selective patronage campaigns which pressured local industries to provide better employment to black Philadelphians, the 400 Ministers who had supported and facilitated the selective patronage campaigns, and the Citizens Committee Against Juvenile Delinquency and Its Causes (CCAJD) which organized the community around preventing juvenile delinquency, OIC received significant support from the start. Sullivan himself received an anonymous gift of \$50,000 from a Philadelphia businessman.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, companies like General Electric, Bell Telephone, Western Union, IBM, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union all donated equipment for OIC's job training programs, though much of it was outdated.<sup>28</sup>

Funding support to get OIC off the ground also came primarily from within the black community. After an initial grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Labor was rejected, a network of one thousand black women organized a community fund drive, which by May 1964 had raised \$102,000.<sup>29</sup> Approximately half of that amount came from within the black community, and the other from local business leaders. Despite all this support up front, OIC was an expensive program to properly run all of its moving parts. During the first year in operation, Sullivan was forced to take a second mortgage on his home and to draw funds from Zion Baptist Church, his church, to meet the costs of payroll.<sup>30</sup>

There was much hard work and sacrifice for all involved in OIC early on, but the OIC vision sufficiently mobilized the financial resources of Philadelphia's black middle and working classes enabling OIC to develop an ethic true to the self-help and racial pride Sullivan and local civil rights leaders long proclaimed. Following this initial victory for intraracial community solidarity, Sullivan began winning financial grants from both federal agencies and large corporations. In March 1964 the OIC received its first significant external funding from the Ford

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<sup>26</sup> "Negro Group Forms Training Program to Turn Out Technicians and Craftsmen," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 31, 1963, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 32, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>27</sup> For more on Sullivan's earlier activism and community organizing during the 1950s in Philadelphia, see Appendix A.

<sup>28</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 113–14.

<sup>29</sup> "Help Needed for Job Training," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1964, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>30</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 115.



Foundation by way of a \$200,000 grant. In December of 1964, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), the agency created to administer the War on Poverty, made one of its first grants to OIC for \$458,000 to fund job training and remedial education programs. The following year OEO head Sargent Shriver announced that he was prepared to provide more than \$5 million to replicate OIC in eight cities across the country. By 1967, \$16.8 million in federal grants supported twenty-four OIC locations nationwide.<sup>31</sup>

For all the struggle that came with funding and getting OIC operational, Sullivan's confidence in the program and its mission was vindicated. Following the pilot site's opening in 1964, Sullivan asserted that never again would discriminatory employers be able to excuse their hiring practices by saying they could not find black workers with the skills necessary to fill their job openings<sup>32</sup>. By May of 1964, the first year of operation, OIC enrolled 300 workers in eight different training programs, including drafting, sheet metal work, power machine operation, electronics assembly, teletype operations and restaurant services. In addition to these 300 enrollees, an additional five thousand people were waitlisted. By the end of 1965, OIC claimed to have trained and placed 1,500 black workers in jobs.

OIC offered more than just a program that would provide job skills and vocational training for applicants, it also provided a program that could help bridge the educational gap across the black community. Sullivan recognized that not every person who sought vocational training at OIC would have the literacy and math skills to fully benefit from their training. The creation of OIC's "Opportunities Schools" in September 1964 spoke directly to that need.<sup>33</sup> Sullivan knew that remedial education would be a tough sell because it was heavily stigmatized as debasing. To draw people in Sullivan rebranded "remedial education in reading, writing, and arithmetic" as "communication and computation skills." Beginning in September 1964, before trainees could attend formal vocational training courses, OIC required every trainee to start out in what they first called the Feeder Program, later known as "Opportunities Schools."<sup>34</sup>

Prior to the announcement of the first class in the Feeder Program, eight hundred Philadelphians applied while five hundred would be selected. Given its immediate popularity, Rev. Thomas J. Ritter, Executive Director of OIC, reassured applicants on site that everyone would eventually be accepted to the program. He projected an optimistic trend of growth for the program, saying that "[although] the size of the first 3-month class has been limited to 500, the second class will accommodate 750, and the third 1000."<sup>35</sup>

The Opportunities Schools, which would also hold classes in designated classrooms around the building, also included a black history curriculum designed to address trainees' learned sense of racial inferiority. The core goal for the Opportunities Schools and OIC was to

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<sup>31</sup> Countryman, 116.

<sup>32</sup> Countryman, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Neil Ulman, "Negro Pioneer: Philadelphia's Rev. Sullivan Preaches Self-Help, Not Protest," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 1966.

<sup>34</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 114.

<sup>35</sup> "OIC Inquirer Newsclipping," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 12, 1964, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 32, Temple University Urban Archives.

provide the resources and guidance through which any African American could develop their own self-respect and self-reliance.<sup>36</sup> A key part of that process was teaching black history to teach trainees a history they did not learn elsewhere, and which would help deprogram that learned sense of racial inferiority.<sup>37</sup> This is in large part thanks to the Feeder Program's first director and designer, Dr. Lafayette Powell.

Dr. Powell, a leading African American educational psychologist, directed and designed the Feeder Program, serving on the Board of Education. Powell asserted that the first obstacle in self-help programs for African Americans, particularly black youth, is ego development. "It's our job to show people how to create in themselves lasting ideas of permanent worth. This is the first step in learning to deal successfully with jobs and with society."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, by reprogramming and empowering trainees to develop their own sense of self-respect and self-reliance, Powell, Sullivan, Ritter, and all of OIC's leaders, strengthened the character and dignity, not only of individual trainees, but of a cohesive community.

While Sullivan and OIC's leadership saw their own community rising up to meet this challenge, white observers seemed somewhat flummoxed by the location of OIC's first site at 1901 W. Oxford Street, a neighborhood the *New York Times* described as "a desperately poor section of North Philadelphia, home to thousands of migrants from rural areas" and "the hub of an overpopulated, underprivileged, and gang-ridden neighborhood."<sup>39</sup> This reference to "rural migrants" is a clear and contemporary phrase describing those African Americans who came to Philadelphia with the Great Migration, and not a positive one. Furthermore, this description of North Central Philadelphia harkens back to the pervasive issues which relegated the neighborhood to its "ghettoization," including redlining and the intentional coalescence of predominately black communities in the city's less favorable housing, and the stigma attached to African Americans living in such neighborhoods which created a class-divide between working- and middle-class African Americans.<sup>40</sup>

Despite this dire depiction of Philadelphia's blighted neighborhoods, that same article gave due praise to the successes of the Opportunities Industrialization Center, sharing stories of graduates and lauding Rev. Sullivan for his coming receipt of the 1964 Philadelphia Fellowship Award, for "creating and bringing to fruition the OIC and for enhancing human dignity and promoting racial, religious, and ethnic cooperation."<sup>41</sup> Rev. Sullivan did not and could not have organized OIC independently. It is specifically because he organized within his church and community that his love and belief in the capacity of every man to rise to his greatest potential spread among his congregants and community members which gave rise to the unprecedented

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<sup>36</sup> "Newspaper Clipping on OIC," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 12, 1964, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 32, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> "OIC Inquirer Newsclipping."

<sup>39</sup> William G. Weart, "Self-Help Center Hailed as Success," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1965, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 34, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>40</sup> Bauman, "Black Slums/Black Projects: The New Deal and Negro Housing in Philadelphia."

<sup>41</sup> Weart, "Self-Help Center Hailed as Success."

success of the Opportunities Industrialization Center. OIC is as significant a feat as it is because of Sullivan's commitment to its mission.

In May 1964, OIC saw their first class complete formal job training with a class of twenty trainees. These first students' training focused on restaurant practices and power sewing machine operation.<sup>42</sup> Impressively, all of them found job placements following completion of the program.<sup>43</sup> These trailblazers found employment primarily in Philadelphia's local industries, including Dewey's Co. (a local restaurant chain), Philly's Sportswear, Mar-Clay Co. and more.<sup>44</sup> As OIC was able to provide more expansive job training, trainees like Orlando Fuller was able to transition from working as a trucker to a more lucrative spotwelding position at the Standard Steel Company plant outside the city in Jenkintown. In his own words, "The center changed my life in many ways. It made it possible to better provide for my family and to pay for my wife's training for the cashier's job she now has at the Acme Markets."<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the results of OIC's Opportunities Schools and formal job training programs spoke for themselves. By 1966, after two years of operation primarily based out of the first OIC at 1901 W. Oxford Street, 1,600 trainees found job placements after training with OIC.<sup>46</sup> For reference, in September of 1964, Rev. Ritter projected that for the first nine months of operation OIC prepared to accept and train 2,250 trainees by mid-1965.<sup>47</sup> Accounting for those trainees going through both the Opportunities Schools and formal skilled labor training which would require approximately six months, a placement of 1,600 graduates in jobs constitutes approximately seventy-one percent of the trainees accepted in that nine-month timeframe. A 1966 article in the *Wall Street Journal* made the point that "the program has succeeded and grown where others, notably Government-sponsored efforts, have failed and died."<sup>48</sup>

This was the philosophical beauty of OIC. In its earliest stages, raising funds exclusively within Philadelphia's black community and local black businesses, Rev. Sullivan and his compatriots promoted intra-racial community solidarity as the avenue through which life could improve in black neighborhoods, as opposed to direct government action and interracial alliances. This is what historian Wilson Moses terms the conservative nationalist tradition.<sup>49</sup> Where government-initiated and -funded programs failed, Sullivan and OIC created a grassroots community-driven program initiated by and for black Philadelphians. This was the mechanism through which the Rev. Sullivan and his supporters organized, funded, and operated the first branch of Opportunities Industrialization Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, this intra-

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<sup>42</sup> "Training Center Graduates 20," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 17, 1964, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 33, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>43</sup> "First 20 End Job Training at New Center," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 17, 1964, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 33, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>44</sup> "Training Center Graduates 20."

<sup>45</sup> Weart, "Self-Help Center Hailed as Success."

<sup>46</sup> Ulman, "Negro Pioneer: Philadelphia's Rev. Sullivan Preaches Self-Help, Not Protest."

<sup>47</sup> "OIC Inquirer Newsclipping."

<sup>48</sup> Ulman, "Negro Pioneer: Philadelphia's Rev. Sullivan Preaches Self-Help, Not Protest."

<sup>49</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> "Negro Group Forms Training Program to Turn Out Technicians and Craftsmen."

racial grassroots organizational mechanism speaks to the original intent of the structure's style; to emphasize the power and majesty in national unity, now the power and majesty of a united and empowered black community. What is curious about the OIC's departure from its origins is the way Sullivan and OIC's leadership subsequently shifted and expanded OIC's funding avenues beyond the immediate surrounding black community and local black businesses to seeking and securing government support and interracial corporate alliances for funding.

When the Opportunities Industrialization Center opened in 1964, Sullivan and OIC leadership raised funds to initiate the program from within the North Philadelphia community and the black business community. By early 1965, funding for OIC began to shift towards federal and corporate partnerships to help facilitate the growth and maintenance of the program.<sup>51</sup> By 1965 OIC had already received ample praise, from the Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson as a grass-roots model in the "War on Poverty." At the same time, the fundraising measures that kept sixty-five full and part-time teachers and operating costs afloat struggled to keep pace with OIC's growth.<sup>52</sup> They requested \$2.1-million and received adequate funding the following year to strengthen the program.<sup>53</sup>

By 1966 OIC began receiving regular federal support from the Office of Equal Opportunity, and with this regular stream of federal and corporate funds on top of the funds raised within Philadelphia's black community, the program which already achieved great success in placing black Philadelphians into better jobs began its formal expansion into a national and then international program. OIC and Rev. Sullivan's work to facilitate neighborhood redevelopment within the black community inspired Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York to visit in December 1966. At the time, Kennedy was pursuing a similar redevelopment program to uplift New York City's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood.<sup>54</sup> During his visit to 1901 W. Oxford Street to examine OIC more closely, Kennedy disclosed to the *New York Times* that, "The program has been effective and, I think, very, very useful to the city of Philadelphia. We hope to have such a program in New York."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Training Center Graduates 20"; Jerome S. Cahill, "Opportunities Center Pleads for US Antipoverty Grant," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 18, 1965, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 34, Temple University Urban Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Cahill, "Opportunities Center Pleads for US Antipoverty Grant."

<sup>53</sup> Jerome S. Cahill, "U.S. Receptive to Plea for Aid," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1965, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Folder 34, Temple University Urban Archives; Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 115.

<sup>54</sup> Jack Newfield, *RFK: A Memoir: A Memoir* (PublicAffairs, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> "Negro Job Training Center Gets a Visit From Kennedy," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1966, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1966/12/06/archives/negro-job-training-center-gets-a-visit-from-kennedy.html>.





Figure 10. Photograph of New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy's visiting one of the classrooms at OIC at 1901 W. Oxford Street in 1966. Image features Kennedy and Rev. Sullivan at right. Image accessed from the City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.

On June 29, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson also paid a visit to the Opportunities Industrialization Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street as part of his "Model Cities" program, the last major urban aid initiative under Johnson's Great Society agenda. The legislation organized coordination of federal services to redevelop the poorest and least-served urban communities in the country, and in 1967 North Philadelphia was designated for renewal under this program.<sup>56</sup> In his remarks given during his visit, President Johnson expressed a comparable observation of praise to Kennedy's; "What Reverend Sullivan has shown me this morning opens my eyes and I hope will open the eyes of all of the Nation to the opportunity that lies here."<sup>57</sup> Speaking almost directly to the dignity and self-respect facilitated in all trainees, Johnson observed men and

<sup>56</sup> Jason T. Bartlett, "Model Cities," The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, 2016, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/model-cities/>.

<sup>57</sup> "Remarks in Philadelphia at the Opportunities Industrialization Center. | The American Presidency Project," accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-philadelphia-the-opportunities-industrialization-center>.

women in classes on site whose “self-respect is beginning to burn inside them like a flame—like a furnace that will fire them all their lives.”<sup>58</sup>



Figure 11. Photograph of President Lyndon B. Johnson shaking hands with Rev. Leon H. Sullivan during a presidential visit to OIC at 1901 W. Oxford Street in 1967. Image accessed from the City of Philadelphia, Department of Records.

These assessments of the promise OIC’s training facilities offered urban and predominately black neighborhoods speak directly to why and how the program’s popularity and efficacy resulted in satellite locations, first around the city, and throughout the 1970s throughout the country. By the time Kennedy visited in 1966, 1901 W. Oxford Street could no longer house the training courses, Opportunities Schools, and administration. Even as early as 1964, news sources indicated that OIC had already outgrown its original location. An article from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote that “The Center provides job training for 700 persons at a time, and Mr. Sullivan and his associates have made such a success of this venture that greatly expanded

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<sup>58</sup> “Remarks in Philadelphia at the Opportunities Industrialization Center. | The American Presidency Project.”

quarters have now become necessary. A newly opened center at Broad and Diamond Streets will provide the additional facilities, and its sponsors have opened a drive for \$100,000 in contributions to train a thousand men and women.”<sup>59</sup> By 1966, OIC required still more space for administration and classrooms for a program providing more training and remedial education. As such, OIC began opening additional satellite campuses around the city, including in Germantown, South Philadelphia, and a new location North Central Philadelphia at 1415 N. Broad Street.<sup>60</sup> In 1966, the Zion Non-Profit Charitable Trust constructed a modern building at 1415 N Broad Street, near Temple University. Now known as the Leon H Sullivan Charitable Trust, the organization still owns the building as of 2021.<sup>61</sup>

Following President Johnson’s visit in 1967, the U.S. Department of Labor adopted what was known as the “Philadelphia Plan” as a model for its national program to root out prejudice in the construction industry. This plan was directly inspired by the organization’s efforts and successes first exhibited by Rev. Sullivan and the Opportunities Industrialization Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street. Two years later, then-President Nixon embraced a revised version of the plan, following pressure from activists in Philadelphia, which required federal contractors to hire African-American employees by certain dates to actively combat institutionalized discrimination in hiring by specific skilled building trades unions. The plan quickly extended to other cities, and the Nixon administration became the first to implement an “affirmative action” program at the federal level.<sup>62</sup> Sullivan responded to the news, rejoicing, “For seven years we’ve been planting seeds. ... We’ve demonstrated what OIC can do and now we’re ready to let America know on a broad scale what OIC is all about.” As of 1972, according to the U.S. Labor Department, the agency had provided \$96 million to the centers since OIC was founded in 1964, which they projected created 150,000 jobs for urban African Americans nationwide.

Having secured the regular support of the federal government, by the early 1970s, OIC exploded into a national organization and the organization had all but outgrown its original home at 1901 W. Oxford Street. The former jailhouse provided, at most, classrooms in North Central Philadelphia for prospective trainees specifically from the neighborhood. The newer satellite locations around the city continued operating OIC’s programs, while administrative operations moved, first to Germantown and then to 1415 N Broad Street, which was better able to meet needs.<sup>63</sup> Despite Sullivan’s own initial recognition of how miserable a sight 1901 W. Oxford Street was for the community before OIC, he chose it because he believed that if he could transform the building, he could transform men as well.<sup>64</sup> By the 1970s, Rev. Sullivan and OIC

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<sup>59</sup> “Help Needed for Job Training.”

<sup>60</sup> “OIC Directory” (Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, 1973), OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 19, Folder 14, Temple University Urban Archives; “Job Training Center, First of 100, to Open Soon in South Phila.,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 3, 1965, OICA, Acc. 688, PC-51, Box 20, Temple University Urban Archives; midcenturymundane, “Leon H. Sullivan Human Services Center, Philadelphia, PA,” *Mid-Century Mundane* (blog), September 27, 2011, <https://midcenturymundane.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/leon-h-sullivan-human-services-center-philadelphia-pa/>.

<sup>61</sup> midcenturymundane, “Leon H. Sullivan Human Services Center, Philadelphia, PA.”

<sup>62</sup> “Opportunities Industrialization Centers Historical Marker.”

<sup>63</sup> “OIC Directory”; midcenturymundane, “Leon H. Sullivan Human Services Center, Philadelphia, PA.”

<sup>64</sup> “Remarks in Philadelphia at the Opportunities Industrialization Center. | The American Presidency Project.”

had succeeded in spades. Having outlived its utility to OIC, 1901 W. Oxford Street entered a second period of silence and emptiness. However, the building's history was forever changed by its direct connection to Rev. Sullivan and its restoration to serve as headquarters to the first Opportunities Industrialization Center, a worldwide recognized organization which provided profound empowerment and expansive vocational training, first, to Philadelphia's African American community and influencing American federal policy. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission dedicated a marker to this historically significant structure in 1990.<sup>65</sup>

### Criteria C & D

In addition to the structure's eligibility for inclusion under Criterion A for association with the demographic changes to North Central Philadelphia during and following the Great Migration and major public figures like Rev. Sullivan, Robert F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, the structure also reflects the environment of the neighborhood from the early twentieth century through its Colonial Revival architectural style and the compatible architecture of the surrounding neighborhood which was developed around the same time. As such, the structure is eligible for inclusion in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under Criteria C and D.



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<sup>65</sup> "Opportunities Industrialization Centers Historical Marker."



Figure 12. Photograph of 1901 W. Oxford Street from the intersection of Turner and N. 19<sup>th</sup> Streets to the north, facing south-southwest.

The station itself is a strong example of the Colonial Revival Style of architecture (1880-1960), a style that gained national popularity first following the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition which first featured it for the United States' 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The style was promoted further by the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Colonial Revival style was borne of a desire to explore the architecture from America's founding period, which was part of its allure following the 1876 Philadelphia Exposition.



Figure 13. Photograph facing north along 19<sup>th</sup> Street with 1901 W. Oxford Street at left and the Philadelphia Electrical Company Substation at right. Further down the street additional Colonial Revival, brick and masonry rowhomes are visible, further solidifying

the compatibility of 1901 W. Oxford Street's architectural style with that of the surrounding neighborhood.

A style conveying national strength and unity, many of the neighborhood's rowhomes remaining from the early twentieth century contribute to that sense of unity as they were designed in Colonial Revival or adjacent styles. Furthermore, the heavy brick and stone masonry used in constructing the former police station and jailhouse at 1901 W. Oxford Street showcase the structure's strength and solidity. Construction completed on 1901 W. Oxford Street by 1910, according to historic maps of the neighborhood. At the same time, the firehouse on the lot directly west of the former jailhouse was also constructed. The reformed church built on the northeast corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Streets was demolished sometime during the Great Depression, with the city constructing a power substation in its place c. 1940.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 14. Photograph featuring the aforementioned 19<sup>th</sup> and W. Oxford Sts. Power Station of the Philadelphia Electrical Company, and additional Colonial Revival rowhouses east of 1901 W. Oxford Street along W. Oxford Street, further situating the structure's style within a compatible setting.

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<sup>66</sup> "City of Philadelphia | Atlas."

Because the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street shares a common architectural style with many of the remaining homes in the North Central Philadelphia neighborhood, it is eligible for listing under Criteria C and D. It both reflects the surrounding environment through its exceptional example of Colonial Revival architecture, the prevailing style of the surrounding neighborhood, and simultaneously embodies the distinguishing characteristics of Colonial Revival architecture which are prevalent in the surrounding built landscape. Most notably, many of the rowhouses, including those in figure 14, feature similar brick and masonry construction and dentil motifs beneath their cornice lines to those above the third story of 1901 W. Oxford Street. With these factors taken into consideration, the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street is eligible for listing under Criteria C and D.

### Criterion E

The architecture and compatibility of the structure at 1901 W. Oxford Street with the surrounding neighborhood qualify the structure for listing under Criteria C and D. Although the structure was long since built by 1964, Sullivan's decision to hire prominent black architect Walter R. Livingston, Jr. to evaluate and rehabilitate the building for OIC's first center further qualifies the structure for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under Criterion E, in recognition of the work of an architect who has significantly influenced the "historical, architectural, economic, social, and cultural development of the city, commonwealth, and nation." Still true to his philosophy of selective patronage, whereby African Americans would hire or purchase only from other black or equitable businesses, Sullivan hired Walter R. Livingston, Jr. (1922-2011) to acquire the permits to rehabilitate the abandoned jailhouse at 1901 W. Oxford Street so that it could house the Opportunities Industrialization Center. Walter Raleigh Livingston, Jr., a native Philadelphian from Philadelphia's North Central neighborhood, became the first black architect to design a school for Philadelphia School District when he designed Huey Elementary School in West Philadelphia. Livingston was also the first black architect inducted into the College of Fellows from the American Institute of Architects' Philadelphia Chapter and remains one of four such architects as of 2021.<sup>67</sup>

Livingston later worked with Rev. Sullivan to design a new structure for Zion Baptist Church after it was destroyed by a fire in November 1970. At the time, Livingston worked for a local center city architecture firm with William Esbach. As Livingston's career continued, he worked on a number of projects in partnership the Rev. Sullivan, including projects for the Zion Baptist Church and Progress Plaza. Livingston lived in Philadelphia all his life and was honored for his contributions to American architecture at an exhibition at Philadelphia's African American Museum.<sup>68</sup> As one of Philadelphia's most celebrated black architects, Livingston's

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<sup>67</sup> Robert S. Saxon and Sr, "Walter R. Livingston, Jr. (1922-2011)," *PHILADELPHIA'S BLACK ARCHITECTS 1950-2000* (blog), March 10, 2017, [https://saxoncapers.wordpress.com/2017/03/10/\\_\\_trashed-6/](https://saxoncapers.wordpress.com/2017/03/10/__trashed-6/).

<sup>68</sup> By Sally A. Downey Writer Inquirer Staff, "Walter R. Livingston Jr., 89, Architect and Civic Activist," <https://www.inquirer.com>, accessed December 1, 2021, [https://www.inquirer.com/philly/obituaries/20110613\\_Walter\\_R\\_Livingston\\_Jr\\_\\_89\\_architect\\_and\\_civic\\_activist.html](https://www.inquirer.com/philly/obituaries/20110613_Walter_R_Livingston_Jr__89_architect_and_civic_activist.html).



involvement as the main architect in the rehabilitation of 1901 W. Oxford Street qualifies the structure for eligible listing under Criterion E.

### Criteria A & J

Finally, as the founding location of Rev. Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Center and its central role in a civil rights movement and organization that were truly unique to Philadelphia, which remain renowned worldwide, and shaped American domestic policy across administrations, and which lives on as a community resource center in the twenty-first century, it is eligible for listing under Criteria A and J.

The trail of ownership or lease of the property fades following OIC's discontinued use of the structure during the 1970s. Nevertheless, the spirit of OIC remains embedded deep in the brick and stone of the old jailhouse. The next city document to show a change in ownership dates from 2009 and shows petitions to the city to repurpose the building once more as a community center.<sup>69</sup> According to the Sultan Jihad Ahmad Foundation's website, they first leased the building in 2004. Ahmad, for whom the Foundation and Center are named, was murdered in 1992, and it is in his memory that his parents founded the Sultan Jihad Ahmad Scholarship Fund and subsequently the Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street in 2004. In 2014, Ahmad's father, Sultan Ahmad, obtained ownership of the building's title after having sought it since 2000.<sup>70</sup> Sultan Ahmad passed away late in 2021, but his vision for the Community Center at 1901 W. Oxford Street continues much the way it did under OIC; it continues to provide educational, vocational, and community resources to its North Philadelphia neighborhood as the Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Center. For this enduring legacy connected to Rev. Leon Sullivan and the Opportunities Industrialization Centers which remain a world-renowned program and which shaped federal policy in the United States across administrations and party lines, 1901 W. Oxford Street is eligible for inclusion under Criterion A and J.

The community building at 1901 W. Oxford Avenue is eligible for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under Criteria A, C, D, E, and J. For its significance as part of the urban development of North Philadelphia in the early twentieth century resulting from the Great Migration (1916-1970) in a prominent and popular architectural style of the period, and for its association with nationally significant figures like Rev. Leon Sullivan, President Lyndon B. Johnson, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the structure is eligible for listing under Criterion A. For its architectural integrity in the Colonial Revival style, which is reflective of the surrounding North Central Philadelphia neighborhood and strong example of Colonial Revival architecture the structure is eligible for listing under Criteria C and D. For its association with prominent black architect Walter R. Livingston, Jr. who independently contributed greatly to Philadelphia's built landscape the structure is further eligible for listing under Criterion E. Finally, as the founding location of Rev. Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Center and its central role in a civil rights movement and organization that were truly unique to Philadelphia, which

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<sup>69</sup> "City of Philadelphia|Atlas."

<sup>70</sup> "Our Inspiration," Sultan Jihad Ahmad Community Foundation, accessed December 2, 2021, <http://www.sultanjihadahmadfoundation.org/about-us.html>; Saffron, "One Building's Journey from a Place of Incarceration, to a Venue of Liberation."



remain renowned worldwide, and shaped American domestic policy across administrations, and which lives on as a community resource center in the twenty-first century, it is eligible for listing under Criteria A and J.

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## **Appendix A:**

This appendix serves primarily as a resource to incorporate Rev. Leon Sullivan's origins and earlier activism. Sullivan's background through his leadership with the Opportunities Industrialization Centers are perhaps most thoroughly discussed in Matthew Countryman's book, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, which served as one of the core secondary sources for this nomination. The following appendix provides a summary of Sullivan's background as described in *Up South*. A native of West Virginia, Rev. Sullivan was named pastor of the Zion Baptist Church in North Philadelphia in 1950 at the age of 28 years old. He previously served for five years as a pastor of a Baptist church in South Orange, New Jersey, and earlier as the assistant pastor at Abyssinian Baptist church in Harlem for two years while simultaneously working for A Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement and helping found the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Aid in Harlem<sup>71</sup>.

With his background solidly based in activism, self-reliance and supporting black communities, and especially youths, Rev. Leon Sullivan quickly became the most prominent black community activist in Philadelphia in the 1950s. Indeed, upon his arrival, Rev. Sullivan was appalled by the conditions of the community surrounding Zion Baptist Church. Comparing the neighborhood to his experiences working with Rev. Adam Clayton Powell's Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, he asserted, "Harlem was bad enough but North Philadelphia, where I rode that day, beat Harlem in housing decay."<sup>72</sup> Almost as soon as he arrived, Sullivan saw in the North Philadelphia's dilapidated neighborhood the result of an influx of southern African American migrants seeking opportunities in employment and housing that were insufficiently prepared for them.

Sullivan's activism was also rooted largely in the social gospel, a theological tradition of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which commanded the church to work toward social justice in the present world. In both South Orange and Philadelphia, Sullivan sought out ways to help young black men overcome racial barriers in the labor market. In the 1950s Sullivan's work focused most heavily on overcoming juvenile delinquency among African American youth in Philadelphia. To that end, he founded the Citizens Committee Against Juvenile Delinquency and Its Causes (CCAJD), which was envisioned as a city-wide coalition of African American block associations and neighborhood groups committed to identifying and solving the root causes of delinquency. At its peak, CCAJD claimed a membership of 100,000, and in respect of his accomplishments leading the initiative, Sullivan became the first African American recipient of the Young Man of the Year award from the National Junior League in 1955. In 1957, Sullivan stepped down from leading CCAJD, and worked with Reverend Thomas Ritter (pastor of the Second Macedonian Church) to focus on establishing an employment agency for black teenagers in his North Philadelphia neighborhood.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Countryman, 83–84.

<sup>72</sup> "Opportunities Industrialization Centers Historical Marker," ExplorePAHistory.com, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1-A-368>.

<sup>73</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 84.

By the end of the 1950s, Philadelphia's black community had achieved success in a number of civil rights campaigns, including the 1948 enacting of the country's first municipal fair employment practice laws, and the 1951 incorporation of human rights provisions banning racial discrimination in all municipal employment, services, and contracts into the city's new charter.<sup>74</sup> By the end of the 1950s, however, Philadelphia's black community began to question the capacity of Philadelphia's city government to implement significant change in a racially divided labor market, red-lined neighborhoods and public schools, all issues previously raised and insufficiently addressed by 1960.

It was within this social context, that in March 1960, Leon Sullivan convened a meeting of fifteen black pastors to discuss avenues for incorporating the sit-in movement – by then gaining momentum and attention in the Southern Civil Rights movement – into solutions for the problems of the “North and East.”<sup>75</sup> This organization of ministers grew rapidly across the city and became known in June 1960 as the “400 Ministers,” a group with a new strategy for using black consumer power instead of the city's liberal civil rights coalition, to press private employers to improve job opportunities for black workers. Through the 400 Ministers, Sullivan transitioned successfully from aiding in the protection and empowerment of black youth to the essential work of expanding their opportunities, and those of black working-class adults, within Philadelphia's labor markets<sup>76</sup>.

According to Sullivan, black workers held less than 1% of “sensitive, clerical, and public contact” jobs in the city.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, one example historians have pointed to to highlight the discrimination Philadelphia's African American laborers faced during the 1950s was the 1953 decision of the Commission on Human Relations to investigate racial discrimination in the building trades industry. The influx of military and government contracts to Philadelphia during and following the Second World War brought an abundance of new work to the city's workforce. However, the city's union leaders controlled employment, and even with the City Charter's ban on racial discrimination in municipal contracts, by 1963 of all 7,300 members of the city's building trade unions, only one was an African American.<sup>78</sup> This inequality in the labor market, despite legal mandate to the opposite, inspired the Rev. Sullivan and the 400 Ministers to create a program of “selective patronage.”

This program of selective patronage involved the Rev. Sullivan and the 400 Ministers meeting with individual hiring personnel across Philadelphia's labor market to discuss the needed changes to access for African American laborers. If the companies contacted were

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<sup>74</sup> “Why Philadelphia? · Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia · Digital Exhibitions,” accessed December 1, 2021, <http://northerncity.library.temple.edu/exhibits/show/civil-rights-in-a-northern-cit/historical-perspective/why-philadelphia->.

<sup>75</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 101.

<sup>76</sup> Countryman, 101–2.

<sup>77</sup> Countryman, 102.

<sup>78</sup> “Why Philadelphia? · Civil Rights in a Northern City: Philadelphia · Digital Exhibitions.”



unwilling to change, the ministers would inform their respective congregants to withhold their patronage from that establishment.<sup>79</sup>

Rev. Sullivan and the 400 Ministers subsequently launched selective patronage campaigns against local industries including Tastykake, Coca Cola and 7-Up, and Sun Oil.<sup>80</sup> While some companies would meet demands following their meetings with the 400 Ministers, some, like Tastykake and Sun Oil pushed back against demands to increase representation of African Americans throughout the labor hierarchies of these companies. The results were boycotts. In the instance of Sun Oil, a boycott was announced on March 19, 1961. Black Philadelphians who would ordinarily have purchased their home heating oil from Sun Oil, and the 25,000 Black masons in Philadelphia also ceased purchasing Sun Oil products for their projects. The Sun Oil boycott expanded to thirty cities across Pennsylvania, including Reading, Scranton, and Pittsburgh, before Sun Oil finally agreed to meet demands on June 11, 1961.<sup>81</sup> Between 1959 and 1963, the Selective Patronage program undertook twenty-nine campaigns resulting in the direct creation of roughly 2,000 skilled jobs and thousands more indirectly.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the impressive record reached between Sullivan and the 400 Ministers during the selective patronage campaigns, Sullivan became somewhat disillusioned with selective patronage's ability to sufficiently address the economic crises afflicting the city's black neighborhoods<sup>83</sup>. Following his shift to working more closely with employers, Sullivan shifted further towards self-help as an avenue for civil rights progress than mass protest. Though he and the 400 Ministers played a crucial role in integrating Philadelphia's labor markets, Sullivan was disturbed by his belief that African Americans' growing access to public sector employment was having little impact on the economic structure of severely red-lined neighborhoods. As Matthew Countryman put it, "Economic self-help, not political action, Sullivan believed, was the key to overcoming black poverty and fully integrating blacks into the life of the nation."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Countryman, 103–4.

<sup>81</sup> Countryman, 106–9.

<sup>82</sup> "Opportunities Industrialization Centers Historical Marker."

<sup>83</sup> Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 110.

<sup>84</sup> Countryman, 111.