

CLIENT BACKGROUND – FRIENDS AT MAFUNDI (F.A.M.)

A group of dedicated people called the 'Friends of Mafundi' came together in February 2020 to save the historic 'Mafundi Institute' (Watts Happening Cultural Center), which was threatened with demolition by the City of Los Angeles R.F.P. (request for proposal) plan ("Origin Story," Friends at Mafundi, n.d.).

The Mafundi Institute came into existence in 1967 with a specific purpose to help the Watts community recover from the unfortunate riots called the Watts Rebellion, which is remembered as unfair, unjust, and torturous for the African-American community. This uprising resulted in severe emotional, physical, financial, and material damage affecting the lives of black communities in the Watts neighborhood, situated in South L.A (Cofield, 2023).

The impoverished and distressed people of the Watts community were in dire need of expressing their emotions, pain, fear, and nothingness lingering from their traumatic experiences, and this is where The Mafundi Institute appeared as a savior. It gave them the space and freedom to vent their feelings through art, dance, poetry, music, and similar cultural platforms.

The institute was inaugurated in 1970 at the Mafundi building, historically known as The Watts Happening Cultural Center, designed by the famous African-American architects - Robert A. Kennard and Arthur Silvers, who were also activists fighting for the same cause and were seen as 'Heros' at the time when the community needed people to believe in them and provide strong support which was effectively done by constructing this thoughtful project (Cofield, 2023).

The only prominent construction done after the 1965 Watt's uprising - The Mafundi building is a simple two-story building representing the time it was built in and its relation to the history of the Black community. The reference to "built by us, for us," means that the Mafundi building is

not just any regular center but a symbol of hope, unity, and perseverance of African Americans; a historical landmark that narrates the story of their struggles and conveys an important message to everyone within and outside the community (Cofield, 2023).

The term 'Mafundi,' means 'artisans' in Swahili language. Therefore, the Mafundi Building is aptly named since it developed as a cultural hub due to the active participation and contribution of the artists, students, and the people of the Watts community. The Mafundi Institute housed in the Mafundi building has played a vital role from 1970 to 1975 in representing the unity and strength of the Black community by helping them grow progressively and nurture and save African aesthetics. It encourages the community to emote fearlessly, thereby contributing progressively towards social, artistic, educational, and personal development for the people, especially the youth belonging to the Watts neighborhood. UCLA students who produced the film "Johnny Gigs Out" came together to establish the Mafundi Institute. Hollywood, too, supported and mentored the talent that came out of Watts (Cofield, 2023).

F.A.M's consistent efforts were pivotal in saving the Mafundi Institute, with all its crucial and eminent elements coming back with greater vigor and energy. F.A. M's advocacy and support have got the Mafundi Building / 'Watts Happening Cultural Center its due title of a 'Historic-Cultural Monument' by L.A. City Council and Historic Commission in 2021. The Watts Coffee House was featured as a 'Legacy Business' on the Los Angeles Conservancy website. The Mafundi Building attained a prestigious designation by being placed on the National Registrar of Historic Places in 2023 due to F.A.M.'s committed devotion ("Accomplishments," Friends at Mafundi, 2021).

Friends at Mafundi (F.A.M.) has been recognized for its incessant efforts. In 2021, a national modern architecture and design N.G.O. called Docomomo awarded them the 'Special Citation for Grassroots Initiative' (Chou, 2021).

Competitors

- The Liberty Hill Foundation and The ACCE Institute may be strong competitors because they work on issues similar to Friends at Mafundi. The Liberty Hill Foundation is a 40-year-old veteran organization working towards social justice, social change, LGBTQ rights, and gender and racial equality. They are known to support grassroots movements and aim to provide opportunities and freedom of speech to all.
- The ACCE Institute, founded in 2010, focuses on issues such as housing justice, shielding tenants and homeowners from real estate, civic engagement, and standing up for the rights of low-wage workers. It ensures the well-being of underserved communities in California, namely communities of color, low-income populations, and immigrants from countries such as South America and Mexico who are not listed anywhere.

Five questions to ask the client

- 1) What challenges do you face when dealing with the City councils for various approvals?
- 2) What improvements do you see in the community individuals over the years?
- 3) Is it easy or difficult to get financial support for your work?
- 4) As Ms. Rita said in her podcast, changes are happening but at a very slow pace. How can we assist you in getting things done faster?
- 5) How do you visualize F.A.M. in the near future? Is there a positive growth in F.A.M. members?

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