CONSTRUCTING AND DECONSTRUCTING ARCHIVAL MEMORY IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: THE ROLE OF LOCAL COLLECTING INSTITUTIONS IN FACILITATING SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

In 1992, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute opened to the public after several years of argument, construction, and development. Was it to remember the heroic events of the Civil Rights Movement, to gain tourist dollars, to correct the historical record, educate the public, or a combination of these ideas? No matter the reason both the Birmingham Civil Institute and the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and created and constructed for, both play an important and needed role in the story of Birmingham.

What is that role? Through education and research, collecting institutions like the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute shine a light on important, but dark chapters, of Birmingham’s, the United States’, and the world’s history so that people can remember, discover, and learn from those events. Whatever their size or affiliation, collecting institutions play a needed role in the search for social justice and transitional justice. Thinking about this, what roles have, and could, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Birmingham Public Library play in the search for social justice in Birmingham, Alabama?

This study will show that both the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts have assisted Birmingham, Alabama in that city’s search for social justice for fostering education and research. Education and research allow the public to learn about the events that took place during Birmingham’s Civil Rights movement and apply the lessons and documents from that Movement to their own time and own location.
## LIST OF TERMS

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transitional Justice</td>
<td>Consists of judicial and non-judicial measures implemented in order to redress legacies of human rights abuses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memory Institutions</td>
<td>Is an organization maintaining a repository of public knowledge such as libraries, archives, and museum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Is the view that everyone deserves equal economics, political, and social rights and opportunities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual Memory</td>
<td>It is a form of memory which preserves some characteristics of our senses pertaining to visual experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Memory</td>
<td>It is a form of memory which preserves important parts of history, culture, or society through the written word.</td>
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<td>Political Memory</td>
<td>It is the political means by which events are remembered and recorded, or discarded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation</td>
<td>Is a commission tasked with discovering and revealing past wrong doing by a government (or, depending on the circumstances, non-state actors) in the hope of resolving conflict left over from the past.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Archives</td>
<td>Collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community member exercise some level of control.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Counter-Narrative</td>
<td>Only makes sense in relation to something else, that which they are countering. Is in tension with narrative.</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In a speech delivered on October 1, 1939, Winston Churchill described the Soviet Union as a “riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”.¹ Like the Soviet Union, Birmingham, Alabama is also a land that is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Instead of being a land shrouded in the shadows of communism, Birmingham was a land shrouded in the shadows of its Jim Crow master narrative. This master narrative made sure that only one story, the story of Birmingham’s white citizens, was told and remembered. All other narratives were forgotten or changed to serve the master narrative. This master narrative was a part of Birmingham for the first 105 years of its existence.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the people of the American South were beaten and angry. They had lost their war for “freedom”, their slaves, and their society had been crushed on the bayonets of the victorious Union Army. Everything that had made the South “great” in their eyes was now gone. For these angry and defeated whites, the only thing left to do was to rebuild their civilization and get it as close to the one they had before the war. They were going to reconstruct their civilization and the master narrative that supported that civilization the best they could.

Moving fast after the rest of country lost interest in them in 1877, white southerners retook control of the South and began the process of constructing a new master narrative that would preserve and protect the reconstructed white civilization, keep outside influences at bay,

and keep the newly freed slaves trapped in a new form of slavery and oppression. This new civilization and narrative needed the ability to survive and thrive. One way for both to live was for the South to become self-sufficient in ways that it had never been before the Civil War.

To construct this new world, new industrial cities had to be constructed to match the abilities and output of the North. In 1871, John T. Milner was on such a quest in central Alabama.² Milner, the Chief Engineer of the North and South Railroad, had been assigned the task of picking the crossing of his railroad and the Chattanooga and Alabama Railroad.³ The hope of Milner and both companies was that they site chosen would give birth to a great southern industrial city. After searching for several months, Milner selected the Jones Valley as the crossing point.⁴ The Jones Valley had several things going in its favor. It was close to water, and it had large deposits of iron ore, coal, and limestone.⁵ All the materials to smelt iron and produce steel. This was a spot where a great industrial city could rise.

And a great city did rise there. Birmingham, Alabama was founded in 1871 but it was founded on the back of a master narrative that would preach the exclusion of large portions of its citizens for the next 100 years.⁶ One of the reasons that Birmingham was able to expand so quickly after its formation was with the assistance once again of John T. Miler. The system that Milner helped found and run was a new form of slavery. Instead of being agricultural slaves, African-American men became industrial slaves. African-American men would be arrested for petty crimes like jaywalking and sent to work in Birmingham’s steel mills, factories, and mines.⁷

³ Ibid. Pg. 150-154.
⁴ Ibid. Pg. 157-159.
⁵ Ibid. Pg. 159-161.
⁶ Blackmon. Pg. 39.
This new form of slavery helped to implement and continue the master narrative that Birmingham was built on. That master narrative, or the only allowed narrative, or part of a narrative, was the white man’s narrative. White history, and white civilization, was the only thing that mattered. Everything else would be forgotten or never remembered in the first place.

It took Birmingham 105 years to realize that the master narrative they had been operating under did not take into account the complete history of Birmingham. The events of 1963 and the early 1960’s forced Birmingham to finally question the narrative they had been operating under for decades. This questioning led to a revaluation of Birmingham’s history after the events of the Civil Rights Movement. Birmingham finally begun the process of liberating itself from the cultural and informational prison it had found itself in for most of its history.

This questioning led to a reorganization of the collecting institutions in Birmingham and the reorientation of the missions of those institutions. No longer would they serve the Jim Crow master narrative of the past. Now they would serve the open and welcoming future. It also led to the founding of new collecting institutions to meet the challenges of the new future all the people of Birmingham were supposed to build together. Out of this questioning came both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Both are restaurant collecting institutions, which Randall C. Jimerson in his book, *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*, defines as institutions that prize the power of interpretation and mediation of the records over anything else. Out of the many facets that make up a restaurant collecting institution, one facet, that many such institutions have is an ability to help the community they are located in and the wider world search for social

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justice. Both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute have the ability to help the city they are located in, Birmingham, and the wider world search for and move towards social justice. Because they have this ability, in what ways do collecting institutions like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute help cities like Birmingham move towards social justice?
METHODS

There are three main ways that collecting institutions help the cities they are located in and the wider world move towards social justice. The first is through the actions of a truth commission. Truth commissions have taken place around the world in places like South Africa, Guatemala, and Cambodia. These commissions have taken place when an investigation into what happened during times of national and societal trouble are deemed necessary to understand what happened, punish those who deserve to be punished, and for future generations to remember.

Priscilla B. Hayner’s *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. *Unspeakable Truths* examines the 40 truth commissions that have operated around the world since 1974. Hayner tells a story of complex commissions, with positive and negative issues and attributes, and countries, region, dealing with often complex issues. These commissions are a struggle to start, a struggle to run, and a struggle to produce valuable results. They work in some situations and don’t work in others.

In the United States, for whatever reason, truth commissions have not caught on. Because of this, in the United States, collecting institutions like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute held move

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10 They fail to work in some situations because the lessons aren’t learned, another oppressive event happens, or the nation wants to learn more. For example, Chile, South Korea, and Argentina have all had multiple truth commissions.
11 While it has not happened in the United States, that doesn’t mean nothing has been happening. Both [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/26/truth-and-reconciliation-is-coming-to-america](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/26/truth-and-reconciliation-is-coming-to-america) and ow Americans are finally beginning to grapple with these issues.
Birmingham, the United States, and the wider world towards social justice through education and research opportunities offered by each institution. Education and research opportunities guide any potential relationship between collecting institution, community, and social justice in the United States.\textsuperscript{12}

This relationship, and its condition in the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute are at the heart of this study. At both locations, the education and research opportunities available allow users, researchers, and the public, to access the lessons of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement and apply them to present and future issues. Groups and movements from Black Lives Matter to Greenpeace could learn from the lessons provided by both Birmingham collecting institutions. To understand the full impact of the education and research opportunities provided by both locations this study will examine the resources at each, the research conducted at each, the results of that research, and educational options at both locations. Both institutions have mission statements that allow for the most growth and movement towards social justice and can be summed up as “Be open, be honest, and be willing to bring things to the table and listen”.

\textsuperscript{12} For an American example of education and research in action see Lisa Magarrell and Joya Wesley’s \textit{Learning from Greensboro: Truth and Reconciliation in the United States}. For a Birmingham example see Glenn T. Eskew’s \textit{But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle}. 
LITERATURE REVIEW

Any investigation of collecting institutions and their relationship with social justice will inevitable start with Randall C. Jimerson’s *Archives Power: Memory, Accountability, and Social Justice*. Jimerson’s book describes the actions archivists, curators, and other guardians of information and memory, take to construct and then reconstruct memory. In Jimerson’s mind, the archivist and informational professional should not be neutral but pick a side, the side of social justice. Both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute would be perfect places for archivists and informational professionals to pick the side of social justice and carry that torch into the future.

History, memory, narrative, and collecting institutions are all dangerous and powerful weapons. The same information can be used to the preach the glories of Jim Crow and destroy that system. This conflict is talked about in Margaret MacMillan’s *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History*. *Dangerous Games* examines several reasons why people, nations, groups, and faiths all use history to tell the story they want people to see even though that story is sometimes not the truth. MacMillan states that “The past can be used for almost anything you want to do in the present. We abuse it when we create lies about the past or write histories that

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13 *Archives Power* is Jimerson explaining in book form what he has spoken about and written about in articles for years. In the last 15 years Jimerson has been at the forefront of the investigation of the relationship between archives and social justice.

14 The Birmingham Police Surveillance Files are one such example.
show only one perspective.” This abuse was the seed from which the Jim Crow master narrative came from.

Right now, international studies of the relationship between social justice and collecting institutions are stronger than their American counterparts. Because of this, a lot of the literature written about the issues and events of places like South Africa can be used as guides to examine the American side of this relationship. South Africa and its Truth and Reconciliation Commission are the example of the relationship between collecting institutions and social justice coming together and producing results. Martin Meredith’s book *Coming to Terms: South Africa’s Search for Truth* examines the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its effect on South African collecting institutions and society. In the book, both the supporters and opponents of the apartheid government tell their stories, are judged, or forgiven, and punished. Memory is reconstructed using the same tools used to oppress and abuse in the past.

Another example of the relationship working from South Africa is the actions of Verne Harris. Harris, a well-known archivist across the world began his archival work in South African’s State Archive Service, the collecting institution of Apartheid South Africa. After the fall of apartheid, Harris became a strong supporter of collecting institutions helping to seek social justice. First as a member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and for the last 12 years as the Director of the Memory Programme at the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s Centre of Memory and Dialogue, Harris has been working to help collecting institutions help South African society move towards social justice. His Centre for Memory:

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16 https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/the-team
“…..seeks to contribute to a just society by promoting the vision and work of its Founder and convening dialogue around critical social issues.

Our Founder, the late Mr. Nelson Mandela, based his entire life on the principle of dialogue and the art of listening and speaking to others; it is also the art of getting others to listen and speak to each other.

Drawing on the contribution that he, his colleagues and his comrades made towards creating our fledgling democracy, the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory encourages people to enter into dialogue – often about difficult subjects – in order to address the challenges we face today.”

Harris himself is an example of an archival agent changing allegiance. He started out as an archival member of the apartheid regime and now finds himself in charge of something that would anger his former political masters. Now, Verne Harris is in charge of keeping Nelson Mandela’s flame alive and making sure that Mandela’s message of inclusiveness remains the bedrock of South Africa political and cultural life.

The United States, unlike South Africa, has never had a national truth and reconciliation commission to actively drive the relationship between social justice and collecting institutions forward. Because of this, the literature on this relationship in the United States is much weaken than the South African literature. One of the best pieces of American literature, and an example for any examination of the relationship in Birmingham, is Lisa Magerrell’s Learning from Greensboro: Truth and Reconciliation in the United States.

Learning from Greensboro describes the most famous example of a truth commission in the United States. It shows how a truth commission, or just an honest examination of the issues, and a willingness to bring anything to the table, can help communities in the United States move

17 http://archive.nelsonmandela.org/
towards social justice. A willingness to have an honest examination of the issues and to bring
everything and anything to the table can work in the United States and can work in Birmingham.
The models of South Africa and Greensboro, North Carolina and the literature surrounding them
are strong models to begin any examination of the relationship between collecting institutions
and social justice in Birmingham from.
MEMORY AND NARRATIVE

“The horror of that moment,” the King went on, “I shall never, NEVER Forget!”
“You will, though,” the Queen said, “if you don’t make a memorandum of it.”

Alice looked on with great interest as the King took an enormous memorandum-book out of his pocket, and began writing.18

The above scene from Alice in Wonderland represents information collecting for most of human history. For most of human history, from the Kings of ancient Sumer to the Kings of France in the 18th century, information collecting was a bureaucratic transaction. They, or the dominate group, nation, empire, religion, ethnic group, or economic group, wanted to remember the nuts and bolts that drove their business, religion, or empire. They wanted to preserve this information because it would be helpful to the next generation and not because it was historical important.

The historical importance of archives finally became a factor when Leopold von Ranke helped to found the modern historical profession.19 Von Ranke’s history, based on primary sources, could only be found at the time in the national archives of the states of Europe, especially in nations like France, Spain the United Kingdom, and The Netherlands. All of these nations had established national archives in the 16th-18th centuries that were rich in primary source material.20 To successfully write this new history, the primary sources had to be

20 Ibid.
reconstructed from the archives. Bureaucratic transactions and historical importance had to find a way to live in the same archival structure. Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, historians and collecting institutions focused on international politics and the “great men” of history. This met a large portion of history, and the related primary sources, were never reconstructed and left on the shelf to be forgotten or even eventually destroyed.  

Beginning in the early 20th century, the debate over the allocation and structure of collecting institutions became defined by the writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and T.R. Schellenberg. Both men, both well-known and well-argued over members of the archival community, established the early rules/conflicts over what went into the archival box. In terms of information collection, Jenkinson believed that it was the duty of the creators of documents and other items to determine what they want sent to an archive while Schellenberg believed that the information’s, and its potential place in an archive, value was based on uniqueness, form, and importance. In both, the archivist is supposed to be a neutral monk basically protecting the records but not interacting with them or bringing new parts of history out into the open. As long as it met each of their rules, it could be included in the archive. But, as times changed and archives and societies evolved, what about the historical narratives that didn’t meet each of their sets of rules?

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21 One such example of a historical narrative that was once on the “shelf” but now isn’t is the material that the book The Edge of the World: A Cultural History of the North Sea and the Transformation of Europe is based on. In that book, by Michael Pye, Pye reexamines the 1000 year history of the cultures around the North Sea focusing on the cultures and how they, being the average person, helped build the foundation for Europe’s great age of expansion. “Great Men” are mentioned but they are supporting actors in the book and not the stars.  
22 http://americanarchivist.org/doi/pdf/10.17723/aarc.65.2.920w65g3217706l1  
23 For Schellenberg’s rules see: http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/archives-resources/principles-of-arrangement.html. For Jenkinson’s rules see: https://archive.org/stream/manualofarchivea00jenkuoft/manualofarchivea00jenkuoft_djvu.txt
In the late 20th century and into the early 21st century new technologies and new ideas forced archivists and historians to reevaluate the contents of the archival box. Instead of just bureaucratic transaction and historical importance being in the box, a new idea was placed in the box: social justice. Archivists like Verne Harris and Randall C. Jimerson believed that archivists and the collecting institutions they represent should not be neutral ground but they should stand in the gap and choose a side, hopefully the side of social justice and societal advancement. The idea of taking a stand helped drive the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the mid-1990’s, the United States Senate’s Report on Torture in 2014 and can drive the relationship between the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and social justice.24

To the supporters of archivists and collecting institutions taking a stand for social justice, or another cause, the information contained within collecting institutions is the most valuable tool they have.25 In Birmingham, the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files Collection located at the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts was once used as a tool to try to discredit civil rights leaders but is now used to tell the story of an abusive police department that terrorized brave civil rights leaders and foot soldiers. This collection doesn’t tell the story of the “glorious” police department anymore but tells the story of the civil rights pioneers who successful overcame the corrupt police to win their rights and their place in history.

25 Supporters of this idea of the relationship between collecting institutions and social justice include Randall C. Jimerson, Priscalla B. Hayner, Jim Wallis, Verne Harris, and Michelle Caswell.
Memory and narrative are powerful tools available to collecting institutions in moving their communities towards social justice. Each item has the ability to tell the story of the past, the lessons of the past, and the warnings of the past. They effected and drove history when they were created will continue to have an effect on present and future generations. It is up to the collecting institution to determine what this impact will be and whether it will be a positive impact. They will remain one of collecting institutions’ most powerful and dangerous tools.
VISUAL MEMORY

Visual Memory is any representation of an event captured in a visual form. It can be a poster, a photograph, or a video. Whatever its form, visual memory has the ability to cause great social and political change. Visual Memory relies on viewer interpretation to generate results. Viewer interpretation is key to this form of memory. This form of memory comes with great power and great responsibility.

One of the most important pieces of visual memory from the struggle for Civil Rights in Birmingham was the CBS documentary “Who Speaks for Birmingham?”. The documentary, narrated and hosted by Howard K. Smith, aired on May 18, 1961, in the rest of the United States but was never aired in Birmingham because of local outrage. Smith, who originally came to Birmingham to report on the mob attacks on the Freedom Riders under the eyes of Bull Connor’s police, was the only national media figure to do so. While he did report on the Freedom Riders and their struggles he also created a documentary that became the first piece of visual memory and narrative to show the rest of the world the massive racial divide that existed in the Birmingham of the early 1960’s.

For an example see: http://hyperstudio.mit.edu/projects/eurasian-memory/

The same piece of visual memory can have different effects on different people. For example, take the photograph of a South Vietnamese police officer executing a Vietcong member in the streets. (http://rarehistoricalphotos.com/saigon-execution-murder-vietcong-saigon-1968/). For Americans this photograph made them question why they were fighting the Vietnam War. For the Vietcong and North Vietnamese, it made them want to fight that war even harder. For more information, see Christian G. Appy’s American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity.

McWhorter. Pg. 181.

Ibid. Pg 165-167.
The racial divide of Birmingham was represented in the documentary by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and Mrs. Eleanor Bridges.  

Shuttlesworth was an African-American Pastor who founded the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, worked with Dr. King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was beaten and bombed by the forces of white counter-revolution, and helped lead the struggle for civil rights in Birmingham. He spoke of being beaten, bombed out of his own home, and bed, and attacked by whites in his civil rights work. His story was the story of African-Americans all over Birmingham, from students at Miles College, to elevator operators downtown. They, like their white neighbors had to go out and make a living, but they also had to struggle with a whole society’s worth of racial oppression.

The other side of the story was represented by Mrs. Eleanor Bridges. Bridges was a white socialite who really didn’t understand or believe that there was a racial divide in Birmingham and what it met to be African-American in that society. She believed that African-Americans were happy with their current status in Birmingham society, didn’t want any addition rights, and were treated well by her fellow white southerners. In actuality, she was tone deaf to what was going in Birmingham as was the rest of the world along with her. To Mrs. Bridges and whites all over the United States, it was hard to think that America was in the wrong when it came to African-American civil rights. To them, at the height of the Cold War, the United States was the supreme beacon of liberty and freedom in the world. The Civil Rights Movement had to the workings of just a few angry and upset outsiders who did not represent the majority of African-Americans.

30 Ibid. Pg. 206.
31 Ibid. Pg. 3-4.
32 Ibid. Pg. 166.
33 Ibid. Pg. 168-169.
34 http://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Eleanor_Bridges
“Who Speaks for Birmingham?” showed the people of the United States that their country was not the supreme beacon of freedom in the world. It had a problem. Instead of being met with freedom and opportunity, the African-Americans of Birmingham were met with tyranny and violence. Howard K. Smith took the narrative, and the visual memory attached to it, and told the world about the racial issues that were beginning to rock Birmingham.

A documentary had cracked the walls of Birmingham’s Jim Crow master narrative. Photographs would destroy those walls and help user in a new world. In May 1963, the Children’s March disrupted Birmingham. The March, which began as a peaceful protest soon became violent when met by the Birmingham Police Department. The Department unleashed dogs and fire hoses on children whose only transgressions were marching for the full civil rights. Pictures and other images from these attacks were transmitted around the world and helped change the course of history in the favor of the marchers.35

The Children’s March began on May 2, 1963, when hundreds of children left their schools around Birmingham and entered the streets to peaceful march for their civil rights. The children, organized by James Bevel, entered those streets to march on Birmingham City Hall to demand their full civil rights and freedoms that had for so long been withheld from them.36 What began as a peaceful protest soon met the Birmingham Police Department and Bull Connor.

Eugene “Bull” Connor was the Public Safety Commissioner of Birmingham, Alabama, in charge of the Birmingham Police Department, Birmingham Fire Department, and the school

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system. He served in the position from 1937-1954 and again from 1957 to 1963. In the struggle for civil rights, he played the role of the “white knight”. Like men before him and men after him, Connor did what he thought was right. He defended “white” Southern civilization from “outside” and “foreign” influences. The whites who supported Connor believed that he was the only thing standing between them and the end of their civilization as they knew it. To them, he was fighting for “traditional” America.

White Birminghamians and Alabamians continued to support Connor and his actions until it started to affect their pocketbooks and their financial bottom lines. The Children’s March began to affect white citizens’ pocketbooks because of the visual memory produced by the March and Bull Connor’s reaction to it. Images of children being arrested and beaten turned the world against Birmingham and it’s white inhabitants. These pictures showed not a “valiant” struggle to preserve “traditional” America but peaceful children being beaten by an overbearing and violent police force. Bull Connor’s overreaction to the March began a day after it started. This was the day he ordered his men to unleash the fore hoses and attack dogs on the marchers. By May 7th, over 3000 marchers sat in Birmingham’s jails. By May 10th, the white business leaders of Birmingham realized they were losing the wider war and destroying Birmingham’s reputation in the world. Because they were losing the battle for visual memory, these same business leaders met with Civil Rights leaders and reached an agreement to begin the

37 Ibid.
38 See Diane McWhorter’s Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution for the full story of why the Big Mules and merchants of Birmingham agreed to desegregate their stores and businesses in the aftermath of the Children’s March.
39 Ibid.
40 McWhorter. Pg. 380-389.
desegregation of Birmingham. There were many winners that day in Birmingham in 1963; Bull Connor was not one of them.\textsuperscript{41}

Bull Connor and his supports lost the battle of the Children’s March in part because they lost the fight for control of visual memory. Instead of seeming like they were fighting against “un-American” ideas and supporters and fighting for “traditional” America, they were shown to be brutalizing innocent peaceful protesters, and sometimes children, marching for their civil rights. Especially in the world environment of the 1960’s, with the Cold War raging, the United States had to been seen as the beacon of freedom and liberty. In the eyes of many this could not happen in the United States and if it was happening then it should change. These pictures made the United States out to be no better than any of the states or groups it often spoke out against throughout the Cold War and afterwards. Together with the political and economic factors, all three finally forced Birmingham to being to desegregate.

Like the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files, visual memory has the ability to switch sides. In both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute there are examples of visual memory that has switched sides and now serves as a tool to educate the public towards social justice.

Take for example Photograph A in the photograph appendix.\textsuperscript{42} This photograph is part of an exhibit at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute that describes the reactions of whites to the Civil Rights Movement. The picture of Dr. King being hung in effigy was supposed to inspire

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\textsuperscript{41} Because of his actions against the Project C, the Freedom Riders, and the Children’s March, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction with Bull’s leadership. When Birmingham switched from a commissioner system to a mayor-council system, he tried to get it thrown out but lost the case and was removed from office when his position ended. He ended his career as the President of the Alabama Public Service Commission. For more information, see: \url{http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1091}.

\textsuperscript{42} See Photograph 1 in photographic appendix.
fear as a tool of the white counter-revolution but today it serves as a tool of social justice.

Visual Memory, in any of its forms, is just one part of relationship between social justice and collecting institutions and one part of the building blocks that make up the education and research opportunities at both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
WRITTEN MEMORY

“Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory there would be no civilization, no society, no future.”-Elie Wiesel

The above quote sums up the power of the written word and written memory. Both sides of the Civil Rights Movement used the written word and written memory to attempt to win the battle they were waging. Like visual memory, written memory is all about attempting to influence and control what people think or thought about a particular situation. This is what both Alabama Governor George Wallace and Martin Luther King Jr. attempted to do on opposite sides of the Civil Rights Movement.

Governor George Wallace first came to national attention when he uttered the infamous line “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” in his inaugural address as Alabama’s governor in 1963. To the white citizens of Alabama and the wider South, Wallace performed the same duty as Bull Connor did for the white citizens of Birmingham. Wallace was the white knight defending “white Southern” civilization from “outside” and “untraditional”

44 Both Dr. King and Governor Wallace were excellent speakers who delivered some of the most memorable speeches of the 20th century in the United States. These speeches used words to paint a picture of each of the worlds both men were fighting for. For Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech see: http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm. For Governor Wallace’s “Segregation now, Segregation forever” see: http://web.utk.edu/~mfitzge1/docs/374/wallace_seg63.pdf.
influences. He crusaded against the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama and would soon take his crusade onto the national stage.

In 1964, Wallace decided to run for president of the United States as a Democrat in the primaries against the sitting Democratic President, Lyndon Johnson. Wallace was angry at Johnson for supporting and then signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964. To Wallace, Johnson, a southerner, had betrayed his people to the outside and untraditional influences Wallace had been fighting. In Wallace’s mind, President Johnson destroyed southern civilization with the stroke of a pen. Southern civilization had to be restored and Wallace was the man to do that.

George Wallace announced his intentions to run for president on July 4, 1964. Wallace knew that his ticket to the White House was the angry white southerner who may be worried about, and may have believed, that their civilization and their way of life had just been destroyed by Johnson and Washington. In his announcement speech, he attempted declare himself the champion of these people and their way of life to outreach by declaring himself an enemy of Johnson, civil rights and pledging to fight for the fallen civilization that had just been destroyed by Johnson and the federal courts. He was going to restore the world to it’s “rightful” condition.

“We come here today in deference to the memory of those stalwart patriots who on July 4, 1776, pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to establish and defend the proposition that governments are created by the people, empowered by the people, derive their just powers from the consent of the people, and must forever remain subservient to the will of the people.

Today, 188 years later, we celebrate that occasion and find inspiration and determination and courage to preserve and protect the great principles of freedom enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. It is therefore a cruel irony that the President of the United

46 Like Wallace and Connor, Donald Trump is defending what he considers to be “traditional” American Civilization. This can be seen in his pledging to build a wall on the US-Mexican Boarder and his want of a temporary banning of Muslims in the United States. Trump is a step backwards into the Jim Crow master narrative. For more information, see: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/are-there-echoes-of-george-wallace-in-trumps-message/
States has only yesterday signed into law the most monstrous piece of legislation ever enacted by the United States Congress.

It is a fraud, a sham, and a hoax.

This bill will live in infamy. To sign it into law at any time is tragic. To do so upon the eve of the celebration of our independence insults the intelligence of the American people.

It dishonors the memory of countless thousands of our dead who offered up their very lives in defense of principles which this bill destroys.

Never before in the history of this nation have so many human and property rights been destroyed by a single enactment of the Congress. It is an act of tyranny. It is the assassin's knife stuck in the back of liberty.

With this assassin's knife and a blackjack in the hand of the Federal force-cult, the left-wing liberals will try to force us back into bondage. Bondage to a tyranny more brutal than that imposed by the British monarchy which claimed power to rule over the lives of our forefathers under sanction of the Divine Right of kings.

Today, this tyranny is imposed by the central government which claims the right to rule over our lives under sanction of the omnipotent black-robed despots who sit on the bench of the United States Supreme Court.”

In 1964, at the height of the Cold War, American freedom was all important to many Americans. Wallace hoped to show that by passing the Civil Rights Act, Johnson and the Supreme Court had acted no better than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Johnson and his allies had just “forced” the law on the United States when a majority of the citizens did not want it in Wallace’s mind. He wanted the American people to realize that they have to fight for their “traditional” civilization and “values” like the founders of the United States had. Wallace wanted Americans to believe that they are under federal occupation now that did not differ from the occupations of King George III or Abraham Lincoln. In the mind of George Wallace, all “true” Americans, led by Wallace of course, needed to rise up, Americans, like the Founding

Fathers did, to overthrow “King Lyndon” and his council of evil liberals, restore America, and make America great again.

Since its defeat in the American Civil War, the South has always felt threatened by outsiders and their ideas. In the postwar period, the main goal of white Southerners was to preserve their culture from these outside “alien” influences. Because of this perceived threat, white southerners voted for men who promised that they would protect the South from outside influences and would do anything to stop it. This led to the rise of leaders like Bull Connor and George Wallace.48

In the early 1960’s, George Wallace was the most recent in a line of Southern leaders stretching back to the Nathanial Bedford Forrest who fought for the “Lost Cause” and would do anything to defend Southern culture and civilization from outside influences. To the Alabamians and Southerners who supported George Wallace, their world was under attack and they needed to save it or all would be completely lost. What they didn’t realize was that they had already lost the battle and it was only a matter of time before they would be forced to adapt to the new world that was in the process of evolving right in front of them.

The builder of this new world was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a pastor from the Atlanta area who quickly became the American face of nonviolent civil protests in the United States and the world. He was the American Gandhi in the making. After leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and a failed attempt to force the integration of Albany, Georgia, in 1962, King

48 For more information about the “Lost Cause of the Confederacy” see Charles Reagan Wilson’s book Baptized in Blood: The Religion of Lost Cause and Tony Horwitz’s Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War.
soon realized that Birmingham, Alabama would be a main, if not the main, battleground in the struggle for civil rights.\textsuperscript{49}

In history there are pivot points, points so important that the course of history depends on which way the pivot throws history. The Franco-Prussian War of 1871 was one such pivot. That conflict unified Germany, made France want revenge, established the alliance system that would destroy Europe in World War I, and pointed the way to the destruction of the of the twentieth century. The complete history of the twentieth century would be different if that war turned out differently. That is power and importance of the historical pivot point. Birmingham 1963 was another such point

Starting in April, Dr. King and his fellow protesters, marchers, and supporters engaged the government and white community of Birmingham in an attempt to force the integration of that city. They believed if they could force the integration of the citadel of segregation they could destroy the system anywhere and everywhere.\textsuperscript{50} Once on the ground in Birmingham, in just over a month, King and his supporters forced the white leaders of Birmingham to begin to desegregate the city, force the white knight Bull Connor from power, and drew attention from all corners of the world to the struggle for civil rights erupting in the American South.

\textit{The Letter from Birmingham Jail} is probably the greatest piece of written memory and narrative from the 1963 struggle in Birmingham. The document was written by Dr. King while he sat in the Birmingham City Jail. His letter was written in response to two letters written by eight white Alabama clergymen. In their letters “An Appeal for Law and Order and Common


\textsuperscript{50} See

http://www.amistadresource.org/civil_rights_era/birmingham_desegregation_campaign.html
Sense” and “A Call for Unity”, these men wrote about the need for a slow and ordered process to gain civil rights and an end to the “outside” influences, like Dr. King, interfering in the natural development of Birmingham’s African-American community. They, like European colonial administrators in Africa in the mid-twentieth century, believed that any headlong rush towards civil rights and equality with the white man would destroy the social order of Birmingham and Alabama. Like their counterparts in Africa, they believed that these civil rights and the corresponding equality would naturally come to the African-American around the end of the twentieth century or sometime in the beginning of the twenty-first.

In response to his fellow clergymen, King blasted their evolutionary approach in The Letter from Birmingham Jail. To King, it was time to move. Protests had ended the British Empire in India, and were in the process of achieving independence for Africa. They could do the same with similar results in the American South. In his broadside, he answered the charges of the white clergymen telling them, and the world, that is the moral responsibility of all people to break, and fight, against unjust laws, and that it didn’t matter that he was an outsider in Birmingham because “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”. He stated that African-Americans had waited long enough and the time was now to finally achieve their freedoms. It was easy for those who have never felt the wrath of Jim Crow to tell African-Americans to wait for evolution to take its course

“A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law.”

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51 Ibid. Pg. 41.
52 Ibid. Pg. 182.
53 Ibid. Pg. 172.
54 Ibid. Pg. 170.
“Segregation laws are immoral and unjust “because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority.”

*The Letter from Birmingham Jail* established Dr. King’s place as one of the greatest social justice figures of the United States and the world in the twentieth century. After its publication and his “I have a dream” speech in Washington D.C. he had established himself as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement, one of America’s greatest citizens, and man who practiced the non-violence that he preached. He would soon be compared with Gandhi and other great non-violent protest leaders from around the world.

In the short term, *The Letter from Birmingham Jail* charged the white community and white church especially with the charge that they had to take a stand or risk being “dismissed as an irrelevant social club”. All Americans were charged with fighting for social justice and civil rights through peaceful protest. 1963 was not a time to wait but a time to move.

Unfortunately, sometimes the lessons learned from visual memory, written memory, and the corresponding narrative can be forgotten. In the aftermath of Dr. King’s own assassination in Memphis, Tennessee in the 1968, Americans were pulled from the path of social justice into the black holes of white conservative reaction and black nationalism. In these black holes, Americans forgot the lessons of *The Letter from Birmingham Jail*. It is up to organizations like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute to preserve those lessons and education this, and all future generations about *The Letter from Birmingham Jail*.

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55 Ibid. Pg. 184.
56 See: [http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v17n2p21.htm](http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v17n2p21.htm) for more on this comparison.
NARRATIVE

Memory in all its forms are integral components in the crafting of all forms of narrative. Without them, there can be no narrative. Control is also a vital component in narrative. In prison institutions, control is absolute and allows for only one form of narrative, the narrative of those who control the institution whether that is a government or some form of an institution. In restaurant institutions, the records and materials are allowed to speak for themselves creating a space for multiple narratives, and sometimes counter-narratives to develop.

The precursors of the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts were prison collecting institution. They supported the Jim Crow master narrative making sure that all their collections supported this narrative on purpose or even by accident. Thomas Duke Parke and his papers were victims of this for most of the twentieth century.

Thomas Duke Parke was not a racist. Parke, who served from 1895-1899 as the City Physician of Birmingham, Alabama spoke out against the convict leasing system of the time that condemned African-American men to a new form of slavery in the mines and industrial works around Birmingham. These men, who were convicted of crimes, ranging from failing to pay a small fine to jaywalking, would become trapped in the mines by the fees and fines that would

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58 Jimerson. Pg 6-8.
59 For example see Verne Harris’ Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory at: http://archive.nelsonmandela.org/home or the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute at: http://nvrmi.com/.
never allow them to return to their former lives.\textsuperscript{61} Parke, instead of certifying, as other physicians had done, spoke out against the system and campaigned against it for the next twenty-eight years.

It wasn’t until the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement that Dr. Parke’s Papers were examined for the first time.\textsuperscript{62} In the mid-1950’s, a researcher was conducting an examination of Dr. Parke’s papers and created a finding aid for those papers to assist in his research. The finding aid focused on possible research points that were important to the researchers and public of the 1950; they were racial points. The researcher took that finding aid and gave it to the archive and the archive used it as the definitive finding aid for Dr. Parke’s papers. It wasn’t until 2010 that another user of the same archive realized that the original researcher’s finding aid was horribly biased and did not fully represent Dr. Parke and his life.\textsuperscript{63} When the record was corrected, the archive discovered that Dr. Parke fought against the convict leasing system it once said he supported and had at times had almost socialist tendencies. He was not what the archive, which was in fact the Birmingham Public Library Archive, and history had painted him as. He was something completely different.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. Pg 47.
\textsuperscript{62} Like Dr. Parke, the former American President John Quincy Adams is currently enjoying a historical reevaluation and reinterpretation for the better. Since 2013, there have been six new biographies of Adams or his wife Louisa. Each, like James Traub’s \textit{John Quincy Adams: A Militant Spirit}, have broken with the past interpretation of Adams as a poor president and poor leader to show that Adams laid the foundation for many of the functions of government, like roads and other internal improvements, that we take for granted today. That, and his work before and after his presidency show that Adams did not deserve the reputation he was given for most of the 19th and 20th centuries.
\textsuperscript{63} This story was provided to the author through a reference request to Jerry Smith. Smith was the discoverer of the issue with the Parke Collection at the Birmingham Department of Archives and Manuscripts.
In restaurant institutions, memory and narrative are allowed to evolve. When this happens, great change can take place. Take for example what happened in Guatemala. Thousands, if not millions of identification documents were discovered in 2005 in the former archives of the Guatemalan National Police. That organization had brutally terrorized the people of Guatemala for 30 years from the 1960’s to the 1990’s. According to the archivists, historians, and volunteers reconstructing the archive, these identification cards were the cards taken from the victims of the National Police. When completely reconstructed these cards will be able to help tell the stories of the people they used to belong too. They will also be able to tell the whole story of what happened during the military dictatorship in Guatemala and educate Guatemalans and the world.

A counter-narrative can also provide new information to a narrative, or narratives. Many aspects of the Civil Rights Movement are represented at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts. One aspect that is missing from the both institutions is the role radio, especially African-American radio, played in the fight for civil rights in the 1960’s.

One institution in Birmingham that has taken up this aspect is the Birmingham Black Radio Museum Project. Founded by Bob Friedman in the late 1980’s, the BBRM is tasked with collecting the history of Birmingham Black Radio that other Birmingham institutions have missed. For most of the 20th century, radio was one of the only avenues, along with newspapers, where African-Americans could actually take some sort of leadership role equal to

64 Weld. Loc. 233.
65 Ibid. Loc. 301.
that, or great than, their white neighbors.\textsuperscript{67} Like preachers, radio hosts could be leaders when no other leadership roles were available to African-Americans.

African-American radio hosts also had an unheralded role in the Civil Rights Movement. During the Civil Rights Movement, radio hosts like Tall Paul White and Shelly “The Playboy” Stewart would broadcast secret messages to organizers, marchers, and protesters, telling them when and where to assemble.\textsuperscript{68} It is thought, but cannot be proven completely, that they broadcasted the go signal for the children to leave their schools and enter the streets to begin the Children’s March in May 1963.\textsuperscript{69}

The history of African-American radio in Birmingham and its role in the Civil Rights Movement is not mentioned or highlighted at either the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute or Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts. Instead it is up to institutions like the Birmingham Black Radio Museum Project to carry this history. Institutions like the BBRM will always be needed to provide counter-narratives that fill in, and add to, narratives provided for at other institutions.

Memory, narrative, alternate narrative, and counter narrative all make up the building blocks of the relationship between collecting institutions and social justice. They make collecting institutions restaurant collecting institutions and allow for the development of education and research opportunities. Without them there would be no foundation for institutions like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute to build off of.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
COLLECTING INSTITUTION OVERVIEW

Both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute were born in the initial opening wave of liberation that swept through Birmingham in the late 1970’s and 1980’s. After suffering for so long under the oppression of the master narrative of Jim Crow, the city, and its people, wanted to understand ALL of their history. They wanted to understand all of the narrative strings of Birmingham’s history for different reasons. Some wanted to understand what had happened to love ones and why it happened to them, some wanted to attempt to learn the lessons of Birmingham’s past and how to apply them to Birmingham’s future, and some wanted to cash in on the country’s and world’s sudden interest in civil and human rights (they wanted the tourist dollars). Whatever their own personal reasons, these two institutions came to life and then lead the charge and the change in how Birmingham and the wider world treated Birmingham’s past.

The Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts was the first of the two to be founded. It was founded in 1976 and tasked with being a repository of the all the history of Birmingham. For the first time, this met ALL of Birmingham’s history. This charge was worked into the Department’s mission statement.

“The Birmingham Department of Archives and Manuscripts collects government records, business records, maps, photographs, letters, diaries, scrapbooks, and other primary material documenting the history and development of Birmingham, Jefferson County and the surrounding area of Alabama known as the Birmingham District. The Archives

70 Raiford, Romano
71 Restaurant institutions as defined by Randell C. Jimerson in Archive Powers are institutions that allow the records, documents, and collections to speak for themselves and let them guide users.
collects material statewide relating to the Episcopal Church in Alabama, the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, Jewish history and life in Alabama, LGBTQ history and life in Alabama, and the Environmental Movement in Alabama.”

For the first time in Birmingham’s history, it had a collecting institution that wanted to not just collect all the narratives of that history but also examine all of these narratives. The public and researchers from Birmingham and the wider world had a place to go and examine the multiple known, and discover the unknown, narratives that make up the story of Birmingham. The Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts was, and is still, willing to collect, preserve, remember, and educate the people of Birmingham and the wider world about the complete story of Birmingham. They can help new stories be told, correct wrongs, and help Birmingham and the wider world move towards social justice. Instead of one master narrative, all the narratives could speak.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute opened to the public on November 16, 1992 after a 16 year struggle. During those 16 years, the people of Birmingham, its government, and outsiders battled about what would be included in the Institute and why they even wanted to build an Institute in the first place. In the eyes of some, Birmingham had embraced multiple narratives after 1963 so there was no need to return to the events of the Civil Rights Movement and the Jim Crow Era. This opinion lost and the Civil Rights Institute opened in 1992 with a strong emphasis on education, research, and the continued fight for civil rights in Birmingham and the wider world.

73 Raiford, Romano
Mission
To enlighten each generation about civil and human rights by exploring our common past and working together in the present to build a better future.

Vision
We stand strong as THE CORNERSTONE of the civil rights story, a living memorial with an on-going mission.

Values
The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is committed to:
  • Persevering and telling the Birmingham story
  • Being a good steward of archival and financial resources
  • Creating programs that encourage cultural awareness
  • Championing civil and human rights by facilitation an atmosphere of dialogue and understanding

Both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute were founded to be strong restaurant collecting institutions that educated and provided opportunities for those who wished to learn about the multiple narratives of Birmingham’s history.

EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

“BCRI [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute] is a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding and appreciation for the significance of civil rights developments in Birmingham with an increasing emphasis on the international struggle for universal human rights. BCRI is a “living institution” that views the lessons of the past as crucial to understanding our heritage and defining our future.”

Unfortunately for the people of Birmingham, Alabama, it took over 105 years to realize that all the narratives working together would produce the strongest society. For those 105 years, the master narrative was that of the rule and continued advancement of the white Birminghamians and their white civilization. All other narratives were “enemies” of the white master narrative and did not matter to the average citizen, the historian, or the librarian. This led to 105 years of racial strife, violence, and oppression. Birmingham could never realize it's true potential with only one part of its story being told. After the opening of the doors of prison collecting institutions in the 1970’s, Birmingham and its collecting institutions finally had a chance to examine what had happened in the first 105 years of Birmingham’s story. The original master narrative was collapsing. What would replace it would be up to new collecting institutions like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The original master narrative had to collapse so new narratives could grow and evolve.

Both of these institutions place an emphasis on supporting and growing Birmingham’s new multiple narrative history and apply the historical lessons of Birmingham of the past to the

75 Ibid.
Birmingham of the present and the world. They educate the public and allow for research into Birmingham’s past so narratives, and their lessons so they can be applied to present and future generations. This is seen in the mission statements of each institution. Take again the mission statement of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

**Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI)**

**Mission**
To enlighten each generation about civil and human rights by exploring our common past and working together in the present to build a better future.

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**Values**
The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is committed to:
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Education and research are the most important functions of both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in terms of social justice. Both function as figurative transmission towers for the memories and lessons of the past and how they can be applied to the present and future. Without these functions, a collecting institution cannot help a society reach social justice in the United States.

The Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts holds multiple collections that examine many aspects and sections of Southern history and culture. Before the formation of the Department in 1976, many of these collections and records were used to serve

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the master narrative of Jim Crow and segregation. These collections and records exulted the “glories” of the white citizens and white history of Birmingham while putting any other history and culture out of the master narrative and history of the city. After the founding of the Department and the gathering of those collections and records under the umbrella of that Department, the same collections and records that once served the white man’s master narrative became free to speak the truth to all current and future generations.

One collection that went through this transformation and now serves as a tool of social justice is the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files. These files, dated from 1941-1972, contain information collected about civil rights meetings, demonstrations, and organization efforts. It also has information related to white supremacists, pornography, voting rights, and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. Most of these documents were generated by the Birmingham Police Department when Bull Conner ran that department.

Whatever narratives, or multiple narratives, that this collection naturally generated were suppressed during the first decades of its existence. During those years, this collection was suppressed itself by the overarching master narrative of the Birmingham of the mid-twentieth century. Instead of being able to speak its mind, it was enslaved to the master narrative that Bull Conner and those who supported him preached in support of.

After it was placed in the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts this collection had the chance to finally speak its mind without the overarching and overbearing power of a master narrative holding it down. When this weight was lifted, the

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78 http://encore.bham.lib.al.us/iii/encore/record/C__Rb1490380?lang=eng
79 Ibid.
collection came to life. Instead of telling the story of the “glories” of Jim Crow Birmingham, it
told of the horrors. This collection told the story of a police force which tried its best to perform
its best to beat, oppress, and terrorize its own citizens because some of those citizens wanted
equal rights. In the United States of the 20th century, one that was fighting the Cold War as a
bastion of freedom and liberties, a police force was imprisoning, beating, surveilling, and killing
their own citizens in the name of a fascistic racist master narrative.

Like the liberated records of apartheid South Africa, the police surveillance files of the
Birmingham Police Department can inform, educate, and warn users in the present and future of
the horrors of the past and the lessons that can, and should, be learned from them. These records,
if used correctly, can show how a society can go from a closed society to an open society and
how any society, even the United States of America, could have to deal with these issues in the
life of the society and culture they inhabit. They also serve as a warning telling Birmingham, the
United States, and the world that this kind of activity should never be allowed in any modern free
civilized society. And that it even happened in the United States of America. The supposed home
of the free and liberty.

While not in any educational display at the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, the
lessons offered up by this collection are actually on display at the Birmingham Civil Rights
Institute. After telling the story of Birmingham’s struggle for civil rights, the Institute warns its
visitors that the struggle is not over. In a series of panels, they tell visitors about some of the civil
rights and social justice struggles that have taken place since the events in Birmingham. The
panels warn visitors that the struggle for civil rights and social justice is not over around the

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80 “About BCRI | Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.” About BCRI | Birmingham Civil Rights
81 Photographs 2-5 in photographic appendix.
world or in Birmingham. The fight is not over and neither should education, investigation, or research be either. The Institute wants to be always moving, always growing, and always learning.

There are current movements in today’s world where the lessons learned gleamed from the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files Collection could be important. One such movement is the Black Lives Movement in the United States. This movement is the direct response to an increase in police violence which seems directed primarily at African Americans. Unfortunately, violence directed towards African Americans by police forces is not a new phenomenon. What the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files could teach both sides of this conflict is that this conflict has unfortunately happened before. The files, and the reactions to them, could show police departments and the victims of those departments how to change and end the current cycle. Most of all, they could show that this type of behavior belongs as the ash heap of history and both sides, and the wider public, need to come together and finally find the true cause of it all.

Another corner of the world where the lessons of the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files Collection could provide helpful lessons is in Canada. According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, between 1980 and 2012, around 1017 First Nations women were murdered while another 108 went missing during that same period. The police barely investigated the murders when they happened and just forgot about most of them afterwards. Hopefully, the new investigation into the old records recently initiated by the Canadian Prime Minister Justin

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Trudeau will be able to undercover some of the lost truth of what happened to these women. Like what happened in Birmingham and the records connected to those events, hopefully the records connected to the murders will be able to tell family members what happened to their loved ones, punish if need be, and remind Canadians that they should always be fighting for social justice.

The educational opportunities based around the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files Collection allow for many opportunities for social justice. These opportunities allow this collection to move social justice forward in Birmingham, Alabama, the United States, and the world. Another way, not just this collection, but the entire Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts helps achieve social justice is through the production of secondary resources through research of the collections they have a hand.

Research is an important way to present the ideas and lessons contained in collecting institutions to the wider world. In the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, this process has produced books like Diane McWhorter’s *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climatic Battle of the Civil Rights Movement*. *Carry Me Home* was born from the records and collections stored at the Department of Archives and Manuscripts. McWhorter, who is originally from Birmingham, used these items and her own personal stake in her project to tell the story of Birmingham’s eventful 1963.  

For Diane McWhorter, the events of 1963 Birmingham are important for both personal and historical reasons. Because she was a small child living in 1963 Mountain Brook, Alabama, she did not fully realize what was happening at Birmingham’s heart. She knew there was a conflict, and she had family members on one side but she didn’t know what they were fighting

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83 McWhorter. Pg. xv-xvi.
for at the time. She wrote *Carry Me Home* to tell the story of Birmingham and her family in 1963 and answer all her questions.\(^{84}\)

What she discovered was that the events of 1963 Birmingham were actually the final results of decades of racial and political intrigue in Birmingham and Alabama.\(^ {85}\) What she found was a raging battle for the master narrative of Jim Crow that started in the 1940’s and would finally end in 1963. Inside that battle she discovered that her family played a role in this intrigue and supported the master narrative of Jim Crow. Her father and uncle were minor members of the Big Mules.\(^ {86}\) The Big Mules were Birmingham and Alabama businessmen who controlled the politics, cultural, and business in Birmingham and Alabama. Starting in the 1940’s, the Big Mules cultivated, organized, and assisted forces that would support their rule and fight against any threat to it and the narrative that told its story.\(^ {87}\) This met that they cultivated the likes of Bull Conner and Asa Carter to lead the fight against outside influences and forces. The Big Mules did not want change and would fight it at any cost.

In McWhorter’s mind the only reason the Big Mules eventually broke and gave in to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement were the fact that it was beginning to affect their pocketbooks. The images of Bull Conner’s police department beating children that were circling the globe gave Birmingham a black eye and painted it into the same corner occupied by Nazi Germany and Pol Pot’s Cambodia. This, and not their changed belief system and their rejection of Birmingham’s master narrative, was the reason that 1963 was a victory for civil rights. McWhorter’s analysis in *Carry Me Home Alabama* is one that should come as a warning to those

\(^{84}\) Ibid. Pg. xvi.
\(^{85}\) Ibid. Pg. 150.
\(^{86}\) Ibid. Pg 400.
\(^{87}\) Ibid. Pg. 450.
who read it. To McWhorter, the victory one in Birmingham 1963 was not the final battle in the war but just another battle. The liberation is incomplete. Those who read this book should take this away from their reading. This battle may have been won but the war is ongoing still.

The sense of continuing struggle is evident today. In 2015, an Indian man was badly beaten by police officers in Northern Alabama. According to the man’s family, the only reason he was beaten was because he didn’t speak English and was not white. The officers reported he was belligerent and didn’t answer their questions. Whatever the reasons that he was beaten it, it was a case of police brutality, overreach, and shows that the struggle continues. This man’s civil rights and social justice was taken away from him by these police officers who were doing their best impression of Bull Conner’s police force from the 1960s.

This sense of continuing struggle is the most important lesson one can take from Carry Me Home. And it is the one of the most important lessons one can take from any of the collections, or works produced by them, in the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts. Most of these collections were created in a time and place where they served, even if not designed for it, the master narrative of Jim Crow. They served the white man and his story only. Now, because of the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, they serve all narratives and provide lessons for present and future generations to examine, learn about, and apply to their own situations.

Education and research are the two main ways the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts helps Birmingham and the wider world search, or work towards, social justice. Both concepts are supported strongly by the Department and form

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cornerstones of its and the library’s central mission statement. Like the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute also supports social justice through education and research. The Civil Rights Institute does so through its public museum, collections access, and the works that that research produces.

Unlike the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, the Civil Rights Institute has a public area where portions of its collections can be put on display and the narratives, both of blacks and whites, of the Civil Rights Era can be told. Because of this public area, the Institute has to worry about making sure that it allows for all the narratives of the Civil Rights Era to be told and not their own master narrative. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is still not a full restaurant collecting institution because of the issues in their public museum area.

The public museum area of the Institute is where it is not fully a restaurant collections institution. This portion of the BCRI relies heavily on visual stimuli to influence visitors and tell the master narrative of the Civil Rights Institute. At times, for oblivious reasons, this narrative draws heavily from television and newspaper accounts of events.

These displays, of both newspapers and television, offer a window into the minds of the people who lived through these events, those who reported it, and those, on both sides, who fought Birmingham’s battle for civil rights. They offer a chance for visitors to see what it was really like to live through the South’s civil rights trials and tribulations. But, they don’t tell the whole story. The tell only the master narrative of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

One aspect of the narrative of Birmingham’s civil rights story that they leave out is the contributions of African American radio hosts. Starting with the mass introduction of radio in the 1920’s, radio is one of the only areas, the other being as a member of the clergy, that African

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89 See Photographs 6-7 in photographic appendix.
Americans had a chance to advance and make something of themselves in that field.\textsuperscript{90} By the time 1963 dawned in Birmingham, there are been many African American radio hosts that had had an impact on the city and the surrounding area. These men, and a few women, showed that African Americans could successfully run businesses and could also successfully contribute to Southern culture in a way that wouldn’t destroy it but enhance it.

In the battles of 1963, these same radio hosts played important roles. Because they were the representatives of a mass form of media that African Americans actually had some manner of control over, they were used to pass messages and orders along to civil rights marchers and protesters. When the children of the Children’s March left their classrooms in May 1963 they did so after listening to Tall Paul and others give them coded messages in their radio programs to begin the march. African American disc jockeys played an important part of African American history in Birmingham and Birmingham’s total history.\textsuperscript{91}

This history is unfortunately missing from the displays of the museum area of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. It is currently being saved and persevered by Bob Friedman at the Birmingham Black Radio Museum Project.\textsuperscript{92} While the public educational displays at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute are informative and do help visitors learn about the history of the civil rights struggle in the South, they would be more complete if they made sure to at least mention other narratives that their master narrative fails to support.

The area where the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute succeeds in being a restaurant collection institution and helping to search for social justice the most is the research

\textsuperscript{90} Ward.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
opportunities it offers. The Civil Rights Institute holds many records and collections, for obvious reasons, that relate to civil rights and social justice in Birmingham and the wider world. These collections have been used to support the writing of many works that have taken the lessons of Birmingham’s Civil Rights Movement into the wider world. One such book is *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King, JR.’s Letter From Birmingham Jail and The Struggle That Changed A Nation* by Jonathan Rieder.

*Gospel of Freedom* is the story of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and then its deployment in the fight for civil rights in Birmingham 1963. The book is the history of what led King to write the letter, how people discussed it and then used it during the Civil Rights Movement. To Rieder, King’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, was the gospel of freedom for the battle for civil rights and can be the gospel of freedom for other civil rights and social justice movements around the world.

Jonathan Rieder’s book and others like it show the power of the collections contained within the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The stories and narratives the collections tell embrace the ideal of a restaurant collection institution much better than the public museum complex within the Institute does. This is important. The public museum complex is important to the educational opportunities that the BCRI offers but it is in the collections, and the research opportunities presented there, that the true work towards social justice takes place. The lessons of the Civil Rights Movement are contained there and available for the researcher to mine them. In these mines, social justice will be found.

With education and research the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute can help Birmingham and the

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93 Rieder. Pg. xv-xx.
surrounding world move towards social justice. Because of these opportunities that can, and have, been mined, the lessons of Birmingham’s Civil Rights Movement contained in both institutions can be presented to the public. Hopefully as more information is discovered and organized that both institutions will continue to be living institutions and grow in the educational and research ways that they can help Birmingham and the world work towards social justice.
CONCLUSIONS

In Guatemala City in 2005, because of an accident, the archives of the Guatemalan National Police were rediscovered.94 Operating from the 1890’s to 1996, the National Police served as the chief instrument of torture and oppression against the Guatemala people.95 The archives of the National Police contained record after record of those it had tortured, oppressed, and sometimes murdered. The country was trapped within the “banality of evil” and the National Police Archive was trapped within the “banality of information abuse”. After the collapse of the government in 1996, Guatemala began the transformation from an oppressive society into an open society. It wasn’t until 2005 when the archives were re-discovered that the archives could begin that transformation also. After the National Police Archives were discovered, archivists and volunteers from Guatemala and around the world began that transformation process. They were able to piece together what happened to people who were taken by the National Police, educate everyone about them, assist in the punishment of some, and help others forgive. They had successfully begun the process of transforming the National Police Archives from a prison institution to a restaurant institution.96

This transformation, and opening, is important at all levels of any collecting institution and it is vital for any institution to have a chance, or the ability, to engage in, or assist, in any search for social justice. In South Africa, Guatemala and the United States, when things were

95 Ibid. Loc. 233.
96 Ibid. Loc. 301.
opened to examining, researchers, and the public, were finally to understand what happened during the reign of the Khmer Rouge, military dictatorship, and the Vietnam War. One product of a successful transformation is *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. In *An Indigenous People’s History*, Dunbar-Ortiz uses the same information and material used to write the accepted history of the United States, showing the triumphant founding and growth of the United States, to show a different side of that same history. Dunbar-Ortiz paints a picture of a United States that isn’t a freedom loving nation where anybody can do anything but of a brutal genocidal empire that attempted to exterminate the indigenous population of North America but failed too. Her analysis is only possible because the collecting institutions of the United States finally allow, because of social, cultural, and institutional changes, for the development of multiple narratives, different voices, and the search for social justice. In the United States, the wall “banality of information abuse” is starting to collapse but there is still much work to be done.

Another example is *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change & Catastrophe In The Seventeenth Century* by Geoffrey Parker. Parker’s history of the seventeenth century is very much a new and different view of the history of that century. Instead of war, religion, great men

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97 *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States* uses documents, collections, and resources that once only told one master narrative to tell a new narrative, that of the plight and abuse of Native Americans before and throughout United States’ history. Like the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, it shows readers that there are social justice lessons to be taken from the darkness of the past.

98 Over the last 15 years, different, and often overlooked narratives from the wider historical narrative of the United States and the Americas are being brought into the light. Like *An Indigenous People’s History*, Andrés Reséndez’s *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*, Iris Chang’s *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* and Tom Gjelten’s *A Nation of Nations: A Great American Immigration Story* have all attempted to bring a forgotten or often not talked about portion of United States or wider American history into the historical light and wider narrative of the two regions.
and women, or new technologies driving the history of that century, Parker claims that climate change was the real and overarching driver of historical events and the changes that swept that century.\textsuperscript{99} Parker is able to back up those claims and show that climate change did play a part in the events of the seventeenth century with some of the same records that assisted in the production of traditional narratives of the period.\textsuperscript{100}

The ability of records and collecting institutions to produce both multiple narratives is an important, and vital, ability of any collecting institution when it comes to social justice. This allows for a multi-faceted examination of the events contained within the institution and in free and open way. Users, researchers, and patrons are able to freely grapple with all aspects of the records and determine their effects on themselves and the world around them. This is a complicated process that sometimes is never started or never completed to a satisfactory completion point.\textsuperscript{101}


\textsuperscript{100} A traditional account of the period would focus on politics or religion as causes for the disorder that swept through that century. Examples of these accounts are \textit{Gustavus Adolphus} by Theodore Dodge and \textit{The Thirty Years War} by C.V. Wedgwood and Anthony Grafton. Both books focus on the “great men” of the period that drove the history in their eyes.

\textsuperscript{101} For example, Uruguay has had two truth and reconciliation commissions. One ran in 1985 and the other in 2000-2003. The second commission was established to go back and continue the process started by the first commission. For more information, see Priscilla B. Hayner’s \textit{Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions}. 
THE SOCIAL JUSTICE RELATIONSHIP

The transformation process from the prison society and prison collecting institution is what makes these civil rights and social justice gains possible. Every document, collection, and record that was generated in Jim Crow Alabama by the official white man was designed to serve the master narrative of Jim Crow. Those documents that could have told another story or added to the narrative of Alabama were destroyed or forgotten about. It was a prison and it was locked up tight.

Then came 1963 and the events of that year. Those events finally, after decades of trying, forced the doors open of the societal and informational prisons that Jim Crow Alabama had been constructed. The throwing open of these doors started a process that would lead to both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and Birmingham Civil Rights Institute being founded. With these two institutions founded, the transformation could really and finally pick up its pace. Birmingham finally had restaurant institutions that could allow the collections, documents, memories, and records contained within them to speak for themselves. They were finally going to tell the multi-narrative story of Birmingham.

After the doors of the informational prisons were open, and informational apartheid and the “banality of informational abuse” both collapsed, collections, documents, memories, and records that once only served, or were force to serve, the master narrative of Jim Crow Alabama had a chance to be reevaluated. When collections, like the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files, were reevaluated in this new open light they told a different story. Those files were originally created to support the narrative of Jim Crow and support the actions of Bull Connor and his
police force. In the new light of the restaurant collection institution it now lived in, these same
files told the story of the abuses of Bull Connor and his police force, the brutal suppression and
oppression they visited upon the citizens they were supposed to protect.

The story of oppression and violence against the people of Birmingham in the
Birmingham Police Surveillance Files now could be examined by researchers and users. These
researchers discovered lessons from this collection that could be adapted to the present and the
future. These lessons are the source of this collection’s and the restaurant collecting institution is
overall ability to help Birmingham and the wider world work towards social justice.

Another way this transformation process liberates social justice lessons from former
prison collecting institutions is through research. Books like *Carry Me Home: Birmingham,
Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* by Diane McWhorter uses
documents and collections from the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and
Manuscripts and memories from her own past to tell the story of 1963 Birmingham. Her book
showed, and continues to show, readers that the struggle for civil rights and social justice is still
continuing. The “Battle of 1963” was won but the wider war is still going on in Birmingham,
Alabama, the United States, and the world.

Through revaluations of both the Birmingham Police Surveillance Files and business and
political documents, hidden corners of Birmingham’s history can be exposed to the light of
history for the first time and social justice lessons can be taken from them. As time goes on, and
more education and research is produced from these, and other records, this transformation
process will continue to happen and continue to hopefully produce social justice results that
could be applied to Birmingham and anywhere else in the world.
FUTURE RESEARCH

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in its mission statement declares itself to be a “living institution” that will grow and change with the changes in society and culture in Birmingham and the world. Any collection institution that wants to have a relationship with social justice needs to be a “living institution”. This means that they should, while not compromising their core archival beliefs, help their societies find social justice and be able to change when the definition of social justice changes. In a restaurant collecting institution that really allows its collections to speak for themselves, the lessons provided from those collections, will be able to be adapted to whatever definition of social justice there may be. In 1993, this was civil rights for African Americans, women, and other racial minorities but in 2016, it may be civil rights for racial minorities and members of the LGBTQ community. Whatever the changes in the definition of social justice, in a proper restaurant collecting institution, with their collections, and the lessons attached to those collections, should be able to meet the demands of social justice without compromising their core archival beliefs.

Both the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute are strong restaurant institutions right now that help Birmingham and the rest of the world work towards social justice through education and research. While they are strong restaurant institutions right now they need to make sure that they

continue to make sure all narratives have a chance to speak. At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, this means telling the story of social justice movements past 2004, and the story of Birmingham’s African American radio hosts. At the Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts this means making sure that new collections are processed and old collections are reexamined and reevaluated to make sure everything is correct. If both institutions do these things and more they will continue to be strong social justice restaurant collecting institutions for years to come. Users will come from far and wide to access their records and continue to work towards the twin social justice goals of education and research. As long as both institutions continue to be willing to grow they will continue to function as restaurant collecting institutions and as valuable partners in the relationship between collecting institutions and social justice.
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PHOTOGRAPHIC APPENDIX
Photograph 1:

Martin Luther King Jr. being hung in effigy by members of the National States Rights Party in Birmingham.

103 Photograph taken by the author at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Photograph 2:

Panel describing the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, a region in western Sudan. Panel located at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

104 Photograph taken by author at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Panel describing the protest of mothers protesting against the military government of Argentina. Panel located at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Photograph 3: Photograph taken by author at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Panel describing the Anti-Apartheid Movement at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

106 Photograph taken by author at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Photograph 5:

Picture of the President Barack Obama and President Bill Clinton walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.

107 Photograph taken at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Photograph 6:

Display at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute describing the role of newspapers in the Civil Rights Movement.

108 Photograph taken by author at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.
Photograph 7:

Display at Birmingham Civil Rights Institute describing the role of newspapers in the Civil Rights Movement.

Photograph taken at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on March 1, 2016. Permission granted by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.