



## ALABAMA CIVIL RIGHTS STORIES LAUNCH ONLINE

*“Voices of Alabama” Documents Oral Histories of 20 Places In Need of Preservation*

*For Immediate Release – New York, NY –* Rich stories from veterans of the Civil Rights era who lived, worked, worshipped, and gathered in a group of sites across Alabama launched today via an interactive digital project, [“Voices of Alabama.”](#) The video-focused oral history platform is a collaboration between World Monuments Fund (WMF), the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI), and the Alabama African-American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium (AAACRHSC).

Joyce O’Neal can still hear horses’ hooves on the steps of her church on Bloody Sunday. Nelson Malden recalls Martin Luther King Jr. stopping by his barbershop for a weekly haircut. Dr. Valda Harris Montgomery remembers more than 30 beaten Freedom Riders finding sanctuary in her childhood home. “Voices of Alabama” tells these and other stories from 20 sites of worship, lodging, and civic engagement in Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma/the Black Belt that played significant roles in the African-American struggle for freedom—not just during the Civil Rights Movement, but beginning in Reconstruction. Today, they have organized as the AAACRHSC.

Thanks to generous support from Jack Shear and the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, with additional support from Friends of Heritage Preservation and an anonymous donor, “Voices of Alabama” allows users to explore each site from the AAACRHSC through video, image, timeline, and map content. A public program featuring Alabama Congresswoman Terri Sewell, award-winning journalist Carol Jenkins, and other speakers will be held in [New York City at TheTimesCenter on October 1st](#) to celebrate the launch the platform.

“What makes the 20 sites of the Alabama African-American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium so remarkable are the world-changing events that happened within their walls,” said CEO-elect Bénédicte de Montlaur, World Monuments Fund. “Preservation of both these places and their stories is crucial so that people around the world can continue to learn from the acts of courage that took place during the African-

American fight for freedom. We are excited to bring greater visibility to these important cultural heritage sites and the dedicated individuals who continue to steward them.”

“From their first meeting, representatives from the Consortium sites expressed the need to document the stories of individuals who actually experienced the Civil Rights movement,” said Priscilla Hancock Cooper, AAACRHSC project director. “The ‘Voices of Alabama’ project captures some of those voices and makes these unique, first-person memories available for present and future generations.”

“The partnership between World Monuments Fund and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, that began in 2017, has catapulted 20 historic Alabama sites of worship, lodging and civic engagement to the forefront of American history,” noted Andrea L. Taylor, President & CEO, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. “This investment in the consortium is more than a preservation project, it has increased the capacity of the storytellers and communities ‘where history happened’ and helped to ensure that future generations can be inspired by their self-determination.”

The AAACHRSC, organized by BCRI, is comprised of dedicated site stewards who recognized a shared need for better resources to preserve not just the physical sites, but also their stories. In October 2017, the sites represented through the newly-formed consortium were included on the [2018 World Monuments Watch](#), WMF’s biennial program that partners with local stakeholders to use heritage conservation to empower communities. Following inclusion on the Watch, the consortium identified documentation of aging foot soldiers’ oral histories of the sites as a most critical need, leading to the funding and creation of “Voices of Alabama.”

Visit [VoicesofAlabama.org](http://VoicesofAlabama.org) to explore the platform. All videos are embeddable.

[Click here](#) for hi-resolution site images courtesy WMF.

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### **About World Monuments Fund**

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world’s treasured places. For more than 50 years, working in over 100 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to the preservation of important architectural and cultural

heritage sites around the globe. WMF's nomination-based program, the World Monuments Watch, uses cultural heritage conservation to empower communities and improve human well-being. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF seeks to inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York City, the organization has offices and affiliates worldwide. Visit [wmf.org](http://wmf.org) for more information, or connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

### **About the Alabama African-American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium**

The Alabama African-American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium (managed by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute) is a collaboration among 20 historic places of worship, lodging and civic engagement that played significant roles in the African-American struggle for freedom. While recent history focuses on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, these institutions have been dedicated to improving the quality of black life since Reconstruction. The Consortium was launched in January 2017 when the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute nominated the sites to the World Monuments Fund (WMF) Watch List. From that nomination, the Consortium evolved from a shared belief that there is strength in unity. Recognizing their shared history, goals and mission, representatives from these sites have participated in joint meetings and needs assessments to set the agenda for ongoing work.

### **About the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute**

An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, and part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, the BCRI is a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding for the significance of civil rights developments in Birmingham that changed our world. Celebrating its 26th anniversary, BCRI reaches more than 150,000 individuals each year through teacher education (including curriculum development and teacher training), group tours, outreach programs (school and community), award-winning after-school and public programs, exhibitions and extensive archival collections. For more information, visit [www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org).

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