The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

The Montgomery Bus Boycott
Speaker: Fred Gray, Charles Moore

Thank you. On behalf of the University of Alabama in Huntsville and on behalf of President Frank Franz, I am very pleased to welcome all of you to this lecture series focusing on the history and impact of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama. This historic initiative brings to Huntsville, distinguished speakers who will reflect on events of the past and who will share with us their hopes for the future. I must once again commend the faculty from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and from Alabama A&M University, who worked over a period of more than two years to make this possible. Those faculty include, but are not limited to, John Dimmock, Lee Williams, Jack Ellis, Mitch Berbrier from UAH, and James Johnson and Carolyn Parker from Alabama A&M. I am very pleased that you could be with us.

Good evening. It is my pleasure to take a couple of moments to acknowledge our sponsors. These are the people who have made it possible for us to do all these kinds of things. They have given us funds and all kinds of support. They are: The Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Senator Frank Sanders; *The Huntsville Times*; DESE Research, Inc.; Mevatec Corporation; and Alabama Representative, Laura Hall. At Alabama A&M, we have the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum, Title III Telecommunications and Distance Learning Center, Office of Student Development, the Honors Center, Sociology/Social Work Programs and the History and Political Science Programs. At the University of Alabama in Huntsville, we

have the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, The History Forum Banking Foundation, Sociology, Social Issues Symposium, The Humanities Center, The Division of Continuing Education, the Honors Program and the Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs, Office of Student Affairs and the UAH Copy Center. Let's give these people a show of appreciation. Now, let's welcome Charles Moore.

Charles Moore: For those of you that saw or bought the special series of stamps of the different images from the sixties, it included a photograph of Martin Luther King's face from the sixties. It was from that picture. They purchased the rights to do that, to use his face for an artist to do a rendition of Dr. King in "I Have A Dream."

This picture is after they told Dr. King to move from the court steps but he refused. One officer had his armed twisted, like in a hammerlock behind his back. I am sure that hurt. People began to gather around Dr. King, and I think he may have been afraid… he certainly didn't want any violence, so he may have been putting his hand out to the people as to say, "No, don't get involved. Just stay away." So I followed them photographing and there was no one around, there were no other journalists or writers. There were no photographers. I followed them down the street until they took him into the booking station, which may be in here. I'm not sure if we have that picture. I came into the door right behind the policeman and Dr. King and I'm over and behind them. I took one shot and I realize how ridiculous this was because I could only see the backs of the people. I knew there was a little floppy, folding door over on the side of the desk there. Without asking permission, I just ran around there and went in behind the jailer. I don't know if he ever knew if I was even there or not but I went behind him to get the

picture that would show their faces and the face of Dr. King while they were still twisting his arm behind his back. That was the other photograph. So, those two photographs of the arrest would be equivalent to the others.

Some of you will remember the Baltimore postman, William Moore (no relation) who had decided to walk to Mississippi with a sign on his back that said, "Eat at Joe's, Mississippi, both black and white," or something like that. I only learned recently that he stopped in a little store in Georgia, I believe. My reporter and I had flown into Chattanooga and met these guys later that retraced this so I was not on the assignment when this man was killed. He stopped at a little country store and he went in, he was kind of a strange guy, but he believed that this thing going on in the south wasn't right, segregation was not right. Unfortunately, he was very naïve and these guys got him into discussion, "Well, do you believe in this, do you believe in interracial marriage, do you believe in blacks and whites getting married." He responded, "Sure I do, if they love each other." They said, "What if they are marrying a Jew?" He said, "Sure there's nothing wrong with that?" The guy went on and on. He was not aware of the danger at all. I did not know this until recently. But he continued his walk, but what I have heard, is that when he started to leave, one of the men said to him, "Boy, you are going to die!" The guy just looked at him and said, "I don't know what you are talking about." The man said, "Like I said, you are going to die". He was shot. It was a cowardly thing. The man that did this is in prison. I do not remember his name. The man went off into the woods on the side of the road by the trees with a high-powered rifle and shot him in the

head as he went by. It was a cowardly ambush and murder of a totally innocent, simple man. These things are terrible.

On this next picture, I was on this march when my reporter heard on a car radio, he was driving along while I was walking with the marchers, of these guys that were retracing that hike that Bull Conner was going to meet Dr. King with some force. Dr. King was bringing his group into Birmingham and that it was going to happen that afternoon. We stopped right then and took off to Birmingham. We thought that it could be bad. This is the first shot I made. When we drove into Kelly Ingram Park, we looked at a map and found out where it was, Michael was driving a rental car, I saw these firemen, it was a little different from this when I first saw it, but I just made him let me jump out of the car so he could go park and join me later. This was the lead photograph in *Life* Magazine. It was in the Birmingham story. *Life* was a pretty big magazine. So, all the way across two pages was this strong black and white image. The firemen were on the left page and they are on the other page and underneath was the caption in big letters, "THEY FIGHT A FIRE THAT WON'T GO OUT." Fred, do you remember that? It's very interesting, I have always liked this picture, and I'm not saying it because of things that have happened with it, but I have always liked this picture because I studied art for a little while and I always had a big thing on composition. I still believe, and I get a lot of questions from other photographers, and I teach it when I am talking about photography. I teach them that they have to think fast, even in violent action. Sometimes the photograph can have composition, whether it's a bat being hit over someone's head or whether it's this. I didn't want the firemen. I had pictures of the firemen. All I wanted

to do was see that white, hot stream of water, which is hard, hitting somebody in the back. I had a 100-millimeter lens on the camera and I just wanted this composition. This has become an icon of the movement. I am happy to say that it is included in twenty-five photographs.

A man came to see me recently who had just left Gordon Parks, and Gordon's a friend, not in very good health now, living in New York City. Gordon has one of the great pictures too. These twenty-five pictures will be on the USA cable network. I don't know when it will be. But anyway, it's the twenty-five most important pictures of the century, so I'm very happy that this one made it.

Next. Why did I put a color photograph in there? This is in Kelly Ingram Park about two years ago. When *Life* decided that they were going to pick one the pictures of the century for their special issue, they sent me back to Birmingham. This is the fourteen-year-old woman, Carolyn McInstry, who is in the photograph in front of those two young men. This is Carolyn today. She is a good friend. She works for BellSouth in Birmingham and has been with them quite a long time, I think. It's been good for her. She has spent at least two times with Oprah on the Oprah show. She is very active. It is really nice to know that young, fourteen-year-old girl, Carolyn, who lost friends when those little girls were killed in the church. Those were her friends. She had been with them earlier. That was a real shock to Carolyn. This is one of the monuments for those of you who have been there. She was one of the children that were hit by the water at fourteen years of age. This is the one similar to the one *Life* ran.

Next. These are the things that disturbed me so much in Birmingham. I didn't just want to stand in the distance and take a lot of safe shots of overall things happening. I was arrested too. It was during the water hoses that I was arrested. I was too active. My reporter was running around with me too so they grabbed us both. This woman had been hit and knocked down and at one point, this picture was just no good, because she is being rolled by that high-pressure hose and her purse was knocked away. Her clothing was folding up over her and what a terrible thing for her. This man came along and picked her up. I think this is important too. You don't grab a photograph and say, "Well, I got that shot. I am going to see what else I can find." You kind of stay with it and I'm glad I did because I did see this man come up and help her. You can see people running in the background.

Next. This is the cover of the book. I think that I reversed all of these. I was in a hurry. This, to me, showed some of the anger. I did photographs of some of the young kids. It's natural for young kids in a situation like this to play in the water. Some people may make fun of that but those are children who are learning. Most of this was a horrible, horrible thing and very degrading and as in one of the photographs in the exhibit, it's one of my favorites because there is one man who is powerful. He's standing like this. He is being hit with this blast of water. It shows his back where he is hit and then he whirls around with this look on his face. He looks like he could destroy anyone of those policemen or firemen. He is standing there helpless as if to say, "How degrading this is to have this happen to you and can't do anything about it".

By the way, it's a good time to say I don't know all about the firemen. I know that now firemen are really heroes and all, and I think they are. The firemen down there, I tell you, I was under the water and he had them down and holding them and just spraying them and I crawled under with a wide-angled lens, under the water, and photographed back at the firemen with the water going over me. They could have turned it down on me. I was just hoping they didn't. I overheard a fireman fussing and holding the hose and saying, because it's been quoted. This fireman said to another fireman, "This is crazy! We are supposed to be fighting fires, not people." Now that is a good fireman. That man obviously did not want to do what he was doing, but sometimes we do it anyway.

I work with a wide-angle lens. A lot of people ask me how close and all of this. I'm pretty close. I think I was using a twenty-eight millimeter lens, that's the reason you can tell from this perspective how large the policemen is that is closer to me than the people in the background. With a telephoto lens, a longer lens, if you shoot with that, it compresses your subjects. It compresses the scene, so it pushes them all together. In relation to the people in the background, to this man, they would appear to be closer. It is the way I work. It is the way I feel that there is more drama and more impact, which is what you need in these photographs. I wonder how close that dog was to me. I didn't see him. I didn't even pay any attention to him. I was focusing on the others, but there was a dog there. This is a pretty vicious thing, to allow it to go out and happen. Sure they're on a leash, but they're leading them in on a leash. It was pretty horrible. This man was bitten, not just his pants torn but his leg was badly bitten.

On the next picture, again you see the same kind of thing thing. I work fast. If you are ever going to be a photojournalist, then you want to do photographs like this and you have to work really fast. You need to be really good with knowing your exposures. All of your professionalism has to come out so it just works automatically for you. These pictures were taken with manual cameras, nothing automatic, just simply manual, no exposure meters built in, no automatic focusing, or anything.

Next. When I photographed this, I just heard that Dr. King had been arrested. I later found out this was not his hand. I don't know whose hand it was but I thought it was Dr. King's. If it were his hand, this would be an even greater photograph. It's the fact that it is just an icon of what was happening there, which was that so many people, children and women were being arrested.

I don't know if any of you all know a writer named Paul Hendrickson, but he wrote about a woman photographer named Marion Post Walcott. He wrote a book called *Looking For the Light.* He first wrote a piece for *Life Magazine,* and then he turned it into a major book. He also has another prize-winning book called *Five Who Died.* It's about Vietnam. He has come from Washington to see me twice. He also works and writes for the Washington Post, but he does books. He's an author. He was haunted, as he said, by this photograph so he has gone back to Mississippi on several occasions and he's been back to Alabama a couple of times and spent some time with me.

I know there is someone here who knows Shannon Wells, who is a photographer from the University of Alabama, UNA. We had lunch together at a restaurant in Florence that is an African-American restaurant. It is popular, especially with the college, and it

has incredible Southern food. Well, we took him there. He fell in love with Shannon. He wants to come back and visit again. He is a great man and he has gone into the lives of all of these men. He has interviewed their family members, they're all dead. This is on the campus at Ole Miss, the University of Mississippi, during the Meredith thing. The men with the clubs are deputy sheriffs and they're waiting for the marshals to bring in the and they're talking and he is kind of laughing and they're cutting up and they're saying, "This is what we are going to do. We'll show Bobby Kennedy and those marshals how we handle them down here." They are laughing and making a joke out of it. He found out through interviewing people who knew all of these men. He is writing a new book that will be coming out; I don't know what he's calling it right now. He said, "One thing you should know is that everyone I talked to that knew the man in the center, said a lot of things, but the one thing they all had in common about him is that he always had to be the center of attention. So it goes on, the interest in Civil Rights and coming together, making the world better, making our country better, understanding each other and understanding that we are all of the same God, understanding that we all must get along. Color? What is color? It doesn't matter. I am a color photographer. I love all the colors of the spectrum.

This last picture is of one of the marshals that had been shot. He had been shot in the leg, I believe. There were twenty-eight marshals that were badly wounded. Two people died that night on the campus. One was a French journalist who was sort of hiding down low behind a piece of shrubbery. His killer got away because someone came up behind and put a bullet in the back of his head. Again, a cowardly thing to do to

a man just witnessing as a journalist. How do you find this person? Anyway, another innocent bystander, I don't remember who he was, but somebody who worked in Oxford was hit and killed by a bullet. But twenty-eight of the marshals were wounded by gunfire.

The next picture is one of the wounded. He happened to be standing next to me by an army jeep when shots came out of the crowd that night. There were shot gun blasts and all kinds of things being shot at the marshals. There was tear gas and bottles of gasoline being thrown. It was a terrible thing. There were cars being set on fire. It was a nightmare out there in front of that building all night. Some of the guys got a bulldozer and they were going to crash into the front of the building. The marshals had to get on it and take these guys off of it. They had to fight them to get them off.

This picture is of an Associated Press writer, a reporter, out of the Memphis office. He was standing and a shot came out of the crowd. I ducked behind the jeep. He turned to run back into the building. The second shot came out. Fortunately it was buckshot, but it blasted his back. He was just patched up by the marshals inside, still bleeding a little bit but went on working. He was interviewing after being wounded. I'm glad I ducked.

This is a picture of the next morning. Tear gas is still lingering out there. In some of the pictures, as they are bringing Meredith onto the campus, marshals and other people have their handkerchiefs over their face. John Durr and the top marshal are escorting him in the next morning. He was hidden overnight and they're escorting him the next morning after the riot into the campus to register.

Next. These are some of the prisoners the next morning. They are some of the people that were rounded up and you can see that some of the people still have a gas mask on because as you walk around there was so much tears gas used out there that when you walked around the next morning, it would stir it up and it would still be drifting.

This is Selma in this picture. Andy Young was praying in this picture. Andrew Young became a good friend and a wonderful man. He wrote the introduction to my book. This was just before the march. They are praying for the march and I think this is before Bloody Sunday. I covered Bloody Sunday and then I went back for the final march.

Next. These are some of deputies or sub-deputies or whatever on the street in Selma as John Lewis, and I couldn't find that slide of John Lewis and all the people coming out toward the bridge, but these were people standing there on the streets of Selma.

I shot this picture in color. It was a little different but it was the cover of *Life.* This was Bloody Sunday, the first march. Next. This is after they stopped. They were stopped on the other side by the police and then given two minutes to disburse, and they didn't, then Bloody Sunday happened. They charged these folks with billy clubs and started beating them and later used tear gas.

Next. I found out this woman's name later. She was hurt badly. You can see the police have tear gas masks on. I had to cut out a lot of pictures for time and this is one of the marching pictures along the road.

Next. Dr. King on the march. This is the final march, the victory march. I wanted to see the reaction of people along the way so I did a lot of photographs also of the people cheering them. This was Birmingham. Everyone knows him. I wanted to get a few faces. I only have a few of them, of the people that were important. Next. James Baldwin certainly was. Harry Bellefonte was one of the most wonderful friends I think I've ever met. He's a great guy. He was also very close to Dr. King. This is one of my favorites always. What a great singer. I have one of her songs on one of my audio/video presentation, which has songs and sounds of the movement on it. Two of his friends. Next. Two of his friends, remember I left my heart in San Francisco? Next. That's Myrlie Evers at the funeral in Jackson, Mississippi. Medgar Evers, I never really worked with him. I only got a chance to go and photograph the funeral.

Next. I don't know if it's here, but there's another picture I have of Myrlie with her face bowed that I like better. She's really, really sad. In Montgomery, in between the first march, Bloody Sunday, and the next march, there were some students from different places that had come down to Montgomery. They were sitting in on the street because they were trying, as had been done a couple of time, to desegregate the capital cafeteria. They tried to go in as a mixed group into the cafeteria but it wasn't working so one day they sat down on the street and they weren't going to move. They were just protesting, but very peacefully. What happens all of a sudden, these people come riding up on horses and they said, " We're all deputies." But, one person was in uniform. This man was beating some of these people with his cane. Others had clubs. Let's see if there's another one. I don't know if there are any others of the horses. Yeah, there's a man with

a hard hat on, hitting this girl over the head with a club. You'll see her, I think in the next picture.

Next. This guy, I have a whole sequence of this, I followed them all along. He had been hit, knocked on the ground, she ran. I've got a picture of her running over to pick him up and then picking him up and helping him. Next. He's bleeding very badly. His head had a bad gash in it. She's angry, and she points at his face and looks at me with a very angry look saying, "Look what they did to him."

Next. This is a poet, I always forget his name, and I've got to write it down. This man is a well-known poet from the University of Pennsylvania or somewhere. Anyway, his face was busted here with a club. Next. A little tender care. So, folks it was violent. Other people here know a lot more about the violence than I do. I mean I've had violence committed and threatened on me. But I was a color that didn't get quite as much violence as people did of another color, a darker color. So much violence was directed at people. So much harm and harm to our country. I'm very happy and I still like to be positive sometimes and say, "Yes, things are better." I think Fred Gray is right in saying, "There's much to be done still." Always, we can't look back. We have to worry about our children today. What are they going to be like when they're adults? What do they feel about civil rights? Yes, I can be friends openly in Florence, Alabama with black people. I was really amazed. Every year, some of you may know, there is an Ebony Fashion Show. I went to the Ebony Fashion Show with a lady friend and a friend of hers, who's a fashion designer in Nashville, who happened to be down visiting. So, the three of us went and it was amazing. Everybody's all dressed up and there was a little jazz trio

there and beautiful models. And I thought, this is Alabama, this incredible mix of black and white here? It was amazing. It was a wonderful, beautiful thing. Everybody had a great time, you know, and it's an annual thing. I think they collect the money for something, I don't remember what the charity is. Anyway, it was wonderful to see that. What happens now is that we must keep moving on, and you educators, especially. I'm happy to see you and hear more about what you're doing at the universities. I speak a lot at universities and I'm very happy to see the things that are happening.

Next. This may be the last. Thank you.

(Fred Gray)

Q: What message do you think scholarships based upon race sends college students, instead of scholarships based on merit?

A: Well, you have to understand the purpose for scholarships in the first place. For example, I was just in a conference earlier this week on a high education case here. For the purpose of integrating and encouraging people when they won't just voluntarily do things, the courts use various other means to do it. I think what you have to understand, because if you just take a scholarship out of the context of the whole history of the struggle, then you miss the purpose for it. I have another speech I make all the time and I didn't do it tonight because we didn't have time to do it. But, you have to understand how this whole business started. It didn't start today; it started really when African-Americans were brought to this country as slaves. The only group that's here, brought against their will. The Constitution that we read about, when we say, "We the people of the United States…" The Constitution as originally written, that preamble did not

include people who look like me. It only included white, almost males. Because, even females couldn't serve on the jury in this state, when I started practicing law. So, in order to correct mistakes that were made in the Constitution, you have the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments. And many of those were designed originally just for the protection of African-Americans. But now the equal protection, the due process clause of the 14th Amendment protects white's rights much more than blacks rights when they originally started. So, the whole purpose of whether you call it affirmative action or whatever you want to call it, the whole idea, the court tried to come up with some derivatives to do away with the effects of past discrimination. And I think, if it takes scholarships like at Alabama State and at A&M, white students can obtain scholarships. And they did that because you won't voluntarily go over there. So, to encourage you to do it, they end up giving scholarships. I see nothing wrong with it. But the purpose of it is not to discriminate against anyone; it's trying to make the field level. I think there is a duty and a responsibility on all of us to come up with some ways and means of doing it. If you don't like that way, do something. But, the discrimination, which still exists in this country, needs to be done away with.

Q: Civil rights, for example, took on a front of peace movement, the teachings of Gandhi, pacifism. Was it ever close to the leaders or a group going the other way to where there was ever a danger of being more violent? Not as far as the marches, but being violent from the movement itself.

A: I think basically, the civil rights movement, particularly as it developed in Montgomery and as Dr. King led it, as you know, his whole philosophy was nonviolence

and there really was a good reason for it. There was a good practical reason, too. Number one, if somebody comes up to you and does something to you and you don't fight back, it's hard to have a fight with one person doing all the beating. You might get a beating, but you don't get a fight. Secondly, if in the movement, during the early stages, if we had decided it was going to be a contest between who could arm themselves more and who could fight the most, that's a losing battle. So you don't even try to engage in it. But we did have some persons in the movement, on our side, even, who didn't believe in nonviolence. They wanted to use force when they got an opportunity. I think one of the reasons the early stage of the movement was successful is because it did take on a nonviolent aspect.

Q: Earlier in the talks you talked about the fact that we still have problems. I want you to comment on in high schools in the south, you still see a lot of the social and economic segregation. It's very poignant, I was wondering if you could comment about that.

A: I think you're perfectly right. There is still, and as one who has been in this fight for a long time, we are still, believe it or not, the case of Lee V. Mason which covers one hundred of one hundred and nineteen school systems in this state. We started out with overt segregation. I now see in some of those same school systems, a less amount of actual, if you count the numbers of whites and blacks who are in these schools. You have fewer now, than we had ten or fifteen years ago. What they're saying is not the result of segregation as it originally exists but it's the result of housing patterns and all of these other things. I think what people have to realize, the idea of and these school desegregation cases were never filed just for the purpose of putting a black child in a

formerly white school. The purpose was they found that blacks were receiving an inferior education in those schools. And most of the resources were going to the white schools and not to the black schools. We are almost getting back to that same situation now. What we're concerned about is quality education. But, we have also found that there is a greater possibility of having quality education in a setting where both races are, because once they finish school, they get into the real world, they're going to have to be competing against each other. So, they need to be able to learn how to work together and there is something that each ethnic group can learn from the other. So, I think it's more than just numbers; it's a question of quality education.

Closing: Thank you Mr. Gray. I hate to cut the questions off because I think this is a rare, historical opportunity for us to hear these individuals who have played such an important role in American history. But, the hour is getting late and we would like to invite you up for a reception. Just give us a moment to set everything up. And I want to express the appreciation of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alabama A&M University, the planning committee for your appearance tonight. This has been a wonderful occasion and we're thankful for all three of you.