

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Trial by Fire and Water: Birmingham, 1963 (Part II)

Speaker: Glenn Eskew, Odessa Woolfolk

Ladies and Gentleman, good evening. I am Sherry Marie Shuck, Assistant Professor of History at UAH. Welcome to the sixth installment of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, a 14-week symposium centered around a series of public lectures, panels and first-hand account of significant events taking place in the state of Alabama. This series is held alternately at UAH and Alabama A&M University. After three years of planning, this unique intellectual project is a joint venture between Alabama A&M University and the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The members of the Steering Committee in alphabetical order are: Mitch Berbrier of UAH, John Dimmock of UAH, Jack Ellis of UAH, James Johnson of AAMU, Carolyn Parker of AAMU and Lee Williams, II, of UAH. To round its work, the planning committee has also been greatly assisted by the efforts of Joyce Maples of UAH's University Relations. We would also like to recognize our two visitors at this time, President John Kee Gibson, President of Alabama A&M University and Dr. Charles Nash, Vice Chancellor of the University of Alabama System.

We ask that you complete an evaluation form for this program and leave it here on the stage or with an attendant at the exit.

This series on the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama would not have been possible without the financial support of numerous sponsors whom the planning committee wishes to acknowledge at this time. First and foremost is the Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities;

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

The Huntsville Times, DESE Research Incorporated, Mevatec Corporation, Alabama Representative Laura Hall and Senator Hank Sanders.

Joining our efforts from Alabama A&M University is the Office of the President, The Office of the Provost, the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum, Title III Telecommunications and Distance Learning, the Office of Student Development, the A&M Honors Center of Sociology/Social Work, Political Science and History.

At the University of Alabama at Huntsville, we greatly acknowledge funding assistance from the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the Humanities Center, the Division of Continuing Education, the Department of Sociology and Social Issues Symposium, the Honors Program, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Student Affairs, The Copy Center, and the UAH History Forum Bankhead Foundation, which is serving as the local host for tonight's activities; and with the kind help of Staff Assistant Beverly Robinson, who has prepared a reception back stage immediately following tonight's lecture to which you are all invited.

Tonight, we are presenting part 2 of our program, Trial by Fire and Water, Birmingham 1963. We would like to remind you that next week's program which will be a panel discussion on the Civil Rights Movement in Huntsville will be held on the Alabama A&M West Campus at the Ernest Knight Reception Center. I would now like to turn things over to Professor James Johnson, Director of the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum who will introduce tonight, the distinguished panelists and moderate the program.... Dr. Johnson.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

I would say good evening also. I would like to make some preliminary remarks regarding Dr. Horace Huntley who was to be one of the panelists on tonight's program. At the last minute, Dr. Huntley informed us that he could not keep his commitment to participate in the program due to a medical condition and at the advice of his doctor advising him against making the trip. He regrets this occurrence and offers his sincere apologies, and of course, we recognize that his health takes priority over the project. Dr. Huntley was scheduled to discuss the oral history project of which he serves as director, sponsored by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. However, Ms. Odessa Woolfolk is familiar with the project and is at liberty to address its significance to the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama.

We are pleased and privileged to have two exceptionally qualified individuals to serve as panelists for this evening's program, Part II, Trial By Fire and Water – Birmingham, 1963.

Introduction: Professor Glenn T. Eskew made did his under graduate studies at Auburn University receiving a BA degree in History and Journalism in 1984. His graduate studies were completed at the University of Georgia, receiving an MA and Ph.D. degrees respectively in 1987 and 1993. He has received prestigious fellowships and honors that reflect upon his outstanding academic and professional accomplishments prior to and as a Professor of History of Georgia State Universities since 1993. Some of these include The National Endowment for Humanities, Summer Institute for College Teachers, teaching the history of the Southern Civil Rights Movement at the WEB Dubois Institute, Harvard

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

University 1195; Robert C. Anderson Memorial Award for undergraduate assistance, best dissertation 1994;. Albert Einstein Institution Dissertation Fellowship 1991 through 1993. The Phelps-Stoke Graduate Fellowship in 1988. He is also a member of the Phi Alpha Theta and Phi Kappa Phi local and national honor societies. His numerous publications have appeared in journals, anthologies and books, which include *Fraternnalism in a Southern City, Race, Religion and Gender in Augusta, Georgia 1999*; *Southern Labor in War Times* and other essays in honor of Gary Fink, 1999, and *But For Birmingham, the Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle, 1997*; essays and a number of journals, the Journal of Southern History, Alabama Review, The Historian, The Atlanta History, as well as encyclopedias and dictionaries. *But For Birmingham, the Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*, is a significant contribution to the recent literature on the history of the Civil Rights Movement in general and to Birmingham and Alabama in particular. It will serve as a basis for his presentation and the context of the panel's discussions. The title of the book that it quotes from Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and provides the continuity between last week's symposium where Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth was a keynote speaker. Although not dealing exclusively with Reverend Shuttlesworth, *But for Birmingham* sees him as a central figure in the Birmingham episode. His work, though expressing some provocative view points, is an excellently written, prize-winning book, and Dr. Eskew has a firm grasp on the topic; and questions pertinent to this topic that were not asked last week, will have an opportunity to be addressed tonight.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Ms. Odessa Woolfolk received a BA in history and political science from Talladega College, AMA in Urban Studies from Occidental College in California and did additional graduate studies in political science at the University of Chicago and Yale University as a National Urban Fellow. Her distinguished professional experience includes teacher at Ullman High School in Birmingham, an administrative position with the Urban Reinvestment Task Force, Washington DC, New York State Urban Development Corporation, New York City, Auber Hill Community Center and Interracial Council, Albany, New York. Ms. Woolfolk has served as a Director of the Birmingham Opportunity Industrialization Center and Associate Executive Director for the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity. For ten years, she was director of University of Alabama Birmingham, UAB, Center for Urban Affairs and adjunct lecturer in a Department of Political Science and Public Affairs. She was also an assistant to the president for Community Relations at UAD. She is now a private consultant and lecturer. Her research in consulting areas are housing, social service, education, race relations, community organization and urban history.

She also has a distinguished civil and community service history that includes voice of educational institutions, nonpartisan political organizations, business organizations, cultural organizations, advocacy groups and community agencies. Her outstanding accomplishments and distinguished service have been recognized and honored through the many citations received from numerous organizations and institutions. Upon her retirement from UAV in 1993, the University established the Odessa Woolfolk Presidential Community Service Award. In 1994, the Mayor and City

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Council of Birmingham selected her as an inductee into the Gallery of Distinguished Citizens. She was awarded the Doctor of Humane Letters by Talladega College in 1996.

As former chair of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and now President Emerita, she will address the role this institution played in the memorializing the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama. She will also comment on her relations to students involved in the movement. I made a comment to her just before coming on stage about one aspect of her talk in which she will not elaborate on but she may mention, and that is the Kelly Ingram Park Monument that is associated with the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. The comment that I made to her is that the State Black Archives usually sponsors a historic preservation forum and due to extenuating circumstances, we are not able to have that this year. In fact, it usually comes during this month. We decided to forego it. I indicated to her that I would hope that she would return to Huntsville next year to address the topic dealing with urban parks as it relates to historic preservation. With that, we will ask Dr. Eskew's to come and begin the presentation.

Glenn Eskew: Good evening and thank you for coming. I would like to thank Professor James Johnson for that very thorough introduction, and Professor Jack Ellis also, the two of them, and the rest of the committee for inviting me to participate in the symposium. I commend the University of Alabama in Huntsville as well as the Alabama A&M University for putting on this series. As Professor Shuck mentioned, the Alabama Humanities Foundation and the marvelous people there such as Marion Carter, Laura Bradsford, and others who fund this kind of event. It is not very often that a symposium is held where people can gather and actually discuss Alabama's history, much less

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

frankly look at the racial past in our communities. I think that it is a great thing. If you have appreciated these symposia, please allow me to encourage you to write your representative down in Montgomery. Thank him for supporting the Alabama Humanities Foundation for they do receive state dollars as well as your representatives in Washington who also through the National Endowment for the Humanities fund the Alabama Humanities Foundation. They need your support, so please write letters. One last thing, I understand that Reverend Shuttlesworth was here last week. As Dr. Woolfolk and I both know, when we are on panels with Reverend Shuttlesworth, he is a phenomenal speaker and very charismatic, as scholars, I am afraid it is not the same thing when you get us or me anyway. If you are used to these activists speaking, think back to the scholars you have had and you will probably be a little happier.

Tonight, I would like to address Birmingham and the Civil Rights Movement, looking at the Birmingham Triptych. A triptych is a three panel. You can sort of think of it in terms of church as an alter piece. The climax of the civil rights struggle occurred in Birmingham in 1963. President John F. Kennedy attributed his decision to propose watershed Civil Rights Legislation to Commissioner to T. Eugene “Bull” Conner's use of police dogs and fire hoses against protesting Black school children, led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King's national group, The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, came to Birmingham to assist the local Alabama Christian Movement to Human Rights, led by the Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth. The resulting Birmingham campaign provoked a brutal response that not only created a crisis in local race relations but also forced a resolution to the national race problem. In the iconography of civil

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

rights history, three images stand above the rest. The Birmingham triptych of Conner, King and Kennedy. Behind the hoses and the dogs, stood Bull Conner.

As city commissioner, Theophilus Eugene “Bull” Conner enforced Birmingham segregation ordinances, a job he relished. Conner first gained notoriety in 1938 when he segregated the biracial Southern Conference for Human Welfare at the apparent behest of the Big Mules, the local name given to the city’s industrial elite. Ten years later, Bull led the Alabama delegation out of the Democratic National Convention and welcomed the _____ to Birmingham. Indeed, Conner cultivated the reputation as a racial extremist, a tough persona for a tough town. Birmingham existed because of the close proximity of the coal, iron ore and limestone, ingredients necessary for making steel. The city’s largest employer, The Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, was a subsidiary of the monopolistic United States Steel Corporation. While Pittsburgh determined TCI’s policy, creative use of interlocking directories and sizable contracts with would-be competitors enabled TCI to determine Big Mule policy. That included the use of a race wage, lower pay for Black workers as a way to keep white wages lower. By enforcing segregation, Conner kept the city running in the interest of the Big Mules.

In June of 1956, a new Black protest group set out to alter race relations in Birmingham. Led by Shuttlesworth, the Alabama Christian Movement used direct action to challenge the legality of the city’s segregation ordinances. Across the South, there emerged new Black leaders, preachers who believed that as Christians they were obligated to confront the sin, segregation. Most well known was King, who gained national attention with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This struggle to integrate the city

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

buses concluded in December 1956 with the US Supreme Court ordering an end to segregated seating. Shuttlesworth saw implementation of the rooming on Birmingham's buses. The Alabama Christian Movement also attempted to register Black students at all-white Phillips High School in 1957. They tried to integrate the terminal train station in 1958, the airport in 1959, and city parks in 1960. Shuttlesworth led Birmingham's Civil Rights Movement. Bull Conner determined to thwart that desegregation drive. He arrested Shuttlesworth and other integrationist, dodged court orders to stop segregating buses and closed parks. When the freedom riders reached Birmingham in May 1961, Conner allowed a white mob of Klansmen to beat the non-violent activists with impunity. Criticized for not providing police protection, a disingenuous Commissioner of Public Safety explained, "The force was off because it was Mother's Day". The national condemnation of Birmingham following the freedom rises, convinced several of the Big Mules to turn against Conner. They hatched a plan to remove him from office by changing the city's form of government.

Voters selected the mayor council system in November of 1962 and slated new elections for spring 1963. Frustrated by the slow process of change, Shuttlesworth invited King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Birmingham. As an umbrella organization, the SCLC had provided assistance to local affiliates such as the Alabama Christian Movement and indeed Shuttlesworth had served as secretary of the SCLC since its inception in 1957. Agreeing to work together, the two groups decided to postpone planned sit-ins until after the April 2nd 1963 runoff election. When Bull Conner lost his bid for mayor that day, he then contested the change of government altogether

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

and refused to leave office. Unwilling to await the outcome of Conner's court challenge, the Movement initiated its boycott of downtown businesses with sit-ins at lunch counters that refused to serve food to Black patrons. While the Birmingham news touted the election, the segregationist Big Mule names Albert Boutwell over Bull Conner, as the start of a new day, the real dawn occurred when twenty Black men and women, dressed in their Sunday best, quietly asked for coffee at Britt's Cafeteria. Conner's men arrested the protesters. Other demonstrations followed as Birmingham confronted a Civil Rights Campaign amidst the chaos of competing municipal governments.

The first civil rights protest March occurred on April when Shuttlesworth led a demonstration to city hall. Police stopped the procession and arrested the forty-three activists. The next day King's brother, the Reverend A.D. King, headed a column of two dozen out of church and in the streets lined with a thousand African Americans. While not members of the movement, these Black bystanders, many of them unskilled or unemployed workers of the underclass, identified with this desire for race reform. The arrest of the marchers, after walking only two blocks, provoked civic unrest. When the canine core arrived to break up the gathering, one Black youth poked a led pipe at a police dog. The German Shepherd attacked, pinning the young man to the ground. Immediately officers moved in, swinging billy clubs and sicking the dogs. Policemen disbursed the crowd. While reporting brutality, the national press mistook the bystanders as actual members of the Movement, thus sensationalizing the number of protesters and exaggerating the support the Movement received from the Black community. King capitalized on this error by staging future episodes after Black bystanders had gathered

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

and in time for national film crews to get their footage to New York City's for the evening broadcast. Increasingly, Birmingham, became a media event.

Despite the use of dogs, Conner tried to follow the example of Police Chief Lloyd Pritchard, who defeated the SCLC's drive in Albany Georgia by meeting King's nonviolence with "nonviolence". Conner obtained a state reporter restraining King, Shuttlesworth, and others from leading protest marches. King's decision to obey a similar injunction the year before had ended the Albany campaign. In Birmingham, King chose to defy the state court order, reasoning that all men had an obligation to violate unjust laws. Also, the SCLC hoped King's arrest would trigger federal support for the Movement. Dressed in the blue denim of the working man, King marched fifty people past a thousand Black onlookers on April 12. Law enforcement officials stepped in and ushered the integrationists into waiting petty wagons.

The arrest of King focused attention on Birmingham as well as the oval office. President John F. Kennedy claimed he had no legal authority to intervene in the dispute, so he remained noncommittal, although he did arrange a telephone call between King and his wife. While held incommunicado, King began his letter from Birmingham jail in response to comments given by eight local clergymen describing the demonstrations as unwise and untimely. Perhaps his greatest written work, King's letter, presented the case for non-violent direct action in theological terms that stressed the immorality of racial oppression. His heart-felt pros gave testament to the urgency of the Civil Rights struggle.

While national interest grew during King's incarceration, local support waned. The Alabama Christian Movement had provided most of the foot soldiers so far. Those

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

fanatical Christians whose faith enabled them to face Bull Conner's police dogs, when others simply watched from the sidelines, yet the past two weeks had taxed their resources. Once out on bond, King struggled to find new volunteers for his non-violent army. The Birmingham campaign teetered on the brink of collapse, as only a few dedicated activist demonstrated. Then King's lieutenants, James Bevel and Ike Reynolds, suggested to let the young people march. Opposition from Birmingham's traditional Negro Leadership Class failed to sway King, who acquiesced to the idea out of desperation to generate creative tension and keep the national press in Birmingham. The children's crusade began at noon on May 2nd, as hundreds of Black students skipped school and gathered at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, and then embarked on a protest march. Wave after wave of Black youth washed down the stone steps in the Kelly Ingram Park headed toward down town. The youngsters took Conner by surprise. By the end of the day, the police had arrested five hundred Black teenagers and crammed them into small jail cells.

The next morning, King promised bigger marches unless the merchants desegregated. Bull Conner had other ideas. To prevent demonstrations, Conner stationed firemen around the park and sealed off the Black business district from down town. Attack dogs strained on their leashes intimidated many in the Black audience of onlookers, while other bystanders taunted the officers. When the Black youth exited the church, Conner hollered, "let them have it," as water gushed out of the fire hoses, blasting blindly at males and females, spinning students down the sidewalks and tearing the bark off trees. "I want to see the dogs work!" barked Bull explaining, "Look at those

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Niggers run!” Loosened, the dogs lunged at the Black crowd ripping at clothes in search of flesh. Police arrested seven hundred people, emptying the area. Half an hour later, the horrifying spectacle had ended, but it was captured on film forever.

Through his actions, Conner achieved immortality. His barbarous treatment of peaceful protesters, the hoses and the dogs elevated Bull’s Birmingham into a national symbol of racial oppression. At least 250 journalists reported the event that dominated the front pages of newspapers around the world. Footage of the brutal suppression played on the broadcast of all three networks that night. Pictures in Saturday’s paper sickened President Kennedy, who decided to act. He ordered Burt Marshall, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights to Birmingham, to end the protest. Unrestrained, Conner routed another demonstration, this time using the fire hoses to keep the activist in the church. When the school children resumed marches Monday, May 6th, however, Conner refrained from force. Instead of the infamous hoses and dogs, his officers arrested youthful offenders and loaded them onto school buses that rumbled off to prison. As the momentum increased, classrooms emptied into the streets. Children ran into the arms of policemen, prompting Conner to remark, “Boy, if that is religion, I don’t want any”. By day’s end, officers had arrested more than a thousand Black youth. The city turned the stockade at the state fair grounds into a holding pen, for the Movement had filled the jail to capacity.

The next morning, the Movement strategist exploited police lunch breaks by beginning their marches earlier in a bid to upset social order through a large non-violent protest designed to shut the city down. Activist reported false alarms to divert the fire

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

department. Small groups of protesters acted as decoys to distract the police while hundreds of other Black students followed different routes around Bull's blockade. The protesters converged at noon in the heart of Birmingham's business district on First Avenue North. Thousands of singing Black citizens stopped traffic on Twentieth Street, milled about stores and knelt on the sidewalk in prayer. "We're marching for freedom," cheered one. A group of Big Mules, discussing the demonstrations, broke for lunch only to emerge from the chamber of commerce into the chaos of the streets. These businessmen recognized social order had collapsed. They hastily reconvened and determined to negotiate and end the protests. Although Burt Marshall saw his role as that of a moderator between two opposing interests, his very presence in Birmingham signaled the shift in federal policy. While unclear how far Kennedy would go, he obviously sided with a need for race reform.

Incensed that the Movement's maneuvering had outfoxed him, Conner reverted to violence. He high powered hoses and repulsed school children as they exited the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Black bystanders threatened to riot, throwing rocks and bricks at officers. When Civil Rights Activist attempted to quell the disorder, firemen trained their hoses on Shuttlesworth. The water lifted him off the ground and slammed him into the side of the church. Learning that an ambulance had taken the minister to the hospital, Conner sneered, "I wish they had carried him away in a hearse."

After arriving in Birmingham, Marshall quickly convinced King to stop the demonstrations. With whites willing to negotiate, Kennedy's envoy acted as a go between, hammering out an ambiguous agreement that acknowledged the movement's

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

demand for desegregation, biracial communications and equal employment. Despite the Klan bombing of the AG Gaston Motel and the Reverend A.D. King's house, with a subsequent Black riot and fires in the ghetto that night, the truce held. Birmingham embarked on a uneasy future. Only willing to negotiate when the white violence reflected badly on his administration, President Kennedy responded to the uprising of Birmingham's Black underclass by mobilizing the armed forces. He stationed riot-controlled units at nearby military basis. He threatened marshall law in the city. His televised statement of May 12, 1963, emphasized the need to restore order. Kennedy urged Birmingham citizens to accept the negotiated accord and make outside military intervention unnecessary. Yet civil disorder had spread beyond Birmingham. In the weeks that followed, some 750 demonstrations occurred in more than 185 cities across the country with nearly 16,000 arrests of protesters. Civil Rights organizations sponsored sympathy marches in Philadelphia, St. Paul, Los Angeles. About 5,000 people took to the streets of Boston over the brutality of Birmingham. Suddenly, a national Black rebellion appeared at hand. To the nation's white elite, it appeared that Black America could follow one of two routes: the nonviolent movement for assimilation into the American system lead by King, or the apparently violent alternative of Black separationism offered by Malcolm X. In light of Conner's savagery and the outrage of many African-Americans, the nation's new magazines began to rewrite the history of the Birmingham campaign. Previously, the media had presented King as an outside agitator, exacerbating a local race problem; but after the Birmingham campaign, Time and Newsweek heralded the moderate King and his gospel of nonviolence. Forced to accept the Black Civil Rights

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

revolution, the northeastern establishment circled around the charismatic King who preached love and abhorred violence. The same circumstances that transformed King's image altered Kennedy's persona as well. For following Birmingham, the President proposed federal reforms to end America's discriminatory race practices. During a national broadcast on June 11, Kennedy admitted that Birmingham posed problems he could no longer prudently ignore. To stop the demonstration, the destruction of property, the negative publicity, the President called for sweeping legislation, for he believed new moral laws would successfully shift the protests out of the streets and into the courts. Eight days later, he sent to Congress his revolutionary Civil Rights Bill of 1963, which harkened back to reconstruction by setting forth legal reforms designed to achieve implementation of the 14th and 15th amendments to the U. S. Constitution and the aborted Civil Rights Act of 1875. To outlaw racial discrimination, the federal government would enforce compliance with the new laws by regulating interstate commerce and withholding federal funds. Yet, southern segregationists in Congress stalled the legislation.

Building on the success of Birmingham, Civil Rights leaders planned a protest March on Washington. Summoning the activists to the White House, President Kennedy expressed his opposition to the idea, fearing the move might jeopardize his new legislative agenda. King responded that the march was no more ill-timed than the Birmingham campaign. As the topic shifted to police brutality, the President said, "I don't think you should all be totally harsh on Bull Conner," In the startled silence that

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

followed, Kennedy quipped, “after all, he has done more for Civil Rights than almost anybody else.”

Shuttlesworth remembered the President saying something different. But for Birmingham, we would not be here today. Birmingham provided the climax of the Civil Rights Movement, and the March on Washington simply celebrated that fact. Instead of the massive protests in the capitol as originally envisioned by A. Philip Randolph, the event became an affirmation of the American Dream. No one sounded the theme better than Martin Luther King who gave the address of his life before an integrated audience of at least a quarter-million people with millions more watching by television. With rolling cadences, his “I Have a Dream” speech epitomized African-American desires for assimilation. Nearly tailor made to fit the demands of the Kennedy legislation before Congress, the oration reasoned the need for race reform like his letter from Birmingham jail while concluding with a resounding expression of faith in the American system.

Remembering that August day in 1963, Ms. Coretta Scott King recalled the sanctification of King as he stood in the sunlight at the summit of the Lincoln Memorial. “At that moment,” she said, “it seemed as if the Kingdom of God appeared.” Thereafter, the media constructed an icon of the Civil Rights leader, a symbol of triumphant nonviolence, marching in Birmingham and espousing the American Dream in Washington. In short order, King won Time Magazine’s “Man of the Year,” and the Nobel Peace Prize. Overwhelmed by his transformation, King accepted his newfound glory with wonder.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Likewise, Kennedy underwent a transfiguration in a touching interview shortly after his assassination in November of 1963. Former First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy likened the heady excitement of her husband's administration to the mythical Camelot of Broadway musical fame. Soon, the media set to work recasting the image of the late President into that of an ennobled race reformer. In reality, a less than aggressive President seeking reelection had allowed segregationists to stymie the legislation in Congress. Now, President Lyndon B. Johnson encouraged the passage of the package as a tribute to the martyred leader, and the adoption by Congress of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked a watershed in national race relations. The act outlined equal employment opportunities that opened the American system to minorities and women, thus, this triptych. The juxtaposed icons of Conner, King and Kennedy symbolized the struggle to overthrow racial oppression in the South. Taken together, the three images tell the story of race reform in America. First, there's Conner, the fat, beady-eyed little man waving on with his pork-pie hat the hoses and the dogs against helpless Black youth. Then, there is Dr. King, having overcome Birmingham's hoses and dogs but now frozen in time at the Lincoln Memorial giving his "I Have a Dream" speech; and finally, there is President Kennedy in the haze of the White House Camelot, benevolently intervening in his advocacy of racial equality.

As icons, these images retell over and again a morality play of triumphant race reform. Clearly centering the climax of the Civil Rights Movement in the streets of Birmingham.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Odessa Woolfolk: Good evening, thanks to Dr. Johnson and to others who have sponsored this wonderful discussion about a tremendously important event. I have heard all over Alabama that this was the place to be, and I think we still have one or two more weeks to go – several more weeks to go, so not only is this the place to be, but there is time to be here. No doubt, the best work about Birmingham was written by Glenn Eskew, and we are all indebted to him for his awesome scholarship. I am suppose to talk about the memorialization of the Civil Rights Movement and use the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute as a case, and I will do that, but as Professor Glenn, my friend, told that riveting study of Birmingham, my mind raced back to 1963. I started thinking about what I was doing in Birmingham during the time of these events so wonderfully captured by Professor Glenn. So let me just be personal for a moment and tell you what I was doing.

There are four things that happened in 1963 that were mentioned by him that I just want to comment about in a personal way. First, the spring campaign where Bevel and others invited kids to participate. I was a young American Government teacher at Ullman High School teaching the 12th Grade in 1963 when the call came for students to go and joint a group marching downtown. It is interesting that the Birmingham Board of Education had sent a notice to all the teachers saying check the roll in the morning and again after lunch and turn in the names of those who were there in the morning and absent after lunch. Well that did not seem right so a lot of fudging went on with those things. I recall that a lot of students who were in my class were trying to decide... now I was teaching American Government (this is the irony of it) reading McGruder, the author of the textbook that we used. McGruder laid out in the most beautiful fashion the

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

American Dream, the American Creed, and it was clear that what was going on in Birmingham was not what McGruder said it should be. So, I counseled my students, as I recollect. Students have told me as I have talked to them since that my counsel to them was, “I can’t tell you whether you should go down and face billy clubs and fire hoses, etc. I can tell you this. I am not teaching on those days when you are not supposed to be here, and so the grade that you will get will be for nothing here.” I remember that and occasionally I see students and they remind me of that.

The second thing in 1963 that I am remembering, Glenn, as you talked about the March on Washington, and I too went to the march. I went down from New York City where I had been visiting with some friends, and we went on a bus that was sponsored by the _____ and the NAACP. I am pretty sure there were more than a quarter-million people there. It was interesting that when the people from Alabama and Mississippi came in with the wagons and coveralls, you could hardly hear because there was such a roar of acceptance by all the folks around the world praising what these folk from the Deep South had done. So, I remember that and I also remember King’s speech.

The third thing you mentioned, Glenn, that raced through my mind was the Sixteenth Street Church. On that September Sunday, I recall hearing the bomb all over town. I didn’t go to Sunday School that day. I was not a member of the Sixteenth Street Church. My church was a mile from Sixteenth Street. I normally taught Sunday School but that day I did not, so I was late going to church, and I heard this awful noise, but we heard a lot of awful noises in Birmingham. When I arrived at church, shortly after I got there, the phone started ringing and members of our church who had family members at

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Sixteenth Street were getting the calls about what had happened, so that day is seared in my memory as well.

Then, the fourth thing you mentioned is Kennedy. I remember the day that the President was assassinated. Then, I was teaching American Government at Ullman High School. The kids had gone to lunch and came back right after the second lunch period with their little transistor radios. We had transistor radios inside as well, and they said, “the President has been shot,” and they were hysterical. This was an all-Black high school for those of you who are too young to know what it was like back then. They were hysterical. About half an hour after that, a carload of white kids came by from another high school chanting, “the nigger lover is dead. The nigger lover is dead,” so when I heard Professor Glenn talking about that year, I had all those images revisiting me. I just wanted to share that with you.

Well, you have heard from Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the fiery, tough-minded leader of the Birmingham Movement, a person for whom I have a lot of respect and admiration. Glenn was absolutely right when he said that not all of the African-Americans (we were Negroes then), not all of the Negroes supported what he did. It was not that people did not want freedom. It was not that the middle class Negroes were so comfortable that they thought they had it made. It was that Fred Shuttlesworth scared the living daylights out of folks, and they said, “Fred, we want our freedom but we want to be alive to enjoy it.” So Reverend Fred did not have as many followers publically as he had supporters privately. At that time what had happened around the South period was that many Blacks lost their employment and people who were in school teaching and jobs

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

like that had lost jobs, in some small towns especially. So, I suspect that many people were fearful of that happening. The church that I attended, a congregational church, was a place where Andrew Young, Wyatt Tee Walker, King, Deanie and John Drew and others met. Now, that was what Shuttlesworth called the middle class negotiating committee. If you heard him speak, I am sure you heard him speak very plainly. These folk met at our church, so our congregation was somewhat involved but not in the middle, although some of the members actually were in the middle.

The Memorializing of the Movement in Birmingham – the healing of a city by design is a title a local news journal used in a cover story of the Civil Rights District. The district linked people, structures, nature, brick, mortar and stone in defining the role that Birmingham played in the Movement. Dr. Johnson mentioned the Kelly Ingram Park and that park was a part of the Civil Rights District which included the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the historic Black business district, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute which was constructed in 1992. Let me just tell you a little about that. Richard Ellington, Jr., about whom many of you have heard, was Mayor of Birmingham for 20 years, the first African-American mayor – it was his job to complete a job proposed by his predecessor, Mayor David Van. David Van in 1979, after having gone to Israel and noticing how the holocaust was dealt with there in museums proposed that the City of Birmingham should spend public dollars for a combination of a museum and an educational facility. It was not a very popular idea I can tell you, even in 1979 in Birmingham, Alabama. It turns out that Van did not get reelected. Richard Ellington did get elected and decided that he would move forward with this idea after thinking about it,

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

as Glenn has written in some of his pieces. Ellington appointed a citizen's task force in 1986. He asked me if I would share it. At that time, I was working for the University of Alabama of Birmingham, your sister university. What we decided to do was to sit and come up with a mission statement, a schematic plan, and to recommend designers to oversee the project to completion. This is what our charge was. You know, preservationists and historians speak of the material culture of human events. We know that the material culture of the Civil Right Movement is, as one scholar put it, comprised of churches, homes, lunch counters, roadways, bus stations, bridges, parks and other public spaces that serve as local sites for community organizing and demonstration. So, we had our task as a planning committee to work on using raw history and telling a story for all eternity of what happened in Birmingham. We were to submit a redesign of Kelly Ingram Park, which is the park across the street from the Sixteenth Street church where the marchers went and where Bull Conner and his crowd welcomed them.

One of the major stories in interpreting history is indeed whose story is to be told and who should participate in the telling of the story. How to tell that story was indeed a challenge for us. What we wanted our designers to do was to depict a really powerful, as described by Glenn, a powerful social movement by redesigning the actual place, the Holy ground if you will, where it occurred. We wanted to ensure authenticity so we invited the people who had really marched in 1963 to retrace, to reenact their path. They were asked to tell where the fire hoses and the firemen were; where were the police dogs; where was the tank in terms of the periphery. Where were the cops stationed, etc., to recollect exactly what happened from their first-hand experience, albeit many years later.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

In addition to those stories, we searched the primary sources and then used that information for designing and landscaping of the park. Dick Ellington was very interested in that particular project and wanted us to think of the park as being from a revolution, which the movement was, to reconciliation, which is the path we felt that Birmingham was on. I would hope that some people might want to visit that park and I will talk about that another time.

The design of the Institute itself needed to capture city history. Even in the building materials that we used, we wanted to celebrate the building materials of Birmingham, which had been field brick and wood. Most of Twentieth Century Birmingham structures were made out of those particular elements. We also wanted to show in the path of visitors to the galleries a kind of undulating walk showing that the movement indeed was a struggle and a move forward, so people proceeded vertically through history. We felt that was symbolically important.

I raised the question earlier of whose story should be told. Fred Shuttlesworth was no doubt the hero no matter what else we said. We had to tell Fred Shuttlesworth's story. Martin Luther King, Jr., was important to Birmingham, but not as important as Frederick L. Shuttlesworth. The Birmingham hero of the movement was Fred L. Shuttlesworth. So, we felt that his story needed to be told... not only the story of the leader, but many, many stories of the people who participated because the movement, as Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth will tell you, is larger than those who lead it.

We went about planning. The task force was appointed by the mayor, and in June of 1990, the City of Birmingham appointed a Board of Directors made up of those who

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

had previously been on the task force. I was asked to be the president of that, and we did finally open the Institute in 1992; but it was not that simple. As a matter of fact, the board was one of controversy. The mayor had tried on two occasions to have the citizens vote on a bond issue which included not only the Birmingham Civil Right Institute planning but a variety of public improvement, including schools and libraries and recreation facilities. On both occasions, the voters turned those down.

There were some interesting arguments in our position, arguments such as: all we will do is open up old wounds; it will rekindle racial strife; and after all, there are more pressing priorities for public dollar. Some argued that just having kind of a building with the name Civil Rights Institute would alienate whites of good will. Somebody said, “white people aren’t coming.” Others said, “no need to build a new facility for a handful of old papers. We have a library, a very fine library, so we could put those old papers there.” There was a group called the Taxbusters who played a major role in the defeat of the bond issue. Their leaders had been very critical of the mayor’s spending priorities and said that the taxpayer should not trust him with another dime of public money. They went on and said that to do this, to build this, would just remind the nation about all of the negative aspects of our city. One even argues, “I can’t image that there would be widespread attendance at the Institute with the crime and drugs that surround the areas.” The Institute was located in the heart of the historic Black community. The crime rate there was no higher than other districts in Birmingham, but that was one of the arguments.

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

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The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Then during construction, we were caught in a public debate which the newspapers carried for many, many weeks over whether a certain city consultant accused of payment irregularities in work that she was doing for the city was involved in the Institute project. Now, Dr. Glenn, most people on the Institute board never saw this lady. To the whites who feared the creation of a Civil Rights District, Ellington responded that whites were as much a part of this rich history as Blacks. This was an opportunity to take pride in what we had been able to overcome as a biracial community; so he was very positive about the biracial nature of this effort.

Well just when we thought we had set aside the usual suspects, we were publically criticized by a small group of Civil Rights activists. The Civil Rights foot soldiers went after us. Their beef was that they did not think that enough of them were on the Board of Directors. They were concerned that the history that we told would not be accurate and that besides, we were talking only to the leaders of the movement, and they were going to be more interested in their particular role rather than the role of the ordinary people. So we had to work that out. One group asked the City of Birmingham for 1.8 million dollars to do their own history project, and what they did was to sort of have a staff to duplicate what our proposed staff was; and they wanted the city to pay 1.8 million dollars. We were able to reason together and decide that would not be a good idea. Eventually, most of the folk who were opposed to the Institute worked together to make sure that it would happen.

We know that museums and institutes and memorials are very effective sources for stories about any group's contribution to society. The purposes of the Birmingham

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Civil Rights Institute are to focus on what happened in the past, not simply because it is in the “past” and leave it in the past, but to understand what lessons can be learned and to be informed as to future developments in human relations in Birmingham and perhaps in the world.

One observer of the District remarked, “In choosing to remember together, the citizens of Birmingham have redeemed their history in a way that does indeed have the potential to reconcile, to heal, to teach and to strengthen the bonds of community—not just for themselves but for the larger community.” So that is really what we are about, finding a way to have those lessons learned from that turbulent period and forming future relationships not only in this country but in the world. After all, both Dr. King and Andrew Young talked about how when they traveled around the world, they would hear, “We shall overcome,” in many languages, so there is indeed a universality in the story.

Those of you who have visited the Institute know its layout. I will just make a brief comment and during the Q&A, I can handle whatever questions you might want to ask regarding the Institute, but we do have a self-directed march through history. The high point is the history of Birmingham, but our story is about American history and about what happened in other parts of the country, especially in the Deep South. I can comment about the old history project later, but it suffices to say now that an important part of the project was to have as many people as we could, who had any recollection from that era to tell their stories in their own words. We have about 300 stories from the people who were known to the public as leaders, such as Fred Shuttlesworth, Andrew Young and the like, from the people who drove the kids downtown, from the people who

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

fed the reporters who came to Birmingham, from the children who themselves marched and from those who organized boycotts, sit-ins and kneel-ins, etc. So, there is a rich collection of history that is videotaped and many of them have been digitized. I recall saying in 1989, as chair of the taskforce, that the Institute would signify that we no longer hide from our history. We recognize that we were once a city that housed two people, black and white, unknown to one another except through the long painful threads of segregation. Now we are a different city embracing our past and through the Civil Rights Institute and similar projects, we are looking to a brighter future. Our motto in spite of the past, a vision for a future... a vision to be a national and international place of healing, mutual understanding and respect among all people.

Q: The first time I visited the Civil Rights Institute and every time since, I am impressed how the story of segregation and the Civil Rights Movement is told very bluntly, but there is no rancor and no vigor, and I want to know how you managed to avoid that?

A: That was a question that we faced up front. We said that basically we wanted to tell the story as it happened but that our goal was not to evoke guilt, but to have people understand what happens when miscommunication occurs. Therefore, we deliberately decided that we would tell it as it happened and let each individual go through with his or her own emotions without any commentary and that way, the interaction would be between the story and the visitor.

Q: How would you compare President Kennedy to Abraham Lincoln?

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

A: That's probably a good comparison. Lincoln of course is the great emancipator and more of a civil war, which he did win. He did free the slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation did not at first; it did not free any of the slaves in the Confederacy and the area the federal troops controlled, the slaves continued to be slaves, so Lincoln got a lot of credit for what it seemed to be on surface at first. But as the historian, DuBois, noted, to win war Lincoln freed the slaves and armed them and in fact, that is what the Emancipation Proclamation was saying. Kennedy was very hesitant to get involved. For example, the Kennedy administration initial response to race relations during the Civil Right Movement was to try to create stability and to end brutality. So, in Alabama you get the Freedom Rights and the Ku Klux Klan mob attacking the bus when it arrives at the Trailway station in Birmingham and again another riot at the bus station in Montgomery. All these sites are now being turned into museums, at least the Montgomery one is. Then, the Kennedy administration intervenes and works out a deal with the State of Mississippi and if in Mississippi there is no violence, if you simply arrest these integrationists and throw them in jail without beating them up in front of the TV cameras, that is great. That is what they did. So they worked out an agreement. Kennedy approached Birmingham with the same kind of perspective. The policy was called federalism and the idea was the federal government, without creating a national police force, really could not come in and intervene in the way you might think it would to prevent Civil Rights abusers. At first, what Burt Marshall was trying to do was simply get the demonstrations ended and that is actually what he achieved. They ended the demonstration. The problem was that it had become much broader than that. In the

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Kennedy papers, I had the privilege of going up and working in them in Boston. You read in the documents themselves and in the exit interviews that were conducted with members of the Kennedy administration that nobody was thinking about race, so race was not on the radar screen. It was not an issue before Birmingham. Birmingham changed everything and then suddenly it became the big issue. Like Lincoln, Kennedy was forced to address the issue and does, and in the end while his administration hesitates to push the legislation through, he set the whole ball in process.

A: Interesting enough, Jerome Bennett's book, *Forced Him To Glory*, is a book that sort of addresses Abraham Lincoln" role.

Q: You said you when you were teaching American Government to students you essentially encouraged them without telling them to go. How many of your kids went and what kind of changes did you see in those that did go out?

A: The high school where I worked had a large number of kids. I cannot give you the exact number of those who went and those who did not go. I would say that a good half of the student body was vocally sympathetic to what happened and perhaps most of the others felt that the Civil Rights Movement, the demonstration downtown made sense. I think you have to just realize that Birmingham was the most rigidly segregated place in a major deep south city. The kids have had experiences going down to the lunch counselors and their parents being addressed by their first names and them not being able to go the library. There was a branch library that they could go to. They could not go downtown to check out books. They saw this every day. If they rode a public bus, the signs would move according to the makeup of those who lived in the neighborhood. So, bus drivers

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

would say to kids and kids talked about that a lot that if whites get on this bus now, we are going to have to move you back. You can sit in the front but if whites get on the bus, we have to move you back. So, I think the teenagers felt that there was something horribly wrong about that and therefore they were really philosophically sympathetic. The change was permanent. We have interviewed at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute many of the kids who were involved in the movement and they talked about how that experience made them appreciate democracy because they felt that they had made a contribution to make it better. The day that they all came back after they had been arrested, several of them had little American flags. I sat in the back of the room with others who said they did not go to march. The heroes and heroines that day were those who had gotten arrested. They really had the badge of courage. So, I think the kids were changed. Now, there were some kids that just went along for fun, kids being kids, but I think many of them were changed.

Q: How would you rate the big mule mentality down there these days?

A: Well, I cannot really speak for recent Birmingham very well at all. I can kind of talk about Birmingham in the 1990's. I recall the Scholl Creek incident that occurred in 1991 and those were bug mules. There is a great irony about Scholl Creek. Let me see if I can recall all the names, Paul Thompson, Lou Willie and Abraham Woods. They had all been involved in 1963 and here they were in 1991, once again, with another Civil Rights protest. You may recall that it was over the desegregation of a country club. It was during a great moment for Birmingham with the PGA tournament out at Scholl's Creek. The demand was to integrate the country club and ultimately that what occurs and we saw that

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

take place. Integrating a country club versus desegregating America, it tells us how far we have come since 1963.

A: I would like to comment on that question. I have remained in Birmingham and have worked with a number of organizations to which the so-called current big mules belong. We do have in Birmingham a new generation of leaders as you do in many communities and I think that the civic leadership of Birmingham realizes that if Birmingham is to attract industry, attract business and attract visitors, then it has to approach these issues in a modern fashion. So, even those individuals who then in there earlier years may very well have been a valid racist. You do not hear that much anymore.

A: The whole economy has changed. That is really the other thing too. The old big mules were industrialists, bankers and insurance men and that kind of thing as well. That is part of what is occurring during the demonstrations in 1963. The old steel industry is losing its control of the city and a new service economy is beginning to emerge. So, today, one of the big mules theoretically would be the president of UAB.

Q: This is a two-part question. Do you think history would have been made the way it has been made if it had not been for the kids, if adults had marched instead?

A: I think we would both say of course not. The kids made all the difference.

Q: The second part is I lived in Thailand during the Vietnam War during _____, but it was not until the last one when the students marched and the adults were afraid to do anything. They saw their children being killed, _____ whole country took over. Is that what it is going to take here to do something about what is

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

going on in the rest of the world now in Afghanistan? American children can give dollars, have American children say stop bombing and killing.

A: That is a very good point.

Q: If Nixon had won the election or somebody else had been president, are you implying that they would have reacted the exact same way or if President Kennedy as an individual had anything to do with it

A: I think Kennedy warmed up to black folk and Civil Rights. Then again, Nixon, since you brought him up, is the fellow who gives us affirmative action.

Q: It sounds like you are both from two certain states, Alabama and Georgia. Do you think that Birmingham has a stigma for being involved in the Civil Rights Movement during 1960 unlike Atlanta, Georgia, having a stigma with some of the same leaders that came from that movement. Atlanta seems to have moved into a major US city and Birmingham has sort of done...

A: That is an interesting point. I heard a speech given by the governor of Georgia not too long along; this was last spring. He made the same kind of reference. He said when Birmingham was using fire hoses and police dogs, Atlanta was addressing racial problems and look at how well Atlanta has done and look at how we have surpassed Birmingham. Maynard Jackson said the same kind of things. He said we go to the bargaining table, that is Atlanta's style. By the way, I am an Alabamian; I am not a Georgian. There is an attitude about that in Atlanta, but Atlanta also runs from its past. It has no past. It has bulldozed whatever was historically significant, just about in the city. It was shunned any kind of connection to its Civil War heritage just about, of course it

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

was burning during the war. _____ is an antivillain town, in part to try to overcome racist views from Gone With The Wind and other things but in other ways just because it is typical of a metropolis. It is the center of the state's multinational corporations and it is historical in many ways. Birmingham, on the other hand though, has very much seemed to have hung on to its Civil Rights past for the longest time as a sore spot. It is hard to overcome that. Today, though, Birmingham is capitalizing on it and using it for heritage tourism. In the state of Alabama, thanks to initiation of a woman named Francis Smiley and a fellow named Aubrey Miller who were working in the Department of Tourism for the state under George Wallace the governor, promoted Civil Rights, black heritage in Alabama. They have created a tourism package that is drawing thousands into the state, thousands to the institute and the institute is the shining star of the whole thing. I would say, however, that it is wrong to suggest that Birmingham was held back because of its racism and Atlanta progressed because it was less racists. Atlanta was very racist. Atlanta was the headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan. Atlanta was segregated up until the 1940's as Birmingham ever dreamed of being. It was only because Atlanta's entire political economy was premised on transportation and it had a lot of locally owned capital and institutions like Coca-Cola and Delta Airlines, and several other corporations. Birmingham had the misfortune of being owned by Pittsburgh in large measure. There was indigenous capital, but it was so compromised by US steel that it really was handicapped by the industry itself.

A: I understand the premise of your question and I share the premise of the your question, that is to say that Birmingham lagged into a racist, repressive state longer than

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

many other southern cities. The key to that has to do also with absentee ownership by US steel. Even during the 1960's when there was an effort to try to get people to sit down around the table to talk about a better community, the US steel representatives who lived in Pittsburgh and elsewhere did not participate fully. So, I think that where we made a mistake as a point that Glenn made is that we were owned by outside interests. The second point I would make is that the people who were owners of even the businesses within Birmingham that Fred Shuttlesworth and others were trying to desegregate by enlarge did not vote in Birmingham either. They lived in a suburban area. So, we had a peculiar kind of array of who lived in Birmingham and who participated in government. Diane McWhorter has written a book. It would be interesting to hear how some historians evaluate her book, but she does talk about the role of some of these elite interests and industrial interests in holding Birmingham back.

A: I would say today though Birmingham is a great place. You can drive across it without too much difficulty, nice communities to live in. You can buy anything you want there. If you cannot get it, you can get it on the Internet, you know. Why live in Atlanta?

A: I would agree why live in Atlanta.

Q: Any other questions?

Q: Who was more in the Civil Rights Movement, was it the middle class, the lower middle class? Who was doing it? Who was the movement force behind it?

A: The movement force was made up of working class people and their preachers. Now, the role I think is incorrect and I will yield to what Glenn's records show on this. It is incorrect to say that the middle class was not involved at all. In terms of the class basis

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

for the Shuttlesworth movement if happened to have been what sociologist would call lower class.

A: The middle class had been active in voting rights registration campaigns. The NAACP had been very active in that in Birmingham for decades. The movement of folks on the street under Shuttlesworth were from Collegeville which was in the center of a number of industrial neighborhoods around _____ and railroad yards. They worked in those plants. The Birmingham Historical Society is doing great work trying to get Bethel Baptist Church on the national register because of the significance of that church and pointing to the community-based support for the civil rights movement out of that church. It came from black workers, paycheck vote.

A: Plus, people who had been in the Labor Movement, there is a strong connection in Birmingham with the protest from the Labor Movement as well.

Q: I just have a couple of things that I am curious about. When you introduced him, did he say that you have been in Albany since 1984.

A: Yes, that is right.

Q: I was just wondering where you grew up and if you have a sense of what happened then in your own personal experience?

A: I am after all this.

A: That is what I have told her. He is a young fellow, so that is why I told the story.

Q: I would like for you to share with us if you can the benefit about the how the company is doing. (inaudible)

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

A: The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute from the beginning proposed that we would do as complete an oral history project as we could, first emphasizing those folks that who were directly involved in the movement in the 1950's and early 1960's. So, the first part of the project, now about 300 people, interviewed as many folks as we could find who were involved in the movement, itself. We defined the movement as being those activities that were sponsored by Shuttleworth's group and others from 1956 when the NAACP was at large through 1965 when the Voting Rights Act was formed. That is our definition of the movement for our research in the institute having to do with the movement. We are going to expand that old history project to have folks who were involved in other protests movements and a large section on the Labor Movement on education, which was very important, in the Birmingham community right after World War II.

Q: (inaudible)

A: The bombing on Sixteenth Street occurred in September of 1963, after the demonstrations. They were in Birmingham in 1961 with Freedom Rights; Diane Nash was. Bevel was there with King in 1963 in the spring, so he had come back. They were in and out over and over again. I heard you had Diane Nash. You were very fortunate to get to have her come speak. I hope you enjoyed the experience.

Closing: Thank you again for coming and remember next week's program will be at Alabama A&M, The Huntsville Civil Rights Movement.