



Police & Society: 1940 to 1979

EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION OF
POLICING AND SOCIETY IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, ALABAMA



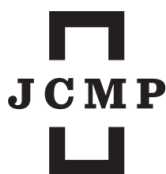
JEFFERSON COUNTY MEMORIAL PROJECT



Police Dogs Attack Demonstrators, Birmingham Protests, © Charles Moore

Police & Society: 1940 to 1979

A REPORT BY JEFFERSON COUNTY MEMORIAL PROJECT FELLOWS



JEFFERSON COUNTY MEMORIAL PROJECT



J E F F E R S O N C O U N T Y M E M O R I A L P R O J E C T



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A COMMITMENT TO HEALING

Since its founding, The Jefferson County Memorial Project has committed itself to racial healing. Jefferson County has served as a place for not only racial strife but also as a sacred space for addressing injustice. JCMP participates in this through meaningful and intentional programs, the dedication of our core coalition members, and our fellowship program.

Every member of JCMP is a public servant working towards healing for the Jefferson County community. This value and principle is upheld in every Fellowship Program as we work to convey the power conversation.

Before conducting their research, each fellow is immersed in spaces of healing in Jefferson County to be able to comprehend the history of racial injustice here. This brings understanding, empathy, and intentionality to their roles as JCMP fellows. These experiences have allowed them to ground themselves in the history of Jefferson County and how to heal from its painful past.

As you engage with this report, we hope to emphasize that the goal of this research is to promote community healing. This research is not meant to harm or exploit racial trauma, rather we hope it offers an opportunity to educate our community on how to confront the past. It is imperative to continue these conversations about the tumultuous history of this community and learn, and heal together.

Thank you for reading,



JCMP Fellowship Coordinator

A COUNTY-WIDE COALITION

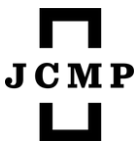
The Jefferson County Memorial Project (JCMP) was created after the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a groundbreaking memorial in Montgomery dedicated to African-American victims of racial terror violence. The Memorial contains monuments corresponding to over 800 counties where EJI documented racial terror lynchings. EJI has invited these counties to participate in their Community Remembrance Project, retrieve their monument, and take the lead in facilitating a local reckoning.

At JCMP we have a four-pronged mission of memorializing victims of racial terror violence and expanding our county's understanding of past and present issues of racial injustice. We're proud of the strategic and intentional work that we do.

- Research and reach out to descendants of the victims of the 33 Jefferson County lynchings
- Educate the county on the history and purpose of the monument through museum exhibits, K-12 engagement, a city-wide book discussion, and other programming.
- Place the monument and establish historical markers throughout the county
- Advocate for criminal justice reform for the city and county

Governed by a team of core advisors that meet bi-weekly, JCMP is a nonprofit community coalition operating under the fiscal agency of Greater Birmingham Ministries, an organization founded in 1969 to overcome the weight of racial oppression so severe that Birmingham was once called the "Johannesburg of the South" and "Bombingham."

Were it not for our dedicated community partners, we would be unable to complete our work. We know it is necessary to have holistic community support and buy-in to understand our history. All of our community partners have presented the importance of this work to their Boards of Directors, partnered with JCMP for events around this history, attended our annual community partner meetings, and helped with community engagement for our memorial efforts.



THE 2023 JCMP RESEARCH FELLOWS

The Jefferson County Fellowship Program brings college students from six institutions in Jefferson County, Alabama together to research areas of racial reconciliation. In 2018, our first class of JCMP fellows documented 30 victims of lynching in their research. 2019 saw our fellows discover four additional victims and connect documented lynchings with past local newspapers. In 2021, the fellows expanded on the history of Linn Park.

Our 2023 JCMP Fellowship saw the fellows partner with the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office for the Emmett Till Cold Case Project. The purpose of the project is to research cold civil rights cases in Birmingham from 1940 to 1979. It is important to understand the role of police in Jefferson County and their impact on communities during this period. It is also essential to understand how societal structures were adapted in turn. After searching through local archives, interviews, and police information, the fellows have prepared research exploring (1) the evolution of six areas of the police force in Jefferson County from 1940 to 1979 and (2) the evolution of six areas of society in Jefferson County from 1940 to 1979

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Juliana Mink

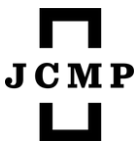
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MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

As members of the Jefferson County community, we understand that exploring this history can be painful. The purpose of this report is to educate, and not to revisit or disregard negative experiences from racial injustice. We must together address this history, but we also must take care of ourselves in the process and protect ourselves from harm. For this reason, we have included resources for mental health and trauma.

TELEPHONE RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is in a crisis, please refer to these hotlines in the local Birmingham area. If there is ever an emergency, please call 9-1-1.

Local Crisis Line: (205)-323-7273

Birmingham Crisis Line: (205)-323-7777

***For Suicide Prevention Support*:** 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) or go to suicidepreventionlifeline.org to chat with a counselor online.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS:

No More Martyrs:

www.nomoremartyrs.org

(205)-440-2837

Magic City Acceptance Center:

www.magiccityacceptancecenter.org

(205)-407-5799

Birmingham Counseling and Wellness

www.birminghamcounselingwellness.com

(205)-224-9181

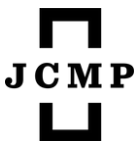
Impact Family Counseling

impactal.org

(205)-916-0123

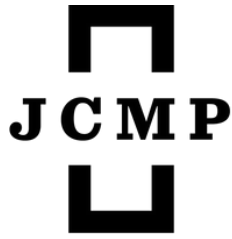
Brother Let's Talk

brotherletstalk.com



JEFFERSON COUNTY'S DOCUMENTED VICTIMS OF RACIAL TERROR VIOLENCE

Victims' Names	Date	Place
Lewis Houston	11/24/1883	Linn Park
Tom Collins	04/22/1886	Pratt Mines - <i>Found to have escaped his lynching</i>
*Otis Brown	04/24/1886	Near Five Mile Creek
Monroe Johnson	09/28/1887	Leeds
Jeff Curry	03/18/1888	Adger, Blue Creek Mines
Hardy Posey	04/23/1888	Bessemer, Southern Railway Depot
George Meadows	01/15/1889	Pratt Mines
*Tom Edmunds	07/31/1899	Blossburg Tunnel
John Steele	09/27/1889	Pratt Mines
Tom Redmond	06/17/1890	Brookside Mines
Henry Smith	11/16/1890	Hillman
Unknown	11/17/1890	Birmingham Mineral Railroad
Robert Mosley	11/14/1894	Dolomite
James Anderson	10/09/1896	Toadvine, near Rock Creek Bridge
Henry Cyat	10/10/1896	Toadvine
William Wardley	12/07/1896	Irondale
Jake McKenzie	03/22/1897	Brookside Mines
James Thomas	07/03/1897	Blossburg
Unknown	05/11/1901	Leeds, Southern Railway Train Route
Charles Bentley	08/02/1901	Leeds
Jerry Johnson	09/03/1907	Birmingham
Elijah Nelms	07/29/1908	Pratt City
William Miller	08/04/1908	Brighton
Anthony Davis	08/21/1908	Pratt City - <i>Mixed evidence on lynching</i>
John Thomas	04/25/1909	Bessemer, outskirts of the town
*Jim Hatter	04/28/1910	Dolomite
*Fred Spencer	06/1910	Mulga (<i>exact date unknown</i>)
John Chandler	01/28/1912	Bessemer, 3rd Ave. and 19th Street
William Smith	11/01/1912	Bessemer, 1623 Second Avenue
Wilson Gardner	08/23/1913	Kilgore
Will McBride	07/12/1923	Adamsville
Elizabeth Lawrence	07/05/1933	Birmingham
George Taylor	08/23/1934	Stockham Park
O.D. Henderson	09/05/1940	Fairfield



**JEFFERSON COUNTY
MEMORIAL PROJECT**

Section 1:

Evolution of Policing in Jefferson County, Alabama

The ratification of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution technically granted equal protections to African Americans in 1868 — abolishing Black Codes. Jim Crow laws, state, and local statutes that legalized racial segregation swiftly took their place. By the 1900s, municipalities began to establish police departments to enforce local laws, including Jim Crow laws. White communities pressed police to enforce and exert excessive brutality on African Americans who violated any Jim Crow law. Jim Crow Laws continued through the end of the 1960s.

The legacy and effects of biased policing are far-reaching. The U.S. is home to the world's largest prison population and the highest per-capita incarceration rate. As of May 2020, there were 655 people incarcerated per 100,000. Prison, parole, and probation operations costs American taxpayers \$81 billion a year.

-National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

POLICE JURISDICTION AND STAFFING

KIERRA BURKS, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The police force dates back to the early 1800s when the first publicly funded police force was created in Boston in 1803. A police force was needed due to the rise of violence and the increase in population. The primary role of the police is to enforce the laws set by the local, state, and federal governments. While the states up north had good intentions to form a police force, southern states instead had “slave catchers” that were used to chase runaway slaves and to keep order and fear amongst the black people in the South. This concept is the root of Alabama’s police force and played a huge role in the determination of those allowed to serve and the role of the officers selected (Potter, 2013).

It is no coincidence that the badge of a slave catcher is very similar to that of the badge of a police officer during this period as the roles never changed. The 1940s - 1960s represented a crucial time in the civil rights movement as many counties including Jefferson County enforced Black Codes which were a part of the Jim Crow Era. “Black codes were restrictive laws designed to limit the freedom of African Americans and ensure their availability as a cheap labor force after slavery was abolished during the Civil War.” (History, 2010). The police officers still were seen as the primary oppressors of the black population. Although their role in the community was to enforce laws and provide protection, there were laws in place that actively discriminated against black citizens and only protected white citizens.

A study by Northeastern University’s Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project documented that more than 100 Blacks were killed by white police officers in Jefferson County from 1932 to 1968 (Burnham, 2020). Many officers had no regard for the lives of African Americans as a lot of officers were active members of the Klu Klux Klan. “ In the period since slavery, there have been times when in some locations in the South, all of the local authorities, including the sheriff, were members of the [Klan]” (Patterson, 2020).

During the 1960’s much of the crime was justified by Jefferson County Police Commissioner Bull Connor as he was openly racist and violent towards African Americans. With so many people in power sharing the same hatred for African Americans, it was very difficult for African Americans to succeed and be protected from danger.

Jefferson County consists of 1,111 square miles of pure Alabama soil and contains 45 different police departments. During this time, Jefferson County was one of the most segregated places with almost half of its population consisting of African Americans. Due to the extreme bigotry in this area, the police and the white citizens were an active threat to the lives of African Americans and had no remorse for their actions as it was socially justified. While police officers had to go through background checks and special training to serve, any racist affiliations were not looked down upon but rather praised as they would “protect” the community.

When researching this topic, it was difficult to find detailed information on the true nature of the police staff and jurisdiction as many of the practices were legal, and much of the history is spoken rather than written. To understand how the police truly were in Jefferson County, time was spent interviewing family members, coworkers, and police officers who were alive during this time and can attest to the horrors Jefferson County faced by its officers. To receive accurate information without fear of repercussions, the identity of those who gave information is kept private.

African American residents of Jefferson County during the 1940s-1960’s all can remember the shared fear of police officers during this time. Black neighborhoods were filled with officers “patrolling” the area for safety, when in all reality they were posing as a threat to the black community. During this time, African Americans were protesting and fighting for their rights as this was during the Jim Crow era and the civil rights movement.

The former police officer interviewed served on the Birmingham City Police Force in the early 1960s under police chief Jamie Moore and police commissioner Bull Conner. He came from a southern Baptist church as his father was a preacher. As a child, he can remember going to church with African Americans, playing with African-American children, and even having an African-American young woman as a maid in his house. He was never taught to treat African Americans differently by his parents, but he still did because “that’s just how things were back then”. Growing up, he never imagined being on the police force as he was a troublemaker himself.

When playing around with his friends as teenagers, they would go around blowing up neighbor’s mailboxes. On one occasion they were caught and he was almost taken to the police station but was able to make a deal with the officer where he was allowed home. Due to the severity of the crime, he was advised to leave town since it was a federal offense. That day, he enlisted in the Air Force and served 8 years. Once completed, he was then offered a position at the Birmingham City Police Department where he only stayed for six months due to the cruel acts expected of him by his peers.

When asked about the Klu Klux Klan’s involvement in the Jefferson County Police Force, the officer did not want to share too much information as a lot of people in power were members of the KKK. He did confirm that several members of the KKK were officers and that he once worked with the Grand Wizard of Alabama (the president and founding member of the local KKK group). The officer interviewed described the KKK as “thugs” and “being a breed of their own” as he stated those were people who still believed in the confederacy and that the South was right during the Civil War.

During his time serving on the police force, he was able to see the crooked practices of officers in Jefferson County. He stated that there were two different payrolls for officers and those who were not

afraid to be violent to African Americans were paid more. He did not receive any formal training other than FBI training while serving in the Air Force. Although he did have to pass a background check, any racially motivated crimes or minor offenses were overlooked as long as you were a white male. Many officers were “placed” to lure criminals to arrest them. When the former officer first joined, he was tasked with catching prostitutes as he would impersonate an average customer for the prostitute and once the payment had been accepted by the prostitute, they would then be arrested.

The day he quit working for the Birmingham City Police Department was during the Children’s March in 1963 “ I remember going down 4th Avenue North with Bull Conner and Jamie Moore while the kids were marching. They both had no mercy or compassion and were filled with hatred. They were given the orders to spray fire hoses, use dogs, and even beat the children to keep blacks in their place. Once I saw that, I couldn’t stand to contribute to killing any Americans as I had already killed enough innocent people during the Vietnam War.”

When talking to citizens who lived during this time that can attest to the horrors of the Police departments in Jefferson County, they all state “That’s just how things were back then.” This statement alludes that although at this time we see the cruelty of white Americans and are completely outraged by it, this was simply a way of life for them. Being mistreated by white people or being racist to black people were widely recognized as norms of society. This norm is what allowed the police officers in Jefferson County to wreak havoc on the lives of African Americans with the intent to protect white Americans. Now in the 21st century, many of the cruel acts done by police officers in Jefferson County are still kept private or were not recorded to continue to protect White Americans as their actions were not seen as being wrong by the majority of white citizens in Jefferson County as “that’s just the way things were back then.”

Burnham, M. (2020, August 14). Police Killings in Jefferson County, Alabama: 1930-1970 by Northeastern University Library - Issuu. Issuu.com. https://issuu.com/northeastern_libraries/docs/neu_m046pk234

History.com Editors. (2010, June 1). Black Codes. History; A&E Television Networks. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes>

Patterson, N. (2020, November 29). Police Brutality Brought Early Alabama Reckoning. Nation Faces Similar Questions Now. BirminghamWatch. <https://birminghamwatch.org/police-brutality-brought-early-alabama-reckoning-nation-faces-similar-questions-now/>

Potter, G. (2013, June 25). The History of Policing in the United States, Part 1. Eku Online; Eastern Kentucky University. <https://ekuonline.eku.edu/blog/police-studies/the-history-of-policing-in-the-united-states-part-1/>

THE STRUCTURE OF THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

ODYSSEY CROWELL, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

The earliest history of the structure of the police department in the United States started with the “Watch Systems”, where there were volunteers tasked with watching for impending dangers. An example of this would be persons during the American Revolution that would warn communities that “the British are coming”. However, in the Southern states, there was also the development of organized policing in the form of slave patrol. According to historian Gary Potter, slave patrols served three main functions.

“(1) to chase down, apprehend, and return to their owners, runaway slaves; (2) to provide a form of organized terror to deter slave revolts; and (3) to maintain a form of discipline for slave workers who were subject to summary justice, outside the law” (Potter, 2013).

Slave patrols were tasked with “keeping slaves in order” and would commit heinous and violent acts to instill fear into Black enslaved persons.

After the Civil War, these organizations soon became modern-day police departments, even though they continued to instill the slave patrol mentality into their officers. Instead of chasing runaway slaves, they instead started to enforce Jim Crow laws that would impose segregation and a continuation of violence. Police stations across the United States, North, and South (and eventually to the West) would start to take this structure of slave patrols and apply it to their doctrine.

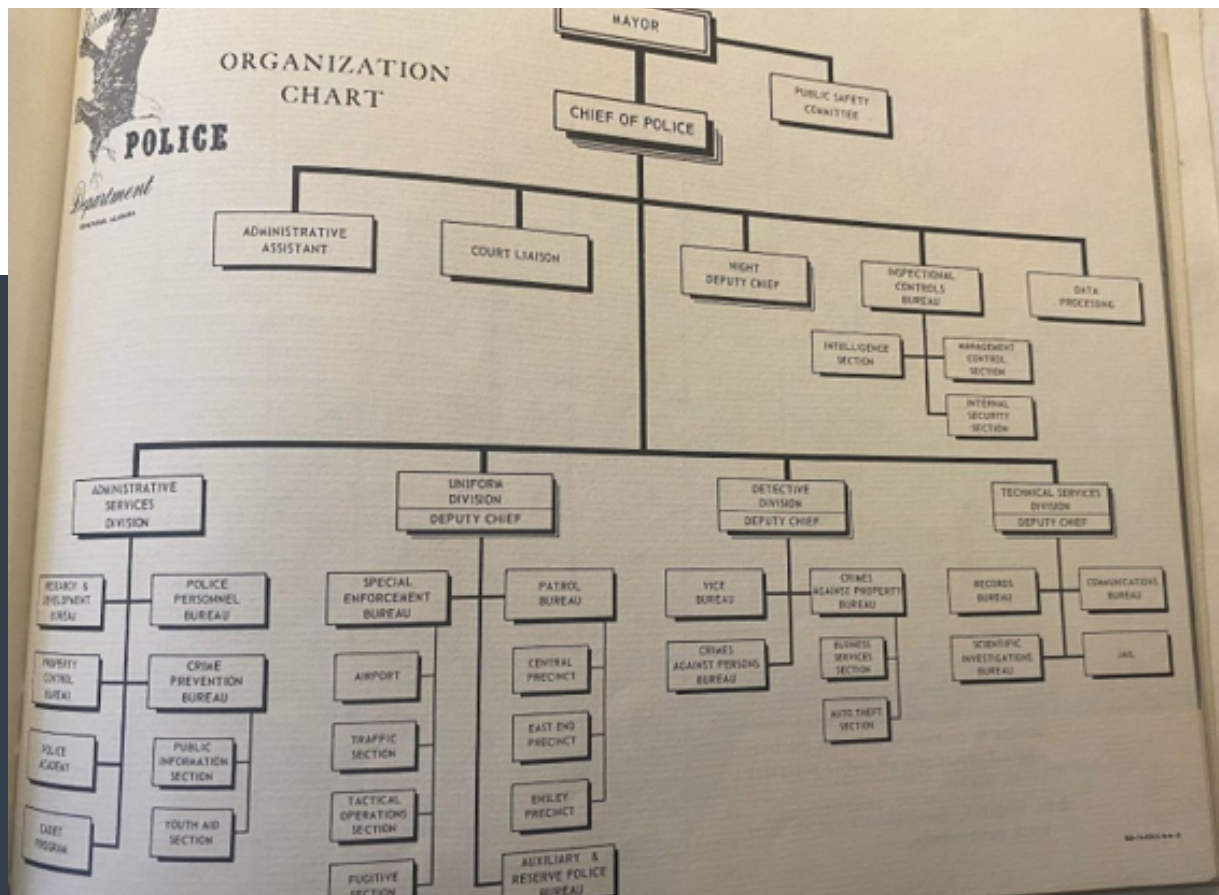
The Birmingham Police Department itself was founded in 1871, the same time as the city was being founded. Birmingham was becoming a king city at the helm of the Industrial Age with its mass production of coal, steel, and iron. However, the Birmingham Police Department tasked themselves to be an iron fist towards African Americans, to uphold White supremacy both in and outside of the department. It was not until 1966 that the first Black police officer was sworn in his name Leroy Stover and ended up serving 32 years. However, his employment did not signify that he nor other Black individuals were becoming respected.

“They didn't spit on me or push me (at least not the first day),... But they did call me racist names and suggested I wouldn't last the first day.”-Leroy Stover (Robinson, 2013)

While researching the Birmingham Police Department Archives and through online research and academic platforms there was a lack of information on the structure of the police department. There is more information and research about the actions of the Birmingham Police Department during the 1960s, since this was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, and there was plenty of media coverage of the catastrophic events happening. However, there is still a lack of information about the police department from the 1940s-1959. This may be due to a lack of documentation, or it could be that the documentation has been lost over the years. Nevertheless, this shows the lack of organization and prioritization of important documents for the BPD.

It could be implied that there was a lack of structure at all until the 1970s. Given that there is some evidence that during Bull Connor's reign in the South, many appointed “protest officers” were normal civilians who were allowed to be violent to protesters. Over the years, there have also been new cases found that Jefferson County had not publicly announced or documented; and many times, the cases would have been handled by the same group of officers. This being said, there is doubt that there were requirements for being a police officer during that time besides “morals” and that the lack of documentation from this institution speaks for itself. Nevertheless, below is a picture of the organizational chart from the 1970s obtained from the BPD archives.

The structure of the police department indicated in this photo is as follows: at the helm of the Birmingham Police Department is the mayor; the mayor oversees the Public Safety Committee and the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police is the: Administrative assistant, Court Liaison, Night Deputy Chief, Inspections Control Bureau, Data Processing, Administrative Services Division, Uniform Division, Detective Division, and Federal Services division.



Birmingham Police Department. Circa 1970s. "Organization Chart". Birmingham Police Department Annual Report.

Furthermore, within the Inspections Counsel Bureau and the Administrative Services, Uniform, Detective, and Technical Services divisions, each has its bureaus, sections, and precincts.

Although there are many moving parts to the police department, it is important to look at three key factors: the Chief of Police, the Public Safety Committee, and the mayor. The branch as a whole is commanded by the mayor, which calls into question the behaviors and belief systems of mayors even though they are not talked about. This police organization gives insight that the violence through the Police Department in Birmingham would have been incited by the mayor. However, this also calls into question whether or not the police department and public safety committee would move to their own devices. An infamous example would be Albert Boutwell (mayor in 1963), and Bull Connor (Commissioner of Public Safety-administrative power of police and fire departments). Although Albert Boutwell was not as violent and overt as Bull Connor, Boutwell was still a segregationist.

The organizational structure of the Birmingham Police Department, as well as other police departments later started to shift from slave patrol to militarism during the Prohibition Era but started to become more popular throughout the years. We have seen past examples of this with the use of tear gas, tanks, and red squads, during the events of Birmingham in 1963. However, there are more recent events such as Reagan's "War on Drugs" when the incorporation of full tactical gear was implemented and funded. Generally, the military powers have been responsible for protecting the United States from potential foreign dangers. So, changing into a militant style for domestic issues shows that the police departments encourage the idea that some American citizens (meaning Black) were to be treated (or rather tortured) as war criminals. Embodying militarism is allowing for the racial discourse to continue through violence; violence that is classified by law as "legal" and "moral" ...but still violence.

There is also another potential factor to the organization, structure, and implementation of the BPD: the Alabama State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police. The Alabama State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police was founded in 1947 to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States, and the State of Alabama, to inculcate loyalty and allegiance to the United States of America...” (Alabama State FOP, 2020), as well as provide support and advocate for police officers in Alabama. The Fraternal Order first started as a social club but later became more formal. They even provide training for its members.

Given the timeframe that it was founded, one cannot help but wonder “What part did this fraternal order play in the policing around Alabama and Jefferson County?”. It calls into question whether this Fraternal Order created space where police officers could train each other and plan for retaliation against Black civilians. Black police officers were excluded from these unions/fraternities, and that was if there were any Black police officers at all. Even today, while Black police officers are capable of joining unions, they can still face racism and discrimination on the job.

In the 1970s we started to see a slight shift in the way that the Birmingham Police Department ran, and although there has been much progression throughout the years (even nationally), there is still far more work to be done. In the 1990s and early 2000s, “Stop and Frisk” and the 1994 Crime Bill (also known as the federal “three-strikes” provision) by governmental leaders like Jerome Cavanaugh and Bill Clinton The current police academy training requirements are the same as they were almost 50 years ago. It includes 800 hours of instruction and lasts approximately 4-5 months. This amount of time is lower than the Alabama Cosmetology Act’s requirement to become a barber, which is 1500 training hours at a barber school OR 3000 hours as an apprenticeship in a barber shop (ABOC, 2022).

Today police brutality, unlawful arrests, over-sentencing, and higher incarceration have become the new norm against Black Americans. With the rise of the Black Lives Matter campaign, we have seen more and more Black men and Women being murdered and mistreated by police officers without civilian and situational training and who still have that desire for the same control of the past....can we truly say that progress has been made?



A successful politician who held various public offices over four decades, Eugene “Bull” Connor (1897-1973) is primarily remembered today as an icon of racial intolerance. Theophilus Eugene Connor was born in Dallas County on July 11, 1897.

A staunch and flamboyant white supremacist, Connor was known for making outrageous comments to the press and for instigating now-famous confrontations over Birmingham's segregation ordinances with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and U.S. Senator Glen Taylor. While not a member of the Ku Klux Klan, Connor protected Klansmen who committed racial violence, including bombings.

In 1961, he ordered Birmingham police to stay away from the Trailways bus station while Klansmen attacked the Freedom Riders, a group of civil rights activists who were touring the South to protest segregation. In 1962, the citizens voted to change the form of city government to remove him from office.

Alabama State FOP. (2020) Our Mission. <https://www.alabamastatefop.org/about-us/mission-history/>

Birmingham Police Department. (Circa 1970s). “Organization Chart”. Birmingham Police Department Annual Report.

Potter, G. (2013). The History of Policing in the United States: Part 1. <https://ekonline.eku.edu/blog/police-studies/the-history-of-policing-in-the-united-states-part-1/>

Robinson, C. (2013). Birmingham's 1st black police officer shares struggles and successes in new book. https://blog.al.com/spotnews/2013/11/birminghams_first_black_police.html

The Alabama Board of Cosmetology and Barbering. (2022).The Alabama Cosmetology Act. <https://www.aboc.alabama.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/New%20Law%20and%20Rules%201.1.2022.pdf>

WEAPONS AND RESOURCES

SHY JENKINS, JEFFERSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The civil rights movement in Birmingham, Alabama was a chaotic and troublesome time. In most places the police are viewed as the protectors of the city, however, Birmingham Police did many unethical things back then. Although some of the crimes police committed against citizens were not viewed as wrong due to the way racism impacted and shaped that time; other things the police did were intentional and they knew it was wrong but they also knew they would not be reprimanded.

The Birmingham Police Department was established in 1871 and although it is very difficult to get specific details of their regulations that date as far back as that; research does show that the police had the freedom to use different weapons than what are allowed to use today. If time was taken to look deeper into the way situations were handled it would become clear that the police force grew more creative in their attempts to determine which weapons would reinforce their power over citizens, specifically black ones at the time.

Within their policies, there were official weapons that police were allowed to use, but just like unspoken rules, there were unlisted or unofficial weapons that police would use. Guns are one of the main weapons that police use and are trained to use. They also had Batons, however, the training to use a Baton was more about in which situations a Baton would be used unlike with gun training where an officer would be perfecting their use of that weapon. There was a point in time when Birmingham Police only had a Smith and Wesson and later the shotgun was added to that lineup.

Although it doesn't state when the policy was officiated, the Report of Citizens Committee on Birmingham Police Department of 1952 states, "The men are now required to provide their pistols. This results in a great diversity of equipment... which would remain the property of the department." (Citizens Committee, 1952). This pushed police to either purchase pistols from pawnbrokers or borrow pistols at high interest rates from loan offices. Tanks were also utilized by the police to cause terror.

Although it is not clear if the tanks were ever used to kill, what makes a weapon a weapon is the threat of injury to a person.

The Birmingham Police Department annual reports of 1959-67 state that on April 13, 1960 tanks were introduced and replaced the riot trucks police were already using. The riot trucks were intimidating, but not as intimidating as the tanks. The tanks introduced were M-20 tanks, weighing 12,000 pounds each as they were plated in armor; this is terrifying to dozens of citizens who could be crushed by these vehicles all at once. These tanks were stated to be used for "riot control" and what was considered as riots most of the time were peaceful protests of the black people living in Birmingham hoping for equal rights.

Citizens who were discriminated against could somewhat come together to fight against the brutality of the police, but they stood no chance against these tanks which were equipped with bulletproof glass, six-wheel drive, and eight portholes to fire through. Something we currently view as a weapon for war was driven down residential streets for weaponless people. (Associated Press)



A 17-year-old Civil Rights demonstrator is attacked by a police dog in Birmingham, Ala., on May 3, 1963. This image led the front page of the next day's New York Times. Bill Hudson/ASSOCIATED PRESS

1960 is also when the “K-9 Corps of the Birmingham Police Department” came into existence. On June 27, 1960 training school started for these dogs which included obedience training with an obstacle course; they were also taught to attack and disarm as well as track by scent. By the middle of September, the K-9 Corps started patrolling. Three years following this training and introduction of K-9s to the police force, a picture was taken that has since become a symbol and an essential part of the story of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham.

Depicted in the picture is Walter Lee Fowlkes. He and others were victims of vicious dog attacks started by the police because they were protesting in 1963. These dog attacks have left adults as well as children in the hospital. Although these dogs were trained to disarm and track criminals they were also taught how to attack and to be obedient to the policemen and they took that to their advantage by using the dogs as a weapon against the black public if they were caught doing something they didn't like or agree with. Bull Connor, commissioner of public safety at the time was all for this behavior. He is quoted saying, “All you gotta do is tell them you're going to bring the dogs. Look at 'em run. I want to see the dogs work.” Instead of using the dogs as a way to protect the police and catch criminals, they decided to use them to terrorize black citizens and to cause harm during protests.

The police of Birmingham were notorious for taking advantage of the hatred towards black people during these times. They would harm or even go as far as killing people of color because they knew they would get away with it. They were not only backed by the department of their jobs but by the city officials such as Bull Connor who was openly racist. Police would ask and allow random white citizens to step into their disputes and beat black people; they would even sometimes provide them with sticks and various handheld weapons. These white men would not be punished for these crimes against black people; instead, they would be turned into witnesses on reports claiming that peaceful protesters were not so peaceful. So not only were the police weaponizing white citizens but they would weaponize their job positions.

They would use their authority to throw people of color into jail whenever they saw the opportunity. Depending on a person's outlook on things it is easy to disagree, however when defined weapons are things that inflict bodily harm and/or physical damage, and a fist or a foot does exactly that, although it is not a physical weapon. It should also be considered that when black people would try to defend themselves against these attacks it would lead to other white people joining in and once that person was being hit by multiple people they would throw items, spit, and kick black people all in the presence of the police.



Heavily armed Alabama State Troopers make a show of force near Sixteenth Street Baptist church
© Danny Lyon

Kelly Ingram Park, formerly known as West Park, was a monumental location during the Civil Rights Movement. According to the National Park Service, this park was the point of assembly for planning protests such as sit-ins, boycotts, marches, and jailings. Currently, the park has statues up to commemorate the history of events that have taken place there (National Park Service, 2021). Two of them, which are included in this report, tell the story of how things not meant to cause harm to humans did. One of these objects would be fire hoses. Created to put out fires, but instead, during the protests, were used on protesters young and old. Some witnesses attested that children would be hit by these hoses and would be thrown to the ground screaming and crying.

Although currently, the black community can look to most police for protection instead of harm, a privilege they would not have had in the earlier days of Birmingham, the brutality by police has not completely ended. Still today black citizens are targeted and terrorized with some of these same weapons and have the same result of no justice. This illustrates for the black community that progress does not mean the fight is over. Racism and discrimination is still a problem today despite all the protesting and lives sacrificed. Until and beyond this battle is over and won it is important to be educated on the true history of not only Birmingham, but also America.

Report of Citizens Committee on Birmingham Police Department of 1952
Birmingham Police Department Annual Reports (1959-1967)

Kelly Ingram Park (U.S. National Park Service). (n.d.)<https://www.nps.gov/places/kelly-ingram-park.htm>

POLICING DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST BLACK POLICEMEN

JULIANA MINK, SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

Much of Black American history is marked by “firsts.” These Brave men and women broke through boundaries set by racist precedents to initiate progress in the centuries-old battle for justice and equality. Some of the Black “firsts” are well known. Jackie Robinson, in 1947 became the first major league baseball player; Toni Morrison was the first Black to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993; Barack Obama became the first Black president in 2009. It is critical to remember these firsts and analyze their surrounding demographics to understand the weight of the influential shift away from those demographics. The marking of “firsts” is certainly important on a national scale. However, remembering and honoring the “firsts” in one’s local community turns an abstract history into something more personal.

One of Birmingham’s firsts recently passed away. Leroy Stover died at age 90 on November 4, 2023. He was the first Black police officer in Birmingham, Alabama. As quoted in a Birmingham Watch article, he Birmingham police department said, “Our hearts

are heavy as we mourn the loss of former Deputy Chief Leroy Stover” (Birmingham Watch, 2023) Leroy Stover significantly commenced a demographic shift in the police force in Birmingham. Before Stover, the demographics had long remained largely unchanged. The Birmingham Police Annual Reports between the years 1950 and 1960 did not even mention racial background or gender as a demographic breakdown—it did not need to be mentioned. The police force was strictly white and male and had been that way since each municipality’s founding. The negation of even a reference to demographics in these annual reports is itself telling. It alludes to the cultural assumption that the police officers would be white males. This assumed demographic domination formulated Birmingham residents’ perception of the police force.

This undated photo provided by The Birmingham Police Department shows Deputy Chief Leroy Stover, the city’s first Black police officer who passed away on November 2, 2023. He was 90. (Birmingham Police Department via AP)



As the historical demographic of the Birmingham police force pre- and post-civil rights movement portrayed the same image—old, white male—the attitude and action of law enforcement framed the police force against the Black community.

This was especially true in the tumultuous Civil Rights years as police hoses and dogs were turned against Birmingham citizens. For example, this is depicted in the infamous news photograph of the young Black boy in the crossfire between a snarling German Shepherd whose leash is held by the older white male police officer. “As Eric Sevareid had said on the CBS Evening News, “A snarling police dog set upon a human being is recorded in the permanent photoelectric file of every human being’s brain” (Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home*, 2001).

While the citizens of Mountain Brook would have adamantly suggested the police officer is tugging the leash, pulling back the dog, and keeping the young Black boy from the dog’s attack, the picture is more symbolic of a localized truth: the brutality of Birmingham’s police department specifically. The image illustrates a larger truth of the continued violence and oppression of Black Americans nationally. The ‘victim’ McWhorter writes is therefore recognized generically as any “colored boy we saw pedaling undersized bikes with flat tires’(McWhorter. 22). But still, the diametric opposition emphasized in the infamous photo is telling: a white, male cop against a young Black boy. This cultural narrative permeated Birmingham society throughout the Jim Crow period and the Civil Rights movement.

While the opposition between demographics is symbolically captured in the photo of the young boy and the police dog, the antagonism of the Birmingham police force was more adamantly manifested through physical violence and philosophical apathy towards said violence. Glenn T. Eskew writes in "But For Birmingham “over the years the all-white Birmingham Police Department had developed a well-deserved reputation for brutality, especially against African Americans. In the eyes of local law enforcement, Black people were inferior beings, singular manifestations of a monolithic mass” (Eskew, 1993).

The all-white and male Birmingham police department inflicted terror on the Birmingham Black community.

Officers regularly beat Black suspects and many times fatalities occurred but were rendered “justifiable homicides”. “Police brutality like vigilante bombings represented manifestations of community-sanctioned violence in defense of the racial norm” (Eskew, 1993).

What is worse is that many seemed to not know or care why they were inflicting such prejudice and violence. McWhorter cites an incident on December 1, at the end of 1955. A Black seamstress was riding the bus home from work.

The driver, J. Fred Blake ordered her to give up her seat to a white man who had gotten on the bus after her. Instead, the woman merely moved from the aisle seat to the window seat, a crime for which Blake called the cops. “When two policemen arrived, the seamstress asked, “Why do you push us around?” One of them replied, “I don’t know,” and then took her to jail”. Comparatively, this story does not depict the inhumane violence inflicted upon Blacks, but it does demonstrate the ominous apathy of the police officers. The demographic uniformity in the law enforcers allowed for an ignorant conformity of the cultural violence towards and oppression of Blacks. (Eskew, 1993).

However, the unlawful violence towards Blacks led the African-American community to fight for integration of Black police officers to diversify the enforcement demographic. A study done by Bryan Kessler titled, *White, Black, and Blue: The Battle Over Black Police, Professionalization, and Police Brutality in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963-1979*, tracks the integration of Black officers in Birmingham. Following the lack of action with the 16th Street Baptist bombing in September of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. returned to Birmingham on October 7th, 1963. He combined his and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) efforts with Shuttlesworth and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). The lack of Birmingham’s administrative response, “the ministers soon focused their energies on the integration of the police force, a longtime goal of Shuttlesworth and the ACMHR” (Kessler, 2012).

In a statement to the city administration, the ministers demanded the appointment of twenty-five Black police officers “within the next two weeks” and suggested a “face-to-face meeting” with the city council about the topic and others.

King threatened a “larger and more determined” march on the city if these requests went unmet. In an article in the *Birmingham News* on October 8, 1963, the city council “ponders negro police.” George Seibels, the councilman over the Committee of Public Safety, and the city council responded to King and Shuttlesworth and their respective groups’ requests. They forcefully contended that “action, if any, will be within the framework of our civil service laws” (*Birmingham News*, 1963).

As Kessler traces, from there two separate petitions for Black policemen appeared as ads in the *Birmingham News* and *Birmingham Post-Herald*. A petition on “Birmingham’s Moment of Crisis: A Statement of Concern and Conviction” contained 117 signatures of distinguished leaders in the Black community. Fighting for Black representation in the police force, the petition statement read:

“Our churches and homes have been bombed, and no one has been charged for the bombing. Our children have been wounded and killed, and no murderer has been convicted. Therefore, we fear for our lives and the lives of our families. We are forced to stand guard at our homes. Negro citizens find it extremely difficult to trust the agents of law enforcement—local, state, or federal.”

Finally, on March 30, 1966, *The Birmingham Daily News* read “City Hires First Negro Policemen.” The report read:

“Police Chief Jamie Moore today announced the hiring of the first Birmingham Negro police officer and indicated that a second will probably be employed on Thursday. The first of his race to join the Birmingham Police Department effective today is Leroy Stover, 33, of 45 Ninth Avenue North. The second Negro who was certified by the Personnel Board as eligible for appointment as patrolman is Johnny Johnson. Chief Moore said in all probability Johnson will be hired effective Thursday.”

The job transition for Stover was far from easy. He faced discrimination and racism from the other white policemen from day one. Remembering his first day on the job, Stover recalled in his biography, *Leroy Stover*, that when he walked into the “everybody moved to the other side” (Powell, 2013).

He recounted that when his partner on the first day was asked if “they put that ‘N’ with you?” he replied, “Yeah, but he ain’t gonna last long”. The police acted out of shame for their hiring of a Black police officer.

Not only did the white community react strongly, but also the Black community. Towards the beginning of his policing, Stover would primarily infiltrate illegal card games, gambling houses, and bootleg operations.

He would have to call in white officers to make the arrests. He said the other Black people “got madder at me than the white policemen. I guess they thought I was just snitching on them” (Powell, 2013). Perhaps because for so long the Black and White communities in Birmingham perceived the police force as a wholly white operation, the sight of a Black officer felt like a betrayal to the Black community. They may have viewed Stover as joining the ‘enemy’. Furthermore, since White police officers had been the perpetrators of racial terror, prejudice, violence, and injustice, Stover’s joining felt like a cruel treason.

While Stover and other preliminary Black police officers were necessary for Black representation in law enforcement, they were also met with distrust from the Black community for their perceived association with past agents of racial terror. Because the demographics of the police force for so long were solely white, law enforcement became intrinsically tied to race in the minds of Birmingham citizens. ‘Firsts’, like Stover, excruciatingly made the steps towards deconstructing faulty preconceived notions that were integral for the process towards a civilization of equality and equity.

Unfortunately, as demonstrated by George Floyd and many others’ murders indicated, we have much further to go. Racial inequalities still exist in the fabric of law enforcement and judicial processes. We will need many more souls like Stover’s to speak out, strive towards justice, and take more first steps.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

AMANDA PRITCHARD, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

To understand Birmingham, we must examine our past to create a more beautiful tomorrow to establish our present. In the 1940's Birmingham voices of the oppressed began their cry. Taking a stand in public places such as street cars, buses and the streets of the community affirmed African Americans wanted their voices to be heard and sent a message that their lives matter. The wartime economy brought about during World War II led to heavy migration to the cities, which increased the amount of riders on public transportation such as streetcars and buses.

This led to heightened racial tensions and robust conflict. The implementation of Jim Crow laws led to society's rationalization of unfair and unequal treatment of black citizens. An outrageous increase in brutality broke out because bus drivers and streetcar conductors were authorized to carry weapons such as blackjacks and guns. Tired of being treated less than and like complete garbage, when passenger Steven Edwards was ordered to the back of the bus to make room for a white passenger, he chose to leave the bus and demanded his fare back. For this, he was shot twice by the bus driver and two more times by a random male passenger. Edwards was fined \$50 for being found guilty of disorderly conduct while the shooters weren't cited for the encounter.

During this time clothes provided status. Black servicemen discovered empowerment through their uniforms. Those not in service jobs often moved North to earn a more decent and fair wage or enlisted in the armed forces. Seeking to be treated with dignity and respect they continued their mission of fair treatment into the 1950's (Encyclopedia of Alabama).

Beaming with potential for progress, 1950s Birmingham was bursting with black activism resisting policies supporting segregation. Community engagement came through leaders like Fred Shuttlesworth who started to emerge and on December 20, 1956, addressed the local Birmingham viewership via TV with a statement demanding desegregation of buses.

He wanted desegregated buses within six days or black members of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) would do it themselves. Five days later, white supremacists bombed Shuttlesworth's house. By the grace of God, Shuttlesworth and his family survived with only minor injuries.

The next day Shuttlesworth implored ACMHR members, of which he was president, to join him in protest against bus segregation. Boarding city buses, Shuttlesworth and his supporters took a stance and said they would no longer move to the back of the bus. This was a civil protest with police arresting twenty-one protesters. On February 14, 1957, Shuttlesworth alongside Reverend Martin Luther King and Reverend Ralph Abernathy founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in New Orleans.

On March 6, 1957, Shuttlesworth along with his wife, Ruby, went south to desegregate the white-only waiting room of the Birmingham train station. The police and a white mob that had assembled let the Shuttlesworths protest which led to high praise from Shuttlesworth to Robert Lindbergh, the then Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner. Sadly, the support system Shuttlesworth and Lindbergh had started was quickly severed with the June 1957 election of Bull Connor.

What the black community needed more than ever was safety in numbers. Active African Americans were needed to fight the brutal suppression of Bull Connor's wrath. Organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Americans (NAACP) offered opportunities for African Americans to engage within their communities. Specifically, in Birmingham, the black community needed continuity amongst powerful African Americans. A newer minister, at the time, Shuttlesworth was fiercely independent and determined to defeat desegregation.

Perhaps one of the most severe bouts of brutality in Birmingham between 1956-1958 happened on September 2, 1957.

A radical paramilitary derivative of the Ku Klux Klan called the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy abducted Judge Aaron, a young, black man from off the street, castrated him, and dropped his body on a highway. He survived and the hoodlums were arrested. The Klansmen pleaded not guilty but were sentenced to twenty years. The white community in Birmingham dismissed this atrocious occurrence as the dealings of a few extreme radicals and this detrimental event did nothing to change policies towards blacks in Birmingham.

Striving to generate reform, Shuttlesworth met with then Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor in hopes that he would start hiring black officers. Connor refused. Weeks after this interaction Shuttlesworth's church narrowly escaped a bombing thanks to a janitor who moved white supremacist J.B. Stoner's bomb away from the church and into the street. On October 27, 1957, three ministers from the Montgomery Improvement Association who organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott two years earlier joined ACMHR members at Fred Shuttlesworth's house to discuss putting into action a bus boycott.

The three ministers were arrested on suspicion of vagrancy. The events of this day played an important role in the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement. Vowing to arrest anyone involved in the bus boycott, Connor made good on his promise. Reverend Charles Woods was even arrested for encouraging his congregation to walk rather than ride buses.

A semi-victory was secured by Shuttlesworth for the community in 1958 when a judge ruled that, even though the bus company remained with the right to tell blacks to move to the back of the bus, those who refused were not breaking the law. This forward movement led to community engagement in the 1960's.

During such a tumultuous time, it was vital for the black community to find support systems and band together in the 60's. College students conducted sit-ins and the Freedom Riders of 1961 became more direct to work to achieve the challenges of overcoming racial discrimination and segregation.

During the most segregated time in our state and nation, Birmingham's youth united in an unorthodox way to march for the fight for racial equality. This became known as the Children's Crusade. James Bevel, a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference fostered the idea of bringing school-age children into the protests by helping Birmingham desegregate.

September 15, 1963, changed the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement with the tragic bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church ignited further rage and brought black and white community members together because of the devastation of losing four innocent little girls. A day later on September 16, 1963, President John F. Kennedy denounced the racial violence in Birmingham (Clark, 2023).

The thought process behind these divisive events in Birmingham motivated Congress to enact the Civil Rights Act, which accelerated the ending of Jim Crow laws and laid the groundwork to end discrimination based on race in hiring, promoting, and firing. The Civil Rights Act empowered the black Birmingham community by strengthening the administering of voting rights and desegregation of schools.



Young Birminghamians are arrested during the 1963 Children's March. (Bob Adelman)

CLearningtoLive.org
EncyclopediaofAlabama.org/article/Birmingham

<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/african-americans-birmingham-alabama-protest-segregation-1956-1958>

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August 25, 2023

COMMUNITY POLICING

KHADJIA SECK, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Woven into the fabric of societal norms are two distinct categories: the spoken and the unspoken. In the era of Jim Crow in the 1940s, explicit rules dictated where one could sit on a bus, which establishments were accessible, and even which employment options one could seek, forming the widely recognized spoken rules. Yet, amid the rhythm of daily life, there exists a set of subtle, unspoken rules that transcend cultural habits. Beyond global customs, such as audibly savoring one's food to convey appreciation to the cook, for instance, these unspoken guidelines took on profound significance during the civil rights era in Birmingham, Alabama.

They became a lifeline, not just shaping cultural norms, but serving as an ultimate defense mechanism for safeguarding marginalized communities. The rules explored here might lack a formal inscription in any legal document, but they were the silent architects of community policing strategies, devoted to ensuring the safety of those who adhered to their unwritten principles. As we embark on this exploration, a narrative unfurls—a story of resilience, adaptation, and an unwavering pursuit of safety amidst the inescapable challenges of systemic adversity.

To unravel the reasoning behind the existence of unspoken rules in the first place, one should delve into the experiences of individuals who grew up in Southside Birmingham during the civil rights movement. One testimony speaks of the reality of their situation, stating, "It was a rare weekend that passed that one or two folks maybe didn't get killed by the police... They'd call you and make you stick your head in the window, right, and then they would roll the window up and get your neck like this all the while calling you boy and nigger, 'where you going nigger' and then hit you on your head. You were lucky if that was all you got away with. You know, they'd beat people to death" (Resident Interview, 1995).

Another disturbing account reveals how kids coined red cop cars as 'buckets of blood,' as police kept clubs in their cars to beat Black children seen in the wrong neighborhood, regardless of age.

The unsettling imagery of red cop cars being labeled 'bucket of blood' by kids, due to the police's readiness to wield clubs and mete out violence, underscores how even the youngest members of the community were fully aware of the potential dangers posed by law enforcement (Resident Interview, 1995).

Exploring the deep impact of community policing during the civil rights era requires a closer examination of how these practices affected children, molding their views of authority and embedding lasting fears of law enforcement; after all, these children later grew up to be the people who went on to share the stories with those of today. As recounted in the narratives from individuals who grew up in Southside Birmingham, the pervasive fear tactic employed by Black parents, warning misbehaving children that "the police gonna get you," exemplifies the psychological toll on these young minds (Resident Interview, 1995). This fear not only creates a tangible sense of dread but also marks an experience that colors their understanding of safety and protection.

Moreover, the chilling account of confiscating pocket knives from children during essential marches adds an unsettling layer to the narrative, as it was stated, "They pass the basket and asked everybody to put their pocket knife in the basket and if you got any weapons." (Resident Interview, 1995). This raises questions about the necessity of arming children for their protection and the grim reality that such measures were considered genuinely crucial for their safety. These experiences collectively contribute to a traumatic narrative for children, instilling not only a fear of the police but also a sense of vulnerability and the need for self-protection from a very young age.

The psychological shift in the psyche of Black children is illuminated by the analogy of fearing monsters or the unknown. The comparison provides the magnitude of the trauma, emphasizing that the fear isn't solely about the actual phenomena but stems from the realization that parents, typically the protectors, are equally powerless in the face of police brutality.

As children witness their parents cowering alongside them in the presence of law enforcement, a profound and lasting imprint is left on their psyche, teaching them, from a tender age, that the police are not guardians but entities to be feared. This narrative of childhood fear and vulnerability further relays the intricate layers of community policing during the civil rights era and its enduring impact on the collective psyche of Black communities.

"I'd rather kill you myself than let the white folks kill you." This powerful declaration, uttered by a Southside Birmingham parent to their child during the Jim Crow era (Resident Interview, 1995), unveils profound internal struggles within Black communities. It serves as an embodiment of a unique form of policing—one born out of a desperate attempt to shield loved ones from the horrors inflicted by systemic oppression. In stark contrast to the challenges faced by white communities, this statement illuminates an additional, deeply poignant dimension of Black existence. Each syllable echoes the heart-wrenching truth of a people trapped in the grip of systemic oppression, forced to grapple with moral quandaries that no individual should endure; proving the relentless battle for autonomy and protection within a deeply entrenched system of inequality.

Black people possess an innate ability to triumph amidst the harshest environments, face the toughest regimes, and confront the fiercest adversaries, all while holding hearts of unparalleled gold. This enduring spirit, a beacon through centuries of struggle, stands as a testament to the resilience and strength of a people whose history is marred by adversity but defined by triumph.

As we reflect on the multifaceted aspects of the civil rights movement, it becomes evident that its success was reliant on numerous interconnected cogs—boycotts, marches, allies—all crucial components in the machinery of change. Yet, at the core of this intricate system lay an indispensable element: unity within the Black community.

Unlike any other force, the collective strength of individuals bound by a shared struggle emerged as the pioneers of progress. In a time when even congregating freely was once denied, the power of community and the unrelenting commitment to each other became Black people's most significant triumph.

Through the struggles and triumphs, the relentless pursuit of justice and equality, the enduring legacy of the civil rights era is not some chapter in history; it is a testament to the unyielding power of unity and the spirit of a people who, against all odds, continue to triumph with hearts set ablaze. We must not only acknowledge the scars but also salute the enduring spirit that emerged, resilient and unbroken, from the depths of adversity. As we navigate the complexities of the past, may these lessons of solidarity be carried forward, recognizing that collective strength is the foundation upon which future triumphs will be built.

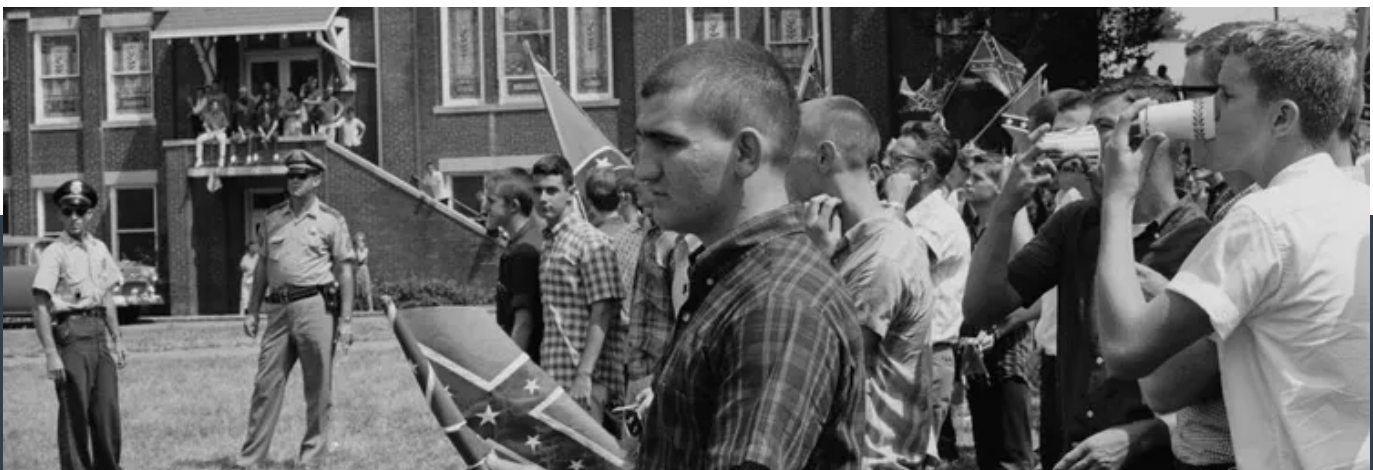
Resident Interview (1995). Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: Oral History Project (pp. 4)

Resident Interview (1995). Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: Oral History Project (pp. 8)

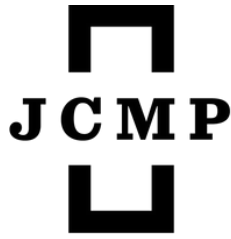
Resident Interview (1995). Interview. Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: Oral History Project (pp. 9)

Resident Interview. (1995). Interview. Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: Oral History Project (pp. 13)

Resident Interview. (1995). Interview. Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: Oral History Project (pp. 16)



A crowd of students at Woodlawn High School in Birmingham, Alabama, flying the Confederate flag in opposition to the start of The Birmingham Campaign, May 1963. Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images



**JEFFERSON COUNTY
MEMORIAL PROJECT**

Section 2:

Evolution of Societal Structures in Jefferson County, Alabama

The South. No other region of the country bears as much responsibility, as much shame, as the states where slavery and then segregation once flourished and dominated. The most famous images of Jim Crow segregation are indelible, unforgettable: Separate bathrooms. Separate water fountains. Separate schools. While Jim Crow laws spread throughout the country with force, African Americans were forbidden to enter public parks, theaters, restaurants without obeyed laws that segregated society. Segregated waiting rooms in bus and train stations were the norm, as well as building entrances, elevators, cemeteries, even amusement-park cashier windows. Laws forbade African Americans from living in white neighborhoods. Segregation was enforced for public pools, phone booths, hospitals, asylums, jails and residential homes for the elderly and handicapped. Some states required separate textbooks for Black and white students. Marriage and cohabitation between white and Black people was strictly forbidden in most Southern states. It was not uncommon to see signs posted at town and city limits warning African Americans that they were not welcome.

HOUSING & COMMERCE

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During the Civil Rights Era, many people believed in the phrase “separate but equal.” This phrase “separate but equal” originated in the Supreme Court Case *Plessy v. Ferguson* where it was ruled constitutional for there to be separate but equal facilities for black and white citizens. Although African-American citizens and white citizens did remain separate, they were not equal at all. When looking at housing and commerce in Jefferson County during this time, there was a clear racially motivated system that always favored the white citizens in every way.

Housing can be defined as the brick-and-mortar locations where people live and their surrounding community. Commerce can be defined as any business in the area and what products they sell. From the available food and shopping options, housing, and even school systems, African American citizens were always at a disadvantage just for being black.

The systematic process that actively discriminated against African-American citizens affecting their communities is known as redlining. Instead of slavery, racism became systematic where the majority of issues African Americans faced were created by the government and upheld by the law. According to New York Times author Candance Jackson, redlining can be defined as “racial discrimination of any kind in housing originating from government maps that outlined areas where Black residents lived and were therefore deemed risky investments” (Jackson, 2021).

Local officials would draw a map consisting of their entire territory. Areas where African Americans lived were identified in red, thus the term “redlining” being born. Due to these areas being labeled as “risky” investors would not put their money into these communities thus affecting the value of everything in it. This process directly affected not only their access to better items but also their health and access to a better future.

From 1940-1979, the median population in Jefferson County was 551,240 with the population having a steady increase during this time. Many working-class families fled to Jefferson County as it was a booming opportunity to work in iron or steel.

Although many of the families consisted of working-class individuals, residents had a drastically different quality of life simply based on their race. Many African Americans were trapped in a lower economic class with little to no opportunity to advance higher due to systematic racism.

The effects of redlining have affected the housing market for African American citizens the longest as it was the original target. The process of creating maps with redlining began in the late 1930s as a part of the New Deal (Jackson, 2021). This program issued government-insured mortgages for homeowners to help them not foreclose due to the Great Depression. Parameters were added to determine who could qualify for this assistance based on a ranking scale from least risky to most risky. The areas labeled as most risky not surprisingly consisted of primarily black neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, due to these neighborhoods being labeled as the most risky, many businesses did not want to establish themselves in this area. This led to African Americans not having access to higher quality stores including groceries, clothing items, and even entertainment options. According to a study done by Urban Food Project, it has been estimated that around 88,000 residents in Birmingham are living in “food deserts” and the majority of all these residents are people of color (Pink, 2018). Food deserts can be described as places where there is limited access to healthy food in the community.

For many families of color, something as simple as a smoothie or organic produce was not available in their community and to get these items, they had to drive to the other side of town which would be then considered the “upper class” that consisted of majority white residents. A popular grocery store option for those in food deserts is Food Giant. Food Giant is a smaller-scale grocery store and can only be found in low-income areas. The options in this store do not consist of high-quality foods and advertise that they accept WIC and food stamps which are both government-funded forms of payment for food.

Food Giant is known for its popular bundle deal “Pick 5” where customers can choose 5 options of frozen meat for only \$19.99. Other popular options sold in this store consist of chitterlings (pig intestines), Souse Meat (deli meat consisting of pig snout, tongue, and liver), and pigs feet. It has been found that the high consumption of pork leads to many health issues including cancer (Andrei, 2023). Other options for purchasing food in these areas are limited to corner stores, locally-owned cafes, and fast-food restaurants. Areas like Mountain Brook and Hoover have a completely different experience when it comes to access to food as they had more access to stores that only sold healthier options to their consumers such as Publix.

When it comes to commerce in Jefferson County, Birmingham was one of the largest cities in America during the 1930s-1940s as many people came to the “Magic City ” for economic opportunities in iron and/or steel. Due to the huge economic growth in this area, Eastwood Village was built and opened in 1960 just months after Charlottetown Mall in North Carolina opened making it the second enclosed shopping mall in the Southeastern United States. At this time there were only five malls in the nation, and with Eastwood Mall being 300,000 square feet, it was considered the third largest mall at this time (Gray, 2015). This mall was located between Mountain Brook and Irondale, both two predominantly white cities during this time.

Eastwood Mall was considered the “Merchandise City of the Future” as it was a huge opportunity at the time. This mall consisted of 43 stores with around 2,200 parking spaces for its consumers.

They were known for keeping the temperature at 73 degrees and having lots of plants to decorate the mall simulating springtime year-round in Alabama (Wells, 2011). Some stores available to consumers were J.C. Penny, Kroger, Eastwood Barbershop, Gordon’s Quality Jewelers, Kmart, and even an ABC Package Store (Wells, 2011).

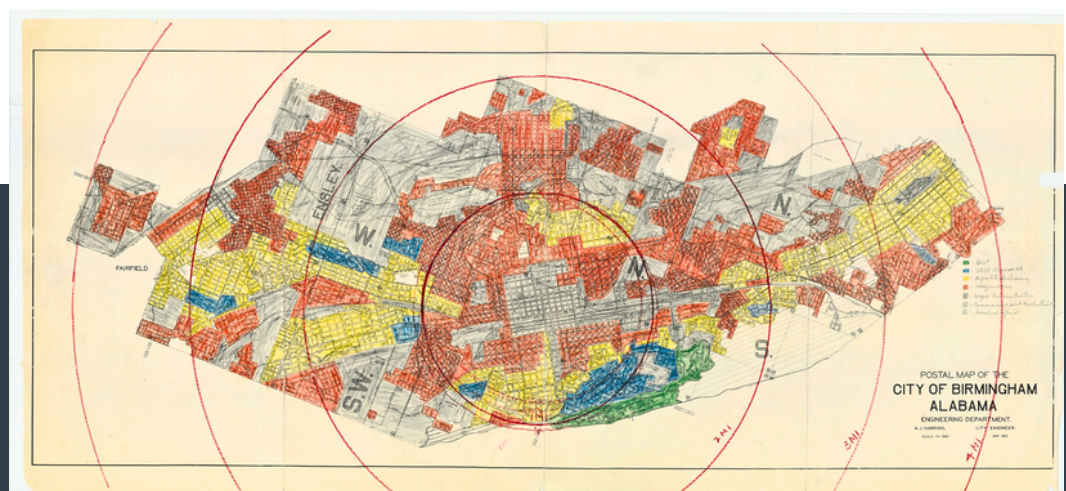
These big box stores were only just the beginning of Eastwood Mall as 6 years later they expanded making the mall 750,000 square feet. This “one-stop shop” now housed a movie theater and a popular retailer Pizitz that was two stories tall. This addition gave locals another place to watch movies as the Alabama Theater was the most popular place at the time. As the mall was built during the Jim Crow era, African Americans did not have access to this amazing mall. African Americans did not get a mall in their community until late 1969 when Western Hills Mall was opened on the other side of town in Bessemer.

Western Hills Mall was inspired by Eastwood Mall offering similar shopping experiences to African Americans in the area. They also followed a season theme as Western Hills Mall was advertised to be “June all year long.” This mall was not as grand as Eastwood Mall as it was only 500,000 square feet and did not have some of the same amenities as its muse such as a food court, a movie theater, and many other major retailers that were housed in Eastwood Mall.

When opened, Western Hills Mall consisted of two major retailers JCPenney and Loveman’s. Other stores included Jo-Ann’s Fabrics, Gordan’s Jewelry, Butler’s Shoes, and Baskin Robbins.

This 1930s Birmingham city map ranked neighborhoods by Jim Crow-influenced value:

- Best
- Still Desirable
- Definitely Declining
- Hazardous
- Negro Concentrations



Although there was no food court, stores such as Woolworth's, Britling Cafeteria, Mr. D's (now known as Captain D's), and Pizitz Bake Shop all had food options. Unfortunately, this mall has been on a constant decline since its opening with major retailers pulling out of the mall.

As seen in the two biggest malls in Birmingham, there was a stark difference between the quality of items and experience for both African-American residents and white residents. With Jim Crow laws and Black Codes being in full effect in Jefferson County, hatred and segregation were at an all-time high during this time. White residents did not want African American residents utilizing the same spaces and items they utilized. Everything was segregated from where they could eat, sleep, drink, park, worship, and even be buried.

The effects of redlining not only directly impacted the value of housing and commerce opportunities in African-American neighborhoods but directly affected every element of their future. Due to the low value placed on African American neighborhoods, schools received little funding so there were not many opportunities for advanced education. African Americans struggled with long-term health issues as the food they had access to was killing them. Also, many other community properties such as parks, roads, and schools were run down as no one wanted to invest in "high-risk" neighborhoods. On the rare occasions where African Americans were allowed to utilize the same resources as their white counterparts, they were often served very last and still did not receive the same attention as others.

The effects of redlining can still be seen long after its origination as much of Jefferson County is still segregated. There are still better food, housing, and education options in communities where there is a primarily white population than in those with a primarily African-American population. African American residents in Jefferson County still struggle with living in food deserts and having fewer economic opportunities for growth as systematic racism is rooted in the history of Jefferson County and remains prevalent today.

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Bruce Davidson "Damn the Defiant!" Arrest of a demonstrator. Birmingham, Alabama, 1963.
© Bruce Davidson | Magnum Photos

RACIAL CONFRONTATION

ODYSSEY CROWELL, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

For this report, racial confrontation will be defined as any interaction between the Birmingham Police Department and the Black community within Jefferson County during the 1940s-1970s. Additionally, we will be reviewing the confrontations between White and Black citizens in the area. These racial confrontations that we will be discussing include killings, bombings, riots, beatings, interrogations, campaigns, as well as individual and community interactions.

The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project (CRRJ) at Northeastern University's School of Law provided demographic findings for Jefferson County from the 1930s to the 1970s. From their findings they found that from 1932-1968 "96% of those killed by police during this time were African American. To CRRJ's knowledge, all of the officers involved in the killings were white". The majority of those killed were African-American men, and the average of the victims was 20-39 years of age.

What is more daunting to these statistics would be the reasoning for African Americans who were killed and harmed in the 1940s-70s. Some you may have already heard of, but they include: not obeying an officer's command, self-defense, whistling, speaking, owning businesses, walking at night, Lastly, and most importantly: the reasoning for African American deaths was simply for being Black. American historian and professor Dr. John Henrik Clarke once stated that in the eyes of the majority "We outside of God's Grace" (Snipes, 1996). This means that since the African diaspora historically was painted as inferior to God's plan, this allowed the enslavement, mistreatment, and oppression of Black individuals without the need to feel any guilt. The reasoning for these murders was simply based on the "morality" of the immoral, and the righteousness of the unrighteous.

At one point in history, Birmingham, Alabama was known for its abundance of materials for the Industrial Age- It was the Pittsburgh of the South, the Magic City. However, Birmingham coined another name for itself: "Bombingham."

Yes, Birmingham had an abundance of iron and coal, but it also had an abundance of bombings wrecking the community. When a person thinks of Birmingham, Alabama, they may think of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombings that ended in the death of four girls. However, Birmingham had more bombings than documented.

Fred Shuttlesworth, a preacher, and social justice advocate during the movement had his church and home bombed. There are many other homes of civil rights activists that were bombed, but it doesn't only pertain to the Black civil rights movement. There was also an attempted bombing of the Temple Bethel in Birmingham, however, it did not detonate.

The Birmingham Police Department, as well as many other police departments in the state, had racist (if not Klu Klux Klan members) within their departments. This leaves no other question as to why a number of these bombings were not documented or investigated thoroughly during the 1940s through the Seventies (Brimner 2022). The bombings themselves were a tactic, along with other maneuvers, to stop and scare the civil rights movement from continuing.



Fred Shuttlesworth standing outside his house after it was bombed.
© Alabama Department of Archives and History

It would be wrongful not to include the story of 20-year-old Bonita Carter, a Birmingham girl who was shot and killed in June of 1979. Her reason for being shot and killed: for being there and Black. The news of her wrongful murder led to Black demonstrations within the community; however, it also preempted counter-demonstrations by the Klu Klux Klan (Cory, 1979). The death of Bonita Carter eventually led to the election of Birmingham's first Black mayor- Richard Arrington Jr- in October of 1979.

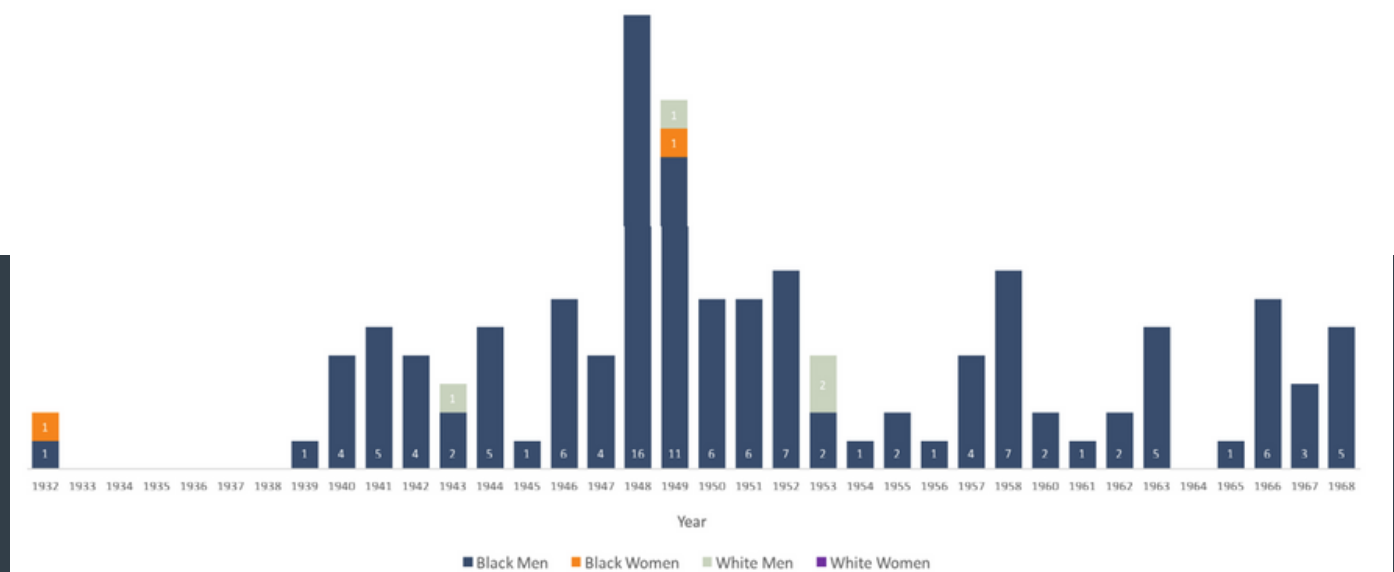
On the topic of race relations between Black and White civilians (outside of the BPD) within Jefferson County and Birmingham, it would be out of the ordinary if there was cohesiveness and unity. Nevertheless, like many places within the Southern United States. Birmingham was (and still is) segregated at its core. By this you can look at the residential areas, Birmingham, AL has an extreme and overt mapping of redlining and racial zoning. Many of the black neighborhoods are separated from white neighborhoods by the many railroads that run through the city. This racial zoning from as early as the 1930s has continued to impact these same Black communities today whether socially, physically, and/or economically (Tindal, 2021). This is one of the key factors in why we have historically Black neighborhoods and historically White neighborhoods.

If individual and community race relations were well between Black and White civilians, you would not have this many bombings, lynchings, and KKK rallies.

If you had good race relations within the city of Birmingham, it would not be called Bombingham; it would not be the place where Martin Luther King Jr. would be writing a letter from jail; it would not be the epicenter of Bull Connors' reign.

If race relations were well between Black and White civilians, then White citizens of Birmingham would have voiced against the atrocities of the Birmingham Police Department, the public safety committee, and the mayor. Moreso, they would not have even voted for them. However, they didn't, and it should be that the silence and inaction speak for itself on the stance and the racial climate between Blacks and Whites in that era.

The Media representation of racial confrontation has changed throughout the years. As any form of media does, as the moralities of the general body of people begin to come into question, the limelight changes to fit the majority agenda. Let me clarify by using some examples. During the times of slavery, it was normal to see ads in the paper of enslaved Black individuals for sale, or a cash reward if they were caught while running away. However, when the abolitionist movement started to pick up, the media began to change to how slavery was inhumane and unethical. In essence, when the majority (White individuals) begin to care, then it isn't as much of a struggle to get the word out.



Police Homicides in Jefferson County, Alabama, 1932-1968
 Civil Rights & Restorative Justice Project, Police Homicides 1932-1968 by Race and Sex, Northeastern University, July 2020

Other notable examples would be the Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 and the infamous “Bloody Sunday” in Selma in 1965. News of these events spread like wildfire, due to the media’s publishing of it. The Birmingham Children’s Crusade was caught on film intentionally to show the worst of segregation in America. While the Children’s Crusade had of large impact on the Civil Rights Movement and its progression, “Bloody Sunday” showed the world the gruesomeness and brutality of Alabama police against Black individuals. John Lewis’ testimony also captured the horrors of the march:

“And about a minute or more Major Cloud ordered the Troopers to advance, and at that time the State Troopers took their position, I guess, and they moved forward with their clubs up over their—near their shoulder, the top part of the body; they came rushing in, knocking us down and pushing us....At that time I was hit and knocked down.”-John Lewis (The National Archives,1965)

Images of tear gas, batons, high-pressure hoses, and police dogs shocked the world; leading President Johnson to sign into law the Voting Rights Act six months later. This documentation of racial confrontations then allowed the foundation for media coverage of police brutality today.

There was overt police brutality and force, but there was also the cunning “Red Squads”. In the 1930s-1970s these Red Squads were considered an “anti-radical task force” in Birmingham, Alabama that would beat and interrogate individuals at secret locations. There was also evidence of red squads in northern areas, most commonly found in the city of Chicago. These red squads essentially were spies that were set to root out subversive organizations in the United States. They were tasked with targeting potential communists and leftists; subsequently during the civil rights movement Black leaders and activists were the focus of red squads and FBI probes.

One example is the Black Panther Party, where the police would often retrieve information and target them because of their political beliefs. These red squads would have a co-intel probe with the FBI to discredit civil rights organizations to make it look like they were overthrowing democracy in the United States (Ingalis, 1981).

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Birmingham school children are sprayed with fire hoses during The Children’s Crusade in Jefferson County, Alabama Frank Rockstroh/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

SHY JENKINS, JEFFERSON STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Public transportation has played a major role in the segregation of the city of Birmingham. As the black citizens had to fight for equal rights, and their lives, they even had to fight for things as petty as a seat on a bus that they paid a fare to be on; the same fare that others paid without having to face the same difficulties due to a lighter hue of skin. Regardless of how minute of a problem a seat on a bus may seem, success in this fight resulted in a major shift in segregation. The first form of public transportation in Birmingham was in 1884 and it was called the Birmingham Street Railway Company.

A recurring pattern throughout history, and the teaching of it, is the neglect to state how harshly black people were treated. While researching, many sources would glaze over how much of a struggle it was for the black citizens of Birmingham to experience a decent trip on the bus with no issues; meanwhile, when testimonies were read of black Birmingham citizens who experienced this period they shared that these occurrences happened almost every trip. When sources didn't undermine the black experience it was sometimes left out in totality.

Some sources account for a period of black people using public transportation in Birmingham and in opposition there are narratives of black Birmingham natives who claim they were not even allowed to use public transportation during that time, and if they were allowed they would be walking on eggshells because an altercation could result in jail or their life being taken. The controversy surrounding these buses caused lots of chaos and turmoil and even when the laws changed the white people didn't, which caused more disputes. However, there is a saying that says "Every bad situation will have something positive. Even a dead clock shows the correct time twice a day." and that is the story of Worcy Crawford, the first black bus driver.

In 1940 the most recent bus driving around Birmingham was a GMC bus, referred to as the "old look" bus. The fare would be ten cents. Around this time buses were segregated and black people would be required to sit in the back section of the bus.

The separation on these buses would lead to many altercations, some being life-threatening for black citizens. Around this time there would be as many as fourteen or more reports a month to police of there being a disagreement involving a black passenger. These arguments would start for several reasons similar to black passengers refusing to move out of the "whites only" section or black passengers refusing to make extra room for white passengers who boarded a crowded bus after they had already been on it; even if the black passenger was in the "colored" section.

These affairs could end in many ways, the black passenger would sometimes get kicked off the bus but if police were called it could lead to the passenger being arrested or be as a result of the passenger being killed most of the time by the conductor of the bus. The majority of police reports would claim that the black passenger was "violent" in their actions leading the issue to escalate although many times that was false. This experience was no different for black men who fought in WWII; they faced much disrespect even after fighting for the Country. Even when segregation laws changed the experience for black passengers didn't.

In 1960 a new GMC bus hit the streets of Birmingham which was referred to as the "fishbowl" due to the six-piece rounded windshield, similar to the windshield of the busses we see today. Around the same time *Boynton v. Virginia* had passed making it illegal to segregate public transportation because it violated the Interstate Commerce Act which forbade discrimination in interstate passenger transportation. Following this monumental win for the black community the law was ignored and segregation was still pushed. In an attempt to test the buses and stations' compliance with the Supreme Court rulings, on May 4, 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began integrated freedom rides through the south which led to many riots and protests because of the pushback from white passengers. Different groups and individuals continued these freedom rides and it had similar results.

This drew national attention and put pressure on the federal government to enforce the law. The struggle for equality was far from over and empowered someone to come up with their solution.

Public transportation was not a common field of work for black men to go in, mostly due to discrimination. Worcy Crawford had humble beginnings as a driver; he was first hired to drive for a black baseball team called the “Ensley All-Stars”. At first, he would drive the players around in a truck but in 1932 he upgraded to a school bus to transport the players. He purchased this bus on Avenue V in Birmingham for two hundred and fifty dollars. This job opportunity sparked the entrepreneur in Worcy and he began doing public transportation services. By 1936 Worcy had purchased a second bus in Leeds; a Chevy bus priced at one hundred and fifty dollars. Worcy making this decision not only helped plenty of black people get around but it also helped them stay out of situations that endangered their lives that happened on the public transportation buses of Birmingham city.



Segregated cab service. Birmingham, Alabama, USA. 1963.
© Danny Lyon | Magnum Photos

Contradictory of public reports Donald Crawford, son of Worcy Crawford and author of the book that tells Worcy's story, Donald states that as far back as the 1950s the Greyhound and Trailway buses didn't charter to black people. After Worcy established his transportation business he began his attempt to get his license and at the licensing office was met with laughter and the comment, “Ain't no such thing as a nigger bus company.” (Donald M. Crawford, Sr., 2006). However, he found a loophole. He was told that the only tag that could be sold to him was for a church bus and that he had to have the bill of sale in the church's name to purchase said tag.

Crawford reached out to an attorney who helped him make the deal with the Trinity A.M.E. Church; they allowed him to put the bill of sale in their church's name. This act of racism allowed Worcy to pay one dollar and fifty cents rather than the twenty-two dollars it would cost for a commercial license.

Further benefits were that insurance rates for church buses were lower and the church didn't have to pay income tax which now included his bus and business. By the 1970s Worcy owned at least six buses providing black people jobs and worry-free travel. The pointless fight to keep the black community down empowered a black man and saved many black lives.

One example is the Black Panther Party, where the police would often retrieve information and target them because of their political beliefs. These red squads would have a co-intel probe with the FBI to discredit civil rights organizations to make it look like they were overthrowing democracy in the United States (Ingalls, 1981).

All in all the history of Birmingham public transportation is very eventful with many layers but was important in the journey toward liberation for black people in the South. A resource for the public became another obstacle to the black community in Birmingham and other places as well. However, public transportation served as a vehicle for social change in Birmingham. It allowed the black community to see laws and policies not only be changed but enforced due to their struggle, ultimately letting them know it was possible.

Every one of these stories is important because it has led us to where we are today and shows how black people had to fight in every aspect of life to be treated the same as the majority. It is important to remember that every story will be different because as the old saying states, there are two sides to every story, but the truth lies in between. It is our responsibility to educate ourselves because history such as this shows us how things meant for good can easily be used against people; also, how the very thing being used against you, like a seat on a Birmingham bus back in the day, can be the same thing that leads you to win your battle.

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RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION'S PARADOXICAL PLACE IN BIRMINGHAM'S BLACK COMMUNITY

JULIANA MINK, SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

Within the period 1940–1979, Birmingham's religious demographics and religious spaces played a paradoxical role in their relation to racial conflict. On one hand, religious spaces and churches provided a safe space of peace and community. On the other, racism was egregiously justified through religion in white churches of varying degrees of forcefulness. The complex nature of these two uses of religious spaces in the Jim Crow South resulted in two key uses of religious spaces. Perpetrated by this false religious justification of racism, Black churches were often the target of racial terror.

This was tragically portrayed through the infamous 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in September 1963. There were other racially charged attacks on religious spaces, such as the 1958 attempted bombing of Temple Beth-El. But despite the identification of Black and other minority churches as sites of racial terror, religious congregations also became a symbol of racial integration. The Billy Graham Greater Birmingham Crusade in 1964 was the largest interracial congregation in Birmingham's history at the time. Religious spaces in Birmingham were simultaneously symbols of peace and violence, separation and unity.

Long before the Civil Rights movement social and religious life centered around religious organization. This was true for much of southern culture, but especially for Black southern culture. In the 20th century, the 1940s, and beyond, the Church became a meeting place for Civil Rights marches.

The Church also generated Black leadership and became a place where Blacks could assert their control and establish their leaders. As Glenn Eskew writes in *The Alabama Christian Movement and the Birmingham Struggle for Civil Rights, 1956-1963*, "The church had always been an important institution in the Negro community.

Blacks could escape white domination within the confines of the sanctuary, for Blacks alone dominated this institution".

When Blacks owned the churches, they could control the ministers. This led to an occupation and leadership independent from white control, a relatively uncommon independence.

However, the relative freedom granted to ministers came with an increased responsibility to the community. As Eskew writes, the social power that Black ministers had led to the growth of the social gospel. "With an increase in Black demands after World War II came a simultaneous growth in the influence of the social gospel among Black ministers" (Eskew,1987). The Black ministers recognized changing attitudes within Black communities because of the war and their living conditions, leading to an embrace of the social gospel and the Black church generally.

Also following World War II, the Birmingham NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, saw significant growth. However, simultaneously, it had become "the target of white intimidation in response to the rising expectations of Blacks". As a result of Alabama's Attorney General John Patterson's seeking the NAACP's temporary injunction in state and federal courts, it was forced to close its offices across Alabama for nine years. But Fred Shuttlesworth, a Birmingham local civil rights activist and minister, decided that Birmingham's Blacks "could not afford to be without a voice or an organization through which they could secure legal assistance" (Eskew, 1987).

Shuttlesworth was concerned because the Civil Rights movement had begun to take a new direction following *Brown versus Board*, but Shuttlesworth feared that Birmingham Blacks "failed to grasp the significance of this decision." Subsequently, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) was formed. Shuttlesworth and other ministers continued to meet, planning events that would strengthen the ties of the religious and civil rights community.

On the day before the June 5 mass meeting, Shuttlesworth, a group of ministers, and other Black community leaders met to plan events. They decided that a “mass meeting would be a ‘Christian movement’ because, Shuttlesworth explained, ‘all our actions, thoughts and deeds would be first, foremost, and always Christian.’” (Eskew, 1987).

The following Tuesday evening on June 5, 1956, “more than 1,000 people overflowed the Sardis Baptist Church to hear Shuttlesworth, Pastor R. L. Alford, and Reverend N.H. Smith, Jr. among other speakers. The audience filled the 850-seat church and spilled outside on the lawn”. This event exemplifies the power of religious groups and spaces to influence the Black community and provide meeting spaces to generate passion and inspiration which would motivate the Civil Rights movement (Eskew, 1987)



Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth and founding members of ACMHR

However, these very religious aspects of the ACMHR turned some Blacks away from the new movement. Most Black ministers did not accept the new theology of the social gospel. Shuttlesworth, describing ministers such as Ware and McMurry, “said they refused to support the ACMHR because of ‘their old priestly philosophy of letting the Lord do it’ For the most part, only young ministers answered the community’s call for new leadership. The support of a minister in the movement usually implied the support of a congregation as well, so when Shuttlesworth and four other ministers accounted for a mass meeting, they anticipated the support of their congregation” (Eskew, 1987). This network of support created a dynamic within the Civil Rights movement intrinsically connected with a new form of religiosity.

Eskew notes this in *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. He says in Black communities, “Charismatic leaders expressed the local concerns for civil rights. They modified the institutional framework of the Black church and the shared religious culture of the Black community to create a new movement culture” (Eskew, 1993).

The new movement of intertwined religious language and social justice combined “with the influence of the social gospel created a new leadership in the Black community” as Eskew writes in *The Alabama Christian Movement...* (Eskew, 1987). The aforementioned religiousness of Birmingham’s Black community permeated the language of Civil Rights. Many perceived the conflict in Birmingham as a “fight between good and evil”.

Both Shuttlesworth and King are critical examples of this religious language. Both demonstrated the emotional power of highly religious civil rights language. Their “ability to ‘personify, symbolize, and articulate’” the Black civil rights movement linguistically intertwined religious images and themes and the men’s charisma, making them some of the most influential leaders of the civil rights movement (Eskew, 1987).

Their religious sentiments in no way implied an ignorance of the suffering and struggle involved in the fight for civil rights. There was a direct correlation between religious Black leaders and the suffering inflicted by racial terror. For example, during a Christmas service, “Instead of preaching Peace on Earth in his Christmas sermon, Shuttlesworth said: “If it takes being killed to get integration, I’ll do just the thing, for God is with me all the way.” At 9:40 Christmas night, someone lobbed six sticks of dynamite at the minister’s northside home.” (Eskew, 1987). This once again demonstrates the paradoxical correlation between religious leaders and spaces being people and places promoting safety and peace and the violent, hateful attacks on these people and places.

The most notable act of racial terror in a religious space was, of course, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing which occurred in September 1963.

The bomb killed four little girls and resulted in 22 non-fatal injuries. This moment was the quintessential symbol of the violent racism that plagued Birmingham. But only six months following the bombing, Billy Graham visited Birmingham. His crusade became the largest integrated event in Birmingham's history. The crusade was held on Easter Sunday afternoon in Legion Field on March 29, 1964. The planning of the event was headed by both white and Black ministers, already a meeting of integrative purposes. The gathering itself was "the largest crowd ever to gather in the state of Alabama for a service of worship" (Immediate Release, 1964).

Up to 40,000 people were in attendance according to an article in the Shades Valley Sun published April 4, 1964. The message promoted, "a way of life that prefers love to hate" (Shades Valley Sun, 1964). Not only was the crusade the largest crowd to ever gather, but for the first time in Birmingham's history, "people came and sat where they pleased. There had been integration on a cultural level among small audiences before, but never anything like this.

Before the event, Arthur Cook, the Crusade chairman, said of the integrated event, "Birmingham is ready for this step, we are looking forward, not back". Reverend Thomas Giltner, pastor of the First Christian Church, said in his platform prayer, "It is good to dwell in unity

and peace with one another. May this be a day of new hope and understanding for our beloved Birmingham". Because this historical event of integration occurred through a religious event, there was the common belief that, as a headline of the Shades Valley Sun stated, "Birmingham could lead America in a moral... reawakening" (Shades Valley Sun, 1964). Certainly, this event characterizes Birmingham's use of religious spaces and meetings to bring about unity, integration, and change.

The Civil Rights movement was and has continued to be intertwined with religious institutions. Religious leaders, spaces, language, and community were integral to the formulation and perpetuation of the fight for equality in Birmingham. However, I wonder if there is an implicit threat of deconstruction because of this connection. As church numbers now dwindle, we no longer observe large religious gatherings, such as the Billy Graham crusade, that unify us communally.

As religion's role in the narrative of social justice diminishes, we must make clear that pursuing social justice does not necessarily depend on religious institutions, despite religion's role in civil rights movements in the past. While the institution of religion is influential beyond bounds in Birmingham, we must continue to pursue racial and social equity for equity's sake.

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The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church served as the headquarters of the Birmingham Campaign, which was organized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth in 1963. Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

CITY MANAGEMENT & POLITICS

AMANDA PRITCHARD, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham has woven a rich and imbibed political fabric. In 1940 Birmingham's population was 267,583. 1942 saw the establishment of the Birmingham Historical Society. From the years of 1945 to 1963, homes, churches and businesses throughout the black community endured 60 bombings, which were strategically designed to create fear through intimidation, and kill black people and anyone who had the gall to stand for this cultural injustice. It was during this time Birmingham became known as Bombingham.

On June 29, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which allowed Interstate highway construction to begin. Historical research shows that this expansion created a great divide which further segregated communities. During a time that could have been used for the enrichment of its surrounding areas, the construction of I-20 and I-65 created non-equitable and negative impacts throughout its surrounding communities.

In the 1950's and 60's Birmingham was known as the most segregated city in the entire United States of America. Inhumane and unjust rules were mandated such as black and white people drinking from separate water fountains and lunch counters and African Americans being banned from working in the very places where they shopped due to debilitating, discriminating, and disgusting Jim Crow laws. Those who opposed these laws and fought for human and civil rights were punished by being harassed, arrested, beaten, or lost their jobs.

Alabama's Governor at the time, George Wallace, avowed in his inaugural address in January 1963 that he would safeguard Alabama against all efforts to integrate. Going to an extreme level of stating, "Segregation today—segregation tomorrow—segregation forever." Meanwhile, in our very backyard, brutal Bull Connor was highly favored to take on a possible new role as Public Safety Commissioner in April 1963. Newly elected Birmingham Councilmen supported Connor's endeavors overseeing the Birmingham police and fire

departments as the Public Safety Department Head. They supported his segregationist agenda even though citizens did not, as Connor's many attempts at being elected Mayor of Birmingham and Governor of Alabama were denied. (1963)

Also, in April 1963 Birmingham's local government made the move from a commission to a mayor-council form of government. Hence, the aforementioned new councilmen. Albert Boutwell was the Birmingham Mayor in 1963 who ran against and defeated Bull Connor by 7,982 votes Connor attributed what he called a 10,000-strong Negro bloc vote" to Boutwell's win due to his more moderate stance. There was optimism surrounding Boutwell's election in local newspaper coverage, but Dr. Martin Luther King's aides did not believe the hype.

Fred Shuttlesworth deemed him as, "just a dignified Bull Connor." Just as King's aides predicted, Boutwell was no advocate of their mission. Boutwell made it known that he would not tolerate violence and declared to arrest, punish, or jail anyone who heeded his warning by disturbing the peace or putting Birmingham citizens in danger. Going against the more moderate platform he ran on after Boutwell was elected, he urged black and white citizens to ignore the movement in Birmingham.

On Good Friday, April 12, 1963, King was imprisoned for violating desegregation laws. There he wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," where called Boutwell a segregationist not as harsh as Connor, but similar. When the Birmingham Campaign ended on May 10, 1963, due to a truce between movement leaders and Birmingham's prominent businessmen, Boutwell later told members of the Birmingham School Board that it was not in the best interest of our school children to integrate. Boutwell served one term from 1963-1967 because he lost his run for reelection.

Also, during this time, some of the worst images of brutality and inhumane treatment emerged due to the way Birmingham police officers treated movement marchers.

Demonstrators were subjected to firemen's water hoses with a water pressure of 50 to 100 pounds. If hoses didn't harm the demonstrators, police attacked dogs with vicious bites. This occurred during The Children's Crusade in Kelly Ingram Park in the heart of downtown Birmingham.

The Children's Crusade took place on May 2, 1963, when over one thousand students skipped school to meet at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and march to various locations, such as Birmingham City Hall, sit-ins at lunch counters, or peacefully protest in the downtown shopping district. The marches were daily for almost an entire week. While the march was for the most part peaceful, the first day, it did not remain that way. Television crews and newspapers documented and filmed these young demonstrators who were hosed down and severely harmed by police dogs. While viewers around the nation were outraged by the horrific scenes they were witnessing on the news, locally the chairman of the community relations committee of the Birmingham City Council, Don Hawkins, praised the work of law enforcement during the demonstrations (Birmingham Post-Herald, 1963).

These broadcasts made their way to the White House which moved President John F. Kennedy to put into action support for federal legislation in enacting the Civil Rights Act of 1964. During that unpredictable political climate, The Children's Crusade served as an enormous catalyst for change. Not only locally in Birmingham but regionally and effected policy change nationally.

In 1970 Birmingham created the One Great City political campaign. This was done in the hope of bringing together the various municipalities and unincorporated areas of Jefferson County under one united metropolitan government. Had the campaign succeeded Birmingham would be a much larger city that's limits went from Lake Purdy to Port Birmingham, and from Graysville and Gardendale to the Cahaba River. While some made strides culturally, others remained with the thought process of their predecessors because former Birmingham City Councilman Alan Drennen was all for the merger because he thought by 1980 Birmingham would be politically controlled and operated by members of what he referred to as "the colored race."



Rev. Ralph Abernathy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. jailed in the City of Birmingham, Circa 1936

An opponent of the campaign was the Jefferson County Mayors Association. Proponents were business leaders, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, and a survey showed that 65% of Over the Mountain citizens polled supported the campaign. One Great City never came to fruition due to a proposal to hold a county-wide referendum being allowed to die in committee in the Alabama State Senate during the 1971 Alabama legislative session.

In 1974 the Citizen Participation Plan was adopted, which reversed Birmingham's longtime standards of denying black citizens the chance to interact in their city's planning process. The 70s brought about change for Birmingham's black community and allowed black citizens to achieve a level of influence that had not been within reach before. 1979 saw Richard Arrington become Birmingham's first black mayor. (Connerly, 2005). He served for the next 20 years until 1999. His political career began in 1971 when he first ran for Birmingham City Council with the intent of making Birmingham, "a city of which all her people can be proud."

Winning the seat, he became the second African American to serve on the council. While on the council, Arrington pushed for a formal investigation of the shooting of a black suspect while he was in police custody. The hearing was inconclusive but paved the way for a deeper look into police procedure. Hoping to restore a bit of magic to Birmingham, Arrington went to work aligning the Birmingham business community with a mission of retooling the city's image and economy. Although campaigning was not his favorite thing, Birmingham's two major newspapers, Birmingham News and the Birmingham Post-Herald, and Birmingham native, lieutenant governor (at the time) George McMillan.

Under the age of Arrington, Birmingham's downtown expanded, the city added a record number of jobs, unemployment was at a record low and he led the charge to establish the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Arrington is remembered for his tireless work in helping Birmingham overcome its history of racial tension and discrimination.

Through evolving city management and different styles and ideals stepping stones for change have been laid out. For history to not repeat itself. It is necessary to truly and finally unite, learning from one another to generate progress for the black community. Culture, experience, and relating to one another. Finding common ground to not continue to allow hate to win, but for love to conquer all. The struggle and fight continue, but the goal since the 1940s, 50's, 60s, 70's, and beyond continues to be, to seek to make Birmingham once again, the Magic City.

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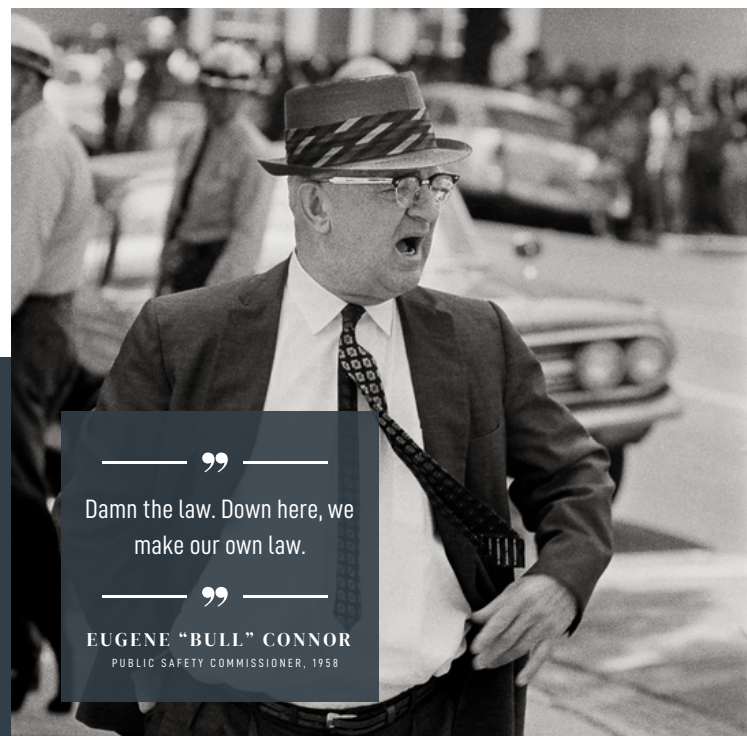
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“

Damn the law. Down here, we make our own law.

”

EUGENE "BULL" CONNOR
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSIONER, 1958

MEDIA

AMANDA PRITCHARD, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

Media in Birmingham, Alabama, and throughout our country from the 1940s to the 1970s equipped audiences with a powerful tool—knowledge. Broadcasts defined reality and allowed listeners and viewers to form their own opinions of what was truly happening in the Deep South. The struggle is still real, but a myriad of leaders laid the foundation intended to create an opportunity for a better future for the black community. This research provides a glimpse into the triumphs and challenges media provided in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, and 70's Birmingham.



Ed Chambers, a sportscaster with WEDR-AM 1220, 1950



Bill Robinson and Shirley Temple dance on stairs in "The Little Colonel" (1935 film)

RADIO

In the 1940s AM radio stations were popular amongst listeners in Birmingham. Frequencies such as WVOK were the state's first 50,000-watt station. The other two stations in town were WJLD and WTNB.

When WEDR 1220 AM went on the air on Sunday, September 4, 1949, it was hailed as the first "All-Negro" radio station in the South. In 1954 WJLD started exclusively targeting African-American listeners. ("WJLD") FM stations hit the airwaves in the late 40's in Birmingham. WAFM 99.5 and WBRC-FM 102.5 atop Red Mountain in 1947. WBCR broadcast at a power of 500,000 watts and was said to have been the most powerful FM broadcast station in the world. It lasted until June 1948 when WBRC found a new purpose for the station...on television.

By 1969 WENN-FM was the only black-oriented radio station in Birmingham that broadcast at night. (Wells, 2015)

MOVIES

In movies, such as *The Little Colonel* starring Shirley Temple and her co-star Bojangles, he was told he could not hold her hand during the filming of a scene where they are dancing on a staircase. Temple grabbed his hand anyway and this became the first scene where integrated dance partners were filmed dancing together. This film was released in February 1935.

Overcoming being cast in stereotypical roles, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) helped broaden roles in film for the black community as early as 1942. The '40s also saw popular entertainers such as Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington take their musical talents to the silver screen.

The '50s saw all-black casts unite on the big screen in movies such as *St. Louis Blues* in 1958 and *Porgy and Bess* in 1959 challenging societal norms and racial views. ("From Blackface to Blaxploitation: Representations of African Americans in Film," n.d.).

TELEVISION

In the 1960s, television propelled the mission of the Civil Rights Movement by introducing viewing audiences to civil rights campaigns, protests, attacks, and awareness, both locally, regionally, and nationally.

Television allowed the rest of the country to witness the brutality inflicted upon the black community in the South. Television provided powerful imagery that showed brutality and injustice, established a narrative for understanding societal norms, and offered viewers the opportunity to see for themselves and decide from their thought process what was happening in the Deep South. Although movement leaders such as Fred Shuttlesworth, James Bevel, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., organized nonviolent demonstrations and marches, the retaliation from Birmingham police officers was anything, but peaceful. The atrocious images forever emblazoned in our minds of the fire hoses and police attack dogs are acts of racial terror still spoken about to this day and will never be forgotten. (“Television News of the Civil Rights Era 1950-1970”)

The reality spotlighted throughout the media from the 1940s to the 1970s allowed the mission and message of the Civil Rights Movement to be witnessed beyond the borders of Birmingham. Broadcasting live footage of what was happening in the streets of the heart of Birmingham showed viewers that movement leaders’ vision of nonviolent demonstrations was not foreseen due to the inhumane treatment of the black community. These messages and images truly hit home because they were receiving this information by inviting them into their living rooms.

Media’s power is still prevalent as we received this information via WBHM 90.3, NPR News for the Heart of Alabama last month when we learned Heaven gained another angel with the recent passing of Birmingham’s first black officer, Deputy Chief Leroy Stover. Stover was valedictorian of his high school in Selma, Shiloh High School in 1952. He became an officer in March 1966 when he was 33-years-old. Decades later, in 1992, Stover was promoted to deputy chief in charge of field operations. Stover considered himself a vessel used by God to integrate the Birmingham Police Department. Stover’s mission was to lead by example doing what was right and treating people right. He passed away on November 2, 2023, at the age of 90 (Shelton, 2023).

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EDUCATION

KHADJIA SECK, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM

In the often-told narrative of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, a common misconception persists—a belief that the movement was solely fixated on achieving integration. However, peeling back the layers of history reveals a lesser-known truth: the primary focus was not integration but rather desegregation. The goal was not merely to allow Black children to share classrooms with their white counterparts; instead, it aimed at fostering a more equitable educational system. But did you know that parents, in their quest for desegregation, were not just seeking racial harmony in schools? They were advocates for expanded options, driven by the aspiration for a fair and unbiased educational experience for their children.

The call for choice extended beyond racial lines, encompassing considerations like superior STEM programs and enhanced access to books, fostering a desire for an all-encompassing educational quality. Moreover, did you know that the movement was not just about breaking down racial barriers but also challenging the stark disparities in the distribution of taxpayer money? Predominantly white schools received a disproportionate share, leaving predominantly Black schools with meager resources. This frustration was not a cry for desegregation but a call for equal opportunities and a just allocation of resources, highlighting the systemic inequalities embedded in the educational landscape of the time.

In the ceaseless struggle for justice, a disheartening pattern emerges, where the articulation of specific demands is met with symbolic gestures that, unfortunately, yield little substantive change. This recurrent trend is not confined to any specific era; rather, it spans the continuum of historical and contemporary social movements. A glaring example is found in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd. Despite the specific demands for legislative actions like the passage of the BREATHE Act and a comprehensive restructuring of the police, the response manifested in symbolic acts.

From Democrats kneeling in kente clothes to the creation of Black Lives Matter murals by city councils, these symbolic gestures, while perhaps visually impactful, fell short of instigating meaningful change. This tendency to appease without addressing core issues echoes throughout history, reaching back to the civil rights era. Within the realm of education, Black parents articulated specific demands concerning their children's learning environment. However, the broader agenda of integration overshadowed these demands, perpetuating the misleading notion that Black parents were enthusiastic about sending their children to predominantly white schools. This misrepresentation obscures the stark realities faced by Black children during the integration process.

A poignant illustration of this struggle is found in the efforts of Bill Shortridge during the integration process. Employing funds from his pocket, Shortridge hired two men from a local funeral home to chauffeur Black children at West End High School (Resident Interview, 1995). This was not a gesture of choice but a strategic move to shield these children from the barrage of insults, raw egg-throwing, and other forms of heinous harassment they were bound to encounter from people old enough to be their parents and grandparents had they taken themselves to school.

When examining the challenges these children endured merely to integrate, the reaffirmation of their parents' initial reluctance should resonate more profoundly. No parent willingly opts for such treatment for their children over the prospect of remaining in their schools, where taxpayer money would be distributed evenly. This historical narrative not only underscores the persistent theme of symbolic appeasement over substantive change but also accentuates the stark divergence in values between Black and white citizens during that intense period.

Embarking on an exploration of the Civil Rights Movement (CVM) reveals a tapestry woven with the struggles and triumphs of Black children during the children's marches.

Their return to school after arrest, suspended during their time in jail, becomes a window into a fraught reality that white students were shielded from. The stark disparities during this period epitomize an educational landscape rife with racial inequalities.

A striking anecdote from an attendee of Carver High School encapsulates the atmosphere of the time (Resident Interview, 1995). The school's assembly, cautioning students against participating in the children's marches, illustrates the institutionalized fear and anxiety prevalent not only among the students but also the teachers. The decision to actively condemn the marches to avoid potential repercussions showcases the precarious position Black educators found themselves in, emblematic of a broader struggle for racial equity in education.

Transitioning to the contemporary educational landscape, the challenges persist but have taken on a different guise. Recent incidents of book banning and the revision of historical events in education underscore the enduring struggle for an equitable and inclusive curriculum. The echoes of historical struggles reverberate in the present, emphasizing the persistence of systemic issues in education.

In 2022, a Shelby County middle school's removal of a book on the Black Lives Matter movement following a complaint illuminates the challenges surrounding discussions on critical race theory and LGBTQ issues in Alabama. The absence of a statewide policy on book challenges reflects a nuanced and complex scenario that continues to shape the educational experiences of students across the state (AL.com, 2023).

Shifting our focus to a comparative analysis of high schools like Mountain Brook High and A.H. Parker unveils potential disparities in the allocation of funds and resources. Utilizing metrics such as household income and school spending, the scoring system employed by WalletHub suggests a potential imbalance in resource distribution within Mountain Brook City compared to Birmingham City.

The divergent overall ratings between Mountain Brook City and Birmingham City, as indicated by WalletHub's scoring system, suggest varying degrees of disparity in resource distribution within these educational districts (Wallethub, 2023).

Mountain Brook City, with a higher rating than Birmingham City, implies a substantial gap between household income and school spending, potentially leading to challenges or inequities in resource allocation (Wallethub, 2023).

This has implications for both Black and White students. The elevated rating in Mountain Brook City signals likely disparities in educational opportunities for Black students and potential imbalances in resource allocation for White students despite the district's higher overall rating. In contrast, Birmingham City, with a lower rating than Mountain Brook City, suggests a relatively smaller disparity between household income and school spending. This implies a more equitable distribution of resources within the district, potentially offering a more balanced educational experience for Black students and comparable resource distribution for White students.



Students protesting the integration of Woodlawn High School in Birmingham, Alabama on Set. 12, 1963. © Ed Jones/Birmingham News

It is essential to recognize that these ratings provide only a partial snapshot, and a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape requires consideration of various factors and a deeper exploration of the experiences of different racial and ethnic groups within these districts. These persistent disparities underscore a profound and enduring issue: the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in education. Whether delving into the anxiety-ridden experiences of Black students during the CVM or examining contemporary disparities in resource allocation, the common thread is the enduring struggle for an equitable education system that serves all students.

This historical and contemporary exploration not only highlights the evolution of challenges but also emphasizes the deep-rooted impact on the lives and futures of Black and White children alike, shaping the trajectory of the nation's educational landscape.

As we reflect on the intricate layers of the Civil Rights Movement's educational focus and consider the present disparities, we find ourselves at a crucial juncture where the echoes of history beckon us to learn, grow, and transcend. It is essential to recognize the misconception that the movement was singularly fixated on integration, revealing instead a nuanced commitment to desegregation and an aspiration for a truly equitable educational experience. After recognizing these false impressions, let us not forget why they were represented incorrectly in the first place.

In this contemporary landscape, the call to action is underscored not by reading history alone but by the palpable need to break free from the historical shackles that still cast shadows on our educational systems. Understanding the true intentions of people who came before us can lead to an even better comprehension of what we must do now. The nuanced goals of the Civil Rights Movement, mirroring our present-day challenges, implore us to reassess our commitment to fostering inclusive environments. The struggles of the past, etched in the fabric of desegregation efforts, should serve as a guide as we confront the disparities that persist.

The call to break free from historical patterns is not only a recognition of the past but an affirmation that we have done it before; we can surely do it once again. The stories of resilience and determination during the Civil Rights Movement should resonate not as relics of the past but as sources of inspiration to guide our present actions. As we navigate the complexities of the current educational landscape, let us view these challenges not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities for transformative change.

The emphasis shifts from scoring and statistics to the lived experiences of students and the urgent need to foster environments that enable every individual to thrive. The call for change becomes a collective responsibility, a commitment to ensuring that educational justice is not a distant dream but a tangible reality.

The lessons of history, the stories of courage, and the struggles for desegregation are threads woven into the fabric of our shared narrative. They remind us that the journey toward educational equity is ongoing, and we are not bound by the limitations of the past.

May knowing the resilience of those who came before urge us to rekindle the spirit of collective action. Breaking free from historical patterns requires intentional efforts, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to dismantling systemic barriers. The Civil Rights Movement serves as a testament to the transformative power of unity, and it is within our grasp to shape a future where educational equity is not only an aspiration but a shared reality for every student.

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Students Protest Against Segregation — Fillmore Street, 1963
© The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley

THE EMMETT TILL COLD CASE PROJECT

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has several programs named in honor of significant individuals and their roles in our nation's criminal justice system. One of those figures is Emmett Till. Emmett's murder galvanized the nascent civil rights movement and reshaped America.

Given the impact Emmett Till's lynching had on America, in 2022, President Biden signed the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act into law - after more than 200 attempts to make lynching a federal hate crime. In 2016, a program was authorized as part of the Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crimes Reauthorization Act. Upon receiving funding in 2020, BJA launched the Emmett Till Cold Case Investigations and Prosecution Program. These investments are a part of the Office of Justice Programs' investment of millions of dollars nationwide to investigate and prosecute hate crimes and assist hate crime victims. As a result of the funding, grantees are reviewing hundreds of cases, leading to dozens of suspected lynching cases being reopened.

As part of the Emmett Till Act, the FBI created a "Cold Case Initiative" in which their field offices search their cold case files to identify incidents that might be appropriate for investigation. The program, launched in 2020, provides support to state and local law enforcement and prosecutors in their investigation and prosecution of cold case murders associated with civil rights violations.

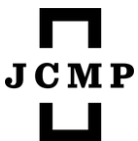
Jefferson County is one of five communities to receive this historic support that addresses violations of civil rights statutes resulting in death that occurred no later than December 31, 1979. Under Category 1 of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Emmett Till Cold Case Investigation and Prosecutions Program, the Jefferson County District Attorney's (JCDA) and Jefferson County Memorial Project will work to honor the lives of racial terror victims.

Working alongside federal partners, including the U.S. Attorney's Office (USAO) and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), the JCDA will pursue cases involving murders associated with civil rights violations in Jefferson County before January 1, 1980, as well as begin the process of community healing from collective trauma while providing educational and emotional resources to maintain and strengthen trust with community members.

This project has established a dedicated Civil Rights Cold Case Crimes Unit that has launched a formal process for investigating and prosecuting these cases. The project also allows JCDA to strengthen existing and create new partnerships with community organizations that can assist in communicating and publicizing actions taken concerning these cases. The new JCDA unit and partner organizations involved will provide widespread community awareness of unsolved homicide cold case murders before January 1, 1980, suspected of having been racially motivated and implement effective strategies for investigation and prosecution.

The Jefferson County Memorial Project (JCMP), is an integral partner in this project, as the coalition will support the JCDA's prosecutorial efforts through an expanded historical exploration of cases with civil rights violations. JCMP will also help the community heal by educating the public on the importance of that history and advocating for reform in the systems where injustice still exists today.

JCMP will provide support from the initial investigative period through the end of the grant project by engaging young adults from our Fellowship Program as well as by developing and implementing impactful curriculum and resources, including a published report containing the project's findings, for community conversations surrounding the purpose of this project.



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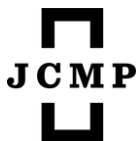
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