



# Foundation Document Overview

## Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument

Alabama



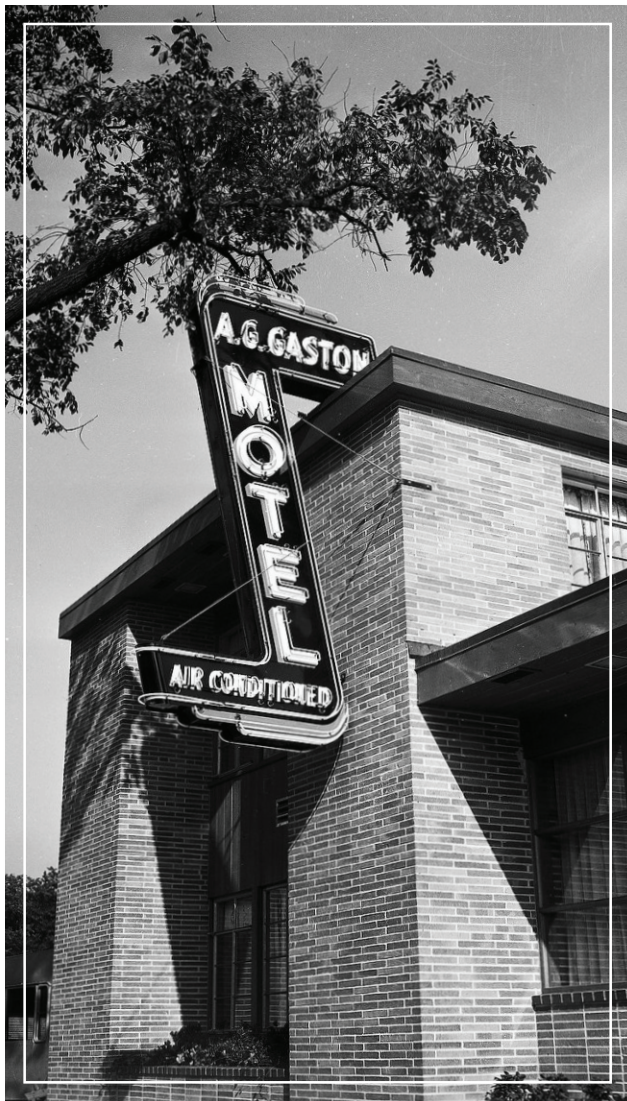
### Contact Information

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## Purpose



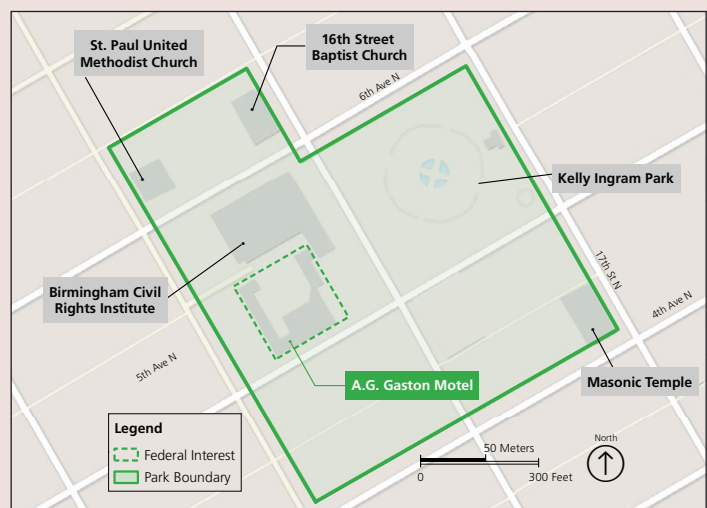
*Through collaboration with partners, BIRMINGHAM CIVIL RIGHTS NATIONAL MONUMENT preserves and interprets the events, stories, and places associated with the nonviolent struggle against racial segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, during the mid-20th century; events in 1963 propelled human and civil rights to the forefront of the American conscience.*

## Description

In 1963, images of snarling police dogs unleashed against nonviolent protesters, and of children being sprayed with water from fire hoses, appeared in print and television news across the world. These dramatic scenes from Birmingham, Alabama, of violent police aggression against civil rights protesters were vivid examples of segregation and racial injustice in America. The events shocked many, including President John F. Kennedy, and elevated civil rights from a Southern issue to a pressing national concern.

The confrontation between protesters and police in Birmingham was a product of the direct action campaign that came to be known as “Project C.” Project C—for confrontation—challenged unfair laws that were designed to limit freedoms of African Americans and ensure racial inequality. Civil Rights leaders took up residence at the A.G. Gaston Motel from April through May of 1963 to direct Project C. From the motel, which served as their headquarters and as an area to stage events and hold press conferences, the movement’s leaders strategized and made critical decisions that shaped national events and significantly advanced the cause of the modern civil rights movement.

Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument commemorates, preserves, and interprets to the public the dramatic events of Project C and the struggle for human and civil rights that played out in Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s. It is made up of many prominent civil rights heritage landmarks in Birmingham, including the A.G. Gaston Motel, which the NPS manages in partnership with the City of Birmingham.



# Significance

Significance statements express why Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument contains a collection of buildings and places that stands as a reminder of the violent opposition to integration in Birmingham's segregated past. These places became a battleground for freedom during nonviolent protests that climaxed in 1963 and directly influenced the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- The A.G. Gaston Motel was a significant site of Birmingham's 1963 civil rights activities, serving as the headquarters for the launch of the Birmingham Campaign. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR)—organizations leading the deployment of "Project C"—rented rooms, held regular strategy sessions, organized protest marches, and held press conferences at the site.
- Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument highlights the importance of a free press in a democracy. Journalists documented the violence and dramatic scenes of brutal police aggression against nonviolent protesters, including children, which shocked the nation and resulted in a public outcry that spurred political action.

- Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument commemorates the power of community organizing and the contributions of national civil rights leaders and foot soldiers, especially youth, and the coordinated efforts of the local African American churches, businesses, and educational institutions to bring about social change and end injustice.
- Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth was a pioneer of the direct action movement and founded the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) in response to the State of Alabama prohibiting the operation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). From its headquarters at Bethel Baptist Church between 1956 and 1961 the ACMHR confronted institutional racism in Birmingham and Alabama and was later pivotal to the success of the Birmingham Campaign.
- On September 15, 1963, white supremacists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four young girls and injuring 22 parishioners. Media reports of the terrorist act outraged the nation and world as one of the most egregious events in opposition to the modern civil rights movement, elevating the tragedies of racism and segregation from a southern issue to one of national concern.
- Within a culture of systemic racism and segregation, African American business and civic leaders were able to develop a successful network of social, cultural, and commercial establishments within the 4th Avenue Business District. These institutions along 4th Avenue, in the Colored Masonic Temple and elsewhere, provided essential support for the civil rights movement in Birmingham.





## Fundamental Resources and Values & Related Resources

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The A.G. Gaston Motel**
- **Partnerships**
- **Archives and Museum Collections**

Related resources are not owned by the park. They may be part of the broader context or setting in which park resources exist, represent a thematic connection that would enhance the experience of visitors, or have close associations with park fundamental resources and the purpose of the park.

- **16th Street Baptist Church**
- **Historic Bethel Baptist Church**
- **St. Paul United Methodist Church**
- **Kelly Ingram Park**
- **Colored Masonic Temple**
- **Other Civil Rights Sites in Birmingham**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **African American entrepreneurs and the A.G. Gaston Motel**
- **Places, churches, the power of community organizing, and contributions of individuals**
- **Youth activism and the Children's Crusade**
- **Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth**
- **16th Street bombing and the importance of the media**
- **The evolution of race relations and human rights**

