

Birmingham was once a city that housed two people, black and white, unknown to each other except through the stigma of segregation.

Black citizens and their allies launched a successful non-violent protest movement that toppled tyrants. As our 'Man of Steel' Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth declared at the 1963 March on Washington, "But for Birmingham we would not be here".

The Movement pushed the President and Congress to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Visitors to B'ham from Poland, the Czech Republic, South Africa and elsewhere expressed a direct link from B'ham to the worldwide Human Rights Struggle. And, as Ambassador Andrew Young reminds us, We Shall Overcome is known around the globe.

To its credit, the City has a clearly designated Civil Rights District and Historic Trail with markers along the routes of the protest marches.

In 1993 the National Trust for Historic Preservation noted: The District healed the human spirit by fostering an understanding of the revolutionary events that occurred here."

Today, thousands of residents remain in this metropolis who, as children or young adults were participants or eyewitnesses to the events of the 1950's and 60's. Tourists can interact with people who made the history we commemorate and with new residents of a more open and diverse community.

Expectations for the District can be summed up in the words of Ms. Alpha Robertson, mother of one of the martyred girls. At the dedication of the Institute, she said " to pass on the torch . to a new generation so they will know of the courage, sacrifice, heroism, and lessons of the past So they will not be condemned to repeat it."

I remember how mesmerized President Obama was when he visited the Institute and Church as a candidate for the US Senate.

To President Obama, I simply say, Mr. President, WE AWAIT THE STROKE OF YOUR PEN.

