

Comments by Andrea L. Taylor, President and CEO, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

Public Meeting on Thursday, October 27, 2016, about the proposed Civil Rights National Park hosted by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the City of Birmingham, Mayor William Bell and Congressional Representative Terri Sewell at the 16th Street Baptist Church at 5:30 p.m. Special guests: U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and National Park Service Director Jonathan Javits.

Nearly 30 years after Project C(onfrontation), the Children's Marches, the horrific bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, and a long struggle here and across the region, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute was dedicated after a symbolic walk from Kelly Ingram Park. The official welcome there was extended by Odessa Woolfolk, then President of the Board, followed by a program at 16th St. Baptist Church that began with a reading of "Let America Be America" by Langston Hughes.

The Institute, has hosted over 2 million visitors from that day to this. If the people of Birmingham had ignored this tragic and shameful history and not created BCRI, we'd probably not be here today.

The reason we are here today is to underscore the importance of preserving not just African American history, but American history that teaches us how to move past acts of terror and hate and how to regain our humanity.

When we think of America's legacy of slavery and segregation, we think of the pernicious effect on the lives of black people, but racism and segregation also has an impact on white people and a national park in the 21st century that tells the full story and provides a place for meaningful dialogue that helps all people in our communities to reconcile and the nation to heal in a new century.

What happened in Birmingham Matters.

This potential for transformation and triumph over fear was Dr. King's plea in *Letter from Birmingham Jail* - that cell which is now exhibited at BCRI.

Thank you Secretary Jewell, Director Javits, Representative Sewell and Mayor Bell for your leadership. We look forward to your future visit to the Birmingham Civil Rights National Historical Park or Monument and to our partnership in a key role as the interpretative/educational hub linking history with contemporary issues.

Thank you.