



Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
Reimagine the Institute: BCRI's 32nd Anniversary Celebration

PRESS RELEASE

Odessa Woolfolk Named 2024 Recipient of the Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award
Birmingham Civil Rights Institute to Honor Longtime Advocate for Social Justice at Public Anniversary Celebration on November 20

Birmingham, AL (November 1, 2024) — The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) is proud to announce that Odessa Woolfolk, renowned educator, civic leader, and lifelong advocate for civil and human rights, has been named the recipient of the 2024 Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award. This prestigious award, named after the legendary civil rights leader and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), recognizes individuals who have made enduring contributions to the ongoing fight for equality, justice, and human dignity. Recipients embody the spirit of courage, determination, and unwavering commitment to justice that Shuttlesworth demonstrated throughout his life.

Woolfolk's remarkable legacy of leadership in human and civil rights, education, and community empowerment spans decades. A native of Birmingham, she has been a tireless advocate for justice, dedicating her life to advancing equality for marginalized communities and promoting the power of education as a tool for social change. Woolfolk's career has been defined by her deep commitment to serving others, fostering dialogue on critical issues, and helping to shape a more inclusive society. Woolfolk's dedication to advancing human rights and fostering community empowerment aligns perfectly with the values of this award.

A Champion for Human Rights and Social Justice

Woolfolk's contributions to the civil rights movement are both historic and ongoing. As a pivotal leader in Birmingham, she played a key role in establishing the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in 1992. Her vision and leadership as the Institute's founding board chair helped transform BCRI into a nationally recognized center for civil rights education and activism. Through her efforts, the Institute became a powerful symbol of Birmingham's place in the struggle for racial justice, serving as a bridge between the past and the future of human rights advocacy.

Woolfolk's social justice work began at an early age, including her role as a high school educator of the foot soldiers who marched with Shuttlesworth in 1963. She went on to serve as an executive administrator for the New York State Urban Development Corporation and the Urban Reinvestment Task Force of Washington, DC. Upon returning to Alabama, Woolfolk became a member of the Alabama advisory committee to the United States Civil Rights Commission and associate director of the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO), the countywide anti-poverty program. Woolfolk's work in promoting civic engagement, educational equity, and dialogue around human rights issues has empowered generations to carry forward the torch of equality.



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"We are honored to present the Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award to Odessa Woolfolk, whose lifelong dedication to human and civil rights has shaped the course of history in Birmingham and beyond," said Rosilyn Houston, newly elected chair of the Board of Directors of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. "Her vision, leadership, and tireless advocacy continue to inspire new generations to stand up for justice and equality. Odessa Woolfolk exemplifies the very essence of what this award stands for."

An Anniversary Celebration for the Community

Odessa Woolfolk will receive the Shuttlesworth Award at the Institute's 32nd anniversary celebration to be held on November 20, 2024, at the BCRI (520 16th Street N, Birmingham). With First Horizon Bank as a major sponsor, the event invites all in the community to "Reimagine the Institute" and preserve the legacy of Birmingham's heroes.

The celebration will take place from 4:00 to 7:00 PM, bringing the BCRI's historic galleries alive with performances from local artists and student docents. Tickets are \$32 and available for purchase at www.bcri.org/event/reimagine or at the BCRI's ticket booth.

New BCRI Board Leaders to Host the Anniversary Event

At the 32nd anniversary celebration, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute will also introduce the new leadership for its board of directors. Houston, retired senior executive vice president and chief of human resources for Santander US, who joined the BCRI board in 2019, was elected board chair along with new board vice-chair, Carlos Alemán, chief executive of the Hispanic and Immigrant Center of Alabama (¡HICA!).

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***About the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI).** An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, the BCRI is a cultural and educational research center that promotes a comprehensive understanding for the significance of civil rights developments in Birmingham that changed our world. BCRI reaches more than 150,000 individuals each year through museum visits, group tours, outreach (school and community), award-winning public programs, exhibitions, and extensive archival collections. For more information, visit www.bcri.org.*