

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 4817

To establish the Birmingham Civil Rights National Historical Park in Birmingham, Alabama, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 21, 2016

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama (for herself, Mr. BYRNE, Mrs. ROBY, Mr. ROGERS of Alabama, Mr. ADERHOLT, Mr. BROOKS of Alabama, and Mr. PALMER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

A BILL

To establish the Birmingham Civil Rights National Historical Park in Birmingham, Alabama, as a unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Birmingham Civil
5 Rights National Historical Park”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) The Birmingham Civil Rights District is an
2 area of downtown Birmingham, Alabama, where sig-
3 nificant events in the American Civil Rights Move-
4 ment of the 1950s and 1960s took place. Many sites
5 in this area are listed on the National Register of
6 Historic Places, including the A.G. Gaston Motel,
7 Kelley Ingram Park, 16th Street Baptist Church,
8 Bethel Baptist Church, the 4th Avenue Historic Dis-
9 trict, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

10 (2) In the 1960s, Birmingham was regarded as
11 one of the most segregated cities in the South.
12 Parks, pools, playgrounds, hotels, theaters, and ele-
13 vators were segregated by race. Discrimination ex-
14 tended to public housing and employment. Despite
15 some change in the early 1950s, segregation re-
16 mained firmly in place and violence was frequently
17 used to maintain the status quo.

18 (3) From 1945 to 1963, Birmingham witnessed
19 60 bombings of African-American homes, businesses,
20 and churches designed to intimidate Civil Rights ad-
21 vocates. The violence earned the City the nickname
22 “Bombingham”. In early 1963, Alabama Governor
23 George Wallace declared, “Segregation Now! Seg-
24 regation tomorrow! Segregation Forever!”.

1 (4) In the spring of 1963, Reverend Fred
2 Shuttlesworth requested that the Southern Christian
3 Leadership Conference (SCLC) make the City of
4 Birmingham the epicenter for an ambitious new
5 Civil Rights campaign. “Project C” (C for con-
6 frontation) was designed to eliminate segregation
7 through mass protests, marches, and sit-ins. The
8 A.G. Gaston Motel served as headquarters for
9 Project C, and was home base for much of the
10 SCLC leadership including Dr. King.

11 (5) The A.G. Gaston Motel opened in 1954 and
12 was regarded as a “historic monument to black en-
13 trepreneurship” in a time of racial segregation. The
14 Motel was built and owned by Arthur George Gaston
15 (1892–1996), a prominent African-American busi-
16 nessman, and is listed on the National Register of
17 Historic Places.

18 (6) The Project C campaign began on April 6,
19 1963, when police arrested 45 protestors who
20 marched from the A.G. Gaston Motel to downtown
21 Birmingham. One week later, during the Good Fri-
22 day march, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was ar-
23 rested and jailed by Birmingham police. While in
24 prison, Dr. King wrote his famous “Letter from a
25 Birmingham Jail”. He wrote the letter as a response

1 to the “Call to Unity” statement from eight White
2 Alabama clergymen who opposed segregation. They
3 believed that the battle for equality should be fought
4 in the courts, not by outsiders trying to stir up civil
5 unrest. As a response, Dr. King wrote “I am in Bir-
6 mingham because injustice is here.”.

7 (7) Phase two of Project C began in May of
8 1963 with a series of mass protests in which chil-
9 dren played a leading role. On May 2, 1963, over
10 900 children were arrested by police, overwhelming
11 the capacity of the City’s jails. In response, Bir-
12 mingham Commissioner of Public Safety Bull Con-
13 nor ordered firefighters and police to prevent new
14 waves of marchers from leaving Kelly Ingram Park.

15 (8) On May 3, 1963, youth protestors in Kelly
16 Ingram Park were violently dispersed by police dogs
17 and powerful water cannons. Images of the brutal
18 police response to peaceful protestors spread across
19 the country, shocking the conscience of the Nation
20 and the world.

21 (9) Fearing civil unrest and unrepairable dam-
22 age to the City’s reputation, the Birmingham busi-
23 ness community and local leaders agreed to release
24 the peaceful protestors, integrate lunch counters,
25 and begin to hire African-Americans. On May 10,

1 1963, the A.G. Gaston Motel served as the site to
2 announce this compromise between local White lead-
3 ers and civil rights advocates. The Motel was
4 bombed later that day.

5 (10) Amid continued racial tensions, on Sep-
6 tember 15, 1963, a bomb detonated at the 16th
7 Street Baptist Church as children were entering the
8 basement on their way to worship. Addie Mae Col-
9 lins, Carole Robinson, and Cynthia Wesley, who
10 were all 14, and Denise McNair, 11, were tragically
11 killed. The explosion injured 22 others and left sig-
12 nificant damage to the church. Dr. Martin Luther
13 King, Jr., travelled to Birmingham to deliver the eu-
14 logy for the four little girls. This act of domestic ter-
15 rorism shocked the conscience of the Nation and the
16 world, and became a galvanizing force for the pas-
17 sage of historic Civil Rights Act of 1964.

18 (11) Located just south of 16th Street Baptist
19 Church is the 4th Avenue Historic District. The dis-
20 trict was the center for Black-owned businesses,
21 which served Black customers during the City's long
22 period of enforced segregation. Specifically, the dis-
23 trict was the home of one of the most well-known
24 African-American owned radio stations in the state.
25 Black radio stations and disc jockeys played a crit-

1 ical role in mobilizing support for the civil rights
2 movement. DJs sent coded messages as to the
3 whereabouts of police, roadblock locations, and rally
4 information.

5 (12) Also located in Birmingham is Bethel Bap-
6 tist Church. Led by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth,
7 this church served as the headquarters for the Ala-
8 bama Christian Movement for Human Rights from
9 1956 to 1961. It was also a place of refuge for dis-
10 placed and injured members of the 1961 Freedom
11 Ride, and was the target of multiple bombings in the
12 1950s and 1960s. Reverend Shuttlesworth's church,
13 as well as many other Birmingham Churches such
14 as the New Pilgrim Baptist Church, hosted mass
15 meetings leading up to many of the civil rights
16 marches throughout the City. The students and fac-
17 ulty of Miles College, a Historically Black College in
18 the Birmingham area, supplemented the efforts of
19 the local churches. Miles College was one of the few
20 institutions of higher education open to African-
21 Americans in the area, and produced many commu-
22 nity leaders.

23 (13) In 1992, decades after the Civil Rights
24 Movement, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
25 opened its doors. The Institute stands at the center

1 of the Birmingham Civil Rights District, acting as
2 a hub for children, students, adults, and scholars
3 who come to learn about the American Civil Rights
4 Movement. The 27,000-square-foot permanent gal-
5 lery within the Institute was designed to bring visi-
6 tors back to the 1950s when Birmingham was deep-
7 ly segregated. The Institute serves more than
8 140,000 individuals each year, and encourages new
9 generations to examine our country's civil rights his-
10 tory, as well as issues such as equality and justice.

11 (14) The preservation, historic interpretation,
12 and management of the Birmingham Civil Rights
13 National Historical Park's important historical re-
14 sources require the collaboration of Federal and mu-
15 nicipal entities, as well as community organizations.

16 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BIRMINGHAM CIVIL**
17 **RIGHTS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK IN BIR-**
18 **MINGHAM, ALABAMA.**

19 (a) ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE.—There is here-
20 by established Birmingham Civil Rights National Histor-
21 ical Park in Birmingham, Alabama, for the purposes of—

22 (1) preserving and interpreting for the benefit
23 of present and future generations the significant
24 civil rights history in the Birmingham Civil Rights
25 National Historical Park;

1 (2) coordinating preservation, catalyzing eco-
2 nomic revitalization, and facilitating interpretive ef-
3 forts by Federal, State, or local governmental enti-
4 ties, and/or private and nonprofit organizations; and

5 (3) creating appropriate collaborative manage-
6 ment to ensure the preservation and interpretation
7 of the park’s historical significance.

8 (b) BOUNDARIES.—The Park shall consist of those
9 lands and interests in lands, including buildings, within
10 the areas generally depicted as “Bethel Baptist Church”
11 and “Birmingham Civil Rights Historic District” on the
12 map entitled “Civil Rights District” and dated March 2,
13 2016.

14 (c) ACQUISITION OF LAND.—The Secretary may ac-
15 quire additional buildings, assets, and lands and interests
16 in lands for addition to the park by donation, transfer,
17 or exchange only. At no time shall the park consist of more
18 than 11 acres.

19 **SEC. 4. ADMINISTRATION.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall administer
21 the Park in accordance with this Act and laws generally
22 applicable to units of the National Park System. Nothing
23 in this Act shall modify any authority of the United States
24 to carry out Federal laws on Federal land located within
25 the Park.

1 (b) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT.—The Secretary may
2 enter into cooperative agreements with Federal, State,
3 City, or other public and non-profit institutions under
4 which the Secretary may identify, interpret, and provide
5 assistance for the preservation of non-Federal properties
6 within the Park and at sites in close proximity to the
7 Park, including providing for placement of directional and
8 interpretive signage, exhibits, and technology-based inter-
9 pretive devices.

10 (c) MANAGEMENT PLAN.—Not later than 3 fiscal
11 years after the date on which funds are first made avail-
12 able to carry out this Act, the Secretary, in consultation
13 with the City, shall complete a general management plan
14 for the Park in accordance with applicable laws, including
15 section 100502 of title 54, United States Code.

16 **SEC. 5. DEFINITIONS.**

17 For the purposes of this Act:

18 (1) CITY.—The term “City” means the city of
19 Birmingham, Alabama.

20 (2) PARK.—The term “Park” means the Bir-
21 mingham Civil Rights National Historical Park.

22 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
23 the Secretary of the Interior.

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