

Southeast Civil Rights Museums To Spotlight Immigration

Museums from Alabama to Louisiana Form "Civil Rights Sites of Conscience" Network

New York, NY, June 8, 2011 — Seven history museums in the Southeast are meeting in Charlotte, NC next week to launch the Civil Rights Sites of Conscience Network. Their goal: to shed light on the challenges of immigration today by tapping into the history of the US civil rights movement. Representatives from the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#) (AL), [International Civil Rights Center and Museum](#) (NC), [Levine Museum of the New South](#) (NC), [Louisiana State Museum](#) (LA), [National Civil Rights Museum](#) (TN), [National Center for Civil and Human Rights](#) (GA), and the Duke Human Rights Center's [Pauli Murray Project](#) (NC) aim to create new public programs that will bring the voices of their visitors into local and national debates around contemporary immigration.

"Civil rights museums help us understand how our nation grappled with injustice and intolerance in the past, making them ideal places to discuss how these issues still haunt us," says Elizabeth Silkes, executive director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a worldwide network of historic sites and museums that activate the power of the past to create a more just future and organized the Civil Rights Network. "Through the visionary steps these museums are taking, we will gain lessons from our history that can help us overcome the rifts in our country and our communities today."

This work has special resonance in the Southeast. Immigration has transformed cities with historically black and white American communities. In Charlotte, for instance, the Hispanic population grew over 600% between 1990 and 2000. Controversial laws like the one [passed in Georgia last month](#), which requires police to check the immigration status of crime suspects if they believe them to be in the country illegally, reflect the need for constructive conversation about how communities can integrate and multiethnic cities thrive. How can the South's history provide a window onto the experiences we face today?

Organized by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and hosted at the Levine Museum of the New South, the launch meeting in Charlotte (taking place June 14-17) will focus on how Civil Rights history and contemporary immigration intersect. Hearing from experts in Southern history and migration, and building from the Levine Museum's exceptional public program around the exhibit *Changing Places: From Black and White to Technicolor*, participating museums will develop a framework for public programs that invite visitors to connect the history of American civil rights to immigration today in an open and positive environment.

The Civil Rights Sites of Conscience Network grew from a larger Immigration Sites of Conscience Network, which was launched in 2009 by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. The Immigration Network consists of 28 sites in the United States and Europe that remember aspects of immigration and civil rights history and share a common commitment to use their histories to open dialogue on immigration today. (See full list of Network members below.)

This project is made possible in part with support from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Service, the Nathan Cummings Foundation and generous unrestricted support from the Oak Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

As of May 2011, the Immigration Network includes:

- Angel Island State Park & Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (San Francisco Bay Area, CA)

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- Arab American National Museum (Dearborn, MI)
- Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (Birmingham, AL)
- Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum (Austin, TX)
- Le Bois du Cazier (Marcinelle, Belgium)
- Cambodian American Heritage Museum (Chicago, IL)
- Chicago Cultural Alliance (Chicago, IL)
- Environment, Culture, and Conservation (ECCo) at The Field Museum (Chicago, IL)
- International Civil Rights Center & Museum (Greensboro, NC)
- Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (Chicago, IL)
- Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, CA)
- Levine Museum of the New South (Charlotte, NC)
- Louisiana State Museum (New Orleans, LA)
- Lowell National Historic Park (Lowell, MA)
- Lower East Side Tenement Museum (New York, NY)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site (Atlanta, GA)
- Mu.MA (Genoa, Italy)
- Museum of Tolerance (Los Angeles, CA)
- National Center for Civil and Human Rights (Atlanta, GA)
- National Civil Rights Museum (Memphis, TN)
- National Hispanic Cultural Center (Albuquerque, NM)
- New Mexico History Museum (Santa Fe, NM)
- Paso El Norte Immigration History Museum/University of Texas El Paso (El Paso, TX)
- The Duke Human Rights Center Pauli Murray Project (Durham, NC)
- Red Star Line (Antwerp, Belgium)
- Rosa Parks Museum (Montgomery, AL)
- Save Ellis Island Foundation (New York, NY)
- Skirball Center (Los Angeles, CA)
- Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island (New York, NY)
- Tsongas Industrial History Center (Lowell, MA)
- Wing Luke Asian Museum (Seattle, WA)

About the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a worldwide network of “Sites of Conscience” – historic sites, museums and initiatives dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies. Members like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in the United States, the Gulag Museum in Russia, and the District Six Museum in South Africa foster public dialogue on social issues to build lasting cultures of human rights. The Coalition provides member sites with direct funding for civic engagement programs, organizes learning exchanges ranging from one-on-one collaborations to international conferences, and conducts strategic advocacy for sites and the Sites of Conscience movement. Currently, the Coalition is led by 17 Accredited Sites of Conscience and includes more than 260 members in 47 countries. www.sitesofconscience.org.

The Immigration Sites of Conscience Network started with 14 historic sites and museums from the United States and Europe, who joined together in August 2008 to use historical perspective and heritage to foster productive dialogue on contemporary immigration. Today, 31 institutions form this ever-expanding network.

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