



Opening Today - *Passion and Purpose: Voices of Maryland's Civil Rights Activists*
Oral histories and photographs tell the story of Maryland's ongoing civil rights movement

BALTIMORE, Md. (May 20, 2022) – The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) opens a landmark, innovative exhibition today, immersing visitors in the ongoing fight for Black civil rights with [*Passion and Purpose: Voices of Maryland's Civil Rights Activists*](#). The installation reverberates with the voices of Maryland's civil rights activists through oral histories and photojournalism.

Marylanders have been at the forefront of the national Black freedom struggle, from lawsuits that revealed the lies of the "separate but equal" doctrine in the 1930s and '40s, to massive protests in the streets during the 1960s that forced a nation to confront its moral consciousness. This legacy continues through today. Visitors to the exhibition will learn and draw inspiration from the lived experiences of activists who make up a complex mosaic of the long and continuing fight for civil rights in Maryland and the nation.

At the heart of the exhibition is MCHC's oral history collection, newly preserved and digitized through a grant from the Council of Library and Information Resources. Visitors can listen to and read excerpts from dozens of oral history conversations with notable civil rights leaders—many recorded more than 40 years ago—including Juanita Jackson Mitchell, Clarence Mitchell Jr., Rep. Parren Mitchell, Gloria Richardson, Rev. Marion C. Bascom, Esther McCready, Walter Sondheim Jr., Silas Craft Sr., Verda Freeman Welcome, and others.

Passion and Purpose also exhibits recent oral histories about the civil rights movement, including a collection created in the 2000s by Baltimore City high school students who conducted research at MCHC and interviewed people involved in the civil rights movement. The students picked up where the earlier oral histories recorded in the 1970s left off, casting a wider view of the continuing struggle for civil rights. The exhibition also shares oral histories recorded during the 2015 Baltimore Uprising. Upcoming programming for *Passion and Purpose* will seek to add even more voices to MCHC's oral history collections.

Passion and Purpose will serve as an educational tool for students, teachers, and the community about civil rights history. It originated from the growing needs of MCHC's Education Department to aid teachers and students across Maryland to address civil rights topics in the classroom.

"MCHC's oral history collections are rich with stories and diverse voices. This exhibition is an opportunity—after decades of collection and preservation—to share them with the broader community thanks to modern preservation technology," said Mark Letzer, MCHC President & CEO. "Civil rights history is one of the most requested topics by educators and researchers who visit our Museum and Library, and *Passion and Purpose* presents Marylanders' personal stories about the civil rights movement from all corners of the state, creating a dialogue around understanding historic moments through multiple perspectives."

A curatorial panel of 13 people—scholars, professors, published authors, historians, artists, community leaders, religious leaders, and researchers—advised and guided the exhibition's creation over several years. The panel worked with MCHC's interdepartmental exhibition team to identify the scope of the exhibition, fill gaps in the narrative, and challenge the MCHC team to create an innovative dialogue about civil rights activism in Maryland. Numerous cultural organizations statewide loaned photographs and objects to the exhibition, including [The AFRO](#), providing a fuller view of Maryland's unique civil rights history.

"Something uniquely special is revealed by this exhibition, exactly because it is built around the voices of activists and participants. The objects and images selected in complement to the oral histories can certainly stand on their own, of course, but taking it all in together—voices, objects, and images, with voices at the center—provides powerful witness to a profound period of our state's history," said curatorial panel member David Taft Terry, a historian, associate professor at Morgan State University, and MCHC trustee. Terry donated oral histories he collected between 1997 and 2003 to MCHC that are focused on Jim Crow era laws and culture in Baltimore, some of which are featured in *Passion and Purpose*.

Passion and Purpose is on long-term view and is supported by many generous sponsors, including presenting sponsors PNC Bank and Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

"The long history of the civil rights movement in Maryland and the impact that struggle has had on the Baltimore community cannot be understated," said Laura Gamble, PNC regional president for Greater Maryland. "PNC Bank's sponsorship of this exhibition is a testament to the important role *Passion and Purpose* will play in preserving that history and making it available as a teaching tool for our community."

Download the media kit for *Passion and Purpose* [here](#). This kit includes images from the exhibition, a list of oral histories and biographies of those featured, and a list of the many lending and contributing organizations, individuals, and thought partners who helped make the *Passion and Purpose* exhibition become a reality.

Upcoming Related Public Programming:

- **May 26, 6-7 pm** (virtual) - Black Activism in Maryland, *featuring guests David Taft Terry PhD, Joshua Clark David PhD, and Linda Day Clark*
- **June 9, 12-1 pm** (virtual) - Lifestories of the Baltimore Student Protest Movement, *featuring guests Chief Judge Robert M. Bell and Simone Renee Barrett PhD*
- **June 16, 12-1 pm** (virtual) - Contextualizing Juneteenth in Maryland: Emancipation or Freedom?
- **July 23, 10 am-11:30 am** (in-person) - A Ride to Remember, *featuring authors Sharon Langley and Amy Nathan*
- **August 11, 12-1 pm** (virtual) - A Conversation about Oral History – the What and Why

Learn more about these free events at mdhistory.org/events.

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The Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) collects, preserves, and interprets the history, art, and culture of Maryland. Originally founded as the Maryland Historical Society in 1844, MCHC offers a Museum, Library, and education programs to inspire critical thinking, creativity, and community. The Museum and H. Furlong Baldwin Library are currently open Wednesday-Saturday. Museum hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Library hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Learn more at mdhistory.org.

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