



## Case Statement for ICRCM Expansion

(April 2, 2022)

Think of **the landmark F.W. Woolworth's** at the crossroads of downtown Greensboro, N.C., as a center-point of civil rights history and ideas — a site where time pivoted toward a more humane future. Here the fundamental national, international, and regional perspectives on enhancing civic equality and human dignity converge on behalf of a new practical vision for building an enlightened community and cultivating decent relations in civic affairs. Think if it, further, as **“Civil Rights World-Building,”** past and future.

### The Mission of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum

Animating **an iconic landmark recognized across the globe**, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened in 2010 as a comprehensive museum of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and an innovative educational organization devoted to understanding and advancing civil and human rights in this country and the world. It commemorates the Feb. 1, 1960, beginning of sit-ins at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, by the N.C. A&T Four college students, reflecting strategic planning and careful training carried out with colleagues at Bennett College. Their non-violent direct action culminated in the integration of this center of commerce six months later, on July 25, challenging the American People to make good on promises of personal equality and civic inclusion enunciated in the Constitution. The fast-spreading Sit-In Movement ignited by the Greensboro protests served as a historical inflection point, renewing the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. Sit-In Movement, Inc., was founded in 1993 to acquire and restore the F.W. Woolworth's site of these transformative events and to establish the Center and Museum as a monument to the bravery and initiative of visionary young advocates of full citizenship and social justice.

## *A Teaching Landmark*

Unlike many other museums and centers portraying and/or advocating themes of civil progress, this institution occupies its most significant artifact: the place where the transformative events occurred, which remains alive with the memory of possibility. The national civil-rights landmark F.W. Woolworth's serves as an internationally resonant symbol for **the opening up of America's imagination of a progressive political world made up of full and equal citizens interacting with mutual dignity in the civic domain.** As the centerpiece of an educational and programming organization, established on Feb. 1, 2010, the Civil Rights Museum has garnered a stellar reputation for promoting understanding of struggles for freedom, equality, and justice in the United States and across the world. The exemplary non-violent direct action of those who initiated and joined the Greensboro Sit-Ins was sustained over a period of six months, until the successful integration of the lunch counter on July 25. The civic wisdom about the nature of a decent and enlightened community that emanates from this teaching landmark continues to be promoted effectively through our permanent and changing exhibitions, as well as through our public program offerings. The messages embedded in this place and communicated by our professional interpreters are more timely today than at any time since the national Sit-In Movement was initiated in this place 62 years ago this year.

Funding support from corporations, foundations, government entities, private citizens, and tax credit investors made the opening of the private, non-profit ICRCM a reality. It should be noted that our start-up period occurred during an economic downturn that had a destructive impact on many small businesses. Like other cultural attractions, the Civil Rights Museum was not immune to the challenges presented by tough financial times, nor those resulting from the recent Covid-19 crisis, during which a reported one-third of the nation's museums were forced to close permanently. But in spite of undercapitalization, the ICRCM achieved remarkable success in settling \$34 million in tax-credit debt retirement and sustaining vigorous operations. Notwithstanding the effects of the pandemic, we continue to move forward with all aspects of our operations, consolidating the second phase of the ICRCM's founding by supplementing our public tours and laying plans for the third phase of adding exhibits and developing the Center as a hub for envisioning the nation's New Constitution based on the Reconstruction Amendments (**the "1868 Project"**). In the current political environment in this country, it is evident that there is a great need for African-American-led organizations of all kinds not only to continue to survive but to grow and develop in strength, commitment, and purpose as we open the Museum's doors and the people's imaginations for the next generations of citizens.

## Acquisition of Adjacent Property for Institutional Expansion

Our objective in expanding the physical plant and land base of the ICRCM, by acquiring the property adjacent to this restored site of the beginning of the national 1960 Sit-In Movement and this recognized international site of social conscience, is to continue to grow into becoming **the nation's central organization for the advancement of the vision of a Civil-Rights America**. The property in question is a modern 5-story brick bank building, located at the corner of West Market and 100 South Elm Street, with 2.2 acres of land filling out the city block, at the center crossroads of the downtown. (The F.W. Woolworth's Building stands on the corner at the other end of the block, and the City and County Governmental Center is located in the block immediately to the West.) The subject property is was purchased by the private, non-profit Sit-In Movement, Inc., on March 31, 2022.

Our most urgent intent is to protect the iconic, but landlocked, building at 134 South Elm Street from surrounding development and have it meet eligibility standards for inscription as part of **a serial listing of American Civil Rights properties as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO**. We will use the additional space for Museum expansion as our reputation and outreach continue to grow. The World Heritage inscription project has been underway for the last five years and, as we work to meet the international standards, including protection of the immediate environment of the historic property, there is great probability that our Museum will be included on a list of 10 civil rights landmarks to be nominated officially by the United States. The confirmation of our importance to the world will further enable the ICRCM to continue as a self-sustaining non-profit organization. Once we have completed the process and, if this nomination is subsequently endorsed by UNESCO, as we hope, the Greensboro Sit-In landmark will be the only cultural World Heritage Site in North Carolina — a tribute to African-American insistence on cultural advancement in this State which will in turn accrue to the good reputation of the community as a whole. The benefit will extend to generations of children to learn about America's best story — the determined fight for personal freedom and full citizenship, with a focus here beginning with the peaceful protests organized by young people against racially segregated dining facilities, which culminated in a successful racial desegregation. That intensely democratic initiative still spurs a Southern city's aspirations for racial harmony.

With this vision, we are seeking financial support to help move this constructive endeavor forward substantively at a time when prominent foundations and corporations have committed to targeting resources to the enhancement of demonstrated success in

promoting new ideas for the evolution of American society, as well as a recovery from the effects of racial injustice.

## Themes for New Institutional Advancement — Building out the Civil Rights Center and Museum

All of our organizational themes for the expansion fall under the general aegis of *“The New Constitution”* concept, which focuses on the further envisioning and implementation of the post-Civil-War treaty of civil peace among the American people. These solemn promises were committed to reconceiving a nation regenerated from violent internal conflict to the fulfillment of guarantees of full citizenship and personal rights. This general theme — of **reconstructing a national community outward from the centerpiece of a new model of the status and character of the human being**, instead of matching the person to the polity — constitutes the greatest contribution ever made by the United States to world civilization. We anticipate using this regenerative idea as the organizing concept of our ever more substantial international programs, instructing the world about new possibilities for enlightened human community.

Included in our plans will be new permanent as well as changing exhibits, along with public educational programs and creative scholarship, that will build out the ICRCM’s intersection of national, international, and regional perspectives on *civil rights* as the key to innovative and humane community at all levels.

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### — I. National Dimensions

The ICRCM will continue to maintain and improve its Permanent Exhibit, which includes the restored lunch counter and “Battlegrounds,” supporting urgently needed civic education about the American Civil Rights Movement — all arising from a site where a vision of a better America was glimpsed in the action of four N.C. A&T students at an F.W. Woolworth’s on Feb. 1, 1960, which served as an inflection point where history shifted from what had been the conventionally settled discriminatory and exclusionary order of the past. But we now see that additions to the Museum’s well-regarded narrative, and extensions into a fuller account of that story over a longer time span, need to be made. The Civil Rights Movement has always been available to be understood as a necessary

part of the on-going constitution making of the United States. The leaders of the Movement strategically and specifically observed that the justification of their actions arose from constitutional promises that the people had already made to themselves in the most solemn and intentional manner that they can, by adding words to the text of their most civically sacred foundational law.

The Civil Rights Museum is an increasingly compelling historic-site-based organization, with a national profile, committed to explaining and advancing the idea of “The New Constitution” of the United States (with its core statements containing the post-Civil War Amendments — 13th, 14th, and 15th, from the later 1800s) These can be understood as **regenerating the whole American constitutional project through a transformed, newly invented concept of full and equal citizenship, along with the recognition of fundamental rights to all persons in the country.** What has been missing in the United States overall, since the beginning of this civic reconstruction in the period around the 1860s, and later under opposition from the Jim Crow Regime, is the practical envisioning of what the national community would look like if the words of the constitutional phrases were brought to life and made true. A project like this — involving “imaginative configuration” on a large scale, urgently needed after a century and a half of resistance and civil decline — is precisely the sort of work suited to a creative cultural organization like a museum that moves from past history to plausible future prospects.

It is well worth noting that a well-constituted order of community is absolutely essential to the prosperity and evolution of a nation, without exception. How many times do people across the world need to prove this? Getting right with our own ordering principles will serve as a powerful prompt for the enhancement of America’s civic and cultural success. In particular, an authentic “constitution,” treated honorably and honestly as the actual precedent for an “operating system,” is itself an innovation platform for more inventive solutions to social problems. The years since 1787 have documented this world-changing proposition. And the story embedded within the F.W. Woolworth’s confirms the validity of the later stages of this historic process for fundamental structural change within an existing framework.

One very important possible new permanent exhibit will be entitled, **“Sit-In Nation,”** which will tell the story and explain the underlying strategy and process of the non-violent direct action that “spread like wildfire” across the South and upper-South, inspired by what had begun in Greensboro. We have already built the initial phase of this exhibit in a provisional and partial form, supported by a generous donation by Fresh Market, Inc., so that we can test its public effectiveness and educational benefits. We also

anticipate a potential, exciting new permanent exhibit focused on the theme of **“Civil Rights as a High-Level Form of Sportsmanship,”** as a way to cultivate a broader awareness of the principles of mutually respectful engagement and fairly administered contests in a just society. We will be designing this theme to take advantage of the widespread public fascination with sports conducted according to complex structures of competition, where “playing by the rules of the game” reflects a profound but actually quite ordinary commitment to the “constitutional values” of any common enterprise. At this preliminary stage of development, we may also enlarge the “Civil Rights and Sportsmanship” theme into a curriculum component to be made available to varsity athletes and other students at 15 member universities, as part of a potential collaborative relationship with the Atlantic Coast Conference. This approach would reflect the ICRCM’s strategy of coordinating on-site exhibits and related programming with a broader outreach that further advances our community agenda of developing creative projects that continue to “put Greensboro on the map” as a reminder of this community’s civil rights character and aspirations.

## — II. International Dimensions

The second part of the expanded Greensboro institution (likely also under the aegis of the Initiative for The New Constitution) would be a full presentation of the international dimensions of civil rights within nations and the worldwide movement for human rights across nations. (These two concepts need to be kept separate, because they are analytically distinguishable and because keeping them so will help ensure that the two categories can continue to inform and refresh each other.) This will include attentiveness to the ways that internal national civil-rights regimes and movements (like those of the United States) gain from, and give back to, international understandings of enlightened principles that might more productively and fairly govern human affairs.

A newly developed set of **International Exposures Galleries** is tentatively envisioned to complement the existing Permanent Exhibit at the Museum with perspectives on international and cross-national developments in civil and human rights. Our themes for these new galleries would reflect the fact that the Sit-In Movement was not strategized simply to highlight and oppose abuses against the status and treatment of constitutionally equal citizens but also **to bring about a replacement civic world of social inclusion and full political membership.** How have such fundamental shifts been sought and accomplished (or defeated) in other parts of the world, and to what extent has the American precedent influenced them? Has the American agenda for

civil liberty been influenced in return? Throughout the Museum's expansion, we are committed to establishing a fundamental shift of view that adds an affirmative vision of what we should be *for*, to match a movement opposed to injustices that we must work *against*.

Pursuing this already existing founding theme of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum's mission will lead to regular educational and programmatic operations where the organization comes into full possession of its name. It will also link powerfully with the campaign to have the F.W. Woolworth's included among the national civil-rights properties in the United States that are to be nominated for designation as a "serial" UNESCO World Heritage site. It is with this focus that the theme of the N.C. Piedmont as a densely historical and intensely practical civil rights zone would support programs for this region of the State, with the idea of "international civil rights" geared to attracting multinational conferences and constitutional developments with participants from across the world. This broader orientation of the Museum's focus will complement the region's well-established policy of welcoming residents from other countries and inviting refugees to find safe resettlement and a more secure future.

Unique among the other 15 sites on the official United States Civil Rights Trail (see [www.civilrightstrail.com](http://www.civilrightstrail.com)), some of which are currently being considered in the smaller group for the UNESCO nomination, **the ICRCM was founded deliberately as a center of international reach**, understanding that the Sit-In Movement has powerful lessons to teach about the transformative and strategic impact of well-organized non-violent protest against established injustice and conventional practices of invidious discrimination that infringe civil and human rights. We intend to elaborate these lessons further and more systematically, so as to contribute to an international discourse on honoring the dignity of all persons wherever they may live. But such an agenda of outreach and deepening should be reciprocally matched by a sustained influx of understanding about experiences from outside the United States and a broadening of the critical ideas involved, which have the capacity for enhancing civilized values here as well as abroad.

### — III. Regional Dimensions for Piedmont, North Carolina

Historically, the North Carolina Piedmont has been regarded as a region of progressive moderation (though it may have later receded into something more like a style of going-slow on progress). And, since the beginning of operations in 2010, the ICRCM has served as a hub at any current time for those persons and projects in the area

oriented toward recovering an earlier spirit of clear-thinking about the destructiveness to community caused by invidious discrimination against persons, as well as the hopeful benefits that attend the establishment of reasonableness in dealings among fellow citizens, and toward persons in general.

The associated idea is that this part of the ICRCM, while telling an honest and honorable story, would present the Piedmont Triad in terms compatible with the most validly optimistic version of its civil-rights past. Here the aim would be to reconnect the local region with the spirit and energy of decency and hard-headed rationality with respect to enlightened human affairs that has marked it in earlier phases of its history. Beyond this, there is the proposition that a place where there have been abiding sources of historical pain, with regard to fair dealings among members of society, will be the most fitting locus where enduring solutions may be formulated. In transcending local community distempers and overcoming narrowly focused boosterism, this institution might call the people of this part of the world to a better version of themselves — even as we teach about a better America overall, through the vision of the New Constitution of the United States still waiting from the later mid-19th Century for full implementation.

Thus we have proposed that Greensboro and Guilford County conceive of this community as a **“Civil Rights City,” setting the standard for an innovative urban brand that might be adopted elsewhere as well.** This rightfully earned theme for the area would establish a broad and relevant understanding of civil rights values as a lens through which public policy and local civic development initiatives would be assessed and refined. It will also provide a broader framework for connecting the many separate initiatives that have already been undertaken with considerable imagination, distinctive to this place, on behalf of serving the wellbeing of the people who live here.

In addition, the new theme, with its focus on the local region, would have the practical effect of justifying a claim by the ICRCM that Greensboro is a plausible site for a national and international organization that would study and promote The New Constitution and the universally compelling ideas associated with it, to inspire a future of constitutional advancement for progressive nations and communities beyond the United States.

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