

RALEIGH, N.C. — From Nina Simone and Julius Chambers to Ella Baker and the Greensboro Four, North Carolina voices have swelled in the national struggle for equality. With the launch of the N.C. Civil Rights Trail, the epic journey will be preserved and amplified from places where leaders and followers lived, learned and took a stand for social justice.

The [**N.C. African American Heritage Commission**](#) is leading the initiative with funding from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation, and with support from the [**International Civil Rights Center & Museum, Visit North Carolina**](#) and the [**North Carolina Office of Archives and History**](#). The commission will work with communities across the state to designate up to 50 sites where trail markers will be placed, starting in early 2021. An interactive web portal will highlight these places and others to guide people to history and experiences from the past.

“The national reckoning over systemic injustice heightens the relevance of our effort to develop the N.C. Civil Rights Trail,” said Angela Thorpe, director of the African American Heritage Commission, which is part of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. “Understanding what has come before will inspire and fuel the work ahead. We need to hear the voices and proclaim the victories that have brought us this far.”

With a target completion date of January 2023, the state’s trail follows the 2018 rollout of the [**U.S. Civil Rights Trail**](#) by Travel South USA, a tourism marketing organization with 15 member states. The national trail includes [**five North Carolina sites**](#), including the F.W. Woolworth’s building in Greensboro, where four N.C. A&T University freshmen powered up the [**sit-in movement**](#), and Estey Hall on the Shaw University campus in Raleigh, where alumna Ella Baker started the [**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**](#).

“Those sites underscore North Carolina’s role in channeling student energy into the movement,” said Visit NC Director Wit Tuttell. “In light of the interest generated by the national trail, we’re excited about providing a more comprehensive look at what has unfolded across the state and giving residents and visitors an opportunity to share the experience.”

Deryn Pomeroy, William G. Pomeroy Foundation’s director of strategic initiatives, is particularly excited about the program. “It is a wonderful way for communities to become engaged in their own history and share the stories that need to be highlighted.” The program invites communities from around the state to apply for markers which will then be reviewed by a selection committee of North Carolina historians. Selections will be based on a series of criteria, including sites’ significance to the national Civil Rights Movement and civil rights efforts in North Carolina.

Thorpe expects the trail to include a wide array of locations including established historic sites as well those that may only be known more locally. One example is the [**YMI Cultural Center**](#) in Asheville, which was commissioned in 1892 for Black construction workers employed to build and furnish the Biltmore estate. Funded by the Vanderbilts, the Young Men’s Institute became a center of civil, cultural and business life in the neighborhood known as The Block. Featuring a gym, bathing facilities and a library, the building was used by churches, schools and civic organizations for classes, gatherings and office space. After urban renewal led to the neighborhood’s mid-century decline, the YMI Cultural Center reclaimed its place in the 1980s and is poised as a neighborhood focal point amid new energy in preservation, restoration and advancement throughout The Block.

Other candidates include the [**Montford Point Marines Museum**](#), which tells the story of the first African Americans to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps (1942-49), and the [**Montford Point Marines**](#)

[Memorial](#) in Jacksonville; the [Pauli Murray Center](#) in Durham, where the influential lawyer, Episcopal priest, and activist for civil and women's rights grew up; and the [Historic Magnolia House](#) in Greensboro, a Green Book site that hosted Black entertainers, icons, and civil rights leaders.

On the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, the [International Civil Rights Center & Museum](#) and nearby [February One](#) monument at N.C. A&T University invoke a towering victory, and the whites-only Woolworth's counter where the four students sat prevails as a powerful symbol.

"We celebrate the place where the sit-in movement took hold," said John Swaine, director of the museum, which is housed in the former Woolworth's building. "But it's important to understand the full story, that the struggle began centuries before the sit-in on Feb. 1, 1960, and that it has endured over the decades since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The N.C. Civil Rights Trail will lead people to a deeper comprehension of what has been achieved and the effort that lies ahead."

To learn more about the project or to apply for a marker, please visit aahc.nc.gov/programs/civil-rights-trail.

About the N.C. Civil Rights Trail:

An initiative of the N.C. African American Heritage Commission with support from Visit North Carolina and the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, the N.C. Civil Rights Trail will be developed with community involvement across the state. Forty to 50 sites will be designated with at least 10 in Tier I and 2 rural North Carolina counties in alignment with Gov. Roy Cooper's [Hometown Strong](#) initiative. Completion of the program is targeted for January 2023 at a cost of \$173,500 to cover a full-time program coordinator; development of a digital GIS map; development of an interactive web portal, featuring at least 150 sites; and up to 50 physical community-based markers.

About the N.C. African American Commission:

Created in 2008, the African American Heritage Commission is a division of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The commission works across the department to preserve, protect and promote the state's African American history, art and culture for all people. Its endeavors include the identification of heritage sites, compiling resources for educators, extending the work of national programs such as the National Park Service's Network to Freedom Underground Railroad, and independent initiatives including Oasis Spaces: Green Book Project. aahc.nc.gov

About the William G. Pomeroy Foundation:

The William G. Pomeroy Foundation is committed to supporting the celebration and preservation of community history; and to raising awareness, supporting research and improving the quality of care for patients and their families who are facing a blood cancer diagnosis. One of their initiative's is helping people to celebrate their community's history. They meet this by providing grants to obtain signage in the form of roadside markers and plaques. Since 2006, they have funded over 1,100 signs across New York State and across the United States, all the way to Alaska. Wgpfoundation.org

About Visit North Carolina:

Visit NC is part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that oversees the state's efforts in business and job recruitment and retention, international trade, and tourism, film and sports development. Visit NC's mission is to unify and lead the state in developing North Carolina as a major destination for leisure travel, group tours, meetings and conventions, sports events and film production. One of the state's most vital industries, tourism generates economic activity and employment in each of the state's 100 counties. In 2019, domestic travelers to North Carolina spent \$26.7 billion and accounted for 235,703 jobs. VisitNC.com

About the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources:

The N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NCDNCR) is the state agency with a vision to be the leader in using the state's natural and cultural resources to build the social, cultural, educational and economic future of North Carolina. NCDNCR's mission is to improve the quality of

life in our state by creating opportunities to experience excellence in the arts, history, libraries and nature in North Carolina by stimulating learning, inspiring creativity, preserving the state's history, conserving the state's natural heritage, encouraging recreation and cultural tourism, and promoting economic development. NCDNCR includes 27 historic sites, seven history museums, two art museums, two science museums, three aquariums and Jennette's Pier, 39 state parks and recreation areas, the N.C. Zoo, the nation's first state-supported Symphony Orchestra, the State Library, the State Archives, the N.C. Arts Council, State Preservation Office and the Office of State Archaeology, along with the Division of Land and Water Stewardship. www.ncdcr.gov

About the International Civil Rights Center & Museum:

Opening 50 years to the day after four N.C. A&T University students took a seat at the whites-only lunch counter at F.W. Woolworth's in Greensboro, the center memorializes the courageous stand they made on Feb. 1, 1960. Focusing on their actions and those of thousands of students around the country who joined the sit-in movement, the center exists as a testimony to courage and the potential of unified people on the right side of history to make change. The ICRCM seeks to preserve the legacy and significance of that event and demonstrate why institutionalized oppression has no place in the human race. www.sitinmovement.org

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