CIVIL RIGHTS TOURISM IN ALABAMA’S BLACK BELT

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PROJECT GOALS

- Stimulate economic development in Alabama, especially in rural Black Belt region
- Create guide that highlights Alabama assets, including rural beauty, unique art & culture, food traditions, and Civil Rights history
- Make it easier for travelers to access Alabama sites
- Record local Civil Rights histories, especially in rural places
ALABAMA ASSETS
Heritage Tourism

Definition: “Traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present” (National Trust for Historic Preservation) or “The trend of transforming the annual family vacation into a cultural history lesson” (USA Today)

- Second fastest growing market segment of tourism, just behind nature-based tourism
- Rose 13% between 1996 and 2006
- Visitors to historic or cultural attractions tend to spend more money per trip and take longer vacations compared to all other travelers

Civil Rights Tourism

- One of the fastest growing sectors of heritage tourism in the U.S.
- Annual visitors:
  - Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: 150,000
  - National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis: 150,000
  - Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, Atlanta: 650,000

- “A surge of interest in the Civil Rights Movement has dislodged lingering discomfort with the past, bringing new attention to the lunch counters, bus terminals and churches that were the Movement's battlegrounds. Suddenly, events both major and minor are being memorialized” (The New York Times, 2004)
CIVIL RIGHTS EVENTS IN ALABAMA

Montgomery Bus Boycott

Freedom Rides

Children’s Crusade

Selma to Montgomery March
STEP ONE: INVENTORY

Several travel guides to the Civil Rights Movement exist. How will this one be different?
1. Decided to design a true “tourist” guide, with maps, photographs and listings for restaurants, lodging, cultural/art amenities and festivals

- Create a practical guide
- Include many photographs to catch the eye
- Use an attractive and friendly layout
- Market all assets together: rural beauty, unique art/culture, food traditions, Civil Rights sites

Antioch Baptist Church, Camden
2. Decided to focus solely on Alabama

– Present detailed local histories
– Include “off the beaten path sites” that tourists love
– Offer previously undocumented histories and sites, many of them in rural areas
– Focus on rural areas with Civil Rights history and unique art, culture and food traditions, going beyond Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma
– Scale down the travel route to a manageable and practical distance (instead of traveling the entire South)
STEP TWO: RESEARCH (academic)

- Read everything we could find about the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama and wrote the text for the guide.

- Discovered that most events happened in central Alabama, and mapped out the “Alabama Civil Rights Trail.”
STEP TWO: RESEARCH (partnering)

- Spread the word
- Garnered support for project
- Avoided duplication of efforts
- Gained information about Trail sites and local histories
- Established project as community driven, community informed, and community owned
- Began forming relationship with media
STEP THREE: TRAVEL THE TRAIL

- Visited all sites to obtain information on exact location, description, history, tours, hours, price range/admission
- Photographed sites
- Mapped sites (GPS locations if possible)
- Interviewed local residents

Jars of Mama Nems Pepper Jelly
Rural Heritage Center, Thomaston
STEP FOUR: QUERY PUBLISHERS

- COMPOSED A PROFESSIONAL QUERY PACKAGE

- INCLUDED A SAMPLE CHAPTER
  - Catches the eye and communicates idea

- SEARCHED OUT LOCAL PRESSES
  - This guide was too narrow in focus for presses outside of Alabama
  - More copies will sell locally than nationally
RESULTS!

- Contract with New South Press in Montgomery, Alabama
- Guide will be published in Spring 2010 as paperback that sells for $20

Former “colored” water fountain, Camden
MEETING OUR GOALS

- Stimulate economic development in Alabama, especially in rural Black Belt region
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~RESERVE A COPY~

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