

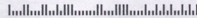
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

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MUSEUM News

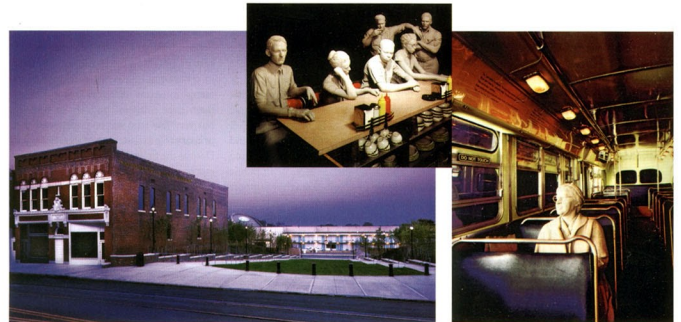
New Orleans: Waiting for the Resurrection

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The mission of the American Association of Museums is to enhance the value of museums to their communities through leadership, advocacy and service.

Two African-American Museums and the Road to Accreditation



The National Civil Rights Museum at the historic Lorraine Motel, Memphis, Tenn. Inset: Recreation of a lunch counter sit-in demonstration, a student-led protest action to end segregated restaurant service practices. Above, right: Recreation of Rosa Parks on a Montgomery city bus—the day in 1955 she refused to move from her seat.

Prior to July 2005, of the nation's nearly 16,000 museums only one celebrating African American history and culture was accredited by AAM: the Studio Museum in Harlem. This number tripled last summer with the accreditation of two major social-history museums—the National Civil Rights Museum (NCRM) in Memphis, Tenn., and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) in Birmingham, Ala. These institutions had different reasons for seeking accreditation, but both knew the process would be lengthy, and both knew the outcome, once achieved, would be great.

Why We Applied

In the fall of 2000, NCRM was preparing to renew a capital campaign to expand its permanent exhibitions, having opened

to the public in September 1991. It was working with the Kresge Foundation to gain its support through a challenge grant. In discussions with the foundation, a primary question was the museum's accreditation status. NCRM had discussed seeking accreditation, but pursuit of the challenge grant had left little time to focus on other undertakings. Being questioned about accreditation by a prospective funder, however, did get the ball rolling and made the designation a priority for the next fiscal year.

NCRM prepared for accreditation by first participating in the AAM's Museum Assessment Program (MAP-I), on the advice of a representative from AAM's accreditation office. While this seemed like a time-consuming first step, it helped warm NCRM up for the detailed process

of policy and procedure writing, revision, and implementation that accreditation would require. It also served to educate the NCRM staff and board of directors about the accreditation process. The MAP-I peer reviewer, Pamela Meister of the Atlanta History Center, provided a highly detailed report, laying out a road map to the NCRM board of directors and staff on the work needed to be eligible for accreditation.

As for the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute: back in July 1995, BCRI hired its second executive director Lawrence J. Pjeaux (the title was changed to president and chief executive officer in 2005), who expressed an interest in benchmarking the institute's performance with other museums. To this end, in December of that year he encouraged a senior staff member to complete an application for the MAP-I