

## **South Carolina Civil Rights Museum's Journey Toward Completion "Something for Everyone"**

For me, the South Carolina Civil Rights Museum is not just a building—it is the fulfillment of a lifelong calling. Since founding the museum in 2019, I've been driven by a deep sense of purpose: to preserve, protect, and share the powerful, often-overlooked story of South Carolina's unique role in the American civil rights movement. And now, after decades of work and unwavering commitment, we stand on the edge of something truly extraordinary.

Our new two-story, 10,000-square-foot facility—rising from the heart of historic Railroad Corner in Orangeburg—is nearing completion. But finishing the construction is only the beginning. The next challenge is even greater: transforming these walls and rooms into a world-class museum that educates, inspires, and uplifts all who walk through its doors.

### **A Museum Rooted in History—And in Heart**

South Carolina was once the stage for some of the most courageous and transformative civil rights actions in America—yet too many of these stories have been forgotten or left untold. From the 1940s through the 1970s, in cities and towns across our state—Charleston, Columbia, Aiken, Batesburg, Spartanburg, Summerton, Greenville, Orangeburg—men and women stood up, spoke out, and demanded justice.

Our museum will chronicle those pivotal decades, arranging exhibits in a powerful timeline that walks visitors through the journey for freedom, equality, and dignity. These stories deserve not just to be remembered—but to be honored.

And there is no more fitting place to tell them than Railroad Corner. Here, the past whispers through the streets. It was on this very spot that the great Thurgood Marshall stepped off the train to visit the College Soda Shop—connecting the threads of transportation, education, and the fight for civil rights in one unforgettable moment. Now, that same ground will host a living tribute to history.

Though the original State Theater and College Soda Shop could not be saved, their spirit endures in brick, beam, and memory. With pride and reverence, we proclaim: salvaged bricks from these historic structures, along with the very trusses that once cradled the roof of the State Theater, have been lovingly restored and woven into the architecture of the South Carolina Civil Rights Museum.

Even more profoundly, these elements now rest precisely where they stood during the theater's final days in the 1940s through its closing in 1960—a powerful echo of the past preserved in the present, allowing history not merely to be remembered, but to be touched, felt, and walked through once again.

## **A Place for All People**

This museum is being built for everyone.

Whether you are a schoolchild discovering history for the first time, a college student diving into primary sources, a senior citizen reflecting on moments you lived through, or simply a visitor yearning to better understand the past—you will find something here that resonates.

But “something for everyone” means more than just broad appeal. It reflects our highest hopes for what this space will become: a sanctuary for healing, a setting for reconciliation, a beacon for racial harmony, and a place where the timeless ideal of the brotherhood of humankind can be seen, felt, and believed. This will not only be a museum of history—it will be a museum of hope.

I’ve worked tirelessly to ensure that the experience will be interactive, emotional, and transformational. Rare photographs and documents, original video footage, compelling artifacts, and state-of-the-art exhibits will allow each visitor to engage deeply—no matter their age, race, or background. In addition to housing South Carolina’s most extensive collection of civil rights-era artifacts, documents, and photographs, the South Carolina Civil Rights Museum will also feature a meticulously crafted display of period-accurate scale model trains, automobiles, and miniaturized streetscapes—including a faithful recreation of the historic Railroad Corner. These immersive displays will transport visitors back in time, offering a dynamic visual experience that brings the era to life.

Among the museum’s many powerful exhibits, the galleries devoted to *Briggs v. Elliott* and the *Orangeburg Massacre* stand out as the most comprehensive and authoritative presentations of their kind anywhere in the nation. These landmark cases—often underrepresented in mainstream civil rights narratives—are explored in unprecedented depth, supported by original documents, images, and artifacts.

Additionally, the museum is home to one of the largest period camera collections in the state. These vintage instruments—many of which were used to document the movement as it unfolded—serve as both historical artifacts and symbols of the power of visual storytelling in the fight for justice.

Together, these collections underscore the museum’s commitment to preserving, honoring, and elevating South Carolina’s vital contributions to the civil rights movement.

## **Education, Legacy, and Transformation**

The South Carolina Civil Rights Museum is not only about looking back. It’s about looking forward—toward what we can learn, how we can grow, and how we pass these lessons on.

That's why every exhibit has been curated with both self-guided exploration and structured learning in mind. Our galleries will serve as classrooms and catalysts—welcoming students, families, researchers, and community groups alike.

We believe this museum will become a cultural cornerstone—not just for Orangeburg, but for the entire state. With an anticipated 200,000 visitors annually, it has the potential to transform Orangeburg from a pass-through town into a destination of historical significance, pride, and economic growth.

### **Admission-Free, Sustained by Purpose**

It is my firm promise that the museum will always be free to the public. To sustain our mission, we will rely on an exceptional gift shop, offering high-quality items that reflect our values and message:

- Local artisan crafts and handmade souvenirs
- Historic memorabilia, books, and educational toys
- Scale model trains, vintage car collectibles, and aviation artifacts
- Exclusive reproductions of original civil rights photographs and documents
- Original art and limited edition signed and numbered prints

These offerings won't be just mementos. Many are designed to be educational, thought-provoking, and purpose-driven. Picture a toy bank that encourages children to save and think critically about the world around them. Imagine puzzles and games that teach about milestones in civil rights history. Every product will tie directly to our mission—and allow each visitor to carry a piece of that mission home with them. Some of our forward-thinking businesses and industries will no doubt recognize a rare and meaningful opportunity for brand placement—integrating their name or message into select museum offerings that align with our values and vision. Whether through sponsored exhibits, educational materials, specialty merchandise, or interactive displays, these partnerships offer a unique platform for visibility, goodwill, and lasting impact. In doing so, businesses can not only support a historic cause, but also align their brand with progress, education, and the enduring pursuit of justice.

### **A Living Museum—With Movement and Meaning**

This will not be a static space filled with silent displays. It will be a vibrant, dynamic museum that breathes, speaks, and stirs the soul.

One of our most ambitious dreams is to install a fully restored historic railcar directly in front of the museum. This transformed space would serve as both a fine dining experience and a unique overnight accommodation for workshop participants and special guests. Just outside, an outdoor courtyard would welcome visitors to enjoy local cuisine in a setting surrounded by history.

To realize this vision, we have reached out to Norfolk Southern, CSX, and Amtrak—railroad giants whose own histories are intertwined with America’s story. Their support would not only secure the railcar itself but elevate the museum’s authenticity and educational reach. This collaboration has the power to turn a symbolic dream into a living reality—right at the very tracks where history once arrived.

### **Almost There—But Not Yet**

We are close—so close. Within months, the building may be complete. But the journey from raw structure to transformative experience requires resources, energy, and help from everyone.

Exhibits must be built. Artifacts must be displayed. Walls must speak, and stories must come to life.

We are hopeful for an early 2026 grand opening. But this last leap will only be possible with broad support from those who believe in this mission. Your donations, sponsorships, and endowments can ensure we open not just a museum—but a beacon of light, truth, and legacy for generations to come.

This museum stands today because of those whose shoulders we stand on—and because of the generosity and commitment of the City of Orangeburg, the County of Orangeburg, our legislative delegation, Congressman James E. Clyburn, and the many supporters who have contributed their time, energy, and resources.

I’ve devoted my life to this cause—not for fame or fortune, but to give voice to those who risked everything to change our world. Their stories deserve to be remembered—and I am determined to make sure they are.

But we cannot do it alone.

We need churches, organizations, businesses, and individuals to step forward—to help build a legacy that will educate, uplift, and transform lives for decades to come. We need endowments, sponsorships, and visionary partners willing to invest in something enduring.

Let’s finish what we started. Let’s build a museum not just of walls and exhibits—but of truth, of courage, and of unity. Let’s make history unforgettable.

CAPTION FOR PHOTO

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE:

Cecil Williams, founder and executive director of the South Carolina Civil Rights Museum, proudly holds a large G-scale model of a Norfolk Southern locomotive—symbolizing one of the museum’s many engaging and visually captivating exhibits. A CSX locomotive sits on the table,

part of a growing gallery that celebrates the deep ties between the railroad industry and the region's civil rights legacy. The railroad has always been intimately connected to Orangeburg's historic "Railroad Corner," a bustling cultural crossroads where African American life, commerce, and resistance converged. Embracing this powerful legacy, the new museum—now just months from completion and located only 100 feet from the active Norfolk Southern rail line—incorporates this symbolism into its very foundation." It stands as a beacon of history, education, and culture, honoring the past while inspiring future generations through stories told on tracks that once carried giants like Thurgood Marshall to this very spot." These finely detailed models are more than collectibles—they serve as educational tools and nostalgic touchpoints that attract visitors of all ages, from schoolchildren to lifelong train enthusiasts.