

Not Just the Fire Hoses and the Marches: A Case Study of the *Kids in Birmingham 1963 Project*

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Abstract: Recent archival literature on social justice emphasizes activism—the importance of documenting social activism and activists, and activists’ use of archives for promoting social justice. Left out of these discussions is the role archives can play in helping to capture the experiences of bystanders—passive participants—during times of tumultuous social change. Recording those stories provides a more nuanced view of times of great change in society and helps people place their own experiences in historic context. Civil rights activists and their opponents’ racist violence in Birmingham, Alabama, have been well documented. The experiences of passive participants have not been entered into the historic record. This case study examines a web-based hybrid heritage project that provides a forum for people raised in Birmingham to share their experiences in the watershed year, 1963. Kids in Birmingham 1963 contains curated first-person accounts and educational tools. The project acts as a clearinghouse, proactively marketing its content and making its contributors available for direct interviews with the media, educators, and students. The Kids project has created a new community that couldn’t have existed 50 years ago because of segregation. Contributors and users find benefits in opportunities to inspire younger generations to join the cause for social justice. The authors propose using the techniques employed in this project and its sister project, Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE), to develop a model that can enable communities to create a rich historical record and make it widely available through mass media, social media, and educational outlets.

About the authors:

Sonia Yaco is an assistant professor and Special Collections librarian at the University of Illinois at Chicago. In her past position, she was the Special Collections librarian and university archivist at Old Dominion University in Norfolk Virginia. She is the founder and Senior Advisor of the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project, a history preservation initiative. Previously Yaco was a reference

archivist at the Wisconsin Historical Society. She holds a MA from the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Yaco's publications are about EAD, confidentiality laws, the history of school desegregation, social activism among historians and archivists, and the use of voice recognition software in oral history projects. She is the co-author of "Historians, Archivists, and Social Activism: Benefits and Costs." Her co-authored chapter "A Documentation Case Study: the Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project" appears in the SAA publication, *Through the Archival Looking Glass: A Reader on Diversity and Inclusion*.

Ann Jimerson is a senior specialist in health communication and behavior change. She currently works for FHI 360 on Alive & Thrive, a project funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to promote improved feeding practices for children under 2 years old in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Vietnam. In the early 1960s, her northern family moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where her father was one of the few white full-time paid civil rights workers in the state. Jimerson's interest in helping ordinary people document their personal stories has led her to volunteer with Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) where she helped to create the oral history component for a traveling exhibit. In 2013, Jimerson founded the Kids in Birmingham 1963 project giving a voice to the black and white children who experienced one of the most turbulent passages of America's civil rights movement.