

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement

A Film by Gail Dolgin and Robin Fryday



www.pbs.org/pov



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Did you know...

- **Richard Arrington, Jr. was inaugurated in 1980 as the first African-American mayor of Birmingham, which King once deemed “the most segregated city in America.” Arrington went on to be re-elected to five terms and left office on July 16, 1999, shortly before the end of his fifth term.**
(Birmingham Public Library
<http://www.bplonline.org/resources/BlackBirmingham.aspx>)

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Mr. Armstrong in barbershop

Photo courtesy of Robin Fryday

In the days before and after Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential election, an 85-year-old civil rights activist and "foot soldier" looks back on the early days of the movement in this Academy Award®-nominated short. World War II veteran James Armstrong was the proud proprietor of Armstrong's Barbershop, a cultural and political hub in Birmingham, Alabama, for more than 50 years. In his small establishment, where every inch of wall space was covered in newspaper clippings and black-and-white photographs, hair was cut, marches organized and battle scars tended. Armstrong, who carried the American flag across the Selma bridge during the Bloody Sunday march for voting rights in 1965, links the struggles of activists of the past with a previously unimaginable dream: the election of the first African-American president.

The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films and series relating to the U.S. civil rights and voting rights movements, including *Eyes on the Prize*, *Chisholm '72*, *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin*, *A Panther in Africa* and *Freedom Riders*
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools, including black student unions
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- 1960s
- Activism
- African-American studies
- Aging
- American history
- Birmingham, Alabama
- Black history
- Civics/civic engagement
- Civil rights
- Community organizing
- Discrimination
- Multicultural education
- Oral history
- Political science
- Protest movements
- Racism
- Social justice
- Societal change/social change
- Sociology
- U.S. history
- Voting rights

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts on pages 19 to 22 are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider the Taking Action steps on page 23. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pbs.org/pov/outreach



Mr. Armstrong with flag

Photo courtesy of Robin Fryday

James Armstrong

James Armstrong was born in Orrville, Alabama, in 1923 to parents who, according to Armstrong, received less than a sixth-grade education. At the age of 18, after successfully completing high school, Armstrong was drafted into the army, where he served from 1943 to 1946. Recalling this period of his life, Armstrong said that the battle overseas prepared him for “another fight.” Upon his return, Armstrong worked in Selma and Mobile before settling down in a third town in Alabama, Birmingham, where he opened a barber shop in the College Hills community in 1953. His dedication to the politics of the civil rights movement was soon known to all his customers, as he adorned his door with aphorisms, such as, *If you think education is expensive, try ignorance* and *If you don't vote, don't talk politics in here*. On Armstrong's barbershop wall hung photographs of Martin Luther King, Jr., including one of King seated in Armstrong's barber chair.

Armstrong's commitment to civil rights took him to the front lines as a “foot soldier”—one of hundreds of Americans who fought each day for racial equality. Armstrong carried the American flag during a 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery (on a day that came to be known as Bloody Sunday), during which it is said that Armstrong was beaten to his knees but never dropped the flag. Over the years, he also participated in and was jailed for various anti-segregation demonstrations. In 1957, he filed a class-action lawsuit that would lead to his two sons' enrolling as the first black students at the previously all-white Graymont Elementary in 1963. He also served as a board member, voting rights education teacher and volunteer at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.



Mr. Armstrong

Photo courtesy of Robin Fryday

Throughout Armstrong's life, the goals of education, justice and having the ability to make change guided every decision he made and every lesson that he instilled in his children, grandchildren and fellow community members. Before he died of heart failure in 2009 at the age of 86, Armstrong witnessed the campaign and 2008 election of the first black president, Barack Obama.

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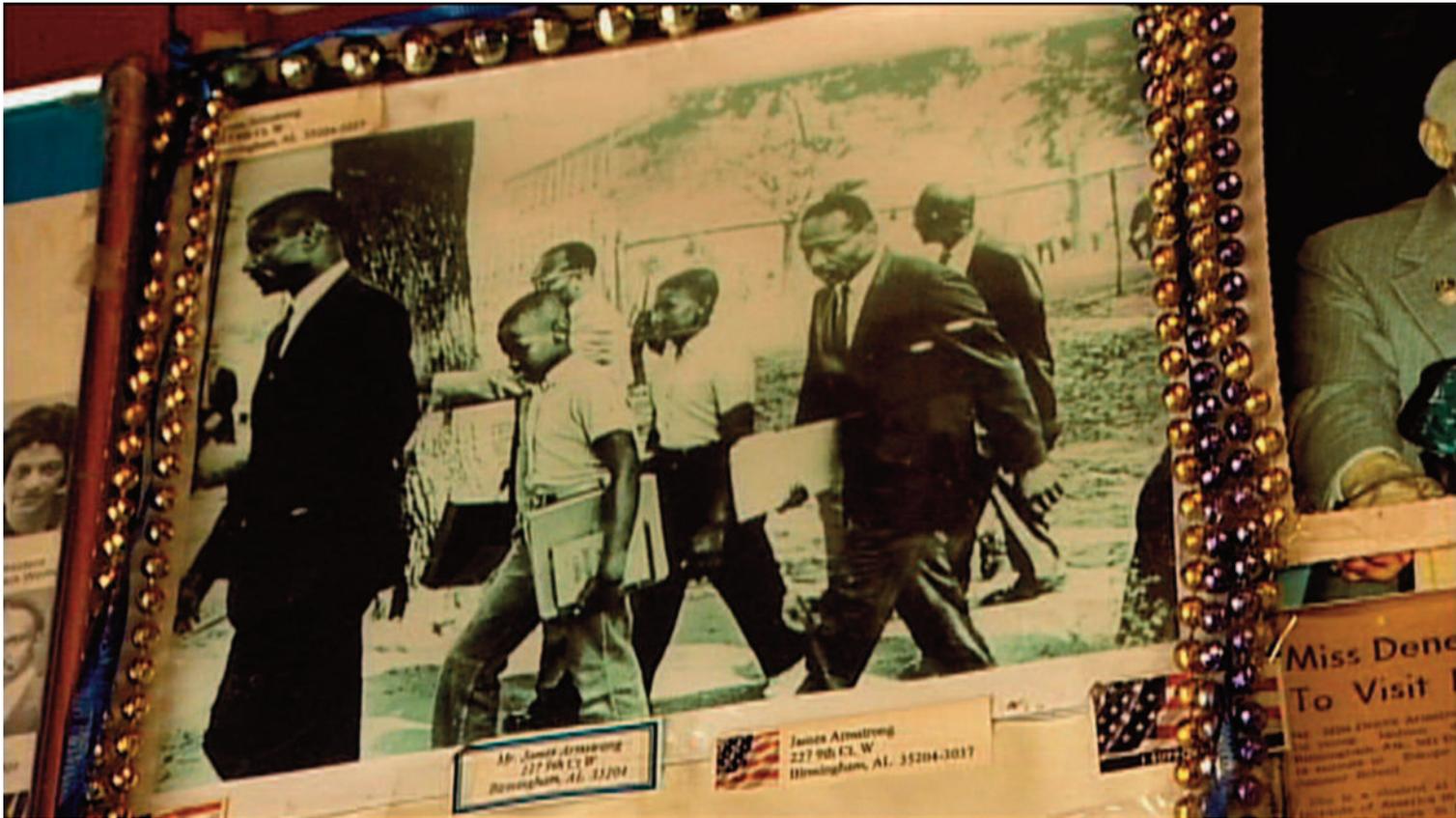
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Armstrong boys integrate Graymont school

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

Roadblocks to Voting

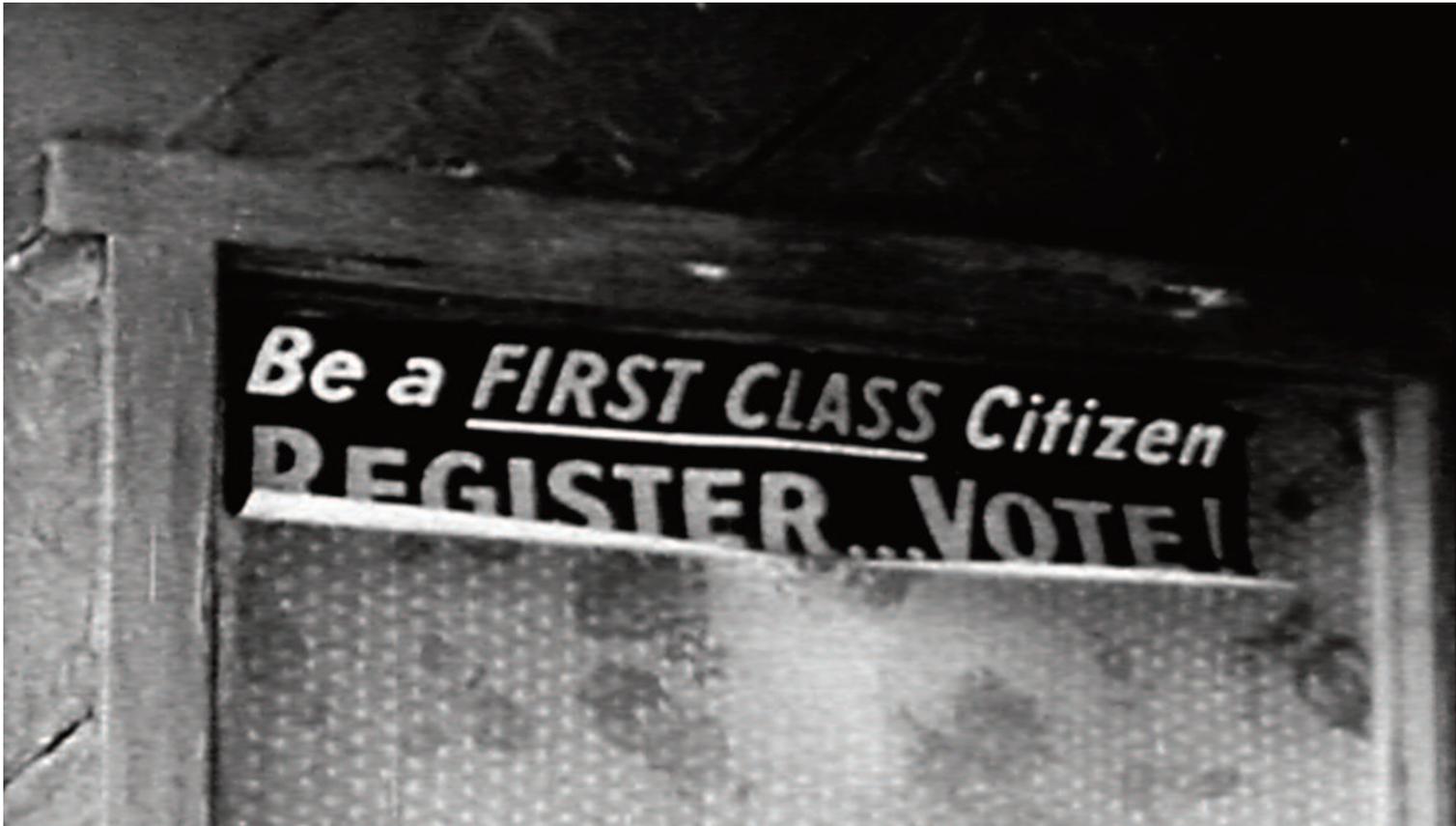
The Jim Crow Era

During the Reconstruction era immediately following the Civil War, the U.S. Congress passed a series of constitutional amendments to guarantee civil rights to freed slaves. The 15th amendment (1870) said that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of “race, color or previous condition of servitude.” In the two years immediately following, the nation elected one black senator and seven black representatives. And hundreds of thousands (possibly one million) black male voters registered to vote.

However, these advances in civil rights were short lived. Many whites in the South, especially in places where they were outnumbered by blacks, were threatened by African-Americans’ new power to elect legislators and other officials. By 1877, segregationist whites were using a combination of violence, intimidation and fraud to reduce the number of black voters. As whites regained control of the government, they gerrymandered voting districts to make it less likely for blacks to be elected. In **The Barber of Birm-**

ingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement, Armstrong recollects and old footage shows images of police brutality. State troopers tear gassed crowds and beat marchers with billy clubs. Amelia Boynton Robinson recalls being pushed into a cop car and carted off to jail. James Armstrong remembers a time when he, his wife and their daughter, who was 13 years old at the time, were all in jail at the same time.

By the 1890s, Southern state legislatures were passing “Jim Crow” laws that explicitly enforced racial segregation. The specifics of the laws varied from state to state, but all mandated separation of whites and blacks in public facilities, such as schools, parks, theaters, libraries, hospitals, restaurants, trains and buses and even cemeteries. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* affirmed Jim Crow by asserting that separate facilities were constitutional as long as they were equal. Not until it issued its 1952 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision would the U.S. Supreme Court finally declare that “separate” was inherently “unequal.”



The vote means first class citizenship

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

Disenfranchisement

There were many ways that Southern states worked around the 15th amendment to deny black people the right to vote. Many states required poll taxes and literacy tests, while others established elaborate voting systems, continually rescheduling and delaying voting times. An all-white board of registrars would sometimes pick a section of the U.S. Constitution at random and ask prospective black voters (many of whom had received little schooling) to read and explain the section. In some areas, a black person who wanted to vote was required to find several white men who would vouch for his “good character.”

The laws proved effective. According to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, fewer than 9,000 of the 147,000 voting-age African-Americans in Mississippi were registered after 1890. In Louisiana, where more than 130,000 black voters had been registered in 1896, the number had plummeted to 1,342 by 1904.

By the 1950s, blacks and sympathetic whites began to organize and pressure state and local governments

through sometimes coordinated, sometimes separate actions including marches, protests, sit-ins, rallies, boycotts, voter registration drives and “freedom rides.” While there would later be splinter groups that advocated responding to violence with violence, the initial movement used tactics of civil disobedience and embraced the principles of nonviolent resistance.

Among the organizing groups were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and a coalition of black churches known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Their efforts would eventually result in passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



Anti-integration protest at Graymont

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

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Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama

In places like Birmingham, Alabama segregation was not only the social norm—it was the law. Fred Shuttlesworth's Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), formed in 1956, did achieve some modest successes, such as integration of the city bus system. And college student Frank Dukes started the Anti-Injustice Committee (AIC), which organized a boycott of segregated stores during the 1963 Easter shopping season. In response, segregationist forces escalated their violence. Between 1957 and 1963 there were 17 church bombings in Birmingham, leading some to give the city the nickname "Bombingham." The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, in particular, became a touchstone for the movement. The church had been a meeting place for civil rights leaders like Shuttlesworth and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the bombing propelled the issues of segregation into



Recalling the violence of Bloody Sunday

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

the national spotlight. The SCLC soon joined forces with the local ACMHR to make plans for a Birmingham campaign. The campaign leaders hoped to use concentrated pressure in a single city as a means to achieve change on the national level. SNCC chairman and SCLC board member John Lewis explained,

It was our hope that our efforts in Birmingham would dramatize the fight and determination of African-American citizens in the Southern states and that we would force the Kennedy administration to draft and push through Congress a comprehensive Civil Rights Act, outlawing segregation and racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment and education.

Organizers planned a multi-pronged approach, including a voter registration drive for African-Americans, lunch counter sit-ins, marches on city hall and a boycott of merchants during the Easter season. They held mass meetings to teach nonviolence and to recruit volunteers. In **The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement**,

Armstrong recalls attending training in tactical nonviolence. Demonstrators were taught not to respond to verbal abuse or physical assaults. During sit-ins at

lunch counters, protestors would demonstrate an enormous amount of discipline and resolve, sitting for hours on restaurant stools without moving or fighting back.

Movement organizers were so successful in recruiting large numbers of nonviolent protestors that they were able to expand their actions to include kneel-ins at churches, sit-ins at libraries and a march on county buildings to register voters.

Government officials attempted to put down the protests. On April 10, 1963, an injunction from the Alabama Circuit Court declared the protests to be illegal. Protestors continued to demonstrate, ignoring the injunction, which Martin Luther King, Jr. called “unjust” and a “misuse of the legal process.” King was arrested on April 12, 1963 and kept in jail for eight days, during which time he wrote his famous letter from a Birmingham jail on the margins of a newspaper. King responded to criticism from moderates, writing,

For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This “Wait” has almost always meant “Never”... the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward



March across Edmund Pettus Bridge after Bloody Sunday

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice".

At the time, civil rights organizers tried to get the letter published in major news outlets, but the letter did not receive much attention until the campaign had succeeded.

As the Birmingham campaign wore on, the organizers faced the tough reality that adult protestors had limited time that they could dedicate to demonstrations. SCLC organizer James Bevel came up with a solution: involve children, who had more time and fewer responsibilities. On May 2, 1963, more than 1,000 African-American children marched on downtown Birmingham. Police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor and his officers greeted them with force. Finally, the national media began paying attention. For the next few days, images of children being attacked by dogs, beaten, by clubs and sprayed with water hoses filled television screens and newspaper pages.

Business declined and national attention was

drawn toward Birmingham. Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent in Burke Marshall, assistant attorney general and the head of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, to facilitate negotiations between black citizens and business leaders. On May 9, 1963, House Republicans introduced the federal civil rights bill, which would later become the Civil Rights Act of 1964. On May 10, an agreement was reached. Terms of the agreement included: the removal of "White Only" and "Black Only" signs from restrooms and drinking fountains in downtown Birmingham; the desegregation of lunch counters; a "Negro job improvement plan"; the release of protestors from jails; and the institution of a biracial committee to monitor the agreement.

Segregationists reacted to the agreement by setting off an explosion near the hotel where Martin Luther King, Jr. was staying and bombing King's brother's house. President John F. Kennedy sent in 3,000 federal troops to help prevent further violence.

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Voting Rights: 1965 Alabama

In the winter of 1965, the SNCC and the SCLC began a voter registration campaign in Selma, Alabama. Tensions between segregationists and civil rights activists ran high. In February, after a nighttime rally protesting the arrest of an SCLC leader, the electrical power went out and a mob of white men seized the moment and attacked a group of protestors. Jimmie Lee Jackson, a 26-year-old black army veteran, died as a result.

In response, activists conceived of a march from Selma to the steps of the capitol in Montgomery, Alabama, where they intended to confront the governor about the recent episode of police brutality. James Bevel, an SCLC strategist explained,

If you don't deal with negative violence and grief, it turns to bitterness. So what I recommended was that people walk to Montgomery, which would give them time to work through their hostility and resentments and get back to focus on the issue. The question I put to them was, "Do you think Wallace sent the policemen down to kill the man? Or do you think the police overreacted? Now if they overreacted, then you can't go around assuming that Wallace sent the men down to kill. So what we need to do is go to Montgomery and ask the governor what is his motive and intentions."

The 40-mile march would serve another purpose as well: The five days' time that the march would require would allow the national media sufficient time to debate the issues.

On March 7, 1965, about 600 demonstrators, including James Armstrong, marched out of Selma and attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Police officers met them there and prevented them from marching any further. Protestors were sprayed with tear gas and beaten in a widely publicized incident that later became known as Bloody Sunday.

Pressure on then-president Lyndon Johnson to sign the voting rights bill immediately intensified. Two weeks later, Martin Luther King, Jr. led a second march, this time with the protection of federal troops. The second group of marchers successfully crossed the bridge and reached Montgomery. Five months later, on August 6, 1965, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which finally eliminated all voter registration tests that had been used to discriminate against black voters. Among other stipulations, the act contained special provisions targeting areas of the country that Congress deemed more likely to have discriminatory voter registration practices. These areas—which included Birmingham—were prohibited from making any changes to their voter registration policies without first submitting those changes for review by the attorney general or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

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Armstrong after he voted in the 2008 election

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

2008 Voters

On November 4, 2008, a presidential election day, 64 percent of American citizens 18 and older went to the polls, a percentage relatively unchanged from the 2004 presidential election.

Turnout rates varied among different populations:

- Minority populations made up almost one quarter of voters.
- Among blacks ages 18 to 24, turnout increased by 8 percent to 55 percent.
- Relatively unchanged from 2004, voter turnout rates for women exceeded voter turnout rates for men—66 percent to 62 percent, respectively.
- There was a 69 percent voter turnout for ages 45 to 65, 70 percent for ages 65 and older and 49 percent of those aged 18 to 24.
- The highest voting rate was the 66 percent in the Midwest, while the rates for the West, Northeast and South averaged 53 percent.
- 77 percent of American citizens with bachelor's degrees voted, compared with 55 percent of those who had only a high school diploma or a GED.

- 70 percent of veterans voted, whereas 63 percent of non-veterans did.

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Armstrong watches election results
Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

Modern Barriers to Voting

Today there are still practices that restrict voting rights. The voting processes in the 2008 election were criticized by various parties, who voiced concerns about voter registration list manipulation; voter caging and other modes of voter suppression; voter list purges in various states, including Colorado, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Nevada and North Carolina; confusion about methods of absentee voting (a problem that specifically affected college students living on campuses away from home and troops stationed abroad); and voter eligibility.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice and the NAACP, an assault on voting rights accelerated in 2011 and has the potential to affect the participation of 5.8 million voters in the 2012 election. Attempts to curtail voting rights are aimed at all stages of the voting process—the voter registration stage, the early voting stage and election day itself.

As of October 2011, 19 new related laws and two new related executive actions had been approved, with no fewer than 42 related bills still pending. Examples of legislation include new photo I.D. and citizenship laws, the eradication of same-day voter registration, limiting mobilization efforts around voter registration, the elimination of early voting days and absentee voting and complication of the criteria necessary to restore voting rights of former felons.

Alabama joined Kansas and Tennessee in requiring documentary proof of citizenship to register to vote. According to the NAACP, these requirements place a unique burden on elderly African-American voters, many of whom were never issued birth certificates because they were born when *de jure* segregation prevented equal access to hospitals. Alabama (along with six other states) has also restricted voting



rights through government-issued photo identification requirements. According to the NAACP, 11 percent of U.S. citizens nationwide—approximately 22.9 million people—do not have government-issued photo I.D.s. They also point out that 25 percent of African-American voting age citizens (more than six million people) and 16 percent of Latino voting age citizens (nearly three million people) do not possess valid identification.

Although the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 both included measures to reduce voter intimidation, various incidents were reported during the 2008 election. For example, a group of black Obama supporters was reportedly heckled and harassed at an early voting center in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In Philadelphia, a lawsuit was filed against members of the New Black Panther Party, who allegedly stood outside a polling place on election day wearing military gear and discouraged people from voting. The American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico also filed a lawsuit in 2008 that charged a state representative and detective with voter intimidation, alleging they had made visits to the homes of voters they thought were guilty of citizenship-related fraud.

In May 2012, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing to consider the Deceptive Practices and Voter Intimidation Prevention Act of 2011. The act would criminalize voter intimidation and voter fraud and would require state and local election officials to correct any false information given to voters.

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Did you know...

- **The 2008 presidential election exit polls showed that 98 percent of blacks in Alabama voted for the Democrat candidate and 88 percent of whites voted for the Republican candidate. Birmingham's population at the time was approximately 70 percent black.** (*The New York Times*)
<http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/results/states/exitpolls/alabama.html>

Selected Civil Rights Activists Featured in
The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement



James Armstrong (85): Proprietor of Armstrong's Barbershop, a cultural and political hub in Birmingham



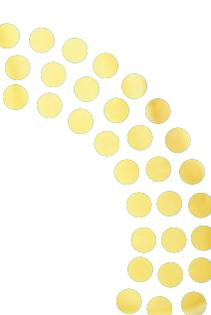
Amelia Boynton Robinson (101): activist who was harassed and arrested for demanding voting rights



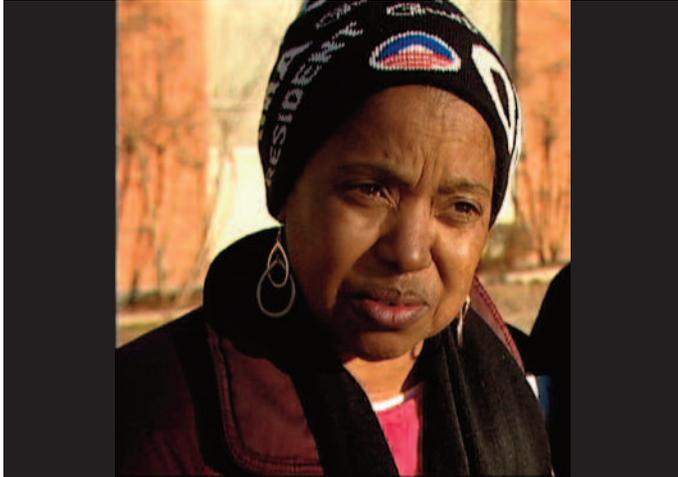
Pastor Carter Gaston



Reverend C.T. Vivian



**Selected Civil Rights Activists Featured in
The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement**



Shirley Floyd: business manager for the Civil Rights Activist Committee



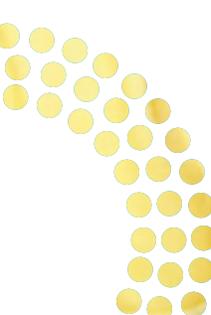
Faya Rose Toure Sanders: civil rights attorney



Dwight Armstrong: James Armstrong's son



Floyd Armstrong: James Armstrong's son



Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. To facilitate this, you might pose one of these general questions and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say to him or her?
- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide? If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, who would it be and what would you ask him or her?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

Did you know...

- In a 2009 Gallup poll, Alabama ranked as the most conservative state in the nation.
(GALLUP Politics
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/125480/ideology-three-deep-south-states-conservative.aspx>)



Shirley Floyd celebrates Obama's election

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*



Flag flies overhead at Obama's inauguration

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

American Ideals

C.T. Vivian concludes that the civil rights movement is “not just black people’s only hope—it is the only hope of Americans to ever be what they say they are.” How did the civil rights movement help all Americans to be better Americans? How did it strengthen democracy?

Why do you think Armstrong chose to carry the American flag when he marched from Selma to Montgomery? What was particularly American about what he did for civil rights and for his community?

Armstrong refers to himself as a patriot, saying, “I love this country. I love Alabama.” In the 1960s, who would have agreed that people like Armstrong were patriots and who would have considered them to be enemies of the state? Would you label Armstrong a “patriot”? Why or why not? How about social justice protestors today? Are they more likely to be described as subversive or as patriotic? How does historical distance influence the use of words like “patriotic”?

Americans refer to freedom as a basic right, but Vivian says, “Freedom in no form was ever given to us. We had to fight for it every step of the way.” What were you taught about basic rights being “given” or “earned”? In the United States today, for whom is freedom a given and who has to fight for it?

Did you know...

- **A Republican presidential candidate has carried the state of Alabama in every election since 1980.** (CNN: Alabama: Presidential Voting History <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/pre/AL/history.html>)



Whites protest the integration of Graymont school

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

The Struggle for Civil Rights

James Armstrong embraced the nonviolent approach to civil rights activism, even for his children, who were the first to integrate their school. In the film, a young man asks him, “How did it feel telling your boys not to hit back?” If you were faced with the same situation, would you tell your sons not to respond to insults or deliberate provocation with violence? Why or why not? How about daughters? Why do you think the nonviolent approach made sense to James Armstrong?

Armstrong sent his children to a previously all-white school, despite objections from his wife and family members, who warned that his kids would be killed. They thought his decision was foolish. Where would you draw the line between “foolish” and “courageous”?

Armstrong’s son Floyd recalls his boyhood experience of school integration: “We had to endure. We had to be exemplary... If you don’t do it, it’s going to fail, because they’re going to say, ‘Aha, we told you they cannot be educated with white kids.’” Have you ever been in the position of being the token representative of an entire

group? What did it feel like? What was at stake? What did you do?

Many of the people in the film are members of the church clergy. In your experience, what is the role of religion in social justice movements? What role has it played in both supporting and hindering civil rights for African-Americans?

Faya Rose Toure Sanders says, “Mr. Armstrong, who with that flag... symbolizes his belief that one day we would get an Obama for president. I, I didn’t see it. But I really do believe that Mr. Armstrong didn’t just carry that flag just to get the right to vote. He saw something greater. He saw the coming free. He saw a president. He saw a vision of America that people like me couldn’t see.” How would you describe Armstrong’s vision of the United States? Which changes did he live to witness? Which parts of the vision remain unfulfilled? What would have to change to complete Armstrong’s vision and what could “foot soldiers” do today to bring about that change?



Writing on Armstrong's window
Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

The Right to Vote

In the film, pastor Carter Gaston says, “The power lies in the vote... Voting was worth dying for.” Would you agree that voting is worth dying for? If so, why do you think voting rates in the United States are so low? If not, why do you think Gaston and other activists were willing to risk their lives to guarantee their right to vote?

Amelia Boynton Robinson explains that whites were afraid to let African-Americans vote because they believed, she says, “If they vote, they would vote us out.” What other reasons did whites have for preventing blacks from voting? What lessons does this part of American history hold for power relations between different groups of citizens today?

The Foot Soldiers' Legacy

Civil rights attorney Faya Rose Toure Sanders says, “The foot soldiers are some of the most important people in the civil rights movement. These are people who will never be known by name, because they’re people who left their jobs, who risked their lives, many were fired from their jobs, who went out to march not just one day but every day. They weren’t there just on Bloody Sunday, but they were there on Bloody Monday, Fire Me Tuesday, Can’t Find a Job Wednesday.” What are the connotations of the epithet “foot soldier”? Who are the “foot soldiers” for important social justice issues in your community?

How would you describe what the election of Barack Obama as president meant to James Armstrong? What did it mean for you?

Armstrong’s barbershop is an important center of social activity in his community, as well as a source of historical mem-



Armstrong's wall of history

Photo still from *The Barber of Birmingham*

ory. Where do people gather to share stories in your community? Who are the keepers of history? What is the significance of historical memory to a community (or a country)?

James Armstrong went to jail six times, saw his wife and 13-year-old daughter jailed and was subjected to humiliation, violence and threats. He recalls, "I didn't know if I could take it or not, but I did. Sometimes you don't realize what you can do unless you try it." He also says, "You can be what you want to be, if you want to be it bad enough." If you interviewed young people in your community today, do you think they would share Armstrong's belief that everyday people can bring change? Why or why not?

James Armstrong says, "I've always thought when I was growing up, the worst thing a man can do is nothing... Dying ain't the worst thing a man can do... I want to live for a purpose." What purpose(s) do you want to live for?

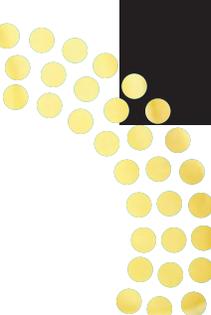
Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php



Youth interested in politics
Photo courtesy of StillPhotographer

Taking Action

- Several people in the film recount that poll tests were used to prevent them from voting. Research and publicize current obstacles that disenfranchise groups of citizens. Look at factors like the number of polling stations and voting machines in different districts, voter I.D. laws (and who does or doesn't have the type of I.D. required) and/or how district lines are drawn. Work with local officials to address any inequities you discover.
- Honor civil rights activists by conducting a voter registration drive.
- Visit the website for the Foot Soldier Project for Civil Rights Studies at the University of Georgia. Use the curricular guide to lead a discussion about finding foot soldiers in your community. Write down dates mentioned in *The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement* and brainstorm names of people in your area who would remember that time. Ask friends, relatives and neighbors for suggestions. You might also contact local community groups, civic organizations or retirement homes. Plan a party to celebrate social justice work in your community and invite these local "foot soldiers" to be the guests of honor.
- Hold a teach-in about the history of the civil rights movement. Invite people from your area to share their personal stories. Consider recording those stories for use in your school district.



FILMMAKER WEBSITE**THE BARBER OF BIRMINGHAM: FOOT SOLDIER OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT****www.barberofbirmingham.com**

In addition to general information about the film, the site includes a very helpful set of links to related resources.

Interact with *The Barber of Birmingham* at PBS.org

POV's Webby Award-winning website offers a broad range of exclusive online content to enhance the broadcast of **The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement**. Watch the full film online for free for a limited time following the broadcast (Aug. 10, 2012 to Sept. 9, 2012), download this discussion guide, lesson plans and other viewing resources, view photos from the film, and interact with the filmmaker through video interviews and an online Q-and-A soon after the documentary airs on *POV*.

What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about **The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement** by posting a comment at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/povshortcuts>

EYES ON THE PRIZE**www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize**

The website for this classic PBS series includes a wealth of primary source documents, profiles of key players and organizations, materials for teachers and more.

THE RISE AND FALL OF JIM CROW**www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow**

The website for this PBS series includes rich resources specifically related to voting rights and Jim Crow laws, including interactive maps, materials for teachers, online activities and tools and more.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE (NAACP)**www.naACP.org**

This civil rights organization's website covers its history, as well as current initiatives.

MSNBC**<http://video.msnbc.msn.com/melissa-harris-perry/46531601#46531601>**

Melissa Harris-Perry hosts a discussion of the film and the issues it raises with filmmaker Robin Fryday, James Armstrong's grandson Darren, former head of the Republican National Committee Michael Steele and legal scholar Anita Hill.

THE FOOT SOLDIER PROJECT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**<http://www.footsoldier.uga.edu/about/intro.html>**

This University of Georgia Project gathers evidence of the contributions of the "unsung heroes" of the civil rights movement.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT VETERANS ROLL CALL**www.crmvet.org/vet/vethome.htm**

This volunteer website invites veteran activists to share their own information and maintains a list of civil rights foot soldiers.

AMERICAN RADIOWORKS: OH FREEDOM OVER ME**http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/oh_freedom/**

This website provides firsthand accounts of Freedom Summer participants.

CIVIL RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION PROJECT**www.usm.edu/crdp/index.html**

This University of Southern Mississippi project includes transcripts of oral histories.

BIRMINGHAM CIVIL RIGHTS INSTITUTE**www.bcri.org/**

This website provides information specific to Birmingham, including an online archive of the institute's documents and recordings.

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

www.videoproject.com



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 25th season on PBS in 2012, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 300 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. Visit www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Digital www.pbs.org/pov

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

POV Community Engagement and Education www.pbs.org/pov/outreach

POV films can be seen at more than 450 events nationwide every year. Together with schools, organizations and local PBS stations, POV facilitates free community screenings and produces free resources to accompany our films, including discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

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Front cover: Mr. Armstrong.
Photo courtesy of Robin Fryday



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