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## Digital Resources on the Web

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## Archival Resources on the Web—Eric Willey, Assistant Editor, Illinois State University, Normal

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### Digital Archives: Civil Rights Movements in the United States

By Antonia E. Rath, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

One of the most significant themes in American history is the struggle many groups face to receive equal treatment under US law. It should not come as a surprise then that archives, libraries, and other institutions make a concerted effort to collect and preserve materials documenting these civil rights movements in America. There is also a growing trend among institutions to make their collections more accessible to the public through digitization. Digitized materials allow researchers to gain access to primary sources from the convenience of their own computers.

When beginning to research a topic, it is useful to have an idea of the scale and scope of relevant digital archives on the Internet. The following is a brief overview of some significant digital archives on civil rights movements in America. This discussion will home in on digital archives regarding the African American, American Indian, Japanese American, and Chicano and Chicana civil rights movements.

#### African American Civil Rights Movement

Type the phrase “civil rights digital collection” into an online search engine, and the **Civil Rights Digital Library** (CRDL), [crdl.usg.edu](http://crdl.usg.edu), appears at the top of the results. The CRDL is an extensive website created as part of GALILEO, a digital initiative of the Board of Regents of Georgia’s University System. Users accessing this online portal can link to civil rights materials held by approximately 160 different contributing institutions, including libraries, archives, museums, and public broadcasters from all across the country. In addition, the CRDL contains news materials from WSB (Atlanta) and WALB (Albany, GA), television archives held by the Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection located at the University of Georgia Libraries. Researchers can locate primary materials using the advanced search function or browsing by event, place, person, topic, educator resource, media type, or contributing institution or collection.

The primary sources that can be accessed through CRDL come from 261 different collections. One of these collections is the **March on Milwaukee: Civil Rights Project** ([collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/march](http://collections.lib.uwm.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/march)) created by the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries. March on Milwaukee provides access to primary

sources and educational materials from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Libraries and the Wisconsin Historical Society. This prime example of a digital collection dedicated to local history highlights the ways local history often reflects larger national trends. March on Milwaukee contains the papers of several individuals involved in the civil rights movement in Milwaukee, unedited news film archives from WTMJ-TV (a television station located in Milwaukee), photographs, and oral history interviews. Rather than include all of the contents of the physical collection, those involved in the digitization process hand selected the most relevant and significant materials for the online collection. The March on Milwaukee project has received several awards, including the 2011 Award of Merit granted by the American Association of State and Local History.

About 80 miles west of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee stands another rich source of civil rights materials. The Wisconsin Historical Society, located in Madison, Wisconsin, is home to one of the largest civil rights collections in the country. To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer, the Wisconsin Historical Society has created the **Freedom Summer Digital Collection** ([www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:1474](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Content.aspx?dsNav=N:1474)). This collection includes over thirty thousand documents digitized from more than a hundred manuscript collections housed in the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. These documents include the personal papers of movement leaders including Amzie Moore and Howard Zinn, diaries and letters from northern college students who volunteered in the South during the summer of 1964, official records of civil rights organizations, and countless other primary materials from the Mississippi Freedom Summer. Like many of the other digital collections, the Freedom Summer Digital Collection also includes educational materials for teachers and students, including a Freedom Summer PowerPoint presentation and a 353-page sourcebook guide to Freedom Summer documents.

#### The American Indian Civil Rights Movement

With over a million manuscript pages, 2,000 maps, 11,000 photographs, 500 atlases, and 3,500 drawings and paintings, the Edward E. Ayer Collection at the

Newberry Library in Chicago is one of the largest collections of American Indian primary sources in the world. **American Indian Histories and Cultures Collection** (AIHC, [www.aihc.amdigital.co.uk](http://www.aihc.amdigital.co.uk)) is the digital archive created from some of the primary source materials found in the Ayer Collection. Using the AIHC, a researcher has access to four centuries of American Indian documents. The AIHC provides a large amount of material covering the American Indian civil rights movement; however, unlike the other digital collections discussed thus far, the AIHC is not automatically free to access. Students can gain free access to this digital collection if the university they attend has purchased it. Teachers, librarians, and other faculty of both public and private universities, colleges, and other academic institutions can request a four-week free trial of AIHC.

Another relevant American Indian civil rights movement digital collection is entitled **American Indian Movement and Native American Radicalism**. This collection includes files kept by the FBI on the American Indian movement from 1968 to 1979 and primary materials documenting the Wounded Knee standoff, which took place in 1973. Like the AIHC, this collection can only be accessed if a researcher has access to a university's library that has purchased a subscription to the database.

While not solely devoted to the American Indian civil rights movement, certain academic institutions, including the University of Maryland's Francis King Carey School of Law, have digital resources that are certainly worth noting. The university's Thurgood Marshall Law Library contains relevant resources, including the **Historical Publications of the United States Commission on Civil Rights**, which house several significant primary sources such as *The American Indian Civil Rights Handbook* ([www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11033.pdf](http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11033.pdf)) and the *Enforcement of the Indian Civil Rights Act: Hearing Held in Washington, D.C., January 28, 1988* ([www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr18in23z.pdf](http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr18in23z.pdf)).

### **Japanese American Civil Rights Movement**

**Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project** ([www.densho.org/densho.asp](http://www.densho.org/densho.asp)) is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the 120,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II. According to the site, one goal of this remarkable project is to "educate, preserve, collaborate and inspire action for equity." Currently, the Densho Digital Archive, one component of the larger Densho Project,

contains primary sources that include 796 interviews, 715 narrators, 1,597 hours of video, and 12,228 documents, newspapers, and photographs. As with many of the other civil rights digital archives previously discussed, the Densho Project is routinely being updated, and more primary sources are being added to the collection. Users must register to access the contents of the archive, but fortunately the registration process is both easy and free. In addition to the rich digital archive, the Densho Project contains many other educational materials, including "Sites of Shame" detailing the Japanese American detention facilities and the "Densho Encyclopedia."

### **Chicano and Chicana Civil Rights Movement**

In 2006, Herman Baca, a Chicano rights activist who was greatly involved in Chicano civil rights grassroots organizing, gave his papers to the University of California San Diego Library. The **Herman Baca Papers**, housed in UC San Diego's Mandeville Special Collections Library, extend from 1964 to 2006 and document over 40 years of Chicano history in San Diego. A substantial percentage of these papers has been digitized by the UC San Diego Library. These digital materials can be accessed using the UC San Diego Library website, the Online Archive of California (OAC), or Calisphere, "the University of California's free public gateway to a world of primary sources." Within the digital archive are 38,000 pages of documents, 3,643 images ([tinyurl.com/UCSD-Baca](http://tinyurl.com/UCSD-Baca)), and audio interviews of Herman Baca and other Chicano activists ([tinyurl.com/Chicano-interviews](http://tinyurl.com/Chicano-interviews)).

The Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, based at the University of Washington, has also created an extensive digital collection entitled the **Chicano/a Movement in Washington State History Project** ([depts.washington.edu/civilr/mecha\\_intro.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/mecha_intro.htm)). This collection, containing materials relating to both Chicano and Chicana history, focuses on the role both groups played in Washington State from the mid-1960s to the 1980s. Included in this digital collection are video oral histories, photos from five different collections, documents, month-by-month newspaper coverage extending from 1968 to 1979, and educational materials for teachers and students.

Many American archives, libraries, and other academic institutions are home to rich civil rights movement primary sources. Whether you are an academic scholar, a student, or an individual interested in your heritage, digital archives give you direct, easy, and often free access to these exceptional primary sources.