

The Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California Proves Its Relevance in a Changing America

RIVERSIDE, CA, UNITED STATES, June 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Named a "Riverside Hero," The Civil Rights Institute has evolved from a local history project into an ongoing civic resource, offering everything from Civil Rights workshops to a first-of-its-kind regional digital archive.

In a moment when civil rights are being debated in courtrooms, classrooms, and the halls of Congress, one question keeps surfacing in the Inland region: Does The Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California still matter? According to Inland Empire residents, community leaders, and the Institute's own packed calendar, the answer is a resounding YES.



The Civil Rights Institute Board of Directors and the community celebrate the Woman of Achievement Awardee. Photo L to R: Ken Gutierrez, The Civil Rights Institute Board Member; Kathy Wright, Community Leader; Sabrina Gonzalez, Civil Rights Institute Exec

Founded on a vision conceived in 2006 by co-founders Rose Mayes (<https://fairhousing.net/about-us/executive-director/>) and the late Lalit Acharya (<https://omeka.ucr.edu/collections/s/peopleshistoryie/item/29083>), the Institute was incorporated as a nonprofit in 2013. The Civil Rights Institute opened its doors to the public in January 2023.

Located at 3933 Mission Inn Ave. in Riverside, The Civil Rights Institute is the marquee of a 92,000-square-foot development that also provides 72 units of urban workforce housing and serves as the new home of the Fair Housing Council of Riverside County.

In early 2026, the organization was named a "Riverside Hero" at Riverside's annual State of the City address, a recognition acknowledging the Institute's growing footprint in the region's civic life.

Three Resources, One Mission

The Civil Rights Institute is comprised of three distinct resources: an exhibition center, a diversity center and a media center. Each serves a different community need, but all point toward the same goal: preserving the past, while equipping people to navigate the present and into the future.

The Riverside African American Historical Society Exhibition Center is presently featuring "Out in the I.E." (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/out-in-the-i-e/>), which runs through July 10, a landmark show exploring LGBTQ+ history and identity in the region. Past exhibits include Building Our Region's Korean Communities (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/building-our-regions-korean-communities/>), Homegrown Heroes (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/homegrown-heroes/>), San Bernardino Photography Now, Working Coachella and Still I Rise (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/still-i-rise/>).

The Bank of America Diversity Center (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/diversity-center/>), available for community reservations for mission-aligned groups, has become a neutral convening space where difficult and sensitive conversations about race, equity, and justice can take place without the charged atmosphere of a courtroom or city hall chamber.

The Altura Credit Union Media Center (<https://archive.inlandcivilrights.org/>) is the venue for oral/visual history recordings, civil rights audio and video productions, and pop-up exhibitions.



Out in the I.E., The Civil Rights Institute of Southern California's Sixth Exhibition is presently underway through July 10, with tours and exhibition every Wednesday through Friday, noon to 5:00 p.m.



The Institute's Executive Director, Sabrina Gonzalez, was named the 2026 Inland Empire Community Foundation Women's Giving Fund Woman of Achievement for Nonprofit Leadership and received Riverside County Supervisorial District 1 Woman of Distinction.

The digital archive (Archive.InlandCivilRights.org) houses photographs, oral histories, letters, reports, and other artifacts that preserve The Civil rights record of the Inland region.

The Institute is investing in the archive's long-term sustainability. For example, in the summer of 2026, it is sponsoring a Digital Archive Internship, in which an intern will be paid \$27 per hour for 12 consecutive weeks to work with community-based archives and multiple digital archive systems, as well as to diversify their professional training.

Timely Programming in a Turbulent Era

The Institute's programming calendar for Spring 2026 reads like a direct response to the national conversation on civil rights.

For example, in June, the Institute is hosting Songs of Freedom: Music of Resistance & Joy to observe Juneteenth, which will feature a children's craft corner presented by Black Arts Museum and a live performance by Empower You Edutainment that celebrates the role of music in Black history; as well as an Out in Print: Zine workshop.

Launa K. Wilson, chair of the Institute's board of directors, described The Civil Rights Institute as a neutral space where people from all walks of life can learn from one another. "The Inland Empire has a massive amount of history relating to the civil rights movement; more than most people think," Wilson said. "We were created to provide information and workshops, and to be a safe space for conversations about civil rights."

The Civil Rights Institute's Executive Director, Sabrina Gonzalez (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/about/executive-director/>), describes the Institute's mission as inspiring people of all ages by highlighting and uplifting historic and ongoing civil rights stories, fostering community advocacy, and building what the Institute calls "champions of tomorrow."

A Record Recognized

The acknowledgments and accolades from community leaders and high-profile dignitaries are many. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors (<https://rivco.gov/board-supervisors/>); the City of Riverside (<https://riversideca.gov/>); the California State Treasurer (<https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/bio/>), Fiona Ma (<https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/bio/>); Governor Gavin Newsom (<https://www.gov.ca.gov/>); and members of the State Senate and Assembly, among them Senator Sabrina Cervantes (<https://sd31.senate.ca.gov/>), Steve Padilla (<https://sd18.senate.ca.gov/>) and former Senator Richard D. Roth (<https://archive.senate.ca.gov/member-archives/2023-24/richard-d-roth>), and Assemblymembers Dr. Corey A. Jackson (<https://jackson.asmdc.org/>) and former Assemblymember José Medina, have all formally recognized the Institute's work and contributions to the region.

In April 2025, the Riverside Arts Council (<https://riversideartscouncil.com/home>) named The Civil Rights Institute its Creative Revolutionaries honoree at the Mayor's Ball for the Arts. In January

2026, the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce (<https://www.riverside-chamber.com/>) presented the Institute with its Riverside HERO Award (<https://www.raincrossgazette.com/civil-rights-institute-receives-riverside-hero-award-from-chamber/>) .

In February 2026, the Riverside Arts Council added a Bronze Award for Art Facility. The Institute's Executive Director, Sabrina Gonzalez, was named the 2026 Inland Empire Community Foundation Women's Giving Fund's Woman of Achievement (<https://www.iegives.org/womens-giving-fund-awards-70000/>) for Nonprofit Leader and Riverside County Supervisorial District 1 Woman of Distinction (<https://rivcodistrict1.org/news/women-distinction-2026-luncheon-celebrates-community-leaders-crestmore-manor>).

A Living Institution

Asked whether the Institute risks becoming a museum piece, a monument to struggles already won, Gonzalez says, "We are not a static organization; we are built to stay relevant and to evolve." The programming calendar, the expanding digital archive, the know-your-rights workshops, and the "Riverside Hero" designation suggest that the community agrees.

"The Ethnic Studies Resource Hub (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/educator-portal/>) and Last Mile Bus Program (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/the-last-mile-program/>) are examples of how The Civil Rights Institute is listening and responding to community needs," says Gonzalez. "These programs strengthen our partnerships with our area school districts and enhance students' learning experiences."

In a region grappling with housing costs, immigration policy, economic inequality, and ongoing debates over equity in education, The Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California has positioned itself not as a relic of the past, but as a blueprint for the future.

For more information, visit InlandCivilRights.org or call (951) 682-5307. The Institute is located at 3933 Mission Inn Ave., Suite 103, Riverside, CA 92501.

Links to photos for each Exhibition Launch

<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/>

Building Our Region's Korean Communities

<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/building-our-regions-korean-communities/>

July 25, 2025 – November 21, 2025

Homegrown Heroes (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/>)

September 26, 2024 – June 20, 2025

San Bernardino Photography Now: I'm Grateful Thorns Have Roses

<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/working-coachella/>

June 6, 2024 – August 23, 2024

Working Coachella: Images of the farmworker community of the Coachella Valley

(<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/working-coachella/>)

January 11, 2024 – May 3, 2024

Still I Rise: The Black IE Fight For Justice (<https://www.inlandcivilrights.org/exhibitions/still-i-rise/>)

October 22, 2022 – December 15, 2023

About The Civil Rights Institute

The Civil Rights Institute's vision is to foster connections among people of all backgrounds through storytelling, shared knowledge, and personal engagement; and to establish Inland Southern California as a center for civil rights and social justice. Its core values are Inclusive, Collaborative, and Good Trouble. The Civil Rights Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Admission to The Civil Rights Institute is free. Public visiting hours are Wednesday through Friday, noon to 5:00 p.m. Tours are available seven days a week upon request, at InlandCivilRights.org

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScwVZQ9c00OT5ZIU_kdhrRamMNc5wRzWm1RWyEA94WjUhSSXQ/viewform).

The Institute is located at 3933 Mission Inn Ave., Suite 103, at the corner of Mission Inn Avenue and Fairmount Boulevard.

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