



**JAH KENTE INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

**Lead Organization, District of Columbia Commission  
on the Arts and Humanities 2022.**

**Cohort: Curriculum Design.**

## **Government, Global Politics, Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs, International Exchange.**

**AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM BY**

**Landmark Civil Rights Cases and Freedom Riders to  
the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

**SOCIAL STUDIES / HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT**

**Connecting with**

**INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATION MEDIA ARTS (MULTIMEDIA),  
PERFORMING ARTS- MUSIC**

**The Standards are based on National Council for Social Studies (NCSS)  
and Common Core State Standards (CCSS).**

## **Landmark Cases:**

**Plessy v Ferguson 1896**

**Mendez v Westminster 1946**

**Morgan v Commonwealth of Virginia 1946**

**Sarah Keys v Carolina Coach Company 1955**

**Brown v Board of Education 1954 - 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Five Consolidated Cases.**

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.**

**Briggs v Elliot, South Carolina**

**Bollington v Sharpe, Washington, DC**

**Belton v Gebhart, Delaware**

**Davis v County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia**

**Freedom Rides and Catalyst of the 1964 Civil  
Rights Act of 1964 and the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.**

**Public and Free Educational Program Co-sponsored by DC  
Commission of the Arts and Commission.**



**DC COMMISSION ON  
THE ARTS & HUMANITIES**



**COUBY WLBT.COM STAFF**

HEZEKIAH WATKINS, MISSISSIPPI'S YOUNGEST FREEDOM RIDER AT 13 YEARS OLD. HE HAS SPENT HIS LIFE FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR ALL.

"EVERY JAIL I WAS IN, EVERY BEATING I HAVE GOTTEN, EVERY LICK THAT I GOT UPSIDE THE HEAD ON THE BACK OR WHEREVER WAS WORTH IT."



"If history were a neighborhood, slavery would be around the corner and the Freedom Rides would be on your doorstep." ~

Mike Wiley, writer & director of "The Parchman Hour."

What do you think he means?

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# OVERVIEW

## About the Freedom Rides

Freedom Rides is a course in Jah Kente International, Inc's program: **Government, Global Politics, Diplomacy, and Foreign Affairs.**

[Government, Global Politics, Diplomacy, Foreign Affairs - Jah Kente International ®, Inc.](#)

The United States federal government was not enforcing the laws that outlawed desegregation in interstate travels. The Freedom Rides constitute a pivotal era in American history that helped to bring about unprecedented and notable change through civil rights legislations.

People may seek to simplify and beautify the past and erase aspects that are uncomfortable. Nevertheless, preserving the stories, commemorating the events, and honoring the moments, foster a collective memory of history, which is the study of the past that can also help society to understand the present, and to shape the future.

History gives us a better understanding of ourselves, the world, and present-day issues by providing knowledge, perspective, and lessons. The Freedom Riders brought new urgency and vitality that broadened the constituency base with moral imperative to test and challenge oppressive laws and practices. The personal accounts are as moving as the images are riveting.

Throughout 1961, more than 450 interracial Freedom Riders - Americans from young students to old and experienced advocates, males and females of different races, social and economic backgrounds, and religious affiliations, united in purpose, risked their lives through non-violent actions that challenged illegally enforced segregation in public transportation.

The draconian antics, shenanigans, duplicity, and conniving reprisals by local government officials and the brutality of civilian segregationists subsequently sensitized, shocked, and scandalized the nation and beyond. The captivating images highlight the protests and violent reactions by the Freedom Riders as they unfolded in southern states.

The non-violent strategies and resistance raised awareness of segregation laws, generated media attention that resulted in public outrage against violent attacks on protestors. The dynamics turned public opinion against segregation laws in

the United States.

The Freedom Rides were first conceived in 1947 when the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) organized an interracial bus ride across state lines to test a Supreme Court decision that declared segregation on interstate buses unconstitutional in *Morgan v Commonwealth of Virginia* in 1946.

Called the “**Journey of Reconciliation**,” the Riders challenged bus segregation in the upper parts of the South, avoiding the more dangerous Deep South. The relative lack of media attention resulted in limited ability to galvanize public support to realize the goals of the Rides.

Fourteen years later, in 1961, a new national context of sit-ins and boycotts changed the course of American history with the emergence of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

This time the atrocious act of vengeance garnered extensive media attention, embarrassed the United States internationally, and eventually forced federal intervention from the **John F. Kennedy Administration**.

The grassroots nature of the movement empowered the cause in a new way, directly influencing, and helping to inspire subsequent activities that followed – from the March on Washington in August 1963, the Freedom Summer Movement in Mississippi in 1964, to the landmark federal legislation culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

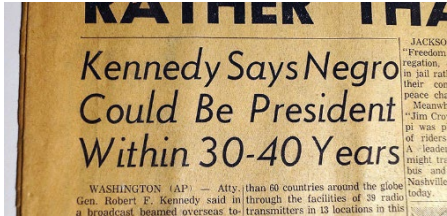
President John Kennedy sent federal troops to the University of Mississippi in 1962 and the University of Alabama in 1963 to protect Black students attempting to enroll.

On June 11, 1963, President John Kennedy gave a nationally televised speech calling upon Congress to pass a comprehensive Civil Rights bill, though adding that Americans were “confronted primarily with a moral issue, not a legislative or political one.” Journalist Evan Thomas states in the PBS documentary *Freedom Riders*, that there is “*a direct line from the Freedom Riders to the speech that President Kennedy gave in June of 1963.*”



Attorney General Robert Kennedy, acknowledging the impact of the Freedom Rides would later say, “I never recovered from it.”

On May 27, 1968, Robert Kennedy, now an undaunting champion of Civil Rights, gave a



radio interview to “Voice Of America,” pointing out that with all the imperfections regarding equal rights. he envisioned an African American becoming president of the United States. It was a bold prediction. This happened in 2008 with President Barack Obama.

Some Freedom Riders, including Congressman John Lewis (1940-2020), an original Freedom Rider, emerged as a new generation of leaders. Some wrote about their experiences. But there are many unsung heroes and heroines whose unyielding conviction changed America for the better with ongoing and resonating lessons on IDEA – Inclusion Diversity, Equity and Access.

# Content Standards

The Freedom Ride Curriculum is aligned with the National Endowment for Humanities Curriculum. The standards are based on the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The Content Standards are interdisciplinary with History/ Social Studies, English Language Arts - how literature (style of writing) is used to represent history, Media Communication Arts, Visual Arts in depicting events, Geography with the use of maps, routes, Performing Arts / Music, and the Information Communication Technology to lessons.

The narratives and images include secondary source research that are cited, in the bibliography, and the words of the Freedom Riders.

A core component of the curriculum requires young people to retrace the bus routes of the Freedom Riders to keep the meaning of the Rides in perspective.

Youths learn about this critical period in America by studying and analyzing landmark cases before the sixties and within the context of the entire Civil Rights Movement. Instructors, historians, visiting experts, and youths use PowerPoint presentations, engage in critical and in-depth discussions, review documentaries to highlight what occurred and why, and interview living witnesses to the events and era, when possible, and they document the experiences.

In Summer 2024, youths will co-organize and host a Symposium: **The Diamond Jubilee of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Catalytic Role of the Freedom Riders.**

Youths consider the motivations, tactics, and objectives of the Freedom Riders, methods of non-violence, songs, and their impacts. They gain an understanding of the role of citizens in shaping America's civil rights history and democracy, and what inspires young people to be active and engaged in bringing about change.

Societal structures place people, based on race, ethnicity, gender, or

socioeconomic status, at differing points of advantage or disadvantage. The dynamics of Civil Rights have implications on equality, equity, and justice. The lessons also address the difference between equality, equity, and justice, and how the implementation of one versus the other can lead to dramatically different outcomes for marginalized people.

## **Civil Rights and Relationship with Equality, Equity, Justice.**

### **Civil Rights:**

Civil Rights refers to fundamental rights that every individual should have, regardless of their background, race, religion, gender, or other characteristics, that are considered essential for the functioning of society. Examples include freedom of speech, right to due process, right to vote, access to education, employment opportunities, and protection against discrimination.

In the next four pages with illustrations, the context highlights the differences and interconnectedness.

# Equality vs. Equity

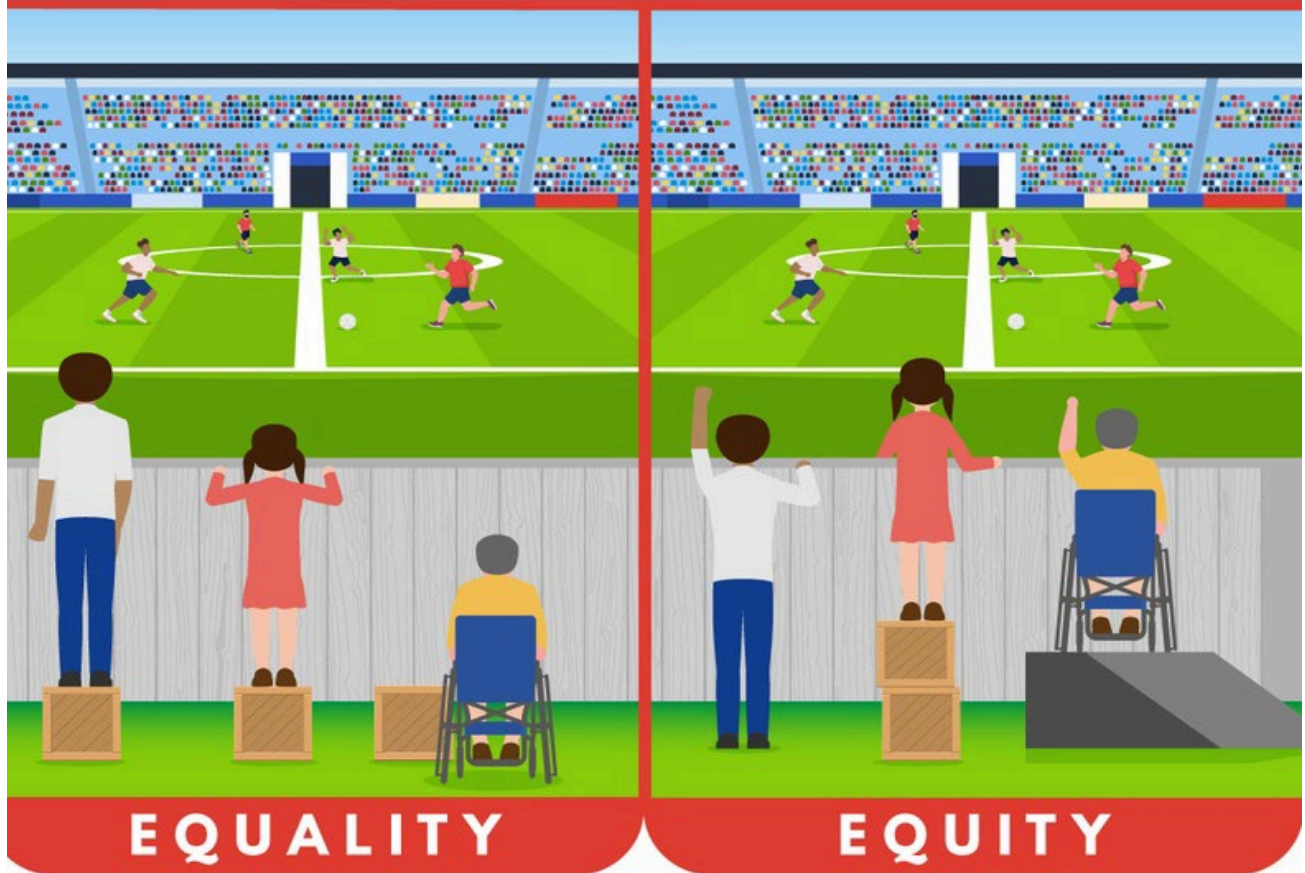


Diagram: Courtesy United Way

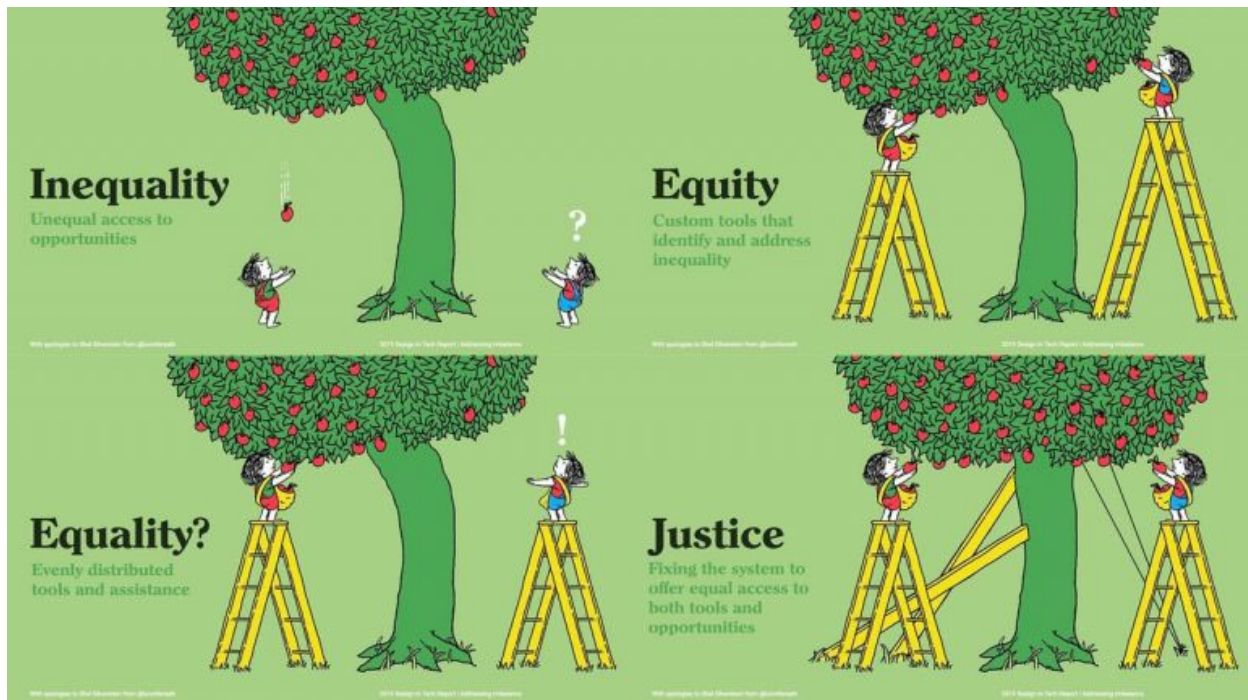


Diagram Courtesy: Paper Pinecon

**Equality:**

Equality means all individuals or populations have the same rights, the same resources, and opportunities. The process focuses on treating everyone uniformly without considering their unique circumstances or barriers.

**Illustration:** Imagine the three individuals standing next to a championship event or two individuals standing near the fruit bearing tree. Equality is dividing resources equally but does not factor in their abilities to participate due to differences in their respective needs.

As seen in the first image, all three individuals receive equal support (such as boxes), to observe the sport and not consider their unequal status. Only one individual on the left can do without extra help and support. In the second image, two individuals are given the same size of ladder not factoring in differences of access, which results in one not able to access the fruits.

In achieving equality, the context requires addressing historical disparities and ensuring that everyone starts from the same point in order to have the same access to succeed.

**Equity:**

Equity goes beyond equality. Equity not only divides resources fairly and equally, but also factors in the different and unequal needs amongst people. Equity recognizes that each person may have **different circumstances** or not have the same starting point, which affects access to opportunities. The differences include factors such as race/ ethnicity and socioeconomic status that would require different support to ensure the same chances of success.

Therefore, instead of distributing tools or resources evenly, an equitable solution is to allocate resources needed by each person to access the game or fruit tree. It could be access to a competitive college or a high paying job.

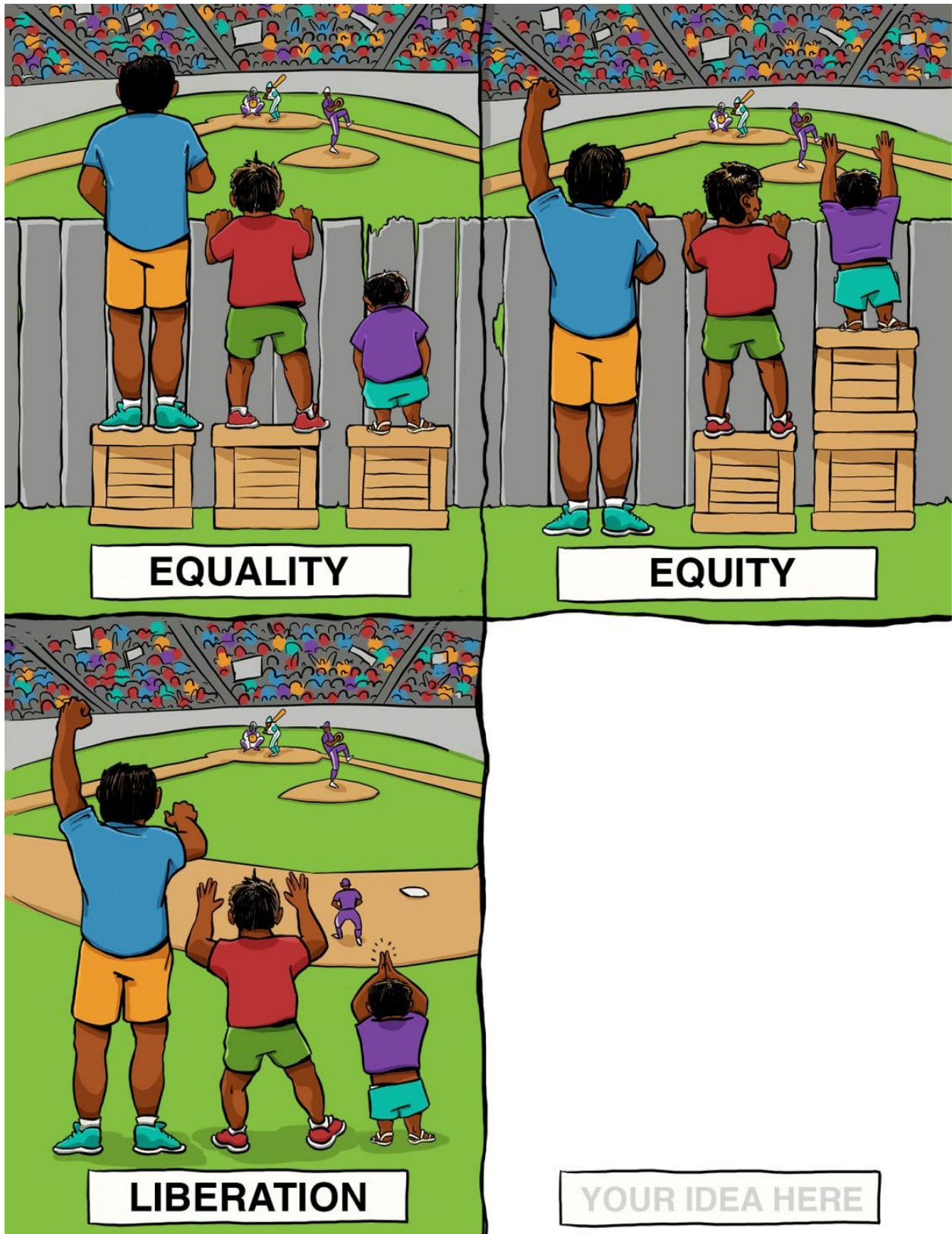
This can be shown in the image by the different height of the boxes and ladders. With the boxes, the individuals in the middle and right have higher boxes to observe the game. The boy on the right has a taller ladder because the tree is higher on his side. Whereas the other boy has a shorter ladder because he has a shorter distance to reach to gather apples. They have different sized ladders to make sure they are both able to pick the fruits.

Equity enables positive results for everyone.

**Justice:**

As seen in the images, all individuals were given the same size of boxes and ladders. But as a matter of equity, they were given different support based on their needs in order for all individuals to be able to respectively observe the event and have access to the fruits.

Justice takes equity a step further. Justice is concerned with fixing social systems and systemic biases and barriers to create long-term equity. It looks to create equity in systems as well as individuals. *“Justice can take equity one step further by fixing the systems in a way that leads to long-term, sustainable, equitable access for generations to come.”*



Courtesy Center for Story-based Strategy

## Essential Questions.

Essential questions to keep in perspectives as youths go through the lessons include:

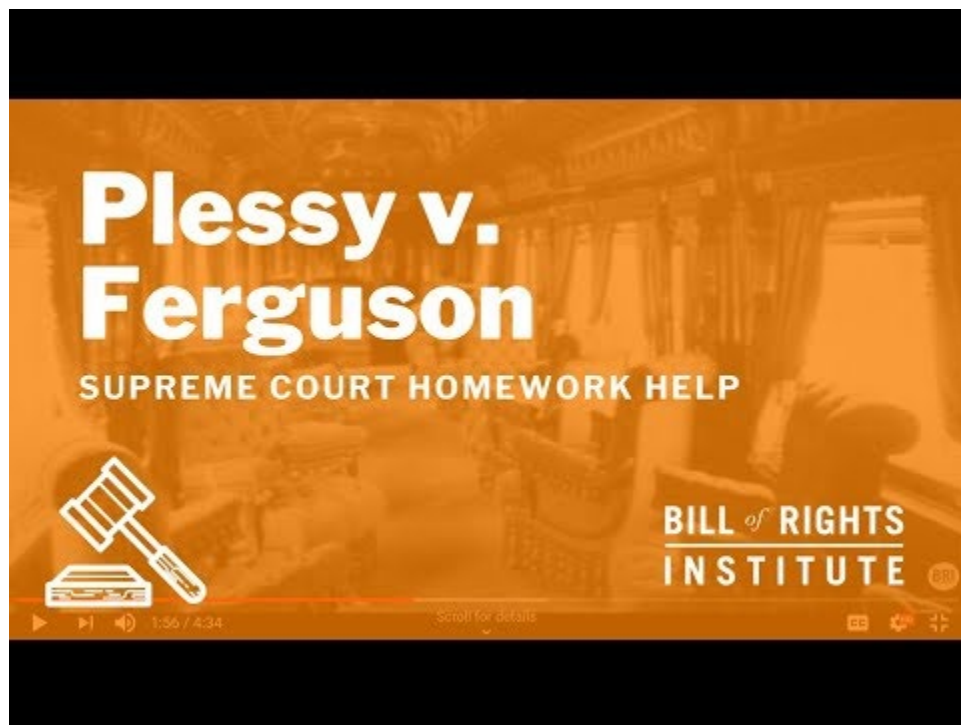
- ✓ Who were the Freedom Riders and why did people join the Freedom Rides as they progressed?
- ✓ When prejudice, bigotry, and racism are rationalized by both custom and law, what can be done to bring about a more inclusive society?
- ✓ How do you explain why there is often so much resistance to change?
- ✓ How does nonviolent direct action expose injustice? Why was it such an effective strategy for bringing about change during the Civil Rights Movement?
- ✓ What role did the media play in the Freedom Rides? How do media shape our understanding of the issues in the civil rights era and today?
- ✓ What do the actions and stories of Freedom Riders indicate about the role of citizens and civil society in shaping social justice and democracy?
- ✓ What role did music play to inspire resistance in the Civil Rights Era
- ✓ How do we link actions and change?
- ✓ What lessons are learnt in the power of interracial collaboration to bring about change as opposed to race-based action?
- ✓ How can you create markers to honor the change?
- ✓ What is the difference between Equality and Equity?
- ✓ What has changed today?



## LANDMARK CASES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER: **Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)**

The institution of slavery was established in North America in the 16th century under Spanish colonization, British colonization, French colonization, and Dutch colonization. From the late 18th to the mid-19th century, different states of United States institutionalized the enslavement of human beings, mostly Blacks who had been transported from Africa during the tragic transatlantic slave trade.

On December 18, 1865, the required three-quarters of the states formally adopted the Thirteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution that unequivocally states: *“neither slavery nor involuntary servitude... shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”*



Click on the image above to play the video.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court ruled that racial segregation laws did not violate the U.S. Constitution - as long as the separate facilities for each race were equal in quality. This ruling came to be known as "**separate but equal**" doctrine. It institutionalized Jim Crow.

Jim Crow laws were a collection of local and state statutes created to enforce racial segregation. Named after a Black minstrel show character, Jim Crow law existed for about 100 years, from the post-Civil War era until 1968.

The enforcement restricted and denied fundamental rights of nonwhites, such as the use of public facilities, transportation, to get an adequate education, and other opportunities.

Color codes detailed when, where, and how formerly people of color could work, and the amount of compensation. The codes were used as a legal way to put colored citizens into indentured servitude, including how they traveled and where they lived. Those who attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence, and death. Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>



In this undated picture, men drink from segregated water fountains.

Even though Abraham Lincoln supposedly opposed slavery, in a speech in Charleston, Illinois in 1858, he stated, *"I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people . . . . I as much as any man am in favor of the superior position assigned to the white race."*

—Abraham Lincoln, First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Ottawa, Illinois, Sept. 18, 1858, in [The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln](#) vol.3, pp. 145-146.

## Mendez v. Westminster (1946)

*“We conclude by holding that the allegations of the complaint (petition) have been established sufficiently to justify injunctive relief against all defendants, restraining further discriminatory practices against the pupils of Mexican descent in the public schools of defendant school districts.”*

—Judge Paul McCormick

*Mendez et al v. Westminster School District of Orange County et al* (1946) is a historic court case on racial segregation in the California public school system. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that it was unconstitutional and unlawful to forcibly segregate Mexican American students by focusing on Mexican ancestry, skin color, and the Spanish language. **This case forged a foundation upholding the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, thereby strengthening the federal landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which found racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional.**

In 1945, the all-white Westminster Elementary School District rejected nine-year-old Sylvia Mendez and her brothers because of their Mexican appearance and ancestry. Legally, the census classified Mexican Americans as racially “white,” based on a designation in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848). However, schools in California had begun to create separate Mexican schools at the behest of White parents in the 1930s. At the time, Mexican American migrants had established themselves as a large minority population following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920).

James Kent, the superintendent of one of the defending districts, stated that *“people of Mexican descent were intellectually, culturally, and morally inferior to European Americans.”*

Judge Paul McCormick found these arguments did not justify the segregation of schools. His ruling established that *“the clear purpose of the segregation by the school districts was to discriminate against pupils of Mexican descent,”* affecting about five thousand Mexican American students across four school districts.

Court cases contextually preceded the Mendez case. One important example is *People v. Zamora* (1944). In this largest mass trial in Californian history, the prosecutor used the appearance of the youth as a part of his evidence for their conviction. Seventeen Latino defendants who were deemed guilty of assault, second-degree murder, and/or first-degree murder, after the Los Angeles Police Department detained over six-hundred youths.<sup>1</sup>

[Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation - Zinn Education Project \(zinnedproject.org\)](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Library of Congress: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States.



A family drinking at a colored drinking fountain in Alabama. CBS

Racial segregation in the United States applied to segregation of facilities and services, such as housing, medical care, education, employment, and transportation based on race. The term referred to the legally or socially enforced separation of Blacks from Whites. **However, it was also used to separate other ethnic minorities of color from majority white and mainstream communities.**



Segregation was not limited to physical and separate facilities. Other manifestations, such as prohibitions against interracial marriage, were enforced with anti-miscegenation laws in most states.

The term **miscegenation** was first used in 1863, during the American Civil War by journalists to undermine the abolitionist movement by stirring up controversies over the prospect of interracial marriage after the abolition of slavery.

The prospect of Black men marrying White women terrified those who believed in slavery. They conjured and amplified this as the greatest threat to society. According to them, freeing Blacks would result in the calamities of White women being raped, defiled, sullied, by savage jungle beasts. It is not clear what they thought White men would do to Black women because such sexual encounters occurred.

The now **notable Sarah "Sally" Hemings** (c. 1773 – 1835) was a female slave with one-quarter African ancestry owned by President of the United States Thomas Jefferson, one of many slaves he inherited from his father-in-law, John Wayles.

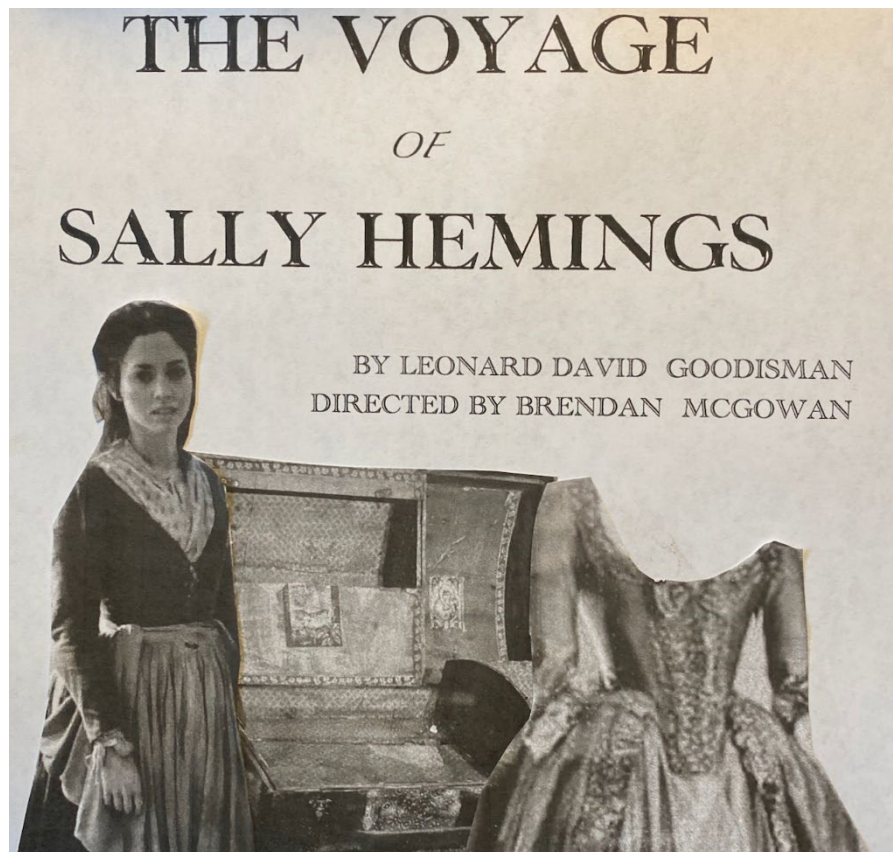
The historical question of whether Jefferson was the father of Hemings' children was the subject of the Jefferson–Hemings controversy. Following renewed historical analysis in the late 20th century, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation empaneled a commission of scholars and scientists who worked with a 1998–1999 genealogical DNA test that was published in 2000.<sup>2</sup> The DNA test found a match between the Jefferson male line and a descendant of Hemings' youngest son, Eston Hemings. The Foundation's panel

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<sup>2</sup>Jordan, Daniel P., ed. (January 26, 2000). ["Report of the Research Committee on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings"](#) (PDF). *Monticello.org*. [Thomas Jefferson Foundation](#) (then Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation). [Archived](#) (PDF) from the original on July 13, 2007. Retrieved October 19, 2020.

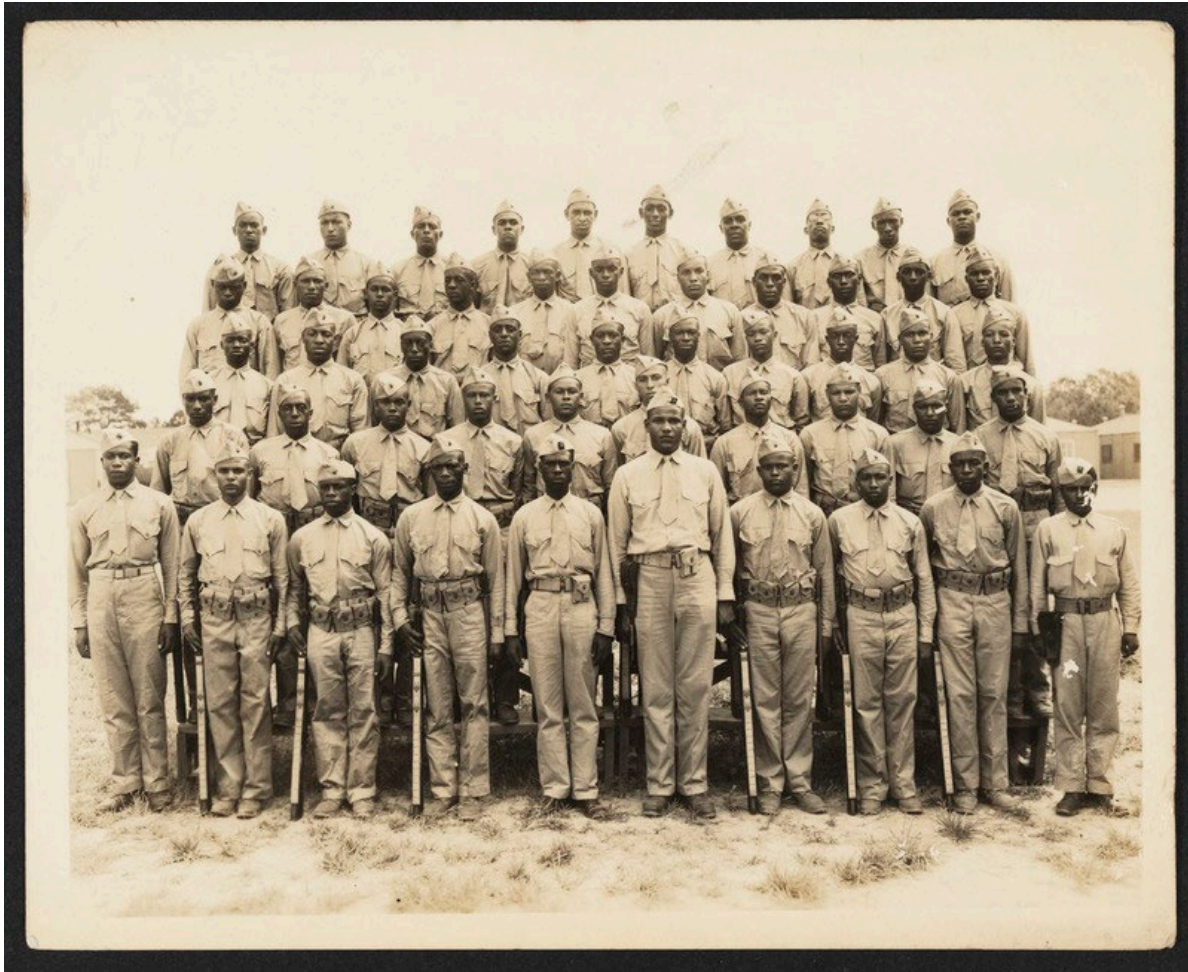
concluded that Jefferson fathered Eston and her other five children as well. Disputes arose with a rival group. However, in 2018, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation of Monticello announced its plans to have an exhibit titled *Life of Sally Hemings* and affirmed that it was treating as a settled issue that Jefferson was the father of her known children. The exhibit opened in June 2018.<sup>3</sup>

Typically, mixed-race marriages or sexual relations were classified as a felony. The laws prohibited the issuance of marriage licenses and the solemnization of weddings between mixed-race couples and barred the officiation of such ceremonies. The first ever law prohibiting interracial marriage was passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 1691.



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<sup>3</sup> Monticello Affirms Thomas Jefferson Fathered Children with Sally Hemings". Monticello.org. Thomas Jefferson Foundation. 2018.



Pointe Marines," *UNC Libraries*, accessed May 18, 2022.

**Above: They are the first African Americans to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps after President Franklin Roosevelt issues an Executive Order establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission in June 1941. The recruits trained at Camp Montford Pointin, Jacksonville, NC from August 26, 1942, until the camp was decommissioned on September 9, 1949.**

United States Armed Forces practiced segregation until 1948. Black units were usually separated from White units but were still led by White officers. In other words, and ironically, Black soldiers fought in World 11 for United States and her allies while subjugated to segregation.



White tenants seeking to prevent Black Americans from moving into the Sojourner Truth Homes, a federal governmental housing project, erected this sign in Detroit in 1942. Getty Images





**“At a bus station. Professor Thornton comes face-to-face with segregation, which he accepts passively but with hurt pride. On long trips he sometimes dodges the problem by taking a more expensive un-segregated plane. His salary as a professor is \$6,600 a year and he could live quite comfortably were it not for his determination to put his own three children through college. Because of their ages, they can go through one at a time, he thinks he can do it.” Gordon Parks/Courtesy the Gordon Parks Foundation.**

## Morgan v Commonwealth of Virginia (1946)

The story of the Freedom Riders began fifteen years earlier in 1946 when Irene Morgan, a Black woman, was arrested for opposing segregation in interstate travel.



Irene Morgan, a twenty-seven-year-old defense plant worker, was recovering from a recent miscarriage and anxious to see her husband who was working in Baltimore. She was feeling weak when she boarded a Greyhound bus in Gloucester County, Virginia bound for Baltimore on July 16, 1944.

The bus was crowded in the scorching Virginia heat. She stood for several miles, sat on the lap of a Black female passenger for a while, and finally took a seat three rows from the back of the bus (but in front of White passengers) in Saluda, Virginia.

The bus driver insisted she should get up in accordance with local and state Jim Crow laws that mandated segregated seating. After she refused, the driver summoned the police to arrest her. Morgan fought back, kicking, shouting, and tearing up the arrest warrant. She was forcibly removed, tried, convicted, and fined ten dollars.

Irene Morgan appealed her case. In 1945, the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals ruled against Morgan. It upheld the conviction. Morgan appealed her conviction on constitutional grounds to the U.S. Supreme Court. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed appeals on her behalf.

# Morgan Vs. State of Virginia my

At last a clear case to test the jim-crow travel laws of Southern States which segregate interstate passengers on interstate carriers is before the U.S. Supreme Court!

The case, which is the first real test to be made of a law which operates against colored passengers in a number of Southern States, involves Mrs. Irene A. Morgan of 550 W. 144th St., New York City.

She was arrested in Saluda, Va., and charged with violation of the Virginia statute requiring segregation of passengers.

The incident took place July 16, 1944, when Mrs. Morgan was a passenger on a Greyhound Bus from Gloucester County, Va., to Baltimore, Md.

## Refused to Move

She refused to give up her seat to a white couple at a bus stop in Saluda. Arrested and forced to post \$500 bail for her release, she was convicted and fined on Oct. 18, 1944, in the Circuit Court of Middlesex County.

Her case was promptly appealed to the Supreme Court of Virginia on a writ of error.

On June 6, 1945, the Circuit Court's judgment was upheld by the Supreme Court of Virginia on the grounds that the Virginia jim-crow statute was constitutional and applied to interstate as well as local passengers.

A motion for rehearing was filed and subsequently denied by the Supreme Court in September.

## Not on Calendar Yet

Chief Justice Harlan F. Stone of the U.S. Supreme Court signed an order, Nov. 19, 1945, allowing her to appeal the judgment of the Supreme Court of Virginia. The U.S. Supreme Court has not placed the case on the calendar yet.

In an exclusive AFRO interview, Mrs. Morgan described the incident. She had been visiting her mother in Gloucester County, following an operation she had undergone in Baltimore.

She was returning to Baltimore for further medical treatment. She boarded a Greyhound Bus at 10 a.m. Sunday, July 16, 1944.

"The bus was quite crowded and there were a lot of people standing," Mrs. Morgan explained.

## Ordered to Move

"A colored woman, who was seated, noticed I was tired and offered to let me sit on her lap. I accepted this offer because I was not feeling well, and sat on her lap for a few minutes in the rear of the bus.

"As the bus pulled into a stop in Saluda, a passenger vacated a seat, third from the rear, and I took it. A young colored woman with a baby in her arms sat next to me.

"It was around 11 a.m. now,

## Case to be Supreme Court Hot Potato

By Richard Dier

Suddenly, the white bus driver came over and told us we would have to give up our seats to a young white couple who just got on the bus.

"You'll have to get up and give your seats to these people," he demanded.

"I told him I wouldn't mind exchanging seats with white people

told me again to get up and stand."

## Returns with Policemen

Mrs. Morgan said the driver got off the bus and returned with two white police officers.

They came over to her, and the driver said colored were to be seated when all whites were seated. One officer asked, "Are you

forced me out of my seat and out of the bus.

"When I told them they were hurting my arms, one said, 'Wait till I get you to jail; I'll beat your head with a stick.'"

The names of the two men were Bristol and Segar.

"The jail was across the street from the Saluda bus station. They locked me up until 5:30 p.m. A minister, the Rev. Mr. Gale, whom I knew, got word to my mother back in Gloucester County. She rushed to the jail and posted a \$500 bond before I was released."

Her arms were torn to pieces, Mrs. Morgan said, and treatment involved considerable medical expenses.

Dr. Tinsley, president of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, Spotswood Robinson III of Howard University and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP took over her case.

On Oct. 18, 1944, she was convicted on two charges: she was fined \$100 for resisting an officer, and \$10 for violation of the State jim-crow law. She paid the \$100 fine on the first charge, but appealed the second one.

## "Means a Lot"

"This case means a lot to me," she told the AFRO, "because my family and I travel frequently to Virginia to visit my mother. My two children go there for summer vacations, and we all want to be able to travel without jim-crow restrictions."

Mrs. Morgan, who is 28, is intelligent and pretty. She is married and lives with her husband, Sherwood, and family in a large apartment house of which he is superintendent.

They have two children, a boy of 5 and a girl of 3.

Born in Baltimore, Mrs. Morgan was educated in the public and high schools there and attended business school in New York.

She works in Manhattan, caring for an invalid. She has been living in New York since last September.



Mrs. Irene Morgan, who was arrested and charged with violation of the Virginia statute requiring segregation of passengers. The Supreme Court of Virginia upheld the lower court decision. Mrs. Morgan has appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

who were sitting behind me, and moving back to the rear of the bus. But he insisted that I give up my seat, get up and stand.

"I told him I wouldn't do it, and I repeated my offer. Evidently, that didn't satisfy him because he

gonna get up or not?"

"The officers said they had a warrant for me," Mrs. Morgan continued. "I asked them what the warrant was for. They both grabbed hold of me, each one tugging at one of my arms, and

## OPEN WIDE!

Sen. Claude Pepper's Subcommittee on Health reports on the nation's most recently discovered backlog.

It consists of 238,000,000 needed tooth extractions, 632,000,000 needed fillings, 39,500,000 crowns and bridges, 20,000,000 partial dentures, and 20,000,000 dental disease treatments.

All this was discovered, naturally enough, because people just can't seem to learn to keep their big mouths shut.—UNCLE MAT'S MONTHLY LETTER.

In 1946, the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case. *Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* was argued by **Thurgood Marshall**, the chief counsel

of the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP) who later became a Supreme Court Justice in 1967).



She won. On June 3, 1946 U.S. Supreme Court, in *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, struck down the Virginia law requiring racial segregation on commercial interstate buses as a violation of the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution.

It declared that the Jim Crow laws was illegal on interstate buses on the basis that the imposition of widely varying statutes on black passengers moving across state lines generated multiple seat changes and thus created the kind of disorder and inconsistency forbidden by the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution.

The Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) was a regulatory agency in the United States created by the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887. The ICC failed to enforce its ruling, and Jim Crow travel laws remained in force in Southern states that ignored the ruling. The federal government did nothing to enforce it. Southern carriers managed to dodge the Supreme Court decision by passing segregation rules of their own, and those rules remained outside the purview of state and federal courts because they pertained to private businesses.

## Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company (1955)



Signs such as Colored Waiting Room constantly reminded travelers of the enforced racial order. Library of Congress.

***Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company*** (1955) is a landmark Civil Rights case filed on the eve of the explosion of the Civil Rights Movement. The case originated in an incident that occurred at a bus station in the North Carolina town of Roanoke Rapids.



United States Army Photo of PFC Sarah Louise Keys.



In her own words: [Click on the image above to watch the video.](#)

Shortly after midnight on July 31, 1952, Sarah Keys, a 23 year old Black woman, departed her Women's Army Corps (WAC) post in Fort Dix, New Jersey, and headed to her home

in the town of Washington, North Carolina. She boarded an integrated bus and transferred without incident in Washington, D.C. to a Carolina Trailways vehicle, taking the fifth seat from the front in the white section.

When the bus pulled into the town of Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, a new driver took the wheel and demanded that she comply with the carrier's Jim Crow regulation by moving to the so-called "colored section" in the back of the bus so that a White Marine could occupy her seat. Keys refused to move, whereupon the driver emptied the bus, directed the other passengers to another vehicle, and barred Keys from boarding it. An altercation ensued. Keys was arrested, charged with disorderly conduct, jailed, held incommunicado overnight, then convicted of disorderly conduct, and fined \$25.

At the time of the incident, segregation laws were deep-rooted in the South and governed Southern bus travel, despite the Supreme Court decision, *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* (328 US 373 (1946)).

Unwilling to accept the verdict of the North Carolina lower court sustaining the charge, Keys and her father brought the matter to the attention of the NAACP office in Washington, D.C., headed by Howard University Law School professor **Frank D. Reeves**.

*Note: The DC Mayor's Offices of African Affairs, Latino Affairs, Asian Affairs, African American Affairs are housed in the Frank D, Reeves Center.*

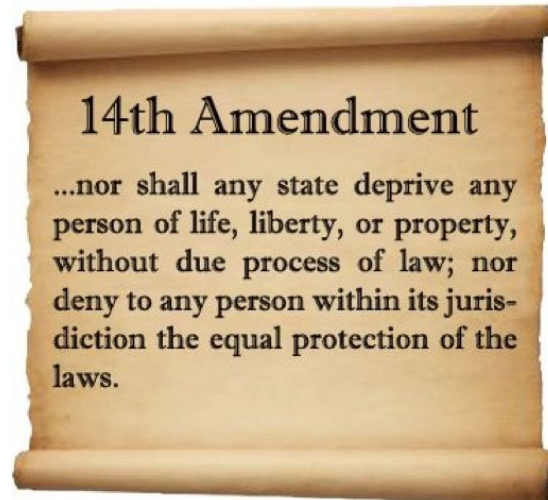
Reeves referred the Sarah Keys matter to a former law student named **Dovey Johnson Roundtree**. He believed she would be an ideal advocate for Sarah Keys.<sup>4</sup> Roundtree, as a recruiter for the WAC in the Deep South, had been evicted from a Miami, Florida bus in a 1943 incident that paralleled Sarah Keys' experience.

With her law partner and mentor DC lawyer **Julius Winfield Robertson**, she took the case as a personal mission. They immediately filed a complaint against the Northern carrier that had transported Keys to Washington, D.C., and the Southern carrier, Carolina Trailways, that perpetrated the alleged wrong. This began a three-year battle.

On February 23, 1953, the US District Court for the District of Columbia dismissed Keys' complaint on jurisdictional grounds. Roundtree and Robertson took the case before the **Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)**, which they believed might be persuaded to re-evaluate its traditional interpretation of the Interstate Commerce Act, in the same way that the Supreme Court was then re-evaluating its interpretation of the **Fourteenth Amendment**.

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<sup>4</sup> McCabe and Roundtree, *Justice Older than the Law*



Sarah Keys became the first Black petitioner to bring a complaint before the Commission on a Jim Crow bus matter.<sup>5</sup> This was on September 1, 1953, two months before Thurgood Marshall and his legal team made the second round of oral arguments in *Brown vs the Board of Education* before the Supreme Court asserting that the Fourteenth Amendment's "equal protection" clause prohibited segregation.

On November 7, 1955, in a historic ruling, the Commission condemned 'separate but equal' on public transportation. In the *Keys* case, and in the NAACP's companion case attacking segregation on railroads and in terminal waiting rooms, *NAACP v. St. Louis-Santa Fe Railway Company*, the ICC ruled that the Interstate Commerce Act prohibited segregation itself. The *Keys* decision banned segregation itself as an assault upon the personhood of Black travelers, and held in part:

*"We conclude that the assignment of seats on interstate buses, so designated as to imply the inherent inferiority of a traveler solely because of race or color, must be regarded as subjecting the traveler to unjust discrimination, and undue and unreasonable prejudice and disadvantage... We find that the practice of defendant requiring that Negro interstate passengers occupy space or seats in specified portions of its buses, subjects such passengers to unjust discrimination, and undue and unreasonable prejudice and disadvantage, in violation of Section 216 (d) of the Interstate Commerce Act and is therefore unlawful."*<sup>6</sup>

Keys was working at a beauty salon in Brooklyn when the news broke. She had tried to keep her case a secret, but her photo soon appeared in the newspapers.<sup>7</sup> The decision

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<sup>5</sup> Barnes, p. 87

<sup>6</sup> *Keys v. Carolina Coach Company*, 64 MCC 769 (1955)

<sup>7</sup> Bell, T. Anthony (25 February 2014). "The quietly defiant, unlikely fighter: Pfc. Sarah Keys and the fight for justice and humanity"



was made public just one week before Rosa Parks' defiance of the bus segregation laws of the city of Montgomery, Alabama.



**Civil Rights Attorney Julius Winfield Robertson, U.S. Senator Carey Estes Kefauver, Civil Rights Attorney James M. Nabrit, Jr., Unknown U.S. Official (left to right), Circa 1960. Credit McGee/Robertson.**

The legal victory was hailed by the press as a "*symbol of a movement that cannot be held back.*"<sup>8</sup> It marked a turning point in the legal battle against segregation, and a major departure from the ICC's history in racial matters. However, in the short term, one ICC commissioner who had dissented from the majority opinion, South Carolina Democrat J. Monroe Johnson<sup>9</sup>, in his position as Chairman of the Commission, consistently failed to enforce the *Keys* ruling.

It was not until 1961, when the violence resulting from the Freedom Riders' campaign prompted **Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy** to take action that the impact of the *Keys* case was felt.

In historical perspective, this major breakthrough in the legal battle for Civil Rights has generally been eclipsed in historical accounts of the Civil Rights Movement by the events which followed it, notably the defiance of Montgomery, Alabama's city bus laws by Rosa Parks.

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<sup>8</sup> Lerner, *New York Post*, November 28, 1955

<sup>9</sup> Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow*, p. 99-100

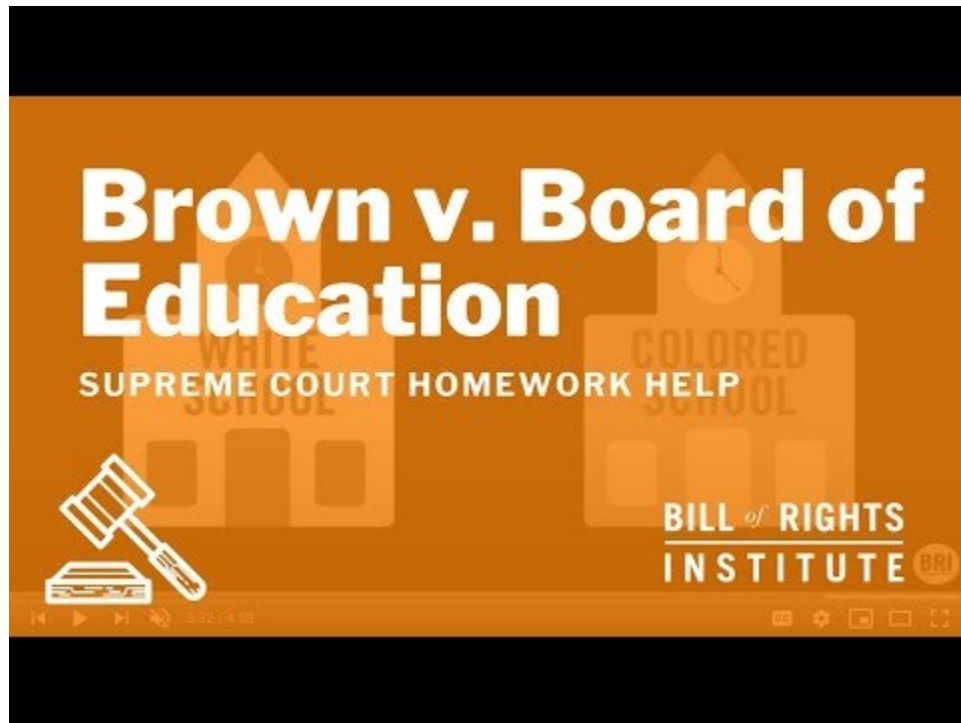


**Dr. and Mrs. Charles N. Atkins of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and their sons, Edmond, 10, and Charles, 3, pause for a glance at the Santa Fe Depot segregation sign on Nov. 25, 1955. AP Photo**



A teacher instructs a segregated class of Black students at a poorly funded, one-room school in the backwoods of Georgia in 1941. Bettmann Archive.

## Brown v Board of Education (1954) -Combined Five Cases



Click on the image above to play the video.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka** is landmark 1954 Supreme Court case. The justices ruled unanimously that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional.

While the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* is the most known, five cases were consolidated and appealed to the United States when none was successful in the lower court. The Supreme Court combined these cases into a single case which eventually became *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The five cases are:

1. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.*
2. *Briggs v. Elliott, South Carolina*
3. *Bolling v. Sharpe, Washington, DC*
4. *Belton v. Gebhart and Bulah v. Gebhart.*
5. *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia*, the only one initiated by students which we narrated in greater details.



**The Brown sisters walked to school.**

## **Brown v Board of Education, Topeka Kansas**

Linda Brown was born on February 20, 1943, in Topeka, Kansas. The elementary schools in Topeka were racially segregated, with separate facilities for Black and White children.

Linda Brown and her two younger sisters grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood. However, she was forced to walk across railroad tracks and take a bus to a segregated school even though there was a school four blocks away from her home.

In 1950, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) asked a group of Black parents that included Oliver Brown, Linda's father to attempt to enroll their children in all-white people schools. Linda's father attempted to do so with Linda in third grade at Sumner Elementary, which barred enrollment of colored children. The strategy was for civil rights organization to file a lawsuit on behalf of the 13 families from different states. NAACP took up Linda's cause. Thurgood Marshall (a future Supreme Court Justice) led the Browns' legal team.

# TOPEKA, KS

## BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

*"If it weren't for Plessy v. Ferguson, we surely would have found the law unconstitutional. But there was no way around it—the Supreme Court had to overrule itself."*

— DISTRICT COURT JUDGE WALTER HUXMAN, 1970



LINDA BROWN



GAGE SCHOOL  
Topeka, Kansas April 6, 1950

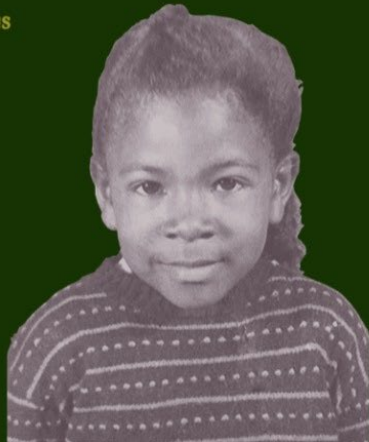
FOURTH & FIFTH GRADES  
Miss Ethel Nelson

## Briggs v. Elliot Clarendon, South Carolina

*"The Negro child is made to go to an inferior school; he is branded in his own mind as inferior.... You can teach such a child the Constitution, anthropology and citizenship, but he knows it isn't true."*

— ATTORNEY THURGOOD MARSHALL,  
CONCLUDING REMARKS, BRIGGS V. ELLIOTT

ELIZA BRIGGS



### **Briggs v. R.W. Elliott**

#### **Summary:**

The legal action in Summerton, South Carolina began in 1947. Ironically, the push to take action derived from a fortuitous encounter between Rev. James Hinton, president of the South Carolina NAACP and Rev. J.A. DeLaine a local schoolteacher. The NAACP leader, through a speech attended by DeLaine, issued a challenge to find the courage to test the legality of the discriminatory practices aimed at African American school children.

Rev. J. A. DeLaine was teaching in St. Paul Rural Primary School and also serving several small churches as an A.M.E. Minister. Initially schools for African Americans in Clarendon County began in their churches and gradually moved to separate buildings. Therefore, many schools and churches had the same names such as Liberty Hill A.M.E. and Liberty Hill Elementary.) For these children and their parents, the issue was bus transportation to school. Rev. DeLaine approached Clarendon County school officials but failed to secure school buses. African American children did not have buses, they had to walk, sometimes as far as eight miles each way to school.

School officials justified their refusal by claiming that since the African American community did not pay (collectively) much in taxes it would be unfair to expect white citizens to provide transportation for African American school children. Even a letter

writing campaign launched by Rev. DeLaine yielded no assistance from state educational officials. Because of the urgent need African American parents collected donations within their community and purchased a second-hand school bus. The continual repairs on the bus proved to be too costly for the parents.

Again, frustration prompted Rev. DeLaine to seek relief from the District Superintendent L.B. McCord. It was hoped that since McCord was a fellow minister he would be sympathetic. However, he refused to even consider Rev. DeLaine's request. Remembering the words of Rev. Hinton, the NAACP state president, DeLaine knew it was time to take legal action.

On March 16, 1948, local attorney Harold Boulware together with Thurgood Marshall, filed in U.S. District Court the case of Levi Pearson v. County Board of Education. Their case was dismissed on the technical matter of where Mr. Pearson paid his taxes. His land straddled more than one school district. The court ruled that Pearson had no legal standing because he paid taxes in District 5 and his children attended school in districts 22 and 26.

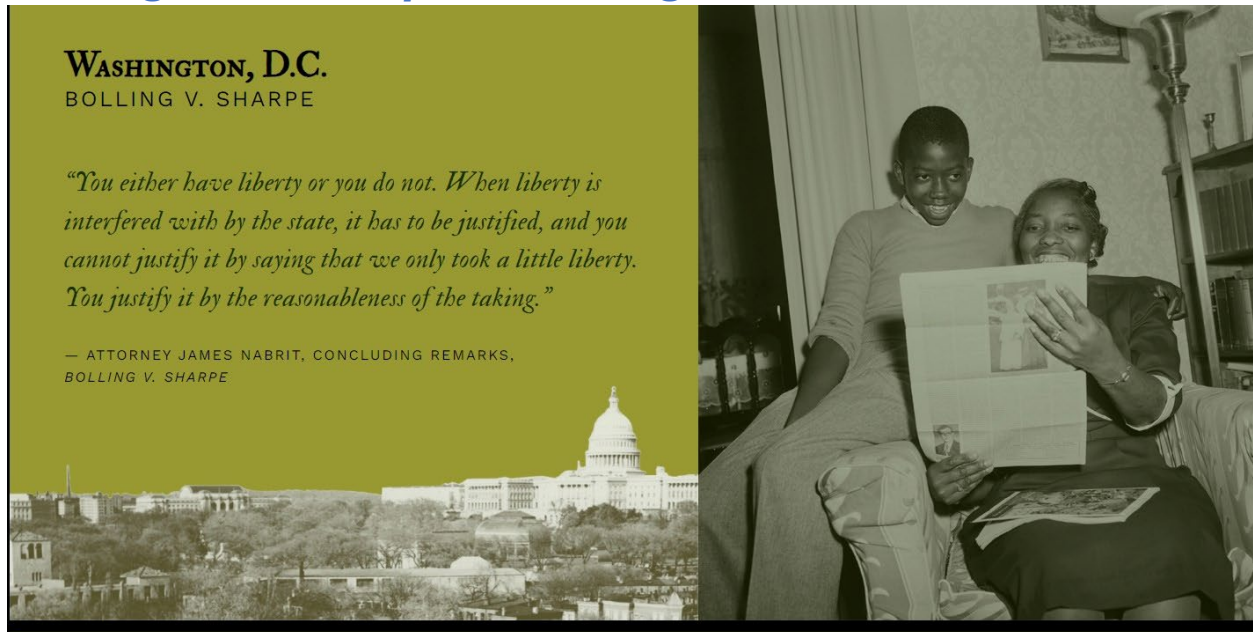
This did not stop Rev. DeLaine and by 1949 he had obtained enough signatures to file a second case. The national office of the NAACP agreed to sponsor their case. It would give Clarendon's African Americans not just buses but would seek educational equality. In May of 1950 with the help of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the case of Briggs v. Elliott was filed. Two months later, the plaintiffs' attorneys moved from simply pursuing equalization of facilities and obtaining buses, to attacking segregation.

The court ruled against the petitioners and ordered schools to be equalized, focusing on equalization, and ignoring the broader question of the constitutionality of segregation. The states action resulted in an NAACP appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Briggs case became part of the Brown litigation.

The Briggs case evoked an extreme reaction. All of the petitioners suffered swift and severe hardships for their courage. Harry Briggs was fired from his job. Annie Gibson lost her job as a motel maid and her husband lost land that had been in his family for eight decades. Rev. DeLaine saw his home burned to the ground. Federal Judge Walter Waring, who sided with the petitioners' concerns, was forced to leave the state by a joint resolution of the South Carolina House of Representatives. Source: The Brown Foundation.



## ***Bollington v Sharpe, Washington, DC***



### ***Bolling, et. al. v. C. Melvine Sharpe, et. al. (DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA)***

#### **Summary:**

Washington, D.C. has been home to a significant population of African Americans. Yet as the nation's capital, the District of Columbia, did not set a positive example regarding race relations, it merely followed custom. Washington, D.C. was firmly rooted in racial segregation.

After World War II, the country moved to integrate the military, Washington, D.C. seemed uninterested in challenging racial custom. By 1950 the traditional African American community leadership, i. e. churches, sororities, lodges, had failed to organize any protest against the run down facilities that served as schools for their children. Even most parents with good wages from government jobs remained silent in the matter of substandard segregated schools. That same year the owner of a local African American barbershop stepped forward and filled the leadership void in the matter of better schools for their children. His name was Gardner Bishop, a man who simply knew civil right from social wrong.

It has been reported that on September 11, 1950, Bishop led a group of eleven African American children to the city's new high school for white students. The school, named for John Phillip Sousa, was a large modern building, boasting of multiple basketball courts and spacious classrooms. At that moment Gardner Bishop asked for admittance for the African American students that had accompanied him to see Sousa High School. It seemed clear that the building could accommodate a higher enrollment. His request was

denied, ensuring the African American students a continued unequal educational experience.

Bishop had been organizing, parents to take action regarding the poor school their children were assigned to. After his field trip to Sousa High, it was time for action. He approached Attorney Charles Houston on their behalf. The idea was to request a facility, equal to that of Sousa High, constructed for their children. Houston worked on this case independently; it was not a NAACP case.

In 1950 while preparing the Bolling case, Charles Hamilton Houston was stricken with a heart attack. As a result, he asked colleague and friend James Nabritt, Jr. to help Gardner Bishop and his group. At that point, the idea of equalization of facilities was rejected by Nabritt and replaced by a challenge to segregation per se.

In 1951 in U.S. District court, the case of Bolling v. Sharpe, was filed. This case was named for Spottswood Thomas Bolling, one of the children who accompanied Gardner Bishop to Sousa High. He was among those denied admission based solely on race.

Although unsuccessful, Nabritt trusted his concept of an all-out attack on segregation. The Bolling case would later meet with success as one of the cases combined under Brown v. Board of Education. Source: The Brown Foundation

## **Belton v. Gebhart. Wilmington, Delaware**

**WILMINGTON, DE**  
BELTON V. GEBHART

ETHEL BELTON

*"I believe the 'separate but equal' doctrine in education should be rejected, but I also believe its rejection must come from [the U.S. Supreme] Court."*

— DELAWARE COURT OF CHANCERY JUDGE COLLINS SEITZ, OPINION IN *BELTON V. GEBHART*

The graphic features a green background. On the right side, there is a black and white portrait of Ethel Belton, a young Black woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt, and holding a book. On the left side, there is a black and white aerial photograph of Wilmington, Delaware, showing the city's layout, including buildings, streets, and a river. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with varying font weights and styles.

### **Belton v. Gebhart (Bulah v. Gebhart) - Delaware**

## Summary:

The final challenge to segregated schools in Delaware came by way of two separate cases with identical issues. One case developed in the suburb of Claymont and another in the rural community of Hockessin.

Segregated Howard High School was a continual source of frustration for African American parents in suburban Claymont. Although their community had a well maintained school in a picturesque setting with spacious facilities, African American children could not, by law, attend the Claymont school.

Instead, they were transported daily on a twenty mile round trip to Howard High School located in an undesirable section of Wilmington. Not only was the distance an adverse factor, class size, teacher qualifications in terms of advanced degrees, and the incomplete curriculum also angered African American parents. Students interested in vocational training courses had to walk several blocks to the run-down Carver annex, regardless of the weather.

In March of 1951, eight African American parents sought legal counsel from attorney Louis Redding. At his urging these parents asked state education officials to admit their children to the local Claymont School, they were denied. Consequently, Redding agreed to take their case.

In the rural community of Hockessin, Mrs. Sarah Bulah only wanted equal opportunity for their adopted daughter, Shirley Barbara. While a bus carrying white children passed her home each day, she had to drive Shirley two miles to an old one-room schoolhouse designated for African American children. Sarah Bulah decided to share her concern with state officials, so she wrote to the Department of Public Instruction and to the Governor. Their replies reaffirmed that no bus transportation would be provided because "colored" children could not ride on a bus serving white children. Undaunted, Mrs. Bulah made an appointment with attorney Louis Redding.

In both cases attorney Redding was ready to challenge the notion of not permitting integrated schools. Both Sarah Bulah and the parents from Claymont, including Ethel Belton, were prepared to sue in order to change state law. Their case would name the State Board of Education as the principal defendant. The Board members were specifically charged. The first name among the members was Francis B. Gebhart. The resulting cases were called *Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart*.

Judge Collin Seitz, in this case ruled that the "separate but equal" doctrine had been violated and that the plaintiffs were entitled to immediate admission to the white school in their communities. Although a victory for the named plaintiffs, his decision had not dealt the sweeping blow to segregation they had hoped for. The decision did not apply broadly throughout Delaware.

The Belton and Bulah cases would join four other NAACP cases in the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown*. Source: The Brown Foundation.

## ***Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia***

### ***Davis, et. al. v. Davis, et. al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County***

#### **Summary:**

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the only way an African American could receive a high school diploma in the early twentieth century was by attending a private academy. Private high schools were operated by Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians in Virginia. The public schools for blacks were elementary schools (grades 1-8) operated by county school boards. The fact that school boards were county affiliated rather than city or town affiliated might have something to do with the relatively rural population of most school districts.

The history of activism in Richmond dates back to the streetcar boycotts in 1900s. When the privately owned streetcar lines attempted to segregate the cars, blacks boycotted them for two years. This impasse was resolved when the Commonwealth of Virginia passed laws making segregation of public facilities legal. Streetcar companies had to comply with the new law. African Americans were not prepared to fight the state legislature at this point in time.

In Prince Edward County public schooling for blacks was considered progressive compared to neighboring counties. Due partly to the fundraising efforts of the Farmville Colored Women's Club, the Robert Moton School added grades 9-12 by 1947. Prior to 1947, African Americans graduated from high school after the 11th grade. Given that the number of school years were fewer than in the white schools, African Americans from neighboring counties came to Farmville to attend the Robert Moton High School in the 1930s and 1940s. The original building was a two-story frame building that later became the elementary school once the new Robert Moton High School was built in 1943 across the street. The Anew school was never adequately large enough, necessitating the use of tar paper covered buildings hastily constructed on the campus for use as classrooms. It was the use of these temporary buildings as classroom space that sparked a student strike in 1951.

The student leaders responsible for the strike were from families who were all long-term residents of the surrounding area. One student leader, Barbara Johns, had a family distinguished by activism. Barbara was the niece of Vernon Johns, the legendary minister who served in the Dexter Street Baptist Church the ten years prior to Martin Luther King, Jr. Vernon Johns was an outspoken critic of segregation and involved in numerous protest attempts throughout his career. Even though he was in Montgomery, Alabama, at the time of the student strike, community members reported that he was influential in giving

advice to the striking students. His wife was a former teacher in Robert Moton High School, and he still had numerous familial ties in the community of Farmville and the surrounding area.

The Johns family knew the social politics of the area. Farmville is an hour and a half southwest of Richmond, on the same route Robert E. Lee followed during his retreat from Richmond in the spring of 1865. Farmville is just two miles from where the Confederacy made its last stand at the battle of Sailor's Creek. Even in 1950 life in the rural south still carried certain risks for African American adults whose livelihoods were inextricably linked to a group of whites who controlled commerce in the area. Opinion was divided within the African American community over whether segregated conditions in Farmville should be challenged.

The Reverend Francis Griffin considered the situation unacceptable and used every opportunity to address the need for change. As President of the local NAACP and Chair of the Moton High School PTA he was well positioned to push for change. Together with school principal M. Boyd Jones, they petitioned the school board to address the obvious disparity in the schools by asking for a new building to replace Moton High. After several months of inactivity by school officials the stage was set for the Moton students, frustrated with their circumstances, to take action.

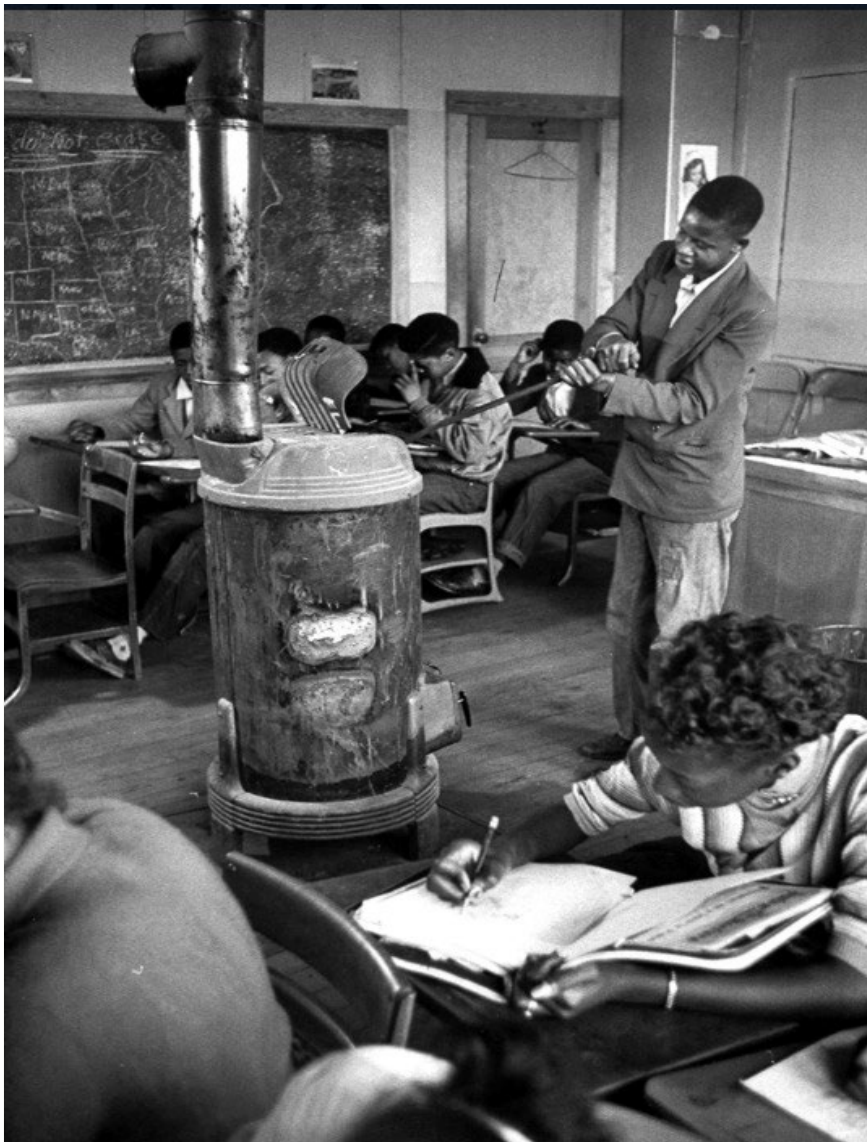
On April 23, 1951, a student strike organized largely by Barbara Johns was underway. School principal Jones was called away by a false claim of racial problems at the bus station downtown. With him absent the students assembled under pretense of a school sanctioned gathering and Barbara spoke of the plan to strike. The strike amounted to students walking out of school with instructions, from strike leadership, not to leave the school grounds. Some of the students were given signs to carry that expressed their goal of better facilities. With the strike underway Barbara Johns and classmate Carrie Stokes sought legal counsel from the NAACP in Richmond. The students received a response in the form of a commitment by NAACP attorney, Oliver Hill agreeing to meet with them. The strike lasted ten days. Hill promised that action would be taken on their behalf, and with that, the students returned to school on May 7, 1951.

After a month of legal maneuvering a suit was filed in Federal Court by Oliver Hill's colleague, Spottswood Robinson citing the student's complaint. Surprisingly when the case was filed it did not carry the name of Barbara Johns as its lead plaintiff. It was by happenstance that the first student listed was a ninth grade girl, daughter of a local farmer. Her name was Dorothy Davis. The Virginia case was filed as Dorothy E. Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County. After filing this case Spottswood Robinson immediately traveled to South Carolina where the case of Briggs v. Elliot was about to be heard in another Federal Court. Source – The Brown Foundation.

## ***Barbara Johns and Moton High School***

*White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school.”*  
— ARTICLE IX, SECTION 140, CONSTITUTION OF VIRGINIA,  
1902

The Virginia constitution of 1902 sanctioned the creation of separate and unequally financed schools.



In Farmville, parents, church ministers, and other community leaders demonstrated their commitment for advocating for improved educational opportunities as a tradition by lobbying county officials and by contributing their own financial and labor to provide buildings, pay teachers' salaries, and fund school transportation.

In 1939, the private citizen endeavors resulted in the construction of the Robert Russa Moton High School. It was one of twelve such high schools in the rural parts of the state.



**This photograph show a home economics classroom in Moton High School, a school for Black students. It was used as Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 37, one of several photographs entered by the plaintiffs to demonstrate unequal facilities in the landmark Civil Rights case Dorothy E. Davis, et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, et al.**



**Worsham High School Home Economics Living Room, Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 27**

However, Moton High School was miserably designed from inception. Built in 1939 for 180 students. By 1951, over 450 students were enrolled. The PTA had petitioned the county for a new school — under the doctrine of separate but equal.

To deal with the overcrowding at Moton High School, county school officials constructed three temporary classroom buildings in 1948; one sat on the front lawn of the school, while the other two sat behind.

The buildings, sided with inexpensive rolls of tar paper, had a projected life span of five years. Drivers passing by thought they were looking at chicken coops, instead of school buildings. As the buildings quickly deteriorated, they became known as the “Tar Paper Shacks” and the students also referred to them as “chicken coops.”

The schools for colored students were often so cold that teachers would opt to move class to school buses. When it rained and poured, students raised umbrellas to keep their



papers or books from getting soaked by rainwater. Books and supplies were just as shameful and scornful. The students had to do with outdated, cast-off textbooks that Whites had used, discarded, or left and sometimes with inscriptions of racial slurs.



Moton High School Classroom, Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 32



Worsham High School Classroom, Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 22



Moton High School Auditorium, Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 42



Farmville High School Auditorium, Plaintiff's Exhibit No. 14

**Source: The online tool for teaching with documents, from the National Archives**

A former Moton football player recalled wearing hand-me-down shoes and uniforms.  
Source: Moton School Story.



**Moton High School 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English. See the pot-belly stove at the back in the center. Source: Document Teach**

There would be one pot-bellied stove, and in one part of the room. Students who sat close to the stoves were too hot, while those who sat far away shivered in their winter coats from the cold. Moton did not have teachers' break room, no gymnasium with fixed seats, no science lab, no lockers, no infirmary.

In contrast, right up the street Moton students could see the reminder of their deprivation and state sanctioned inferior status. The facilities paled in comparison to the much larger and better equipped Farmville High School for all White students built the same year. White students attended schools built with firm foundations, bricks, dedicated communal spaces, and an atrium. When Black families and students expressed their frustrations with the school, the Prince Edward School Board ignored them.

*“Despite these inadequacies, Moton students thrived in a nurturing and supportive environment created by their teachers, parents, and church communities. Teachers held*

*them to high standards, encouraged them to pursue extracurricular activities, and challenged them to seek a college education. Parents, who lobbied the school board consistently for a new school, sought to improve educational opportunities for their children. Their churches taught them to have faith and believe in their own capacity for change. Inspired by America's victory in World War II and by the presence of veterans at their school, Moton students had rising expectations. They aspired to achieve the American dream and to be equal citizens in our democracy."* Source Moton School Story.

The students' patience was wearing thin in view of stark realities.



**Moton High School (on the left, for Black students) and Farmville High School (for White students).**



In 1951, 16-year old Barbara Rose Johns (1935-1991) was a junior at Moton High School. Barbara had four siblings and lived with their grandmothers in Darlington Heights in western Prince Edward County, Virginia. She was the oldest daughter who shouldered the responsibility of taking care of her younger siblings while her parents were away. Barbara's uncle Vernon Johns was a prominent Baptist minister and activist who had moved from Virginia to Montgomery, Alabama but maintained a home in the Prince Edward County, VA and visited frequently.

Increasingly frustrated by the conditions in her school, Barbara hatched a plan. In April 23, 1951, the plan was activated.

*There wasn't any  
fear, I just thought—  
this is your moment.  
Seize it!"* — BARBARA JOHNS

## STRIKE COMMITTEE

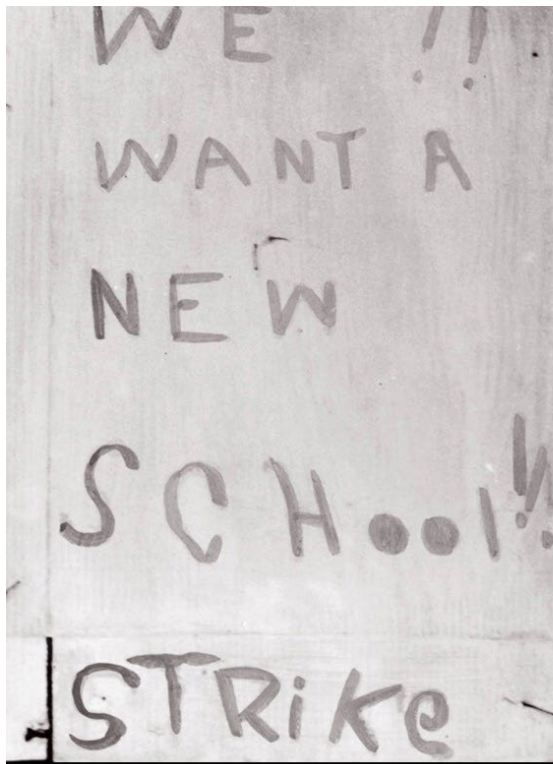


Barbara Johns assembled a small group of student leaders from each class, including twin siblings Carrie and John Stokes, and shared her idea of a strike. The students kept the plan a secret. In April were ready to put their plan into effect.

Barbara led the strike to protest conditions at Robert Russa Moton High School.



Watch the video for the brave and fearless vision in action.



*“We want a new school  
or none at all!”*

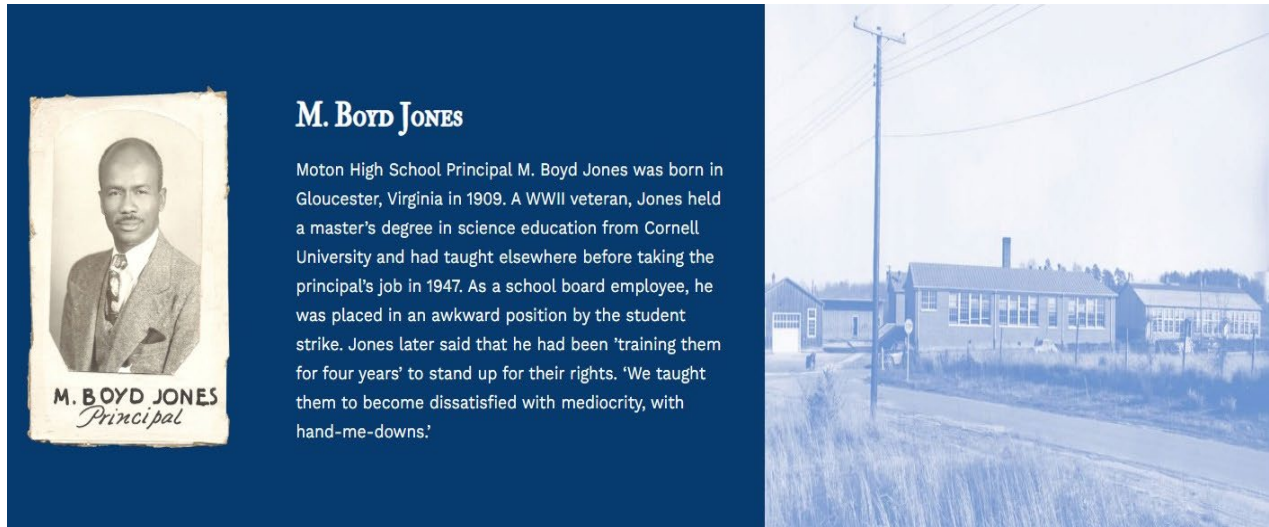
— STUDENTS' STRIKE POSTER



**Barbara Johns (right) and her high school teacher.**

The students had planned for the principal to be away from the school premise when they called their all-school assembly. Barbara and other organizers first got teachers to bring their students to the auditorium where the teachers were encouraged to leave. This was to protect the teachers so they would not know what was about to happen or be implicated in what was to happen.

Barbara stood on stage. She took off her shoe and used it as a gavel. Addressing the students, Barbara appealed to, and encouraged, them to take a firm stand for the equal treatment they had been calling for. The students cheered and some were in tears. Most students joined the strike. The student body walked out of school.



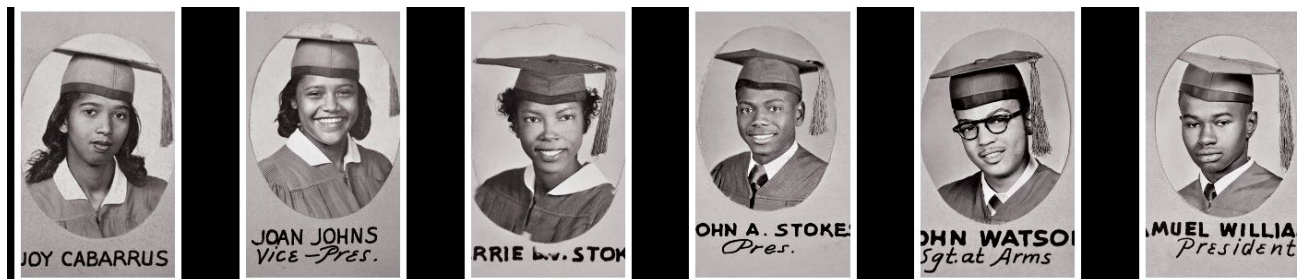
**M. BOYD JONES**

Moton High School Principal M. Boyd Jones was born in Gloucester, Virginia in 1909. A WWII veteran, Jones held a master's degree in science education from Cornell University and had taught elsewhere before taking the principal's job in 1947. As a school board employee, he was placed in an awkward position by the student strike. Jones later said that he had been 'training them for four years' to stand up for their rights. 'We taught them to become dissatisfied with mediocrity, with hand-me-downs.'

**Courtesy Moton Story**

A meeting with Superintendent Thomas J. McIlwaine did not impress the students. He was focused on getting to return to school and nothing else.

On the other hand, Reverend Francis Griffin wanted to use his position as the President of the local NAACP chapter and Chair of the Robert Russa Moton High School PTA to leverage a deal with the school board to build a new facility for the ever-increasing number of students. However, his request were ignored, and the school board took no action for several months.



While the strike was being conducted, Barbara Johns and other fellow student leaders sought legal counsel from the NAACP. out to lawyers. They wrote a letter to the Richmond-based law firm of Hill, Martin & Robinson.

Rev. L. Francis Griffin made a request to NAACP attorneys and Richmond natives Oliver Hill and Spottswood W. Robinson III to visit Prince Edward County.



April 23, 1951

Gentlemen:

We hate to impose as we are doing, but under the circumstances that we are facing, we have to ask for your help.

Due to the fact that the facilities and building in the name of Robert R. Moton High School, are inadequate, we understand that your help is available to us. This morning, April 23, 1951, the students refused to attend classes under the circumstances. You know that this is a very serious matter because we are out of school, there are seniors to be graduated and it can't be done by staying at home. Please we beg you to come down at the first of this week. If possible Wednesday, April 25th between nine a.m. and three p.m.

We will provide a place for you to stay.

We will go into detail when you arrive.

Letter from Carrie Stokes and Barbara Johns to Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson | April 23, 1951.

On April 25, 1951, Oliver W. Hill and Spottswood Robinson, lawyers for National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), arrived in Prince Edward County to help the students of Robert Russa Moton High School

The NAACP agreed to assist but urged that the suit would better if filed for an integrated school system, and not just equal facilities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow, Jim Crow Stories. People. Barbara Johns | PBS



Oliver W Hill (1907-2007) collaborated closely with the Virginia NAACP on cases focused on equality in teachers' salaries, bus transportation, and high school facilities.

He attended Dunbar High School in Washington, DC and earned his undergraduate degree from Howard University and in 1931 and an LLB in 1933 from Howard University School of Law.

Hill was a classmate and close friend of Thurgood Marshall. Hill was the salutatorian and Marshall was the valedictorian at the commencement.

After his service in War 11, Hill, along with his law partner Spottswood Robinson, led the NAACP's campaign to undermine "separate but equal" education across the state.

*"I went to law school so I could go out and fight segregation."*

— OLIVER HILL

Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson eventually came to Farmville to meet with the student and parents. Originally, the students' aspiration was simple: They just wanted a new school that was equal to the white school.



## Negro Pupils At Farmville Go on Strike

### 455 Protest School's 'Inadequate' Facilities

FARMVILLE, VA., April 24—(AP)—The entire student body of the R. R. Moton Negro high school walked out yesterday, protesting against "inadequate" facilities at the school, and were still on "strike" today.

Four hundred and fifty-five pupils left school shortly before noon after attending an assembly they said "was so overcrowded that breathing was difficult." One of the students said the school auditorium seats only 300, and the students who must stand in the aisles create a serious fire hazard.

School officials were slightly dismayed at the action, pointing out that a new \$800,000 high school is in the planning stage.

Initially the strike was thought to be unserious. But the news soon filtered, and it could be ignored.

## NEGRO PUPILS AT FARMVILLE GO ON STRIKE

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Superintendent T.J. McIlwaine said negotiations were in progress for a site. In Richmond, Dowell J. Howard, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, said the State Education Department had approved the new school as part of Prince Edward County's four-year school development program.

Big Outlay Planned

The program also includes plans for three new Negro elementary schools. All told, the county intends to spend \$1,925,000 improving Negro school facilities, as against \$675,000 for white schools.

The new Moton school, which as now planned would take care of 700 pupils, was approved by the State Education Department January 25.

However, the county school board must submit another application for monetary help before any State funds can be released for construction of the school.

McIlwaine said the strike apparently was a protest against conditions at the present school and delay in the construction of the new school. He said he didn't know how much longer it would be before work started.

The superintendent said the walkout "seemed to be student-inspired." In answer to a query he declared it had "nothing in the world" to do with a recent rail crossing accident in which five Moton students were killed when a school bus was struck by a train.

A member of the student "s t r i k e committee" complained that a new school building has been promised for five years, and "all we get is tarpaper shacks." Three temporary wooden buildings were erected to relieve overcrowding at the school. The student said that they are improperly heated, have leaky roofs and lack sanitary facilities. She said there are only two lavatories and four drinking fountains for the 455 pupils, all located in the main building.

The students, by their self-assurance and strength of character, convinced Hill and the NAACP in Virginia to take their case. The students and their parents agreed to the NAACP's litigation strategy.

The goal was to capitalize on the strong passion from the strike "striking the iron while hot) to go to court and demand that schools in Prince Edward County be desegregated so that all students could have equal learning opportunities.

After having made their points, students agreed and returned to school May 7, 1951.

On May 23rd, 1951, a month the lawsuit was filed in the case Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County. Not all parents were united behind the plan; some preferred working with the school board rather than confronting and antagonizing it. Still, the majority of parents threw their support behind the suit and on May 23, 1951, Robinson

filed *Dorothy Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward*. The case was later incorporated into *Brown v Board of Education*. Source: Library of Virginia – Exhibition.

3480

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND DIVISION

*to*  
DOROTHY E. DAVIS, BERTHA M.  
DAVIS and INEZ D. DAVIS, infants,  
by John Davis, their father and  
next friend,

*to*  
ANDREW LEWIS WOOLRIDGE, WILBERT  
ALEXANDER WOOLRIDGE and AUBREY  
LESLIE WOOLRIDGE, infants, by  
Leslie Woolridge, their father  
and next friend,

ROBERT GOODE, JR., AND MERIAM  
O. GOODE, infants, by Amanda Goode,  
their mother and next friend,

ROOSEVELT OWENS HICKS, an infant,  
by Inez O. Hicks, his mother and  
next friend,

ALPHONZO S. BIGGER, an infant, by  
Katie H. Bigger, his guardian and  
next friend,

JOY ANNETTA CABARRUS, an infant, by  
Emma H. Norton, her guardian and next  
friend,

GRACE ELIZABETH BROWN and WALTER W.  
BROWN, infants, by Carrie Brown, their  
mother and next friend,

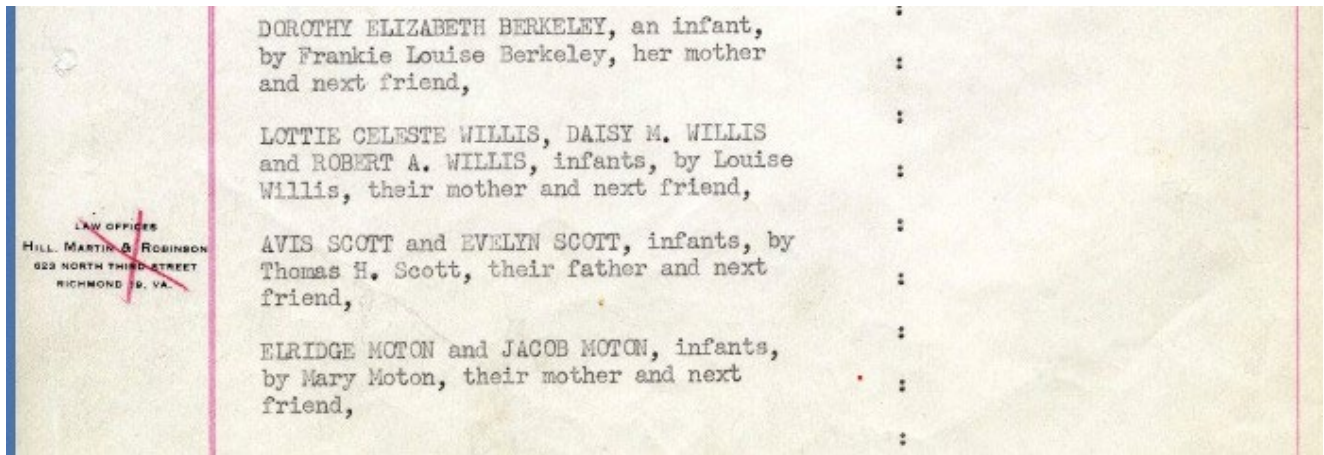
WARREN LEE DAVIS and WILLIE H. DAVIS,  
infants, by Rosa Bell Davis, their  
mother and next friend,

MARY REBECCA HALL, an infant, by Harry  
S. Hall, her father and next friend,

~~FILED~~ MAY 23 1951  
Walter E. Johnson, Clerk  
*Caroline H. Morris*  
Deputy Clerk

CIVIL ACTION NO. 1333

(FILED IN ENFORCEMENT OF WRIT)



Robinson and Hill filed suit on behalf of one hundred seventeen students who were willing to sign on to the court case.

Despite Barbara Johns being one of the fundamental forces behind the strike, the case was instead named after Dorothy E. Davis, a 14 year old ninth grader whose name was first to appear on the petition.

Some individuals in the town of Farmville and Prince Edward County were not amused and retaliated in many ways. They directed their anger at the students, families, and teachers at Moton High School.

“Barbara had received death threats, so her family decided it would be safer for her to move to Montgomery, Alabama with her uncle rather than stay in Farmville. Teachers at the school had been fired, some parents lost their jobs, and families were turned away at stores they were formerly welcome to.” Source: The First Student-Led Civil Rights Protest. R.H. Moton Museum.

The Davis plaintiffs asked that the state law requiring segregated schools in Virginia be struck down.



As attorneys for the NAACP, Spottswood W. Robinson III (far left) and Oliver Hill (far right) represented parents and students in cases throughout Virginia. In 1953, they defended parents from West Point, Virginia, who refused to send their children to a segregated school twenty miles away. Robinson, George Leakes, Elaine Bowen, and Hill. 1953. NAACP Papers, Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-118180.

Johns's name did not appear on the lawsuit. Fearing for her safety, her parents sent her to live with her uncle in Montgomery, Alabama.<sup>11</sup> .

A three-judge panel at the U.S. District Court upheld segregation and unanimously rejected the students' request, stating, "We have found no hurt or harm to either race." The Prince Edward County School Board was ordered to proceed with plans to equalize the Prince Edward County schools.

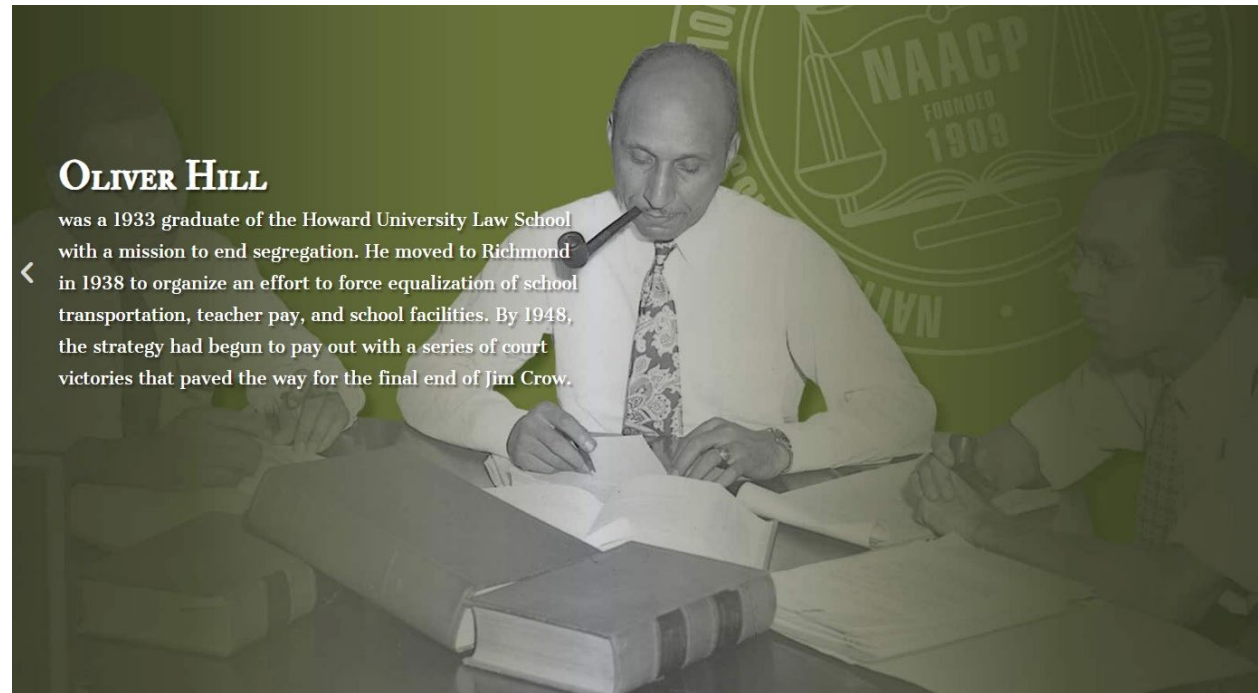
*"There was never any doubt about the outcome of the trial.... We were trying to build a record for the Supreme Court."*— OLIVER HILL

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<sup>11</sup> [Farmville, Virginia - Separate Is Not Equal \(si.edu\)](http://Farmville, Virginia - Separate Is Not Equal (si.edu))



Davis v. Prince Edward County was combined with lawsuits from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, and Washington, D.C., and argued, together, as Brown v. Board of Education. Seventy-five percent of *Brown* decision plaintiffs came from the Moton strike. The *Davis* case was the only lawsuit initiated by students.



## OLIVER HILL

was a 1933 graduate of the Howard University Law School with a mission to end segregation. He moved to Richmond in 1938 to organize an effort to force equalization of school transportation, teacher pay, and school facilities. By 1948, the strategy had begun to pay out with a series of court victories that paved the way for the final end of Jim Crow.



Erected 2008 by Virginia Department of Historic Resources. (Marker Number K-91.)

"1" My first recollection of Cullews, Virginia, ~~was~~ in the year of 1942. I arrived by train from Washington, D.C. to Richmond, VA. In Richmond, we were picked up by my uncle and transported to my Grandmother's home in Cullews, VA.

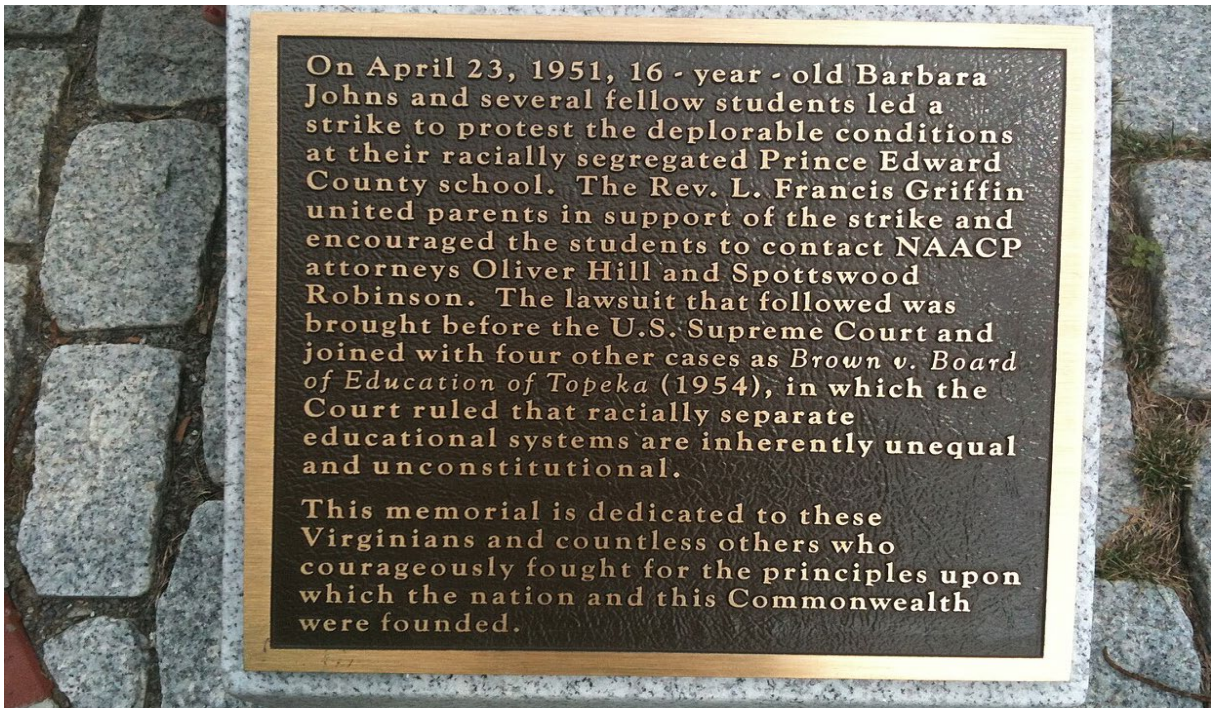
The ride on the train had been exciting - mainly because it was my 1st train ride, but mostly, because it was crowded with soldiers. I was fascinated by all of them - in my imagination they were tall, not-so tall men who looked so handsome and polished in their uniforms. I was particularly impressed by them because my own Daddy had been called into the army and though I had not seen him in his uniform - I imagined he must look as handsome as these men. In fact, the very reason my Mother, brother, sister and I left Washington to live in Va. was because my Daddy was in the service, and he felt we would fare better in the country.

My days at my Grandmother's house were fun filled and chose

①

filled. In fact, one seldom got a chance to sit down and rest before the familiar cry of Barbree (as she called me came). I then rushed to feed the chickens, pick up chips for the wood stove, run to the spring for a bucket of cool, fresh water, gather the eggs, or do some other household chore that was needed. My Grandmother owned a 175 acres of land, and farming (raising pigs, cows, tobacco, corn and other crops) was as important to her and my Grandfather's existence as they became to our own when my Dad returned from the war. My mother left us in our Grandmother's care and returned to Washington to live with her sister and work for the government at the Pentagon. I was enrolled in school at the Mary E. Branch Elementary School in Farmville, VA, where I remained through the 8th grade. My Dad and we were happy to see him. He brought me a pair of red <sup>wooden</sup> Dutch shoes which I prized very highly and kept until they were burned in our house (2)

*It seemed like reaching for the moon.” - Barbara Johns.*



Plaque on Virginia Capitol Grounds commemorating Barbara Johns' initiative in integrating Virginia schools.



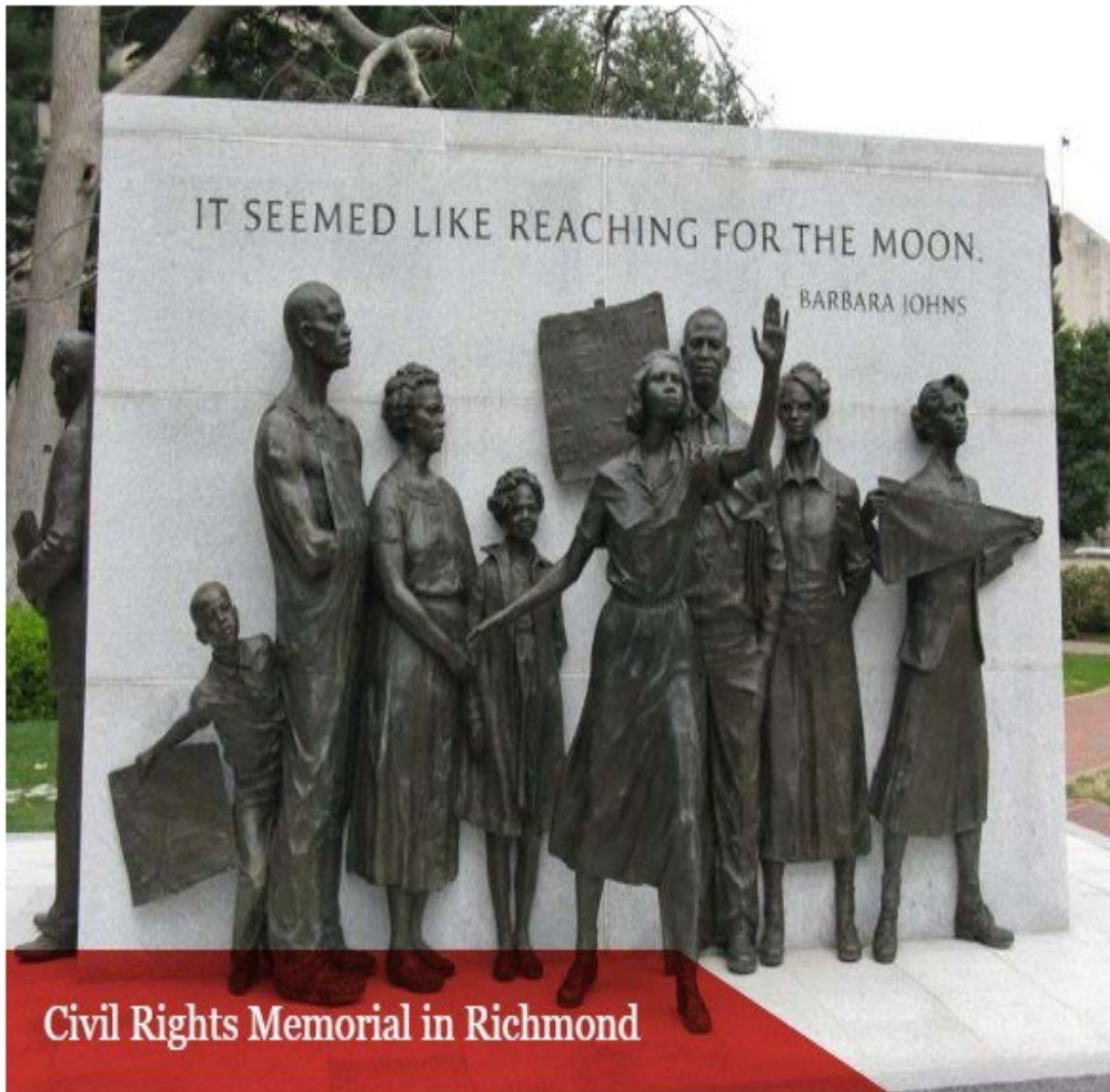
**On April 23, 2017, the town's library was renamed the Barbara Rose Jones Farmville Price Edward Community Library at 1303 West Third Street Farmville, Virginia. 2390.United States. Above her family members present.**

After graduating high school in Montgomery, Barbara got her degree in library science and worked as a librarian in the Philadelphia public school system. The auditorium at the high school in Farmville is named after her. The town rededicated the library in her honor.

In 2005, Library of Virginia also honored Barbara Johns Powell by naming her one of their Virginia Women in History.

Johns passed away on September 25, 1991, from bone cancer. Since her death, she has been honored through monuments, building dedications, and the annual Barbara Johns Day in Virginia.

In 2020, Virginia chose to replace a statue of Confederate General Robert E Lee with one of Barbara Johns in the United States Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection.



DEDICATED TO THE CHILDREN  
OF 1951 STUDENT WALK-OUT  
AT R. R. MOTON HIGH SCHOOL



PRESENTED BY THE MARTHA E.  
FORRESTER COUNCIL OF WOMEN  
APRIL 23, 2001





Robert Hamlin Sr, a former student at Robert Russa Moton high school, with a portrait of Barbara Johns, on the stage where Johns gave her initial strike speech to students. Photograph: Christopher 'Puma Smith/The Guardian

***“You need to know your history because it will come back again.”***

***Robert Hamlin Sr***

## The Legal Team: *Brown v Board of Education*



The team of lawyers who argued *Brown v. Board*: John Scott, James Nabrit, Spottwood Robinson, Frank Reeves, Jack Greenberg, Thurgood Marshall, Louis Redding, U. Simpson Tate, George Hayes. Photo courtesy of NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

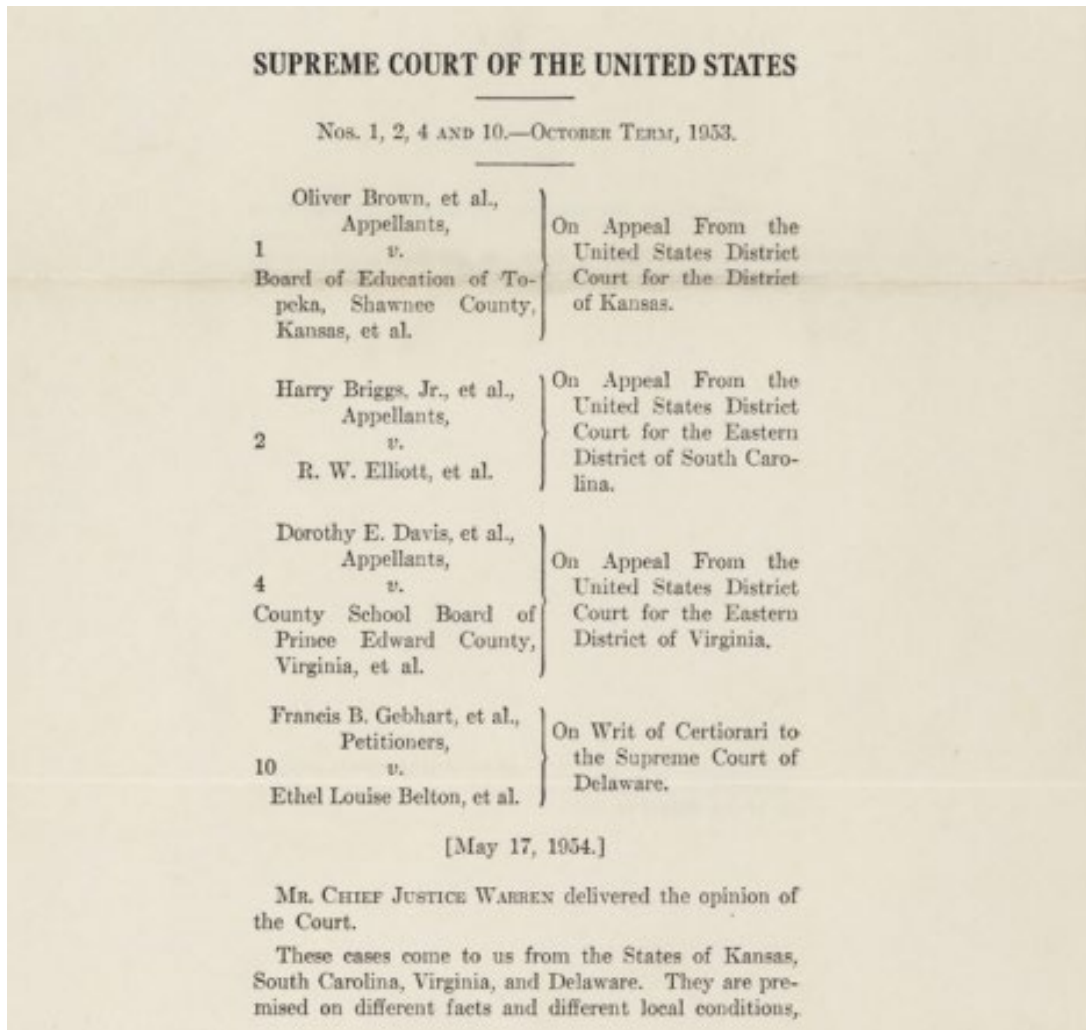
From the five consolidated cases, the issues were framed in a national context and not a state or southern matter.

Chief Justice Earl Warren, the former Governor of California, had been appointed to the Supreme Court just two months prior to the desegregation ruling being handed down. He encouraged the other justices to make it a unanimous ruling. In his mind, the way the decision was handed down was as important as the decision itself.

The popular narrative is that *Brown v. Board* was a single case or summation of the entire civil-rights movement. But would be an oversimplification. There were coordinated grassroots and strategic effort.

On May 17, 1954, the highest court in the land handed down a unanimous decision. In an opinion written by Chief Justice Earl Warren. The court ruled that not only was the “*separate but equal*” doctrine was unconstitutional in all cases because educational segregation stamped an inherent badge of inferiority on Black students.

The ruling signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in the schools of the United States, overruling the "separate but equal" principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case.



[Brown v. Board of Education \(1954\) | National Archives](#)

# STATE JOURNAL

## SCHOOL SEGREGATION BANNE



### Supreme Court Refut Doctrine of Separate but Equal Education

That National Policy to Supply White Families of South States must be changed to permit Negroes to attend white schools.

Supreme Court today ruled that separate but equal schools are unconstitutional.

Segregation Already in Plans, Says School Official



**Late News**

Associated Press  
Leased Wires

**The Bee**

FOR ALL DEPARTMENTS CALL  
**4500**

56th Year      Published February, 1938      Danville, Va., Monday Afternoon, May 17, 1954      Price: FIVE CENTS

# SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENDED BY COURT

**Suit Being Tried**  
ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP)—A suit by John Locke Green to force his recognition as a Democratic candidate for Congress went to trial before a three-judge federal court here today.

Green, a Republican when he held office as Arlington County treasurer, brought the suit against Virginia's 18th District Democratic Committee after it refused to accept him as a party candidate for the forthcoming congressional election.

**Funds Requested**  
WASHINGTON (AP)—President Eisenhower asked Congress today for an extra \$24,100,000 to help areas crowded by federal workers or workers on federal projects with school construction.

The request, in a letter to Speaker of the House Martin, is for funds for the next fiscal year beginning July 1. The extra money is in addition to 40 million dollars already in the budget for the same purpose for the fiscal year ahead.

**Considering Violations**  
WASHINGTON (AP)—Atty. Gen. Brownell said officially today the Justice Department is considering "possible violations of the criminal law" in the preparation and dissemination of a document Sen. McCarthy presented May 4 in the McCarthy-Army hearings.

Brownell made the disclosure in ruling that no part of the document should be declassified from its confidential character.

**Strike Called**

**Ruled Unconstitutional By Supreme Court; Date To End Practice Not Set**

**Rules Separate Facilities Are Unequal**

**Danville School Board Will Meet At Once To Study Court Decision**

**Officials Give Views On Matter; Call For Calm Study On All Sides**

**Firm Entered, Haul Is Made; Boy Wounded**

**Man Accidentally Shot In The Hand**

A breaking and entering and an accidental shooting topped occurrences claiming police attention over the week-end.

Charlie's Place on Riverside Drive was broken into by way of a rear window and a sizeable quantity of cigarettes, cigars, candy and chewing gum taken. The discovery was made during a routine check by Lt. Curtis Fields shortly after last midnight. Patrolmen J. B. Walton and J. B. Gardner conducted the initial investigation and this morning turned the case over to the district attorney.

**Paroled Slayer Captured After Bizarre Deaths**

**Held For Four Brutal Killings**

MOULTREE, Ga. (AP)—Capture of a paroled Georgia convict wanted in connection with four brutal slayings ended three days of terror today and brought signs of relief to this South Georgia community.

Tom Williams, a 45-year-old paroled murderer, was taken on the edge of a swamp east of the city last night. Lt. W. E. McDuffie of the Georgia Bureau of Identification made the capture. He hurried Williams off to his auto-

**McCarthy-Army Hearings' Future Thrown In Doubt**

**Presidential Order Shutting Off Inquiry Denounced By Sen. McCarthy**

WASHINGTON (AP)—The future of the McCarthy-Army hearings was thrown in doubt today by a presidential order—denounced by Sen. McCarthy as an "iron curtain"—shutting off inquiry into whether "higher-ups" directed the charges against the senator.

The Senate investigations subcommittee recessed its public hearings at 11:55 a. m. (EDT) to consider in closed session what stand it might take on Eisenhower's order.

McCarthy, claiming that "this cover up" made it impossible to get at the truth, declined to say, when asked by

Robert P. McConnell, chairman of the School Board, on being in-

**Good Progress**



Nettie Hunt with her daughter Nikie on the Supreme Court steps following its ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

# THE DECISION: BROWN V. BOARD

**FOLKS AND THINGS**  
By 2054 This Bill Should Be Terrific

**STATE THE TOPEKA JOURNAL** Home Edition  
Topeka, Kansas, Monday, May 17, 1954—Twenty-four Pages FIVE CENTS

## SCHOOL SEGREGATION BANNED

### Supreme Court Refutes Doctrine of Separate but Equal Education

High Tribunal Fails to Specify When Practice of Dual Schools Must Be Discontinued

Washington, May 17 (AP)—The Supreme court ruled unanimously Monday that segregation of Negro and white students in public schools is unconstitutional. This ruling is expected to have far-reaching effects on the South and will be the first step toward the end of the practice.

The court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was argued in 1953. The case was brought by a group of African American parents in Topeka, Kansas, who wanted their children to attend the same schools as white children. The court ruled that the "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896 was unconstitutional in the context of public education.

The court's decision was a landmark moment in American history, paving the way for the Civil Rights Movement and the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The ruling was a clear statement that the Constitution guarantees equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their race.

**Workmen Busy at Fairgrounds for 'Cruz Holiday'**  
The special over the state fairgrounds is being held at such a busy time that the fairgrounds are being used for the fairgrounds. The fairgrounds are being used for the fairgrounds.

**Future of Probe Uncertain After President Rules**  
The future of the probe is uncertain after the president has ruled. The president has ruled on the future of the probe.

**Eisenhower Checks Top-Level Meeting on Army Charges**  
Eisenhower has checked a top-level meeting on Army charges. The meeting was held to discuss the charges against the Army.

**Oldies to High With 2.08 Inches**  
Oldies to high with 2.08 inches. The weather is expected to be sunny and warm.

**Rainfall Spread Far Over State**  
Rainfall spread far over the state. The rain is expected to continue for several days.

**MAY 17, 1954**

*"What the South was guilty of was an inherent determination that the people who were formerly in slavery, regardless of anything else, shall be kept as near that stage as is possible, and now is the time, we submit, that this Court should make it clear that this is not what our Constitution stands for."*

— THURGOOD MARSHALL

**"WE COME THEN TO THE QUESTION PRESENTED: DOES SEGREGATION OF CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF RACE, EVEN THOUGH THE PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND OTHER 'TANGIBLE' FACTORS MAY BE EQUAL, DEPRIVE THE CHILDREN OF THE MINORITY GROUP OF EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES? WE BELIEVE THAT IT DOES."**

All the News That's Fit to Print

# The New York Times

LATE CITY EDITION

Printed and Published Daily, except on Sundays and Public Holidays, at the Times Building, 405 N. York Street, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone: MU 2-1211. Cable: NY 10-1211. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y.

VOL. CIII, No. 8137

NEWSPAPER

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY 14, 1954

PRICE: 10 CENTS

FIVE CENTS

## HIGH COURT BANS SCHOOL SEGREGATION; 9-TO-0 DECISION GRANTS TIME TO COMPLY

### McCarthy Hearing Off a Week as Eisenhower Bars Report

#### SENATOR IS IRATE

President Orders Aides Not to Disclose Details of Top-Level Meeting

President's order and reaction from Washington, May 13, 1954.

By W. H. LAWRENCE  
Washington, May 13—A sharp rebuke by President Eisenhower revealed today in an official release for at least a week of the Senate's Army-McCarthy hearings.

The release was called after Senator Kenneth C. Curtis, the Arkansas Democrat, demanded through his attorney general's office that disclosure be made of the "substance and administration" of an official, unrecorded but not confidential Presidential meeting on May 11 in the White House.

Republicans insisted Tuesday it is a violation of the President's constitutional obligation to keep the Senate in secret until after the hearing was in progress.

#### Communist Arms Unloaded in Guatemala

By Vessel From Polish Port, U. S. Learns

State Department Views News Graciously Because of Red Infiltration

Washington, May 13—The State Department said today that it had reliable information that an important shipment of arms had been sent from Communist-controlled territory to Guatemala.



Map of Central America showing Guatemala and surrounding regions.

Embassy Says Nation of Central America May Buy Russian Weapons

Washington, May 13—The State Department reported today in large shipments of equipment and supplies to the Government of Guatemala.

#### REACTION OF SOUTH

'Breathing Spell' for Adjustment Tempers Region's Feelings

By JOHN H. HENNING  
Washington, May 13—The South today reacted to the Supreme Court decision with a "breathing spell" for adjustment.



Photograph of three men in suits, likely political figures, engaged in conversation.

#### 1898 RULING UPSET

'Separate but Equal' Doctrine Held Out of Place in Education

For at least 50 years since its enactment in 1896, the Supreme Court's decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson has been a cornerstone of the "separate but equal" doctrine.

#### SOVIET BIDS VIENNA CEASE INTRIGUES

Every Wants Austrian Chief on Incoming East Zone—Raid Device Charges

By JOHN HENNING  
Washington, May 13—The Soviet Union today urged the United States to demand that the Austrian Government cease its intrigues.

#### City Colleges' Board Can't Pick Chairman

The Board of Higher Education today failed to elect a chairman at its second meeting last night at Hunter College.

#### TAX PROJECTS DIE IN ESTIMATE BOARD

Beer Levy and More Parking Collections Killed—Payroll Impact Still Weighed

By CHARLES H. HENNING  
The panel on tax projects today was sharply criticized yesterday by the Board of Estimate.

#### MORETTI'S LAWYER RULING TO FIGURE MUST BARE TALKS IN '54 CAMPAIGN

Army Court Orders Counsel to Racketeers in Berger to Disclose Data to Grand Jury

#### Decision Tied to Eisenhower—Russell Leads Supporters in Criticism of Court

Washington, May 13—The Supreme Court's decision today to outlaw school segregation was hailed by supporters of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

## Brown v. Board of Education: 1954

"We conclude that the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

—Chief Justice Earl Warren



image: <http://www2.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/jpe/1954/brownboardofeducation.jpg>

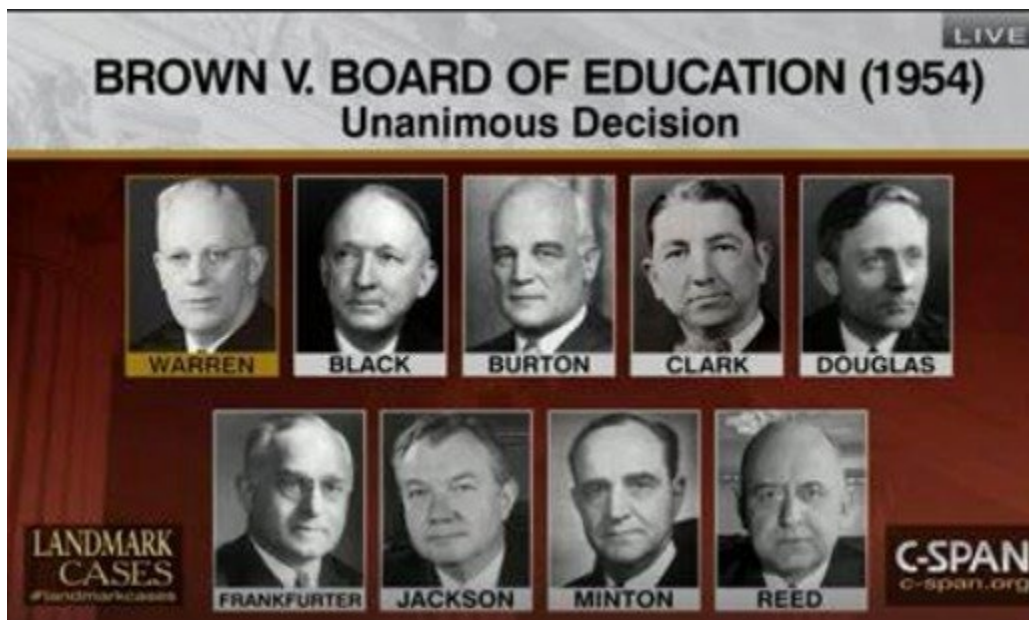
Click on the image above to watch the video.

## Brown vs the Board of Education

- [May 17, 1954](#), unanimous (9-0) decision
- "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."
- [de jure racial segregation](#) was ruled a violation of the [Equal Protection Clause](#) of the [Fourteenth Amendment](#),
- this victory paved the way for [integration](#) and the [Civil Rights Movement](#).



Brown v. Board of Education remains one of the foundations of the Civil Rights Movement. It helped establish the precedent that "separate-but-equal" was, in fact, not equal at all.



### Supreme Court Justices in 1954.

A year later, arguments were heard during the next term to determine just how the ruling would be imposed. On May 31, 1955, Warren read the Court's unanimous decision, now referred to as *Brown II*, instructing the states to begin desegregation plans "with all



deliberate speed." The Supreme Court published guidelines requiring public school systems to integrate.

## Segregationist Extremism

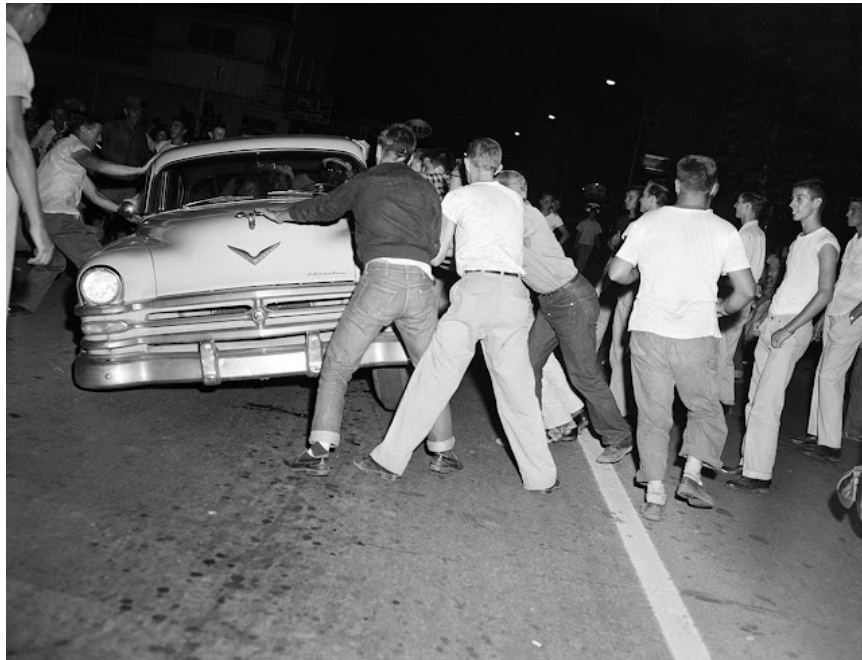
The few images, among thousand, typify the mounted resistance to the rule of law.



In Baltimore, Black students walk to high school in 1954, followed by White students carrying a sign that reads, "Southern Don't Want Negroes."



Buddy Trammell, Max Stiles, and Tommy Sanders, students at Clinton High School in Clinton, Tennessee, picket their school when it becomes the first state-supported school to integrate, on Aug. 27, 1956. AP



An unruly mob protesting integration of the Clinton High School attacks a car full of Black people who just happened to be passing through on Aug. 31, 1956.



**Police examined the wreckage of the newly desegregated Hattie Cotton Grammer School that was destroyed by dynamites in Nashville, TN, on September 10, 1957, after a six-year Black girl was enrolled in the first grade. The entire east wall and four classrooms were demolished.**



**The Little Rock Nine were a group of nine African American students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Their enrollment was followed by the Little Rock Crisis, in which the students were initially prevented from entering the racially segregated school by Orval Faubus, the Governor of Arkansas.**



(CH3) CHARLOTTE, N.C., Sept. 4-DOROTHY COUNTS IN CLASS-  
15-year-old Dorothy Counts sits quietly, while a white  
student grimaces in rear, as she attends her first  
class in a white school. Dorothy was among 4 Negro pup-  
ils integrated into white schools at Charlotte today.  
Students later threw rocks and sticks at her. *regretful segregation*  
(AP WIREPHOTO) (bbl:600 news) 1957

In Arkansas, Governor Orval Faubus had activated the state's National Guard in early September to keep the Black students, who became known as the "Little Rock Nine," from entering the school as mobs of angry Whites shouted racial slurs and threats.



**On September 24, 1957, paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division landed in Little Rock, Ark., Sept. to enforce the ruling on *Brown v Board of Education*.**

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was enforcing the 1954 Supreme Court ruling ending school segregation in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. He sent in the military to end a three-week standoff and ensure nine Black students were able to attend the all-White Central High School.

They were soldiers of the 101st Airborne Battle Group, 327th Infantry Regiment. They landed at Fort Campbell, Ky. It was chosen for Operation Arkansas because of its ability to deploy quickly and on short notice.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> US Army. Division celebrates 72nd anniversary By Yvette Smith, Fort Campbell Courier. December 15, 2014



In 1957 President Eisenhower ordered units of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division to enforce desegregation in Little Rock and protecting the students'



In 1957, army soldiers escort Black students to Little Rock's Central High School. In response to "forced integration," the governor shut down high schools in the city. Unknown/U.S. Army

Virginia was determined to avoid integration and a showdown with the federation government. Accordingly, in response to *Brown v Board of Education* ruling, in 1956, the Virginia General Assembly empowered the governor to close any school in order to escape the desegregation ruling.

Virginia lawmakers launched a campaign known as "Massive Resistance." In the fall of 1958, they closed schools in three major districts for a semester to avoid having to integrate them.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATEMENT BY SENATOR HARRY F. BYRD (D-VA.) MAY 17, 1954

The unanimous decision of the Supreme Court to abolish segregation in public education is not only sweeping but will bring implications and dangers of the greatest consequence. It is the most serious blow that has yet been struck against the rights of the states in a matter vitally affecting their authority and welfare.

The Supreme Court reversed its previous decision directing "separate but equal" facilities for the education of both races. Nothing now remains for the Supreme Court to do except to determine the effective date and the method of the application of its decision.

One of the cruel results arising out of this "about-face" of the Supreme Court is that the Southern States, accepting the validity of the previous decision in recent years have expended hundreds of millions of dollars for construction of new Negro school facilities to conform with the policy previously laid down by the Court.

Great progress has been made at tremendous cost throughout the Southern States to carry out that which our Southern State Governments had the right to believe was the law of the land. This reversal by the Supreme Court from its "separate but equal" policy to complete abolition of segregation will create problems such as have never confronted us before.

The decision will be deplored by millions of Americans, and, instead of promoting the education of our children, it is my belief that it will have the opposite effect in many areas of the country. In Virginia we are facing now a crisis of the first magnitude.

Those in authority, and the parents directly affected in the education of their children, should exercise the greatest wisdom in shaping our future course.

Whatever is done should be based on our most matured judgment after sober and exhaustive consideration.

*"If we can organize the southern states for massive resistance to this order, I think in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South."*

— UNITED STATES SENATOR HARRY F. BYRD, 1956

Citizens groups, which included Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, pressurized local politicians to take a hard and unyielding stand. Virginia's congressmen called for defiance in Washington, while newspaper editors enabled the resistance stance, including with hyperbolism.



## FEBRUARY 28, 1959

A week after his defiant speech in support of "massive resistance" Gov. J. Lindsay Almond called an emergency session of the Virginia General Assembly, during which he orchestrated the repeal of the Stanley Plan legislation, noting that massive resistance "has run its course."

In February 1959, schools that had been closed in Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Warren County reopened as integrated schools.



In 1963, a coalition of educators and community leaders created the Prince Edward Free School Association and used private funds and the support of President Kennedy's administration to open four campuses serving about 1,500 Black students. The 1964 Supreme Court ruling in **Griffin vs. School Board of Prince Edward County** forced the district's schools to finally reopen.

On March 30, 1964, the case was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. In a unanimous opinion it held that the schoolchildren of Prince Edward county were treated differently from the schoolchildren of other Virginia counties.

The mainstream thrust of the Supreme Court ruling that even though Virginia had wide discretion in deciding whether or when laws operate statewide, the record in Prince Edward county demonstrated that public schools were closed and private schools were operated in their place—with state and county funding—solely to keep White and Black children from attending the same schools. The court therefore held that the closing of the Prince Edward county schools denied Black students equal protection of the law.

The court then added that the time for desegregating "with all deliberate speed" had run out and that there was no justification for "denying these Prince Edward County school

children their constitutional right to an education equal to that afforded by the public schools in other parts of Virginia.” The court concluded that a decree should be issued guaranteeing students in Prince Edward county.

The Moton School is now a National Historic Landmark, its classrooms turned into exhibits documenting the students’ strike, the five-year educational drought, and the legacy of the historic Supreme Court ruling.



**Presidential Medal of Freedom Oliver White Hill. White House Ceremony with President Bill Clinton**



Integration battle in Virginia five long years later

## **Boynton vs Virginia (1960)**

***Boynton v. Virginia***, 364 U.S. 454 (1960), was a landmark decision of the US Supreme Court. In *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), the Supreme Court ruled that segregated public buses were unconstitutional. Bruce Boynton, a Black man, was a law school student at Howard University in Washington, D.C. when he boarded a bus bound for Alabama in 1958.

On a 40-minute layover at the Trailways Bus Terminal in Richmond, Virginia, the passengers went inside to eat. Boynton entered the segregated restaurant, sat in the

white section, and ordered a sandwich and tea. When asked to move to the colored section he refused. He stated that as an interstate passenger he was protected by federal anti-segregation laws. Refusing to leave, he was arrested by local police, charged with trespassing, and fined \$10.



Above: Bruce Boynton was arrested at the Trailways Station, 822 E. Broad St., Richmond, Virginia in late 1958 ([Library of Virginia](#) photo, 1960)

Lawyers from NAACP petitioned the Supreme Court on grounds that Boynton *was* entitled to such protection under the Constitution. Five years(1955) prior to the *Boynton vs Virginia* ruling, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) had issued a ruling in *Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company* that had explicitly denounced the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) doctrine of separate but equal in interstate bus travel.



Above Future justice Thurgood Marshall (July 2, 1908 – January 24, 1993) argued the case for Boynton in front of the U.S. Supreme Court (1957 photo).

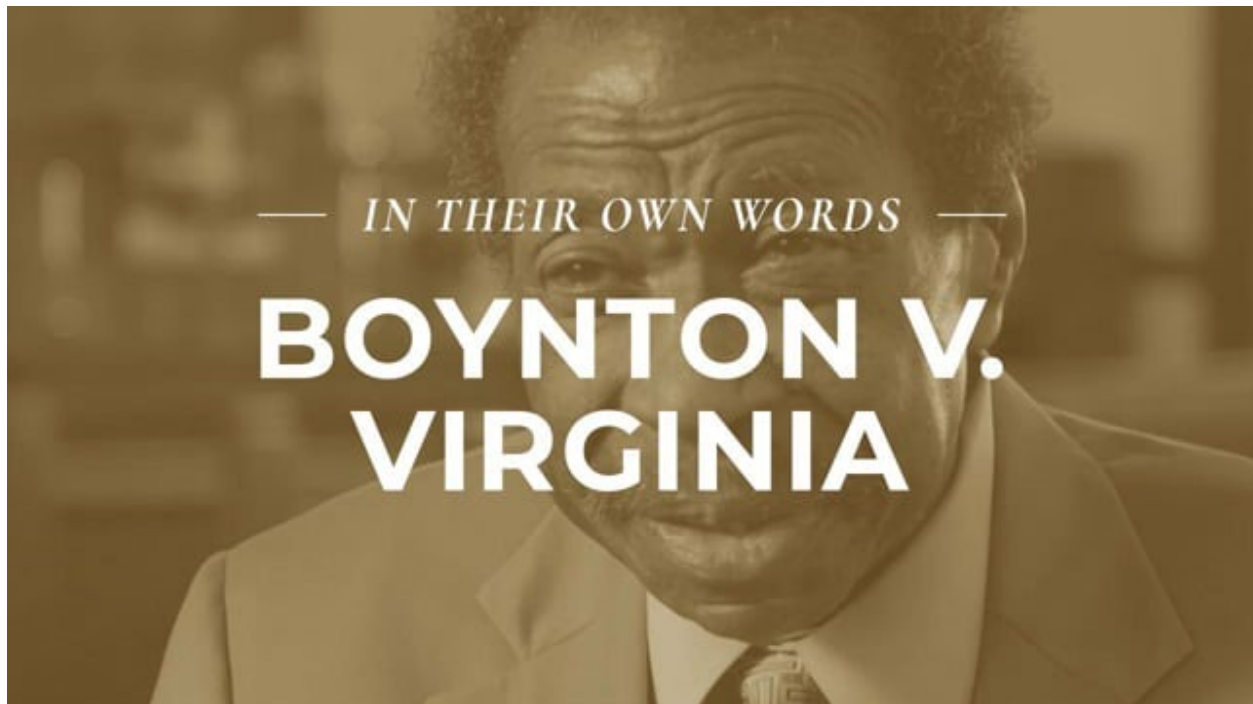
Pleading *Boynton v Virginia* before the Supreme Court on October 12, 1960 was, once more, **Thurgood Marshall**, who later became the first Black Supreme Court Justice in 1967.



In this landmark case, the Supreme Court overturned the judgment convicting Boynton for trespassing in a restaurant in a bus terminal which was "whites only." On December 5, 1960, the Supreme Court decided 7-2 in favor of Boynton, the first time since 1946 it had divided on a matter of racial segregation.

A strong factor in the Court's decision had been the earlier testimony of the restaurant manager who conceded that although the restaurant received "quite a bit of business" from local people, it was primarily for the service of Trailways passengers. Describing this as "much of an understatement," in the majority verdict written by Justice **Hugo Lafayette Black**, he added:

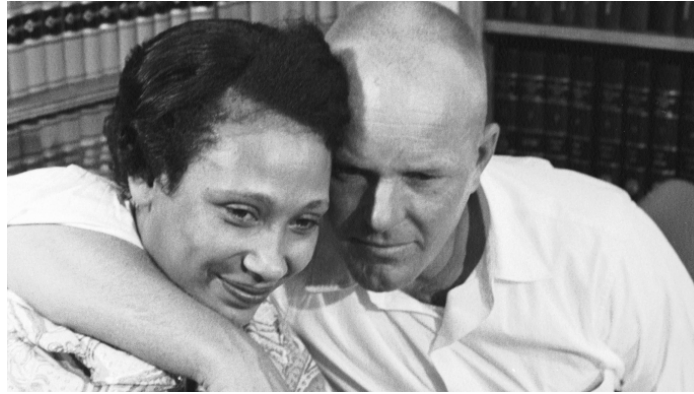
*"Interstate passengers have to eat, and they have a right to expect that this essential transportation food service ... would be rendered without discrimination prohibited by the Interstate Commerce Act. We are not holding that every time a bus stops at a wholly independent roadside restaurant the act applies ... [but] where circumstances show that the terminal and restaurant operate as an integral part of the bus carrier's transportation service ... an interstate passenger need not inquire into documents of title or contractual agreements in order to determine whether he has a right to be served without discrimination."*



In his words. Click on the image above to listen to Bruce Boynton in the video.

The significance of Boynton vs Virginia is that it outlawed of racial segregation in public transportation and directly escalated the Freedom Ride movement where Blacks and Whites rode together in various forms of public transportation in the South to challenge local laws or customs that enforced segregation.

## Loving v. Virginia (1967)



Above Mildred and Richard Loving

*Married couple Mildred and Richard Loving (1933 - 1975) embracing at a press conference the day after the Supreme Court ruled in their favor in 'Loving v. Virginia,' June 13, 1967. (Photo by Francis Miller/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images)*

While this case is not related to the Freedom Rides, it has implications on the Jim Crow law. In 1967, 16 states still outlawed interracial marriage. The plaintiffs in *Loving v. Virginia*, were Richard and Mildred Loving, a White man and Black woman whose marriage was deemed illegal according to Virginia state law. The Lovings had been branded felons in their home state of Virginia. In fact, they were exiled from it.

With the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the couple appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. On June 12, 1967, in *Loving v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that so-called “anti-miscegenation” statutes were unconstitutional based on the 14th Amendment adopted in 1868.

Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in the court opinion that *“the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the State.”* The decision is often cited as a watershed moment in the dismantling of “Jim Crow” race laws.



## CONFRONTING JIM CROW

### Journey of Reconciliation in 1947



The Journey of Reconciliation—first “Freedom Ride”—standing outside office of Attorney S. W. Robinson, Richmond, Virginia. Photograph, 1947. Bayard Rustin Papers, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. Courtesy of Walter Naegle

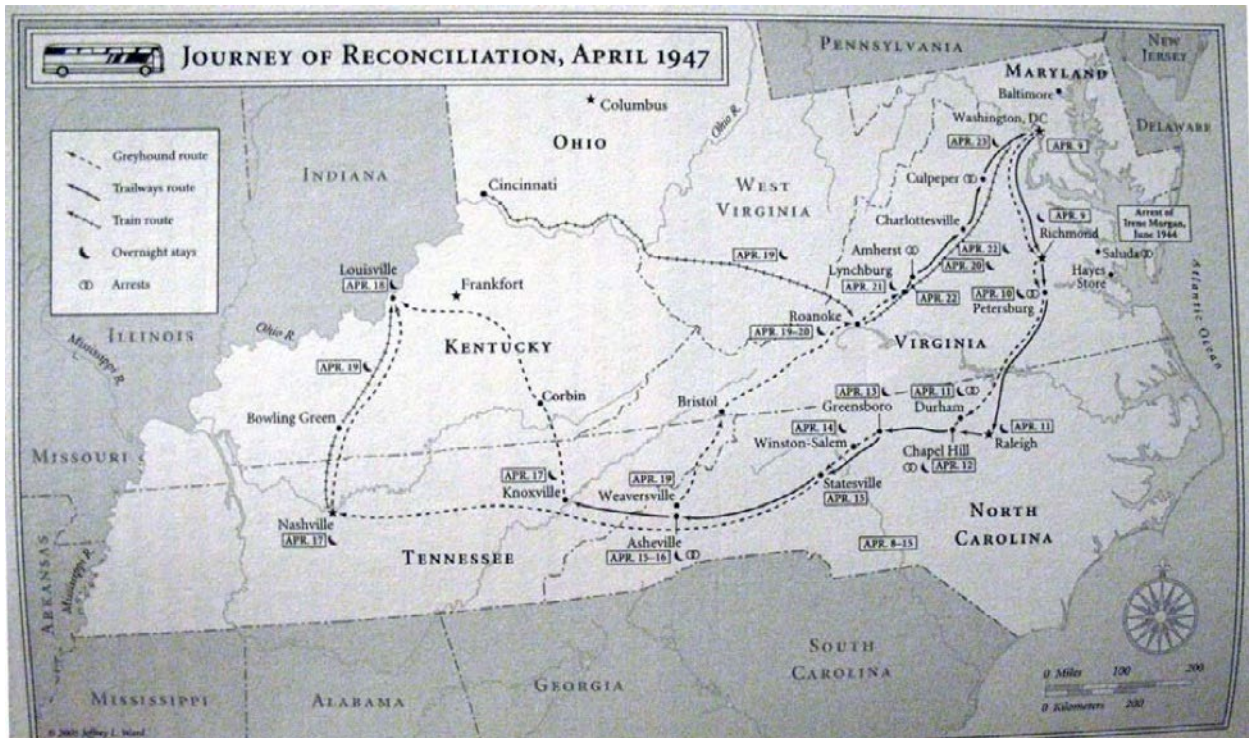
Long before the more familiar Civil Rights events of the 1960s, the movement had already been set in motion with the **Journey of Reconciliation**,<sup>13</sup> dubbed the First Freedom Ride.

The 1947 Journey of Reconciliation was a pioneering effort by an interracial group of Riders in a daring, unprecedented, and remarkable challenge to segregation in interstate travel. It established the model for the 1961 Freedom Rides.

In the lessons, students discuss, write original poems, dramatize the concept of democracy, analyze Jim Crow laws that dominated the South, and examine what laws Riders were challenging or seeking to enforce.

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<sup>13</sup> "[Journey of Reconciliation, 1947 | NCpedia](http://www.ncpedia.org)". *www.ncpedia.org*. Retrieved May 24, 2019.



The Journey of Reconciliation from Washington, DC planned for Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. During the two-week period from April 9 to April 23, 1947.

Sixteen men, eight Blacks and 8 Whites from Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) participated in the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation. Among them were the organizers, **George Houser**, a White Methodist minister of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and CORE, and **Bayard Rustin**, a Black activist and Quaker, with FOR and the American Friends Service Committee.

The other Black participants were Chicago musician **Dennis Banks**; a student from Cincinnati, **Andrew Johnson**; New York attorney **Conrad Lynn**; **Wallace Nelson**, a freelance lecturer; **Eugene Stanley** of North Carolina A&T College; **William Worthy** of the New York Council for a Permanent FEPC; and **Nathan Wright**, a church social worker from Cincinnati. Other White participants were North Carolina ministers **Louis Adams** and **Ernest Bromley**; **Joe Felmet** of the Southern Workers Defense League; **Homer Jack**, executive secretary of the Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination; **James Peck**, editor of the *Workers Defense League News Bulletin*; **Worth Randle**, a Cincinnati biologist; and civil rights activist and pacifist **Igal Roodenko**.

On April 9, 1947, the group set out in buses from Washington, D.C. with stops

planned in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. During the two-week period from April 9 to April 23, the interracial group of men, traveling as a deputation team, visited fifteen cities in the four states.



**Journey of Reconciliation. 1947**

The goal of the road trip was to test enforcement of the 1946 Supreme Court decision of *Morgan vs Commonwealth of Virginia*. It was a non-violent form of activism to see if the Southern states were honoring the federal law against segregated seating on interstate travel.

**Instruction produced by [George Houser](#) and [Bayard Rustin](#) for the Journey of Reconciliation (April, 1947).**

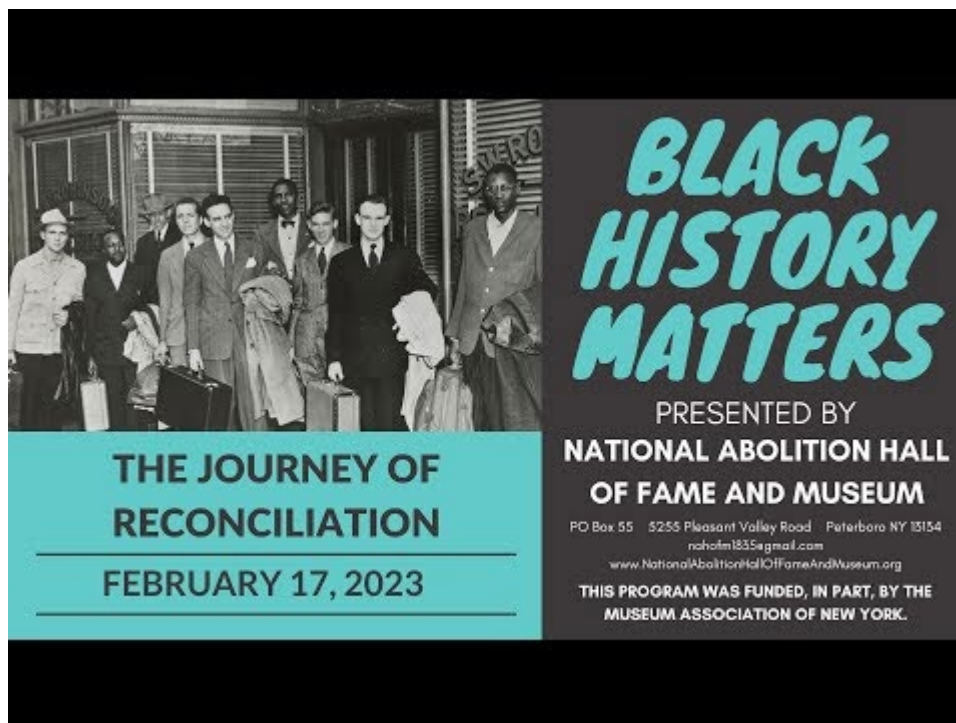
- If you are a Negro, sit in a front seat. If you are White, sit in the rear seat.
- If the driver asks you to move, tell him calmly and courteously: "As an interstate passenger I have a right to sit anywhere on this bus. This is the law as laid down by the United States Supreme Court".
- If the driver summons the police and repeats his order in their presence,

tell him exactly what you said when he first asked you to move.

- If the police ask you to "come along," without putting you under arrest, tell them you will not go until you are put under arrest.
- If the police put you under arrest, go with them peacefully. At the police station, phone the nearest headquarters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), or one of your lawyers. They will assist you.

The group did twenty-six tests of segregated seating arrangements during their two-week Journey, and they were arrested on six of those attempts. During the bus trip, Blacks continued to sit in front, Whites sat in back, or sometimes side-by-side, all in defiance of state laws which required passengers to practice segregated seating on buses.

The riders departed from starting in Washington D.C., went through Richmond, and stopped in Petersburg, Virginia.



**Petersburg to Durham, North Carolina, April 11, 1947.**

On April 11, the Greyhound bus left Petersburg for Raleigh while the Trailways

headed to Durham.



**In addition to segregation on buses and trains, there were also segregated waiting rooms at transit stations. Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images**

On the Greyhound to Durham, there were no arrests. Peck (White) and Rustin (Black) sat up front. About ten miles out of Petersburg, the driver told Rustin to

move. When Rustin refused, the driver said he would "attend that at Blackstone." However, after consulting with other drivers at the bus station in Blackstone, he went on to Clarksville. The group changed buses.

In Oxford, North Carolina, the driver called the police. The police refused to make an arrest. People waiting to get on at Oxford were delayed for forty-five minutes while neither the driver nor Rustin budged. A middle-aged Black school instructor was permitted to board and to plead with Rustin to move: *"Please move. Don't do this. You'll reach your destination either in front or in back. What difference does it make?"*

Rustin explained his reason for not moving. Other Black passengers were firm in their support of Rustin, one of them threatening to sue the bus company for the delay. When the travelers reached Durham without arrest, the Black school instructor begged Peck not to use the instructor's name in connection with the incident at Oxford: *"It will hurt me in the community. I'll never do that again."*

#### **Raleigh to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 12, 1947.**

Lynn (Black) and Nelson (Black) rode together on the double seat next to the very rear of the Trailways bus, and Houser (White) and Roodenko (White) in front of them. The bus was very crowded.

The one other Black passenger, a woman seated across from Nelson, moved to the very rear voluntarily when a White woman got on the bus and there were no seats in front. When two White college men got on, the driver told Nelson and Lynn to move to the rear seat. When they refused based on the interstate passage, he said the matter would be handled in Durham.

A White passenger asked the driver if he wanted any help. The driver replied, "No, we don't want to handle it that way." By the time the group reached Durham, the seating arrangement had changed, and the driver did not press the matter.

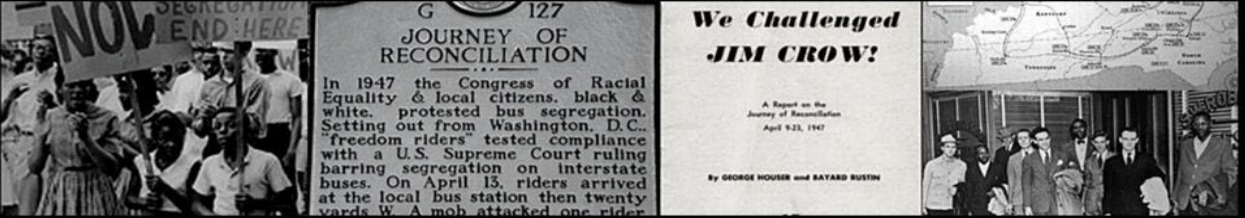
## Durham to Chapel Hill, April 12, 1947

Johnson (Black) and Rustin (Black) were in the second seat from the front on a Trailways bus. As soon as the driver saw them, he asked them to move to the rear. A station superintendent was called to repeat the order. Five minutes later the police arrived, and Johnson and Rustin were arrested for refusing to move when ordered to do so.

Peck (White) was seated in about the middle of the bus. He got up after the arrest, saying to the police, *"If you arrest them, you'll have to arrest me, too, for I'm going to sit in the rear."*

The three men were held at the police station for half an hour. They were released without charge when an attorney arrived on their behalf. A lawsuit was pressed against the company and the police for false arrest. The conversation with the Trailways official indicated that the company knew there was an interracial group making a test. The official said to the police: *"We know all about this. Greyhound is letting them ride. But we're not."*

**• A Long Road to Justice •**  
**The 1947 Journey of Reconciliation**  
Friday, May 20 | Hillsborough Courthouse | 2 pm - 4 pm



A FREE public program commemorating the 75th anniversary of the "First Freedom Rides" in 1947, featuring Professor Gene Nichol (UNC-CH Law School), Vocalist Mary D. Williams, Poet & Performer CJ Suitt, & Attorney James E. Williams, Jr. Details & registration at [humanities.unc.edu/reconciliation75](http://humanities.unc.edu/reconciliation75)



*Communities are teaching the lessons.*

## Chapel Hill to Greensboro, North Carolina, April 13, 1947



PHOTOGRAPH OF TAXI DRIVERS IN FRONT OF THE TRAILWAYS BUS STATION, CHAPEL HILL: Courtesy University of North Carolina, University Libraries. Exhibition.

On April 13, as the buses departed Chapel Hill for Greensboro, Johnson (Black) and Felmet (White) were seated in front. The driver asked them to move as soon as he boarded. They were quickly arrested. The police station was just across the street from the bus station. Felmet did not get up to accompany the police until the officer specifically told him he was under arrest. Because he delayed rising from his seat, he was pulled up bodily and shoved out of the bus. The bus driver distributed witness cards to occupants of the bus.

One White girl said: *"You don't want me to sign one of those. I'm a damn Yankee, and I think this is an outrage."*



Rustin and Roodenko, sensing the favorable reaction on the bus, decided they would move to the seat in the front vacated by Johnson and Felmet. Their moving forward caused much discussion by passengers. There was a commotion on the bus. The driver soon returned. When Rustin and Roodenko refused to move, they were also arrested.

The Black men were charged with disorderly conduct, for refusing to obey the bus driver. The charge of their White collaborators was interfering with arrest. A White woman at the front of the bus, a Southerner, gave her name and address to Rustin as he walked by her.

The turmoil in the bus attracted a large crowd of spectators, including several White taxi drivers. The bus was delayed for two hours. The arrested 4 men were taken to the police station across the street. A fifty-dollar bond was placed on each man.

James Peck, a White Rider, was not among the four arrested. He went to pay the bonds. A taxi driver assaulted Peck, striking him with a hard blow on the head, saying, *"Coming down here to stir up the \*\*\*\*\*s."*

Peck did not retaliate. Two people standing by, one Black and one White, reprimanded the cab driver for his violence. The Black person was told, *"You keep out of this."* In the police station, some of the men standing around could be heard saying, *"They'll never get a bus out of here tonight."*

Peck described the incident:

*"White cab drivers were hanging around the bus station, with nothing to do. They saw our Trailways bus delayed and learned the reasons why. Here was something over which they could work out their frustration and boredom. Two ringleaders started haranguing the other drivers. About ten of them started milling around the parked bus. When I got off to put up bail for the two Negroes and two whites in our group who had been arrested, five of the drivers surrounded me. "Coming her to stir up the niggers," snarled a big one with steel-cold grey eyes. With that, he slugged me on the side of the head. I stepped back, looked at him, and asked, "What's the matter?" My failure to retaliate with violence had taken him by surprise."—James Peck,*

*"Freedom Ride" (1962).*

After the bond was placed, Reverend Charles Miles Jones, a local White Presbyterian minister who had agreed to host the activist for the night proceeded to do so. As Reverend Jones speedily drove the Riders to his home, they were pursued by two cars full of murderous, angry White men.

When the interracial group reached the front porch of Minister Jones' home, the two cabs pulled up at the curb. The men jumped out, two of them with sticks; and others picked up sizable rocks. They started toward the house but were called back by one of their members. In a few moments, the phone rang, and an anonymous voice said to Jones, *"Get those damn \*\*\*\*\*s out of town or we'll burn your house down. We'll be around to see that they go."*

The police were notified, and the officers arrived in about twenty minutes. Wary of more violence, the interracial group felt it prudent to leave town before nightfall. Two cars were obtained, and the group was driven to Greensboro, through Durham, for an evening engagement.

*Scaled headline: 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Journey of Reconciliation. Credit – Chapel Hill Community History.*

# MOB ATTACKS MIXED GROUP AT CHAPEL HILL

[Bayard Rustin, Jim Crow and Chapel Hill: Remembering the "Journey of Reconciliation," 75 Years Later - Chapelboro.com](#)

Letter from Rev. Charles Miles Jones to a New York Times journalist.

I believe the date  
is given in the  
1 FSC article -  
of 4

On Sunday Morning a group  
arrived in Chapel Hill after  
having stopped in Durham. The  
only names we can recall are  
Bayerl Pectin and James Farmer.  
They had <sup>lunch</sup> breakfast with us  
and I remember James Farmer  
helping me with clearing up the  
dishes.

Later they went to the bus station  
to leave for Greensboro, N.C.  
~~they~~ had trouble with bus drivers  
and police because of the seating.  
They paired off with some of  
them sitting in the front of the bus  
and others in the back. The driver  
asked the black in front to move back  
which he refused to do.

At that time there was a taxi  
stand across the street from the  
bus station. Some of the cab  
drivers got interested in the situation  
and it was our understanding they said  
if the police couldn't handle <sup>them</sup> it, they  
could take them off the bus and  
take care of them.

Hilton Seals

the assistant minister was passing and saw the problem developing and telephoned our house -

Charles went down and got them off the bus and into his car, intending, I believe, to take them to Greensboro. But the cab drivers started following him so he quickly brought them back to our house arriving just in time to unload and get into the house before the cab drivers arrived.

The cab drivers did not try to come into the house but stayed outside in the street.

Charles telephoned the police who said they did not have anyone to send. They were called a number of times. Finally Charles told them he was going out with the men and if there was trouble the police would be responsible for what might happen - at that point the police said they would send someone. The nicest one on the police force came, and

## **Greensboro to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, April 14, 1947**

Two tests were done on Greyhound buses. In the first test Lynn (Black) sat in front and Nelson (Black) sat in second. A South Carolinian seated by Bromley (White) on the first bus said, *"In my state he would either move or be killed."* He was calm as Bromley talked with him about the Morgan decision.

Martin Watkins, a White, disabled war veteran and UNC student, a non-rider, was beaten by several taxi drivers for speaking with a Black woman at a bus stop. Watkins pressed charges, but the judge also brought charges against Watkins by stating that he started the fight.

Debates erupted for a week in both the Daily Tar Heel and Chapel Hill Weekly over the incident and race relations. The Journey of Reconciliation continued, eventually passing through western North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and then returning to Virginia and Washington, D.C.

## **Winston-Salem to Asheville, North Carolina, 15th April**

From Winston-Salem to Statesville the group traveled by Greyhound. Nelson (Black) was seated with Bromley (White) in the second seat from the front. Nothing was said. At Statesville, the group transferred to the Trailways with Nelson still in front. In a small town about ten miles from Statesville, the driver approached Nelson and told him he would have to move to the rear.

When Nelson said that he was an interstate passenger, the driver said that the bus was not interstate. When Nelson explained that his ticket was interstate, the driver returned to his seat and drove on.

The rest of the trip to Asheville was through mountainous country, and the bus stopped at many small towns. A soldier asked the driver why Nelson was not forced to move. The driver explained that there was a Supreme Court decision and that he could do nothing about it.

He said, *"If you want to do something about this, don't blame this man [Nelson];*

*kill those bastards up in Washington."* The soldier explained to a large, vociferous man why Nelson was allowed to sit up front. The large man commented, "*I wish I was the bus driver.*"

Near Asheville, the bus became very crowded, and there were women standing up. Two women spoke to the bus driver, asking him why Nelson was not moved. In each case the driver explained that the Supreme Court decision was responsible. Several White women took seats in the Jim Crow section in the rear.

### **Asheville to Knoxville, Tennessee, 17th April**

Banks (Black) and Peck (White) were in the second seat on the Trailways bus. While the bus was still in the station, a White passenger asked the bus driver to tell Banks to move. Banks replied, "*I'm sorry, I can't,*" and explained that he was an interstate passenger.

The police were called, and the order repeated. A twenty-minute consultation took place before the arrest was made. When Peck was not arrested, he said, "*We're traveling together, and you will have to arrest me too.*" He was arrested for sitting in the rear. The two men were released from the city jail on \$400 bond each.

The following day both buses arrived in Chapel Hill. That night the Riders met with the Intercollegiate Council for Religion in Life. The council included students from University of North Carolina, Duke University, and North Carolina College for Negroes. The next morning several of the Riders, Blacks and Whites, attended services led by the Reverend Charles M. Jones at the Presbyterian Church of Chapel Hill and met with a delegation of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen.

Cases against the Freedom Riders were dropped in Durham, Asheville, and Virginia, but not in Chapel Hill.

On May 20, 1947, the 4 Riders who had been arrested went on trial. Rustin and Roodenko, represented by NAACP lawyers Jerry Gates, Henry Taylor, and Ed Avant, appeared before Chapel Hill Recorder's Court Judge Henry Whitfield. The

North Carolina Court argued that it was because the passengers were not travelling outside of the state that day and were not interstate travelers. Therefore, the Supreme Court decision did not apply to them.

The District Attorney, T. J. Phipps, gave an impassioned argument to Judge Whitfield that **“our nigras wanted Jim Crow,”** and it was the outside agitators coming and that was the cause of all the trouble. The District Attorney characterized Rustin as a *“poor misled negra.”* Apparently, Judge Whitfield agreed. Accordingly, his sentencing demonstrated that the Blacks were less responsible than the White agitators who should know better.

Two Blacks , Bayard Rustin and Andrew Johnson, were found guilty of violating the state's Jim Crow bus statute and were sentenced to thirty days in a chain gang.

Judge Whitfield then turned his attention to Roodenko. **“I presume you’re Jewish, Mr. Rodenky”** For the White men, Judge Whitfield clearly expressed his disgust in their more objectionable behavior.

The Judge told Igal Roodenko and Joseph Felmet. ***“It’s about time you Jews from New York learned that you can’t come down here bringing your niggers with you to upset the customs of the South. Just to teach you a lesson, I gave your black boys thirty days [on a chain gang], and I give you ninety.”***<sup>[6]</sup>

It was clear that the Southern states were refusing to enforce the Supreme Court's decision, which was the objective of the Riders to test. Based on consultation, the riders limited their travel to the Upper South, where the risk of violence was not as high as in the Deep South.

The Journey of Reconciliation led to significant arrests and racial uproar in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Their methods would inspire the next generation of activists who conducted the Freedom Rides of the 1960’s. The Riders conducted more than thirty speaking engagements with church, NAACP, and college groups.

*“We challenged Jim Crow! A report on the Journey of Reconciliation, April 9-23,*

1947.” Creator George Houser (June 2, 1916 – August 19, 2015) and Bayard Rustin (1912-1987).



**Oral History Interview with Igal Roodenko, participant in 1947 Journey of Reconciliation**  
Click on the image above to listen to the video.

Despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1946 decision, *Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, which prohibited segregation in interstate travel as unconstitutional, North Carolina Superior Court Judge Chester Morris upheld the convictions.

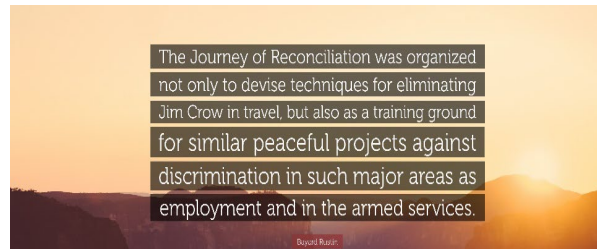
On March 21, 1949, Rustin, Roodenko, and Felmet surrendered at the courthouse in Hillsborough and were sent to segregated chain gangs in Roxboro jail. They refused to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, preferring to broadcast the injustice to the world.

Note: A **chain gang** is a group of prisoners chained together to perform menial or physically challenging work as a form of punishment. Such punishment might include repairing buildings, building roads, or clearing land.



## Memoirs

Many Riders in the Journey of Reconciliations have documented their experiences.



**Above: Quote by Bayard Rustin**

In Roxboro, Rustin was assaulted, almost starved, and warned “*you ain’t in Yankee land now.*” A guard pointed a revolver at his head saying, “I’ll shoot the goddamned life out of you.” At the end of his sentence, he walked out, head high, undaunted by his tormentors.

Source: A lesser-known Freedom Ride in North Carolina still matters today BY GENE NICHOL  
UPDATED MAY 23, 2022, 1:19 PM. Published in The News and Observer

Read Rustin’s Account: **A Report on 22 Days of the Chain Gang at Roxboro, North Carolina by Bayard Rustin:**

[Bayard Rustin - Jah Kente International @, Inc.](#)

After serving three weeks in a state prison camp at Roxboro, Bayard Rustin wrote “Twenty-two Days on a Chain Gang.” Rustin’s prison memoir—an unsparing expose of the brutal conditions in the state’s prisons—was serialized in the New York Post and the Baltimore Afro-American and drew considerable attention in state and beyond.

Among the horrors Rustin exposed was the practice of hanging prisoners by their hands for hours. A group of UNC faculty quickly formed a committee to press for reforms and their demands were echoed by protestors across the nation.

Under considerable public pressure, Governor Kerr Scott overhauled prison disciplinary procedures and he appointed a prison oversight committee to guard against continued abuses. [John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, p. 170] The North Carolina chain gang was discontinued in 1949. The 1947 Freedom Riders were especially pleased about this outcome.

Rustin published journal entries about the experience as well as the actions of the “Journey” riders in April 1947, inspired Rosa Parks’ nonviolent protest in 1955 and the Freedom Rides of 1960–1961.

He received numerous awards and honorary degrees throughout his career. His writings about civil rights were published in the collection *Down the Line* in 1971 and in *Strategies for Freedom* in 1976.

## **Vindication Over 75 Years Later.**

### [National News](#)

#### **Freedom Riders' Convictions Vacated Over 70 Years After Arrest**

**By Jovonne Ledet**

Jun 17, 2022

In 1947, Bayard Rustin, Andrew Johnson, James Felmet, and Igal Roodenko were all arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for sitting at the front of the bus — they were sentenced to work on a chain gang in North Carolina. These men were among the first group of Freedom Riders who boarded buses in multiple cities to challenge laws that mandated segregation on interstate travel after the Supreme Court deemed these restrictions unconstitutional.

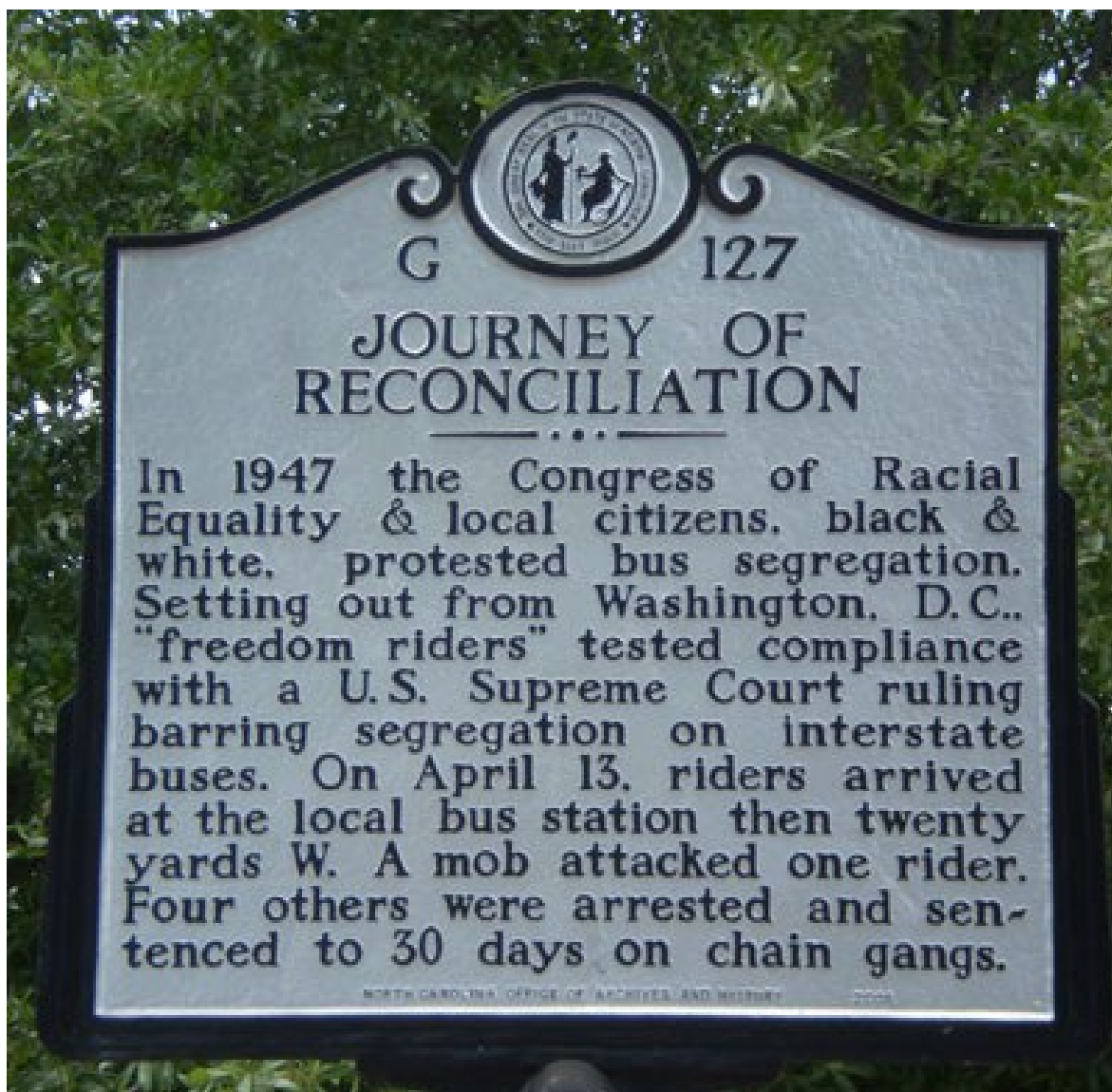
On Friday, June 17, 2022, all four men were officially posthumously vacated of the conviction. The Chairman of the Orange County Board of Commissioners Renée Price said in a statement, *“While this judicial action is taking place 75 years after the injustice occurred, never should we falter in examining past wrongs, seeking reparation, and lifting those heavy burdens from our hearts and minds so that future generations may know justice.”* The vacation of convictions followed an apology in May 2022 from district court judges amid the 75th anniversary of the freedom riders’ arrests.

*“The Orange County Court was on the wrong side of the law in May 1947, and it was on the wrong side of history,”* a statement from five district court judges read. *“Today, we stand before our community on behalf of all five District Court Judges for Orange and Chatham Counties and accept the responsibility entrusted to us to do our part to eliminate racial disparities in our justice system.”*

**George Houser**, was interviewed by Jervis Anderson for his book, **A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait** (1972)

George Houser later wrote: "We in the non-violent movement of the 1940s certainly thought that we were initiating something of importance in American life. Of course, we weren't able to put it in perspective then. But we were filled with vim and vigor, and we hoped that a mass movement could develop, even if we did not think that we were going to produce it. In retrospect, I would say we were precursors. The things we did in the 1940s were the same things that ushered in the civil rights revolution.

In retrospect, I would say we were precursors. The things we did in the 1940s were the same things that ushered in the civil rights revolution. Our Journey of Reconciliation preceded the Freedom Rides of 1961 by fourteen years. Conditions were not ready for the full-blown movement when we were undertaking our initial actions. But I think we helped to lay the foundations for what followed, and I feel proud of that."



## Significance of the Journey of Reconciliation

While unknown compared to the Freedom Rides of 1961, the Journey of Reconciliation was a precursor to 1961 protests. In February 1948, the Council Against Intolerance in America gave George Houser and Bayard Rustin the Thomas Jefferson Award for the Advancement of Democracy for their attempts to bring an end to segregation in interstate travel.

In North Carolina, the scene of the combustible incidents, hundreds of Blacks and Whites across North Carolina rallied to the defense of the Freedom Riders at mass meetings in Raleigh, Durham, Greensboro, and Chapel Hill.

Many of these meetings were held on black and white college campuses, such as St. Augustine's and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, while others took place in black churches and were sponsored by local NAACP branches. Before packed crowds that were very enthusiastic, the Freedom Riders discussed Gandhian nonviolence as a means of ending segregation. Hundreds of other people were exposed to Gandhian nonviolence through the black press's extensive coverage of the Journey. As the esteemed civil rights historians August Meier and Elliot Rudwick later observed:

*"The Journey served to publicize nonviolent direct action and, thereby, undoubtedly played a part as one of the many events that gradually were to make protest of this type respectable, even fashionable. As [Jim] Peck observed as late as 1954, in his speaking engagements he found the Journey interested audiences more than anything else. Moreover, he added, "through the meetings we held each night during the Journey itself [in the communities where the riders stopped along the way] and through the nationwide publicity which it received, more Negroes than ever before were made aware of the nonviolent technique of CORE." August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "The First Freedom Ride," Phylon 30:3 (1969) 213-222*

White students and religious leaders who prioritized social justice also played key roles in the Journey of Reconciliation. For instance, after a Chapel Hill mob threatened the bus protestors, students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill volunteered to shuttle them to their next stop in Greensboro and to provide protection for the family of their beleaguered white host, the Rev. Charles Jones.

The Journey of Reconciliation's greatest significance may be that it served as the model and inspiration for the larger, more dramatic, and successful Freedom Rides of 1961. Many of the key figures in the latter effort had participated, to varying degrees, in the 1947

protests, including Jim Peck who traveled on both freedom rides. The 1961 Riders drew community support from many of the same local NAACP branches as the 1947 Riders and they visited many of the same churches.

Ollie Stewart of the Baltimore Afro-American later summed up the Journey's long-term impact:

*"History was definitely made. white and colored persons, when the whole thing was explained to them as they sat in their seats on several occasions, will never forget what they heard (or saw). The white couple who went to the very back seat and sat between colored passengers, the white marine who slept while a colored woman sat beside him, the white Southern girl who, when her mother wouldn't take a seat in the rear, exclaimed 'I do not care, I'm tired'—all these people now have an awareness of the problem. The Journey of Reconciliation, with whites and colored traveling and sleeping and eating together, to my way of thinking, made the solution of segregation seem far simpler than it ever had before. I heard one man refer to the group as pioneers. I think he had something there. They wrote a new page in the history of America."* Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, p. 52.

# FREEDOM RIDES 1961

## Summary

After *Morgan v Commonwealth of Virginia* in 1946, the Freedom Rides were first conceived in 1947 with Journey of Reconciliation that challenged bus segregation in the upper parts of the South, avoiding the more dangerous Deep South. At the dawn of the sixties, Jim Crow laws were still supremely entrenched in Southern States in America.



*Click on the image above to watch the video.*

In summary, 1961 Freedom Riders were interracial civil rights activists who rode interstate buses into the segregated Southern United States to challenge the non-enforcement of the United States Supreme Court decisions, as we have learnt, for examples, in *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* (1946) and *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960).

*Boynton* outlawed racial segregation in the restaurants and waiting rooms in terminals serving buses that crossed state lines. Five years prior to the *Boynton* ruling, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) had issued a ruling in *Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company* (1955) that had explicitly denounced the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) doctrine of separate but equal in interstate bus travel. But the ICC failed to enforce the rulings.

The 1961 Freedom Rides were initially organized by Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CORE was led by James Farmer, a child prodigy who earned early fame as a skilled debater. He grew up in Marshall, Texas, where his father, James L. Farmer, Sr., was a minister and academic, mostly at Historically Black Colleges. Farmer was educated at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas (1938), and at Howard University in Washington, D.C. (1941), where his father taught divinity. A conscientious objector on religious grounds, he received a military deferral in World War II, and he joined the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).

Farmer devoted his career to civil rights and social justice causes, also working for the NAACP.

A major difference between the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation and the 1961 Freedom Rides was the inclusion of women in 1961.

## The Original 13 on a Cause that Changed the Course of History

The first group of 13 of seven Blacks, Six Whites, males and females were:

1. **Ed Blankenheim** (1934–2004), White, had experience as a young Marine in North Carolina, where he witnessed segregation and racism, laid the groundwork for his role in the Civil Rights movement prior to becoming a Freedom Rider.

After leaving the military, Blankenheim enrolled in classes at the University of Arizona, where he helped Black students suffering from housing discrimination. He also joined the NAACP and soon after was offered a spot as a Freedom Rider.

Blankenheim was 27 when the bus he rode into Anniston, Alabama was set on fire on Mother's Day 1961. He lost several teeth after being hit in the face with a tire iron. He later lost the use of the right side of his body. He also suffered a stroke which is believed to be a result of the injuries he suffered from the attack.

2. **John Lewis**, (1940-2020), Black, son of Georgia sharecroppers, was 19, and student at the American Baptist Theological Seminary. He was considered one of the "Big Six" leaders of the Civil Rights movement. He represented Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1987 to 2020.

Not long after the group set out, Lewis was attacked in Rock Hill, South Carolina. In another attack during the rides, a white mob beat Lewis in Montgomery, Alabama. Jailed numerous times, he also spent 40 days in the Mississippi State Prison, known as Parchman Farm, for entering a "white" restroom as a Freedom Rider.

For several years until his death, beginning in 2014, Lewis posted his mugshots on Twitter each year to mark the anniversary of his Mississippi arrest.



“During the time I was being beaten and other times when I was being beaten, I had what I called an executive session with myself. I said I’m gonna take it, I’m prepared. On the Freedom Ride, I was prepared to die,” he said during a 2011 appearance on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

- 3. Albert Bigelow**, (1906–1993), White, a Boston native, studied at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a degree in architecture. He worked as an architect before heading off to World War II with the Navy.

Bigelow was an activist prior to his time as a Freedom Rider. A former United States Navy Commander, he came to prominence in the 1950s as the skipper of the *Golden Rule*, the first vessel to attempt disruption of a nuclear test in protest against nuclear weapons.

He opposed the use of nuclear weapons after the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, and opened up his home to survivors of Hiroshima who were seeking reconstructive surgery. Following the war, he and a small crew set out for the South Pacific to disrupt and protest atomic testing. They were jailed for 60 days in Hawaii.

Bigelow was 55 when he joined the Freedom Riders. Bigelow and former U.S. Rep. John Lewis were the first to face violence after attempting to integrate a whites-only waiting room in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Lewis was struck first as Bigelow stepped in between Lewis and his attackers.

“It had to look strange to these guys to see a big, strong white man putting himself in the middle of a fistfight like this, not looking at all as if he was ready to throw a punch, but not looking frightened either,” Lewis wrote in his memoir “Walking with the Wind.”

- 4. Walter Bergman**, (1899-1999), White, graduated from high school when he was only 15 and was drafted into the Army during World War I. Dr. Bergman earned a PhD from the University of Michigan. When he saw the devastation in Germany, he became a pacifist. A former union activist and college professor, Dr. Bergman became a victim of McCarthyism in 1953 when the State Department seized his passport while he was teaching in Denmark.

Dr. Bergman was a founder of both the Michigan chapter of the A.C.L.U. and the Michigan Federation of Teachers. A longtime educator and administrator in Detroit, Michigan, retired from teaching and became a Freedom Rider when he was 61 years old.

By profession an educator, Dr. Bergman over the years took such controversial stands as declaring in a public debate in 1935 that the New Deal was too timid in its attack on poverty, and that the United Auto Workers was wrong to bar officials from claiming their Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination when asked about Communist leanings.

Dr Bergman was on the Trailways bus that arrived in Anniston about an hour after the Greyhound bus. He lost several teeth, had a stroke, brought on by the blows to the head. The severity of the stroke left Bergman disabled, forcing him to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life. His description of the attack can be read in the book, *The Price of Dissent: Testimonies to Political repression in America*.

After more than two decades, Dr. Bergman won compensation for the attack from the F.B.I. In 1983, after an informant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation had testified that the agency had ignored warnings of the impending attack, Dr. Bergman won a damage suit against the Federal Government, though he was awarded only \$35,000 of the \$2 million he had sought.

**Frances Bergman**, (1904-1979), a civil rights activist alongside her husband Walter Bergman, Frances Bergman was a schoolteacher and member of the American Civil Liberties Union and Socialist Party of America. After she and her husband retired from education, they volunteered to ride on the first bus that left Washington on May 4, 1961. At 57, she was the oldest of the female Freedom Riders.

5. **Henry (Hank) Thomas** (1941 of Jacksonville was a Black 19 years old when he joined the Riders at the last minute after his roommate, John Moody. dropped out with a bad case of the flu. "My roommate John Moody had been accepted as a Freedom Rider, and at the last minute, he couldn't. "Well, why don't you take my roommate?" They looked at my age, and they wanted somebody 21 or over. When I went to see them, I'm a big, tall fella so I looked big for my age. [*Laughs*]. But I still say that they just didn't have time to talk to anyone else so that's how I got selected. Hank Thomas was on the Greyhound bus that was bombed in Anniston.

"When folks ask me what incident led me to ride," he said years later. "I can't say it was one. When you grow up and face this humiliation every day, there is no one thing. You always felt that way." Thomas overcame an impoverished childhood in southern Georgia and St. Augustine, FL to attend Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he was active in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) affiliated Nonviolent Action Group (NAG).

After participating in the May 4 CORE Freedom Ride, Thomas returned to the Deep South to participate in the May 24 Mississippi Freedom Ride from

Montgomery, AL to Jackson, MS, and was jailed at Parchman State Prison Farm.

After being released on bail, he went on to participate in the July 14 New Jersey Freedom Ride. On August 22, 1961, Thomas became the first Freedom Rider to appeal his conviction for breach of peace. He was released on appeal, pending payment of a \$2000 bond.

Following the Freedom Rides, Thomas served in the Vietnam War, returning home after being wounded in 1966. In recent years, Thomas has owned and operated several hotel and fast-food restaurant franchises in the Atlanta metro region.

6. **Ivor (Jerry) Moore**, (1941-2015), Black, was 19 years old when he boarded a bus bound for Birmingham, Alabama, joining fellow Freedom Riders. The son of a Baptist minister from the Bronx, Moore had already been involved in several sit-ins and marches against segregation as a student at Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina before participating in the Freedom Rides.

After graduating from college in 1964, he became a folk and rock musician in Greenwich Village and Woodstock, NY. Moore moved to Los Angeles in 1980, where he conducted street ministry for drug addicts and the homeless, taught computer skills, and coordinated church outreach activities.

7. **Mae Frances Moultrie**, (1936-2010), was a 24-year-old Morris College student and the only Black female on the original Freedom Ride, joining the ride on May 11th in Sumter, SC. She suffered severe smoke inhalation during the firebombing and burning of the Greyhound bus on May 14.

Moultrie was so badly overcome by the heat and smoke, she says in *Freedom Riders*, that she could not remember "if I walked or crawled off the bus."

*"I am fed up with this. . . We have tried Litigation, Non-Violent Protests, and pleading to the government and all it has brought us is threats, injury, and arrest. We must keep riding to get rid of this unjust racism!!!"*

In October 1961, she moved to Philadelphia, PA to attend Cheyney State College. She later received an M.S. in education from Temple University. Moultrie taught school in Delaware from 1964-1990, after which she served as a missionary in Liberia, Mexico, and Canada. Later, she taught Christian education at Sanctuary Christian Academy in Philadelphia.

8. **Joseph Perkins**, (1933-1976), Field Secretary at CORE. Black. Perkins was educated at Kentucky State University and served in the Army for two years. He later pursued a graduate degree at the University of Michigan. Perkins was recruited by CORE in August 1960 and became known as a masterful organizer. He was the first Freedom Rider arrested for sitting at a whites-only shoeshine stand in Charlotte, North Carolina, according to PBS. After spending two days in jail, he caught up with the group and led the Freedom Riders on the Greyhound bus, which was burned in Anniston, Alabama.
  
9. **Charles Person**, (1943), Black, was the youngest original member at 18. He was a gifted math and physics student, with aspirations to become a scientist. In high school, he was a member of his local NAACP Youth Council. He wanted to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. But during that time many universities weren't willing to look beyond his skin color to consider his intellect.

After multiple denials, Person attended Morehouse College and waded deep into the politics and racism of society by participating in rallies and facing discrimination head-on. He would spend weeks behind bars after being arrested at protests, but he never failed to complete homework.

In an interview, Person had this to say about the sit-ins: "Once I got involved, it was infectious, anything that had to do with protests, I was there. My life revolved around it, I did my homework and my assignment around sitting-in."

You'd be surprised how good study habits you can develop, because you were just sitting at a lunch counter with no place to go, they weren't going to feed us, so you just sat there and did your studies."

Pearson gained the attention of CORE recruiters. As a minor, he needed a parent signature to participate. His mother refused to sign, but he was able to convince his father. His memoir *Buses Are a Comin': Memoir of a Freedom Rider* was published by St. Martin's Press in 2021.

10. **Genevieve Hughes** (1932-2012), White, was 28, and one of the three women to participate in the early days of the Freedom Ride. She quit her job as a stockbroker to become the field secretary of CORE and civil rights activist. One of two women participants in the original 13-person Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) Freedom Ride,

She became active in the New York City chapter of CORE during the late 1950s, helping to organize a boycott of dime stores affiliated with chains resisting desegregation in the South. Alienated from the conservatism of Wall Street, she made the shift to full-time activism in 1960.

A Maryland native, Hughes explained her motivation for joining the Freedom Ride by saying, "I figured Southern women should be represented so the South and the nation would realize all Southern people don't think alike."

During the original CORE Freedom Ride, Hughes survived the brutal May 14, 1961, attack on the Greyhound Bus near Anniston, Alabama. On May 15, when faced with mounting threats and intimidation, the Riders could not find a bus driver willing to take them further, and they flew from Birmingham, AL to New Orleans, LA.

11. **James Peck** (1914-1993), White, a member of CORE and journalist, was born in New York to a wealthy clothing wholesaler and attended an elite Connecticut prep school. He dropped out of Harvard University to become a full-time activist and was the only person to participate in both the Freedom Rides 1961 and Journey of Reconciliation on 1947.

"By encouraging and supporting actions such as that in Montgomery, we who adhere to the principles of nonviolence hope to hasten complete abolition of segregation within our social system," Peck wrote in CORE's introduction to Martin Luther King's 1957 article, "Our Struggle: The Journey of Montgomery."

At Harvard he quickly gained a reputation as a campus radical, shocking his classmates by bringing a Black date to the freshman dance. Peck dropped out after the end of his freshman year, spending several years as an expatriate in Europe and working as a merchant seaman.

Returning to the United States in 1940, Peck devoted himself to organizing, worked as a journalist on behalf of pacifist and social justice causes. He spent almost three years in federal prison during World War II as a conscientious objector. After his release from prison in 1945, he rededicated himself to pacifism and militant trade unionism. In the late 1940s, Peck became increasingly involved in issues of racial justice, joining CORE as a volunteer.

On May 14, Peck assumed de facto leadership of the 1961 CORE Freedom Ride after James Farmer returned to Washington for his father's funeral. Peck sustained heavy injuries to the face and head during the Ku Klux Klan riot at the Birmingham Trailways Bus Station. Peck was finally able to see a doctor at Jefferson Hillman Hospital, where he received 53 stitches. Undeterred by his injuries, he urged the riders to continue. *"If he could be beaten as he was and still go on, we certainly felt we could go on,"* says Genevieve Hughes in *Freedom Riders*.

In 1976, Peck, along with Walter Bergman, filed a lawsuit against the FBI, seeking \$100,000 in damages for the lasting injuries he sustained as a result of the attack

in which FBI informant Gary Thomas Rowe Jr. was an active participant. In 1983, he was awarded a partial settlement of \$25,000.

12. **Herman K. Harris** (1939-1988), Black, was a 21-year-old student enrolled at Morris College in Sumter S.C. He became president of the Morris chapter of CORE. On May 14, 1961, he was aboard the Trailways bus departing Atlanta for Birmingham. Following his service as a Freedom Rider, Harris returned to Sumter and spoke publicly about his experiences. Harris completed a graduate degree at the University of California, Berkeley. He returned to Friendship College, serving as a teacher and a coach until the closing of the college in 1982. He later served as a coach at Clinton College.

Poetry was Harris' passion. His poem, "Well Done," aptly summarizes a life that spanned from a sharecropper and victim of Jim Crow indignities to Freedom Rider, beloved teacher, and coach.

13. **Jimmy McDonald** (1933–2000), Black artist and folklore musician, was 29 years old when he joined the Freedom Riders. As a teen in the late 1940s, McDonald, according to author Raymond Arsenault, campaigned for a Progressive Party presidential candidate. Later, he became a folk singer in New York City before joining the Freedom Riders. McDonald said he was brought along for his singing ability.

Donald later worked on television for BET, where he hosted two programs. He was also the executive director of the Yonkers Human Rights Commission and a 30-year activist for the NAACP.



11 of the 13 Original Members of Freedom Riders.



**Summary Narrative: History of the Freedom Riders.**

While CORE sponsored most of the Freedom Rides initially, the Rides were also organized by the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**. Beginning with 13 Riders, eventually, the Freedom Riders came from 40 states across the country and received training in nonviolence tactics.

An estimated 450 Riders participated from May to December 1961. The participants were from different religious, educational, and economic backgrounds. Most were college students and 75 percent of them were 18 and 30 years old. Many were Episcopal clergymen and contingents of Yale divinity students with religious affiliations. Some were active in civil rights groups like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942. About half were Blacks and women made up a quarter of the Riders.

There were multiple buses and different routes.

The 13 initial Riders aimed to reach New Orleans, Louisiana, on May 17 to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which ruled that segregation of the nation's public schools was unconstitutional. Their plan was to ride through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, ending in New Orleans, Louisiana, where a civil rights rally was planned.



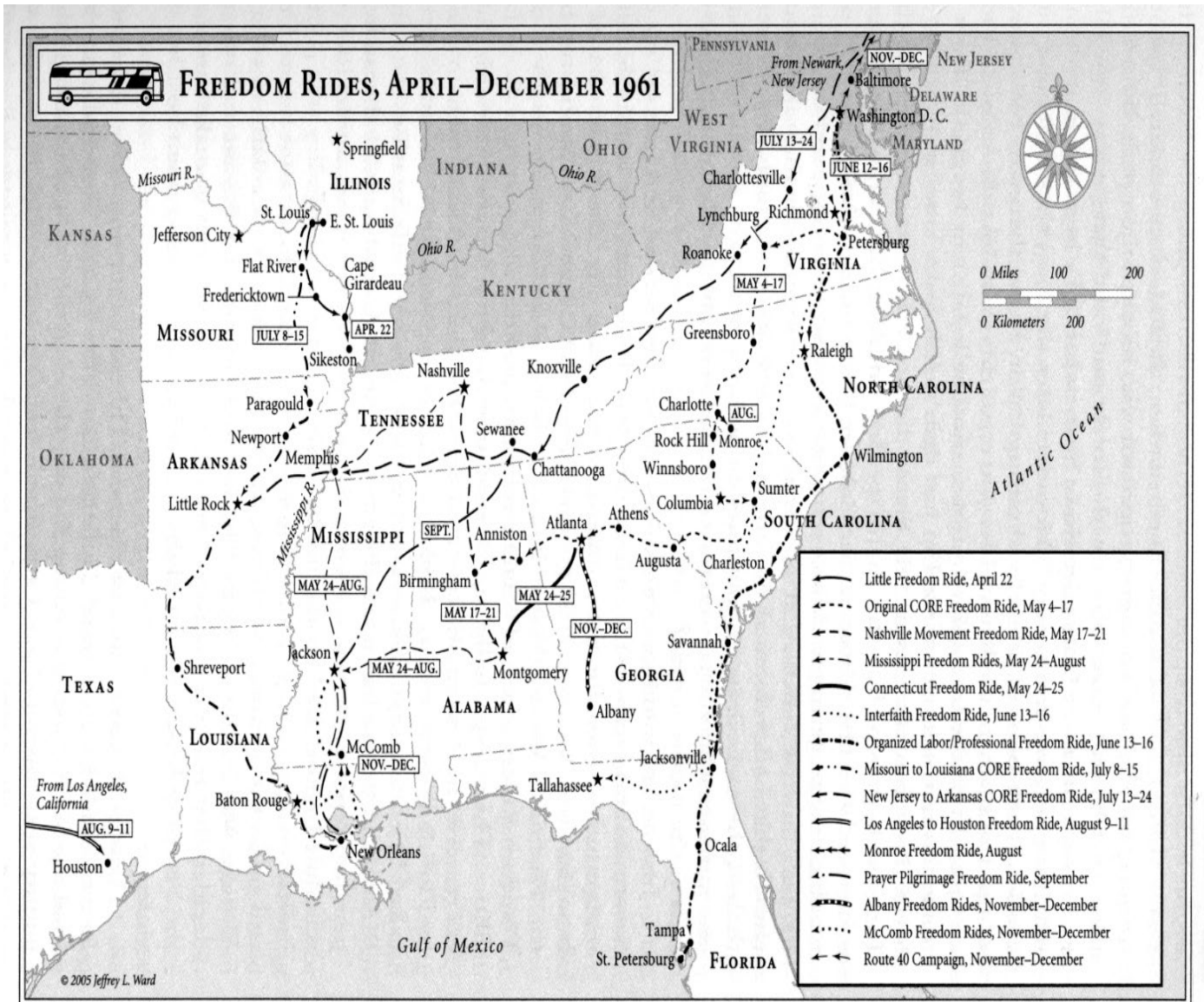


**Freedom Riders Charles Person, right, and James Peck on the bus in 1961, with James Farmer, the head of CORE, in the background.**

The Executive Director and Co-founder of the first Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter in 1942, James Farmer ((born January 12, 1920, Marshall, Texas, U.S.—died July 9, 1999,) set the foundation for the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts in the mid-1960s.

Farmer spent 41 days in Mississippi jails. One of the most memorable moments of that time, he said, was when those jailed alongside him in steel and concrete cells with straw-filled mattresses sang freedom songs together, despite being threatened by guards. Farmer would go on to serve as assistant secretary of health, education, and welfare under President Nixon. In 1998, Farmer was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

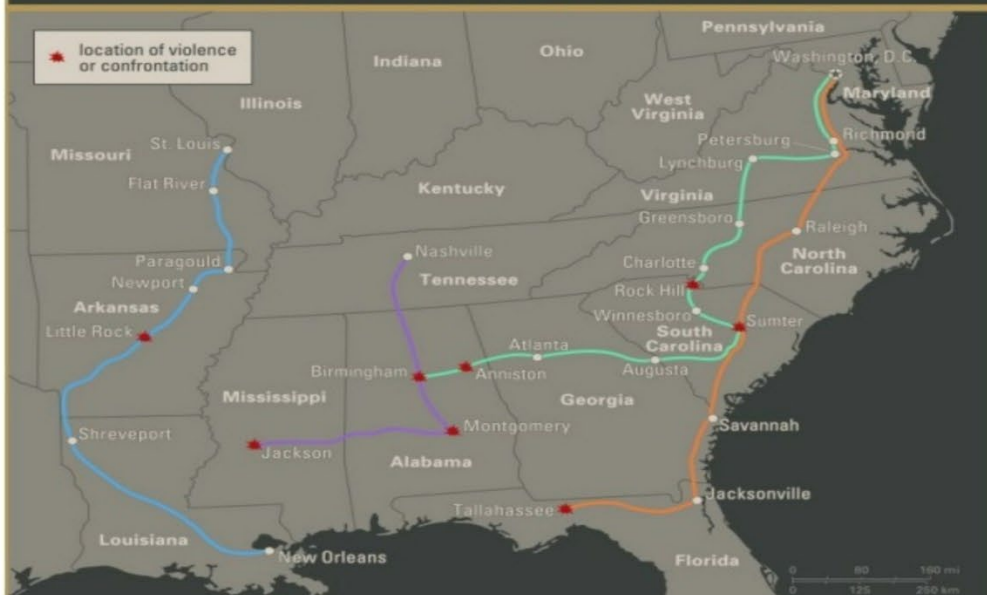
# Map and Routes of Freedom Rides



# FREEDOM RIDES OF 1961

The Freedom Rides were a series of nonviolent protests in 1961. African American and white activists challenged laws against segregation by traveling together on buses throughout the South. When the bus stopped in a segregated area, white Freedom Riders used Black facilities and Black Freedom Riders used white facilities. The contrast between their peaceful approach and the violence they encountered drew attention to their cause and, in some cases, forced the U.S. government to intervene.

The map below shows the routes of four Freedom Rides, including the first two, that took place during the spring and summer of 1961.



## WASHINGTON, D.C., TO BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA MAY 4-17

- Riders include John Lewis and James Farmer.
- Violence along the route:
  - **May 9: Rock Hill, South Carolina**
    - Two Freedom Riders are beaten.
  - **May 14: Anniston, Alabama**
    - Ku Klux Klan firebombs the first bus.
    - Riders escape the bus but are forced into an angry mob.
    - When the second bus arrives in Anniston, the Riders are beaten by Klansmen passengers.
  - **May 14: Birmingham, Alabama**
    - Riders are beaten again.
- Most Freedom Riders are evacuated from Birmingham and flown to New Orleans, Louisiana.

## NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, TO JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI MAY 17-24

- Riders include John Lewis and James Farmer.
- Violence along the route:
  - **Montgomery, Alabama**
    - Riders are severely beaten in the bus terminal.
  - **Jackson, Mississippi**
    - Riders are arrested and jailed.

## WASHINGTON, D.C., TO TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA INTERFAITH FREEDOM RIDE JUNE 13-16

- Riders include seven Black and seven white Protestant ministers and four white rabbis.
- Confrontations along the route:
  - **Near Sumter, South Carolina**
    - 20-30 white civilians stop the Riders from entering a lunchroom. Since the lunchroom was not connected to the bus terminal, it was legal for the lunchroom to be segregated.
  - **Tallahassee, Florida**
    - At the airport, the restaurant closes down before the Freedom Riders arrive.
    - Some Riders fly back to their homes, but others stay to try to eat in the restaurant.
    - After attempting to eat in the restaurant, 10 Freedom Riders are arrested. They become known as the Tallahassee Ten, and their legal appeals drag on for years. They serve short jail terms in 1964.

## ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, TO NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA JULY 8-15

- Riders include Benjamin Cox, who was on the first Freedom Ride.
- Confrontations along the route:
  - **Little Rock, Arkansas**
    - A mob of 300-400 white people gather outside the bus terminal before the bus arrives.
    - Four Freedom Riders are arrested for disturbing the peace.
    - A judge tries to keep them from continuing the Freedom Ride, but they continue on to New Orleans.



<b>Ride</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Carrier or terminal</b>	<b>Point of departure</b>	<b>Destination</b>
Original CORE Freedom Ride	May 4–17, 1961	<a href="#">Trailways</a>	<a href="#">Washington, D.C.</a>	<a href="#">New Orleans, Louisiana</a>
		<a href="#">Greyhound</a>	Washington, D.C.	New Orleans, Louisiana
<a href="#">Nashville Student Movement</a> Freedom Ride	May 17–21, 1961		<a href="#">Birmingham, Alabama</a>	<a href="#">New Orleans, Louisiana</a>
Connecticut Freedom Ride	May 24–25, 1961	Greyhound	<a href="#">Atlanta, Georgia</a>	<a href="#">Montgomery, Alabama</a>
Interfaith Freedom Ride	June 13–16, 1961	Greyhound	Washington, D.C.	<a href="#">Tallahassee, Florida</a>
Organized Labor–Professional Freedom Ride	June 13–16, 1961		Washington, D.C.	<a href="#">St. Petersburg, Florida</a>
Missouri to Louisiana CORE Freedom Ride	July 8–15, 1961		St. Louis, Missouri	New Orleans, Louisiana
New Jersey to Arkansas CORE Freedom Ride	July 13–24, 1961		<a href="#">Newark, New Jersey</a>	<a href="#">Little Rock, Arkansas</a>
Los Angeles to Houston Freedom Ride	August 9–11, 1961	<a href="#">Union Railway Station</a>	<a href="#">Los Angeles, California</a>	<a href="#">Houston, Texas</a>
Monroe Freedom Ride	August 17–September 1, 1961			<a href="#">Monroe, North Carolina</a>
Prayer Pilgrimage Freedom Ride	September 13, 1961	Trailways	New Orleans, Louisiana	<a href="#">Jackson, Mississippi</a>

Albany Freedom Rides	November 1, 1961	Trailways (terminal only)	Atlanta, Georgia	
		Trailways	Atlanta, Georgia	<a href="#">Albany, Georgia</a>
	November 22, 1961	Trailways (terminal only)	Albany, Georgia	
	December 10, 1961	<a href="#">Central of Georgia Railway</a>	<a href="#">Atlanta Terminal Station</a>	<a href="#">Albany, Georgia (Union Station)</a>
McComb Freedom Rides	November 29, 1961	Greyhound	New Orleans, Louisiana	<a href="#">McComb, Mississippi</a>
	December 1, 1961	Greyhound	<a href="#">Baton Rouge, Louisiana</a>	McComb, Mississippi
	December 2, 1961	Greyhound	Jackson, Mississippi	McComb, Mississippi

□ Denotes location a Freedom Rider tested the compliance of the *Boydton v. Virginia* (1960) decision at a terminal facility only

Date	Carrier or terminal	Point of departure	Destination
May 24, 1961	Trailways	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
	Greyhound	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
May 28, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
	Trailways	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
May 30, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
June 2, 1961	Trailways (#1)	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
	Trailways (#2)	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
June 6, 1961	Trailways	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
June 7, 1961	Trailways	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
	Greyhound Bus Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
	Hawkins Field (airport)	St. Louis, Missouri	Jackson, Mississippi
June 8, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
	Hawkins Field (airport)	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
June 9, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi

June 10, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
June 11, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
June 16, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
June 19, 1961	Greyhound Bus Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
June 20, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
June 21, 1961	Trailways	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
June 23, 1961	Tri-State Trailways station <sup>[106]</sup> (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
June 25, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
July 2, 1961	Trailways	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
July 5, 1961	Tri-State Trailways station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
July 6, 1961	Jackson Union Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
	Greyhound Bus Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
July 7, 1961	Jackson Union Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
	Trailways	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
July 9, 1961	Trailways	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi

	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
	Tri-State Trailways station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
July 15, 1961	Greyhound	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
July 16, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
July 21, 1961	Hawkins Field (airport terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
July 23, 1961	Trailways	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
July 24, 1961	Hawkins Field (airport)	Montgomery, Alabama	Jackson, Mississippi
July 29, 1961	Greyhound	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
July 30, 1961	Illinois Central Railroad	New Orleans, Louisiana	Jackson, Mississippi
July 31, 1961	Greyhound Bus Station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	
August 5, 1961	Trailways (bus and terminal)	Nashville, Tennessee	Jackson, Mississippi
August 13, 1961	Tri-State Trailways station (terminal only)	Jackson, Mississippi	





The first leg of the Freedom Ride from Washington made stops in Virginia and North Carolina. Source: PBS / American Experience.

The first leg of the Freedom Riders' trip included stops at Richmond, Petersburg, Farmville, Lynchburg, and Danville in Virginia. Cities in North Carolina included Greensboro, High Point, Salisbury, and Charlotte.



May 5, 1961: Washington Post story (p. B-4) covers the Freedom Riders' plan and departure for the first 13 riders.

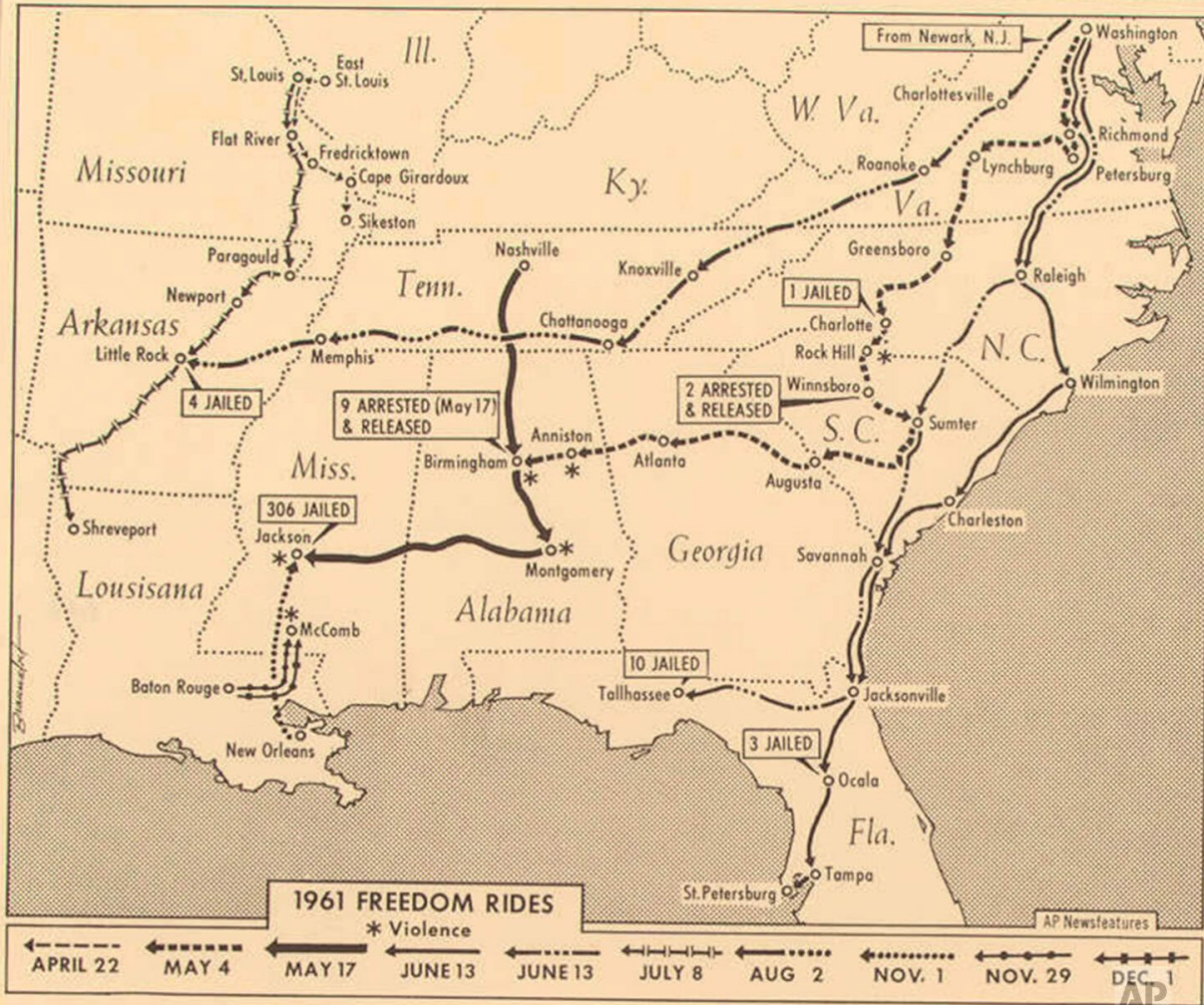
The *Washington Post* ran a story on the group's intentions the following day, May 5th, 1961, on p. B-4 by reporter Elsie Carper. The story headlined "Pilgrimage Off on Racial

**Test,”** described the group’s trip along with an Associated Press photo of five of the participants looking over a map of their planned route of travel over the next two weeks.



Members of an interracial group pose on May 4, 1961, in Washington with a map of a route they plan to take to test segregation in bus terminal restaurants and rest rooms in the South. From left to right: Edward Blankenheim, Tucson, Arizona.; James Farmer, New York City; Miss Genevieve Hughes, Chevy Chase, Maryland; the Rev. B. Elton Cox, High Point, North Carolina; and Henry Thomas, St. Augustine, Florida. All were members of the Congress of Racial Equality, the organization sponsoring the trip. (AP Photo/BHR)

# BACKGROUND MAP





The Freedom Riders' method for the ride was to have at least one interracial pair sitting in adjoining seats, and at least one Black rider sitting up front - where seats under segregation had been reserved for white customers by local custom throughout the South.

The rest of the team would sit scattered throughout the rest of the bus. One rider would abide by the South's segregation rules to avoid arrest and to contact CORE and arrange bail for those who were arrested.

There were no confrontations with riders at most of these stops. However, in Charlotte, Rider Joseph Perkins (Black) tried to get a shoeshine at a "white only" shoeshine station. He was arrested for trespassing. He refused bail and spent two nights in jail. He later rejoined the group as the journey continued south.

## South Carolina

### Rock Hill

On May 9, 1961, the Riders encountered violence at Rock Hill, South Carolina, at the Greyhound bus terminal when John Lewis (Black) and Albert Bigelow (White) attempted to enter a white-only waiting area. John Lewis and Bigelow were brutally attacked before a White police officer, who had been present the entire time, finally intervened. Another Freedom Rider, Genevieve Hughes (White), also sustained injuries.



Genevieve Hughes and John Lewis



May 9, 1961, 21-year-old John Lewis, was severely beaten by a mob at the Rock Hill, South Carolina, Greyhound bus terminal. A few days earlier, Lewis and twelve Freedom Riders — seven Blacks and six Whites — had left Washington, D.C., on a Greyhound bus headed to New Orleans.

The Freedom Riders responded with nonviolence. They did not press charges. They continued their ride further south where they experienced continued violence from voracious and murderous white mobs in Alabama.

Note: John Robert Lewis (February 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020), became a US Congressman. He served in the United States House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020.

Nearly 47 years later, Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols apologized to John Lewis, by then a U.S. Congressman representing Georgia.'



48 Years Ago, He Attacked Future Rep. John Lewis; Now the Two Hug

In February 2009, one of his attackers, former Klansman Elwin Wilson publicly apologized to Rep. John Lewis (D-Georgia) for beating him. *"I don't hold the town any more responsible than those men who beat us,"* Congressman Lewis said about the community of Rock Hill, *"and I saw those men as victims of the same system of segregation and hatred."*

## **Dinner with Dr. MLK -May 13 in Georgia**

The Freedom Riders continued through South Carolina, with stops at Winnsboro, Columbia, and Sumter. They crossed into Georgia, with stops at Augusta, Athens, and Atlanta. Arriving in Atlanta on May 13th, the Freedom Riders had dinner with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The beating of Lewis and Bigelow in Rock Hill had attracted widespread media coverage. The Riders were hopeful that King would join them on the buses — becoming a Freedom Rider himself.

Instead, King questioned the wisdom of proceeding into Alabama, where the probability of violent racist resistance was high. During this meeting, King whispered to Booker, who was covering the story, “*You will never make it through Alabama*” (Lewis, 140).



**The second leg of the trip through South Carolina and Georgia included dinner with Martin Luther King in Atlanta. Source: PBS/American Experience.**

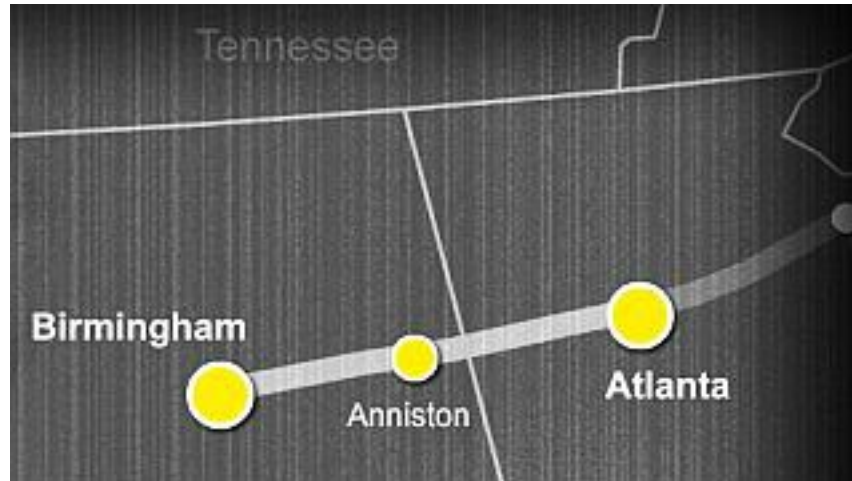
Sources told King at the time that the Ku Klux Klan has “quite a welcome” planned for them in Alabama. King urged the Riders to reconsider traveling through the Deep South.

In fact, King flatly stated that night that the Riders would never make it to New Orleans for the intended May 17 commemoration of Brown v Board of Education. Nevertheless, the Freedom Riders left Atlanta on Mothers’ Day, May 14th, bound for Alabama. At dawn on Sunday, it was sunny and clear as the Riders headed to Atlanta’s Greyhound and Trailways stations. They split up to take two staggered itineraries into Alabama. The Greyhound would leave first.

## Alabama

### Anniston Mayhem on Mother's Day - May 14

On May 14, 1961, the two groups of Freedom Riders left Atlanta an hour apart in two different buses.



**Map showing route of two Freedom Ride buses traveling from Atlanta, GA to Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama.**

The Greyhound group, with Joe Perkins in charge, was the first to leave at 11:00 A.M. Among the 14 passengers who were on the Greyhound bus destined for Anniston, 7 were Freedom Riders who embarked on their journey for justice, seven individuals boarded the Greyhound bus destined for Anniston.

Let us introduce these remarkable souls:

1. **Albert Bigelow**, 55 White male from Connecticut (a retired naval officer, architect, housing administrator, and peace activist).
2. **Ed Blankenheim**, 27 White male from Arizona (a carpenter and student at the University of Arizona and World War 11 veteran).
3. **Genevieve Hughes**, 28 White female, who lived in Washington, D.C. (CORE field secretary, a stockbroker turned activist),
4. **Jimmy McDonald**, 29 Black male from New York City, (folk singer and CORE activist).
5. **Mae Frances Moultrie**, 24 Black female from Sumter, S.C. (student at Morris College).
6. **Joseph Perkins**, 27 Black male from Owensboro, Ky. (CORE field secretary)
7. **Hank Thomas**, 19 Black male from Elton, Fla. (student at Howard University).



-- FREEDOM BUS CHRONOLOGY --

Sunday, May 14:

greyhound bus carrying integrated core group of nine, and other passengers, surrounded and damaged by mob at anniston bus station, later burned when had flat tire outside anniston. 12 persons hospitalized for smoke inhalation. state investigator ell (cq) cowling, who had boarded bus at atlanta on tip of impending trouble, courageously held white crowd back, allowing passengers to get off burning bus. fire apparently started by soft drink bottle, loaded with gasoline or some such, thrown through window of stalled bus. negroes in cars from birmingham later picked up the smoke victims and brought them to b'ham sunday night. no arrests at an.

5 Negro  
4 white

trailways bus carrying ~~seven~~ integrated core group of seven <sup>3 Negro</sup> was boarded at anniston by white toughs who mauled them over seating <sup>4 white</sup> arrangements. bus then proceeded to birmingham, where white mob met them, slugged them with pipes, sticks and chains, on loading dock behind station and in white waiting room. p-h fotog tom langston beaten. core mbr james peck badly beaten, hospitalized, about 50 stitches. several others banged up. pox arrived 10-15 mins later. no arrests at bm.

Monday, May 15:

gordon

core group (now 17, 9 whites, 8 negroes, with addition of core field director ~~james~~ carey, white, of new york) met at shuttlesworth house at noon and decided go ahead with efforts reach ~~new orleans~~ montgomery (and ~~ultimately~~ ultimately new orleans) by bus. they stayed at greyhound station 2 hours and bus didn't leave -- drivers wouldn't take it on road. then they went to airport and bought tickets on eastern flight to new orleans. flight was cancelled because of bomb scare. they switched to capitol flight. it was cancelled because of weahter at mobile. they switched back to next eastern flight and finally got out after about 6 hours at airport. crowd at bus station, and at airport, controlled well by pox. ominous crowd for a time at airport.

atty gen kennedy began making efforts during day to assure safety of the riders. he asked state to provide local police protection for them.

patterson issued statement saying he couldn't guarantee safety of riders if they continued their bus trip. he offered to guarantee safety to nearest state line. he cancelled a bus ~~z~~ escort of highway patrolmen planned for the greyhound bus. patterson said, "i cannot accept the responsibility for the safety of a group of renegades who are here for the avowed purpose of stirring up trouble.

also: bomb threat foned to airport saying bomb in waiting room.

AP

Also on the Greyhound were five regular passengers and two journalists, Charlotte Devree, and Moses Newson. Unbeknownst to the Riders, the Greyhound regional manager Roy Robinson, was on board.



*State Agent Ell Cowling in the foreground.*

Two undercover plainclothes agents of the Alabama Highway Patrol, Corporals Ell Cowling and Harry Sims also boarded. Both Cowling and Sims sat in the back of the bus, several rows behind the scattered Freedom Riders.

The Riders had no inkling of who these two seemingly innocuous (harmless, innocent) White men actually were. Unsure of the Freedom Ride's itinerary, Alabama Governor John Patterson wanted more information on the Riders. Under Paterson's order, Floyd Mann, the director of the Alabama Highway Patrol, instructed Cowling (now on the bus) to gather information on the Riders and their plans. Cowling carried a hidden microphone to eavesdrop on the Riders - unknown to the Riders.

Hank Thomas (Black) took his seat on the bus next to 27-year-old Ed Blankeheim (White), a bespectacled World War 11 veteran and college student. Genevieve Hughes (White),

a stockbroker-turned-activist, boarded the bus clutching a book to help pass the time on the drive into Anniston.

Mae Frances Moultrie (Black), a 24-year-old Black college student who joined the Rides in South Carolina, dressed in a pale, belted shirtdress with earrings shining beneath her chic bob, slid into a fabric seat midway back. Three other Riders sat scattered among other passengers. The passengers exchanged idle small talk as the bus departed Atlanta.

Moultrie gazed out the window, *“God, protect us and keep us from injury,”* she prayed.

Anniston was a small military city serving nearby Fort McClellan. Although the city had a strong NAACP branch, it was also home to some of the most belligerent Klansmen in the country.<sup>14</sup>

On Mother’s Day, Sunday, May 14, 1961, they arrived at the Anniston Greyhound station around 1:00pm. A white mob had gathered waiting, and some still in church attire after attending church service.



**A white segregationist mob blocks the driveway exit at a bus terminal to keep the bus carrying Freedom Riders from leaving Anniston, Alabama, 14th May 1961.**

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<sup>14</sup> "Get On the Bus: The Freedom Riders of 1961: NPR

Eventually, at least fifty murderous White men, many from Alabama Ku Klux Klan Klaverns, surrounded the bus. The mob attacked the bus with iron pipes and baseball bats, breaking some windows and slashing its tires. The passengers remained inside the bus.



An Unidentified white man sits in front of a Greyhound bus to prevent it from leaving the station with a load of Freedom Riders testing bus station segregation in the South in Anniston, Ala. The bus was stopped by a flat tire and surrounded by a white crowd outside Anniston, and burned a short time later.

Joseph Postiglione, a photographer with the *Anniston Star*, took the iconic images of the Freedom Ride. Otherwise, there was very little visual documentation of the attack. Postiglione had been tipped off by the KKK to be at the scene, but there was also an amateur filmmaker making his debut.

By the time Anniston police arrived, the bus itself had taken some pummeling. No arrests were made. The Anniston police car escorted the bus out of the station to just beyond the Anniston city limit on a rural stretch of road. The tires of the bus were punctured, and the bus was forced to pull off the road near the Forsyth & Son grocery store. This was about five miles west of Anniston.



The white mob, in the meantime, had pursued the bus, with a line of some thirty cars and pickup trucks following behind – with at least one car later weaving back-and-forth in front of the bus to slow it down. The mob attacked the bus with iron pipes and baseball bats, breaking some windows and slashing its tires.



**Mothers' Day, May 14, 1961, as Greyhound bus carrying Freedom Riders and other passengers burns after being fire-bombed by white mob that attacked the bus and some riders near Anniston, Alabama.**

One attacker hurled a firebomb into the bus. Some reports indicate that the bus door was held shut from the outside preventing riders from exiting, as some of the mob yelled, "burn them alive!"

A few of the riders exited through windows. The bus door was later forced to open, but only after one of the bus fuel tanks exploded, sending some of the mob into retreat. Riders exited gasping for their lives, choking on the thick smoke that had filled the bus.



The fire-bombed bus at Anniston, Alabama produced thick smoke that filled the cabin, choking escaping riders.

The Riders barely escaped. Many suffered smoke inhalation. One rider, Hank Thomas, after stumbling off the bus with lungs full of smoke, was met by a Ku Kluxer and beaten with a baseball bat, leaving the student barely conscious.



Freedom Riders Jimmy McDonald, center, Hank Thomas, foreground, and regular passenger Roberta Holmes, right, behind Thomas, after bus burning. May 14, 1961.

*“Hank Thomas sensed he was about to die. Thick smoke billowed out of the shattered bus windows surrounding him, curling in the southern heat. It mixed with a chorus of screams, flung with venom from the mob encircling the marooned Greyhound bus. Inside, he and his fellow passengers crawled between seats through broken glass, gagging as a gritty soot coated their throats.*

*Thomas folded his lanky frame into the narrow aisle, sweating through his plaid sports jacket as he tried to think. He was 19. A few weeks earlier, his death had not been entirely conceivable. Now, he wondered, would it come from the flames he felt at the back of his neck, or at the hands of the Klansmen outside?*

*Maybe he could accept a lungful of smoke.*

*He took a deep breath.*

*The Freedom Ride movement almost ended in Alabama on May 14, 1961, when Thomas and six other Riders nearly died on a bus set ablaze in rural Klan country.”*

*Thomas stumbled onto the grass.*

*“Are you all OK?” a White man said.*

*Thomas nodded. The man’s face twisted in a sneer.*

*A bat careened toward Thomas’ head, sending him sprawling. As he tried to stand, Thomas saw someone coming back for a second pass. Instinctually, Thomas reached out for Cowling, grabbing him around the waist.*



*Cowling pulled his gun. For the second time in minutes, Thomas thought he was about to die and dropped his head in his hands.*

*Cowling pointed his pistol skyward and fired.*

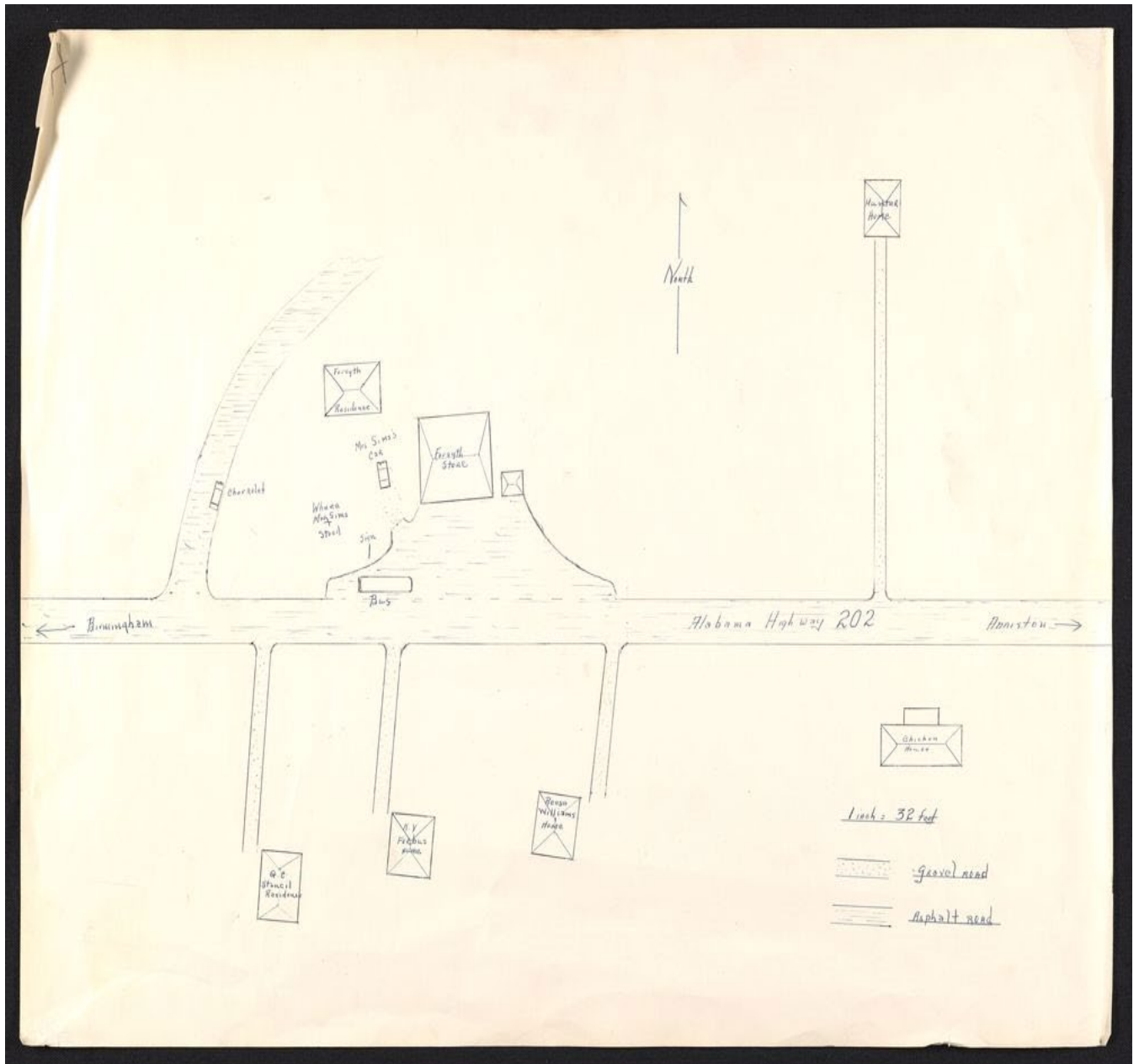
*“You’ve had your fun,” Cowling told the mob.*

*Thomas tried to catch his breath. His lungs felt scalded, his throat seared. Someone pressed a water-filled paper cup into his hands. He looked up at a young white girl (12-year-old), Janie Miller, whose family owned the nearby general store.*

*“That little girl was doing what she learned in Sunday School, to help somebody in need,” Thomas said. “Those adult Christians were looking at her with fire in their eyes.”*

Source: USA TODAY’s [“Seven Days of 1961”](#) explores how sustained acts of resistance can bring about sweeping change. Throughout 1961, [activists risked their lives](#) to fight for voting rights and [the integration of schools](#), businesses, public transit and libraries. Decades later, their work [continues to shape debates](#) over voting access, police brutality and equal rights for all.

*Read more about Janie Miller later and in her own words.*



Hand-drawn map of Highway 202, Anniston bus burning site, May 14, 1961



**Firefighter going through remains of bus, following fire.**

The Greyhound bus was completely engulfed in flames and totally destroyed. At the scene in Anniston, there was lone photographer, Joe Postiglione of the *Anniston Star*, who had been tipped off by KKK members. Postiglione's photos of the Anniston bus bombing were the only still photographs of the incident, and they soon made it over the newswires to newspapers across the country – some running the photo on the front pages, thereby drawing the first national attention to the Freedom Rides.

The vicious beatings and a firebombing of the Anniston-bound bus by the Ku Klux Klan had the support of local law enforcement and politicians. When Anniston police arrived, warning shots were fired into the air by highway patrolmen. This was the only official action that prevented the Riders from being lynched.



A firebomb was thrown into a bus ridden by Freedom Riders on the outskirts of Anniston, Ala., on Mother's Day in 1961.



Freedom Rider Mae Frances Moultrie Howard stands by a burning Greyhound bus in Anniston, Ala. on May 14, 1961.

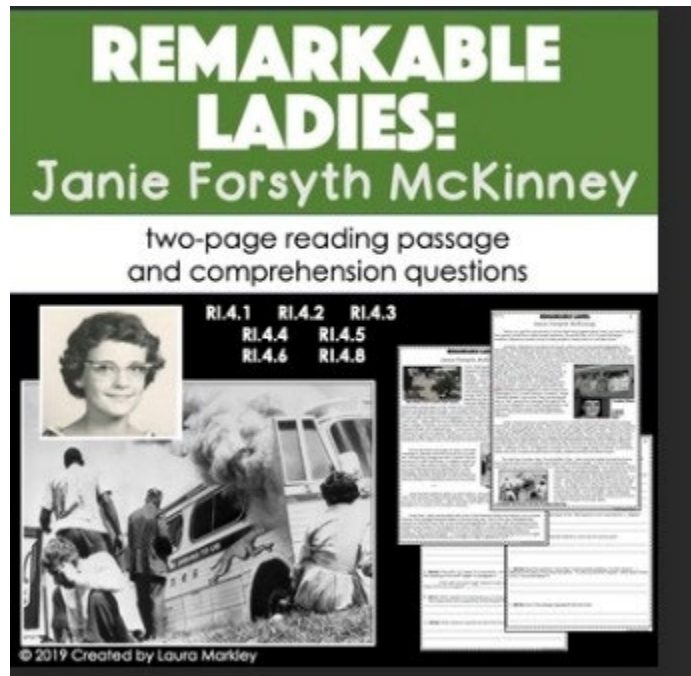
## Compassion of Brave 12-Year-Old White Girl



In Janie Miller's words (video). Janie Forsyth McKinney  
**AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: Freedom Riders: The Young Witness**



Then Janie Miller, later Janie Forsyth McKinney



Today, taking to the social media against racism is something completely different from taking a public stand, in real time, during the *Jim Crow* era when overt racism was “just how things were.”

An incredibly courageous 12-year-old White girl did just that on May 14, 1961 when she saw fellow human beings being dehumanized in a crisis and felt compelled to give them attention and demonstrated compassion and care.

During the Anniston attack, **Janie Miller** supplied the choking victims with water, filling and refilling a five-gallon bucket while braving the insults and taunts of Klansmen. According to the accounts, she was later ostracized and threatened for this act of kindness. She and her family found it impossible to remain in Anniston in the aftermath of the bus bombing.

The harrowing account was described by Raymond Arsenault, denoting the Klan’s terrorism and the Riders’ courage in “Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice,” excerpted on NPR’s website here: <http://www.npr.org/2006/01/12/5149667/get-on-the-bus-the-freedom-riders-of-1961>

*“It was the worst suffering I’d ever heard,”* Miller would recall in the PBS / American Experience film, *Freedom Riders*. *“I walked right out into the middle of that crowd. I picked me out one person. I washed her face. I held her, I gave her water to drink, and soon as I thought she was gonna be okay, I got up and picked out somebody else.”*

For daring to help the injured riders, she and her family were later ostracized by the community and could no longer live in the county.

# The girl who helped when few others would

Anthony Cook  
acook@annistonstar.com

May 11, 2011



Janie Miller Forsyth McKinney delivered water to the victims of the 1961 bus burning. Photo: Special to The Star

**BY JANIE FORSYTH MCKINNEY**

**Published in Los Angeles Times.**

**MAY 9, 2021, 3:05 AM PT**

In early 1961, I considered myself an unremarkable, shy seventh-grader except for the fact I made straight A's, wore thick prescription glasses and had recently won the Alabama state spelling bee on the word "cloisonné."

But after the Freedom Riders arrived in my small hometown of Anniston, Ala., I became famous — or infamous — as the 12-year-old white girl who defied the Ku Klux Klan to tend civil rights activists injured in a vicious attack on their Greyhound bus. My life would never be the same, and some people would come to hail me as a hero. I never saw myself that way.

As a preteen, I was already a civil rights activist, intent on doing the right thing. I was just closeted about it until the first wave of Freedom Riders almost landed on my doorstep 60 years ago on Mother's Day — May 14, 1961. They were conducting "Freedom Rides," with black and white passengers riding side by side to protest segregated busing practices in Southern states.

Over breakfast days earlier, my dad told my family "Those damn Freedom Riders" would be coming through town, and the KKK had some kind of "surprise party" planned for them. That woke me up. I could tell he knew more than he was saying, but I was afraid to pry. I didn't want to even imagine my dad could be a member of the KKK. I never knew if he was.

The first attack on the Freedom Riders occurred at the Anniston Greyhound station, where an angry mob struck the bus with baseball bats and iron pipes — and slashed the tires, forcing the bus to stop on the side of the highway in front of my family's home just outside town.

I could hear the cacophony before I could see who was causing it. Angry white men yelling racial epithets and armed with various bludgeoning implements milled around our front yard and the parking lot of our family's grocery store next door. They surrounded the bus with obvious evil intent while their families — wives, children and babies in arms — quietly watched.

From my perch near Forsyth and Son Grocery, I watched a man break a passenger window on the bus with a crowbar and lob something into the resulting hole. A crowd stood around him, trying to hide his identity, but I could see he was white. The "something" turned out to be a firebomb, and the bus burst into flames. Acrid black smoke soon billowed out the back window.



The bus riders, coughing and gagging from the dense smoke, tumbled out of the bus and onto the lawn. The growling, cursing white men began to beat them, and I could hear the passengers cry out, “Water, please give us water ... we need water.”

After offering up a quick prayer for protection, I sprang into action. I went to our house and got a bucket of water and as many drinking glasses as I could handle. I fixated on a Black woman who reminded me of Pearl, the woman who helped raise me. I washed her face, held her, gave her water to drink. And then I did it again and again and again, comforting as many people as I could. Every time I ran out of water, I went back for more.

No one stepped up to help me, but no one stopped me, either. I knew what I was doing was dangerous, and it could get me in real trouble. A white person wasn’t allowed to drink out of the same water fountain as a Black person, let alone get on the ground with them, touch them, give them water — especially in the middle of a KKK ambush.

Passing time has blurred my memories of that day. I heard that a Klan meeting was held to decide whether to try me as an adult for my crime of compassion. In the end, they considered me to be “weak-minded” because no right-minded person would ever do what I had done.

For years, various local KKK members railed against me, sometimes getting right in my face. In the hallways of my high school, the offspring of Klansmen often confronted me. But no one laid a hand on me. After the initial furor passed, my family never talked about it again, as if I had done something shameful that would be best forgotten. It wounded me for decades.

If Freedom Rider Hank Thomas had forgotten me, my actions that day might have been lost to history. When CBS was producing a 20th anniversary segment about the civil rights activists, he told producers they couldn’t “do that story justice” without finding the little white girl who had given the Freedom Riders water. Thomas and reporter Ed Rabel went on a road trip and found me. I’ve been part of the Freedom Rider story ever since.

While visiting Pearl on her deathbed in 1984, I told her I thought my father, Richard Forsyth, had never forgiven me for helping the Freedom Riders. Pearl’s response was as magnificent and healing as it was unexpected. “No, that’s not right,” she said. “Mr. Richard told me he had never been prouder of you than he was that day.”

*Janie Forsyth McKinney lives in Thousand Oaks. She recently retired from UCLA, where she worked in human resources.*



**After getting off the bus, Freedom Riders, and regular passengers in need of medical attention faced more obstacles. An ambulance driver initially refused to transport Black passengers to the hospital, and Klansmen threatened the Anniston hospital building.**

It got more treacherous. The Riders had experienced barriers and trouble getting to the hospital for treatment. They faced racist administrators and a mob threatening to burn the hospital down.

The ambulance driver refused to carry any Black Rider. Arsenault writes, *“After a few moments of awkward silence, the White Riders, already loaded into the ambulance, began to exit, insisting they could not leave their Black friends behind. [Eventually]...the driver’s resolve weakened, and before long the integrated band was on its way to Anniston Memorial Hospital.”*

After one attempt was made, unsuccessfully, by a group of Klansmen to block the entrance to the emergency room, with great trouble the Freedom Riders made their way to the Anniston hospital, Anniston Memorial Hospital (400 East 10th Street), which provided little in the way of treatment, and where they found themselves once again under siege by a white mob.

Their torment eventually ended when deacons dispatched by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham’s Bethel Baptist Church, rescued the Riders, and drove

them to Birmingham. The hospital is part of the Anniston Civil Rights and Heritage Trail and is marked with a sign. *See the next page.*



**Freedom Rider Hank Thomas Thursday, Sept. 29, 2014. Hank Thomas, one of the 13 original Freedom Riders, discusses the impact of the rides on his own life and the nation.**

# Anniston Freedom Riders Monument

## ANNISTON CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL SITES

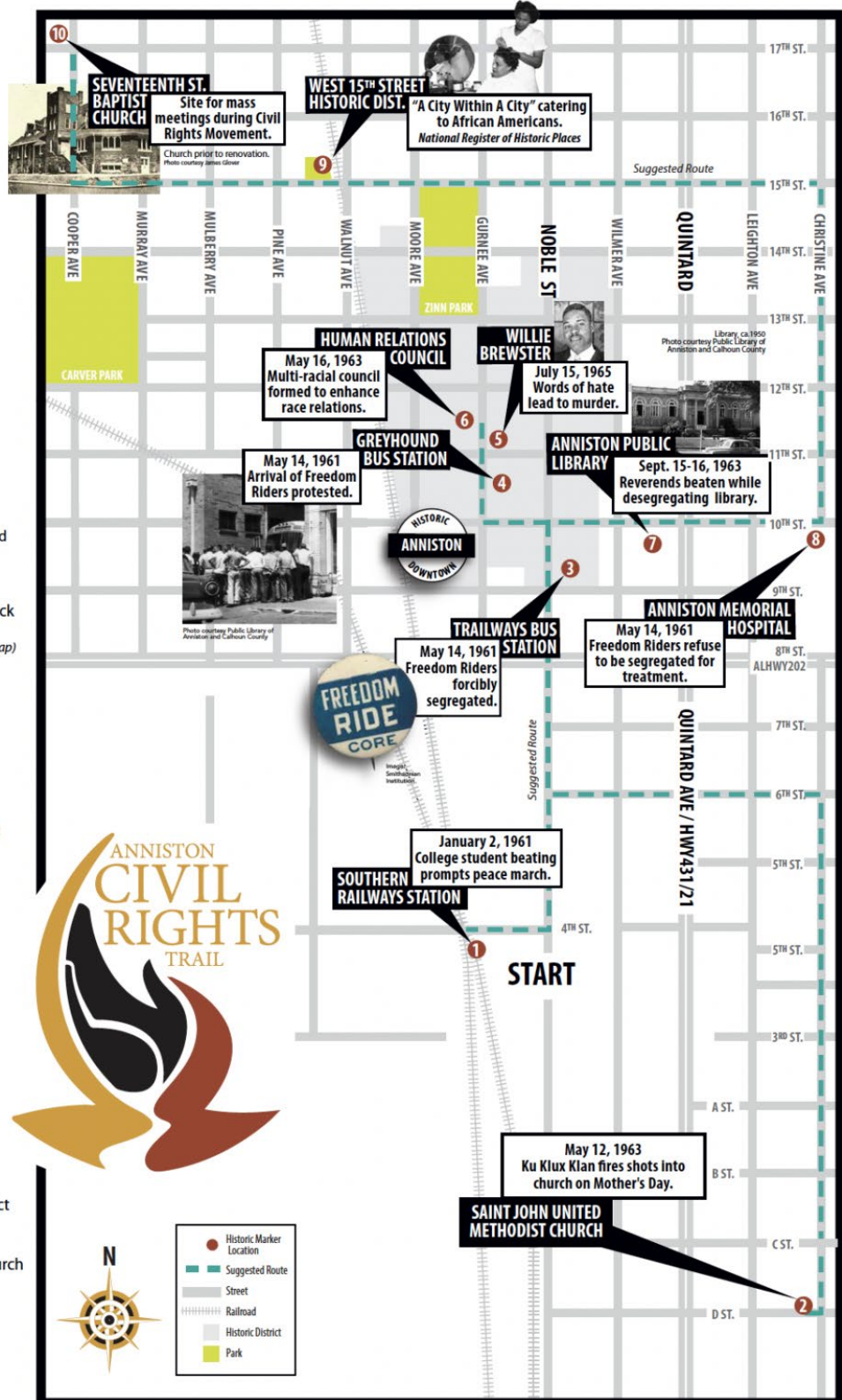


Look for these historic markers at each site. Download a QR code reader on your smartphone to scan the QR code on each marker, and quickly link to the Trail web site.

The following suggested route is based on ease of navigating and parking:

- START** ———
- 1** Southern Railways Station Attack  
144 West 4th St.  
(Currently Amtrak Station, bottom of map)
  - 2** Saint John United Methodist Church  
329 East D St.
  - 3** Trailways Bus Station Attack  
901 Noble Street.  
Mural exhibit at this site.
  - 4** Greyhound Bus Station Protest  
1031 Gurnee Ave.  
Mural exhibit at this site.
  - 5** The Murder of Willie Brewster  
34 West 11th St.  
(Calhoun County Courthouse)
  - 6** Human Relations Council  
1128 Gurnee Ave.  
(U.S. Federal Court House)
  - 7** Desegregation of the Library  
108 E. 10th St.  
(Currently Public Library of Anniston and Calhoun County)
  - 8** Anniston Memorial Hospital  
10th & Christine  
(Currently Regional Medical Center)
  - 9** West 15th Street Historic District  
West 15th Street Mural Park
  - 10** Seventeenth Street Baptist Church  
801 West 17th Street

Anniston's downtown district is organized on a grid aligned to cardinal directions (east, west, north, south)—the result of its origin in the late 1800's as The Woodstock Company, a planned, private community.





Students take fields trip to the Freedom Riders Civil Rights Heritage Trail through the historic murals, and find out the major and infamous role Anniston, Calhoun County, Alabama played during the Civil Rights movement.

Murals in the alleyways of the old Greyhound and Trailways Bus stations depict scenes from when the Freedom Riders were attacked on May 14, 1961 at the:

- Alleyway of Greyhound Bus Station: Site of first attack. Near 1031 Gurnee Ave.
- Alleyway of Trailways Bus Station: Site of second attack. Near 1018 Noble St.



Above: mural and interpretive signage adjacent to the former Greyhound station. Below: view of the bus-burning site in October 2017; the state historical marker is in the foreground, with the field where the burning took place in the middle distance. Credit: Ser Amantio di Nicolao

The roadside site in Anniston and the downtown Greyhound station were preserved as part of the [Freedom Riders National Monument](#) in 2017.



Above: The Greyhound bus attack site (center) is south of Anniston on Old Birmingham Highway. [Freedom Riders National Monument](#) (2017 photo)

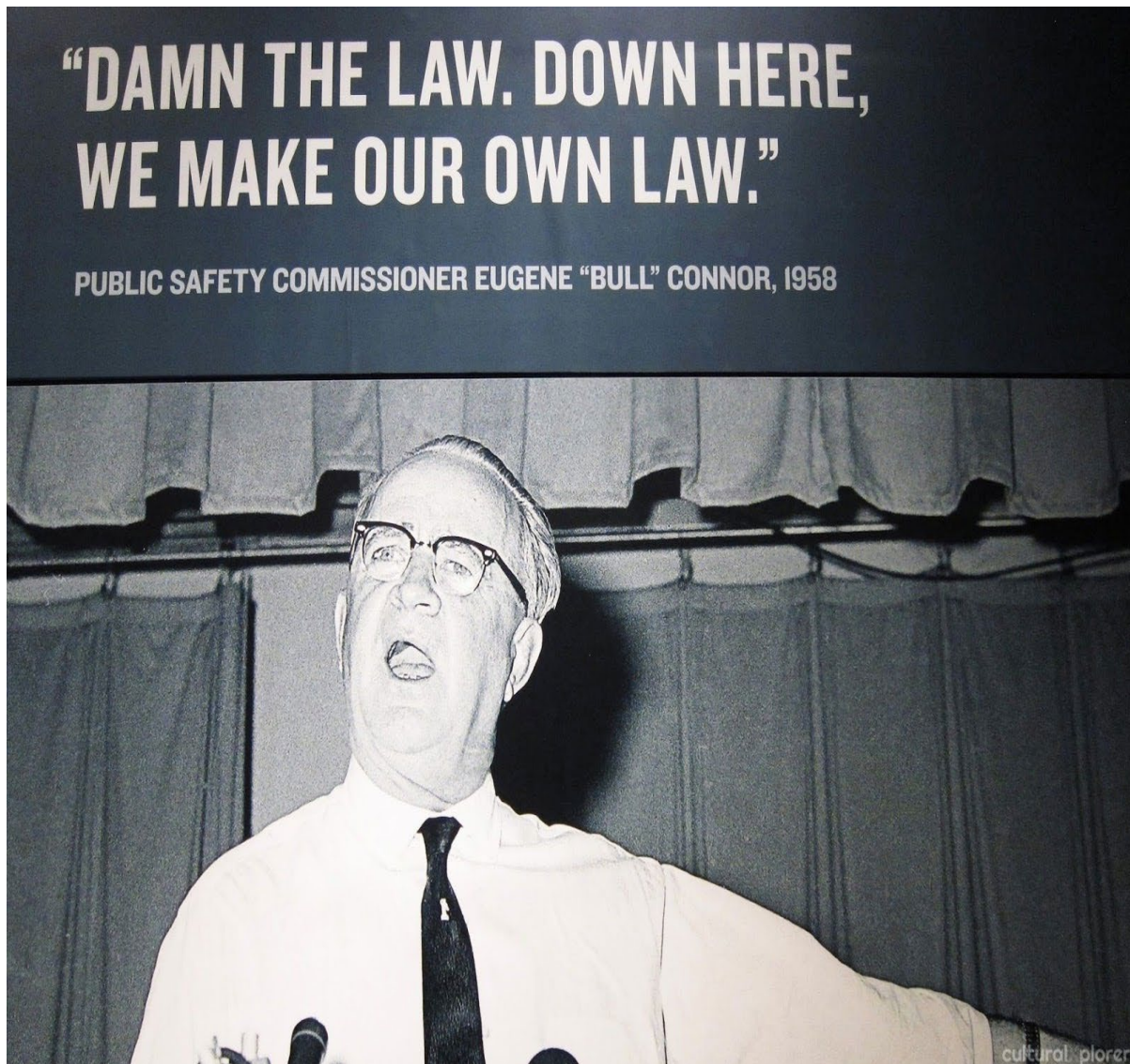


**Violence at the Anniston Trailways Terminal, at 901 Noble St., is commemorated with a mural (2012 photo)**



## Birmingham – May 14

The second bus, the Trailways bus with Freedom Riders, which left Atlanta, made a brief stop in Anniston at another bus station – one hour after the first bus was burned.



Bull Connor, full name **Theophilus Eugene Connor**, held the position of **Commissioner of Public Safety** in Birmingham, Alabama. He was known as an ultra-segregationist with close ties to the KKK. Connor encouraged the violence that met the Freedom Riders at the Birmingham Trailways Bus station by promising local Klansmen that, *“He would see to it that 15 or 20 minutes would elapse before the police arrived.”* [Meet the Players: Other Figures | American Experience | Official Site | PBS](#)

**“You can never whip these birds if you don’t keep them separate. I found that out in Birmingham. You’ve got to keep your white and black separate. — Bull Connor.**

Source: Bull Connor: Icon of Alabama Racism. Rubery Taylor. Jan 10, 2022

As was later learned, Bull Connor called the Imperial Wizard of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan and guaranteed them fifteen minutes alone with the Freedom Riders with no police.<sup>15</sup>

Connor had agreed to keep his police away from the Trailways station for 15 minutes to give local White segregationists and members of the Klan time to beat up the arriving Freedom Riders. Connor cut a deal with the KKK giving them 15 minutes to “*burn, bomb, kill, maim, I don’t give a goddamn what you do.*”

Connor became the face of the dangerously brutal segregated South.



Freedom Riders sit at a bus station in Birmingham, Alabama, in May 1961. Donald Uhrbrock/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images. CNN Exhibits

The Trailways station was filled with Klansmen and some reporters. When the Freedom Riders exited the bus, they were beaten by the mob, some wielding baseball bats, iron pipes and bicycle chains. White Freedom Riders in the group were especially singled out by the mob, receiving ferocious beatings.

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<sup>15</sup> Civil Rights Museum. *Unsung Freedom Riders*. Arsenault, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. Oxford University Press, 2007.



At the Anniston depot, an unknown assailant slashed the front tires of the Riders' bus, and a group of white reactionaries in forty cars followed the Greyhound as it limped out of town. When the bus pulled onto the shoulder of the highway, the mob tossed a firebomb into the bus through a shattered window. Black smoke billowed as the passengers—twelve men and women, white and black—poured out onto the side of the highway. As the Greyhound burned, a second group of Riders arrived in Birmingham to a crowd of angry whites at

the Trailways bus station. Source: The University of Alabama at Birmingham, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Freedom Riders were not the only ones attacked in Birmingham. Innocent bystanders were beaten too, and so were members of the press. Tommy Langston of the *Birmingham Post-Herald* (above left) was assigned to capture the arrival of the Freedom Riders at the Trailways bus depot. He was at the scene when a mob of Klansmen was attacking the Freedom Riders. Langston shot a picture. As soon as the flashbulb went off, and the mob took after the photographer. The Klansmen beat him mercilessly and with pipes, and smashed his camera, but the photograph was intact. Langston was later nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.



Moments before Tommy Langston was attacked on May 14, 1961, he shot this single photo of Klansmen attacking a Freedom Rider at the Trailways Bus Station in Birmingham. The photo helped identify Klansmen involved in the assault. (AP Photo/Birmingham Post-Herald, Tommy Langston, File) This picture was reclaimed from his camera that was smashed. Langston later staggered down the street to the *Post-Herald* building and was later treated at the hospital.

Thirty men broke from the crowd, beating the riders and several bystanders, including members of the press from the Birmingham Post-Herald, the Birmingham News, and CBS television.

The Birmingham News immediately placed blame for the violence on the police, led by Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor, for failing to respond quickly to the rioting, as well as the activists, who tried "to create racial trouble to make headlines." *In fact, Connor and Governor John Patterson had been informed of the Freedom Riders' planned arrival and deliberately kept police from the station.* Alabama Heritage. Published by the University of Alabama. Summer 1961. Freedom Rides.



**Jim Peck in hospital after treatment for injuries sustained during a mob beating at the Birmingham bus terminal.**

James Peck (White) was on the Trailways bus that arrived in Birmingham. A Rider in the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947, now a man at 46 in 1961 and CORE member from New York, and Charles Person (Black), a student from Atlanta, both headed for the “whites only” lunch counter, as they came off the bus. However, they never made it there.

Peck was furiously beaten and severely injured. He was taken to Carraway Methodist Medical Center, which refused to treat him. He was later treated at Jefferson Hillman Hospital. James Peck required more than fifty stitches for wounds on his head.



**“James Peck of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) shows the effects of a beating he received in Anniston, Alabama as he answers questions at a press conference in New York City. As noted in “Eyes on the Prize,” Peck spoke to a reporter in Birmingham on May 15, a day after the Anniston bus firebombing. “I was beaten twice yesterday by hoodlums,” said Peck. “Once aboard the bus and once in the terminal in Birmingham,” May 17, 1961. Photo credit: AP / Jacob Harris — in New York, NY.**

A group of Klansmen pummeled Peck with fists, chains, and clubs. He was knocked unconscious, his face and head ripped with wounds. “When I saw Peck, I was shocked,” Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, a Birmingham civil rights leader would later say. “His head was split down to the skull.” Somebody had cracked him with a lead pipe. Peck was a bloody mess. . . .”

It took more than an hour for Reverend Shuttlesworth to find an ambulance willing to take Peck to the all-white Carraway Methodist Hospital. Once there, the staff refused to treat him. Only at Jefferson Hillman Hospital did Peck finally receive treatment, including some fifty-three stitches for his head wounds.

The Birmingham News immediately placed blame for the violence on the police, led by Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor, for failing to respond quickly to the rioting, as well as the Freedom Riders, whom the paper accused trying “to create racial trouble to make headlines. In fact, Governor John Patterson had been informed of the Freedom Riders’ planned arrival and he also deliberately kept police from the station.”

*Source: Alabama Heritage. Published by The University of Alabama, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Becoming Alabama: Civil Rights Movement Author Matthew L. Downs (PhD, Alabama) is an adjunct professor of history at Birmingham-Southern College.*



Headline from 'The Montgomery Advertiser' newspaper

At this stop, the bus was infiltrated by some ticketed KKK members who proceeded to restore the “blacks-in-the-back” seating order on the bus by brutally beating up two of the Freedom Riders and forcibly situating them in the rear seats.

Several White men stalked up the bus steps, demanding the front Black Riders retreat. *“You’re in Alabama, and n-----s ain’t worth nothing here,”* one man said. The KKK infiltrators stayed on the bus until it arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, slinging verbal abuse at the Freedom Riders and promising them a “special reception” in Birmingham.

A Klansman who was accidentally beaten by his own accomplices – required hospital treatment. The attacks caused shock throughout the country and brought the issue of segregation under an international spotlight, embarrassing the United States during the height of the Cold War.



**After arriving in Birmingham, Ala., the Nashville group of Freedom Riders are promptly arrested by the order of Eugene "Bull" Connor. Connor declared they were being arrested for their own protection. The group was taken to the Birmingham City Jail.**

Upon their arrival in Birmingham, Bull Connor ordered the police to arrest the Freedom Riders. According to him, it was not an arrest. They were in "protective custody." Well, the students kept their spirits up in jail by singing freedom songs.

Out of frustration, Connor wanted them out, taken back to Tennessee, saying, "I just couldn't stand their singing. Later that night, in the early a.m. hours, Connor transported the group to Ardmore, Alabama near the Tennessee line, and dropped the Freedom Riders off in a rural area – an area known for KKK activity.

The students were told to take a train back to Nashville.





**Arrested Freedom Riders taken back to Tennessee.**

After finding refuge with a local Black family, they reached Diane Nash who sent a car for them. Instead of abandoning the campaign, Nash led the resilient activists one hundred miles back to Nashville to regroup. They would soon return to Birmingham.

The Nashville students and Nash were committed, ready, and willing. *"It was clear to me that if we allowed the Freedom Ride to stop at that point, just after so much violence had been inflicted, the message would have been sent that all you have to do to stop a nonviolent campaign is inflict massive violence,"* says Nash. She took over responsibility for the Freedom Rides and worked to recruit Riders.

Coordinating from Nashville, she led the Freedom Riders from Birmingham, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi, where CORE Field Secretary Tom Gaither coordinated a massive program on the ground.

Connor and the Klan had intended to deter future Rides, but they had the opposite effect and inspired hundreds of volunteers to spend the summer of 1961 traveling across the South facing arrest and mob violence.

The Riders galvanized public support and put immense pressure on President John Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy to act. In late September, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued regulations which effectively ended segregation in public transportation.

The Freedom Rides and the May 14 attacks brought CORE from a position of relative obscurity to the forefront of the national movement against white supremacy. They are considered a key event of the civil rights movement.



**Marker erected in 1995 by Greyhound and Kenneth Mullinax, Jr.**



Headline from 'The Montgomery Advertiser' newspaper (Montgomery, AL) tells of Anniston bus burning & mob attacks in Birmingham.

When CORE Freedom Riders sought to continue their ride on May 15th to their next stop, Montgomery, Alabama, bus drivers refused to leave the station for fear for their lives. Behind the scenes in Washington (federal government), some calls were made to union officials to try to bring in willing bus drivers, but that effort failed. Robert Kennedy, the US Attorney General, also tried to organize protection for the riders, but was unable to reach a compromise with Alabama officials.



Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth (center) and Freedom Riders discuss plans at Birmingham Greyhound Terminal after drivers refused to carry them farther. It was the day after the bus was bombed in Anniston and passengers on a second bus were beaten in Birmingham. Surrounding Shuttlesworth, clockwise from left: Ed Blankenheim, (kneeling), Charles Person, Ike Reynolds, James Peck, Rev. Benjamin Cox, and two unidentified Freedom Riders. (Robert Adams or Ed Jones photo.)

Trying to secure safety for the determined activists, at this juncture, President John F. Kennedy dispatched John Seigenthaler, assistant to the U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, to Birmingham to ensure safe passage of the Freedom Riders.

Seigenthaler convinced the Freedom Riders to fly to New Orleans, which was a stated objective of the Riders to attend the seventh anniversary of Brown v Board of Education, instead of going by bus. They agreed to the plan. A native Tennessean, Seigenthaler secured an airplane flight for the Riders, from Birmingham to New Orleans.



**May 15, 1961: Freedom Rider James Peck, talks with a Dept of Justice official and Ben Cox on plane to New Orleans. Photo, T. Gaffney.**

Seigenthaler secured a flight for the Riders to New Orleans, which departed from Birmingham airport late on May 15th. Seigenthaler informed the reluctant Alabama governor that it was the government's duty to protect these citizens during the Freedom Rides

A mob had gathered at the airport, resulting in a tense waiting period. When the Riders first boarded the plane, all passengers had to exit because of a bomb threat. The Riders were off to a rally to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Supreme Court school desegregation decision, Brown v. Board of Education on May 17.

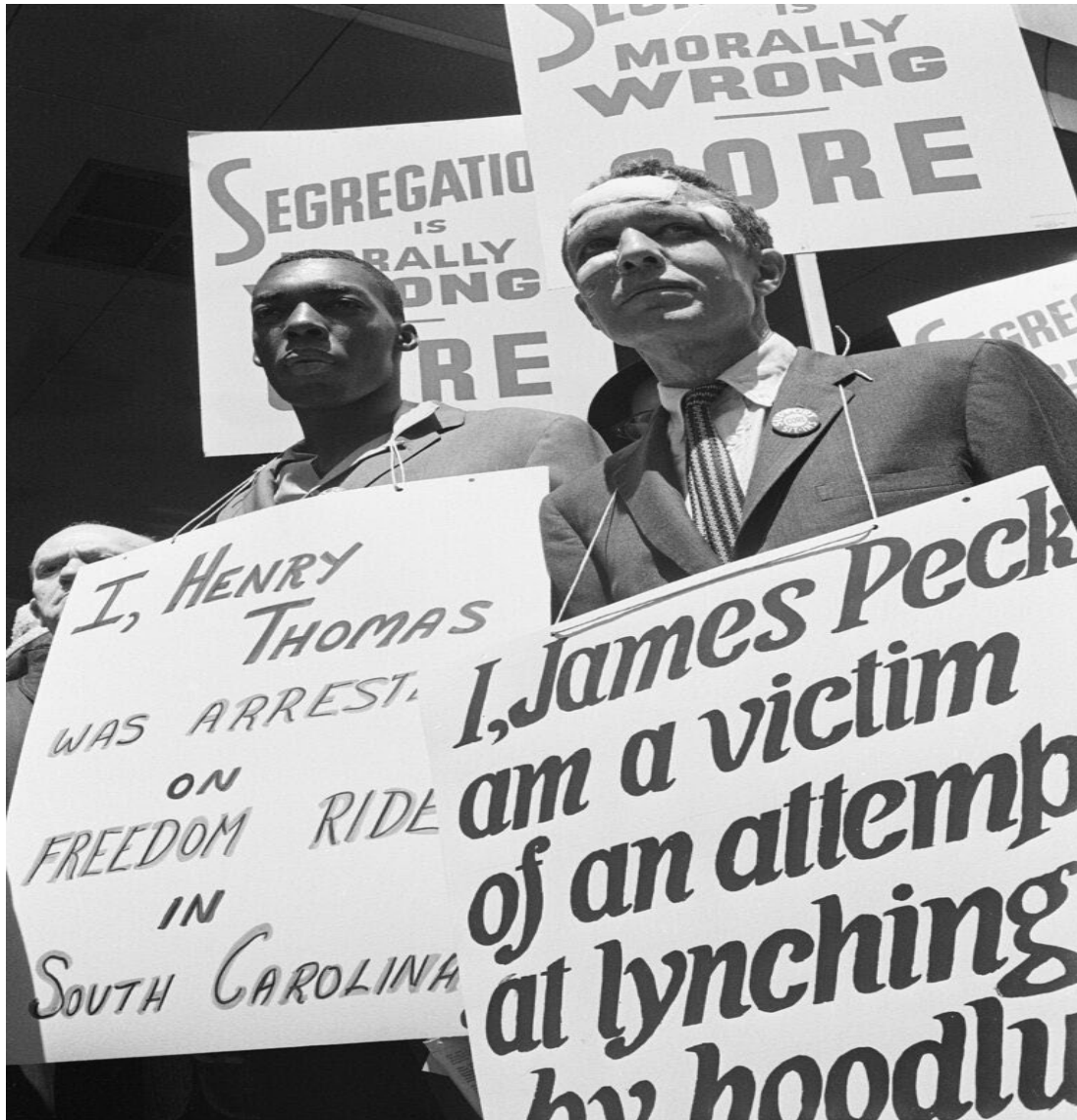
But what Connor and federal officials did not know was: more Riders would soon be on their way to Birmingham to carry on the struggle.



Two members of the Freedom Riders reverend B. Elton Cox (L) of High Point, North Carolina, and Dr. Walter Bergman (C) of Detroit are pictures as WWL-TV news Director Bill Reed interviewed them, shortly after their arrival in New Orleans late May 15. Dr. Bergman received a black eye in a beating at the bus station in Birmingham on May 14 by a group of White segregationist mob.

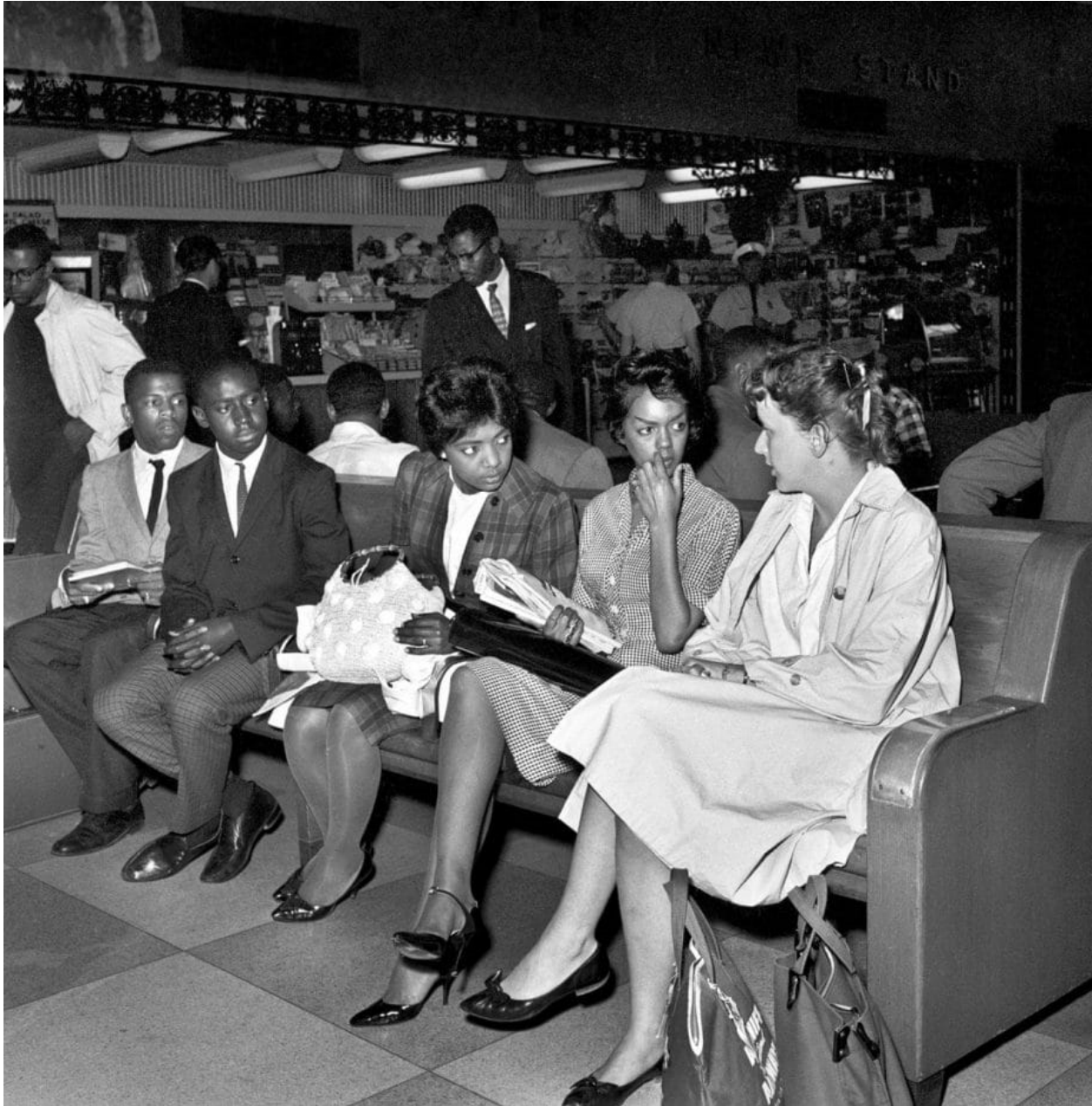


Freedom Riders Paul Brooks, left, and Jim Zwerg enter the Birmingham Greyhound Station in May 1961. The men were arrested for sitting together in the front of the bus as they entered Birmingham city limits on May 16, 1961.



Picked about a week after the attack, Peck is shown still healing from his injuries and carrying a placard accusing his assaulters of attempted murder. The image highlights the solidarity of Black and white people engaging in direct nonviolent action together that was central to CORE.





**Freedom Riders, from left, John Lewis, Charles Butler, Catherine Burks Brooks, Lucretia Collins, and Salynn McCollum sit on a bench in the Birmingham Greyhound station on May 17, 1961. Soon after the photo was taken, the group was arrested and later released in a rural all-white area on the orders of Birmingham commissioner of public safety Eugene "Bull" Connor. *Courtesy of the Birmingham News.***



**Greyhound employees cover the windshield of a company bus carrying Freedom Riders on May 17, 1961, in Birmingham to protect it from a mob of white supremacists that had gathered to wait for the bus. *Courtesy of The Birmingham News***

## **A Ride with the Bull: Eyewitness Account by Rider Catherine Burk-Brooks.**



**Police arrest Freedom Rider Catherine Burks-Brooks in Birmingham. (Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by Alabama Media Group. Photo by Robert Adams or Norman Dean, The Birmingham News).**

This is an account narrated by Freedom Rider Catherine Burks-Brooks in an interview with Alabama News Center in 2021.

The group left Nashville by bus on the morning of May 17, 1961. At the Birmingham city limits, police stopped the bus and Bull Connor stepped aboard. Sitting side by side at the front of the bus were Black seminary student Paul Brooks, who would later become Burks-Brooks' husband, and a White student, Jim Zwerg. Connor asked them to separate – they refused. They were arrested and removed from the bus.

When the bus arrived at the downtown Greyhound station, just across from City Hall, Connor asked for everyone's tickets and ordered anyone who came from Nashville to Birmingham to get off the bus. Burks-Brooks and the other Freedom Riders had tickets to New Orleans, so they stayed seated. Connor said he was arresting them – "for our own protection," Burks-Brooks recalled. They were taken to the city jail.

That night, Connor pulled the group out of the jail (one had already left after being picked up by a parent). Connor said he was taking them back to Nashville. But he actually had something else in store.

Burks-Brooks “went limp – *I just stretched out, right on the floor,*” she recalled. It was what the young activists had been trained to do. “They had to carry me to the car.” The Riders were carried or dragged out and deposited by police into an unmarked car, which turned north. Burks-Brooks was in the front seat, between Connor and the police driver. In the back were the other activists, including John Lewis.

Connor had a surprise in store. So did the Riders, and they did not share it, either.

Burks-Brooks vividly remembers that night’s ride with the Bull on the dark roads of Alabama – long before brightly lit interstates crisscrossed the state. The car stopped briefly in Cullman, where Connor picked up a “white preacher” to ride along, Burks-Brooks said. Cullman at that time was known as a “sundown town” – where Blacks were warned not to be found after dark.

Burks-Brooks figured Connor wanted the preacher to come along “so he could be a witness” that the riders were not harmed along the way.

The car sped on into Alabama’s rural north. Burks-Brooks and Connor conversed cordially during much of the ride, she said, which stunned a silent Lewis (John Lewis). She said the subjects ranged from the “Dixiecrats” – pro-segregation Democrats who met in Birmingham to officially split from the national party in 1948 (Connor was one of them) – to Burks-Brooks sharing her own, candid descriptions of the many ways life was unequal and unfair for Blacks in the South. She did most of the talking.

“I’d heard about the Bull all my life,” she said. “When I met the Bull, I was ready: I was ready to talk. “We talked all the way. We talked about our situation, our living situation. We talked about our upbringing. He said we must follow the law, things like that. He was very calm. “I guess he was calm – he was going to let me run my mouth – because he knew what he was going to do to us.”

Burks-Brooks invited Connor to have breakfast with her when the group arrived in Nashville. Connor accepted. It was the wee hours when Connor suddenly stopped the car, in the tiny town of Ardmore, Alabama, on the Tennessee state line. Police tossed out the group’s suitcases and Connor ordered the Riders to get out. He said they could take the train back to Nashville from there.

As the car turned to head back to Birmingham, an irate Burks-Brooks could not let Connor have the last word. What she said came right out of the Western cowboy movies that were popular at the time. “I yelled out to him: **‘I’ll see you back in Birmingham by high noon, Mr. Bull!’**”

Standing in the dark along the railroad tracks, the group discovered the building Connor said was a train station and was actually a warehouse. What they did not know was Ardmore was a town with hardly any Black families.



**On May 17, 1961, Birmingham law enforcement took the Freedom Riders into custody, allegedly for their protection. However, they were released that evening in a remote area known for Klan activity on the Alabama-Tennessee border.**



The Brooks Family

**Paul (middle standing and Catherine (sitting) Brooks continued their activism, participating in Mississippi voter registration drives and other civil rights actions. In 1962 and 1963, they co-edited a newspaper that reported on the civil rights struggle, the Mississippi Free Press. Among the partners in the newspaper was civil rights activist Medgar Evers, who was assassinated in 1963 by a member of the Jackson White Citizens' Council. Paul Brooks, a businessperson, and entrepreneur, died in 1989. The couple raised two daughters.**



**May 1961: CBS reporter, Howard K. Smith, (left) reported on the mob attacks on Freedom Riders that occurred in Birmingham, Alabama.**

*When the Freedom Riders arrived, national CBS News correspondent Howard K. Smith, a native of Louisiana, was already in Birmingham, AL, working on a television documentary investigating allegations of lawlessness and racial intimidation in the Southern city Smith was still trying to decide if the claims were exaggerated.*

*On the night of May 13, Smith received a phone call tipping him off to hang around the downtown bus stations the next day "if he wanted to see some real action." Smith thus witnessed the May 14 "Mother's Day" riot at the Birmingham Trailways Bus Station, as a vicious mob of Klansmen attacked Freedom Riders and innocent bystanders alike with pipes and*

*baseball bats. After the riot, Smith helped the badly injured Riders Jim Peck and Walter Bergman to hail a cab. Later in the day, Smith delivered a shocking account of the riot over the national CBS radio network. "One passenger was knocked down at my feet by 12 of the hoodlums," he reported, "and his face was beaten and kicked until it was a bloody pulp." He warned of "a dangerous confusion in the Southern mind" and urged that the "laws of the land and purposes of the nation badly need a basic restatement, perhaps by the United States President."*

Source: [FREEDOM RIDERS](#) | Meet the Players: Other Figures

News of the bombing and violence in Alabama spread like wildfire in Harmattan – nationally and internationally. The media began reporting atrocious violence, which began to sensitize, shock, and scandalize the nation – all at once - and even internationally. President John Kennedy and federal government could not plead ignorance of this unprecedented violence.

Ratterman Freed, U. S. Probe Awaited

Armed U. S. Officers Ordered Into Alabama

Kennedy Asks Bloodshed Halt

REBEL TRADE O.K.'d By Cardona

Exiles Will Meet Castro's Offer

Plan Campaign Planned To Gain Freedom

MIAMI, Fla., May 20 (AP)—The Cuban Revolutionary Council today accepted Ph. Carlos Cardona's offer to trade prisoners for hostages.

The 700-mile Cardona, president of the council, said he would accept the offer to trade hostages for prisoners. He said the council would accept the offer to trade hostages for prisoners.

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WASHINGTON, May 20 (AP)—The Federal government today ordered armed marshals and deputized officers into Alabama as an effort to stem mounting racial violence. An order to march today was issued to the Alabama National Guard and the state police. The order was issued to the Alabama National Guard and the state police.

The Justice Department said it had received information that violence and other acts of terrorism were being committed in Alabama. The Justice Department said it had received information that violence and other acts of terrorism were being committed in Alabama.

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Mr. and Mrs. George Ratterman in a scene from the rehearsal.

Grandma Blows Case Sky High

BY MARGARET JOYNER

At the Ratterman trial, Mrs. Nancy May Blows' testimony was a key factor in the case. She testified that she saw her husband with the woman who was accused of murdering her son.

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Lensman's Story Brings Trial To Sudden Climax

George Ratterman was freed yesterday after dramatic testimony supported by an charge that he was innocent and innocent.

All charges against the witness vanished for Campbell County shortly after he was freed. He was freed after a trial that lasted for several days.

The trial was a dramatic one, with the witness providing key testimony. The trial was a dramatic one, with the witness providing key testimony.

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In Alabama, the summer of 1961 was dominated by discussion of "Freedom Rides" and the growing national outcry over the brutality and mistreatment of civil rights activists who came south to protest against continued segregation.



## Who the Hell is Diane Nash?



The Freedom Ride movement almost ended in Alabama on May 14, 1961, when a group of Riders nearly died on a bus set ablaze by Klansmen.

The local civil rights leader Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth organized several cars of Black citizens to rescue the injured Freedom Riders (both Blacks and Whites) in defiance of the white supremacists. Reverend Shuttlesworth was a co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Birmingham–Shuttlesworth International Airport was named in his honor in 2008. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Fred L. Shuttlesworth Human Rights Award is bestowed annually in his name.

Colonel Stone Johnson worked closely Rev. Shuttlesworth. Under his leadership, his group provided armed protection to nonviolent activists, rescuing them from the segregationist mob. He also served for a time as vice-president of the Birmingham chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

An oft-repeated remark of Johnson, when asked how he managed to protect civil rights leaders given his commitment to nonviolence, Johnson replied, "*with my nonviolent .38 special.*" Colonel Stone Johnson - activist/bodyguard — The Optional Facts In 2011, the city of Birmingham dedicated a street in his honor. Birmingham street dedication to be held for civil rights activist Colonel Stone Johnson - al.com

The series of brutal attacks in Alabama generated national media attention. CORE officials could not find a bus driver who would agree to transport the interracial group. The dwindling number of Riders due to sustained injuries and the undercurrents prompted James Farmer of CORE to end the Rides. Some of the Riders had already reached New Orleans by air on May 15 – as arranged by the federal government.

The decision to end the ride frustrated student activists, such as Diane Nash, who argued in a phone conversation with Farmer: "*We can't let them stop us with violence. If we do, the movement is dead*" (Ross, 177).

With fractured support, the organizers had a difficult time securing financial resources. Nevertheless, under the auspices and organizational support of Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Freedom Rides rebounded and continued.

But some SNCC mentors were also wary of continuation, as well as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who had declined to join the rides when asked by Nash and Rodney Powell. Farmer continued to express his reservations, questioning whether continuing the trip was “suicide” (Lewis, 144).



**April 1960: Diane Nash, junior at Fisk University with the Rev. Kelly Smith, president of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. Photo: Gerald Holly, Nashville Tennessean.**

Nash emerged from the sit-in movement in Nashville, Tennessee as one of the most esteemed student leaders and organizers of the time. Born to a middle-class Catholic family in Chicago, Nash did not truly understand what segregation was until she enrolled in Fisk University. When she got to Nashville, in her own words, “I started feeling very confined and really resented it.”



**Diane Nash stands smiling beneath a small sign that reads "Jailbird for Freedom!"**

Notwithstanding the obstacles and risking jail or worse, Diane Nash talked with the students of the Nashville Student Movement and remained adamant that they should not send a message to the public that civil rights efforts could be stopped with violence. John Lewis, the future US Congressman, also agreed to continue it, as did other students.



**Diane Nash (middle front row)**



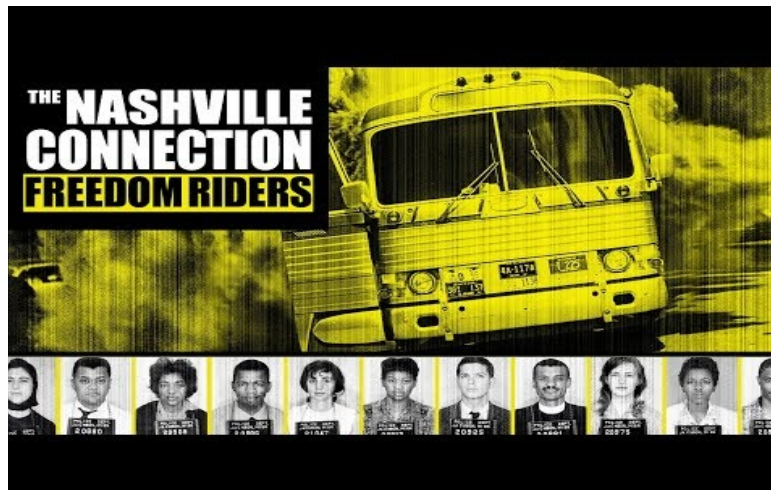
Freedom Rider Diane Nash. She would be arrested over twenty-eight times during her civil rights activism and once when she was six months old.

*"Who the hell is Diane Nash?"*

The rhetorical question from the Attorney General of the US, Robert Kennedy, to his special assistant, John Seigenthaler, was one of bewilderment that reflected his frustration - as more Freedom Riders were to Birmingham from Nashville. It was also an introduction to Diane Judith Nash on national stage, a Civil Rights activist, strategist, and all-around force to be reckoned with.

50 Years later: First person narrative! With John Seigenthaler

Seigenthaler spoke with Nash on the phone. He warned her that the Freedom Rides could result in death and violence for participants. Nash responded, "*We know someone will be killed, but we cannot let violence overcome nonviolence.*" Nash explained to Seigenthaler that she and other students had already signed their wills.



Compelling account of the courage of youths from an obviously stunned Mr. Seigenthaler. Click on the picture to watch the video.

Nash telephoned Fred Shuttlesworth to inform him of the intent of the riders. He responded to her sternly: "*Young lady, do you know that the Freedom Riders were almost killed here?*" Nash assured him that she did and that it would not stop her from continuing the ride. "The students have decided that we can't let violence overcome," Nash replied. "*We are coming into Birmingham to continue the Freedom Ride,*" she concluded.

The entire world watched in alarm and anguish at the violence that took place in Alabama. The Kennedy Administration was worried about the fallouts. Diane Nash responded that "despite the violence, the Freedom Ride must continue." The destination was Mississippi.

She was also a part of a committee that promoted the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



**Alabama Freedom Rider Catherine Burks-Brooks' mugshot in Mississippi. (Mississippi Department of Archives and History).**

Catherine Burks-Brooks, a 21-year-old Freedom Rider, was a Birmingham native and student at Tennessee A&I State College (now Tennessee State University). She was a close friend of Nash. "*When they took that picture (mug shot), I knew I was going to jail,*" she said. "*I was tired. I was hungry. And I was ready to get into bed. I was not afraid.*" She recalled in an interview with Alabama News Center in 2021. "*That was part of history. That's the way I look upon it.*"

Burks-Brooks recalled that when Nash reached out to Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Shuttlesworth strongly discouraged the group, saying it was too dangerous to come to Birmingham. She said it was not a case of seeking Shuttlesworth's blessing. "*Diane didn't ask his opinion. She was telling him.*"

On May 17, seven men and three women rode from Nashville to Birmingham to resume the Freedom Rides. Although the Riders knew that they were risking their lives to fight for their conviction in equal rights, the Nashville Student Movement (NSM) reasoned that they will not allow KKK to defeat the Ride.

# WE WERE PREPARED TO DIE: FREEDOM RIDERS



Students from Fisk University, Tennessee State University, and the American Baptist Theological Seminary, traveled by bus from Nashville to Birmingham, where they would then resume the Freedom Rides from Birmingham to Montgomery, Alabama, and then to Mississippi, and onwards.

After gathering the final list of Riders, Diane Nash placed a phone call to Shuttlesworth. They knew their phone line had been tapped by local police, so they worked out a set of coded messages related to, of all things, poultry. For instance, "roosters" were substituted for male Freedom Riders, "hens" for female Riders and so on. When Nash called Shuttlesworth again on Wednesday morning to tell him "The chickens are boxed," he knew that the Freedom Riders were on their way.



**The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth with Freedom Riders. (Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by Alabama Media Group. Photo by Robert Adams or Norman Dean, The Birmingham News)**



**May 18, 1961: Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, left, talks with several Freedom Riders waiting in the Birmingham bus station to go to Montgomery. AP photo**

An Associated Press news story filed from Birmingham reported that on May 19 a crowd (i.e., a mob) had gathered outside the bus terminal that evening. Civil rights leader, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, was quoted in the story saying more riders from other areas outside Alabama were ready to come join the Freedom Rides – “*wave after wave, if necessary,*” he said.



**The Rev Fred Shuttlesworth with Freedom Riders Charles Butler, Catherine Burks, Lucretia Collins, and Salynn McCollum in the "white" Greyhound terminal waiting room.**

The most vocal opponent of Freedom Rides was Alabama Governor John Patterson, who had won election on a strong segregationist platform but had also endorsed John F. Kennedy for president. When the Freedom Riders came to his state, and even within a few blocks of the governor's mansion in Montgomery, Patterson stood by and watched the mayhem. “*We can't act as nursemaids to agitators,*” he said at the time. “*You just can't guarantee the safety of a fool, and that's what these folks are. Just fools.*”

Other adversaries came from within the civil rights community. “The civil rights leaders are not at the center of this story,” says American Experience's Executive director Mark Samels. “*They are observers, observers who are not really pleased by this disruptive group of young people who are taking history into their own hands and refusing to stop in the name of reason and caution.*”

The Riders were undaunted. The US Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy began negotiating with Governor John Patterson of Alabama and the bus companies to secure a driver and state protection for the new group of Freedom Riders. While under intense public pressure and the Kennedy administration, Greyhound was forced to provide a driver. On the other hand, Alabama Governor Patterson had promised to “fill the jails” with anyone “[trying] to stir up trouble.”



AX RELAY

NIGHT LEAD SHUTTLESWORTH

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., June 1 (AP)-The Rev. F.L. Shuttlesworth,

Birmingham Negro leader, today was convicted <sup>on</sup> ~~of~~ two breach of peace charges growing out of "Freedom Rides" and the violence that met them here.

~~Shuttlesworth was fined \$500 and sentenced to 90 days in jail.~~

In each case he was fined \$500 and sentenced to 90 days in jail.

His attorneys said he would appeal.

Shuttlesworth, on the stand himself about an hour near the end of the one-day trial, told of two telephone conversations with Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy during the height of racial tension here the week of May 14-20.

AP news report, June 1, 1961, on the conviction of the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth on two breach of peace charges related to the Freedom Rides. (AP Photo/Corporate Archives)



Three members of a racially mixed group of college student Freedom Riders catch a nap on May 20, 1961, in the Birmingham bus station after they were thwarted several times in attempts to board busses to Montgomery. Left to right are Susan Hermann, Etta Simpson, and Frederick Leonard. All attend college in Nashville, Tenn. (AP Photo/Horace Cort)

After direct intervention by **Byron White** of the Attorney General's office, on Friday, May 19, Patterson agreed to meet with Siegenthaler, telling him that the state would protect the Riders. Patterson reluctantly promised to protect the bus from KKK mobs and snipers on the road between Birmingham and Montgomery.

The Kennedy Administration had intervened on two counts: first by pressuring Greyhound to provide a bus driver, and second by, securing a commitment from Governor Patterson to protect the riders and the bus from KKK mobs and snipers on the road to Montgomery. Patterson's director of public safety, Floyd Mann, had arranged for the safe passage to Montgomery.

With a group of replacement Free Riders sent from Nashville, the Rides finally resumed. The Riders boarded a Greyhound bus in Birmingham and headed for Montgomery under police escort on May 20.

Alabama  
Montgomery



## May 20



**Unidentified Rider purchasing ticket.**

Assured with a promise of safety, on the morning of May 20, John Lewis (later congressman) and an interracial group of students from Nashville traveled to Alabama to continue the Freedom Rides, as one student explained, "*The impression would have been that whenever a movement starts, all [you have to do] is attack with massive violence and the blacks [will] stop.*"

The bus carrying the Riders traveling toward Montgomery at 90 miles an hour was protected by a contingent of the Alabama State Highway Patrol.

The high speed trip to Montgomery was a spectacle with state patrol officers in cars, and planes flying overhead, escorting the bus down Highway 31, skirting a rudimentary roadblock at Clanton as the bus approached Montgomery.



**National Guardsmen escorting Freedom Riders. Lynn Pelham/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images**

At the Montgomery city line, as agreed, the state troopers left the buses, but the local police that had been ordered to meet the Freedom Riders in Montgomery never appeared.



**May 23: National Guardsmen with fixed bayonets stand guard at the home of Rev Ralph Abernathy where Freedom Riders held a meeting to announce their intentions of continuing their bus tour of the South, Montgomery, Alabama. A few days earlier, one of the Riders' buses had been burned in Anniston, Alabama. (Photo by Underwood Archives/Getty Images)**



Troops of National Guardsmen stand on duty at the Trailways bus station on May 24, 1961, in Montgomery, Ala. as Freedom Riders plan to resume their bus trips through the south. (AP Photo/Horace Cort)



**An unidentified Freedom Rider cranes his head out of the window of an interstate bus as a National Guardsman stands watch outside.**





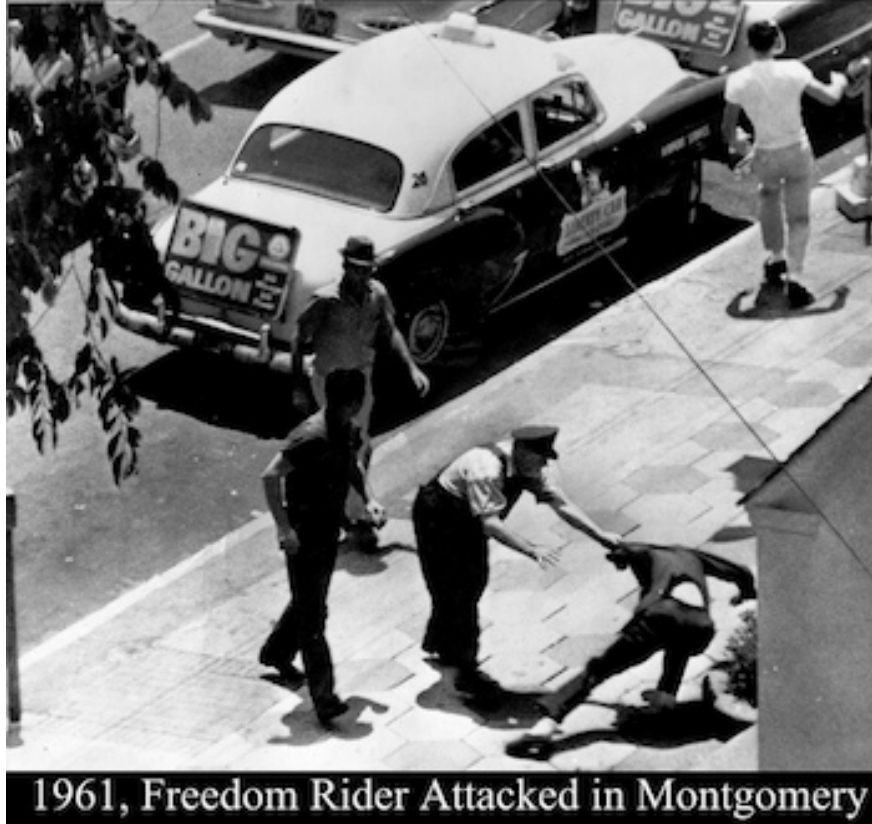
**National Guardsmen were assigned to travel with the Freedom Riders following bouts of attacks. Getty Images.**



**A Freedom Rider and a National Guardsman sleep on a bus ride from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery.**

After about forty miles, all signs of protection disappeared. The patrol officers were gone.

Unprotected when they entered the terminal, riders were beaten so severely by a white mob that some sustained permanent injuries. When the police finally arrived, they served the Riders with an injunction barring them from continuing the Freedom Ride in Alabama.



1961, Freedom Rider Attacked in Montgomery

John Lewis recalled *"shouting and screaming, men swinging fists and weapons, women swinging heavy purses, little children clawing with their fingernails at the faces of anyone they could reach."*

The mob of more than two hundred, many of whom were Klansmen, armed with baseball bats and iron pipes.



**John Lewis with a head wound.**

Lewis was struck on the head with a wooden crate and fled from the Greyhound Bus Terminal in Montgomery. The mob brutally attacked Bernard Lafayette and William Barbee. Barbee was beaten unconscious and left on the sidewalk, suffering injuries that would later shorten his life.

Three others escaped the violence by jumping over the retaining wall and running to the adjacent post office. Five Black female Freedom Riders escaped in a cab driven by a black cab driver. Two white women were pulled from another cab and beaten by the mob.

U.S. Justice Department aide John Seigenthaler, arriving at the scene, was brutally attacked on the head with a pipe by Ku Klux Klansmen left John in the street to die.



**May 20, 1961: Jim Zwerg, one of the Freedom Riders beaten at Montgomery, Alabama bus terminal.**



**Freedom Rider Jim Zwerg in his hospital bed after beating with a copy of the “Montgomery Advertiser” newspaper, with his bloody photo on its front page.**

One of Riders on the arriving bus was Jim Zwerg, a 21-year-old white college from Beloit College in Wisconsin who became an exchange student at Fisk University. As Zwerg, stepped off the bus in Montgomery, someone shouted, “*kill the nigger-loving son of a*

*bitch!*" With clubs and fists they attacked Zwerg brutally, beating him several times. He lost teeth in the beatings and was eventually hospitalized.

Acting against directives from his superiors, Alabama Public Safety Director Floyd Mann pulled his revolver and stopped the Klansmen who were kicking and stomping Zwerg, Lewis, and William Barbee — saving their lives. (*When Governor George Wallace [takes office](#) in 1963, he immediately fires Mann, and replaces him with "Colonel" Al Lingo, a rabid segregationist.*)

Under the segregation laws, Black cab drivers cannot take white Freedom Riders to the hospital, and White drivers will not. Only the Catholic St. Jude's hospital will treat wounded Riders of any color. From his hospital bed, William Barbee tells reporters: "*As soon as we've recovered from this, we'll start again.*" And from the White side of the segregated hospital, Zwerg agreed, saying: "*We are prepared to die.*"

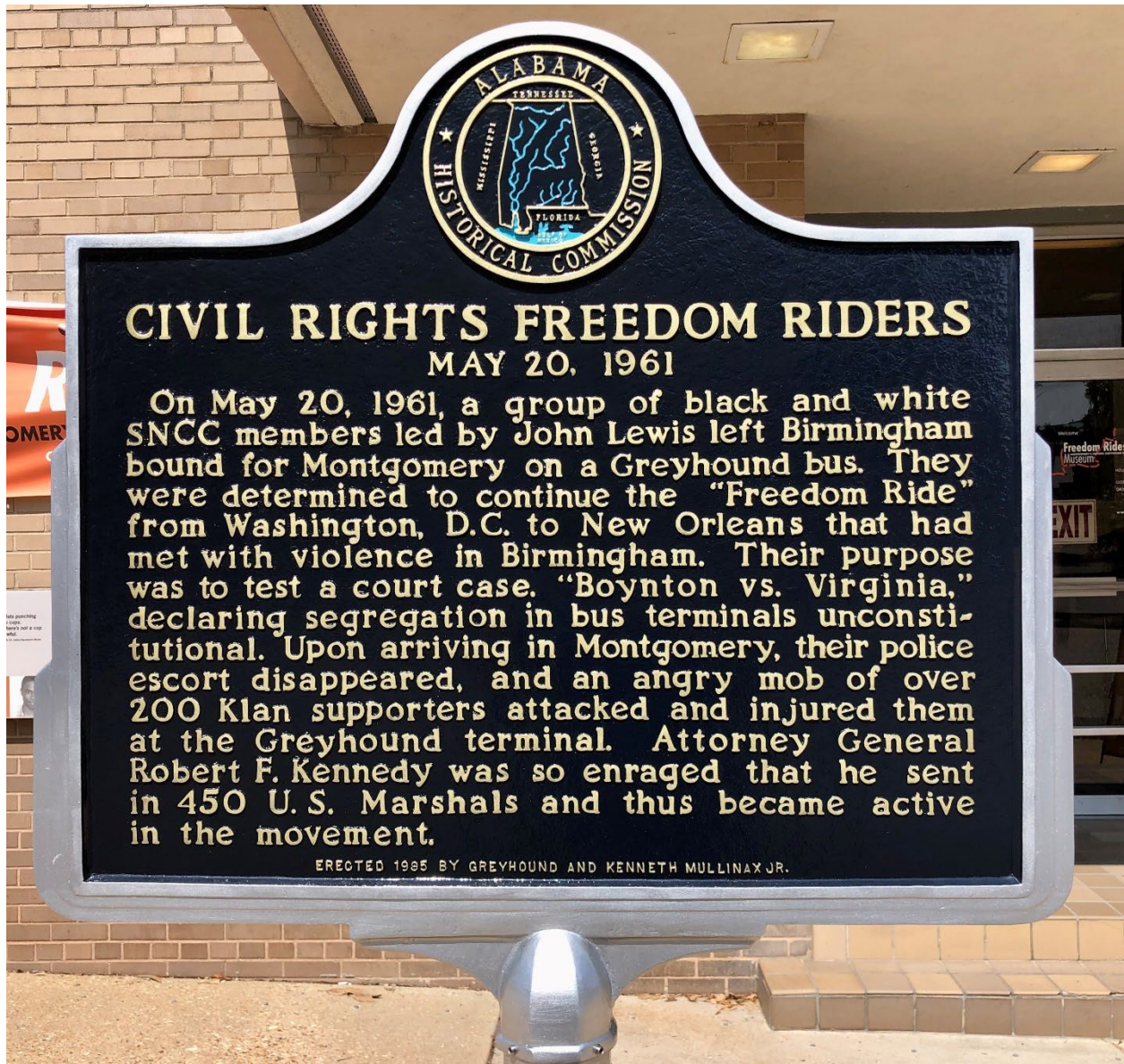


**May 20, 1961: Montgomery, AL mob member, later identified as a KKKK leader, attacking news photographer.**

The mob, now increased to over 1,000, extended outward from the Greyhound terminal attacking Black people on the street, setting one teenage boy on fire, and burning the Riders' luggage in a bonfire. The police officers made no arrests. Instead, they served the Freedom Riders with injunctions blaming them for the violence.

By the time state troopers managed to disperse the mob, news reporters had begun to send images of the violence around the world.

Furious at Patterson's duplicity, the Kennedys sent federal marshals to Montgomery to keep the peace. Lewis and his fellow Freedom Riders continued to Mississippi.





**Police officers riding in on horses due to the violent response towards the Freedom Riders protest. Freedom Riders were met with violent responses and arrests, Montgomery, Alabama, 1961. (Photo by Afro American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Images)**

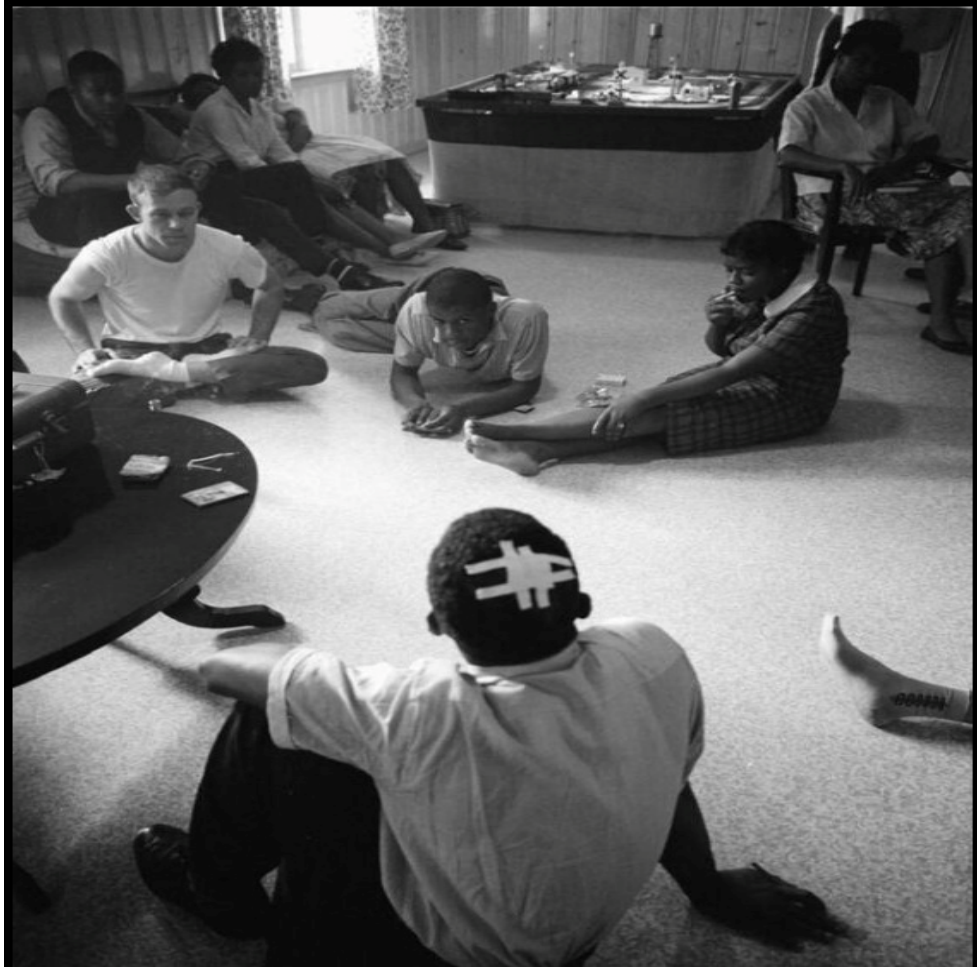
Walter Jones, a local judge, issued an injunction against interracial groups traveling in the state of Alabama. The Riders were cited for violating this injunction. Contempt of Court warrants are issued for their arrest. Many of the riders took refuge in First Baptist, Rev. Abernathy's church.



**Rev. Ralph Abernathy is questioned by two police officers during one of the Freedom Rides. Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images**

When the police officers come with photos and arrest warrants, the Riders quickly put choir robes, assembled up in the choir loft, and pretended to be practicing. With his head bandaged, John Lewis hid at the rear of the group. They were used to singing gospel-based freedom songs, so they sounded good. The police searching the pews below assumed they were the regular choir and ignored them. Eventually, they left empty-handed.





Freedom Riders relax, regroup, and heal (note the bandage on the back of future Congressman John Lewis' s head) after being rescued from First Baptist Church in the safe house in Montgomery. Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Premium Collection/Getty Images

**May 21**



**Freedom Ride Rally in Montgomery, Alabama**

During this time, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr was on a speaking tour in Chicago. Responding to the brutal assaults of the Riders, Civil Rights leaders called for a gathering of supporters in Montgomery for Sunday evening, May 21, 1961. They convened at Rev. Ralph Abernathy's First Baptist Church and organized a program of hymns and speakers.



**Part of the 1,500 supporters who came out to learn about the Freedom Rides and hear from civil rights leaders – on what became a long night. Joseph Scherschel /Time Life.**

In his speech, Dr. King blamed Governor Patterson for “aiding and abetting the forces of violence” and called for federal intervention, declaring that “the federal government must not stand idly by while bloodthirsty mobs beat nonviolent students with impunity” (King, 21 May 1961).

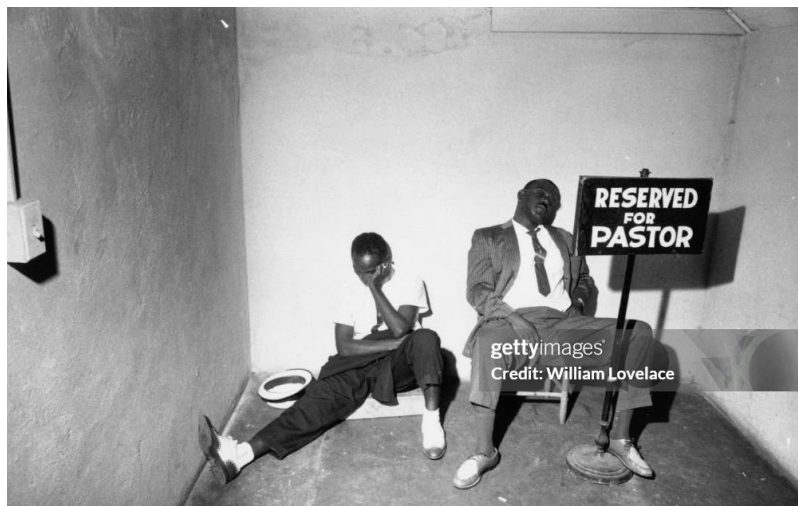


**Freedom Riders and supporters sleep in the church pews.**

As Dr. King spoke, a threatening white mob gathered outside. From inside the church, Dr. King called Attorney General Kennedy, who assured him that the federal government would protect those inside the church. Kennedy swiftly mobilized federal marshals who used tear gas to keep the mob at bay.



**Freedom Riders endure tear gas that was thrown into Abernathy's church in Montgomery on May 21, 1961, forcing them out of the church where they were meeting. A. Y. Owen/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images**



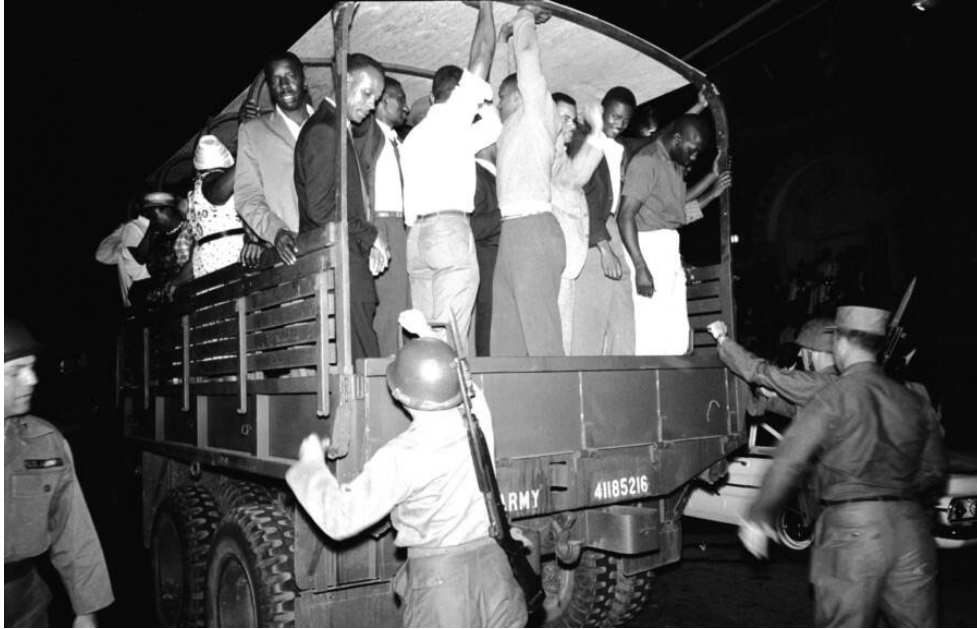
**Two men sleeping in the pastor's car park during a siege of the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama by a white mob during the night of 20th-21st May 1961**



**Federal marshals escorted Riders and supporters from the church at dawn.**

Federal marshals were later replaced by the Alabama National Guard, who escorted people out of the church at dawn.

The intent of the gathering was to show support for the Freedom Riders – of which more than a dozen was present. Diane Nash was listed on the program. The First Baptist Church was located a few blocks from the state capitol.



**U.S. Army truck takes Freedom Riders away from a church rally back to their homes after an angry mob besieged the church. The Freedom Riders rode buses throughout the Deep South to test and call attention to still-existing local policies that ran contrary to national laws. Photo by Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images**

Dismayed by the betrayal of Governor of Alabama with the police abandoning the Greyhound bus just before it arrived at the Montgomery, Alabama terminal, which gave the racist mob time to viciously attack Freedom Riders as they disembarked, Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent six hundred federal marshals to the city to stop the violence.

As the violence continued and with federal intervention, the Freedom Riders were propelled to national prominence. Dr. King became one of the major spokespeople for the Rides. However, some activists began to criticize him for his willingness to offer only moral and financial support but not his physical presence on the Rides.

In a telegram to Dr. King the President of the Union County National Association for the Advancement of Colored People branch in North Carolina, Robert F. Williams, urged Dr. King to *“lead the way by example.... If you lack the courage, remove yourself from the vanguard”* (*Papers* 7:241–242). In response to Diane Nash’s direct request that Dr. King join the Rides, Dr. King replied that he was on probation and could not afford another arrest, a response many of the students found unacceptable.



**Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. Attorney General and brother of President John F. Kennedy, is deep in thought at the Justice Department as he worked with aides considering legal measures to be taken following racial violence in Montgomery, Ala., May 21, 1961, Washington, D.C. He ordered a task force of U.S. Marshals and Byron R. White, Deputy U.S. Attorney General, to the area to safeguard federal rights. (AP Photo/Byron Rollins)**





**May 21, 1961: A contingent of Federal marshals gather to watch over civil rights activists and Freedom.**

A few federal marshals, now on the scene in Montgomery, stood watch from a park near the church. No city or state police officers were in sight – but they lurked nearby and some in civilian clothes joined the crowd. Rev. Shuttlesworth, from Birmingham, braved the mob that completely surrounded the church to escort in James Farmer.

*“The streets were full of roving bands of short-sleeved white men shouting obscenities. ... The crowds grew thicker as we approached the church. ... As we got close, they clogged every roadway, waving Confederate flags and shouting rebel yells. ... As we stopped, the crowds grabbed hold of the car and began rocking it back and forth. We shoved the car into reverse, heavy-footed the accelerator and zoomed backwards. ... The only approach to the church was through a graveyard, but we were too late, the mob was already there, blocking the entrances to the church. Shuttlesworth just plowed in, elbowing the hysterical white men aside. ... "Out of my way," he said. "Let me through." The mob obeyed. ... Looking back. I can only guess it was an example of the "crazy*

*nigger" syndrome — "Man, that nigger is crazy; leave him alone, don't mess with him." — James Farmer.<sup>16</sup>*

Inside the church, the attendees sang hymns, and were undaunted. Dr. King and Rev. Abernathy led the mass meeting. Those assembled inside the church listened to testimonials about courage and commitment and sang hymns and freedom songs, while a white mob began gathering outside.

Outside the church, as darkness fell, a huge mob of white racists, numbering in the thousands, estimated at over three thousand, outnumbered the marshals, surrounded the church in a long night of terror. Confined inside the Church, the Freedom Riders and their supporters waited with unwavering conviction and courage for dawn.

Inside, Martin Luther King Jr. told the crowd that Gov. Patterson was responsible for allowing the violence to happen. Dr. King also called for legislation to end desegregation and stop the violence. *"We hear the familiar cry that morals cannot be legislated. This may be true, but behavior can be regulated," King said. "The law may not be able make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me."*

As the evening wore on, the size of mob increased, overturned a U.S. marshal's car, and set a couple of small fires. The mob threatened to overwhelm the federal marshals who feared the church would be set on fire. According to one account of that evening by a U.S. Marshals historian, *"a fiery projectile nearly burned the roof of the church."* At one point during the evening, some seventy-five marshals charged the angry mob and were pelted with rocks. Local and state police later bolstered the marshals. Still, the mob persisted.

From inside the church that night, at around 3 a.m., Dr. King called Attorney General Robert Kennedy at the Justice Department for help. Kennedy then called Governor Patterson and also had his Deputy Attorney General, Byron White, later a Supreme Court Justice, meet with Patterson and his staff.

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<sup>16</sup> *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train*, Howard Zinn. Beacon Press, 1994



**May 21, 1961: U.S. Marshals stand guard in front of Baptist Church as an automobile burns in the distance after being overturned by the mob. Photo, AP/Horace Cort.**

One wire story of the church attack by United Press International that appeared in newspapers on Monday, May 22nd, reported: *“Tear gas and fire hoses were needed to beat off the angry mob of about 200 whites who converged on the church [other accounts had that number much larger]. It took 100 U.S. Marshals and more than that number of city police and a National Guard contingent to hold back the rock-hurling, club-swinging mob.”*

But it was early morning before the surrounding streets were secure enough for the Freedom Riders and their supporters to leave the church. Before dawn on May 22, 1961, the Guard moved the congregation out, using military trucks to transport some of the church attendees back to their communities. Source: *Buses Are A’Comin’*” Freedom Riders: 1961



**Freedom Rider Bernard Lafayette Jr during a Freedom Riders planning session, Montgomery, Alabama, May 1961. He holds a pen in one hand and a copy of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary in the other. (Photo by Lee Lockwood/WSPI/Getty Images)**

In a commemorative Op-Ed piece in 2011, **Bernard Lafayette** remembered the mob breaking windows of the church with rocks and setting off tear gas canisters. He recounted heroic action by King. After learning that black taxi drivers were arming and forming a group to rescue the people inside, he worried that more violence would result.

He selected ten volunteers, who promised non-violence, to escort him through the white mob, which parted to let King and his escorts pass as they marched two by two. Dr. King went out to the Black drivers and asked them to disperse, to prevent more violence. Dr. King and his escorts formally made their way back inside the church, unmolested.

Lafayette also was interviewed by the BBC in 2011 and talked about these events in an episode broadcast on the radio on August 31, 2011, in commemoration of the Freedom Rides. The Alabama National Guard finally arrived in the early morning to disperse the mob and safely escorted all the people from the church.<sup>17</sup>



**May 22, 1961: Alabama National Guardsman are also stationed at Montgomery bus station. AP photo.**

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<sup>17</sup> : Bernard Lafayette Jr., "The Siege of the Freedom Riders" Archived 2017-06-27 at the Wayback Machine, Opinion page, New York Times, May 19, 2011, carried at blog for Baltimore Nonviolence Center, accessed February 24, 2012



May 1961: Scene from Montgomery, Alabama after National Guard arrived to protect Freedom Riders from local mobs. / Bruce Davidson

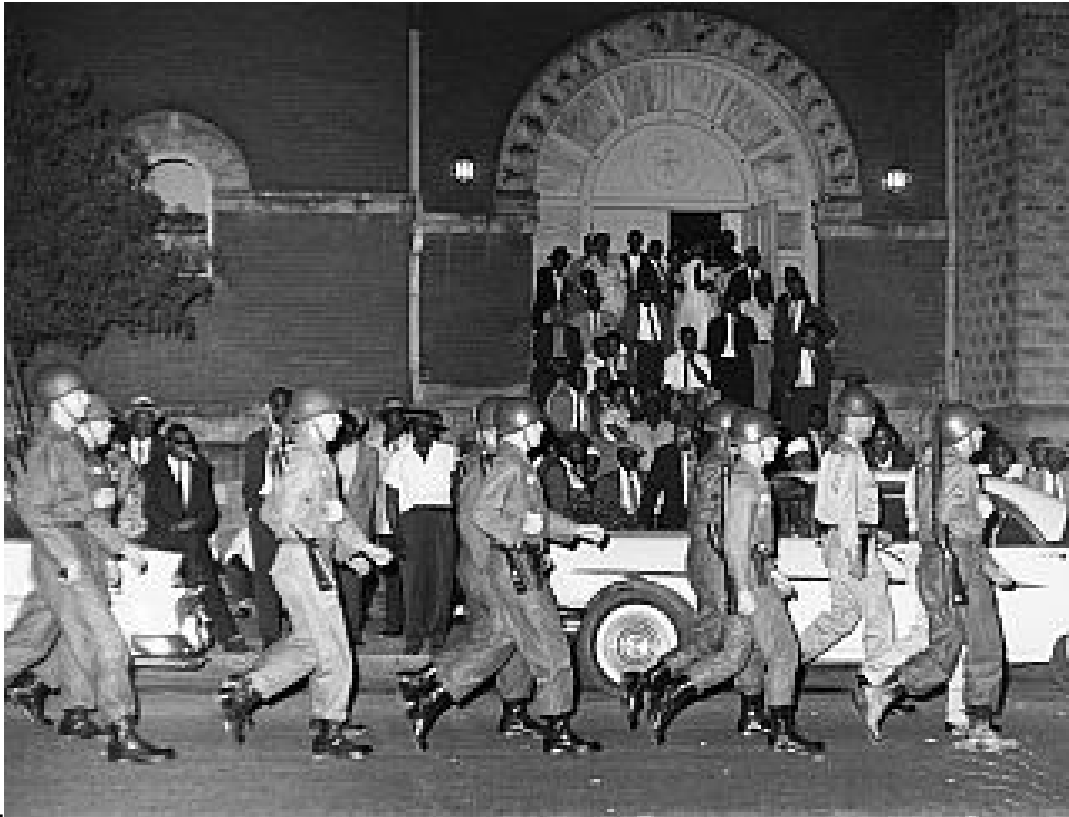
The church attack and martial law were front-page news across the country. In Rome, Georgia, the *News-Tribune* story covering the church attack included reaction from state and local politicians, including some who blamed the Kennedys for encouraging “these people to come into the South to change traditions and the way of life.”



U.S. Marshals sit across from the bus station where a Freedom Riders were attacked. (Photo by Bettmann Archive/Getty Images)

That story also quoted the Alabama Ku Klux Klan “grand wizard,” Robert Shelton, who said the KKK of the nation would amalgamate in an effort to prevent further integration attempts in the South. He also added: “It is regrettable that the President of the United States would use the power of his office to condone the unlawful activities of these integrationist groups by attempting to enjoin the Alabama Klan’s from aiding in the

preservation of our laws and customs.” Shelton said that while the Klan did not condone violence, it would “take all measures necessary” to preserve Alabama customs.



**May 21. A detachment of National Guardsmen at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama after martial law was declared. AP photo/Horace Cort.**



**George Lincoln Rockwell, center, self-styled leader of the American Nazi Party, and his "hate bus" bearing several young men wearing swastika arm bands, stops for gas in Montgomery, Ala., May 23, 1961, en route to Mobile, Alabama. (AP Photo)**

“Rockwell, the party’s head, said the “hate bus” is en route from Arlington, Va., to New Orleans as a protest against Communism and racial integration. The occupants of the bus said they had planned to make a speech in Montgomery, but that Alabama Attorney General MacDonald Gallion asked them not to.” (AP News Report, May 23, 1961)





**May 21-22, 1961: Rev. Ralph Abernathy & Rev. Martin Luther King during stand-off with white mob outside Abernathy's Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL. King had been on the phone with Attorney General Robert Kennedy seeking help. Photo, Paul Schutzer/**

From inside the church, King called Attorney General Kennedy, who assured him that the federal government would protect those inside the church. Kennedy swiftly mobilized federal marshals who used tear gas to keep the mob at bay. Federal marshals were later replaced by the Alabama National Guard, who escorted people out of the church at dawn.



**May 21-22, 1961: Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on the phone at his Justice Dept office during the night of the church attack in Birmingham, Alabama. Bob Schutz/AP.**

Back in Washington, there had been early a.m. meetings at the Justice Department on the crisis, and Robert Kennedy, up all night, called President Kennedy at 7 a.m. to update him on what had happened.

Given the Anniston and Birmingham incidents, the Kennedys worried that there might be more violence in Alabama, and they wanted protection for the Freedom Riders. Governor Patterson had refused to guarantee the Freedom Riders safety.

JFK thought at one point he would be able to persuade his old political ally to come around on the matter, diffuse the tensions at the state level, and keep Washington out of the picture. Kennedy had White House telephone operators place a call to Governor Patterson. The governor's secretary responded that the governor was fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and could not be reached.

It was then that Kennedy realized what he was up against and gave permission to begin preparing for the possible use of federal marshals.<sup>18</sup>



**Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, center, conferring with Justice Department assistants, Nicholas B. Katzenbach, left, and Herbert J. Miller, during the May 1961 Freedom Rides.**

Robert Kennedy had conferred with a number of assistants on the matter, including Nicholas B. Katzenbach and Herbert J. Miller. He urged all citizens and travelers in Alabama to refrain from actions “which will cause increased tension or provoke violence” in troubled Montgomery.

The US Attorney General also sent his longtime friend, Justice Department representative John Seigenthaler, to mediate between the Freedom Riders and southern politicians. A native of Nashville, Tennessee, Seigenthaler had local southern roots that Robert Kennedy hoped would help ease tensions with southern politicians.

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<sup>18</sup> *Civil Rights History* “Buses Are A’Comin’” Freedom Riders: 1961

Seigenthaler went to Birmingham to monitor the situation and ensure that the Freedom Riders would get off safely to their next destination. Other RFK aides and DOJ officials, including John Doar and Deputy Attorney General Byron White, later a Supreme Court justice, would also become involved with the Freedom Rides.

READ THE TRANSCRIPT AND WATCH THE VIDEOS.

[Eyes on the Prize; Interview with John Seigenthaler - American Archive of Public Broadcasting](#)

Filed interview with John Seigenthaler conducted in 1985 for Eyes on the Prize. Discussion centers on the Freedom Rides, during which Seigenthaler served as Administrative Assistant to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy and acted as Attorney General Robert Kennedy's representative in meetings with Alabama officials.

[Seigenthaler recounts attack while trying to rescue Freedom Riders \(usatoday.com\)](#)

Patterson called the Freedom Riders “agitators” and said, “they were to blame for the race rioting because of their insistence on testing bus station racial barriers.”



Nevertheless, under pressure and to preempt the federal government from doing so, on May 23, 1961, Patterson declared martial law in Montgomery. Martial law authorized the National Guard to disperse the crowd. The Alabama National Guard took control of the scene, and the U.S. marshals were placed under Guard command. Alabama, and

national guard soldiers were present in front of the First Baptist Church and elsewhere in the city, including the Montgomery bus terminal.



**May 22, 1961: National Guard troops in front of the First Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL. AP/Horace Cort**

The protests convinced state leaders of the need for greater vigilance against the actions of such "outside agitators," even as civil rights activists were encouraged by the bravery of the Freedom Riders. The mood was best captured by Martin Luther King Jr. who arrived in Montgomery on Sunday, May 21, to address the wounded activists: **"Alabama will have to face the fact that we are determined to be free ... we've come too far to turn back."** With those words, the eyes of the nation turned on Alabama, launching a summer of

festering debates over the limits of rights and rabbleroxing.<sup>19</sup> Summer 1961: Freedom Ride.



**Freedom riders sing at the Rev. Ralph Abernathy's First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala., as a white mob gathers outside. Paul Schutzer—The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images**

As state leaders were using the riotous and barbaric incidents to convince themselves of the need for greater vigilance against the actions of such "outside agitators," civil rights activists were encouraged by the bravery of the Freedom Riders.

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<sup>19</sup> Summer 1961. Freedom Ride. Published by The University of Alabama, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History.



**May 23, 1961: Civil rights leaders John Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Ralph Abernathy and James Farmer announced that Freedom Rides would continue.**

On May 24, the Alabama state legislature adopted an amendment praising Patterson's actions during the crisis and blasting the Freedom Riders and federal troops for creating "conditions of unrest, violence and hatred."



**Freedom Riders Study Map in Safe House. Along with unidentified Freedom Riders, John Lewis studies a map on a table in a temporary safe house during a Freedom Riders planning session, Montgomery, Alabama, late May 1961. They were in the house, owned by Dr Richard H Harris Jr, the night before a 'Freedom' bus departed for Jackson, Mississippi. (Photo by Lee Lockwood/WSPI/Getty Images)**





This was the home of Dr. Richard Harris, Jr., and his wife Vera. He was the grandson of John W. Jones, Alabama State Senator during Reconstruction. Harris was a captain with the famed 99<sup>th</sup> Squadron Tuskegee Airmen during World War II. A registered pharmacist, he owned and operated Dean Drug Store, Montgomery's oldest black drug store. He was known to be an ardent civil rights supporter. Between May 20-24, 1961, Dr. Harris opened this home to a group of 33 Freedom Riders, students from Nashville, Tennessee. This house provided a safe harbor as well as a strategic meeting place.



[Dr. Richard Harris House](#) | [About the Dr. Richard Harris House](#)

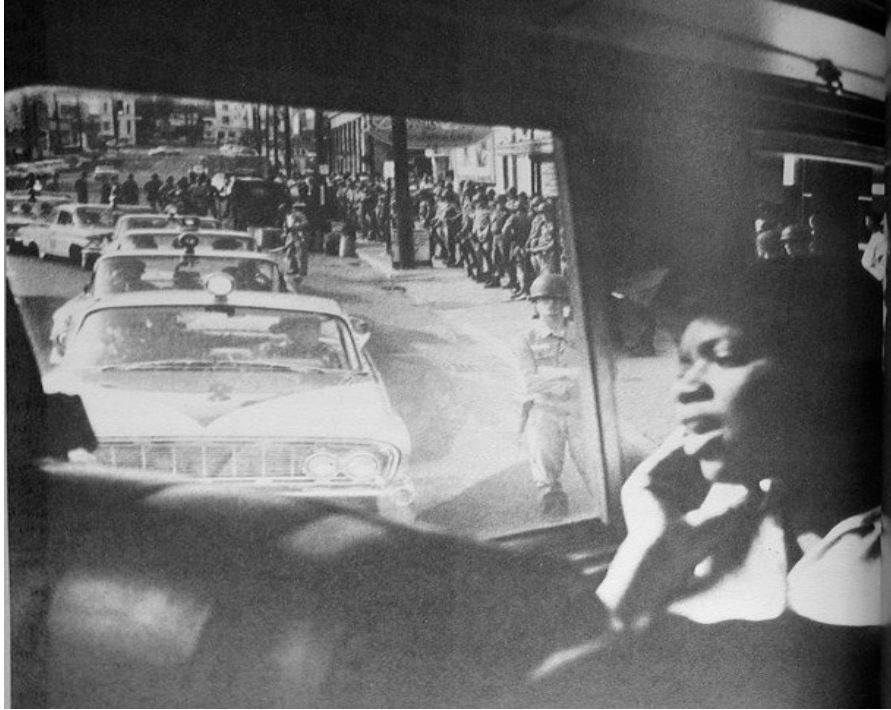
**May 24**



**Back Freedom Riders have breakfast at a lunch counter in the bus station in Montgomery, Ala., on May 24, 1961. It is the first time the eating facilities at the station have been integrated. With their White peers, will travelled to Jackson, Miss., and New Orleans, La., on their Freedom Ride movement to test the effectiveness of the 1960 Supreme Court ruling on integration. (AP Photo)**



**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader, shakes hands with Paul Dietrich just before a bus of Freedom Riders left Montgomery, Alabama, May 24, 1961. Dietrich, a ministerial student from Virginia, joined the Freedom Riders. (AP Photo).**



May 24, a bus carrying Freedom Riders departs Montgomery on the way to Mississippi.

On the morning of May 24, the Freedom Riders in Montgomery resumed their travels with two buses departing at different times for Jackson, Mississippi. The two buses carried 27 Freedom Riders between them and also about twenty members of the press. A few national guardsmen were also on the buses.

The buses were escorted by sixteen highway patrol cars, each carrying three National Guardsmen and two highway patrolmen. The ride from Montgomery to Jackson, a distance of about 140 miles, would take about six hours with a convoy of police cars and overhead helicopters.



On May 24, troops escorted the Freedom Riders as they departed to Jackson, Mississippi.



**More Freedom Riders follow, coming down from the North and rolling in from the West. All are imprisoned. More than three hundred are jailed in Jackson alone. Similar arrests occur in other Southern towns.**

As Freedom Riders and civil rights leaders gathered at Ralph Abernathy's home in Montgomery, including Martin Luther King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and student leaders, a new strategy was devised for the Freedom Rides heading into Mississippi. They decided that as more riders came to participate – then converging on Jackson, Mississippi where all incoming riders would be arrested – they would seek to “fill the jails” in Mississippi as part of the protest.

More Freedom Riders were also converging on Montgomery to fill more buses for additional trips into Mississippi.

In Washington, US Attorney General Robert Kennedy had been negotiating with Mississippi officials over the safety of the Freedom Riders who were heading to Jackson. He struck a deal with Mississippi's Democratic Senator, James O. Eastland, allowing the Riders to be jailed in exchange for their safety. Kennedy would not interfere in Mississippi's affairs by sending in federal marshals as long as Eastland would guarantee

there would be no mob violence. Kennedy explained that the Federal Government's "primary interest was that they [Freedom Riders] weren't beaten up."

Eastland was known for having opposed integration and the Civil rights movement. During World War II, he vocally opposed and degraded the service of African American soldiers in the war. He equated protest with Hitlerism following a vitriolic speech on the floor of the Senate in July 1945, in which he complained that the Negro soldier was physically, morally, and mentally incapable of serving in combat.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Eastland claimed that the "boys from the South were fighting to maintain white supremacy"<sup>21</sup>



May 24, 1961: National Guard troops line sidewalk at a bus station in Montgomery, AL as Freedom Riders resumed bus trips. Photo, AP / Horace Cort.

The bus only made limited stops en route, at which point the National Guardsmen would make formations around the bus in a protective manner. As they approached the

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<sup>20</sup> Young III, John H. (July 7, 1945). "Eastland Insults 13,000,000 Citizens". Pittsburgh Courier. Retrieved 18 March 2019. Smadbeck, Warren (July 14, 1945). "Hitlerism and Eastland". New York Amsterdam News. Retrieved 18 March 2019. Asch, Chris Myers (February 1, 2011). *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer*. Univ of North Carolina Press. pp. 116–117. ISBN 978080787202

<sup>21</sup> Blount, George W. (April 1, 1944). "Blount - Speaks Softly". New Journal and Guide. Norfolk Journal and Guide. Retrieved 18 March 2019. Congress, United States (1945). *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the ... Congress*. U.S. Government Printing Office.



Mississippi border, they changed guard. The Mississippi Guard took over from the Alabama Guard. The transfer went efficiently. However, there had been one report of a phoned-in dynamite threat in Mississippi. So, the guardsmen at the state-line border were especially attentive to their surroundings.

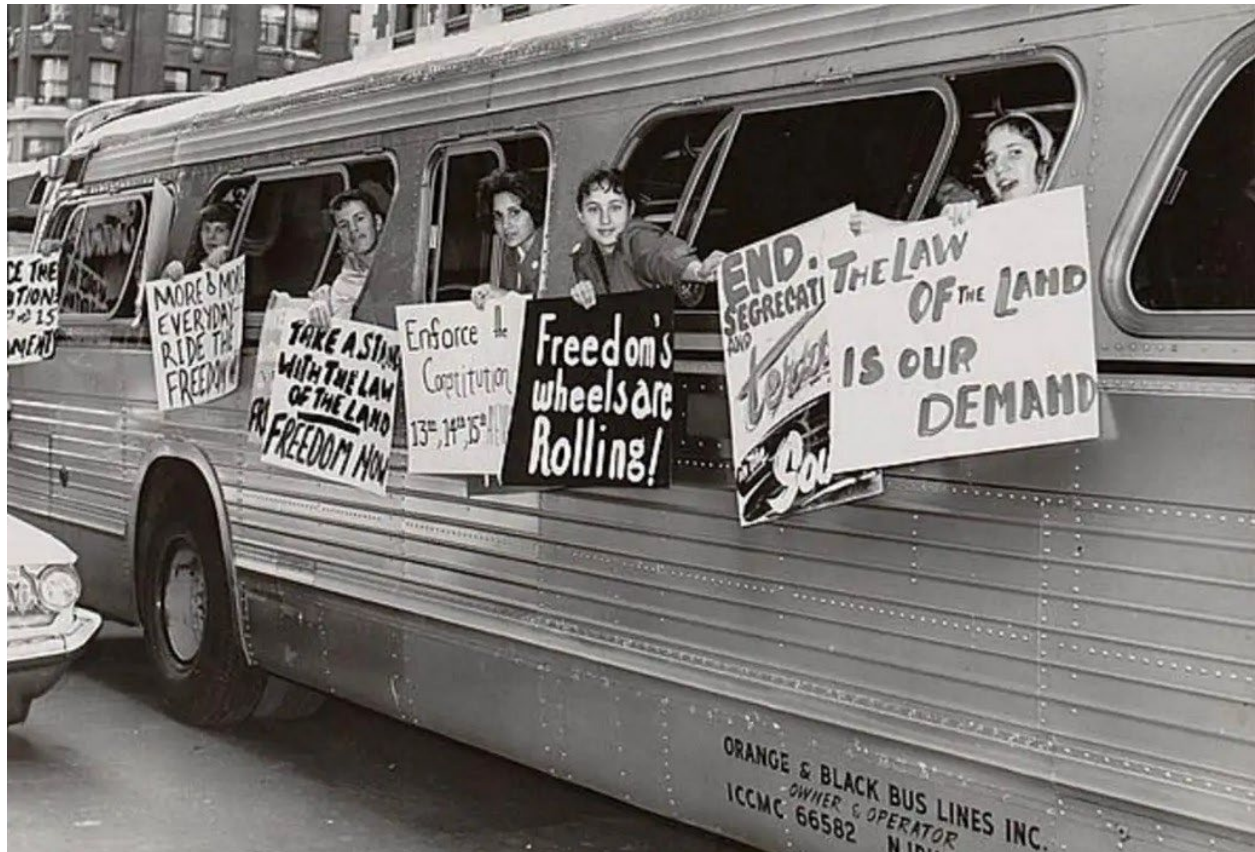
On the same day, as the first buses departed for Jackson, for example, two White college students, David Fankhauser and David Myers, at Central State College in Ohio, arrived in Montgomery. They were among those responding to the earlier call of Diane Nash seeking new recruits. On their arrival, these prospective riders and others would stay at local homes for a few days awaiting additional Freedom Riders sufficient to fill more buses.



**A new bus load of Freedom Riders, including four white college professors and three Black students, arrives in Montgomery, AL, May 24, 1961, under guard of police and National Guard. Center, with glasses, is Rev. William S. Coffin, Jr. On the left, partly hidden, is Dr. David E. Swift, and behind him, wearing glasses, is Dr. John D. Maguire. (AP Photo/Perry Aycock)**

On May 24, another bus arriving in Montgomery that afternoon from Atlanta brought a group of Riders from Connecticut, including four White college professors and three Black students. Leading this group was a White clergyman Rev. William Sloan. Coffin, who was

the Chaplin at Yale University. He arrived at the Montgomery bus terminal with Dr. David E. Swift, Dr. John D. Maguire, and a contingent of Yale divinity students.



New York Freedom Riders leaving for Washington DC to protest segregation, 1961, via Library of Congress, Washington DC



A group of White men in suits carrying bats on their way to confront the Freedom riders. Getty Images.

The National Guard patrolled the terminal. A throng of angry Whites had gathered there, but they were not able to make it to cars that carried the group to meet with civil rights leaders at a local home.

Rev. Coffin, 35, born into an elite wealthy family in New York, was a WWII veteran and also a member of President Kennedy's Peace Corps Advisory Council. A day or so earlier on the Yale University campus, at a pre-Freedom Ride rally, he criticized southern ministers for not supporting the Rides.

In a *Life* magazine article, a week later, Rev. Coffin also stated: "Many people in the South have criticized the Freedom Riders as 'outsiders' who want to stir up trouble. But if you're an American and a Christian you can't be an outsider on racial discrimination, whether practiced in the North or the South..." Rev. Coffin also explained that by joining the Freedom Rides with his group "we hoped to dramatize the fact that this is not just a student movement. We felt that our being university educators might help encourage the sea of silent moderates in the South to raise their voices..."



**Yale Chaplin William Sloan Coffin (second from right) Ralph Abernathy (third from right), Fred Shuttlesworth, and Bernard Lafayette at the "white only" lunch counter in the Montgomery Trailways terminal just before they are arrested.**



**Yale University chaplain William S. Coffin Jr. (second left) and other Freedom Riders being arrested after the demonstration. (Photo by Lynn Pelham/Getty Images)**

The next day, Rev. Coffin and his group were slated to board a bus for Jackson. However, while at the bus terminal that morning before departure, Coffin and others joined Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others at a terminal lunch counter, testing a “whites only” restriction.

Most in this group, including Rev. Coffin, were arrested in the Montgomery terminal for “breach of peace and unlawful assembly.” They did not make the trip to Jackson. They were later released after posting a \$1,000 bond.



**Yale University Chaplain William S. Coffin Jr. (C) and other Freedom Riders holding a press conference. (Photo by Lynn Pelham/Getty Images.)**



**White segregationists hurled stones at a bus carrying freedom riders in Mississippi.**

The Freedom Riders embarked on a 250-mile journey to Jackson, Mississippi with no incidents along the way. The exception were some hecklers who threw one or two bottles.

The Kennedy administration called Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett to strike a deal behind the scenes unbeknownst to the public. Instead of ordering the Governor to enforce the federal law integrating interstate travel, Mississippi authorities agreed that there would be no violence and no mob but would arrest and transport the Freedom Riders once they arrived at the terminal in Jackson, Mississippi.



**May 24, 1961: Alabama National Guard protecting Freedom Ride bus at stop near Mississippi handover, at state border.**



**Freedom Riders and Rev. Metz Rollins speaks with the media as a National Guardsman stands watch. Joe Scherschel/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images**





**The Old Montgomery Greyhound Station, site of the May 20, 1961, violence is preserved as the Freedom Rides Museum (2011 photo)**

Located in Montgomery's former Greyhound Bus Station where the Riders faced the segregationist mob, the exterior of now a museum exhibits trace the history of the rides and the pivotal events that happened in Montgomery. The interior tells a powerful story of the Freedom Rides with exhibits that include art, architecture, oral histories, and a video kiosk where Freedom Riders and others have told their story.

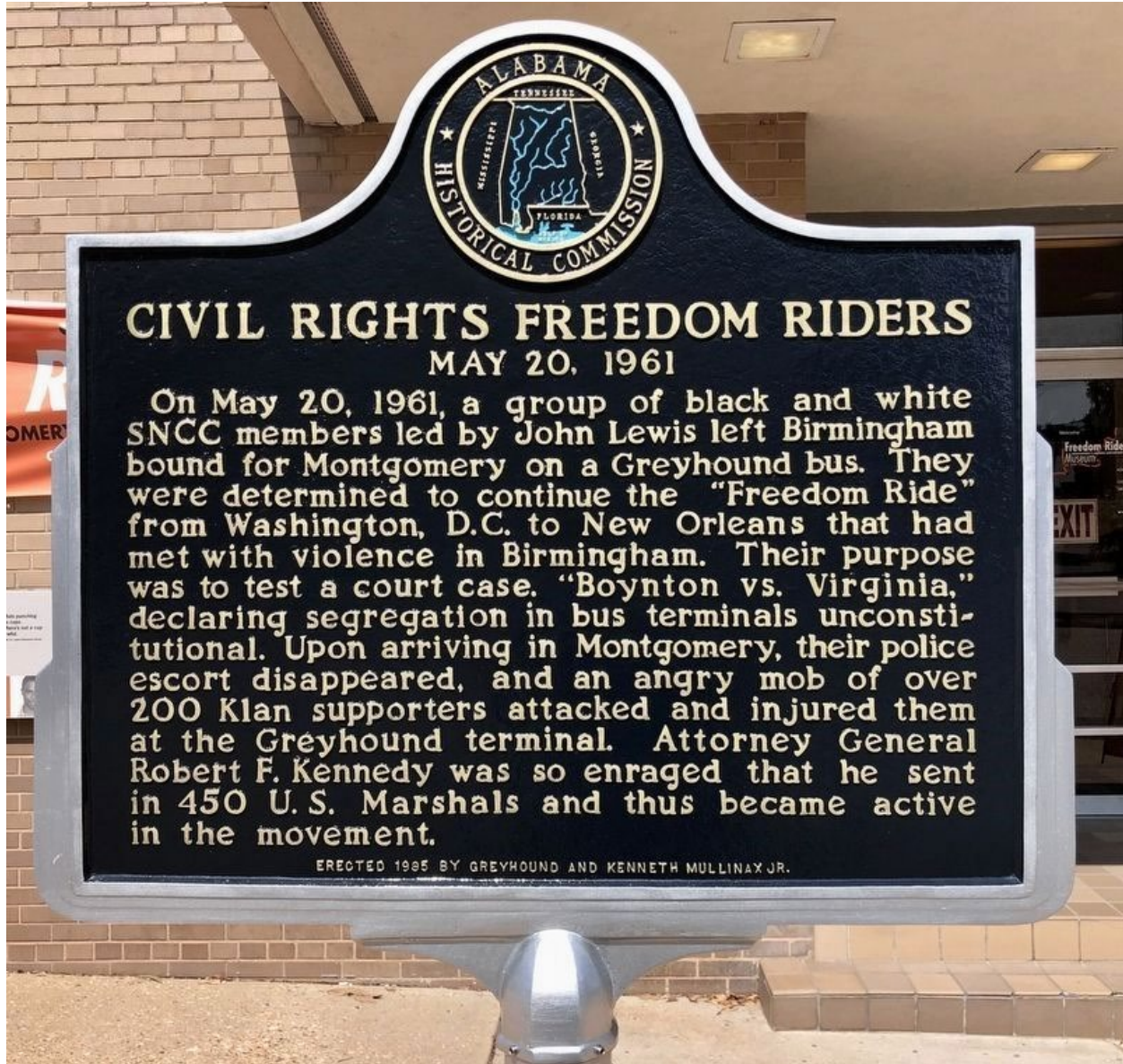
The exterior exhibits and a cell phone tour are available 24/7 and are free. Students visit the museum in their field trip lessons.

As one of the last acts of his presidency, on August 11, 2019, President Obama proclaimed two places in Alabama as National Monuments, establishing the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and the Anniston Freedom Riders National Monument.

President Obama used the authority given to him by the [Antiquities Act](#), to make the presidential proclamation, which enables him to establish national monuments on federal lands, in order to protect significant natural, cultural or scientific features.

# Presidential Proclamation

## Establishment of the Freedom Riders National Monument.



The Freedom Riders National Monument is a United States National Monument in Anniston, Alabama established by President Barack Obama in January 2017 to preserve and commemorate the Freedom Riders during the Civil Rights Movement. The monument is administered by the National Park Service.

The Freedom Riders National Monument is one of three National Monuments that was designated by presidential proclamation of President Obama on January 12, 2017. The

second was the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and the third, the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, was re-designated as a National Historical Park on March 12, 2019.

The Freedom Riders National Monument comprises two locations, one in downtown Anniston itself and the other outside town.

The first site designated as part of the national monument is the former Greyhound bus depot at 1031 Gurnee Avenue in Anniston, where, on May 14, 1961, a mob attacked the Freedom Riders. The City of Anniston owned the premise prior to its donation to the United States government.



The second site incorporated into the new national monument is that of the bus burning, located outside of Anniston along Old Birmingham Highway/State Route 202 some 6 miles (9.7 km) away from the Greyhound station. It was at this spot that the bus broke down because of its flat tires.



**Video. Freedom Rider speaking at speaking at the establishment of the Freedom Rider Monument on May 13, 2017.**

A dedication ceremony took place on May 13, 2017, in downtown Anniston, on the day before the 56th anniversary of the incident; some members of the audience had traveled from as far away as Denmark. Freedom Rider Hank Thomas, the last living survivor of the bus-burning incident, delivered a speech.

## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FREEDOM RIDERS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

### **BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

#### **A PROCLAMATION**

An interracial group of "Freedom Riders" set out in May 1961 on a journey from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans through the Deep South. In organizing the 1961 Freedom Rides, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was building upon earlier efforts of other civil rights organizations, including the 1947 "Journey of Reconciliation," an integrated bus ride through the segregated Upper South. The purpose of the 1961 Freedom Rides was to test if bus station facilities in the Deep South were complying with U.S. Supreme Court decisions. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) had reversed the infamous "separate but equal" doctrine in public education, and *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946) and *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960) had struck down Virginia laws compelling segregation in interstate travel.

These rulings were the result of successful litigation brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which laid the groundwork for direct action campaigns by civil rights organizations like CORE, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). These organizations had gathered strength, and by the 1950s had launched mass movements that demonstrated the power of nonviolent protest. At the same time, reaction to the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* had heightened racial tensions in the country, especially in the Deep South. White Citizens' Councils, made up of politicians, businessmen, and civic leaders committed to resisting integration, formed throughout the South. In 1956, over 100 members of Congress signed the "Southern Manifesto," which criticized the *Brown* decision and called for resistance to its implementation. This campaign of massive resistance launched by white segregationists reinforced their determination to assure continued separation of the races in public spaces.

Against this background, on May 4, 1961, in Washington, D.C., eleven Freedom Riders split into two groups and boarded two buses, a Greyhound bus and a Trailways bus, bound for New Orleans. The Greyhound bus carrying the first of these groups left Atlanta, Georgia on Sunday, May 14, and pulled into a Greyhound bus station in Anniston, Alabama later that day. There, a segregationist mob, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, violently attacked the Freedom Riders. The attackers threw rocks at the bus, broke windows, and slashed tires. Belatedly, police officers arrived and cleared a path, allowing the bus to depart with a long line of vehicles in pursuit. Two cars pulled ahead of the bus and forced the bus to slow to a crawl.

Six miles outside of town, the bus's slashed tires gave out and the driver stopped on the shoulder of Highway 202. There, with the Freedom Riders onboard, one member of the mob threw a flaming bundle of rags through one of the windows that caused an explosion seconds later. The Freedom Riders struggled to escape as members of the mob attempted to trap them inside the burning bus. When they finally broke free, they received little aid for their injuries. Later that day, deacons dispatched by Reverend Fred L. Shuttlesworth of Birmingham's Bethel Baptist Church rescued the Freedom Riders from the hostile mob at Anniston Hospital and drove them to Birmingham for shelter at the church. A freelance photojournalist captured the horrific scene of the attack in photographs, which appeared on the front pages of newspapers across America the next day. The brutal portrayal of segregation in the South shocked many Americans and forced the issue of racial segregation in interstate travel to the forefront of the American conscience.

When the Trailways bus, which had departed Atlanta an hour after the Greyhound bus, arrived in Anniston, the Trailways station was mostly quiet. A group of Klansmen boarded the bus and forcibly segregated the Freedom Riders. With all aboard, the bus left on its

two-hour trip to Birmingham during which the Klansmen continued to intimidate and harass the Freedom Riders.

When the Trailways bus arrived in Birmingham, a mob of white men and women attacked the Freedom Riders, reporters, and bystanders with fists, iron pipes, baseball bats, and other weapons, while the police department under the charge of Commissioner of Public Safety T. Eugene "Bull" Connor was nowhere to be seen. After fifteen minutes of violence, the mob retreated and the police appeared. Leaders of the Nashville Student Movement, including members of SNCC, firmly believed that they could not let violence prevail over nonviolence.

They organized an interracial group of volunteers to travel to Birmingham and resume the Freedom Rides. Under police protection negotiated with help from the Kennedy Administration, on May 20, these SNCC Freedom Riders departed Birmingham en route to Montgomery, Alabama, where an angry white mob viciously attacked them. The next night, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. -- who had not been involved in the planning of the Freedom Rides -- joined Reverend Ralph David Abernathy and Reverend Shuttlesworth at a mass meeting in Abernathy's First Baptist Church in Montgomery.

A white mob gathered outside the church, attacked African American onlookers, and held hostage the civil rights leaders and approximately 1,500 attendees inside the church. King remained in telephone communication with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy while U.S. marshals attempted to repel the siege. Finally, Governor John Patterson was forced to declare martial law and send in the National Guard.

Media coverage of the Freedom Rides inspired many people to take action and join the effort to end racial inequality. Over the summer of 1961, the number of Freedom Riders grew to over 400, many of whom were arrested and jailed for their activism. The Freedom Rides of 1961 focused national attention on Southern segregationists' disregard for U.S. Supreme Court rulings and the violence that they used to enforce unconstitutional State and local segregation laws and practices. The Freedom Rides forced the Federal Government to take steps to ban segregation in interstate bus travel. On May 29, 1961, Attorney General Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to issue regulations banning segregation, and the ICC subsequently decreed that by November 1, 1961, bus carriers and terminals serving interstate travel had to be integrated.

As described above, the sites of these events contain objects of historic interest from a critical period of American history.

WHEREAS, section 320301 of title 54, United States Code (known as the "Antiquities Act"), authorizes the President, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic

landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Federal Government to be national monuments, and to reserve as a part thereof parcels of land, the limits of which shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected;

WHEREAS, the City of Anniston has donated to The Conservation Fund fee title to the former Greyhound bus station building in downtown Anniston, Alabama, approximately 0.17 acres of land;

WHEREAS, Calhoun County has donated to The Conservation Fund fee title to the site of the bus burning outside Anniston, Alabama, approximately 5.79 acres of land;

WHEREAS, The Conservation Fund has relinquished and conveyed all of these lands to the United States of America;

WHEREAS, it is in the public interest to preserve and protect the historic objects associated with the former Greyhound bus station in Anniston, Alabama, and the site of the bus burning outside Anniston in Calhoun County, Alabama;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by the authority vested in me by section 320301 of title 54, United States Code, hereby proclaim the objects identified above that are situated upon lands and interests in lands owned or controlled by the Federal Government to be the Freedom Riders National Monument (monument) and, for the purpose of protecting those objects, reserve as a part thereof all lands and interests in lands owned or controlled by the Federal Government within the boundaries described on the accompanying map, which is attached to and forms a part of this proclamation. The reserved Federal lands and interests in lands encompass approximately 5.96 acres. The boundaries described on the accompanying map are confined to the smallest area compatible with the proper care and management of the objects to be protected.

All Federal lands and interests in lands within the boundaries described on the accompanying map are hereby appropriated and withdrawn from all forms of entry, location, selection, sale, or other disposition under the public land laws, from location, entry, and patent under the mining laws, and from disposition under all laws relating to mineral and geothermal leasing.

The establishment of the monument is subject to valid existing rights. If the Federal Government acquires any lands or interests in lands not owned or controlled by the Federal Government within the boundaries described on the accompanying map, such lands and interests in lands shall be reserved as a part of the monument, and objects identified above that are situated upon those lands and interests in lands shall be part of

the monument, upon acquisition of ownership or control by the Federal Government. The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) shall manage the monument through the National Park Service, pursuant to applicable legal authorities, consistent with the purposes and provisions of this proclamation. The Secretary shall use available authorities, as appropriate, to enter into agreements with others to address common interests and promote management needs and efficiencies.

The Secretary shall prepare a management plan, with full public involvement, within 3 years of the date of this proclamation. The management plan shall ensure that the monument fulfills the following purposes for the benefit of present and future generations: (1) to preserve and protect the objects of historic interest associated with the monument, and (2) to interpret the objects, resources, and values related to the civil rights movement. The management plan shall, among other things, set forth the desired relationship of the monument to other related resources, programs, and organizations, both within and outside the National Park System.

Nothing in this proclamation shall be deemed to revoke any existing withdrawal, reservation, or appropriation; however, the monument shall be the dominant reservation. Warning is hereby given to all unauthorized persons not to appropriate, injure, destroy, or remove any feature of this monument and not to locate or settle upon any of the lands thereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand seventeen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-first.

**BARACK OBAMA**





Freedom Riders National Monument, Anniston, Alabama



### **Freedom Riders National Monument, Anniston, Alabama**

Several Freedom Riders and Rev. J. Phillips Noble, author of “Beyond the Burning Bus,” made remarshaled remarks at 4 p.m. The four Freedom Riders attending will be Hank Thomas, Charles Person, Glenda Gaither Davis, and Bill Harbor, who also serves as co-chair of the freedom riders park board.

The event also will include a meet-and-greet with the Freedom Riders and the unveiling of National Park Service signs for the site.



**Freedom Riders National Monument, Anniston, Alabama**



**Eight Freedom Riders,' five Whites and three Black people, have left New Orleans for the first train ride assault on the South's segregation laws. The group departed New Orleans 5/30 aboard the City of New Orleans bound for Jackson, Mississippi. All are graduates of a hastily arranged school for 'Freedom Riders' in New Orleans.**

# Mississippi Jackson



**"Freedom Riders" surrounded by photographers prepare to board a Trailways bus for Mississippi from Montgomery, Alabama, under heavy guard by state troopers and National Guardsmen**



**May 22. State Injunction Against 'Freedom Riders: Gov. John Patterson (L), an anxious look on his face, confers with Floyd Mann, Alabama Public Safety Director, at the Capitol. Mann's department distributed a state injunction against 'Freedom Riders' to state highway patrolmen with orders to read it aboard interstate buses, which will be stopped as they enter the Alabama.**



**Rev. Ralph Abernathy (Rear C) participating in prayers prior to Freedom Riders' bus trip from Montgomery, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi. (Photo by Lee Lockwood/Getty Images)**



**Freedom riders waiting to board a bus to Jackson, Miss.**





National Guardsmen and U.S. marshals from Mississippi are seen through a bus window as Freedom Riders travel from Montgomery, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi.



**National Guardsmen holding guns and standing alongside a road were dispatched by-Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Getty Images**



**National guardsmen a bus en route from Montgomery, Alabama, as civil rights activists known as the Freedom Riders head for Jackson, Mississippi, 26th May 1961. (Photo by Express/Archive Photos/Getty Images)**



**The third Trailways bus from Montgomery, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi, May 24, 1961. Freedom Riders Julia Aaron & David Dennis sitting on board interstate bus as they and 25 others are escorted by 2 National Guardsmen holding bayonets, on way from Montgomery, AL to Jackson, MS. Photo by Paul Schutzer**

Julia Aaron Humbles, known at the time as Julia Aaron, was a twenty-year-old student at Southern University in New Orleans. *“Every time I saw a sign that said, ‘white only’ or ‘white’ or ‘colored’ I had to attack that,”* Julia told News with a Twist’s LeBron Joseph in an interview in 2013. *“I had to go get some of the white water. It bothered me. When you see those who look at you, who’ve never seen you before, and the hate that comes out of them. We began to really become involved in the movement.”*

David Dennis attended Dillard University in New Orleans and was not initially interested in civil rights protests. However, the turning point was a statement said in the meeting debating whether to continue the Freedom Rides or not when someone stood up and said, “There is no space in this room for both God and fear.” He made a choice to be on that bus, to continue the ride. Dennis dropped out of school to pursue this new path but received his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees from Dillard University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Michigan Law School.



**May 26, 1961. Freedom Riders en route from Montgomery, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi. (Photo by Daily Express/Archive Photos/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)**



The view from a bus window during the trip from Montgomery, Alabama to Jackson, Mississippi.  
Paul Schutzer/The LIFE Premium Collection/Getty Images



**Jackson, Mississippi police line city streets near the bus station as Freedom Riders arrived May 1961.**

The first two buses of Freedom Riders arrived in Jackson, Mississippi on May 24. There was no ardent white mob waiting. Several hundred supporters greeted the riders. As the Riders exited the buses and tested the whites-only or colored waiting areas, they were immediately ushered by police into a waiting paddy wagon and whisked to jail arrested not for violating segregation laws - but for Breach of Peace and Refusal to Obey an Officer.



**Nashville Freedom Riders Rip Patton (left) and Bernard LaFayette (aisle) with James Lawson seated behind them on the bus headed into Jackson MS with National Guard troops standing guard.**



**Freedom Riders disembark from their bus (marked Dallas), en route from Montgomery, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi on 26th May 1961. (Photo by Daily Express/Archive Photos/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)**

Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett defended of segregation for inhumane reason: Hear him: ["The Negro is different because God made him different to punish him."](#)



**Ross Barnett, the segregationist Governor of Mississippi.**

Ross Barnett (January 22, 1898–November 6, 1987) served one term as Mississippi's governor, but he remains one of the state's most well-known chief executives due in large part to his willingness to oppose civil rights efforts by imprisoning protesters, defying federal law, inciting insurrection, and functioning as a mouthpiece for the Mississippi white supremacist movement. Barnett aligned himself with powerful White citizens who believed Mississippi, not the U.S. government, should be allowed to decide whether or not to uphold segregation. Freedom Riders arrested, convicted, and sent to jail.





**May 26: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sits on a couch and speaks on the telephone in view of white mob protests against the Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Alabama, (Photo by Express Newspapers/Getty Images)**

## **Jail No Bail**

In the jail, the Freedom Riders shouted, "Jail No Bail" and were not paying fines for what they maintained were unconstitutional arrests and illegal convictions. More than 300 Riders arrested in Jackson, Miss., refused to pay their fines and chose to serve sentences. In these dynamics, they preferred staying in jail and keeping the cause alive. Every prisoner stayed in jail for 39 days.

Once the Jackson and Hinds County jails were filled to overflowing, the state transferred the Freedom Riders to the infamous Mississippi State Penitentiary (known as Parchman Farm) in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. The Parchman Prison Farm was one of the most notorious prisons in America dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.

Governor Barnett would privately say, "*We don't want to break their bones. We only want to break their spirits.*"<sup>22</sup> This statement captures the resilience and determination of the Freedom Riders. Sometimes, it is not about physical strength, but rather the unconquerable spirit that drives change makers forward.

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<sup>22</sup> Arsenault, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. Oxford University Press, 2007.



**A Freedom Rider being searched by a Jackson police officer after charged with the “breach of peace.” Seventeen others were also jailed on this charge. Police harassment was a tactic used by law enforcement to prevent challenges to the southern status quo.**



gettyimages  
Credit: Bettmann

**Prior to roll call for about 170 Freedom Riders in a college church, this guitar accompanied group broke into several of CORE's Sit-in Songs. Cut on appeal bond, the Riders returned from locations as New York, Minnesota, and California, to meet the August term of Hinds County Court, where they will be tried two each day. Photo by Bettmann Archive/Getty Images**



**James Farmer consulting with the lawyer who represented the Freedom Riders.**



**NAACP Rally in Jackson, Mississippi. 1500 people attended a NAACP nighttime rally on August 13, 1961, among them some 170 'Freedom Riders' in town to appeal previous convictions before the August term of Hinds County Court. James Farmer, of New York, National Director of CORE, gestures dramatically as he gives the main address of rally.**



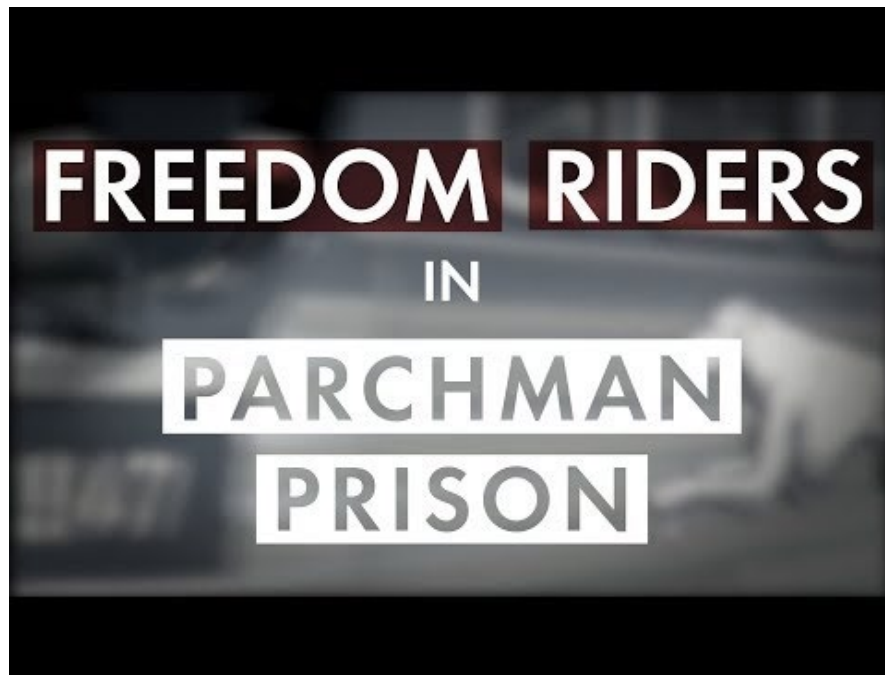
**May 24. Twenty-seven Freedom Riders were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi (THE CHARGE.....Whites & Blacks sitting at the Front of a Bus in their state). On June 12, 1961, Hinds County Board of Supervisors announced that more than one hundred "Freedom Riders" had been arrested.**

## Parchman Prison

Parchman had a reputation as a particularly inhospitable and cruel place. Basic jail cells had open toilets and were often rife with mice and insects, some with soiled mattresses. Abusive treatment of arriving female Freedom Riders included a Lysol-based vaginal examinations.

Most Riders jailed were issued only underwear, had no exercise, and received no mail. Some were placed in the maximum-security unit on death row. Others were subject to solitary confinement or thrown in extremely crowded cells.

Mississippi's Governor Ross Barnett set out "to teach 'em a lesson" and "break the back" of their movement. By doing "real time in a real prison" like Parchman, Barnett believed his Mississippi jailers would give the Riders an education they would remember, helping to end the Freedom Rides.



*Click on the video to listen. Determination! Courage!*

But Barnett and the jailers underestimated the resolve and ingenuity of the Freedom Riders. Among other measures to maintain their spirits while jailed, the Riders sang freedom and folk songs – among them, "**Buses Are A'Comin, Oh Yeah,**" which surely made their jailers boil with anger and anxiety.

May 25, 1962

Committee of Inquiry  
38 Park Row, New York 38, New York  
COrtlandt 7-6270

Att: Marvin Rich

James Farmer, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality.

-----  
A year ago, on May 24, 27 of us in two buses arrived at Jackson, Mississippi, the first in Jackson to test the Boynton decision of the U. S. Supreme Court desegregating terminal facilities in interstate commerce. We were met by about 50 police, with 3 police dogs. Almost immediately, we were all arrested -- some of us before we reached the door of the restaurant. The charge was breach of the peace. We went first to the local jail, then before the local court where we were found guilty, fined \$200 and given suspended sentences of 2 months. We went to jail to work off our fines at the rate of \$3 a day.

We were next in the Hinds County Jail, then the county prison farm, then the maximum security unit of the state prison at Parchman, the first of the 325 Freedom Riders to make this tour of Mississippi jails. Our being arrested was not extraordinary. Since the sit-ins in Greensboro, N. C., in February, 1960, more than 5,000 civil rights demonstrators have been arrested.

Parchman is a flat one-story building surrounded by a high chain-link fence topped with rolls of barbed wire. In the cell block our clothes were taken from us; we were given ill-fitted shorts; mattresses were taken away; we slept on the floor; in very hot weather, windows were closed and fans turned off. Most of the 325 riders were 39 days in jail, chiefly in Parchman.

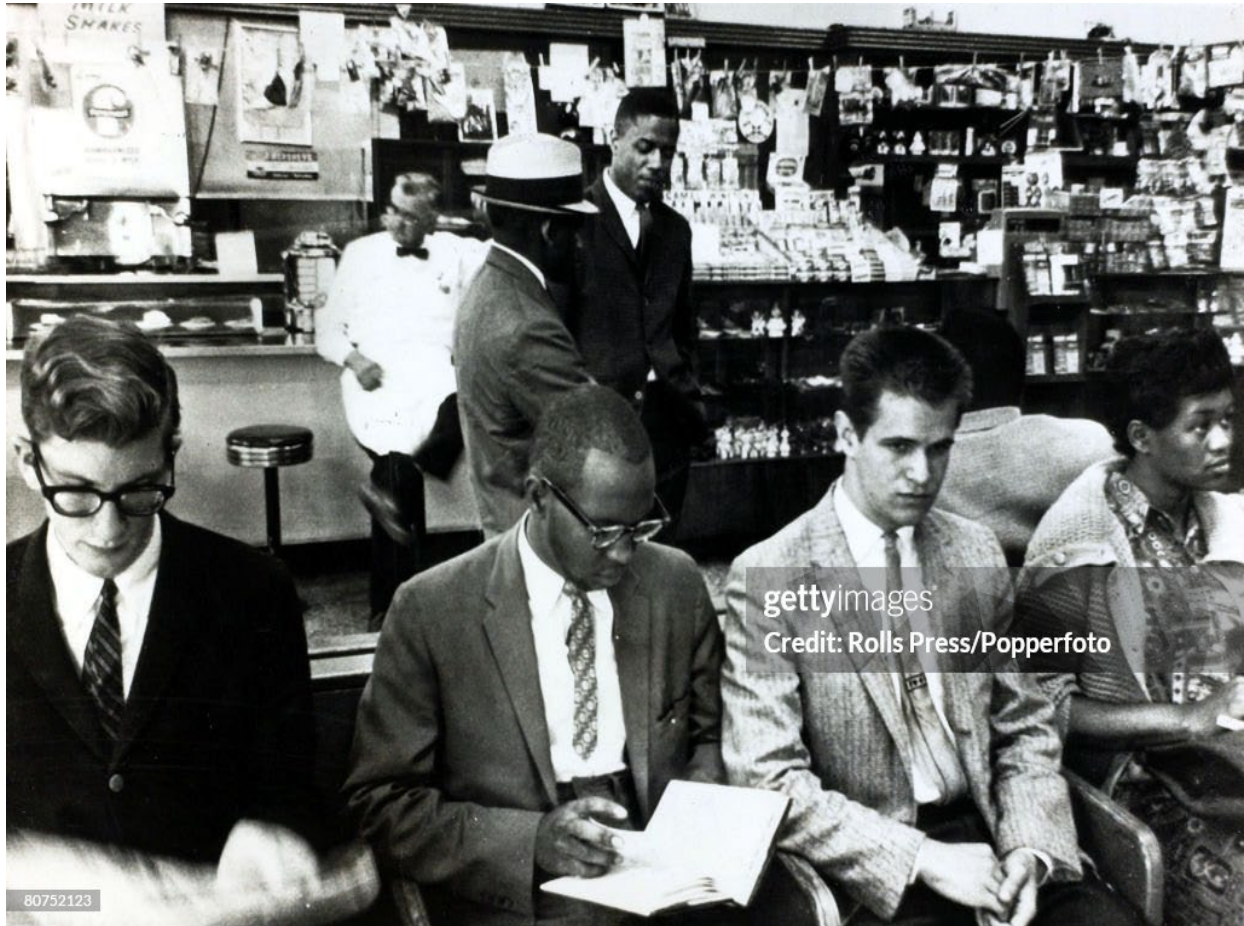
Sentences reached 6 months for other riders. We decided to appeal; appeal bonds were first set at \$500 for each of us, for many bond later reached \$1,500, and for one, \$2,000. We have all appeared before the county court for arraignment and most of us again for trial. Trials are still going on at the rate of 2 a day, 10 a week, and will continue for another month. This despite the Supreme Court ruling of last February 26: "We have settled beyond question that no state may require racial segregation of interstate and intrastate transportation facilities."

To pay bonds, and riders' travel costs to and from Hinds County court, CORE has spent privately more than \$350,000. No bonding company was found that would give bond. In the best possible estimate -- there are no exact figures -- since the Greensboro sit-ins total demand for bonds of all kinds, cash and other, in civil rights cases exceeded 2 million dollars.

Meanwhile, back in Montgomery, more Riders were preparing for the trip to Jackson. On May 28th, and in the days thereafter, additional buses with more Freedom Riders made the trip to Jackson.



When the jailed Riders refused to stop singing, prison officials took away their mattresses and toothbrushes. But the Riders kept singing and devised other strategies to survive their jail time. Most would endure a sentence of about 45 days.



**On 28th May 1961, Montgomery, Alabama, some Freedom Riders defied the system at the Trailways bus station sit in the "white only" section of the waiting room (Photo by Rolls Press/Popperfoto via Getty Images/Getty Images)**



**Mug shots of some of the Freedom Riders jailed at Parchman Prison Farm**

Among many arrested in Jackson included **Stokley Carmichael** (19), **Catherine Burks** (21), **Gloria Bouknight** (20), **Luvahgn Brown** (16), **Margaret Leonard** (19), **Helen O'Neal** (20), **Hank Thomas** (20), **Carol Silver** (22), **Hezekiah Watkins** (13), **Peter Stoner** (22), **Byron Baer** (31), and **LeRoy Glenn Wright** (19).



Among those who departed from Montgomery on May 28th for Jackson was Pauline Knight, a 20-year-old Tennessee State student. She was arrested in Jackson and later lead a brief hunger strike among female Rider-inmates. Describing the motivation that led Knight to participate in the Freedom Rides, she said: *"It was like a wave or a wind, and you didn't know where it was coming from, but you knew you were supposed to be there. Nobody asked me, nobody told me."*



June 1961: A police paddy wagon in Jackson, Mississippi arrested Freedom Riders aboard. Photo from "Breach of Peace" book, Eric Etheridge.

The hundreds of Riders, exemplified by Pauline Knight, were participating out of personal conviction, each coming from different cities, but each making a similar decision to come directly. It was a simple but powerful statement of democratic action – one that augured well for America’s future, and a proud moment.



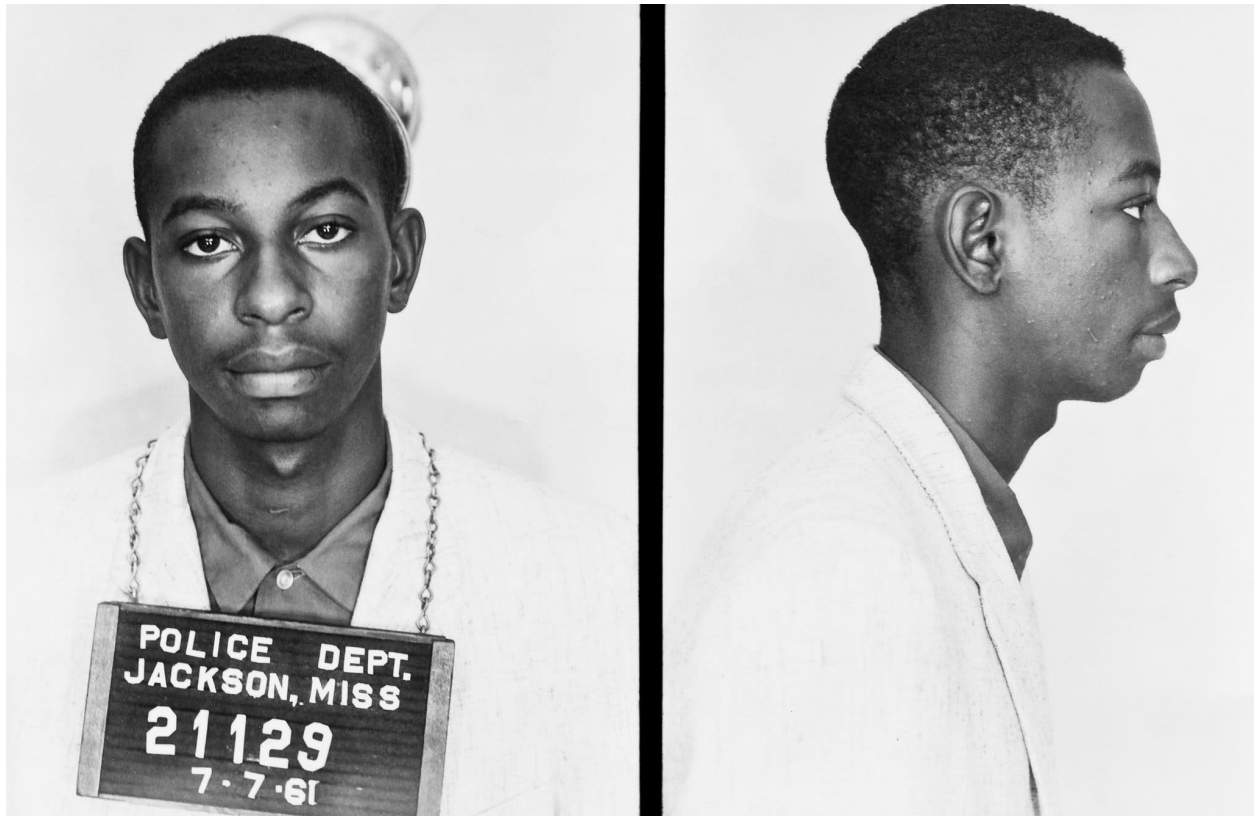
During the Mississippi hearings, the judge turned and looked at the wall rather than listen to the Freedom Riders’ defense—as had been the case when sit-in participants were arrested for protesting segregated lunch counters in Tennessee. He sentenced the riders to 30 days in jail.

Attorneys from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), appealed the convictions all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which reversed them.



**A group of the "Freedom Riders" sit in a truck as they wait to leave for the Hinds County Farm in Jackson, Miss., May 29, 1961. Twenty-two of the "riders" who were left in the county jail were transferred. (AP Photo/Ferd Kaufman)**

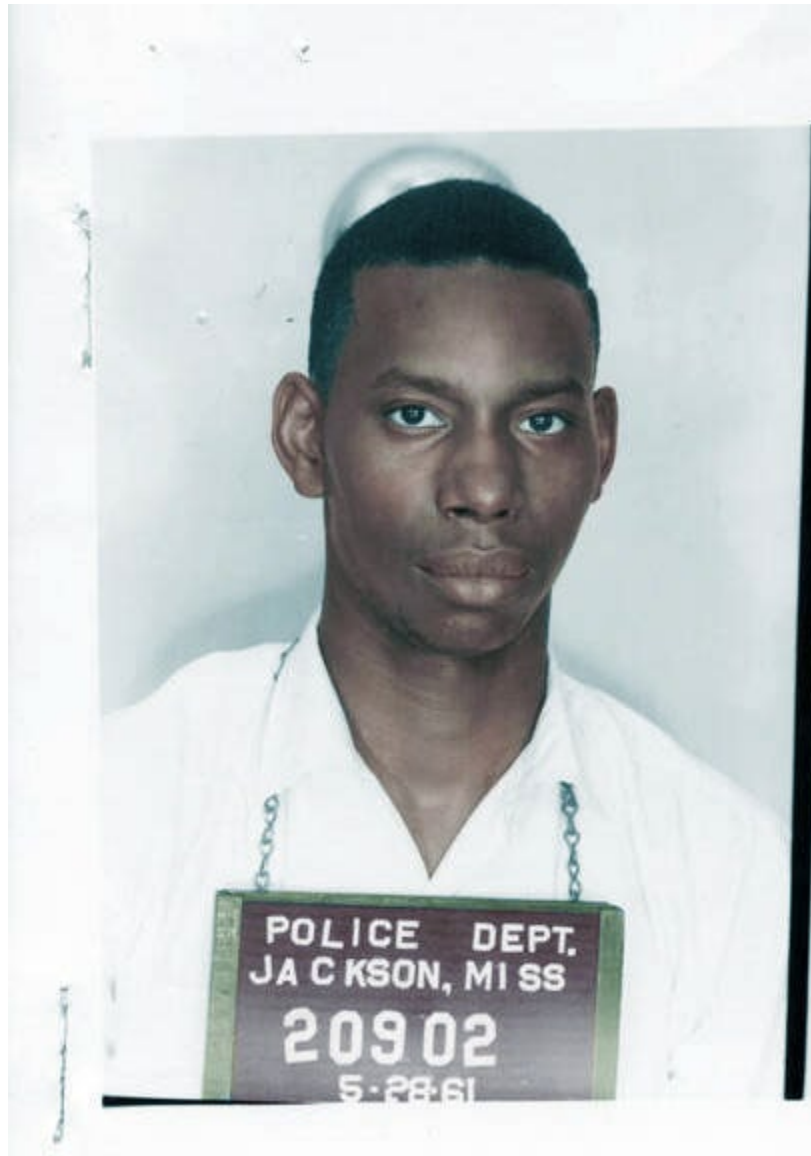
## Some unsung heroes and heroines



Hezekiah Watkins was on summer break between 8th and 9th grade when he was pushed into history, becoming the youngest person arrested during the 1961 Freedom Rides. Five days inside Mississippi death row cell transformed him from a comic book-loving kid into a lifelong activist.



**Winonah Margaret Beamer, age 19. Beamer was arrested at 5:35 a.m. at Jackson, Mississippi's central depot after arriving from Nashville. Matt Loughrey/My Colorful Past.**



**William Edd Harbour, age 19. Harbour was expelled from his Tennessee college due to his participation in the Freedom Rides. Matt Loughrey/My Colorful Past.**

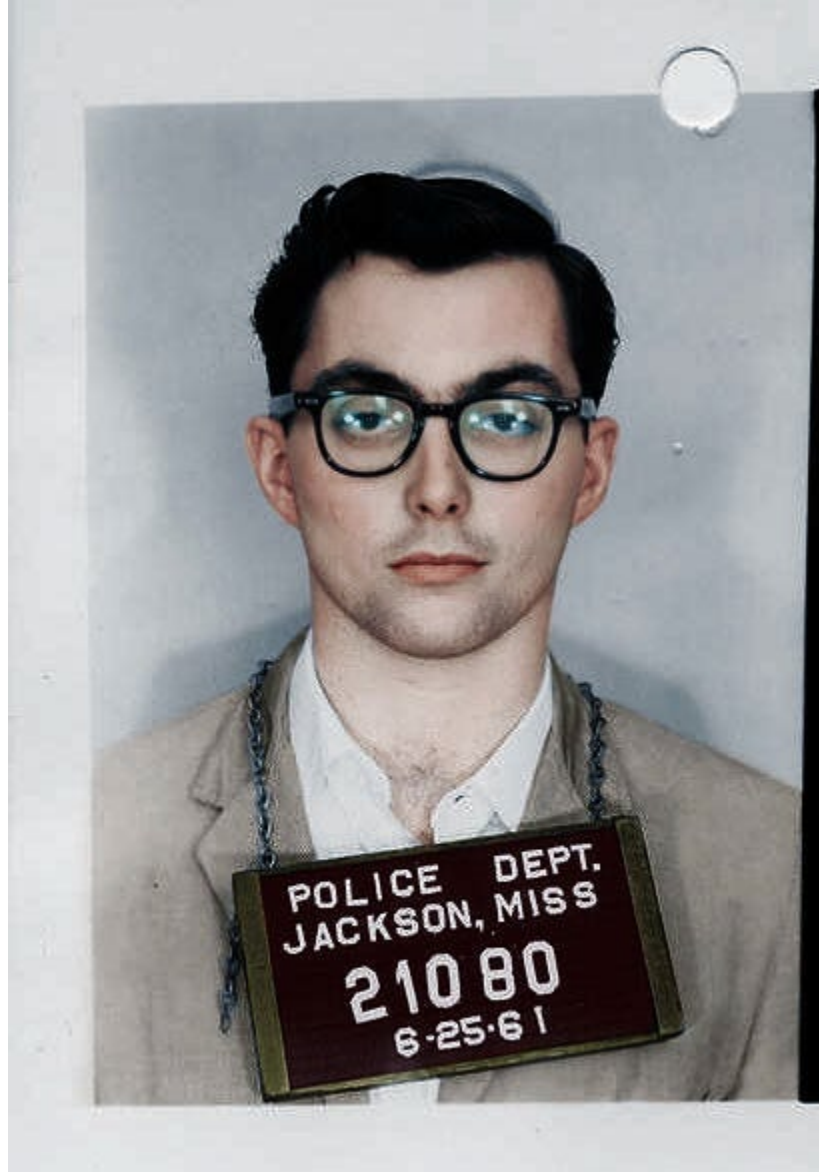




Patricia Elaine Bryant, age 20. Bryant was a member of the twelfth group of Freedom Riders that were arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, coming from Nashville, at 5:30 a.m.



Jorgia Siegel, age 19. She was arrested for a breach of the peace and for sitting next to a Black person on a bus. She spent 40 days in jail. Matt Loughrey/My Colorful Past.



John Luther Dolan, age 20. Dolan was a member of the CORE in 1961.



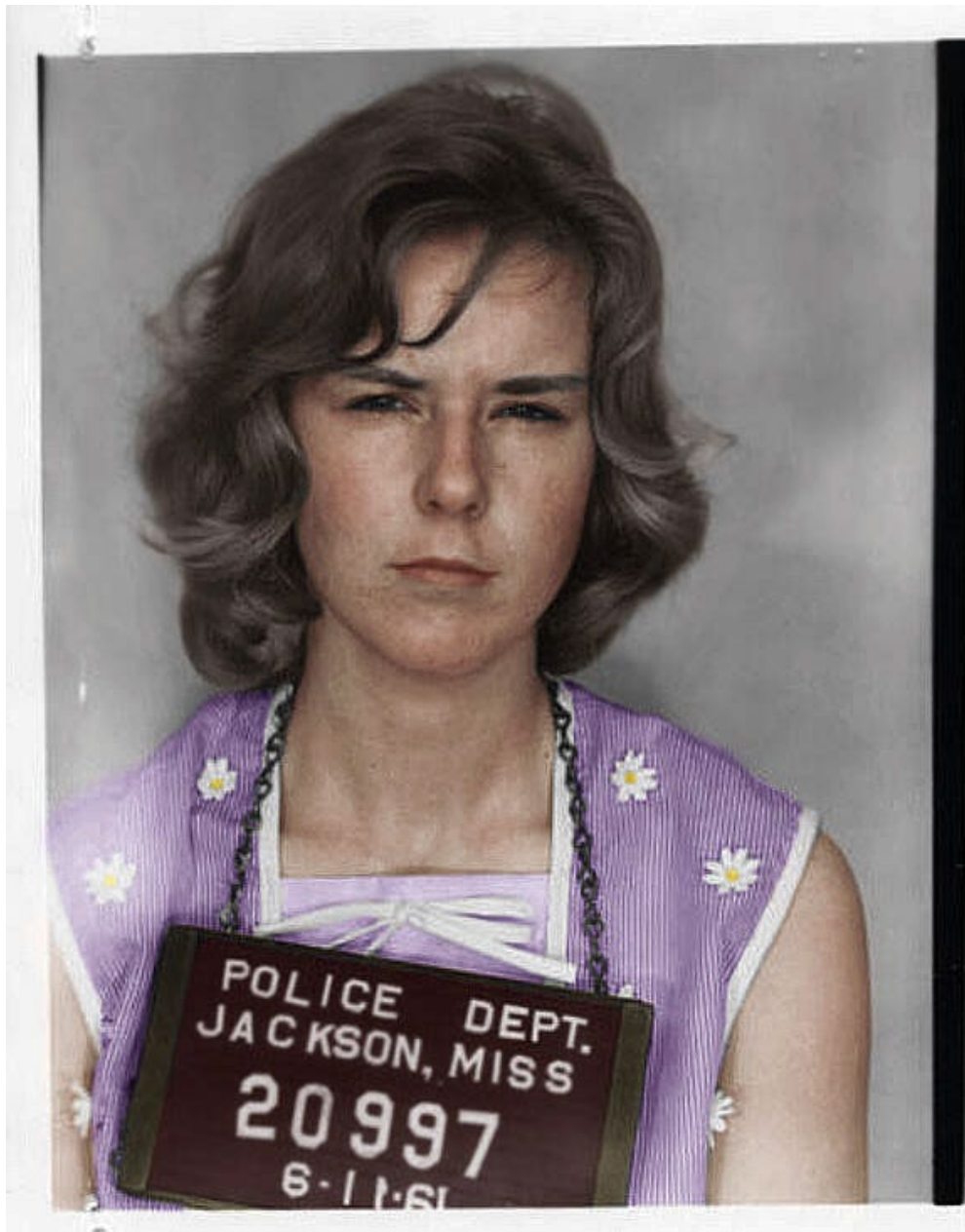
Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, age 19. For two months, she was held with other civil rights activists on Parchman Penitentiary's death row.



Helene Dorothy Wilson, age 26. Wilson worked as an activist with the Nonviolent Action Group and the Congress of Racial Equality.



David Kerr Morton, age 21. Morton was arrested at the Jackson, Mississippi bus depot for trying to order a meal in the colored section.



Claire O'Connor, age 22. O'Connor was a student at the University of Minnesota when she was arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for her participation in a Freedom Ride.



Kredelle Petway, age 20. Petway was a student at Florida A & M University in Tallahassee when she was arrested for her participation in the Freedom Rides during the summer of 1961.





**Lucretia Collins, 21, "Freedom Rider" from Fairbanks, Alaska, walks to plane in Jackson, May 27, 1961, after being freed from the county jail on \$500 bond. (AP Photo).**



**Freedom Riders” Levert Taylor, 20, and Glenda Jackson, both of Shreveport, La., are shown with police officer W.L. Copeland at Jackson, Miss., on Nov. 1, 1961, in Jackson, Miss., after their arrest on a breach of peace charge for refusing to move out of the white waiting room at a bus station there.. (AP Photo/Jim Bourdier)**



*Click on the image to watch the video.*

*"I was an original 'Freedom Rider.' I was attacked and beaten by the Klu Klux Klan [sic] in Alabama; and I walked among the giants of the Civil Rights Movement, and I felt at home. The lumps and bruises on my head are a daily reminder of my commitment and my obligations." — Charles Person, "My Reflection of Years Gone By."*

The lessons also demonstrate the courage and critical role of activists in bringing about change, especially when officials are conflicted between ideals and the realities politics. It allows students to learn something about the grassroots protests against exclusion, public response, and a renewed commitment to right.



A small cross-section of the 328 Freedom Riders who were arrested in Mississippi during the summer of 1961 – most of whom were processed in Jackson, MS and served time in Parchman State Prison for their “crime.”

The Mississippi Freedom Rider mug shots helped bring a new dimension to the Freedom Rider story, and many are now circulating on the web with personal histories attached, including “where-are-they-now” details. This visual record also helped enliven the 2011 PBS documentary mentioned earlier, and in some cases the photos have also been used on more recent book covers, magazine specials, websites, and DVDs exploring Freedom Rider history. They have also been used in special exhibits and in displays at some museums. A dozen or so are also offered below in “Sources,” only as a sampling, with very brief sketches.

Source: Jack Doyle, “Buses Are A’Comin’ - Freedom Riders: 1961, PopHistoryDig.com, June 24, 2014.

## Kennedy Offers Cooling Period

In Washington, the Kennedy Administration was suffering from bad press abroad as new reports of the Freedom Ride violence spread around the world at the height of Cold War. The Soviet Union criticized the United States for its racism and the attacks on the Riders.

The part of the *land of the free* sounded like a mockery with White segregationists stifling freedom with barbaric acts, while the part of *home of the brave* was projected by the interracial integrationists represented by the Freedom Riders with nonviolent means.

Attorney General Robert Kennedy called for a "cooling off period" and condemned the Rides as unpatriotic because they embarrassed the nation on the world stage at the height of the Cold War.

*"A very difficult condition exists now in the states of Mississippi and Alabama. Besides the groups of 'Freedom Riders' traveling through these states, there are curiosity seekers, publicity seekers and others who are seeking to serve their own causes, as well as many persons who are traveling because they must use the interstate carriers to reach their destination. In this confused situation, there is an increasing possibility that innocent persons may be injured. A mob asks no questions.*

*A cooling off period is needed. It would be wise for those traveling through these two Sites to delay their trips until the present state of confusion and danger has passed and an atmosphere of reason and normalcy has been restored."-US Attorney General Robert Kennedy.*

James Farmer, head of CORE, responded to Kennedy saying, *"We have been cooling off for 350 years, and if we cooled off anymore, we'd be in a deep freeze."*

On May 25, 1961, Robert. Kennedy delivered an idealistic radio broadcast for Voice of America (VOA), defending America's record on race relations to the rest of the world, insisting that *"there is no reason that in the near or the foreseeable future, a Negro could [not] become President of the United States."* VOA is listened to around the world.

Four days later, on May 29, Robert Kennedy formally petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to adopt "stringent regulations" prohibiting segregation in interstate bus travel. He formally sent a petition to the (ICC) asking it to comply with the bus-desegregation ruling it had issued in November 1955, in *Sarah Keys v. Carolina Coach Company*. That ruling had explicitly rebutted the concept of "separate but equal" in the realm of interstate bus travel. But Chaired by the South Carolina Democrat J. Monroe Johnson the ICC had failed to implement its own ruling.

The order was proposed on May 29, issued on September 22 and it became effective on November 1. The order removed Jim Crow signs in stations and ended segregation of waiting rooms, water fountains, and restrooms in interstate bus terminals later that same year, giving the Freedom Riders an unequivocal victory in their campaign.

# Summer Escalation

LATE FINAL **The Birmingham News** COOLER  
17TH YEAR—NO. 62 12 Pages—2 Sections BIRMINGHAM, ALA., MONDAY, MAY 15, 1961 PRICE: 5 CENTS

## INTEGRATIONIST GROUP CONTINUING TRIP AFTER BRUTAL BEATINGS HERE

### Mob terror hits city on Mothers Day

BY TOM LOCKFORD, Staff writer

Mothers Day had passed quietly, happily in Birmingham here until the moment the huge, daily bus arrived at the Trailways depot.

Monday—the date in general—a bitter beating of what would be called a mob.

It did seem like a setting on a scene of violence and chaos. The mob was not a mob of the kind that had been seen in the streets of Birmingham in the past. It was a mob of the kind that had been seen in the streets of Birmingham in the past. It was a mob of the kind that had been seen in the streets of Birmingham in the past.

### JFK meeting with K. now thought likely

BY CHARLES CAULFIELD, Staff writer

WASHINGTON, May 14 (AP)—A meeting between President Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy is now thought likely to take place in the near future.

### 'Freedom' bus target of Anniston mob

By a handful of a mob, a Freedom bus was targeted in Anniston, Ala., Monday. The mob, which was made up of several hundred people, surrounded the bus and began to beat it. The bus was set on fire and the mob then fled.

### Racial fighting erupts at Trailways station

By a mob of several hundred people, a Freedom bus was targeted in Birmingham, Ala., Monday. The mob, which was made up of several hundred people, surrounded the bus and began to beat it. The bus was set on fire and the mob then fled.

### Trouble blamed on out-of-towners

By a mob of several hundred people, a Freedom bus was targeted in Birmingham, Ala., Monday. The mob, which was made up of several hundred people, surrounded the bus and began to beat it. The bus was set on fire and the mob then fled.



CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC rejected any "cooling off period". They formed a Freedom Riders Coordinating Committee to keep the Rides rolling through June, July, August, and September. The maps showed some of the routes traveled through July 1961 – although additional Rides would continue into November and even December 1961.



**Hampton Alumni Association in Richmond. Attendees listening to a guest speaker named Reverend William Warren recounting his experience as a Freedom Rider, Freedom Riders.**



*PBS “Freedom Riders” map showing routes traveled as of July 1961, when over 367 Riders had participated.*

During those months, more than 60 different Freedom Rides crisscrossed the South, most of them converging on Jackson, where every Rider was arrested, more than 300 in total. An unknown number were arrested in other Southern towns. It is estimated that almost 450 people participated in one or more Freedom Rides.



A 19-year-old Duke University student, Joan Trumpauer arrived in Jackson, MS by train from New Orleans, LA as part of a June 4, 1961, Freedom Ride. Arrested that day, she was later transferred to Parchman Prison, where among other things, she was subject to a forced vaginal examination. In 1964, she became a Freedom Summer organizer, later worked at various jobs in Washington, DC, and taught English as a second language.





**Freedom Rider Julia Aaron having a conversation with a police officer.**

In Jackson, Freedom Riders received support from local grassroots civil rights organization, Womanpower Unlimited, which raised money and collected toiletries, soap, candy, and magazines for the imprisoned protesters.



### 2013. Civil Rights History Project: Joan Trumpauer Mulholland

Library of Congress

Womanpower Unlimited was an interracial and interdenominational group. It was considered instrumental in the success of the Freedom Riders. Upon Freedom Riders' release, its members provided places for them to bathe and offered them clothes and food. Freedom Rider Joan Trumpauer Mulholland said the Womanpower members "*were like angels supplying us with just little simple necessities.*"

Freedom Riders also campaigned against other forms of racial discrimination. They sat together in segregated restaurants, lunch counters and hotels. This was especially effective when they targeted large companies, such as hotel chains. Fearing boycotts in the North, the hotels began to desegregate their businesses.

Freedom Riders would also test compliance with court decisions in train and plane routes and their related facilities — waiting areas, restrooms, and restaurants — at train stations and airports. Riders also went to Arkansas, Florida, and Texas; some came from New York and Los Angeles. In fact, they came from all regions of the U.S., and some from Canada as well. (see PBS Freedom Riders website for full list of rides, riders, and routes traveled).

## Louisiana New Orleans



Freedom Riders James Peck and Charles Person at Xavier University on May 17, 1961.

TIMES-PICAYUNE ARCHIVE PHOTO BY P.A. HUGHES

When the original 13 Riders left Washington on May 4, 1961. Their plan was to reach New Orleans on May 17 to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the ***Brown v. Board of Education*** decision desegregating public schools. The difference is that they departed by air, arranged by the Kennedy Administration, after the brutal attacks on the Riders by segregationists in Alabama.

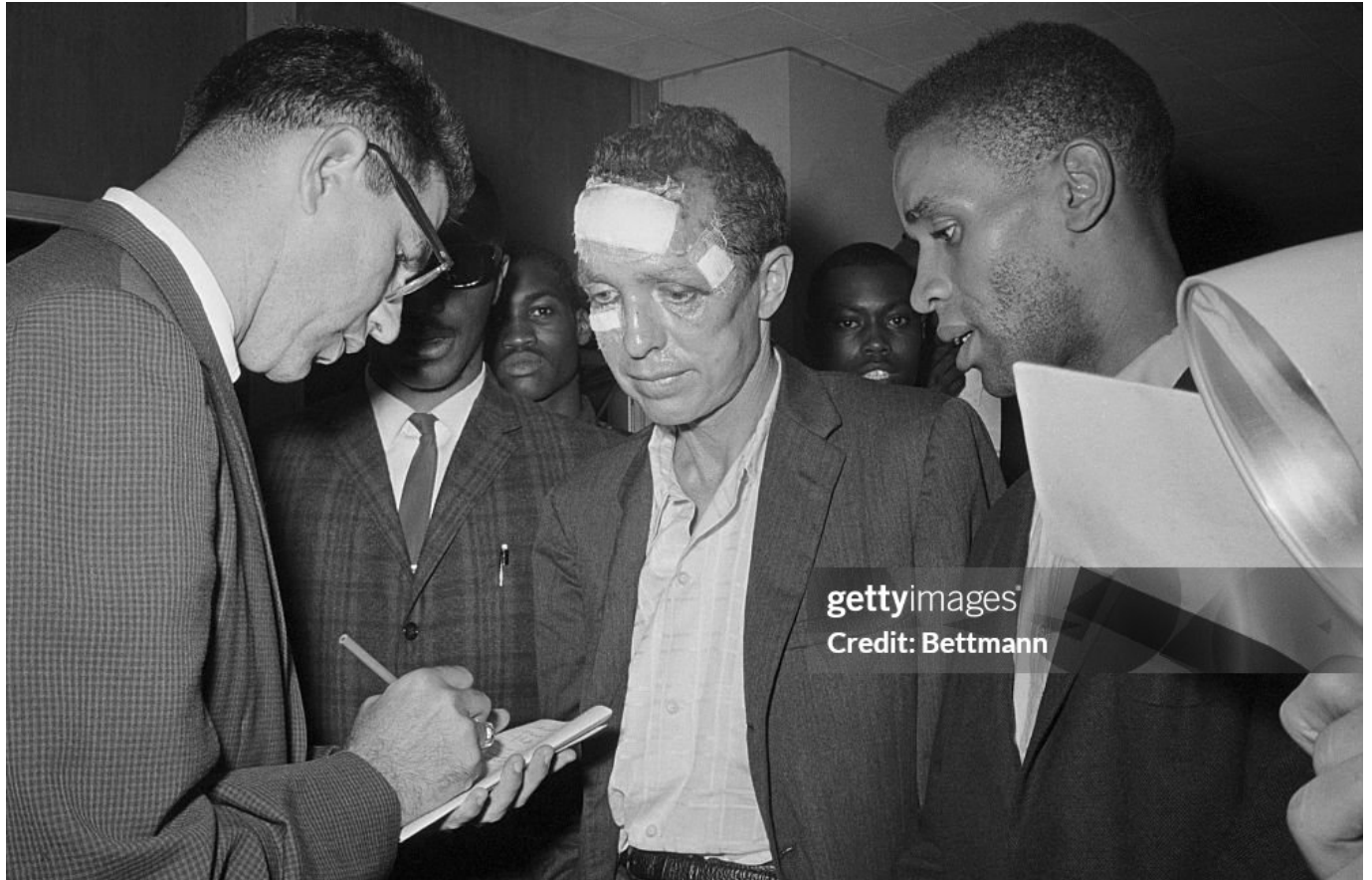
The Freedom Riders found it difficult and struggled to find a place to stay upon their arrival in New Orleans. Hotels refused to admit<sup>23</sup> them. Residents were wary and would not house them either, considering the dangers of accommodating the Freedom Riders because they believed violence would visit them, too, trouble. These fears were stirred by groups like The Citizen's Council, which, according to the Times-Picayune, referred to the Freedom Riders as "a lawless, radical group" and "ideological brigands"<sup>24</sup> The Council

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<sup>23</sup> Holmes, Marian S. "The Freedom Riders, Then and Now." Smithsonian. Last modified February 1, 2009. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com>

<sup>24</sup> The Times-Picayune, May 17, 1961.

went as far as to demand Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison to “rid the community of [the] agitators before violence erupt[ed].”<sup>25</sup>



**Freedom Riders Jimmy McDonald (right) and James Peck (center) talk to reporter Bill Cook (left) upon their arrival in New Orleans. Peck had been beaten by pro-segregationists in the Birmingham Bus Station attack on May 14.**

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<sup>25</sup> he Times-Picayune, May 17, 1961.



**Four Freedom Riders, David Dennis, Julia Aaron, Jerome H. Smith, and Doris Castle, (left to right) return to New Orleans after posting bond and being released from jail in Jackson, Mississippi**



CORE members and Xavier University students, Rudy Lombard and Vincent Roux convinced Dr. Norman C. Francis, Xavier's dean of male students, to allow the Riders to stay in a dormitory on the school's campus.

Xavier University of Louisiana remains the nation's only Catholic and historically black university founded by a White nun known as Mother Katharine Drexel. Xavier University came to the aid of Freedom Riders. As its website says, the University "was determined to admit students of all faiths and races—and to do it in the same city, New Orleans, where *Plessy v. Ferguson* had prompted decades of enforced segregation, all throughout the South."

The then Dean of Men, also fought to permit the Freedom Riders to stay on Xavier's St Michael's Residence Hall and one week stay was not disclosed to general public to ensure their safety.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> When Freedom rang; How Norman Francis made Xavier a shelter from a storm of violence in 1961; Ride heralded as a success." The Times-Picayune (New Orleans), July 5, 2015. Accessed March 21, 2019. <https://eds.a.ebscohost.com>.



Exterior of St. Michael's Resident Halls as it looked on May 17, 1961

The Freedom Riders in St. Michael's Residence Hall on the third floor. Their presence was significant for Xavier University students and the surrounding community. The Riders encouraged the community to take a public stand against social prejudice and racism.

While in New Orleans, the Riders also appeared at a peaceful rally at New Zion Baptist Church. The Pastor, Rev. A.L. Davis later became New Orleans' first Black city council member.

## Interstate Commerce Commission Ruling

The source of the documents: INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION, 1961: 29 MAY-22 JUNE  
Papers of John F. Kennedy. Presidential Papers. White House Staff Files of Harris Wofford. Wofford.

To Radin

BEFORE THE  
INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

Docket No.

PETITION FOR RULE MAKING  
FILED BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL ON BEHALF OF  
THE UNITED STATES

ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

BURKE MARSHALL  
Assistant Attorney General

IRVING H. TRAMEN

ROBERT L. SALOSCHIN

ROBERT S. BURK

Attorneys  
Department of Justice

Dated at:  
Washington, D. C.  
May 29, 1961



BEFORE THE  
INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

---

PETITION FOR RULE MAKING

COMES NOW the Attorney General, hereinafter referred to as petitioner, on behalf of the United States, and respectfully submits this petition pursuant to section 4 (d) of the Administrative Procedure Act 5 U.S.C. § 1003 (d) and section 204 (6) of the Interstate Commerce Act 49 U.S.C. 304 (6) for the issuance of certain rules and regulations and represents as follows:

I

Section 216 (d) of Part 2 of the Interstate Commerce Act 49 U.S.C. 316 (d) which applies to motor carriers, provides in part as follows:

" \* \* \* It shall be unlawful for any common carrier by motor vehicle engaged in interstate or foreign commerce to make, give, or cause any undue or unreasonable preference or advantage to any particular person . . . in any respect whatsoever; or to subject any particular person . . . to any unjust discrimination or any undue or unreasonable prejudice or disadvantage in any respect whatsoever: \* \* \* ."

In National Association for the Advancement of Colored People v. St. Louis-San Francisco Railway, et al., 297 I.C.C. 335 (1955), the Commission gave extensive consideration to section 3 (1) of the Act 49 U.S.C. § 3 (1), which is similar

to section 216 (d) and decided, at page 347, as follows:

"We find that the practices of . . . assigning or directing Negro interstate passengers to coaches or portions of coaches designated or provided for the exclusive use of such passengers, and in maintaining waiting rooms in their stations designated for the exclusive use of such passengers, subject Negro passengers to undue and unreasonable prejudice and disadvantage, in violation of section 3 (1) of the act."

The Commission simultaneously considered these problems under section 216 (d) of the Act in connection with interstate transportation of passengers by motor buses in Keys v. Carolina Coach Company, 64 M.C.C. 769 (1955). The Commission's decision therein refers to its decision in the above Railway case and holds at page 772:

" \* \* \* we conclude that the assignment of seats in interstate buses, so designated as to imply the inherent inferiority of a traveler solely because of race or color, must be regarded as subjecting the traveler to unjust discrimination, and undue and unreasonable prejudice and disadvantage. In addition to the discrimination, prejudice, and disadvantage resulting from the mere fact of segregation, additional disadvantage to the passenger is always potentially present because the traveler is entitled to be free from the annoyances which inevitably accompany segregation and the variety and unevenness of methods of its enforcement. \* \* \*

"We find that the practice of defendant requiring that Negro interstate passengers occupy space or seats in specified portions of its buses, subjects such passengers to unjust discrimination, and undue and unreasonable prejudice and disadvantage, in violation of section 216 (d) of the Act, and is therefore unlawful."

The Supreme Court in its recent decision, Boynton v. Virginia, 364 U.S. 454 (1960), noted that the Interstate Commerce Act uses language "of the broadest type to bar discrimination of all kinds." In this case the basic question presented was "whether an interstate bus passenger is denied a federal statutory or constitutional right when a restaurant in a bus terminal used by the carrier along its route discriminates in serving food to the passenger solely because of his color." [Emphasis added] In deciding that question, the Court found a violation of section 216 (d) and held, at page 460:

" \* \* \* if the bus carrier has volunteered to make terminal and restaurant facilities and services available to its interstate passengers as a regular part of their transportation, and the terminal and restaurant have acquiesced and cooperated in this undertaking, the terminal and restaurant must perform these services without discriminations prohibited by the Act. In the performance of these services under such conditions, the terminal and restaurant stand in the place of the bus company in the performance of its transportation obligations \* \* \*" [Emphasis added].

It will be seen that section 216 (d) of the Act requires that all users of all facilities of motor carrier transportation in interstate commerce be treated equally and that a failure by a carrier to afford passengers such equality of treatment amounts to unjust discrimination.

## II

Interstate motor carriers of passengers represent a cohesive system of transportation linking every part of the country. Any discriminatory acts or practices in violation of the Interstate

Commerce Act have an immediate and direct bearing on commerce throughout the country. Recent events that have taken place in certain states have disclosed a breakdown of guarantees of non-discriminatory transportation to passengers in interstate commerce. The promulgation of rules and regulations by the Interstate Commerce Commission is necessary to create order out of chaos, to lessen the possibility of mob action further disrupting the free flow of commerce and threatening the safety of passengers, to protect the very instrumentalities of such commerce, to guarantee to all passengers their rights under the Interstate Commerce Act, and to vindicate those rights against inconsistent and unlawful action by state or local authorities.

The lack of rules and regulations clearly enunciating the rights of all passengers in traveling on interstate motor carriers and clearly setting forth their rights in waiting room facilities, rest room facilities and eating and drinking facilities, has given rise to confusion on the part of the motor carriers as to their duty to their passengers and has contributed, and will continue to contribute, to unrest and civil disorder.

The Department of Justice has received complaints, and can present evidence, of many instances of discriminatory treatment of passengers on motor carriers in interstate commerce. Such instances include passengers not being permitted:

1. The free and non-segregated use of seating, or other facilities, on the vehicle of the motor carrier.
2. The free and non-segregated use of waiting room facilities.

3. The free and non-segregated use of rest room facilities.

4. The free and non-segregated use of eating and drinking facilities.

These categories of complaints encompass flagrant violations of section 216 (d) of the Interstate Commerce Act as construed by the above-cited decisions of the Supreme Court and the Commission.

Petitioner avers that the void created by the lack of rules and regulations, such as petitioner herein urges the Commission to issue, has played, and is continuing to play, a significant role in creating and allowing to continue situations giving rise to such violations. The promulgation of the regulation requested herein is urgently needed to remove doubts as to the rights of passengers and the obligations of the carriers.

The Commission should promulgate the requested regulation in order to have clearly implemented the basic statutory rights embodied in sections 216 (a) and (d) of the Act. Just as our Constitution is color blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens, so too is the Interstate Commerce Act. The time has come for this Commission, in administering that Act, to declare unequivocally by regulation that a Negro passenger is free to travel the length and breadth of this country in the same manner as any other passenger.

The actual discrimination in interstate commerce -- which can and must be rectified by the requested regulation -- has had an obvious effect upon members of the military service of this country

who must, in the performance of their duties, use the facilities of interstate motor carriers as passengers. The further effect of this discrimination upon our foreign relations is apparent. Departments within the executive branch of the government have expressed to petitioner their grave concern about the continuance of such discriminatory practices and the need for their prompt elimination.

III

WHEREFORE, your petitioner respectfully prays that the Commission, under its rule making powers, promulgate the following regulation, as expeditiously as practicable, to the end that the above described discriminations now burdening the interstate transportation of passengers and violating sections 216 (a) and (d) of the Act, and the National Transportation Policy, be eliminated. With respect to the need for expeditious procedure, petitioner waives the issuance of an examiner's report and requests the Commission to act on this petition.

PROPOSED REGULATION

SECTION 1. No interstate motor carrier of passengers shall as such operate vehicles on which the seating of passengers is based upon race, color, creed, or national origin.

SECTION 2. Every interstate motor carrier of passengers shall conspicuously display and maintain, in each vehicle which it operates as such, a plainly legible sign or placard containing

the statement, "All seats aboard this vehicle are by law available at all times to any passenger without regard to race, color, creed, or national origin."

SECTION 3. No interstate motor carrier of passengers shall provide, maintain arrangements for, utilize, make available, adhere to any understanding for the availability of, or follow any practice which includes the availability of, any terminal facilities which are so operated, arranged or maintained as to involve any separation of any portion thereof or in the use thereof on the basis of race, color, creed, or national origin. As used in this regulation, the words "terminal facilities" include waiting room facilities, rest room facilities, eating and/or drinking facilities, ticket sales facilities, and/or any public spaces appurtenant thereto which are used by or available to any part of the public in connection with the transportation furnished by an interstate motor carrier of passengers at any regular stop in its operations as such.

SECTION 4. As used in the preceding section, the word "separation" includes, among other things, the display of any signs indicating that any portion of the terminal facilities are separated, allocated, restricted, provided, available, used, or otherwise distinguished, on the basis of race, color, creed, or national origin.

SECTION 5. No interstate motor carrier of passengers shall provide, maintain arrangements for, utilize, make available, adhere to any understanding for the availability of, or follow any

practice which includes the availability of, any terminal facilities in which there is not conspicuously displayed and maintained so as to be readily visible to the public a plainly legible sign or placard containing the full text of this regulation. Such sign or placard shall be captioned, in large black type, "Public Notice: Requirements of Law for Terminal Facilities at Stops of Interstate Motor Carriers of Passengers, By Authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission of the United States Government."

SECTION 6. Nothing in this regulation shall be construed to relieve any interstate motor carrier of passengers of any of its obligations as such under the Interstate Commerce Act or its certificate(s) of public convenience and necessity.

SECTION 7. Every interstate motor carrier of passengers shall report to the Interstate Commerce Commission, within fifteen (15) days of its occurrence, any interference by any person, municipality, county, parish, state, or body politic, with its observance of the requirements of law, including this regulation. Such report shall include a statement of the actions that such carrier may have taken to eliminate any such interference.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

ROBERT F. KENNEDY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

BURKE MARSHALL,  
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

IRVING N. TRANEN

ROBERT L. SALOSCHIN

ROBERT S. BURK  
Attorneys  
Department of Justice



Interstate Commerce Commission  
Washington 25, D. C.

*file*

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN

June 22, 1961

Honorable Joseph S. Clark  
United States Senate  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Senator Clark:

This is in reply to your letter of June 9, 1961, in which you expressed your concurrence in the petition filed by the Attorney General with respect to segregation in interstate motor passenger transportation.

For your information, I am attaching a copy of an order which the Commission issued on June 19, 1961. You will note from the order that the Commission is proceeding to a consideration of the need for specific regulations in the field of segregation by motor carriers. The order provides for a prompt submission of facts and views by interested or affected parties. Thereafter, the matter will be determined.

You also suggested that the Commission consider the issuance of regulations prohibiting racial discrimination in interstate rail terminals. While I should not like to commit myself upon a point which may soon be in issue before the Commission, I may say that there is a question as to whether, under Part I of the Interstate Commerce Act relating to railroads, the Commission is empowered to issue general rules on this subject. In the meantime we are not abandoning any other action available to us when facts show the carrier has violated the law.

I appreciate your interest in this matter and I trust this reply will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

Everett Hutchinson  
Chairman

Enclosure

People of color living in states still dominated by the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils began to envision major change and prepare for the campaigns of the future. They had seen that, regardless of the intimidation and violence directed towards the Freedom Riders, the activists continued to defy segregation with a nonviolent discipline.

The riders sang songs, made signs, and refused to move even though facing arrest, assault, and death.

A Gallup Poll in mid-June 1961 showed that a majority of Americans supported desegregated interstate travel. A Gallup Poll in mid-June showed that a majority of Americans supported desegregated interstate travel and the use of federal marshals to enforce it. However, 64 percent of Americans disapproved of the rides after initial expressions of sympathy, and 61 percent thought civil rights should be achieved gradually instead of through direct action. The civil rights movement was undeterred by such popular opinion.<sup>27</sup>

Over the next few years, civil rights activists directly confronted segregation through nonviolent tactics to awaken the national conscience and to pressure the federal government for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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<sup>27</sup> Freedom Riders. Written by: Bill of Rights Institute

## Florida

# 2 Bands Of Freedom Riders Heading South For Florida

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The first of three bus riding groups totaling 32 white and Negro "Freedom Riders" arrived at Myrtle Beach, S.C., this morning for a brief rest stop after the short, uneventful trip from Wilmington, N.C., where they spent Tuesday night.

Eight members of the party that left Washington Tuesday were aboard the scheduled public (Greyhound) bus that was to take them to Charleston, S.C., where they will remain overnight before continuing to Florida Thursday.

Six more riders who remained in Wilmington overnight were due to leave this afternoon for Charleston, also by scheduled bus, in their test of racial segregation in the South.

They will proceed to Jacksonville, Fla., Thursday morning and go on to St. Petersburg, Fla., Friday. They are not passing through Alabama or Mississippi.

A third group, composed of four

uniformed officers at the bus terminal when they arrived in late afternoon. But they weren't needed.

The Freedom Riders got off the bus, entered the terminal restaurant, bought refreshments and then left by taxi for a Negro hotel, where both white and Negro riders spent the night. Police patrolled the area.

The Rev. Robert J. Stone, white minister and pastor of Adams-Parkhurst Presbyterian church in New York City, was spokesman

for the group that stayed overnight in Raleigh. He said his party encountered no incidents. The party stayed at Shaw University, a Negro institution in Raleigh.

The ministers plan to depart today from Raleigh en route to Tallahassee, Fla., where they hope to arrive Thursday.

Gov. Farris Bryant of Florida said through his office that he believes Floridians will ignore the 32 riders. However, before he left Tallahassee on a business trip he signed a law permitting authorities to disperse persons assembled unlawfully.

A Mississippi Negro, Leon Daniel Horne, 22, said in Jackson, Miss. that "I'd rather be in jail here than starve in Chicago." He caught a Freedom Ride from Chicago to his home state. He is among 82 riders in jail in Jackson, where 110 have been arrested since May 24.

Mayor Haydon Burns of Jacksonville, Fla., and five other offi-

## 4-H Fund Goal Here \$25,000

A goal of \$25,000 has been set for the current Tuscaloosa County 4-H fund drive, according to James R. Maxwell, campaign chairman.

Tuesday's edition of the News erroneously listed the county goal as \$3 million, which is the amount set as a state-wide goal.

The top article appeared in the "Park City Daily News" (Bowling Green, KY) on May 10, 1961. The bottom article appeared in the "Tuscaloosa (AL) News" on June 14, 1961.



Freedom Riders Patricia Stephens and Reverend Petty D. McKinney arrested in Tallahassee, Florida on June 16, 1961

### **The Tallahassee**

In mid-June, a group of Interfaith Freedom Riders travelled by bus from Washington, D.C. to Tallahassee, Florida. They scheduled to end their ride in Tallahassee, Florida, with plans to fly home from the Tallahassee Municipal Airport. They were provided with a police escort to the airport from the city's bus facilities.

*Freedom riders Priscilla Stephens, from CORE, and Reverend Petty D. McKinney, from Nyack, New York, are shown after their arrest by the police in Tallahassee, Florida, in June 1961.*





After successfully completing the Freedom Ride, rather than flying home, they decided to test whether or not the group would be served in the segregated airport restaurant. The Riders cancelled their flight reservations and waited until the restaurant re-opened.



Photographed on June 15, 1961.

The owners decided to close rather than serve the mixed group of Freedom Riders. Although the restaurant was privately owned, it was leased from the county government. They waited until 11:00 pm that night and returned the following day.

During this time, hostile crowds gathered, threatening violence. On June 16, 1961, the Freedom Riders were arrested in Tallahassee for unlawful assembly. Later that month they were sentenced to pay a \$500 fine or serve 60 days in jail. They were released on a \$1000 bond.



Rabbi Israel "Si" Dresner (left-center) and Rabbi Martin Freedman of New York – who rode a bus on the June 1961 Washington-to-Tallahassee, FL Freedom Ride – were also arrested in Tallahassee, shown above, for attempting to eat at a segregated airport restaurant.

The arrested Freedom Riders, later known as the Tallahassee Ten, were charged with unlawful assembly. The arrest and subsequent trial became known as *Dresner v. City of Tallahassee*, named for Israel S. Dresner, a rabbi among the group arrested.

The Riders were convicted of unlawful assembly by the Municipal Court of Tallahassee, and the convictions were affirmed in the Florida Circuit Court of the Second Judicial District. Following about 3 years of legal appeals, the Riders returned to Tallahassee to serve brief jail terms in August 1964. They were released after serving 4 days of their 60-day sentences.



*Freedom riders Priscilla Stephens, from CORE, and Reverend Petty D. McKinney, from Nyack, New York, are shown after their arrest by the police in Tallahassee, Florida, in June 1961.*



## North Carolina

### Monroe

In early August, SNCC staff members James Forman and Paul Brooks, with the support of Ella Baker, began planning a Freedom Ride in solidarity with Robert F. Williams. Williams was an extremely militant and controversial NAACP chapter president for Monroe, North Carolina.

After making the public statement that he would "meet violence with violence," (since the federal government would not protect his community from racial attacks) he had been suspended by the NAACP national board over the objections of NAACP's local membership.

Williams continued his work against segregation however, but now had massive opposition in both black and white communities. While some SCNN staff members sympathized with the idea of armed self-defense, violence was antithetical to the non-violent code of conduct. Many Riders saw the Ride to Monroe as an opportunity to prove the superiority of Gandhian nonviolence over the use of force.

The Freedom Riders in Monroe were brutally attacked by white supremacists with the approval of local police. On August 27, James Forman was struck unconscious with the butt of a rifle and taken to jail with numerous other demonstrators.

Police and white supremacists roamed the town shooting at black civilians, who returned the gunfire. Robert F. Williams fortified the black neighborhood against attack and in the process briefly detained a white couple who had gotten lost there. The police accused Williams of kidnapping and called in the state militia and FBI to arrest him, in spite of the couple being quickly released.

Convinced he would be lynched, Williams fled and eventually found refuge in Cuba. Movement lawyers, eager to disengage from the situation, successfully urged the Freedom Riders not to practice the normal "jail-no bail" strategy in Monroe. Local officials, also apparently eager to de-escalate, found demonstrators guilty but immediately suspended their sentences.

One Freedom Rider however, John Lowry, went on trial for the kidnapping case, along with several associates of Robert F. Williams, including Mae Mallory. Monroe legal defense committees were popular around the country, but Lowry and Mallory served prison sentences. In 1965, their convictions were vacated due to the exclusion of Black citizens from the jury selection.

## Other Rides



**June 13 in-Washington, DC: About 32 Freedom Riders, including Protestant and Jewish clergymen, here for a 3-day test of bus desegregation between here and Florida. Shown prior to boarding bus are Rev. Perry A. Smith III, of First Baptist Church, N. Brentwood, MD (left) and Rev. Robert Stone, a Presbyterian minister from New York City (Center). Photo by Bettmann Archive/Getty Images)**



**Freedom Riders from California are being held at Harris County jail after refusing to post \$500 bonds on unlawful assembly charges in Houston, Texas, on Aug. 11, 1961. The group of 7 Whites and 9 Blacks was arrested at the coffee shop of Houston's Union Station train depot when they tried to get service. The manager of the coffee shop charged them. (AP Photo)**

From the map and routes, there were other Freedom Rides with Riders coming from different states.

For example, on September 13, 1961, a group of 15 Episcopal priests, including 3 black priests, entered the Jackson, Mississippi Trailways bus terminal. Upon entering the coffee shop, they were stopped by two policemen, who asked them to leave.

After refusing to leave, all 15 were arrested and jailed for breach of peace, under a now-repealed section of the Mississippi code § 2087.5 that "makes guilty of a misdemeanor anyone who congregates with others in a public place under circumstances such that a breach of the peace may be occasioned thereby, and refuses to move on when ordered to do so by a police officer."

The group included 35-year-old Reverend Robert L Pierson. After the case against the priests was dismissed on May 21, 1962, they sought damages against the police under the Civil Rights Act of 1871. Their claims were ultimately rejected in the United States Supreme Court case *Pierson v. Ray* (1967), which held that the police were protected by qualified immunity.

## POWER OF PRESS

### Significance of the Media in the Freedom Ride



**Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor yells at a photojournalist. Credit: Birmingham News**

The role of the media cannot be underestimated. It was crucial. Initially, other than reports from writers affiliated with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) that accompanied the Riders on the buses during CORE's original May 4 Freedom Ride, the news coverage of the Rides was distorted, mixed or strongly negative.

Early news accounts criticized "extremists on both sides," equating civil rights activists with their segregationist opposition. Other editorials characterized the Freedom Riders as "outside agitators," meddling in communities to which they did not belong — not minding the fact that many Riders had been raised in the South.

The images and eyewitness accounts of May 14, 1961, in Alabama, jarred the collective consciousness of the nation – if these biases were in the subconscious. Many were appalled, as never before, by footages of a burning bus in Anniston, photographs of the beatings and injuries inflicted during the riot at the Birmingham Trailways Bus Station, and of the bandaged face of Freedom Rider James Peck lying in a hospital bed.

Americans were newly introduced to pictures that were unlike anything they had seen. The images brought home the barbarism of the white segregationists in a way that words alone could not convey. Klan members attacked *Birmingham Post-Herald* photographer Tommy Langston along with other members of the media and attempted to destroy their film; miraculously, the roll of film inside Langston's smashed camera survived intact.

The Freedom Rides were successful, in the way they did, because the Rides generated and attracted publicity beyond local confines. The sheer brutality against the Riders and the fact that government was not implementing its own laws inspired a sympathetic national audience with snowballing effect - as more were sensitized, shocked, and scandalized. Reporters and photographers were attacked.

Headlines, such as the one below, were compelling. They were hard to deny or ignore.

**Shades of Little Rock**

**NEW YORK Amsterdam News**

VOL. 31, NO. 20 SATURDAY, MAY 20, 1961

**In Alabama:**

# Inhuman!

**The Flames of Hotred!**

**Governor Refuses State Protection**

**NAACP's Ace Lawyer Joining U.S. Staff!**

**Leo Aiken Nabbed In Dope Raid**

**ONE PICTURE — LAMAR TERRY — 3¢**

Headline the day after the Greyhound bus burning outside Anniston, AL. Credit: Amsterdam News

The impassioned eyewitness accounts were riveting.

As he tells it, **Howard K. Smith**, a native Southerner, a national CBS News correspondent, was already in Birmingham at the time of the attacks. Just a few hours after the riot, he delivered his report over the national CBS radio network. Smith described a scene where *"one passenger was knocked down at my feet by twelve of the hoodlums and his face was beaten and kicked until it was a bloody pulp."* In the end, the journalist warned of "a dangerous confusion in the Southern mind." He called for legal change and presidential action to improve the situation.



**Dr. Walter G. Bergman and his wife, Frances, were both original Freedom Riders. Bearing the fading scars of his ordeal on his face, Dr. Walter Bergman described his harrowing experiences on a Freedom Ride through the deep south. Dr Bergman, who had retired several years ago as director of education research for the Detroit Board of Education, told of attacks by hoodlums who used clubs, fists, and their heels on the freedom riders in Alabama cities.**

Smith helped Riders Jim Peck and Walter Bergman, who were seriously injured, to hail a cab. He also found three other injured Black men after the melee, one of whom was Ike Reynolds. These men had agreed to do on camera interviews, which Smith conducted with the men and was hopeful of airing that evening on CBS-TV. But "signal difficulties" from the local TV station – WAPI – prevented that from happening, though Smith suspected that the local owner there had vetoed such broadcast.

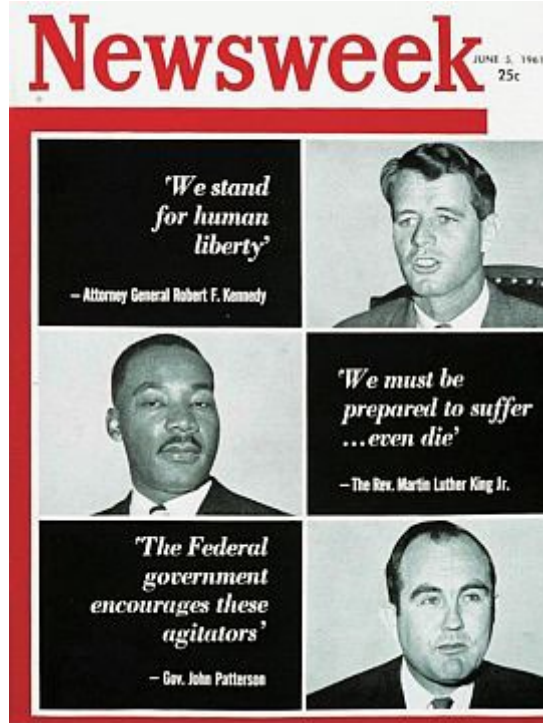
Dr. Bergman was savagely beaten, suffered a stroke 10 days after the beating, and used a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He won compensation for the attack from the F.B.I. more than two decades later.

Smith did deliver news accounts of the bus station melee over the CBS radio network made national news. He delivered a series of live radio updates from his hotel room that that fateful day. *“The riots have not been spontaneous outbursts of anger,” he reported in one broadcast, “but carefully planned and susceptible to having been easily prevented or stopped had there been a wish to do so.”*

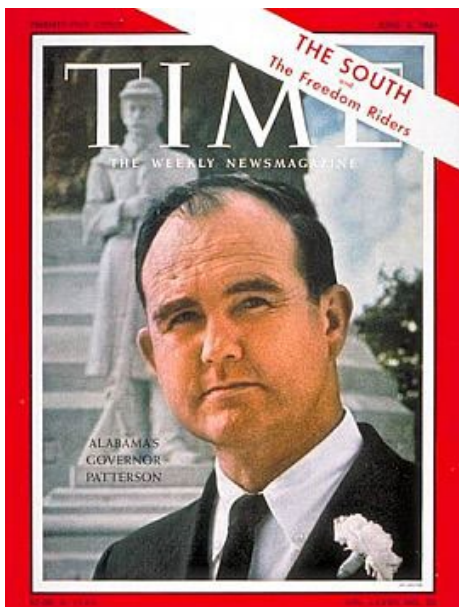
Smith recounted the facts of the incident for CBS. “When the bus arrived,” he explained in one report, *“the toughs grabbed the passengers into alleys and corridors, pounding them with pipes, with key rings, and with fists.”* The journalist was now shocked by what he had witnessed and stated at one point that the *“laws of the land and purposes of the nation badly need a basic restatement.”*

Smith at the time also did a Sunday radio commentary, during which he was more direct, *“The script almost wrote itself,”* he would later recall. *“I had the strange, disembodied sense of being forced by conscience to write what I knew would be unacceptable.”* In his commentary, Smith laid the blame squarely on Police Chief Eugene “Bull” Connor, whose officers had looked the other way during the attack. During that commentary Smith also stated that the *“rule of barbarism in Alabama”* must bow to the *“rule of law and order – and Justice – in America.”*

By early June, the Freedom Riders' story was frontpage national news everywhere. Magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* had cover stories devoted to the latest developments.



Newsweek's June 5, 1961, featured three of the contending major players in the Freedom Rider controversy that continued throughout the summer.



June 2, 1961: Alabama Gov. John Patterson on Time cover for Freedom Riders story. [Click for copy.](#)

*Time* magazine featured the Freedom Riders as its cover story, using a cover photo of 39-year-old Governor John Patterson and focusing on the governor's segregationist career, the incidents that had occurred in his state, and the fight between he and Robert Kennedy over enforcing the law.



*Life* magazine ran several pages of photos and narrative for its story of the week – “The Ride for Rights: Negroes Go by Bus Though the South Asking for Trouble and Getting It. Among *Life*’s photos in that issue was a sequence from the siege of the First Baptist Church in Montgomery.

More news reporters and photographers were drawn to the story by this time as well. A number of the media had already witnessed the early mob violence visited on the Freedom Riders in Montgomery. More reporters joined on the bus rides in late May 1961 during the National Guard escort from Alabama to Mississippi and others came to Jackson, Mississippi as the “breach of peace” arrests were made throughout that summer.

Freedom Rider stories continued to appear in the news media through the summer and fall of 1961. The media coverage of the Rides kept the issue on the nation’s front burner. The headline news aroused the rising up of individuals across the United States, which kept the Freedom Rides going – much to the dismay of the Kennedy Administration which tried to dissuade the Riders from continuing.

By November 1, 1961, the ICC rule that Robert Kennedy had initiated began to be enforced. With the new rule, passengers were permitted to sit wherever they pleased on interstate buses and trains and related facilities. All the “white” and “colored” signs came down at all terminals.

There would be no more segregated drinking fountains, toilets, or waiting rooms. Lunch counters would serve all customers, regardless of race. However, there were still pockets of resistance in some locations. Black riders encountered stiff resistance in December 1961 when they attempted to desegregate a white waiting room in Albany, Georgia. Other locations also offered resistance. But eventually, the rule took hold everywhere, and segregated interstate travel and accommodation ended.

# The Freedom Ride

By LESLIE W. DUNBAR

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THE SIT-IN DEMONSTRATIONS began in the South early in 1960. The device was simple: Negroes, most of whom were students, violated local customs by seating themselves at lunch counters and asking for service. The tactic spread contagiously, though least in the so-called Deep South, i.e., the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. By the year's end, more than 100 cities and towns of the South had responded to the sit-ins by opening to Negro patronage at least some of the eating places formerly for whites only.

No other method had ever achieved as much in so short a time as had these non-violent protests. Moreover, not the least of their results was the effect they had on the white South. At first annoyed, then angered, then confused, white Southerners in scores of places came fairly rapidly to a grasp of the

rightness of the protest. For almost the first time in their history, they yielded on a racial issue without being compelled by the federal government to do so.

Because many Africans, Asians, and Europeans visit the office of the Southern Regional Council, I know that the above statement hides a question eternally puzzling to them: the nature of our federal system of government. Indeed, I have sometimes wondered, when my explanations have proven helpless, whether we Americans believe in federalism firmly enough to make it sound credible to others.

The sometime impotence of American federalism has been revealed clearly by the Freedom Ride, which since May 4, 1961 has been the most prominent form of the Negro movement. Unlike the sit-ins, the Freedom Ride is an attack on laws, not customs—laws which are plainly unconstitutional under rulings of the Supreme Court of the United States and yet still are enforced by some state governments.

The Ride is an assertion of a clear federal right to travel freely and peacefully from one state to another; yet only most clumsily can the federal gov-

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*(This is a reprint of SRC Director Dunbar's appraisal of Freedom Rides for The Forum of London, a news and opinion service with wide distribution in Africa and Asia, published in New South with Forum permission.)*

## Freedom Ride

*Continued*

ernment protect this right against state obstruction. In short, the benefits of decentralized government do not come without pain. The inability of the federal government to shield private citizens, in all circumstances, from deprivation of rights by state and local authorities is one side of a coin, whose other is the limited power of Washington to interfere in the private lives of citizens.

Federalism works poorly without a general consensus among the parts of the country. On the racial question, that consensus has come slowly between the South and the rest of the nation. The victory of this generation is that we now are moving toward it with a sure pace. The Freedom Ride will help perfect American unity. That will be, in sum, its historical accomplishment. The sum, as it now is in late July, has five parts.

First, the Freedom Ride brought the Negro protest movement to the heart of the Deep South: Alabama and Mississippi. The latter had been the only state to have no sit-ins; Alabama had been the one state where governmental power had wrecked the sit-ins of 1960. Yet into these two citadels of caste the Ride penetrated daringly. This is likely to be a telling defeat for Alabama and Mississippi, just as it would be for any tyranny whose fearsome myth of invincibility had been defied, and the defiant not destroyed.

Secondly, in the three Alabama cities where there was violence, the mob did its work with official toleration. The nation—and the world—had seen this before; mobs can be, in the American South as well as in totalitarian nations.

the instruments of official policy. Each spectacle, however, hastens the conquering revulsion.

Thirdly, the arrests of Freedom Riders in Jackson, Mississippi affords another, and the clearest, opportunity to test juridically the anti-trespass laws passed by several southern states as a defense against sit-ins.

Fourthly, lunch counters in the bus terminals of Montgomery, Alabama have been desegregated as a result of the Ride. This was not only a defeat for segregation, but also an humbling setback for the Governor and his policies of bitter-end resistance to reform.

And finally, the national administration has requested the Interstate Commerce Commission to prohibit by effective regulations the practice of segregation at any stations where interstate buses stop. Non-Americans will be baffled that a Commission which the President cannot order, but can only appeal to, has the responsibility to regulate interstate travel; such, however, is the complexity of this government, a complexity which Americans also do not widely understand, but only get used to.

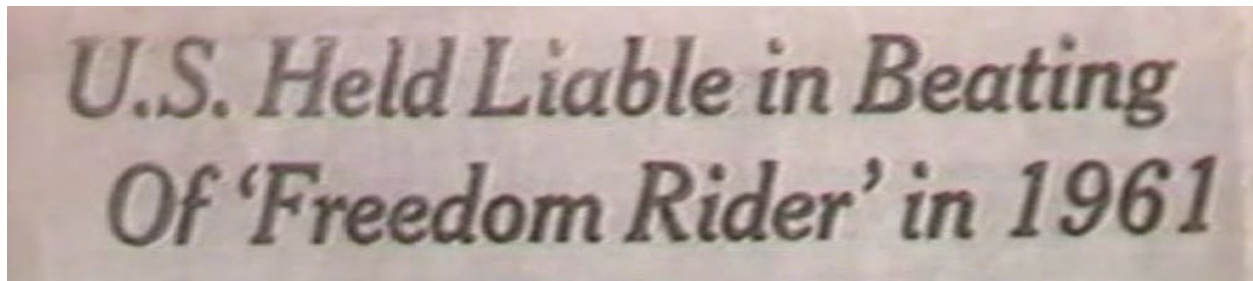
These I would say are the achievements of the Freedom Ride, and they add to a contribution to American popular unity. I have said nothing of the moral witness which the Riders have offered against racial injustice. Here it is doubtful that they have widened or deepened that already given so magnificently in recent years by Negro Southerners. More than any previous protest, however, the Ride has enlisted both white people and non-Southerners for direct action in the South. Thus, the Ride has given its distinctive witness to the savagery of racism, but also to the unstilled surge of the free spirit throughout American democracy.

## A Gripping Personal Travails and Legal Victory

These few stories and what happened to the Riders, among too many to include, shine closer up light to the Rides.



In May 1961, retired Michigan professor Walter Bergman and his wife Frances joined eleven others in the Freedom Rides. He believed he needed to take the next step and fight the white supremacist policies. Walter had retired in 1958 and began working with CORE on issues within the city, like picketing the international headquarters of the Kresge Corporation for their racist practices.



About a week after the attacks, Dr. Walter Bergman had a stroke, brought on by the blows to the head. The severity of the stroke left Bergman disabled, forcing him to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life. With the help of the ACLU, Bergman and his wife filed a lawsuit against the federal government in 1977, on the grounds that they believed that the FBI was complicit in the attacks against Walter.

[FBI Sued by Freedom Rider Crippled in '61 KKK Beating - The Washington Post](#)



Credit: New York Times: [F.B.I. IS ORDERED TO PAY \\$35,000 TO 'FREEDOM RIDER' INJURED IN '61 - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/1961-09-28/us/fbi-ordered-to-pay-35000-to-freedom-rider-injured-in-61)

After years of litigation and investigation, the courts decided in his favor and awarded him a settlement. The judge found the FBI to be guilty of wrongdoing since they knew about the plans by the KKK to attack the freedom riders but did nothing to prevent them attacks from taking place.

Dr. Bergman died on Sept. 29 in a nursing home in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was one hundred.

## A Memoire

“In *Freedom Riders*, **Raymond Ostby Arsenault** details how the first Freedom Rides developed, from the personal level to the legal maneuvering involved. His narrative touches on elements from the jails of Alabama to the Kennedy White House.

Arsenault is the John Hope Franklin Professor of Southern History and co-director of the Florida Studies Program at the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg.

Read an excerpt from *Freedom Riders*:

### Alabama Bound

*We had most trouble, it turned into a struggle,  
Halfway 'cross Alabama,*

*And that 'hound broke down, and left us all stranded,*

*In downtown Birmingham.*

-- Chuck Berry

Jim Farmer's unexpected departure placed a heavy burden on Jim Peck, who suddenly found himself in charge of the Freedom Ride. As Farmer left for the Atlanta airport, Peck could not help wondering if he would ever see his old friend again. They had been through a lot together — surviving the depths of the Cold War and CORE's lean years, not to mention the first ten days of the Freedom Ride.

Now Peck had to go on alone, perhaps to glory, but more likely to an untimely rendezvous with violence, or even death.

**Note: James Peck, who died on July 12, 1993 at the age of 78, is the only person who participated in both the Journey of Reconciliation (1947) and the first Freedom Ride of 1961. He has been called a White civil rights hero. Peck advocated nonviolent civil disobedience throughout his life and was arrested more than 60 times between the 1930s and 1980s.**

When Peck phoned Fred Shuttlesworth, the outspoken pastor of Birmingham's Bethel Baptist Church and the leader of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, to give him the exact arrival times of the two "Freedom Buses," the normally unflappable minister offered an alarming picture of what the Freedom Riders could expect once they reached Birmingham.

The city was alive with rumors that a white mob planned to greet the Riders at the downtown bus stations. Shuttlesworth was not privy to FBI surveillance and did not know any of the details, but he urged Peck to be careful. Peck, trying to avoid a last-minute panic, relayed Shuttlesworth's warning to the group in a calm and matter-of-fact fashion.

He also repeated Tom Gaither's warning about Anniston, a rest stop on the bus route to Birmingham. But he quickly added that he had no reason to believe the Riders would encounter any serious trouble prior to their arrival in downtown Birmingham. Barring any unforeseen problems, the four-hour ride would give them plenty of time to prepare a properly nonviolent response to the waiting mob — if, in fact, the mob existed.

Faced with staggered bus schedules, the two groups of Freedom Riders left Atlanta an hour apart. The Greyhound group, with Joe Perkins in charge, was the first to leave, at 11:00 A.M. The bus was more than half empty, unusual for the Atlanta-to-Birmingham run.

Fourteen passengers were on board: five regular passengers, seven Freedom Riders — Genevieve Hughes, Bert Bigelow, Hank Thomas, Jimmy McDonald, Mae Frances Moultrie, Joe Perkins, Ed Blankenheim — and two journalists, Charlotte Devree, and Moses Newson. Among the "regular" passengers were Roy Robinson, the manager of the Atlanta Greyhound station, and two undercover plainclothes agents of the Alabama Highway Patrol, Corporals Ell Cowling and Harry Sims.

Both Cowling and Sims sat in the back of the bus, several rows behind the scattered Freedom Riders, who had no inkling of who these two seemingly innocuous white men actually were. Following the orders of Floyd Mann, the director of the Alabama Highway Patrol, Cowling carried a hidden microphone designed to eavesdrop on the Riders. Unsure of the Freedom Ride's itinerary, Mann — and Governor John Patterson — wanted Cowling to gather information on the Riders and their plans.

During the ninety-minute trip to Tallapoosa, the last stop in Georgia, on Highway 78, none of the passengers said very much, other than a few words of nervous small talk. Around one o'clock the bus crossed the Alabama line and followed the road in a southwesterly arc to Heflin, a small country town on the edge of the Talladega National Forest.

After a brief rest stop in Heflin, the Greyhound continued west through De Armanville and Oxford before turning north on Highway 21 toward Anniston. The largest city in Calhoun County and the second largest in east-central Alabama, Anniston as a no-nonsense army town that depended on nearby Fort McClellan and a sprawling ordnance depot for much of its livelihood. Known for its hard-edged race relations, Anniston boasted a relatively large black population (approximately 30 percent in 1961), a well-established NAACP branch, and some of the most aggressive and violent Klansmen in Alabama.

Just south of Anniston, the driver of a southbound Greyhound motioned to the driver of the Freedom Riders' bus, O. T. Jones, to pull over to the side of the road. A white man then ran across the road and yelled to Jones through the window: "There's an angry and unruly crowd gathered at Anniston. There's a rumor that some people on this bus are going to stage a sit-in. The terminal has been closed. Be careful."

With this message the Riders' worst fears seemed to be confirmed, but Joe Perkins — hoping that the warning was a bluff, or at least an exaggeration — urged the driver to keep going. A minute or two later, as the bus passed the city limits, several of the Riders couldn't help but notice that Anniston's sidewalks were lined with people, an unusual sight on a Sunday afternoon in a Deep South town. "It seemed that everyone in the town was out to greet us," Genevieve Hughes later commented.

Amazingly enough, Hank Thomas did not recall seeing anyone on the streets. He did remember the strange feeling that he and the other Riders experienced as the bus eased into the station parking lot just after 1:00 P.M. The station was locked shut, and there was silence — and then suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a screaming mob

led by Anniston Klan leader William Chappell rushed the bus. Thomas thought he heard Jones encourage the attackers with a sly greeting. "Well, boys, here they are," the driver reportedly said with a smirk. "I brought you some niggers and nigger-lovers." But it all happened so fast that no one was quite sure who was saying what to whom.

As the crowd of about fifty surrounded the bus, an eighteen-year-old Klansman and ex-convict named Roger Couch stretched out on the pavement in front of the bus to block any attempt to leave, while the rest — carrying metal pipes, clubs, and chains — milled around menacingly, some screaming, "Dirty Communists" and "Sieg heil!"

There was no sign of any police, even though Herman Glass, the manager of the Anniston Greyhound station, had warned local officials earlier in the day that a potentially violent mob had gathered around the station. After the driver opened the door, Cowling and Sims hurried to the front to prevent anyone from entering.

Leaning on the door lever, the two unarmed investigators managed to close the door and seal the bus, but they could not stop several of the most frenzied attackers from smashing windows, denting the sides of the bus, and slashing tires. "One man stood on the steps, yelling, and calling us cowards," Hughes noticed, but her attention soon turned to a second man who "walked by the side of the bus, slipped a pistol from his pocket and stared at me for some minutes."

When she heard a loud noise and shattering glass, she yelled, "Duck, down everyone," thinking that a bullet had hit one of the windows. The projectile turned out to be a rock, but another assailant soon cracked the window above her seat with a fist full of brass knuckles.

Joe Perkins's window later suffered a similar fate, as the siege continued for almost twenty minutes. By the time the Anniston police arrived on the scene, the bus looked like it had been in a serious collision. Swaggering through the crowd with billy clubs in hand, the police officers examined the broken windows and slashed tires but showed no interest in arresting anyone. After a few minutes of friendly banter with members of the crowd, the officers suddenly cleared a path and motioned for the bus to exit the parking lot.

A police car escorted the battered Greyhound to the city limits but then turned back, once again leaving the bus to the mercy of the mob. A long line of cars and pickup trucks, plus one car carrying a news reporter and a photographer, had followed the police escort from the station and was ready to resume the assault.

Once the entourage reached an isolated stretch of Highway 202 east of Bynum, two of the cars (one of which was driven by Roger Couch's older brother Jerome) raced around the front of the bus and then slowed to a crawl, forcing the bus driver to slow down.



Trailing behind were thirty or forty cars and trucks jammed with shrieking whites. Many, like Chappell and the Couches, were Klansmen, though none wore hoods or robes. Some, having just come from church, were dressed in their Sunday best — coats and ties and polished shoes — and a few even had children with them.

The whole scene was darkly surreal and became even more so when a pair of flat tires forced the bus driver to pull over to the side of the road in front of the Forsyth and Son grocery store six miles southwest of town, only a few hundred yards from the Anniston Army Depot.

Flinging open the door, the driver, with Robinson trailing close behind, ran into the grocery store and began calling local garages in what turned out to be a futile effort to find replacement tires for the bus. In the meantime, the passengers were left vulnerable to a swarm of onrushing vigilantes. Cowling had just enough time to retrieve his revolver from the baggage compartment before the mob surrounded the bus.

The first to reach the Greyhound was a teenage boy who smashed a crowbar through one of the side windows. While one group of men and boys rocked the bus in a vain attempt to turn the vehicle on its side, a second tried to enter through the front door.

With gun in hand, Cowling stood in the doorway to block the intruders, but he soon retreated, locking the door behind him. For the next twenty minutes Chappell and other Klansmen pounded on the bus demanding that the Freedom Riders come out to take what was coming to them, but they stayed in their seats, even after the arrival of two highway patrolmen. When neither patrolmen made any effort to disperse the crowd, Cowling, Sims, and the Riders decided to stay put.

Eventually, however, two members of the mob, Roger Couch and Cecil "Goober" Lewallyn, decided that they had waited long enough. After returning to his car, which was parked a few yards behind the disabled Greyhound, Lewallyn suddenly ran toward the bus and tossed a flaming bundle of rags through a broken window.

Within seconds the bundle exploded, sending dark gray smoke throughout the bus. At first, Genevieve Hughes, seated only a few feet away from the explosion, thought the bomb-thrower was just trying to scare the Freedom Riders with a smoke bomb, but as the smoke got blacker and blacker and as flames began to engulf several of the upholstered seats, she realized that she and the other passengers were in serious trouble.

Crouching down in the middle of the bus, she screamed out, "Is there any air up front?" When no one answered, she began to panic. "Oh, my God, they're going to burn us up!" she yelled to the others, who were lost in a dense cloud of smoke.

Making her way forward, she finally found an open window six rows from the front and thrust her head out, gasping for air. As she looked out, she saw the outstretched necks of Jimmy McDonald and Charlotte Devree, who had also found open windows.

Seconds later, all three squeezed through the windows and dropped to the ground. Still choking from the smoke and fumes, they staggered across the street. Gazing back at the burning bus, they feared that the other passengers were still trapped inside, but they soon caught sight of several passengers who had escaped through the front door on the other side.

They were all lucky to be alive. Several members of the mob had pressed against the door screaming, "Burn them alive" and "Fry the goddamn niggers," and the Freedom Riders had been all but doomed until an exploding fuel tank convinced the mob that the whole bus was about to explode. As the frightened whites retreated, Cowling pried open the door, allowing the rest of the choking passengers to escape.

When Hank Thomas, the first Rider to exit the front of the bus, crawled away from the doorway, a white man rushed toward him and asked, "Are you all okay?" Before Thomas could answer, the man's concerned look turned into a sneer as he struck the astonished student in the head with a baseball bat. Thomas fell to the ground and was barely conscious as the rest of the exiting Riders spilled out onto the grass.

By this time, several of the white families living in the surrounding Bynum neighborhood had formed a small crowd in front of the grocery store. Most of the onlookers remained safely in the background, but a few stepped forward to offer assistance to the Riders.

One little girl, twelve-year-old Janie Miller, supplied the choking victims with water, filling and refilling a five-gallon bucket while braving the insults and taunts of Klansmen. Later ostracized and threatened for this act of kindness, she and her family found it impossible to remain in Anniston in the aftermath of the bus bombing. Even though city leaders were quick to condemn the bombing, there was little sympathy for the Riders among local whites. Indeed, while Miller was coming to the Riders' aid, some of her neighbors were urging the marauding Klansmen on.

At one point, with the Riders lying "on the ground around the bus, coughing and bleeding," the mob surged forward. But Cowling's pistol, the heat of the fire, and the acrid fumes wafting from the burning upholstery kept them away. Moments later a second fuel tank explosion drove them back even farther, and eventually a couple of warning shots fired into the air by the highway patrolmen on the scene signaled that the would-be lynching party was over.

As the disappointed vigilantes slipped away, Cowling, Sims, and the patrolmen stood guard over the Riders, most of whom were lying or sitting in a daze a few yards from the burned-out shell of the bus. But no one in a position of authority showed any interest in identifying or arresting those responsible for the assault.

No one wrote down the license numbers of the Klansmen's cars and pickup trucks, and no one seemed to be in any hurry to call an ambulance. Several of the Riders had inhaled smoke and fumes and were in serious need of medical attention, but it would be some time before any of them saw a doctor.

One sympathetic white couple who lived nearby allowed Hughes to use their phone to call for an ambulance, and when no one answered, they drove her to the hospital. For the rest of the stricken Riders, getting to the hospital proved to be a bit more complicated. When the ambulance called by one of the state troopers finally arrived, the driver refused to transport any of the injured black Riders.

After a few moments of awkward silence, the white Riders, already loaded into the ambulance, began to exit, insisting they could not leave their black friends behind. With this gesture — and a few stern words from Cowling — the driver's resolve weakened, and before long the integrated band was on its way to Anniston Memorial Hospital.

Unfortunately, the scene at the hospital offered the Riders little solace. The first to arrive, Hughes found the medical care in Anniston almost as frightening as the burning bus:

*There was no doctor at the hospital, only a nurse. They had me breathe pure oxygen but that only burned my throat and did not relieve the coughing. I was burning hot and my clothes were a wet mess. After a while Ed and Bert were brought in, choking. We all lay on our beds and coughed. Finally, a woman doctor came in — she had to look up smoke poisoning before treating us. They brought in the Negro man who had been in the back of the bus with me.*

*I pointed to him and told them to take care of him. But they did not bring him into our emergency room. I understand that they did not do anything at all for Hank. Thirteen in all were brought in, and three were admitted: Ed, the Negro man and myself. They gave me a room and I slept. When I woke up the nurse asked me if I could talk with the FBI. The FBI man did not care about us, but only the bombing.*

Hughes's general distrust of the FBI's attitude toward civil rights activists was clearly warranted, but — unbeknownst to her — the FBI agent on the scene had actually intervened on the Freedom Riders' behalf. At his urging, the medical staff agreed to treat all of the injured passengers, black and white, though in the end they failed to do so.

When the ambulance full of Freedom Riders arrived at the hospital, a group of Klansmen made an unsuccessful attempt to block the entrance to the emergency room. Later, as the crowd outside the hospital grew to menacing proportions, hospital officials began to panic, especially after several Klansmen threatened to burn the building to the ground. With nightfall approaching and with no prospect of adequate

police protection, the superintendent ordered the Riders to leave the hospital as soon as possible.

Hughes and several other Riders were in no shape to leave, but Joe Perkins, the leader of the Greyhound group, had no choice but to comply with the evacuation order. Struggling to conceal his rage, he told the Riders to be ready to leave in twenty minutes, though it actually took him well over an hour to arrange safe passage out of the hospital.

After both the state troopers and the local police refused to provide the Riders with transportation — or even an escort — Bert Bigelow called friends in Washington in a vain effort to get help from the federal government. A few minutes later Perkins placed a frantic call to Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham.

A native of the Alabama Black Belt, Shuttlesworth knew enough about towns like Anniston to know that the Freedom Riders were in serious danger. Mobilizing a fleet of eight cars, he planned to lead the rescue mission himself until his longtime bodyguard, Colonel Stone "Buck" Johnson, persuaded him to remain in Birmingham with the Trailways Riders, who had arrived in the city earlier in the afternoon.

Just before the cars left for Anniston, Shuttlesworth reminded Johnson and the other volunteers that this was a nonviolent operation. "Gentlemen, this is dangerous," he admitted, "but... you mustn't carry any weapons. You must trust God and have faith." All of the "deacons" nodded in assent, but as soon as they were safely out of sight, several of the faithful pulled out shotguns from beneath their seats. Checking triggers and ammunition, they made sure they would be able to defend themselves if the going got rough.

While the Riders waited for Shuttlesworth's deacons to make their way across the back roads of the Alabama hill country, the Anniston hospital superintendent grew impatient and reminded Perkins that the interracial group would not be allowed to spend the night in the hospital. Perhaps, he suggested with a wry smile, they could find refuge in the bus station.

Fortunately, the superintendent's mean-spirited suggestion became moot a few minutes later when the rescue mission pulled into the hospital parking lot. With the police holding back the jeering crowd, and with the deacons openly displaying their weapons, the weary but relieved Riders piled into the cars, which promptly drove off into the gathering dusk. "We walked right between those Ku Klux," Buck Johnson later recalled. "Some of them had clubs. There were some deputies too. You couldn't tell the deputies from the Ku Klux."

As the convoy raced toward Birmingham, the Riders peppered their rescuers with questions about the fate of the Trailways group. Perkins's conversation with Shuttlesworth earlier in the afternoon had revealed that the other bus had also run into trouble, but few details had been available.

The deacons themselves knew only part of the story, but even the barest outline was enough to confirm the Riders' worst fears: The attack on the bus in Anniston could not be dismissed as the work of an unorganized mob.

As the deacons described what had happened to the Trailways group, the true nature of the Riders' predicament came into focus: With the apparent connivance of law enforcement officials, the organized defenders of white supremacy in Alabama had decided to smash the Freedom Ride with violence, in effect announcing to the world that they had no intention of letting the law, the U.S. Constitution, or anything else interfere with the preservation of racial segregation in their sovereign state.

The Trailway Riders' ordeal began even before the group left Atlanta. As Peck and the other Riders waited in line to purchase their tickets, they couldn't help noticing that several regular passengers had disappeared from the line after being approached by a group of white men.

The white men themselves — later identified as Alabama Klansmen — eventually boarded the bus, but only a handful of other regular passengers joined them. The Klansmen were beefy, rough-looking characters, mostly in their twenties or thirties, and their hulking presence gave the Riders an uneasy feeling as the bus pulled out.

There were seven Freedom Riders scattered throughout the bus: the Bergmans, Jim Peck, Charles Person, Herman Harris, Jerry Moore, and Ike Reynolds. Simeon Booker and his *Jet* magazine colleague, photographer Ted Gaffney, were also on board. Seated in the rear of the bus, the two journalists had a close-up view of the entire harrowing journey from Atlanta to Birmingham. "It was a frightening experience," Booker later reported, "the worst encountered in almost 20 years of journalism."

He was not exaggerating. The bus was barely out of the Atlanta terminal when the Klansmen began to make threatening remarks. "You niggers will be taken care of once you get in Alabama," one Klansman sneered. Once the bus passed the state line, the comments intensified, giving the Riders the distinct impression that something might be brewing in Anniston.

Arriving at the Anniston Trailways station approximately an hour after the other Riders had pulled into the Greyhound station, Peck and the Trailways Riders looked around warily before leaving the bus. The waiting room was eerily quiet, and several whites looked away as the unwelcome visitors walked up to the lunch counter. After purchasing a few sandwiches, the Riders walked back to the bus.

Later, while waiting nervously to leave, they heard an ambulance siren but didn't think much of it until the bus driver, John Olan Patterson, who had been talking to several Anniston police officers, vaulted up the steps.

Flanked by eight "hoodlums," as Peck later called them, Patterson gave them the news about the Greyhound riot. "We have received word that a bus has been burned to the ground and passengers are being carried to the hospital by the carloads," he declared, with no hint of compassion or regret. "A mob is waiting for our bus and will do the same to us unless we get these niggers off the front seats." His bus wasn't going anywhere until the black Freedom Riders retreated to the back of the bus where they belonged.

After a few moments of silence, one of the Riders reminded Patterson that they were interstate passengers who had the right to sit wherever they pleased. Shaking his head in disgust, he exited the bus without a word. But one of the white "hoodlums" soon answered for him: "Niggers get back. You ain't up north. You're in Alabama, and niggers ain't nothing here."

To prove his point, he suddenly lunged toward Person, punching him in the face. A second Klansman then struck Harris, who was sitting next to Person in the front section of the bus. Both black Freedom Riders adhered to Gandhian discipline and refused to fight back, but this only encouraged their attackers. Dragging the defenseless students into the aisle, the Klansmen started pummeling them with their fists and kicking them again and again.

At this point Peck and Walter Bergman rushed forward from the back to object. As soon as Peck reached the front, one of the attackers turned on him, striking a blow that sent the frail, middle-aged activist reeling across two rows of seats. Within seconds Bergman, the oldest of the Freedom Riders at sixty-one, suffered a similar blow, falling to the floor with a thud.

As blood spurted from their faces, both men tried to shield themselves from further attack, but the Klansmen, enraged by the white Riders' attempt to protect their "nigger" collaborators, proceeded to pound them into a bloody mass. While a pair of Klansmen lifted Peck's head, others punched him in the face until he lost consciousness.

By this time Bergman was out cold on the floor, but one frenzied assailant continued to stomp on his chest. When Frances Bergman begged the Klansman to stop beating her husband, he ignored her plea and called her a "nigger lover." Fortunately, one of the other Klansmen — realizing that the defenseless Freedom Rider was about to be killed — eventually called a halt to the beating. "Don't kill him," he said coolly, making sure that no one on the bus mistook self-interested restraint for compassion.

Although Walter Bergman's motionless body blocked the aisle, several Klansmen managed to drag Person and Harris, both barely conscious, to the back of the bus, draping them over the passengers sitting in the backseat. A few seconds later, they did the same to Peck and Bergman, creating a pile of bleeding and bruised humanity that left the rest of the passengers in a momentary state of shock. Content with their

brutal handiwork, the Klansmen then sat down in the middle of the bus to block any further attempts to violate the color line.

At this point a black woman riding as a regular passenger begged to be let off the bus, but the Klansmen forced her to stay. "Shut up, you black bitch," one of them snarled. "Ain't nobody but whites sitting up here. And them nigger lovers . . . can just sit back there with their nigger friends."

Moments later, Patterson, who had left during the melee, returned to the bus, accompanied by a police officer. After surveying the scene, both men appeared satisfied with the restoration of Jim Crow seating arrangements. Turning toward the Klansmen, the police officer grinned and assured them that Alabama justice was on their side: "Don't worry about no lawsuits. I ain't seen a thing."

The officer then exited the bus and motioned to Patterson to head out onto the highway. Realizing that there was a mob waiting on the main road to Birmingham, the driver kept to the back roads as he headed west. When none of the Klansmen objected to this detour, the Freedom Riders were puzzled but relieved, thinking that there were limits to the savagery of the segregationists after all, even in the wilds of eastern Alabama. What they did not know, of course, was that the Klansmen were simply saving them for the welcoming party already gathering in the shadows of downtown Birmingham.

During the next two hours, as the bus rolled toward Birmingham, the Klansmen continued to taunt and torment the Riders. One man brandished a pistol, a second threatened the Riders with a steel pipe, and three others served as "sentries," blocking access to the middle and front sections of the bus. As Booker recalled the scene, one of the sentries was "a pop-eyed fellow who kept taunting: 'Just tell Bobby [Kennedy] and we'll do him in, too.'"

When one of the Klansmen approached Booker threateningly, the journalist nervously handed him a copy of *Jet* that featured an advance story on CORE's sponsorship of the Freedom Ride. Over the next few minutes, as the article was passed from Klansman to Klansman, the atmosphere became increasingly tense. "I'd like to choke all of them," one Klansman confessed, while others assured the Riders that they would get what was coming to them when they arrived in Birmingham.

By the time the bus reached the outskirts of the city, Peck and the other injured Riders had regained consciousness, but since the Klansmen would not allow any of the Riders to leave their seats or talk among themselves, there was no opportunity for Peck to prepare the group for the impending onslaught. He could only hope that each Rider would be able to draw upon some combination of inner strength and past experience, some reservoir of courage and responsibility that would sustain the Freedom Ride and protect the viability and moral integrity of the nonviolent movement.

Though battered and bleeding, and barely able to walk, Peck was determined to set an example for his fellow Freedom Riders. As the designated testers at the Birmingham stop, he and Person would be the first to confront the fully assembled power of Alabama segregationists.

The terror-filled ride from Atlanta was a clear indication that they could expect some measure of violence in Birmingham, but at this point Peck and the other Trailways Riders had no detailed knowledge of what had happened to the Greyhound group in Anniston two hours earlier. They thought they were prepared for the worst.

In actuality, however, they had no reliable way of gauging what they were up against, no way of appreciating the full implications of challenging Alabama's segregationist institutions, and no inkling of how far Birmingham's ultra-segregationists would go to protect the sanctity of Jim Crow. This was not just the Deep South — it was Birmingham, where close collaboration between the Ku Klux Klan and law enforcement officials was a fact of life. The special agents in the Birmingham FBI field office, as well as their superiors in Washington, possessed detailed information on this collaboration and could have warned the Freedom Riders. But they chose to remain silent.

The dire consequences of the bureau's refusal to intervene were compounded by the active involvement of FBI informant Gary Thomas Rowe. In the final minutes before the Trailways group's arrival, Rowe helped ensure that the plot to "welcome" the Freedom Riders would actually be carried out.

The plan called for Rowe and the other Klansmen to initiate the attack at the Greyhound station, where the first group of Freedom Riders was expected to arrive, but news of the Anniston bombing did not reach Birmingham until midafternoon, just minutes before the arrival of the Trailways bus.

A frantic call from police headquarters to Rowe, who quickly spread the word, alerted the Klansmen waiting near the Greyhound station that a bus of Freedom Riders was about to arrive at the Trailways station, three blocks away. The "welcoming committee" had just enough time to regroup at the Trailways station.

Years later Rowe recalled the mad rush across downtown Birmingham: "We made an astounding sight . . . men running and walking down the streets of Birmingham on Sunday afternoon carrying chains, sticks, and clubs. Everything was deserted; no police officers were to be seen except one on a street corner. He stepped off and let us go by, and we barged into the bus station and took it over like an army of occupation. There were Klansmen in the waiting room, in the rest rooms, in the parking area."

By the time Peck and company arrived, the Klansmen and their police allies were all in place, armed and ready to do what had to be done to protect the Southern way of life. Police dispatchers, following the agreed-upon plan, had cleared the "target" area:



For the next fifteen minutes there would be no police presence in or near the Trailways station. The only exceptions were two plainclothes detectives who were in the crowd to monitor the situation and to make sure that the Klansmen left the station before the police arrived.

Since it was Sunday, and Mother's Day, there were few bystanders, aside from a handful of news reporters who had been tipped off that something big was about to happen at the Trailways station. Despite the semisecret nature of the operation, the organizers could not resist the temptation to let the outside world catch a glimpse of Alabama manhood in action.

One of the reporters on hand was Howard K. Smith, a national correspondent for CBS News who was in Birmingham working on a television documentary titled "Who Speaks for Birmingham?". Smith and his CBS colleagues were investigating *New York Times* columnist Harrison Salisbury's charges that Alabama's largest city was consumed by lawlessness and racial oppression.

"Every channel of communication, every medium of mutual interest, every reasoned approach, every inch of middle ground," wrote Salisbury in April 1960, "has been fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism, reinforced by the whip, the razor, the gun, the bomb, the torch, the club, the knife, the mob, the police and many branches of the state's apparatus."

After several days of interviews, Smith was still trying to decide if Salisbury's claims were exaggerated. A Louisiana native with considerable experience in the Deep South, Smith was more than intrigued when he received a Saturday night call from Dr. Edward R. Fields, the president of the ultra-conservative National States Rights Party (NSRP), an organization known to promote a virulent strain of white supremacist and anti-Semitic extremism. Identifying himself simply as "Fields," the arch segregationist urged Smith to hang around the downtown bus stations "if he wanted to see some real action."

A gun-toting Birmingham chiropractor with close ties to the infamous Georgia extremist J. B. Stoner, Fields himself had every intention of taking part in the action. Along with Stoner, who had driven over from Atlanta for the occasion, and several other NSRP stalwarts, Fields showed up at the Greyhound station on Sunday afternoon armed and ready for the bloodletting — even though Klan leader Hubert Page warned him to stay away. Page and his police accomplices were having enough trouble controlling their own forces without having to worry about Fields and his crew of professional troublemakers.

With Police Chief Jamie Moore out of the city and Connor lying low in an effort to distance himself from the impending violence, Detective Tom Cook was in charge of the operation, but Cook did not share Page's concern. When Rowe called Cook to complain that the NSRP was complicating the Klan's plans, the detective told him to relax. "You boys should work together," Cook suggested.

Connor — who spent Sunday morning at city hall, barely a stone's throw away from the Greyhound station — was the only man in Birmingham with the power to call the whole thing off. But he was not about to do so. Resisting the entreaties of several friends, including his Methodist pastor, John Rutland, who warned him that joining forces with the Klan was a big mistake, he cast his lot with the extremists.

He knew that the welcoming party might backfire — that it could complicate the mayoral campaign of his political ally Art Hanes, that Birmingham might even become a second Little Rock, a city besieged by federal troops — but he simply could not bring himself to let the Freedom Riders off the hook. He had been waiting too long for an opportunity to confront the Yankee agitators on his own turf.

It was time to let Earl Warren, the Kennedys, the Communists, and all the other meddling South haters know that the loyal sons of Alabama were ready to fight and die for white supremacy and states' rights. It was time for the blood to flow.

At 4:15 on Sunday afternoon, Connor got all the blood he wanted — and then some. As soon as the bus pulled into the Trailways terminal, the Klansmen on board raced down the aisle to be near the front door.

Following a few parting taunts — one man screamed, "You damn Communists, why don't you go back to Russia. You're a shame to the white race" — they hustled down the steps and disappeared into the crowd. They had done their job; the rest was up to their Klan brethren, several of whom were waiting expectantly in front of the terminal. The Klansmen's hurried exit was a bit unnerving, but as Peck and the other Freedom Riders peered out at the crowd there was no sign of any weapons.

One by one, the Riders filed off the bus and onto the unloading platform, where they began to retrieve their luggage. Although there were several rough-looking men standing a few feet from the platform, there was no clear indication that an attack was imminent.

After a few moments of hesitation, Peck and Person walked toward the white waiting room to begin testing the terminal's facilities. In his 1962 memoir, Peck recalled the intensity of the scene, especially his concern for the safety of his black colleague. "I did not want to put Person in a position of being forced to proceed if he thought the situation was too dangerous," he remembered, but "when I looked at him, he responded by saying simply, 'Let's go.'"

This bravery was not born of ignorance: Person had grown up in the Deep South; he had recently served sixteen days in jail for his part in the Atlanta sit-ins, and he had already been beaten up earlier in the day. Nevertheless, neither he nor Peck was fully prepared for what was about to happen.

Moments after the two Freedom Riders entered the waiting room and approached the whites-only lunch counter, one of the waiting Klansmen pointed to the cuts on Peck's

face and the caked blood on his shirt and screamed out that Person, who was walking in front of Peck, deserved to die for attacking a white man.

At this point, Peck tried to explain that Person was not the man who had attacked him, adding: "You'll have to kill me before you hurt him." This blatant breach of racial solidarity only served to incite the crowd of Klansmen blocking their path.

After an Eastview Klansman named Gene Reeves pushed Person toward the colored waiting room, the young black Freedom Rider gamely continued walking toward the white lunch counter but was unable to sidestep a second Klansman who shoved him up against a concrete wall. Standing nearby, NSRP leader Edward Fields pointed toward Peck and yelled: "Get that son of a bitch."

Several burly white men then began to pummel Person with their fists, bloodying his face and mouth and dropping him to his knees. When Peck rushed over to help Person to his feet, several Klansmen grabbed both men by the shoulders and pushed them into a dimly lit corridor leading to a loading platform. In the corridor more than a dozen whites, some armed with lead or iron pipes and others with oversized key rings, pounced on the two Riders, punching and kicking them repeatedly.

Before long, the assault turned into a chaotic free-for-all with "fists and arms... flying everywhere." In the ensuing confusion, Person managed to escape. Running into the street, he staggered onto a city bus and eventually found his way to Fred Shuttlesworth's parsonage. In the meantime, Peck bore the brunt of the attack, eventually losing consciousness and slumping to the floor in a pool of blood.

The fracas had been moved to the back corridor in an effort to avoid the reporters and news photographers roaming the white waiting room, but several newsmen, including Howard K. Smith, witnessed at least part of the attack. Smith, who had only been in Birmingham for a few days, could hardly believe his eyes as the rampaging Klansmen and NSRP "storm troopers" swarmed over the two Freedom Riders. But he soon discovered that this was only the beginning of one of the bloodiest afternoons in Birmingham's history.

While Peck and Person were being assaulted in the corridor, the other Riders searched for a refuge. Jerry Moore and Herman Harris avoided detection by losing themselves in the crowd and slipping away just before the assaults began. Frances Bergman, at her husband's insistence, boarded a city bus moments after their arrival, but Walter himself was unable to escape the mob's fury. Still woozy from his earlier beating, with blood still caked on his clothing, he bravely followed Peck and Person into the white waiting room.

After witnessing the initial assault on his two colleagues, he searched in vain for a policeman who could help them, but soon he too was knocked to the floor by an enraged Klansman. When Simeon Booker entered the terminal a few seconds later, he saw the bloodied and defenseless professor crawling on his hands and knees.

Recoiling from the grisly scene, Booker retreated to the street, where he found a black cabdriver who agreed to whisk him and Ted Gaffney away to safety.

Others were less fortunate. Several white men attacked Ike Reynolds, kicking and stomping him before heaving his semiconscious body into a curbside trash bin. In the confusion, the mob also attacked a number of bystanders misidentified as Freedom Riders.

One of the victims was actually a Klansman named L. B. Earle, who had the misfortune of coming out of the men's room at the wrong time. Attacked by fellow Klansmen who failed to recognize him, Earle suffered several deep head gashes and ended up in the hospital.

Another victim of the mob, a twenty-nine-year-old black laborer named George Webb, was assaulted after he entered the baggage room with his fiancée, Mary Spicer, one of the regular passengers on the freedom bus from Atlanta. The last person to leave the bus, Spicer was unaware of the melee inside the station until she and Webb encountered a group of pipe wielding rioters in the baggage area.

One of the men, undercover FBI informant Gary Thomas Rowe, told Spicer to "get the hell out of here," and she escaped harm, running into the street for help. But Rowe and three others, including an NSRP member, immediately surrounded Webb and proceeded to pummel him with everything from their fists to a baseball bat.

Webb fought back but was soon overwhelmed as several more white men joined in. Dozens of others looked on, some yelling, "Kill the nigger." But moments later the assault was interrupted by Red Self, one of the plainclothes detectives on the scene, who grabbed Rowe by the shoulder and told him it was time to go. "Get the boys out of here," he ordered. "I'm ready to give the signal for the police to move in."

During the allotted fifteen minutes, the violence had spread to the sidewalks and streets surrounding the Trailways station, making it difficult to get the word to all of the Klansmen and NSRP members involved in the riot. But by the time the police moved in to restore order, all of the rioters had left the area. Despite Self's warning, Rowe and those attacking Webb were among the last to leave. "Goddamn it, Tom," Self finally screamed at Rowe, "I told you to get out of here! They're on the way."

Rowe and several others, however, were preoccupied with Webb and continued the attack until a news photographer snapped a picture of Rowe and the other Klansmen. As soon as the flashbulb went off, they abandoned Webb and ran after the photographer, Tommy Langston of the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, who made it to the station parking lot before being caught.

After one man grabbed Langston's camera and smashed it to the ground, Rowe and several others, including Eastview klavern leader Hubert Page, kicked and punched him and threatened to beat him with the same pipes and baseball bats used on Webb.

In the meantime, Webb ran into the loading area, where he was recaptured by a pack of Klansmen led by Gene Reeves. With the police closing in, Webb, like Langston, was released after a few final licks, though by this time both men were bleeding profusely.

Stumbling into the parking lot, Webb somehow managed to find the car where his terrified fiancée and aunt had been waiting. As they drove away to safety, Langston, whose life had suddenly become intertwined with the beating of a man whom he had never met, staggered down the street to the *Post-Herald* building, where he collapsed into the arms of a shocked colleague. Later in the afternoon, another *Post-Herald* photographer returned to the scene of the assault and retrieved Langston's broken camera, discovering to his and Langston's amazement that the roll of film inside was undamaged.

The graphic picture of the Webb beating that appeared on the front page of the *Post-Herald* the next morning, though initially misidentified as a photograph of the attack on Peck, turned out to be one of the few pieces of documentary evidence to survive the riot.

Immediately following the attack on Langston, Rowe and Page grabbed *Birmingham News* photographers Bud Gordon and Tom Lankford and promptly destroyed all of the unexposed film in their cameras. Neither photographer was beaten, but Clancy Lake, a reporter for WAPI radio, was not so lucky.

As Rowe and two other Eastview Klansmen, Billy Holt and Ray Graves, walked toward the Greyhound station parking lot to retrieve their cars, they spied Lake sitting in the front seat of his car broadcasting an eyewitness account of the riot. Convinced that Lake had a camera and had been taking photographs of the scene at the Trailways station, the Klansmen smashed the car's windows with a blackjack, ripped the microphone from the dashboard, and dragged the reporter onto the pavement.

Although Lake noticed a passing police car and screamed for help, the officer drove on, leaving him at the mercy of the attackers. At one point the three men pushed him into a wall, but after Holt swung at him with a pipe and missed, Lake bolted into the Trailways station, where he was relieved to discover that a squad of police had just arrived. With the police on the scene, the gritty reporter was able to resume his broadcast via telephone, as Rowe and his companions called off the pursuit and once again headed toward their cars.

Along the way, they encountered a smiling Bobby Shelton, who congratulated them for a job well done and offered them a ride to the Greyhound parking lot in his Cadillac. Upon their arrival, the Imperial Wizard and his passengers were shocked to discover several local black men writing down the license plate numbers of the Klansmen's cars.

Following a brief struggle — at least one of the overmatched blacks was in his mid-sixties — the Klansmen ripped up the pages with the incriminating numbers before heading to Rowe's house for a victory celebration. Arriving at the house around five o'clock, they stayed there only a few minutes before a phone call from Sergeant Tom Cook sent them back downtown to intercept another bus full of Freedom Riders.

The Greyhound freedom bus, having been burned in Anniston, never actually arrived, but Rowe and Page had too much blood lust to return home without getting some action. Wandering into a black neighborhood on the north side of downtown, they picked a fight with a group of young blacks who gave as good as they got. The battle put one Klansman in the hospital and left Rowe with a knife wound in the neck serious enough to require immediate attention from a doctor. None of this, however, dampened the sense of triumph among the Klansmen and their police collaborators.

At a late-night meeting with Rowe, Red Self suggested that the shedding of a little blood was a small price to pay for what they had accomplished. After weeks of anticipation and careful planning, they had done exactly what they set out to do.

Carried out in broad daylight, the assault on the Freedom Riders had turned a bus station into a war zone, and the Klansmen involved had come away with only minor injuries and little likelihood of criminal prosecution. In the coming days and weeks, the publication of Langston's photograph would be a source of concern for those who were identifiable as Webb's attackers — and for Rowe's FBI handlers, who were furious that one of their informants had allowed himself to be captured on film during a criminal assault.

But as Self and Rowe congratulated each other in the waning hours of May 14, there was no reason to believe that anything had gone wrong. Backing up words with action, the white supremacists of the Eastview klavern and their allies had demonstrated in no uncertain terms that they were ready to use any means necessary to halt the Freedom Rides.

The late-afternoon scene at the Trailways station testified to the success of the operation. Within twenty minutes of the Freedom Riders' arrival, the mob had vanished, leaving surprisingly little evidence of the riot and few witnesses with a clear sense of what had just happened. When Peck regained consciousness a few minutes after the assault, he was alone in the corridor.

*Excerpted from **Freedom Riders** by Raymond Arsenault.*



# Judge Halts Diane Nash Bevels Jail Try

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI—Mrs. Diane Nash Bevel, expecting her first child in September, again has refused to “cooperate with the evil and corrupt court system of Mississippi” and tried to surrender herself to a two-year jail term.

Mrs. Bevel was charged last summer with “contributing to the delinquency of minors” after she gave young Mississippi Negroes instruction in the philosophy of nonviolence. She is a SNCC Field Secretary, and was among several SNCC staffers working in Mississippi last summer.

In November, 1961, she was convicted and sentenced to two years in jail and a \$2000 fine on the “contributing” charge. She appealed the conviction, but in late April decided to abandon her appeal, saying that her philosophy of nonviolence prohibited her from cooperation with “the evil court system” of the state. She recently served ten days in the Hinds County Jail here because she refused to move from the “white” side of a segrega-

## 2 From Jackson Movement Jailed

JACKSON, Miss. - Apparently inspired by the example of Mrs. Diane Nash Bevel, two leaders of the Jackson Nonviolent Movement defied courtroom segregation here and were jailed on charges of contempt of court.

They are Luvagh Brown and Jesse Harris, both residents of Jackson.

Brown and Harris seated themselves on the side of the courtroom reserved for whites and refused to move when the bailiff ordered them to. County Judge Russell Moore sent them to jail for contempt.

ted courtroom.

On May 21, Hinds County Judge Russell Moore told Mrs. Bevel that she cannot abandon her appeal until she has been tried in his court. The judge said that his court calendar would not allow him time for her appeal trial until late June.

### SCEF'S Patriot Well Worth Reading

The Southern Conference Educational Fund publishes a monthly newsletter, The Southern Patriot, which gives news of the Southwide struggle for human dignity as well as noteworthy highlights from selected areas. The Patriot is sent to all persons who give \$2.00 or more annually to the Southern Conference Educational Fund, 822 Perdido Street, New Orleans 12, Louisiana.

## Kennedy

Continued from page 1

buting to the delinquency of minors.”

The students were marching to protest the slaying of 52-year-old Herbert Lee, a farmer active in SNCC's voter registration drive, who was shot and killed by a Mississippi legislator.

They also protested the refusal of school authorities to readmit two students expelled after they participated in a lunch counter sit-in. All 119 people who took part in the march on October 4, 1961 were arrested, but only the SNCC Field Secretaries and six others were charged with two counts.

Moses and McDew were defended by Jack Young, a lawyer from Jackson, who told the all-white, all-male jury that found both guilty that they had only been exercising their rights under the Constitution.

Prosecuting Attorney Joe N. Pygott asked SNCC

## Seeks "Freedom Highway" Riders

In a planned assault on segregation on Federal Highways, the Congress of Racial Equality is planning to send car loads of anti-segregation protesters on trips from New York to Miami.

The groups will try to integrate roadside restaurants, encourage local communities to take up the fight, and will be prepared to stay in jail if arrested.

Volunteers for the summer-long project may contact CORE Program Director Gordon Carey at 38 Park Row, New York 38, New York.

Field Secretary Moses who he worked for and what his business was.

“We do whatever is necessary in this country and in this state to see what Negroes get the rights they're entitled to. If it is necessary to suffer and go to jail then we do it,” Moses said.

The Student Voice and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee cannot continue without your contributions. A donation entitles you to all issues published this year. Make checks payable to: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 135 Auburn Avenue, Atlanta 3, Georgia.

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**Musician and actor Harry Belafonte, Freedom Rider Diane Nash and Freedom Rider Charles Jones discussing the Freedom Riders movement, July 14, 1961. (Photo by Afro American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Images)**



Their mug-shot expressions hint at their resolve, defiance, pride, vulnerability, and fear. *"I was captivated by these images and wanted to bring them to a wider audience,"* Eric Etheridge writes. *"I wanted to find the riders today, to look into their faces and photograph them again."* Using the Internet and information in the arrest files, Etheridge tracked riders down, then called them cold. *"My best icebreaker was: 'I have your mug shot from 1961. Have you ever seen it?'"*

Etheridge, a veteran magazine editor, provides a visceral tribute to those road warriors in *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders*. The book, a collection of Etheridge's portraits of 80 Freedom Riders juxtaposed with mug shots from their arrests in 1961, includes interviews with the activists reflecting on their experiences.

Source: The Freedom Riders, Then and Now Fighting racial segregation in the South, these activists were beaten and arrested. Where are they now, fifty years later? Marian Smith Holmes February 2009. Published in Smithsonian Magazine.

# CONTENT STANDARDS

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

## Social Studies / Humanities

NCSS.D2. His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

NCSS.D2. His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

NCSS.D2. His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

NCSS.D2. His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

NCSS.D2. His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

NCSS.D2. His.15.9-12. Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument.

NCSS.D2. His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

## Assessment

Students are graded on:

- Their assessment of the civil rights movement
- Their ability to demonstrate understanding of the role of popular culture in political and social movements.
- Their ability to process and analyze primary sources.
  - Students should develop a better understanding and define concepts of non-violent protest.
  - Students should be able to produce a written assessment of their oral history experience. In addition to a written component, students should be evaluated in their presentation to the class.

## Lesson Extensions

Selected EDSITEment Websites

[National Archives Document Analysis Worksheets](#)

[National Archives -- Using Primary Sources in the Classroom Resource](#)

[Our Documents](#)

[Center for History and New Media](#)

[Smithsonian Folkways](#)

NEH-sponsored documentary *Remembering Jim Crow*

PBS Documentary [Freedom Riders](#)

PBS Documentary [Strange Fruit](#)

PBS Documentary [Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985](#)

[National Park Service Historic Places of the Civil Rights](#)

### Quiz Questions: Select Correct Answers:

- 1) Freedom Riders of 1961s were best known for (select correct answers):
  - a. inciting violent protests against urban policing policies
  - b. providing transportation to those participating in the Montgomery bus boycott
  - c. boycotting travel on segregated buses across the South
  - d. challenging segregated seating on interstate bus routes
  
2. Response to the Freedom Riders as they travelled throughout the South illustrated
  - a. uniformly violent opposition to their actions and arrest.
  - b. varied racial attitudes and reactions on the part of southerners.
  - c. widespread indifference
  - d. local support and public mobilization of the black community
  
3. The Freedom riders encountered the most violent reactions to their methods in:
  - a. Lynchburg, Virginia
  - b. Charlotte, North Carolina
  - c. Atlanta, Georgia
  - d. Birmingham, Alabama
  
4. The federal government's response to the Freedom rides was characterized by:
  - a. overwhelming support, including federal protection of the riders
  - b. the full support of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy, but not of Congress
  - c. observation and information gathering but limited actual support.
  - d. official training in nonviolent tactics but little overt support
  
5. Compared with earlier tactics in the movement, in the early 1960s, new civil rights groups advocated greater emphasis on:

- a. taking direct action
- b. working through the federal court system
- c. inciting violent revolution
- d. electing local officials sympathetic to their cause

6. The actions of the Freedom Riders most directly contributed to the

- a. *Brown v. Board of Education* decision
- b. Civil Rights Act of 1964
- c. Voting Rights Act of 1965
- d. Election of President John F. Kennedy

**Open -ended Response Questions:**

1. Explain how the Freedom Riders of the early 1960s drew upon the U.S. Constitution to justify their actions.
2. Explain how the Freedom Rides of the early 1960s represented an evolution in the methods of the civil rights movement.



*A Greyhound bus carrying freedom riders was firebombed by an angry white mob while in Anniston, Alabama, in 1961. The passengers were forced to evacuate and were then assaulted.*

*Refer to the image provided.*

1. The events in the image most directly led to
  - a. a Supreme Court decision declaring segregation unconstitutional
  - b. increased support for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - c. the development of the counterculture
  - d. Martin Luther King Jr.'s becoming a civil right leader.
  
2. The event in the photograph contributed to which of the following?
  - a. Debates over the role of government in American life
  - b. An increase in public confidence in political institutions
  - c. Domestic opposition to containment
  - d. The abandonment of direct-action techniques to achieve civil rights.
  
3. The event in the image was most directly shaped by
  - a. the techniques and strategies of the anti-war movement
  - b. desegregation of the armed forces
  - c. a desire to achieve the promise of the Fourteenth Amendment
  - d. Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program

# Role of Music

## Guiding Questions

- ✓ How did the popular music of the 1960s influence or aid the civil rights movement?
- ✓ How did the Freedom Riders and other political activists inspire or help produce civil rights-oriented music?

## Learning Objectives

Students have:

- ✓ Have a better grasp of the role of popular culture as a tool for social change.
- ✓ Recognize the connection between non-violent protest and the use of music for social change groups such as the Freedom Riders and their actions.
- ✓ Analyze lyrics of prominent songs of the era and the civil rights movement and extract meaning and value from them through textual analysis.
- ✓ Compare and contrast the music used by the movement with other popular music of the day and recognize both similarities and differences.

## Preparation

Students may utilize a variety of primary sources and multimedia components. Several Web resources provide access to sound recordings, images, video, and documents that will potentially give historical context to and enhance the lesson. The Activity Worksheets will make many of these activities and resources printable for classroom or at-home use.

For more background concerning music in post-war America, consider the NEH-funded website *Voices Across Time*.

A number of NPR resources and webpages provide useful background to the context of, and artists involved in particular musical selections. Podcasts can prove beneficial for students' song lists and informative interviews. Several feature interesting discussions on Sam Cooke, the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and general civil rights background.

PBS's *American Experience* site *Eyes on the Prize* hosts many song clips from various artists and periods of the civil rights movement.

The Smithsonian Folkways project will prove valuable for gathering relevant songs and also features streaming capabilities for song clips. The site has specific pages on songs of the Freedom Riders, music used by the Congress on Racial Equality (C.O.R.E), and other songs used by the civil rights movement. (Note that some charges may apply.)

The PBS-sponsored *Strange Fruit* site's [timeline](#) can provide useful context of American protest music throughout the years.



For primary sources, several EDSITEment-reviewed and NEH-sponsored websites contain excellent documents and images that will enrich your lesson. The National Archive's [DocsTeach](#) hosts the Civil Rights Act (also available here through Our Documents).

An interesting court case involving Freedom Riders vs. the KKK is available here. If students are new to analyzing music as a primary source, consider consulting the National Archive's document analysis guide for sound recordings.

The Center for History and New Media, in addition to the Smithsonian Institution, offers unique resources as part of their Object of History project. Additionally, the PBS-sponsored site [Eyes on the Prize](#) hosts many primary documents that span the entire civil rights movement (and beyond) and gives useful historical background and multimedia resources.

### **Activity 1. Setting the Stage**

- Begin with a discussion where students define and understand the goals of the civil rights movement and the concept of equal rights.
- Examine issues on aspects of the movement most relevant to the Freedom Rides.
- Examine essay from the PBS documentary *Eyes on the Prize* by Bernice Johnson Reagon gives useful framework for music's meaning in the civil rights movement.

Students begin the discussion by defining and understanding the goals of Freedom Riders within the civil rights movement and the concept of equal rights.

### **Activity 2. Understanding the Message in the Song**

After Relevant songs and more possible.

- ✓ "If I Had a Hammer" – Pete Seeger (1949)
- ✓ "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned" – Mahalia Jackson at the March on Washington (1963) •
- ✓ "This Little Light of Mine" – Various Artists and Performances (1950s and 1960s)
- ✓ "Help Your Eyes on the Prize" – Various Artists and Performances (1956) •
- ✓ "Get Your Rights Jack" – C.O.R.E Freedom Singers (early 1960s) •
- ✓ "We Shall Overcome" – Various Artists and Performances (consider Joan Baez's version, 1963)
- ✓ "Blowin' in the Wind" – Bob Dylan (1963) •
- ✓ "A Change is Gonna Come" – Sam Cooke (1964) •
- ✓ "Here's to the State of Mississippi" – Phil Ochs (1964) •
- ✓ "Nowhere to Run" – Martha and the Vandellas (1965) •
- ✓ "Rescue Me" – Fontella Bass (1965)
- ✓ "I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to be Free" – Nina Simone (1967)

After the first activity with the songs, students move next to rank them according to their relevance to civil rights and social justice. A more focused version of this activity could center attention on a specific and foundational song, such as the anthemic freedom song "We Shall Overcome."

There are several sources where these resources can be found such as the Smithsonian Folkways collections on songs by the C.O.R.E Freedom Singers and songs by the Freedom Riders, and the PBS website for the documentary In what ways did protesters and civil rights advocates utilize this song?

- What types of meaning and emotion could be extracted from the lyrics and the performance of the song?
- Where did the song actively appear in protests of the early 1960s?
- See Our Documents to view a March on Washington brochure and analyze the context surrounding the song and the march.
- Then have each student present their findings and chosen songs (via YouTube, for example).

### **Activity 2. Understanding the Message**

Have students analyze the lyrics to a song and analyze the message behind them. Songs:

- "If I Had a Hammer" – Pete Seeger (1949)
- "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned" – Mahalia Jackson at the March on Washington (1963)
- "This Little Light of Mine" – Various Artists and Performances (1950s and 1960s)
- "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" – Various Artists and Performances (1956)
- "Get Your Rights Jack" – C.O.R.E Freedom Singers (early 1960s)
- "We Shall Overcome" – Various Artists and Performances (consider Joan Baez's version, 1963)
- "Blowin' in the Wind" – Bob Dylan (1963)
- "A Change is Gonna Come" – Sam Cooke (1964)
- "Here's to the State of Mississippi" – Phil Ochs (1964)
- "Nowhere to Run" – Martha and the Vandellas (1965)
- "Rescue Me" – Fontella Bass (1965)
- "I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to be Free" – Nina Simone (1967)

Students rank the songs according to their relevance to civil rights and social justice. Several resources can provide songs such as the Smithsonian Folkways collections on songs by the C.O.R.E Freedom Singers and songs by the Freedom Riders, and the PBS website for the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary. A more focused version of this activity could center attention on a specific and foundational song, such as the anthemic freedom song "We Shall Overcome."

- In what ways did protesters and civil rights advocates utilize this song?

- What types of meaning and emotion could be extracted from the lyrics and the performance of the song?
- Where did the song actively appear in protests of the early 1960s?
- See Our Documents to view a March on Washington brochure and analyze the context surrounding the song and the march.
- Then have each student present their findings and chosen songs (via YouTube, for example).

### **Activity 3. The Use of Music in the Freedom Rides**

As Freedom Rider James Farmer explained, “the prison officials wanted us to stop singing, because they were afraid our spirit would become contagious, and the other prisoners would become Freedom Riders as a result of our singing.”

This activity will further explore the link between song and motivation. Find/read primary documents from the Freedom Riders and examine the use of song as a motivational force. Apply the streaming clips from the NEH and PBS-sponsored documentary on the Freedom Riders.

- How did the anthems of the movement comfort or invigorate the participants? Which songs or group of lyrics were chosen?

View letters written between jailed Freedom Riders as a way to understand their place in confinement. Additionally, these Library of Congress-hosted photographs of Freedom Ride bus stations and events can help illustrate the harsh tone and environment around their project.

The PBS documentary site *Eyes on the Prize* provides insight into the role of music for the Freedom Riders.

- Use the documentary *Eyes on the Prize* to also analyze the use of the song "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round." How does this song serve as an example of music as a tool that aided the Freedom Riders' cause?

How else did the Jim Crow era further protest music in the 1960s? For this, utilize the NEH-sponsored documentary on Jim Crow in the South.

What was the role of spirituals in both the Freedom Riders mission and in the greater use of music in the civil rights campaign?

- To examine the use of spirituals as a tool, examine this clip discussing the role of spirituals from the PBS *Freedom Riders* documentary.

Use the EDSITEment lesson plan on the historic role of spirituals in history to gain more context and insight. This list of spirituals, work songs, and ballads from the Library of Congress may be a useful resource.

What role did "We Shall Overcome" play in the Freedom Rider's campaign?

#### **Activity 4. Seeing and Hearing the Message**

The students can compare and contrast a prominent document or speech to important songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" (1963), "Get Your Rights Jack" (1963), or "A Change is Gonna Come" (1964) (clips available through the Smithsonian's Folkways library). Ask them to examine if these prominent events and documents reflected the wants and needs of the participants.

Have student consult Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. How did Sam Cooke's song "A Change is Gonna Come" reflect the tone and mission of Dr. King's "dream"?

#### **Activity 5. Examining the Popular Music Landscape**

Have students examine the top-selling songs from the early 1960s (specific years are the choice of the instructor). Have each student pick two or more songs and explain the connection (or lack thereof) to the civil rights movement and the racial politics of the day using the provided worksheet.

Examples of top songs of 1961 (the year the Freedom Rides campaign began):

- "At Last," – Etta James
- "Are You Lonesome Tonight" – Elvis Presley
- "Blue Moon" – The Marcels
- "Crazy" – Patsy Cline
- "Cryin'" – Roy Orbison
- "Hello Mary Lou" – Ricky Nelson
- "Let's Twist Again" – Chubby Checker
- "Please Mr. Postman" – The Marvelettes
- "Runaway" – Del Shannon
- "Running Scared" – Roy Orbison
- "Shop Around" – The Miracles
- "Travelin' Man" – Ricky Nelson
- "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?" – The Shirelles

Example:

The early 1960s saw the beginnings of pop ensembles, later known as girl groups. Characterized by stylishly presented all-female singers with glossy production such as

The Shirelles, The Ronettes, and later The Supremes, girl groups created a distinct sound of youthful and innocent love songs.

Juxtapose the sound of the early girl group phase with the somber and harsh lyrics of "Strange Fruit." Instructors can utilize this NPR podcast concerning Billie Holiday's use of the last song and this additional podcast providing context around the song and lynching.

This PBS film *Strange Fruit* may prove useful for its timeline overview of various protest music in American history.

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