

FREEDOM RIDERS | 1961

THE ROAD TO CHANGE



May 24, 1961, near Cuba, Ala.

National Guard troops protect a Trailways bus carrying Freedom Riders near the Mississippi state line as it travels from Montgomery to Jackson, Miss., on U.S. 80 outside of Cuba. The troops were called out after prolonged violence in Montgomery.
NEWS FILE/NORMAN DEAN



May 17, 1961

While being taken to jail, Freedom Riders sing in the rear of a Birmingham paddy wagon. From right are Carl Bush, William Harbour and Rudolph Graham. Police said the men were arrested "for their protection." Later that night, they were taken to the Alabama-Tennessee state line and released. Freedom Rider Catherine Burks Brooks said that Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor personally dropped them off and told the group not to come back.
NEWS FILE

May 15, 1961

Freedom Rider Genevieve Hughes reads about an attack on a Greyhound bus in Anniston. Hughes, inside the Birmingham Greyhound Station, had been a passenger on that bus, which was firebombed. Aides to the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth picked up Hughes and other Freedom Riders in Anniston and gave them a ride to Birmingham. Greyhound refused to carry Freedom Riders farther. Freedom Rider Esther Bergman, left, joins Hughes at the station.
NEWS STAFF/ED JONES



May 19, 1961

Jim Zwerg opens the door for fellow Freedom Rider Paul Brooks as they enter the Birmingham Greyhound Station. Zwerg and Brooks were arrested coming into Birmingham from Nashville. They were separated from other riders, but rejoined the group two days later. Their contingent of Freedom Riders later left for Montgomery, where Zwerg was beaten unconscious and hospitalized for several days.
NEWS FILE

Bold volunteers – Freedom Riders – challenged the custom of segregation in 1961 after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in interstate bus and railroad stations. Bus riders, black and white, set out from Washington; their arrival in Alabama met with violence. Mobs attacked several buses, firebombing one in Anniston. In Birmingham and Montgomery, whites beat some riders and federal marshals had to be called out to prevent attacks. A Birmingham News front page headline asked, "Where were the police?"



May 17, 1961

Police cover the windshield of a Greyhound bus carrying Freedom Riders from Nashville at the Birmingham depot. Police said they did it for the riders' safety because a mob had gathered around the bus station.
NEWS FILE



May 17, 1961

A Greyhound bus driver faces passengers waiting at the Birmingham Greyhound Station as Freedom Riders are held aside by Birmingham police.
NEWS FILE