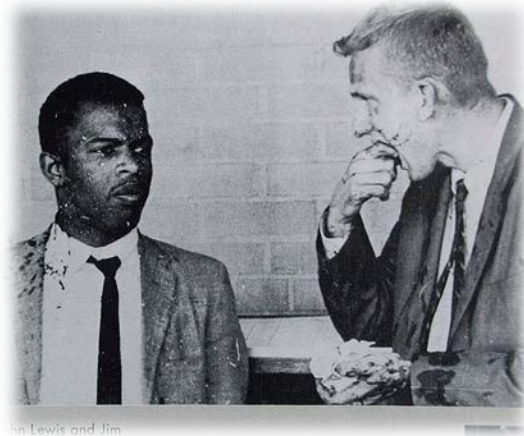


The Freedom Riders



Excerpt from:
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by Jake Henderson & Robert Marshall
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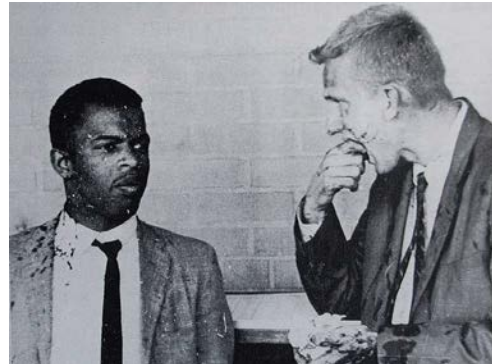
The Freedom Riders

One of the monumental efforts during the Civil Rights Movement was known as the Freedom Rides. Who were the Freedom Riders? What were they trying to do?

In 1961, a group of well-meaning college students (mostly from Northeastern states) and other activists made the decision to challenge Southern segregation laws. Their plan was to make a bus trip across the South, from Washington DC to New Orleans. The group was made up of blacks and whites who were going to ride the bus in an integrated fashion (rather than segregated seating, as was the custom in Southern states).

Their purpose was to illustrate that these segregation laws were in violation of national law, established by multiple Supreme Court cases, and bring national attention to the fact that segregation was being enforced by use of violence in Southern states.

The first Freedom Ride began on May 4th, 1961. At first, they encountered few problems in states like Virginia and North Carolina. However, as the interracial group moved further into the Deep South, they began to face tough resistance.



Two Freedom Riders after being attacked

In Birmingham, Alabama, Police Commissioner Bull Conner coordinated efforts with the local Ku Klux Klan chapter, with the intention of bringing the Freedom Ride to an end.

On May 14th, Klansmen attacked the first bus (of two). They blocked its path, refusing to allow it to leave the bus station and then slashed the tires. As the bus was forced to stop, a firebomb was thrown into the vehicle. As the bus began to burn, the attackers held the door shut, hoping to burn the Freedom Riders inside.

As the riders managed to escape, they were physically beaten by those who had attacked them. Eventually, highway patrolmen arrived to chase off the violent mob, and they almost certainly prevented the deaths of several Freedom Riders. The passengers were taken to the local hospital, where many were refused treatment.

An hour after the first Freedom Riders were assaulted, the second bus arrived. It was attacked multiple times by two different groups of Klansmen. The passengers were beaten with baseball bats, pipes, and chains.

Despite the violence, the Freedom Riders hoped to continue their mission. They faced violence several more times throughout their journey, and fresh Freedom Riders replaced the wounded as the ride continued. They eventually made it as far as Jackson, Mississippi.

Even though they did not continue all the way to New Orleans, they accomplished their goal in bringing much needed national attention to the issue of segregation in the South. Other rides would follow, and throughout the early 1960s, more than 450 people participated in a Freedom Ride.

Multiple Choice: *Select the choice that completes the statement or answers the question.*

1. _____ Which of these best describes the Freedom Riders?
 - a. Most were angry Southern farmers.
 - b. Many were white and black college students from the Northeast.
 - c. Most were U.S. veterans who had fought in World War II.
 - d. Many were retired rodeo cowboys.

2. _____ What was the purpose of the Freedom Rides?
 - a. To focus attention on the plight of Southern farmers and how difficult their lives were.
 - b. To focus attention on segregation and point out that it violated national law.
 - c. To focus attention on how World War II veterans were being neglected.
 - d. To focus attention on America's Western heritage and how the horse industry was being neglected.

3. _____ Where did the initial Freedom Ride face its toughest opposition?
 - a. The toughest opposition came at the very beginning, as they left Washington DC.
 - b. They faced the worst opposition in places like Virginia and North Carolina.
 - c. The worst opposition was in the Deep South, in places like Alabama.
 - d. They did not face any opposition and were allowed to ride peacefully to New Orleans.

4. _____ Where did the first Freedom Ride come to an end?
 - a. Birmingham, Alabama
 - b. New Orleans, Louisiana
 - c. Atlanta, Georgia
 - d. Jackson, Mississippi

5. _____ Which of these is the best estimate of how many people participated in the Freedom Rides?
 - a. 100
 - b. 450
 - c. 5,000
 - d. 10,000

Student Response: *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of at least five complete sentences.*

6. What is your opinion of the Freedom Riders who set out on their journey across the Deep South, knowing that they would assuredly be assaulted as they were? Do you feel that their actions were necessary to bring national attention to segregation laws in the South? Explain your answer.

Guided Reading: *Fill in the blanks below to create complete sentences.*

1. Most of the Freedom Riders were from _____ states.

2. The Freedom Rides were an effort to challenge _____ segregation laws.

3. In the initial 1961 Freedom Ride, the intention was to travel on buses from Washington DC to _____.

4. The Freedom Riders intended to ride buses in an _____ fashion.

5. Several _____ cases had ruled that segregation was illegal.

6. The Freedom Riders hoped to expose that segregation was being enforced by use of _____ in Southern states.

7. As the first group of Freedom Riders traveled into the _____, they began to face tough resistance.

8. Birmingham Police Commissioner _____ coordinated efforts with the local Ku Klux Klan chapter in hopes of bringing the Freedom Ride to an end.

9. On May 14th, 1961, a _____ was thrown into the first Freedom Rider vehicle.

10. New Freedom Riders replaced the wounded as the ride continued as far as _____.

Vocabulary Check: *Select the option that best identifies the use of the underlined word.*

1. _____ “Their purpose was to illustrate that these segregation laws were in violation of national law.” The word illustrate seems to mean
 - a. To judge the value of.
 - b. To clarify by serving as an example or comparison.
 - c. To conduct or behave (oneself) in a particular manner.
 - d. To cause one thing to seem to be of less value than another.

2. _____ The word encountered in the fourth paragraph means
 - a. To belittle or put down.
 - b. To go forth with an effort.
 - c. To value the worth of.
 - d. To come up against or experience.

3. _____ “As the interracial group moved further into the Deep South, they began to face tough resistance.” In the previous sentence, resistance implies
 - a. Committing to selfless devotion.
 - b. A force that tends to oppose or impede a motion or action.
 - c. Unwilling or disinclined.
 - d. An inability to make up one’s mind.

4. _____ In the fifth paragraph, the word coordinated is used to convey
 - a. That the Police Commissioner Bull Conner aided the Freedom Riders in their efforts.
 - b. That the Police Commissioner Bull Conner supported the freedom Riders.
 - c. That the Police Commissioner Bull Conner worked with the Ku Klux Klan in an effort to stop the Freedom Riders.
 - d. That the Police Commissioner Bull Conner stood by and allowed the Freedom Riders to be attacked.

5. _____ “The passengers were taken to the local hospital, where many were refused treatment.” The word refused
 - a. Indicates staying clear of, or shunning something.
 - b. Indicates accepting something or someone willingly.
 - c. Indicates annulling something, or to make something void.
 - d. Indicates an unwillingness to do something.

TRUE/FALSE: *Indicate whether the statement is true or false. If the statement is false, write the correct word in the space provided to make the statement true.*

6. _____ The Freedom Riders encountered the worst violence in the Upper South.

7. _____ The Birmingham Police Commissioner coordinated efforts with the local Ku Klux Klan chapter in hopes of bringing the Freedom Ride to an end. _____

8. _____ The first Freedom Ride was supposed to end in Memphis, Tennessee.

9. _____ Most of the Freedom Riders were college students from California.

10. _____ The first Freedom Ride ended in Jackson, Mississippi. _____

Answer Key:

The Freedom Riders Multiple Choice:

- 1) B
- 2) B
- 3) C
- 4) D
- 5) B

Student Response for the Freedom Riders:

- 6) Student answers will vary, but both questions should be addressed in a satisfactory manner.

Guided Reading for The Freedom Riders:

- 1) Northeastern
- 2) Southern
- 3) New Orleans
- 4) Integrated
- 5) Supreme Court
- 6) Violence
- 7) Deep South
- 8) Bull Conner
- 9) Firebomb
- 10) Jackson, Mississippi

Vocabulary Check:

- 1) B
- 2) D
- 3) B
- 4) C
- 5) D

True/False:

- 6) F – Deep South
- 7) T
- 8) F – New Orleans, Louisiana
- 9) F - Northeast
- 10) T