



BACKGROUND **FREEDOM RIDES MUSEUM**

In Montgomery's Historic Greyhound Bus Station

Montgomery played a significant role in the modern civil rights movement. According to historian J. Mills Thornton, III:

The civil rights movement swept across Montgomery in the decade from 1955 to 1965, and left many monuments to its passage—buildings and places perhaps otherwise ordinary but rendered extraordinary by the history made there. The events that occurred in this city during that decade powerfully contributed to developments that changed the entire structure of our national life.

The Greyhound Bus Station is one of those ordinary buildings that has been “rendered extraordinary” by the American struggle for equality in the mid-twentieth century.

When a biracial group of 21 young men and women arrived here on May 20, 1961, they came willing to risk their lives to end racial segregation in interstate travel. Trained in Gandhian nonviolent protest methods, they were met by an angry, police-sanctioned mob. The violence that ensued resulted in a marked turn for the young administration of President John F. Kennedy and for Montgomery's business community.

On November 1, 1961, sweeping new Interstate Commerce Commission regulations went into effect. The Freedom Riders had won an unqualified national victory. No longer did African Americans have to sit separately or use separate waiting rooms and restaurants. Equally significant, the Kennedy administration had forcefully sided with the protesters. Washington had sent federal marshals to protect the Riders in Montgomery and had enforced existing laws and court decisions against racial discrimination.

The Freedom Rides were a watershed event, “a psychological turning point in our whole struggle,” in the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Freedom Rides Museum stands as a testament to 438 ordinary people who did an extraordinary thing. They risked their lives and their freedom to bring justice to our nation.