

### Event A

#### May 1961: the Freedom Rides

In May 1961, a group of civil rights activists sought to test enforcement of a recent Supreme Court decision which outlawed segregation in bus terminals. The group consisted of black and white people who were both male and female. They boarded two busses in Washington D.C. and were bound to New Orleans where they would celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*. Their route would take them through South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. At various bus terminals, the black freedom riders would go to the white dining areas and waiting rooms while the white freedom riders would go to the area reserved for black people.

During the journey, the freedom riders and sympathisers (including a representative of the Justice Department dispatched by Attorney General Robert Kennedy) were attacked and threatened. On 14 May, in Birmingham, Alabama a number of the riders were severely beaten. At Anniston the students were attacked by a mob of about 200 people and on leaving the town the bus was fire bombed. These incidents led to the bus company refusing to carry the riders any further - the riders were forced to fly onwards to New Orleans, but they had gained the national attention they needed.

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### Event B

#### September 1962: James Meredith and the University of Mississippi

In September 1962, James Meredith sought to enrol as the first black student in the history of the University of Mississippi. His enrolment triggered substantial resistance from the University, the community of Oxford Mississippi, and the Governor of the state, Ross Barnett. As a result, President John F. Kennedy ordered federal marshals to ensure Meredith's right to enrol and to protect him as he moved to the campus. On the evening of the Meredith's enrolment, President John F. Kennedy spoke to the American people in a live television address.

As Kennedy was speaking, violence broke out on the campus and in Oxford. President Kennedy ultimately ordered federal troops to Oxford to quell the riots which injured over 300 and killed two.

You can hear recordings of Kennedy's telephone negotiations with Governor Barnett, in which they discuss the deployment of federal troops here:

<http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/olemiss/confrontation/telephone.html>

### Event C

#### **April-May 1963: Birmingham, Alabama 'Project C'**

'Project C' was the name given to the plan devised by Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to challenge the system of segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. The 'C' in the project stood for confrontation, the strategy of non-violent direct action designed to confront segregation through peaceful demonstrations, rallies, boycotts, and appeals to justice. This strategy actually hinged upon the anticipated reaction of police commissioner Bull Connor. Leaders reasoned that the response of Connor and the police would be to suppress the demonstrations, quite likely through violent means. If so, this response to peaceful protest would attract national attention and create public sympathy for the cause of desegregation.

The leaders reasoned correctly. The response of Bull Connor was as expected. Police dogs and fire hoses were used to disperse the demonstrators. Martin Luther King was arrested by Birmingham police on Good Friday, April 12, 1963. During his stay in jail the white ministers of Birmingham churches wrote and urged King to call off the demonstrations and boycotts.

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### Event D

#### **June 11, 1963: George Wallace stands in the 'school house door' during the desegregation of the University of Alabama**

In 1963 the governor of Alabama was George Wallace. He had run for and won the office on the slogan of 'segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever'. In June of 1963, a federal court barred any state government interference with the enrolment of two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, at the University of Alabama. Despite this order, Governor George Wallace appointed himself the temporary University registrar and stood in the doorway of the administration building to prevent the students from registering. In response, President Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard. One hundred guardsmen escorted the students to campus and their commander, General Henry Graham, ordered George Wallace to 'step aside'. Thus the students were registered.

### Event E

#### **June 12, 1963: the assassination of Medgar Evers, Jackson, Mississippi**

One day after Kennedy's landmark speech, violence struck again. The place was Jackson, Mississippi. The field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), Medgar Evers, was leading a protest against Jackson's system of segregation. That evening, Evers arrived home, stepped out of his car, and was shot in the back. He died on his driveway with his wife and children looking on. The assassin was white supremacist Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the Ku Klux Klan and a man with an intimidating and violent personality. Beckwith was arrested, tried, and acquitted by an all-white jury. Years later, in 1994, Assistant District Attorney, Bobby DeLaughter, reopened the case. This led to a retrial in which the jury convicted Beckwith, 31 years after the act, of assassinating Medgar Evers. The story of Beckwith's second trial is the subject of the 1996 film entitled *Ghosts of Mississippi*.

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### Event F

#### **September 15, 1963: Birmingham bombing**

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, a bomb exploded in the 6th Street Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama. The explosion killed four young girls who were in the church for Sunday school and injured another 20 people. The FBI sent agents to investigate and four suspects were identified. The Birmingham office of the FBI recommended that the four be prosecuted. However, the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, refused and claimed that civil rights activists bombed the church themselves to gain public sympathy. The FBI initially closed the case in 1968. The suspects were four members of the Ku Klux Klan. It took nearly 40 years for them to be brought to justice.

Local prosecutors reopened the case and one suspect, Robert "Dynamite Bob" Chambliss, was convicted of murder in 1977. Herman Cash died in 1994 as charges against him were being prepared. On May 1, 2001, a Birmingham jury convicted Thomas Blanton (62 years old at the time of the trial) on four counts of murder. Finally, on May 22, 2002, a jury convicted Bobby Frank Cherry (now 71 years old) of the murders. Both Blanton and Cherry were sentenced to life in prison.

Activity sheet

**Event A**

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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Activity sheet

**Event B**

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction?: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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Activity sheet

Event C

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction?: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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Activity sheet

Event D

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction?: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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Activity sheet

**Event E**

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction?: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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Activity sheet

**Event F**

The event: .....

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What was the white reaction?: .....

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Why do you think they reacted in this way? .....

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Who was the biggest benefactor from this and why? .....

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