Tales of a Young Freedom Rider

David Fankhauser

Professor of Biology and Chemistry (ret.)
University of Cincinnati

Anderson Churches for Racial Unity
and
Greater Anderson Promotes Peace

20 May 2019

For a webpage on the Freedom Rides, see:
https://fankhauserblog.wordpress.com/freedom-riders/

Photo by Joseph “Little Joe” Postiglione
Europeans celebrated the slaughter of "Savages".

- 1619: first 20 slaves brought to the colonies

Up to 482 carried per ship. 305,000 imported total
American Way of Slavery

Colonial Prosperity due to:

- **Slave-produced exports:**
  - Tobacco, cotton, rice and indigo

- “The Blues” may have arrisen from field hands suffering from growing cotton and *indigo.*

- 1793: **Cotton Gin** made slave-grown cotton even more profitable:
  - Bales of cotton produced/year:
    - 1792: 13,000 bales
    - 1830s: “Cotton was King”
    - 1860: 4,800,000 bales
      - (370 fold increase)
      

**NOTE THAT SLAVERY:**

Consciously Destroyed:

1) black family unit
2) black culture

Males: beasts of burden served as “studs”

Females: “breeding stock”

Children: increased wealth.

* https://blackwhiteandblues.wordpress.com/the-origin-of-the-blues/
Civil Disobedience in the 19th Century

Thomas Jefferson
“Founding Father”, promoted disobeying unjust laws.

Henry David Thoreau
Urged resisting acts of government what are against one’s conscience or morals: Slavery and Mexican-American War.

Levi Coffin
Quaker activist, called “President of the Underground Railroad”, intentionally violated “Fugitive Slave Law”.

Levi Coffin
- Provided “safe haven” to thousands of slaves en-route North to freedom from the late 1820s through 1840s
- Considered the “President” of the Underground Railroad
- Supposedly depicted in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”

POST WAR:

Fear, fear, resentment, hatred
Sherman: 40 acres and a mule?
Freedslaves nearly illiterate.

SUPRESS BLACK VOTE:

Literacy test
Poll tax: up to $200/voter
Gerrymandering
Intimidation

MAKE SEGREGATIONAL LAW

Jim Crow Laws
Red Lining
American-borne Terrorism

But not only in the South:

KKK, AMERICAN TERRORISTS:
Lynching became a common fact of life in the Deep South.
4084 Blacks were lynched in the South, 1877-1950.
In 1900 alone, more than 100 African Americans are lynched.

7 August 1930, Marion, Indiana: two black teenagers, accused of raping a white woman, dragged out of jail, beaten, and lynched.
BLACK MEN LYNCHED IN OHIO

William "Old Bill" TERRY, lynched, Manchester Township, Adams County, 22 November 1856

Absalom KIMBLE & Andrew McCLOUD (possibly a third man) lynched, Celina, Mercer County, 9 July 1872

Jeff. DAVIS (AKA John MILLER) lynched Ragersville, Tuscarawas County, Ohio, 20 July 1873

James SCHELL/SHELL lynched Bellefontaine, Logan County, 4 September 1875

William TAYLOR, lynched in Erie County on 4 September 1878

Christopher C. DAVIS lynched Athens, Athens County, Ohio, 21 November 1881

Albert GUEST lynched New Straitsville, Perry County, Ohio, 22 May 1885

William BALES lynched Kenton, Hardin County, Ohio, 9 April 1892

Henry CORBIN lynched Oxford, Butler County, Ohio, 14 January 1892

An unidentified black man lynched Millersburg, Holmes County, Ohio, 1 April 1892

Roscoe PARKER lynched West Union, Adams County, Ohio, 12 January 1894

Seymour NEWLIN (AKA Seymour NEVILLE) lynched Rushsylvania, Logan County, Ohio, 15 April 1894

Noah ANDERSON lynched New Richmond, Clermont County, Ohio, 21 August 1895

Charles MITCHELL lynched Urbana, Champaign County, Ohio, 4 June 1897

Richard DICKERSON lynched Springfield, Clark County, Ohio, 7 March 1904

Luke MARION lynched Ironton, Lawrence County, Ohio, 11 June 1932

http://www.monroeworktoday.org/explore/map2/indexif.html
POST WW II: Black soldiers fought for Freedom and Justice... but at home? Segregation in the South was pervasive. What had they fought for?

The Federal Government looked the other way.

How to correct this injustice?
Much of the leadership of the KKK was drawn from the police.

Ironically, police generally ignored, often coordinated, the violent and lawless vigilante reaction to desegregation.

Song: “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round…”
NON-VIOLENT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: a Core Value of the Civil Right Movement

1959: The Quakers funded a visit by Dr. King to Gandhi’s family in India.

LESSON: Non-Violent Resistance to injustice is the only way to a *just, peaceful society*.

_Satyagraha:_ “truth power.” _Reconciliation_ is the way to a peaceful society.

- **MLK:** “Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of *non-violent resistance* is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity.”

- “Violence only begets violence.”
Supreme Court and Segregation

1896:
SEPARATE BUT EQUAL
Plessy v. Ferguson endorsed segregation.

1946:
ON INTERSTATE TRANSPORT
“Irene Morgan decision.”

1954:
PUBLIC SCHOOL SEGREGATION
“Brown v. Board of Education.”

Angry public reaction!
1950s and ‘60s, The Struggle comes to a head.

1955-1956: MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT organized by Drs. King and Abernathy after the arrest of Rosa Parks who refused to give up her bus seat to a white man.

1959: NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE becomes the method to stand up to segregation.

1960: LUNCH COUNTER SIT-INS: Spread in cities through the South. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded.
Testing the enforcement of Supreme Court Ruling:

An integrated group, traveling by Greyhound and Trailways busses from Washington DC through the South, entered “White Only” waiting rooms.
Welcome to Alabama...

The KKK conspired to save their main attack on the Freedom Riders until Sunday, 14 May 1961 (Mother's Day), in Anniston, where they planned a spectacular attack.

There, the KKK-surrounded the bus, blocked it in, slashed its tires. The bus was finally able to flee out of town.
With tires slashed, the bus driver drove as far as he could until he was running on the rims.

He pulled into the parking lot of Forsyth Grocery Store, about 6 miles from Anniston.
The white mob followed the bus:

The slashed tires went flat.

The mob: fire-bombed the bus. Held the doors shut.

An undercover State Policeman drew his gun, ordered the door to be opened.

Choking Freedom Riders were beaten as they stumbled out of the inferno.

Photo by Joseph “Little Joe” Postiglione
The bus turned into an inferno.

Alabama State police watch the burning bus.

We might ask why they did not show up until after the fire-bombing, even though the violence began an hour earlier at the Greyhound bus station in Anniston.
Freedom Riders, choking on the dense smoke inside, were beaten as they fled out of the burning bus. Janie Forsyth, the 12 year-old (white) daughter of the store owner, saw their distress, and brought out a bucket of water and glasses to give some relief to the suffering Freedom Riders.
Later the *same* day, Sunday 14 May 1961: Trailways Station, Birmingham, Alabama.

The leading Trailways bus, with the first group of FRs, arrives in Birmingham...

Police Chief “Bull” Conner gave the angry KKK-led mob 15 minutes to severely punish the riders as they got off the bus.

Then the police arrested the injured riders...

“Which Side Are You On?”
White Freedom Riders on the Trailways bus were especially targeted for beatings in Birmingham. We were called “N****r-loving race traitors.”

47 year-old Jim Peck, pacifist veteran of earlier 1947 rides, was viciously beaten, was refused treatment at a white-only hospital. He required 53 stitches to close the wounds to his head.
CORE pleaded with the Kennedys: 

*Enforce the Law...*

The Kennedys feared the powerful Southern Democrats (“Dixiecrats”). They would desert the party if Kennedys enforced the law or protected the Riders.

The Kennedys pleaded with CORE:

“Call off the Freedom Rides! Somebody’s going to get killed!”

President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy
The Kennedys were correct: When the Democrats under Johnson passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the “Dixiecrats” defected en masse to the Republican Party, electing Nixon in 1968.

To this day, these Southern defectors form the most reactionary segment of the Republican Party.

http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/
Saturday, 20 May 1961: In Montgomery: 20 more Riders are beaten and injured...

SNCC* students from Nashville replaced injured FRs in Birmingham.

Attty General Bobby Kennedy sent in Justice Dept. observer, John Siegenthaler.

FRs arrived in Montgomery: NO POLICE Riders were again severely by white mob.

White Freedom Rider Jim Zwerg was hospitalized, teeth knocked out.

John Lewis struck in the head with a tire iron.

Siegenthaler, trying to protect a female FR being beaten, was struck with a tire iron, fracturing his skull.

As he lay unconscious in the gutter, the mob continued to kick him.

* Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
Tuesday 23 May 1961:

Diane Nash, Fisk University student and a founder and leader of SNCC, refuses to quit at this critical moment. Quitting now would set the movement back years.

She calls US black colleges to recruit fresh volunteers to replace injured Freedom Riders.
Tuesday, 23 May 1961:

Diane Nash called Central State College (Ohio’s only state-sponsored Black College) pleading urgently for volunteers to replace injured Freedom Riders. David Myers and David Fankhauser, CSC students, immediately fly down.

Wednesday, 24 May 1961:

The “two Davids” land in Montgomery in the early AM.

They are secretly whisked to Rev. Ralph Abernathy’s home where they must “hide out” for four days until sufficient number of volunteers to fill the next two buses. There, they found these leaders:

Revs. King, Shuttlesworth and Abernathy met in Abernathy’s home planning the Freedom Rides.
The National Guard holds back the mob outside Montgomery bus station. Yale Chaplain William Sloan Coffin, with a contingent of 13 Yale divinity students attempt to integrate the Montgomery bus station. All are arrested. The Nat'l Guard prevents violence. They immediately bail out.

WILL THE RIDES BE QUASHED BY JAIL?:

That evening, in Montgomery, we met in Abernathy’s home with Drs. Martin Luther King, Jr, Ralph Abernathy, and Fred Shuttlesworth to strategize:

FILL THE JAILS!
The focus of the Freedom Rides changes

- **New Segregationist Strategy:**
  - Mob violence has given the South a bad name.

- **Instead:**
  - Jail all Freedom Riders for “Breach of Peace.”
  - They think throwing us in jail will halt the Rides.

A NEW CIVIL RIGHT STRATEGY:

FILL THE JAILS!

“Jail, no bail!”
Sunday, 28 May 1961, Montgomery Trailways Station, 6 AM: Freedom Riders successfully integrate Montgomery AL Trailways Station. Await departure for Jackson MS.
Dr. King bids goodbye to Freedom Riders as we depart Montgomery for Jackson.
28 May 1961:

As the bus departs Montgomery, the National Guard, holds back the angry crowd.

The bus was escorted by a large cordon of Alabama State Police.
Six hour bus ride from Montgomery to Jackson

No rest stops, only a state police escort, front and back, protect from KKK violence.
“High Noon”, Sunday 28 May 1961: Entering Jackson, Mississippi Trailways Bus Station
Sunday
28 May 1961:

In the Jackson, MS Trailways Station: Freedom Riders were funneled into the “Whites Only” Waiting Room.

“Captain Ray” (left) perfunctually ordered us “Y’all have to move on”. After the third order, arrested us.

(I am pretending to read the New York Times as a fellow Freedom Rider Albert Dunn is being arrested and Larry Hunter is being frisked.)

“Cap’n Ray  Albert Lee Dunn  Larry Hunter  David Fankhauser  David Myers
Sunday afternoon, 28 May 1961:

David Fankhauser “outside agitator”, is booked in Jackson City Jail for “Breach of Peace”.

He and David Myers, the first white Freedom Riders to refuse to be bailed out, were immediately separated and placed in solitary confinement for several days.
30 May 1961:

In solitary confinement, I wrote a letter on toilet paper, which was smuggled out by a sympathetic reporter.

(Thanks to Carole Carpey Rozycki for saving this letter, and recently making it available.)

QUOTES:

“I was tried yesterday...[and] have received a 60 day suspended sentence and $200 fine which I have refused to pay, and will be “working it out...”

The jail is segregated, but I am in solitary confinement, so it doesn’t matter.

I... ask... that each of you write a letter [to President Kennedy]... urging that immediate steps be taken to end segregation in the South—as well as the North. We are on our way to Victory... with [your] help, we will overcome Jim Crow.
We began to fill up the Jackson City jails. From hyper-action on the buses, to inaction in prison, we wanted to do something to further contribute to the cause.

We launched a hunger strike to try to pressure Attny. Gen. Robert Kennedy to enforce the law:

To issue an injunction against segregated interstate facilities.

For me, the hunger strike lasted 12 days.

I weighed 165 lbs when arrested, and 123 when released.
Jackson Mississippi Jails filled!

Overflow Freedom Riders are bussed to Parchman State Penitentiary. (“Parchman Farm” of Delta Blues fame)

- **Prison Bus:**

- **Below:**
  - Prison Labor
  - “chopping cotton”

Route: Jackson MS to “Parchman Farm”
Inset: Mississippi Delta (lilac)
Maximum Security Unit, Death Row

Parchman State Penitentiary, Maximum Security Unit
Housed Freedom Riders, June 1961

Womens’ Cell Block

Mens’ Cell Block

Primary Exit
Secondary Exit
Secondary Exit
Secondary Exit

Corridor

Cells
Cells
Cells
Cells

Fire Extinguisher
Fire Extinguisher

Shower
DBF, cell 5
Gas Chamber

Rows of high narrow windows
Screens from these windows were removed when we refused to stop singing.

15 June 1961, Men's Cell block, Parchman State Penitentiary Maximum Security Unit

Underwear
Toothbrush
Bible
Aluminum cup

TYPICAL MEALS:

BREAKFAST
Grits or biscuits
black molasses
and chickory
“coffee”

LUNCH
Mashed potatoes
Sweet Potatoes
Macaroni
two biscuits
(occasionally
Gristle gravy)

SUPPER
Rice
Mashed Potatoes
cup of milk
Death Row Cell-Block Mates
I am proud to have served time with these men:

James Farmer
Founder of Congress of Racial Equality
Organizer of Freedom Rides

Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)
Originator of the phrase “Black Power”
Used non-violence as a technique
Felt freedom would not come without violence.

John Lewis
Co-founder of SNCC
One of original 13 Freedom Riders
Suffered head injury from Montgomery beating
Got back on the bus from Montgomery to Jackson
Prominent member of House of Representatives
Freedom Songs: Heart and Soul of the Movement

In Parchman State Penitentiary, for the first time, black and white Freedom Riders were housed in the same cell block.

Blacks taught us “white boys” to sing! Freedom songs, derived from slavery-inspired spirituals, retained their emotional content.

These songs sustained us, raised our spirits, and bound us together in our common cause.

We sang for hours on end.

SING WITH ME!
FREEDOM SONGS, PARTICIPATION MORE THAN PERFORMANCE

Stand up, clap your hands, and SING OUT!
“If you can't sing, sing LOUDER!”

(3x) Woke up this Mornin’ with my Mind...
STAAAY-in’ on Freeee-dom...
Hallelu... Hallelu..., Halleluuuu---Yah

Second Verse:
Ain't no harm to keep your mind...

Third Verse:
Walkin’ and talkin’ with my mind

Bridge:
● I’m gonna walk, walk... I’m gonna walk...
  (with my mind on Freedom...)
● I’m gonna talk, talk...
  (with my mind on Freedom...)
● Hallelu..., Hallelu..., Halleluuuu---Yah
Guards battle against Freedom Songs

Because our songs were "bothering the cooks...,” guards took away in succession:

Our toothbrushes...  
Our Bibles...  
Our mattresses and sheets...  
Cut off the water to our toilets...  
Took the screens off the windows...  
Then... as hoards of insects flew in, attracted by the 24 hour lighting...  
We kept singing  
We kept singing  
We kept singing  
We kept singing  
We kept singing  
Chemical warfare!
“Final solution” to “bugs” which now filled the cell block...

- At 2 AM, the third shift guards arrive:
  “Look at all them bugs! We’re gonna hafta spray.”

- 3 AM: A large truck rumbles up outside, and a “fire hose” is fed through the screen-less window.

- Prisoners, confined and unprotected in cells, dressed only in undershorts, are drenched with high power spray of DDT: eye-stinging, poisonous insecticide.
Then...Everything is restored... Why?

The next morning, the warden paid us a visit, saying:
- “Now boys, we all got off on the wrong foot.”
- “If’n you just keep your singing down, y’all can have back all your stuff.” Why the major change in attitude?

Around noon that day, a delegation from the Governor of Minnesota showed up to check on conditions...

Question answered.

Free at last, free at last!

On 9 July 1961, (after 42 days) I was released, bussed back to Jackson, and put on a train to Cincinnati.

Arriving at Cincinnati’s Union Terminal, I was met by a singing crowd of 50 CORE supporters.

Two large men hoisted me up on their shoulders and carried me the length of the concourse, singing all the way!
Success for the Freedom Rides!

These 320 Freedom Riders arrested between 24 May 1961 and 13 September 1961

The Freedom Rides turned the Civil Rights into a *nationwide movement*.

Robert Kennedy *finally* enforced the law prohibiting segregated *interstate* facilities, 1 Nov 1961.

“White” and “Colored” signs came down passengers sat and ate where they pleased.

Diane Nash: “History books say a lot about Presidents, generals, dates and battles; they say little about *citizen-made history*… We must continue to teach about the Freedom Ride.”
“What would Martin say?”

- **ECONOMY:**
  - Economic injustice *still* follows racial lines.
  - The rich are getting richer, everyone else is getting poorer.

- **CULTURE OF VIOLENCE:**
  - (At home and abroad)
  - Plague of Gun violence
  - US militarism costs us trillions for their wars and bases.
  - Just look at our military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan.

---

**DISCRETIONARY SPENDING FY 2013**

- **Military:** $653.11 billion (56.94%)
- **Food & Agriculture:** $133.77 billion (1.17%)
- **Transportation:** $273 billion (2.38%)
- **Labor:** $27.91 billion (2.43%)
- **Science:** $29.46 billion (2.57%)
- **Energy & Environment:** $36.66 billion (3.2%)
- **International Affairs:** $42.2 billion (3.68%)
- **Health:** $55.96 billion (4.88%)
- **Veterans Benefits:** $61.2 billion (5.34%)
- **Housing & Community:** $52.9 billion (4.48%)
- **Government:** $64.06 billion (5.58%)
- **Education:** $72.84 billion (6.35%)

Figures from the Urban Institute. (Chart: John Light/Moyers & Company)
BUT…
America still has racism in its DNA.

EQUALITY OR DISPARITY?
- Educational opportunities vastly different
- Two brand of justice:
  one for Blacks and one for Whites.
- Black encounters with police are 2.8x
  more likely to be killed than whites

SOCIAL CLIMATE?
- Prejudice against religions, minorities
- Black young men given “The Talk…”
- Xenophobic “Whitelash” elected Trump:
  The same racial sentiments that
  historically supported segregation.
- The President refers to predominantly
  black nations by a profane slur.
“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, Only Love can do that.”

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.
~Martin Luther King, Jr.

FREE YOUR MIND and THINK

Born Michael King, Jr., 15 January 1929 in Atlanta GA