

MORE FREEDOM RIDES!

This is a call for more Freedom Rides. Already, new ones are under way as this CORElator goes to press. An interracial group of 7 led by William Coffin, Jr., chaplain of Yale University, was arrested May 25 in the Trailways restaurant in Montgomery following a bus trip from Atlanta.

"The time to act is now," said James Farmer, CORE national director, in a phone conversation following his arrest May 24 for trying to eat at the Jackson terminal. "Just as the Greensboro sit-in of February 1, 1960, set off a wave of sit-ins, so has CORE's Freedom Ride of May 4-17, 1961 set off a wave of Freedom Rides. Just as the sit-ins succeeded in desegregating lunch counters throughout the south, so will the Freedom Rides succeed in desegregating all phases of interstate bus travel throughout the south."

To facilitate Freedom Rides in the immediate future, CORE has posted its field secretary James McCain and Walter Bergman, one of the original riders, in New Orleans to train applicants in nonviolence. Richard Haley, another CORE field secretary, has been posted in Jackson and Thomas Gaither, a third field secretary, in Montgomery.

Persons interested in participating in a Freedom Ride now or at any time throughout the summer should immediately write CORE for an application blank, fill it out and return it to the office.

FREEDOM RIDERS

The original CORE Freedom Riders were: Julia Aaron, Mr. & Mrs. Walter Bergman, Albert Bigelow, Edward Blankenheim, Doris Castle, B. Elton Cox, Dave Dennis, James Farmer, Herman Harris, Genevieve Hughes, Jean Lewis, Jimmie McDonald, Ivor Moore, Mae Frances Moultrie, Jim Peck, Joseph Perkins, Charles Person, Isaac Reynolds, Jerome Smith, Henry Thomas and Jean Thompson. Joining the Freedom Ride in Birmingham was a contingent of some 20 students from the Nashville Non-violent Movement led by Diane Nash.

CORE-LATOR

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James Farmer, national director

Jim Peck, editor



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FREEDOM RIDE



by Jim Peck

(The New York Post concluded its editorial "Battle of Alabama" on May 16 with: "The country has been properly reverential about the valor exhibited by Commander Shepard in his conquest of space. But the best in the democratic character is also exhibited by such men as Jim Peck, who are seeking to lead us beyond the boundaries of bigotry and know-nothingism, and who have stoically taken so many beatings in their quest for a new world. A bus ride across Alabama under the banner of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) may be as daring an exploit as any ride in a space ship. We need more such starry-eyed men on earth.")

Seating on both local and express buses, even in the deep south, has become largely integrated but terminal facilities and rest stops have not—even in Virginia's larger cities where the "white" and "colored" signs have been removed.

This is the main conclusion reached by testers on the Freedom Ride, May 4-17, 1961. The integration of seating is a sharp contrast to the situation prevailing at the time of the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation when CORE testers were virtually the only passengers to ride non-jimcrow. The same rigid segregation which prevailed in seating at that time now prevails at the terminal facilities and rest stops.

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FREEDOM RIDE

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Virginia

It is disheartening that in a city such as Richmond, which is not far from the nation's capital and where the "white" and "colored" signs have been removed, Negroes stick to the formerly separate and grossly unequal colored waiting rooms and restaurants. This is true both in the Greyhound and Trailways terminals.

The first "white" and "colored" signs encountered were only 50 miles south of Washington—atop the rest room doors at the Greyhound stop in Fredericksburg. Charles Person went into the "white" rest room and I went into the "colored" rest room without incident.

In Farmville, center of Prince Edward county, where school closing has left Negro children schoolless for the past two years, the "white" and "colored" signs were painted over but still visible. The Freedom Riders were served without incident.

While there were no color signs in the Lynchburg Trailways terminal, there was a divider in the middle of the counter making persons on one side virtually invisible to those on the other.

Danville, Virginia was the first place where testers met with refusal of service. At the "colored" counter, Ed Blankenheim sat for 10 minutes until his bus was ready for departure. Genevieve Hughes and I, aboard a later bus, were at first refused service at that same counter but we—and Walter Bergman—finally got refreshments following a brief discussion with the manager.

North Carolina

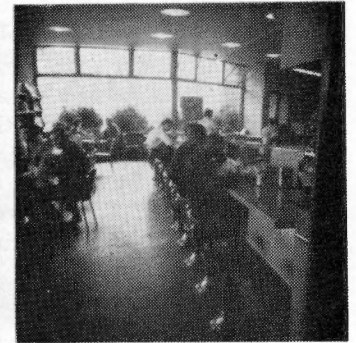
Greensboro, though reputed for its liberalism, was the first city where the color signs started to become the rule. First greeting to arriving bus passengers are large signs all around the building with arrows pointing to the "colored waiting room." On the other hand, the "colored" lunch stand, which is no bigger than a good-sized closet and equally gloomy, had been shut down permanently a few weeks before our arrival. A Negro in the "colored" waiting room told one of the testers he was amazed recently when upon going to the "colored" lunch stand, he was advised to walk around to the formerly "white" restaurant.

In Salisbury the color signs were on every facility. However, two Negro women, after watching our testers, sat down to eat at the "white" counter.

Charlotte was the scene of the trip's first arrest—and the birth of a new "in," the shoe-in. Charles Person climbed onto the shoeshine chair and, after being refused service, remained seated until a cop with handcuffs arrived. Person then left, since no shoe-in policy had yet been planned by the group. It was then hastily decided that Joe Perkins should get into the shoeshine chair and remain until arrested. The trip's first arrest came within minutes. Attorney Thomas Wyche won an acquittal on the basis of the Supreme Court decision against segregation in terminals.

South Carolina

Violence against the Freedom Riders erupted for the first time in Rock Hill, where the press had headlined our arrival and where hoodlums recently had attacked lunch counter pickets. In fact several of the hoodlums waiting at the Greyhound station were recognized as the same individuals who had led mob violence in the past. As the Greyhound contingent of Freedom Riders arrived,



some 20 of these ruffians were on hand. When John Lewis approached the entrance of the "white" waiting room, he was assaulted by two of them. Three started slugging Albert Bigelow who was next in line. Both Lewis and Bigelow maintained nonviolent attitudes. Genevieve Hughes was pushed to the ground. At that point, the police who had been standing-by but taking their time in performance of their duty, arrived. The police captain asked Lewis and Bigelow whether they wanted to press charges against any of their assailants. They declined. Thereupon, the Freedom Riders entered the "white" waiting room unmolested.

When the Trailways group arrived at that terminal a few hours later, some of the hoodlums were waiting in cars. However, they did not attack but only drove after us a few blocks toward Friendship Junior College. The Trailways terminal building was completely locked-up and its eating facilities had been closed since Friendship students had conducted sit-ins there.

When we left next day, the Trailways "white" waiting room was open and a test team sat there unmolested. The same was true at the Greyhound station. The hoodlums did not stage a repeat performance.

Two Arrests

The Trailways group left Rock Hill about lunch time. At what was supposed to be the lunch stop in Chester, "closed" signs had been hastily put on the doors.

The lunch stop turned out to be Winnsboro, which we discovered to be as ultra-segregationist as Alabama. Here occurred the Freedom Ride's first arrest of lunch counter sit-inners. It all happened like a film which is being reeled too fast. Henry Thomas and I entered the "white" side and sat at the counter. The woman who owns the restaurant dashed back and called the police. Within two minutes a police officer who was a stereotype of the role stepped over and told Thomas: "Come with me, boy!" I stepped over to ask about my teammate and cite the Supreme Court decision and was promptly arrested also. We were driven away in a police car before the bus had left the station. Aboard the bus there was no outspoken reaction. We were jailed for several hours before being told what the charges were against us. The officer who booked us was over-anxious to fill this in but the cop who drove kept insisting: "Don't write anything down before we talk with the chief." The charge against Thomas turned out to be "trespass" and that against me, "interfering with arrest." However, after about eight hours in jail, we were released and the charges dropped.

At Sumter, both on arrival and on departure for Augusta, the "white" waiting room was tested without incident. There is no restaurant in the Sumter terminal.

Georgia

In Augusta, Georgia, at both the Trailways and Greyhound terminals, Freedom Riders used all facilities with-

out incident. It marked the first time that Negroes had ever eaten at the terminal restaurants. In fact, only a few months ago a Negro serviceman had been arrested for trying to eat at one of them. Yet our eating there drew little attention. Neither racist hoodlums nor mere curiosity seekers were on hand. To make sure that the policy change was not solely for our arrival and departure, a test team made up of Herman Harris and Walter Bergman went back to both terminal restaurants during the evening of the overnight stop and were served courteously.

In Athens, scene of last fall's mob action against admission of two Negro college students, Freedom Riders were served without question at the rest stop. Again, there were no gapers. The scene of the momentarily integrated lunch counter could have been somewhere up north rather than deep in Georgia. In Atlanta, the Greyhound restaurant was closed for repairs but the Freedom Riders ate at the Trailways restaurant without incident. We also used the waiting rooms and rest rooms at both terminals. (Photos at left show testing of waiting room in Augusta and restaurant in Atlanta.)

Alabama

Next lap of the trip was Atlanta to Birmingham. When I phoned Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth to give him the arrival time of the Freedom Riders, I learned that white supremacists were expected to mobilize at the terminals. However, there was no inkling that a similar mob was waiting in Anniston. Freedom Riders first learned of this when their Greyhound bus stopped just outside of Anniston and their driver conferred briefly with the driver of another Greyhound bus going the other way.

When the Greyhound bus pulled into Anniston, it was immediately surrounded by an angry mob armed with iron bars. They set upon the vehicle, breaking windows and denting the sides. They punctured the tires. Finally, police arrived and the bus managed to depart. But the mob pursued it in cars. One car got ahead of the bus and prevented it from gathering speed. About six miles out, one

Bus Bombed and Burned



of the tires went flat and the bus was forced to pull over to a gas station. Within minutes, the pursuing mob was again hitting the bus with iron bars. The rear window of the bus was broken and a bomb was thrown in. At once the vehicle was filled with thick smoke. The passengers, including the Freedom Riders, ducked toward the floor in order to breathe. A few climbed out of a window. Some tried to get out the door, but it was being held shut from the outside. However, the passengers finally succeeded in opening the door. All the passengers managed to escape before the bus burst into flames and was totally destroyed. As the Freedom Riders emerged, some of them were beaten. Henry Thomas was clubbed on the head. But at this point, the police arrived. A couple of them fired shots into the air. The mob dispersed and the injured were treated at the hospital. The Freedom Riders finally reached Birmingham in cars dispatched by Rev. Shuttlesworth.

Hoodlums Board Second Bus

When the Trailways bus carrying the rest of the Freedom Riders arrived in Anniston an hour later, the other passengers heard at the rest stop what had happened to the Greyhound bus and discontinued their trip. As the bus was about to depart, eight hoodlums climbed aboard and stood by the driver as he announced that he would refuse to proceed unless the Negro Freedom Riders moved to the rear of the bus. As the Negroes remained seated, the hoodlums cursed and started to move them, bodily, to the rear, kicking and slugging them at the same time. Walter Bergman and I who were seated toward the rear, moved up to try to halt the onslaught and we, too, were pushed, slugged and kicked. Finally, all the Freedom Riders were forced to the back of the bus. The hoodlums—together with a pregnant woman whom they had brought aboard—sat in the very front. The seats in between remained empty. At that point the driver agreed to proceed to Birmingham. For the entire 2-hour ride, the hoodlums craned their necks to stare at us with looks of hatred.

Violence in Birmingham

Upon arrival in Birmingham, a mob was gathered outside the bus station. Charles Person and I entered the "white" waiting room. We were grabbed bodily and pushed toward the street exit. As soon as we reached the alleyway leading to the exit and were out of sight of persons in the waiting room, six of the mob assaulted me with fists and lead pipe. Five others attacked Person.

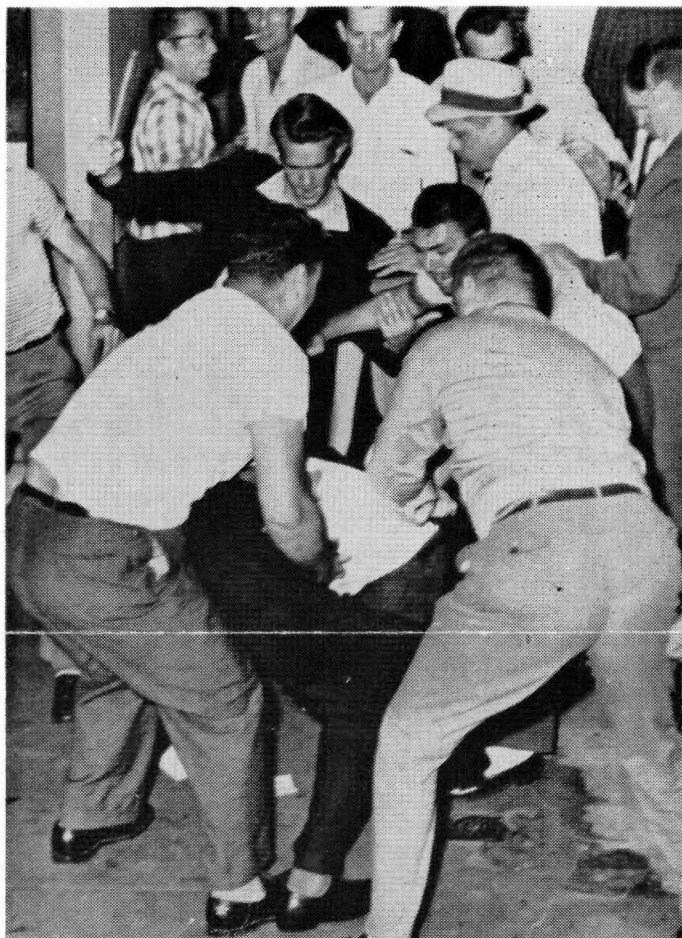
Next, they attacked Tom Langston of the Birmingham Post-Herald and smashed his camera. Langston had been sufficiently quick-witted to remove his film and the photo of my beating, clearly showing the angry faces of the assailants, appeared in next morning's Post-Herald. (see next page).

Then, Clancy Lake, a radio newsman, was attacked as he sat in his car broadcasting an account of the onslaught. An ambulance took me to a hospital where 53 stitches were sewed into my head and face. Not a single uniformed policeman was on hand at the Birmingham terminal at the time. Police Chief Eugene "Bull" Connor later explained that since it was Mothers' Day, many were off duty.

Proceeding From Birmingham

Next day we went to the Greyhound terminal to board a bus for Montgomery. After receiving protests over the mob violence, Attorney General Robert Kennedy had promised to do all possible to safeguard the Freedom Riders.

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FREEDOM RIDE

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However, the bus for Montgomery never left. Drivers of both Greyhound and Trailways refused to drive the Freedom Riders. After waiting more than an hour on the platform as the mob started to gather again, we went into the "white" waiting room.

Since it became clear that we would not get out of Birmingham by bus in time to make the mass meeting scheduled in Montgomery that evening, we decided to fly to New Orleans in order to make sure of being at the mass rally there marking the conclusion of the Freedom Ride on May 17, anniversary of the Supreme Court's key anti-segregation decision.

In cars supplied by Rev. Shuttlesworth, we rode from the bus terminal to the airport and got reservations on an Eastern Air Lines plane leaving about an hour later. No sooner had we boarded the plane than an announcement came over the loudspeaker that a bomb threat had been received and all passengers would have to debark while luggage was inspected. Time dragged on and eventually the flight was cancelled. The mob started to gather in the airport. The Freedom Riders then got reservations aboard a Capital Airlines plane which was the next flight to New Orleans. That flight was cancelled also, though no public announcement was made of a bomb scare. We finally took off on an Eastern Air Lines plane at 11 p.m., after six tense hours in the airport. The only factor which deterred the ever-growing mob from staging a new assault, was that police were on hand. By about 10 p.m., police cleared them out of the airport and set up a roadblock nearby. The Freedom Riders reached New Orleans, the

last stop on their trip, shortly after midnight. They were met by at least a dozen reporters and cameramen. The story of the Freedom Ride had become national and international news. Alabama-style terrorism was now in the world spotlight.

Nashville Students Take-up Ride

The original Freedom Ride ended with a mass rally in New Orleans on May 17, but members of a Nashville student group, the Nashville Nonviolent Movement, decided to travel by bus over the yet-untested portion of the route, from Birmingham to New Orleans.

Upon arrival in Birmingham, 12 of them were arrested, held in "protective custody" and then taken by police to the Tennessee border. They returned to Birmingham and went to the Greyhound station. At first no driver would take them, as had been the case with the original Freedom Riders, but finally they boarded a bus for Montgomery under guard of the state highway patrol, a helicopter and officials of the U.S. Justice Department.

Montgomery Mobism

At Montgomery, they were awaited by a mob far bigger than the one which set upon the original Freedom Riders in Birmingham. Like in Birmingham, no uniformed police were at the bus station and the riders were ruthlessly beaten with all types of weapons as they debarked. Police did appear soon after the original assault, but the mob onslaught erupted twice more until, finally, tear gas bombs were hurled. Throughout the night there were bomb-threats, car-burnings and threatened house burnings. Fifteen hundred persons attending a mass meeting addressed by Martin Luther King and James Farmer spent the entire night in the First Baptist Church, because to venture into the streets would have been unsafe. Over 600 federal marshals were dispatched to Montgomery and, finally, Governor Patterson called out the National Guard.

The Nashville students met and decided to continue the ride to New Orleans. With them were three of the original Freedom Riders—Farmer, Lewis and Thomas—and five members of New Orleans CORE who had journeyed from that city to Montgomery to join.

The total number which boarded two Trailways buses from Montgomery to Jackson was 27. Prior to departure, several of the group ate at the terminal restaurant without incident. Both buses were escorted by large contingents of national guardsmen and highway patrolmen.

Mississippi

A threat to dynamite the first bus as it crossed the Mississippi line, failed to materialize. The buses drove to Jackson without making any rest stops. City police had cleared the terminal of spectators and had stationed 50 officers there. In front of the station were three of the police dogs which recently have become a hallmark of Mississippi in dealing with anti-segregationists.

All 12 from the first bus were arrested upon attempting to use the "white" rest room in the terminal. The 15 from the second bus, including Farmer, were arrested while lining-up to eat at the terminal's cafeteria.

CORE National Chairman Charles Oldham flew to Jackson to assist defense attorney Jack Young. However, the Freedom Riders were convicted on May 26 on charges of "failing to move on." They received a 60 day suspended jail term and a \$200 fine. To work out the fine—at \$3 a day—would require 67 days in jail. Twenty-two, including James Farmer, have chosen to remain in jail.