

Breach Of Peace-Discussion Guide

Synopsis

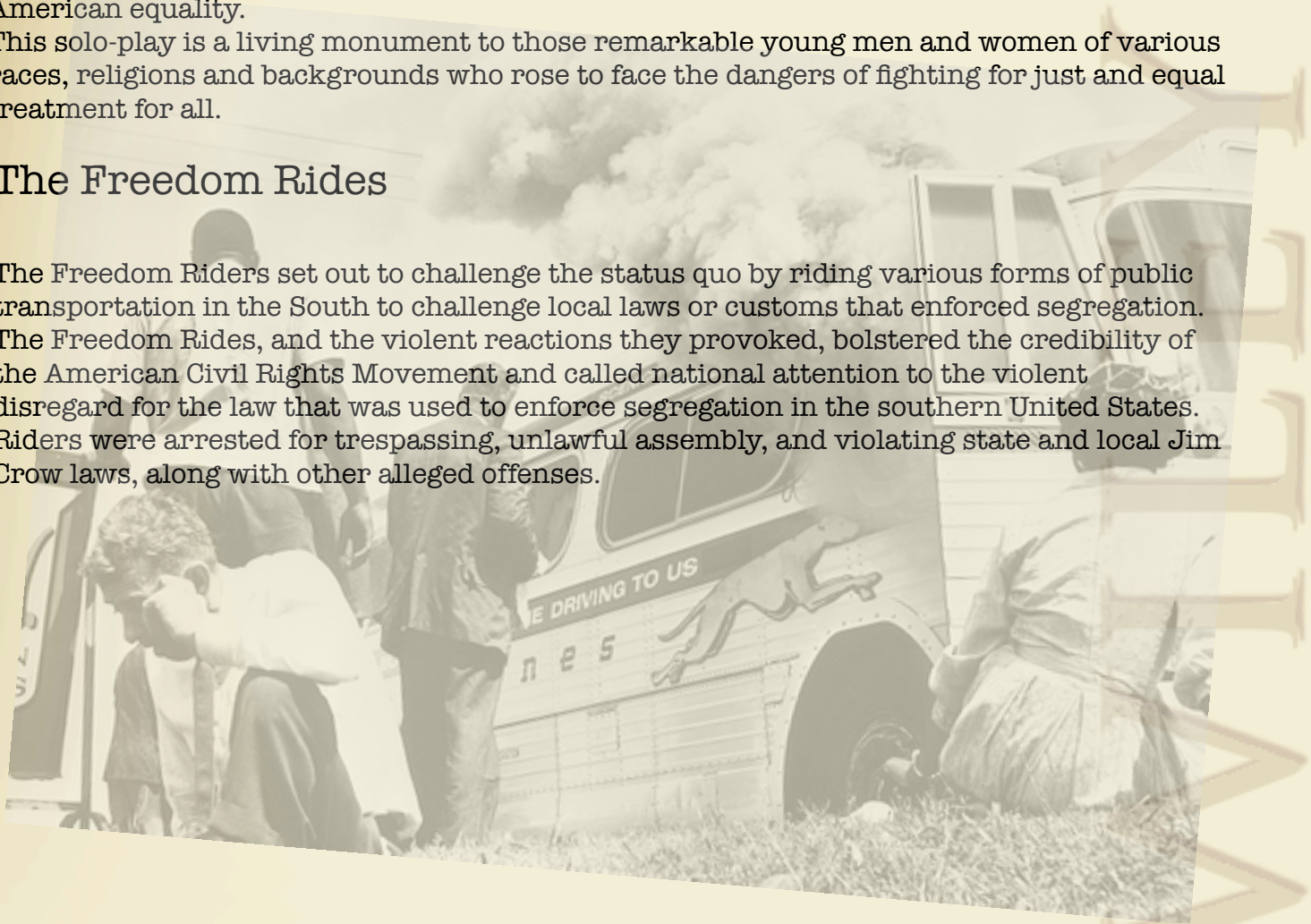
May 24, 1961 was the day 19-year-old Jean Thompson's father had prepared her for her entire life. "My parents always talked about the injustice of segregation, but they were optimistic; they didn't feel like it was going to last forever," Thompson recalled. "They raised us to be ready. I remember my dad saying the day will come, and when it does, you should be ready."

On that day, she boarded a Trailways bus in Montgomery, Alabama with 11 other young Freedom Riders bound for New Orleans – and history. Within three months, approximately 300 other riders took up the mantle to desegregate buses, following the path of the first brave few. Mobs bloodily assaulted many. Others were arrested shining a light on a brutal, segregated South. Breach of Peace is based on true accounts of surviving participants of the Freedom Rides as well as many other individuals involved in the early struggle for African-American equality.

This solo-play is a living monument to those remarkable young men and women of various races, religions and backgrounds who rose to face the dangers of fighting for just and equal treatment for all.

The Freedom Rides

The Freedom Riders set out to challenge the status quo by riding various forms of public transportation in the South to challenge local laws or customs that enforced segregation. The Freedom Rides, and the violent reactions they provoked, bolstered the credibility of the American Civil Rights Movement and called national attention to the violent disregard for the law that was used to enforce segregation in the southern United States. Riders were arrested for trespassing, unlawful assembly, and violating state and local Jim Crow laws, along with other alleged offenses.



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Central Characters of Breach Of Peace

John Lewis was born outside of Troy, Alabama, on February 21, 1940. Lewis had a happy childhood—though he needed to work hard to assist his sharecropper parents — but he chafed against the unfairness of segregation. He was particularly disappointed when the Supreme Court ruling in 1954's *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* didn't affect his school life. However, hearing Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermons and news of the 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott inspired Lewis to act for the changes he wanted to see. In 1957, John Lewis left Alabama to attend the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. There, he learned about nonviolent protest and helped to organize sit-ins at segregated lunch counters. He was arrested during these demonstrations, but Lewis was committed to the Civil Rights Movement and went on to participate in the Freedom Rides of 1961.

James Farmer Jr. was born on January 12, 1920, in Marshall, Texas. His mother was a teacher and his father a minister who was also the first African-American citizen to earn a doctorate in the state. Surrounded by literature and learning, the young Farmer was an excellent student, skipping grades and becoming a freshman at Wiley College in 1934 at the age of 14. Previously contemplating a career in medicine, Farmer then thought he would follow in his father's footsteps and take up ministerial work, earning his divinity degree from Howard University in 1941. While there he learned about the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Farmer studied much of Gandhi's philosophies and would apply the leader's ideas of nonviolent civil resistance to U.S. racial desegregation.

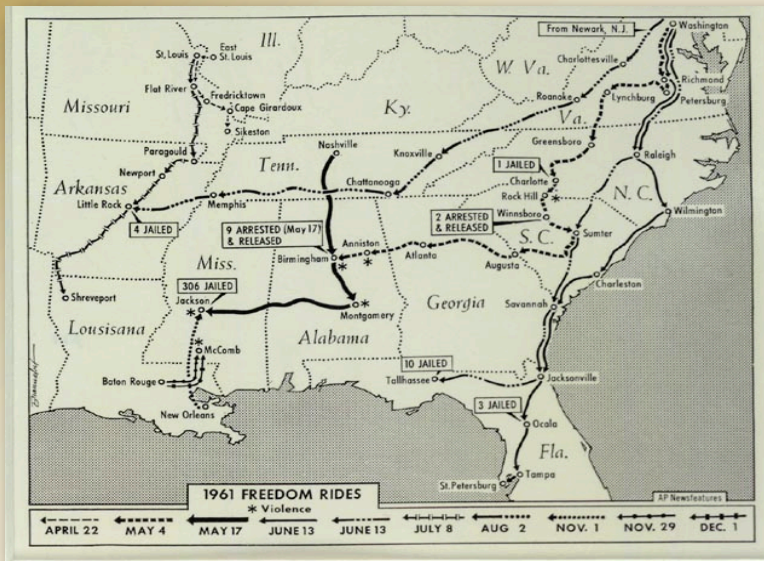
Joan Trumpauer Mulholland was a 19-year-old Duke University student and part-time secretary in the Washington office of Senator Clair Engle of California. Joan Trumpauer arrived in Jackson, Mississippi by train from New Orleans, LA as part of the June 4, 1961 Mississippi Freedom Ride. The group was promptly ushered by Jackson police to a waiting paddy wagon; all nine Riders refused bail. Trumpauer was transferred to Parchman State Prison Farm.

Lucretia Collins was a 21 year-old student at Tennessee State University, that participated in the Nashville, Tennessee (via Birmingham, Alabama) to Montgomery, Alabama Freedom Ride from May 17 to 21, 1961 and was arrested on May 25, 1961 in Jackson, Mississippi for her participation in the Freedom Rides.

Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor became a known foe in the Civil Rights Movement. He refused to provide police protection for the Freedom Riders in 1961 upon word that they would be besieged upon their arrival in Birmingham. Later, during the 1963 spring campaign to end segregation in the city, hundreds of student protesters were jailed. Connor eventually ordered authorities to besiege peaceful protesters, many of whom were quite young, with water hoses and attack dogs. Images of this were broadcast around the world and became history, thus accelerating integration in the city and galvanizing the likes of President John F. Kennedy, helping to set into motion the creation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

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A Freedom Rides Timeline



Thursday, May 4, 1961

Washington D.C.

CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) Freedom Ride leaves from Washington D.C. Led by CORE Director James Farmer, 13 riders (seven black, six white) left Washington, D.C., on Greyhound and Trailways buses. Their plan was to ride through Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, ending with a rally in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Monday, May 8, 1961

Charlotte

Joseph Perkins is the first Freedom Rider to be arrested after sitting at a whites only shoe-shine stand in Charlotte, NC.

Rock Hill

Later that same day, Freedom Rider John Lewis is assaulted in the Greyhound bus terminal of Rock Hill, SC, after attempting to enter the white waiting room with fellow Freedom Rider Al Bigelow.

Winnsboro

Other riders were arrested in Winnsboro.

Fri, May 12, 1961

Atlanta

The CORE Freedom Riders arrive in Atlanta, GA, where Martin Luther King, Jr. warns them of violence ahead. Amid bomb threats, jeers, and other methods of intimidation, CORE Freedom Riders travel to New Orleans by plane.

Sunday, May 14, 1961

Anniston

CORE Freedom Riders bus #1 burned

An angry mob of KKK members and their supporters burns a Freedom Riders' Greyhound bus near Anniston, AL.

Birmingham

CORE Freedom Riders bus #2 attacked.

A riot breaks out at the Trailways Bus Station in Birmingham, AL. A KKK mob savagely beats both Freedom Riders and innocent bystanders alike with iron pipes, chains, and clubs.

Fri, May 19, 1961

Montgomery

Freedom Riders attacked

The Freedom Riders arrive in Montgomery, AL where a police escort abandons them to an angry mob. Freedom Rider Jim Zwerg and Federal official John Seigenthaler are badly injured in an ensuing brawl.

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A Freedom Rides Timeline Cont.

Tue, May 23, 1961

Jackson

Freedom Riders jailed

The Riders board buses from Montgomery to Jackson, MS under National Guard escort. They are jailed upon arrival under the formal charges of incitement to riot, breach of the peace, and failure to obey a police officer.



Sun, Jun 11, 1961

Parchman State Penitentiary

Freedom Riders sent to Parchman State Prison Farm

Riders are transferred to Mississippi's notorious Parchman State Prison Farm. Segregationist authorities attempt to break their spirits by removing mattresses from the cells. New Freedom Riders will continue to arrive in Jackson, MS and be jailed throughout summer.

General Vocabulary - Freedom Riders, 1961

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) - a not-for-profit human rights organization that seeks to bring about equality for all people regardless of race, creed, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnic background. (<http://www.coreonline.org/Features/what-is-core.htm>, 2010)

Boynton v. Virginia - This case interprets the idea that interstate facilities were for the use of all citizens regardless of race. In 1958, Bruce Boynton, a black student at Howard University Law School took a Trailways bus from Washington to his home in Montgomery, Alabama. On a 40-minute layover at the Trailways Bus Terminal in Richmond, Virginia, the passengers went inside to eat. Boynton entered the segregated restaurant, sat in the white section and ordered a sandwich and tea. When asked to move to the colored section, he refused and was arrested by local police. He was charged with trespassing, and fined \$10.

Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) - an organization that was established from the student sit-ins that occurred on February 1, 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. (<http://www.sncc50thanniversary.org/sncc.html>, 2010)

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) - an American organization, consisting chiefly of southern churches, formed in 1957 to campaign for Negro civil rights.

Separate but Equal - having to do with a policy of racial segregation between Negroes and whites, as in education, employment, or transportation, by providing ostensibly equal facilities for all.