



Foundation Document Overview

Freedom Riders National Monument

Alabama



Contact Information

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Purpose



Modern Highway 202 and the Old Birmingham Highway at the Greyhound Bus Burning Site.

FREEDOM RIDERS NATIONAL MONUMENT fosters reconciliation and racial healing by commemorating the stories, places, and people involved in the 1961 Freedom Rides, a nonviolent campaign that brought national attention to the brutal reality of segregation in the South and forced the federal government to take action toward ending segregation in interstate travel.



Significance

Significance statements express why Freedom Riders National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Building upon the foundation of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) victories in the U.S. Supreme Court that struck down state laws compelling segregation in interstate travel, the Freedom Rides of 1961 brought focus to the violations of these rulings in the South and the brutality used to enforce Jim Crow laws and practices.
- Freedom Riders National Monument honors the work, sacrifice, and courage of an interracial group of men and women committed to nonviolent methods, who risked their lives and endured physical violence to test the Supreme Court's ruling in *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), which declared segregation in interstate bus stations unconstitutional.
- Freedom Riders National Monument commemorates the power of public organizing and the ability of ordinary individuals, including youth, to bring about social change and end injustices.
- The iconic images of the burning Greyhound bus outside of Anniston, Alabama, publicized worldwide, raised awareness of the depths of violent enforcement of segregation in the South, resulting in political action, and inspiring others to join the civil rights movement.
- The historic Greyhound bus station in Anniston, Alabama, stands as a reminder of racial segregation in America. The structure retains its historic character, including vestiges of its "separate but equal" accommodations.

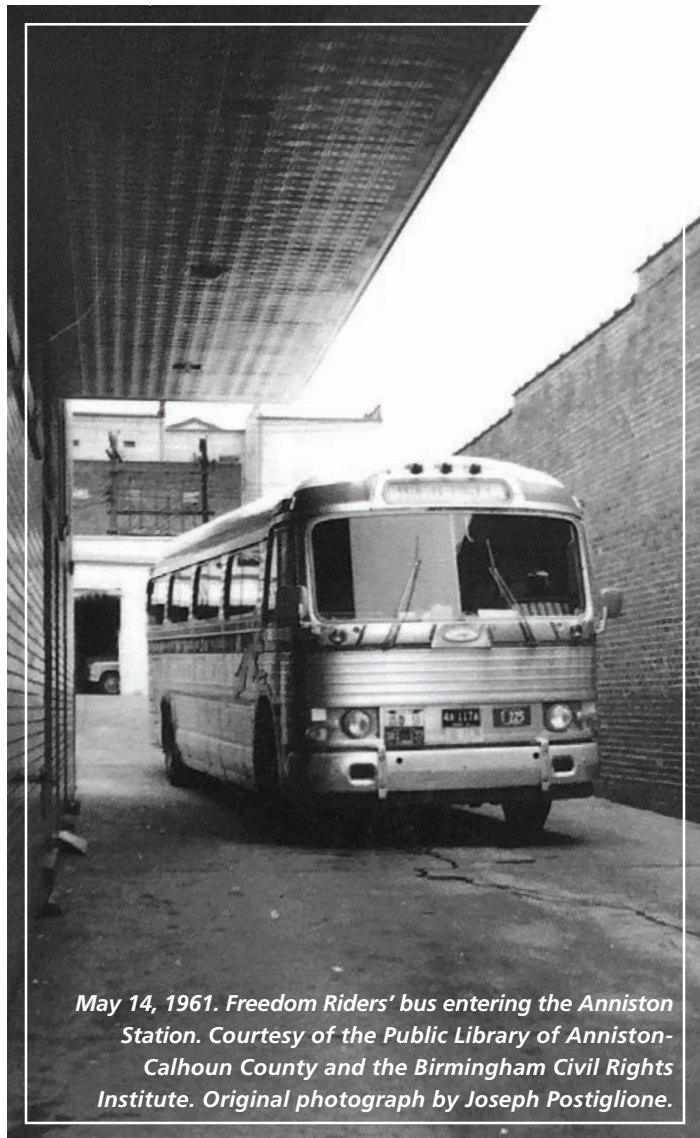


The bus station's infilled segregated exits separated by the baggage room door.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Greyhound Bus Station and its Surroundings**
- **The Greyhound Bus Burning Site**
- **Oral Histories, Archives, and Museum Collections**
- **Partnerships**



May 14, 1961. Freedom Riders' bus entering the Anniston Station. Courtesy of the Public Library of Anniston-Calhoun County and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Original photograph by Joseph Postiglione.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

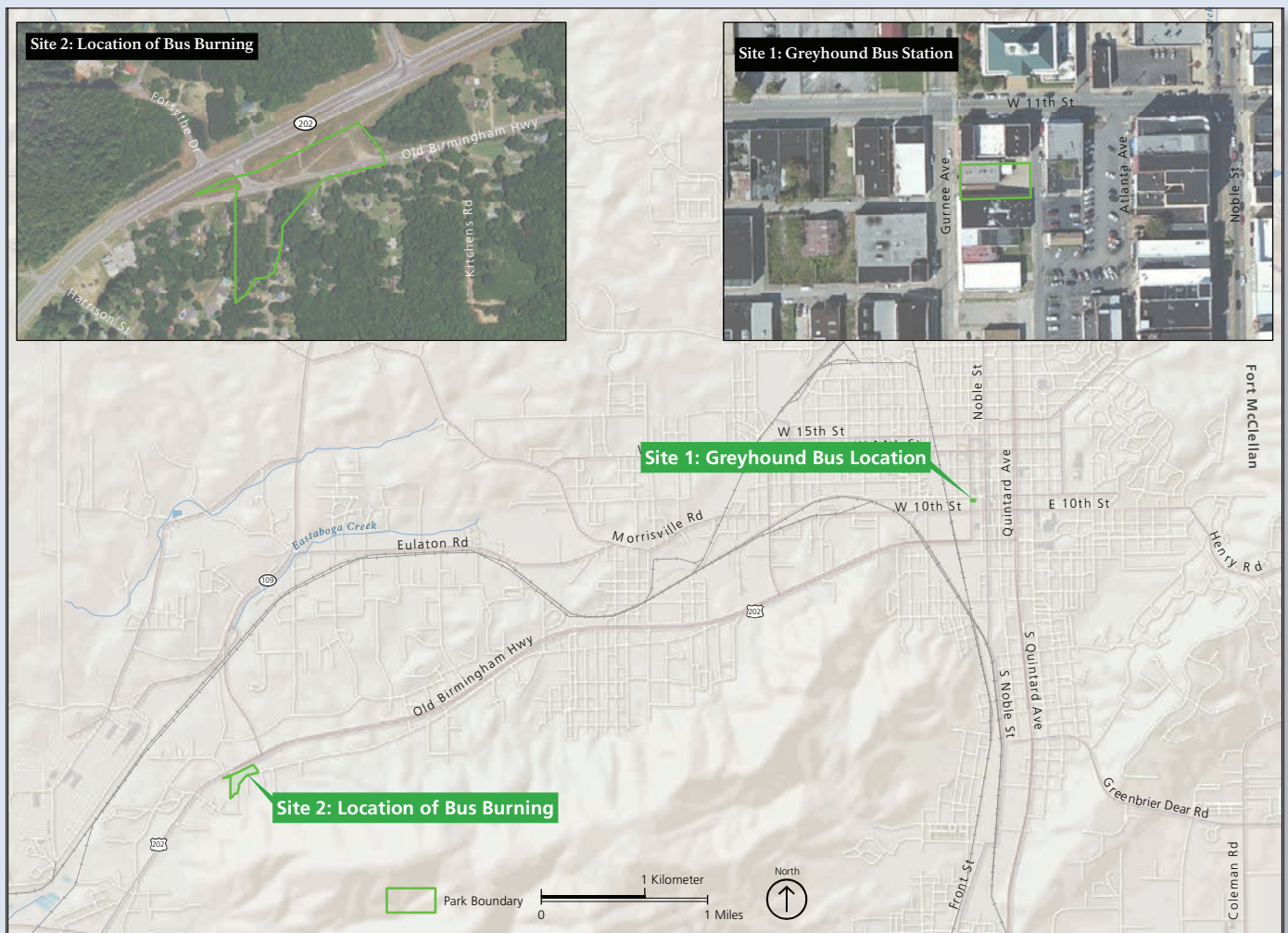
- **The Bus Station.** The Greyhound bus station in Anniston, Alabama, serves as a representation of a public space that connects visitors to the day-to-day dehumanizing effects of segregation and transports them to an era of racial tension where violence and intimidation were met with courage and determination that continues to inspire visitors today.
- **The Bus Burning.** Images of a firebombed bus outside Anniston, Alabama, and the brutal attack on riders shocked the American public, inspired empathy, and galvanized public sentiment that forced the federal government to take steps to end segregation in interstate travel nationwide. Locally, small acts of compassion during the violent scene planted the seed of positive change in race relations in Anniston and reminds us of the power of reconciliation and healing.
- **The Freedom Rides.** Starting with two buses in Washington D.C., and inspiring more than 400 people from all over the country to join the movement, the Freedom Rides of 1961 exposed the indignity and injustice of segregated travel and struck a powerful blow to Jim Crow laws.
- **The Freedom Riders.** Proving that a small group of diverse individuals united by their convictions can ignite social change, the courageous Freedom Riders of 1961 confronted injustice and inspired a national conversation on race relations. Their example and success inspire current and future generations to not underestimate the power of organizing and the ability of individuals to positively influence social change.
- **Strategic Organization.** The nonviolent strategies employed by multi-generations of determined individuals proved to be integral to the successful 1961 Freedom Rides. The grassroots development of the Freedom Rides, the success of the campaign, and the eventual expansiveness of the Freedom Rider network continues to serve as an example and inspiration for other worldwide democratic movements.

Description

On May 14, 1961, a Greyhound bus left Atlanta, Georgia, carrying among its passengers seven members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a.k.a. the “Freedom Riders.” Their journey was one of dozens of planned interstate bus trips designed to test if bus station facilities in the Deep South were complying with U.S. Supreme Court decisions that struck down state laws compelling segregation in interstate travel and which had hardened the attitudes of segregationists in the South who continued to promote segregation policies. Upon reaching the Greyhound Bus Station in Anniston, Alabama, the bus was met by a crowd of angry segregationists. The mob threw rocks, broke windows, and slashed the bus’s tires. After leaving Anniston, the bus made it only 6 miles outside of town before the driver was forced to pull over when the slashed bus tires gave out.

The angry segregationists who had followed the bus continued their attack and set the bus aflame. The Freedom Riders barely escaped with their lives. A freelance photographer captured the scene; his photographs of the burning bus—which appeared in hundreds of newspapers the following morning—became iconic images of the civil rights movement. Images of the firebombed bus shocked the American public and created political pressure that would eventually lead to federal action to end segregation.

Today, the National Park Service interprets the history of the Freedom Rides and the events of May 14, 1961, at the Greyhound Bus Station in Anniston, Alabama, and at the bus burning site 6 miles outside of town in Calhoun County. These two properties make up the discontinuous units of Freedom Riders National Monument.



Front Cover: Alabama Highway 202, May 14, 1961. Burning Bus. Courtesy of the Public Library of Anniston-Calhoun County and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Original photograph by Joseph Postiglione.