

Remembering the Freedom Riders

This week, civil rights activists are celebrated in a much-changed American South

By Bobby Harrison
Of *The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Flonzie Brown-Wright was an 18-year-old from Mississippi living in Los Angeles when the Freedom Riders reached Jackson in May 1961.

After seeing reports that summer on the arrests of the Freedom Riders, she called her mother to ask what was happening in her home state.

"I didn't have a clue what was going on," she recalled last week. "My mother and daddy protected me."

In hindsight, Brown-Wright said, she never wondered why, as she walked to school each day, busloads of white students passed her. That was just the way it was.

Brown-Wright returned to Mississippi in 1963 and soon became involved in the civil rights movement. She admits, however, that she wasn't a willing participant until then-NAACP state director Medgar Evers was shot dead in front of his wife and children as he returned to his Jackson home one night.

Today, Wright sits outside her office at the historic Ayer Hall on the Jackson State campus where she is working as the office manager to help coordinate the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Rides. She works her cell phone like a teenager, texting in between answering questions.

About 100 Freedom Riders will be on hand for this week's events.

In a speech to the Mississippi Economic Council earlier this year, Henry "Hank" Thomas of Stone Mountain, Ga., national chairman of the Freedom Riders, said, "After 50 years, American has evolved. The South has changed. Mississippi has changed."

Thomas said the anniversary observance would be a "religious, racial, reconciliation time."

Planned events include the placing of Freedom Trail Markers by the state in key locales of the civil rights movement, including Jackson's Trailways Bus Station, where many Freedom Riders were arrested, and at Parchman penitentiary, where many were incarcerated.

Seminars during the week will cover the Freedom Riders and their impact on the civil rights movement, with participants talking about their experiences.

Wright said everyone associated with the event is pleased with the reception the Freedom Riders are receiving.

"We knew from the reception of people it was going to be big," she said. "But I don't think we realized the magnitude."

Wright said it was the Freedom Riders who spurred the



Freedom Riders in the '60s sit next to a bus that had been firebombed

civil rights movement and the ensuring changes that allowed her become the first black female elected official in the state.

She won the office of Madison County election commissioner in 1968 and had the privilege of registering her father, a successful plumber-electrician, to vote.

"The Freedom Riders got the attention of President Kennedy," she said.

At that point the federal government became involved in bringing change to the South.

In the 1960s, the Freedom Riders were greeted in Jackson with abuse and incarceration. Now, 50 years later, many of them are back in town.

And, says Flonzie Brown-Wright, she's glad to be with them this time.

We honor the many accomplishments of African Americans.



It is our primary goal as a labor union to better the lives of all people working in the building trades through advocacy, civil demonstration, and the long-held belief that workers deserve a "family wage" – fair pay for an honest day's work.

A family wage, and the benefits that go with it, not only strengthens families, but also allows our communities to become stronger, more cohesive, and more responsive to their citizens' needs.

Our family wage agenda reflects our commitment to people working in the building trades, and to workers everywhere. In this small way, we are doing our part to help people achieve the American Dream. This dream that workers can hold dear regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, creed, or religious beliefs.



The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters

Representing more than 5,000 construction workers in Oregon state.

Do you want to know more about becoming a Union carpenter?
Go to our website at www.nwcarpenters.org

Offices in Portland
1636 East Burnside
Portland, OR 97214
503.261.1862 • 800.974.9052

Headquarters in Kent, WA
25120 Pacific Hwy S, Ste 200
Kent, WA 98032
253.945.8800 • 800.573.8333

THE SKANNER
Full Print
Version

Check Out
The Skanner's
Turn-the-pages
WebPaper

www.theskanner.com home page:
click the 'Full Print Version Online'
button to view our full
newspapers, just as they are
printed, on-line. Just click to turn
the pages and click to zoom.



Caldwell's, Hennessey, Goetsch & McGee Funeral Home



Von D. Bailey
Funeral Director
20 NE 14th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232
503-232-4111
Fax 503-231-1586
von.bailey@sci-us.com