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Perilous Journey

by Steph Smith

Separate But Not Equal

Imagine going to a restaurant and being told that you could not sit down because of the color of your skin. Imagine being forced to sit in the back of a train or bus, even though you paid the same price as other travelers. That was real life for black people throughout the American South until the 1960s. Segregation and Jim Crow laws said that black and white people should be treated differently. Black people had fewer privileges. They lived and went to school apart from whites.

Fighting for Fairness

Groups such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) worked to change this unfair treatment and bring civil rights to all Americans. For example, they organized the Freedom Riders—volunteers who protested against segregated buses in the South. Both black and white Freedom Riders from the north rode buses to southern states to challenge the unfair laws.

On the Road Again


The Freedom Riders practiced civil disobedience by protesting peacefully. Blacks sat in the front of buses and whites sat in back. During stops, the whites used black-only rest areas and vice versa. Many segregationists responded with great violence. In May 1961, many Freedom Riders in Birmingham, Alabama, were beaten so severely that they had to be taken to the hospital. Later that May, in Jackson, Mississippi, more than 100 Freedom Riders were jailed for trying to desegregate a bus station. By the end of the summer of 1961, more than 300 Riders were in jail there.

Courage Pays Off

Eventually, the Freedom Riders' courage paid off. Reports about these activists in newspapers and on television inspired many Americans to support the civil rights movement. In September 1961, four months after the first protesters boarded buses in Washington, D.C., the federal Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) banned segregation on buses and trains throughout the United States. Another brick in the wall of segregation had been knocked down.

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Resource Links

 RDI Book 1: p. 399

SAM Keywords: Content Area

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Workshop 2

Create a Time Line

Enter each event in time order on this time line. Add more lines if you need to.

Title _____

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