

Timeline of Selected Events in the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi

Please note that this timeline is evolving, and other events may be suggested by contacting wwirr@olemiss.edu

1945

Medgar Evers is honorably discharged; black veterans protest treatment in a hearing to Mississippi Senator Theodore Bilbo.

1947

April 9: Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) sends “Freedom Riders” on a Journey of Reconciliation through the upper South to test *Morgan v. Virginia*, in which the US Supreme Court ruled segregation on interstate travel to be illegal.

1948

April: Gladys Noel Bates files suit for equal pay.

1951

May 8: Willie McGee is executed in Mississippi for raping a white woman.

1954

May: *Brown v. Board of Education* is decided by US Supreme Court, ruling “separate but equal” schools segregating black students and white students to be unconstitutional.

July: First “Citizens Council” is organized in Indianola, MS.

December: Medgar Evers becomes National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Field Secretary.

1955

May 7: NAACP leader Rev. George Wesley Lee is killed in Belzoni, MS.

May: *Brown v. Board of Education II* decided by US Supreme Court, ordering school districts to desegregate “with all deliberate speed.”

August 13: Political Activist Lamar Smith is killed in Brookhaven, MS.

August 28: Fourteen-year old Emmett Till, visiting family from Chicago, is kidnapped and murdered near Money, MS. Media coverage of the Chicago funeral, with an open casket showing the brutality performed on his body, energizes the Civil Rights Movement.

September: Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam are tried and found not guilty for the murder of Emmett Till.

December 1: The Montgomery Improvement Association, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., organizes the Montgomery bus boycott in neighboring Alabama, which lasts for over a year.

December: Black businessman Clinton Melton is gunned down at a Glendora gas station by a friend of Bryant and Milam, in an apparent follow-up to the Emmett Till case.

1956

January: *Look* magazine publishes a story in which Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam confess to murdering Emmett Till.

February-March: The Southern Manifesto is signed by 19 U.S. Senators and 82 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, including the entire congressional delegations of the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. The Manifesto, written in response to the *Brown* decisions, accused the Supreme Court of “clear abuse of judicial power.” It further promised to use “all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.”

March 29: The Mississippi State Legislative Session establishes the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.

December 21: After the U.S. Supreme Court affirms the District Court's decision that segregation on buses is unconstitutional, the Montgomery buses are desegregated.

1957

Clyde Kennard first attempts to enroll at Mississippi Southern College, now the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). He made subsequent attempts in 1958 and 1959, prompting a campaign by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission to discredit him, resulting in his arrest and conviction on false charges of possession of liquor. He was sentenced to seven years at Parchman Penitentiary, where he was denied proper care for serious health conditions that eventually led to his death.

1958

June 30: The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *NAACP v. Alabama*, that the NAACP has the constitutional right of freedom of assembly to keep its membership a secret.

1959

April: Dr. Gilbert Mason, Sr., a founding member of the Biloxi NAACP, leads the Gulf Coast wade-in to desegregate the sand beaches. In addition, he was the major petitioner in the lawsuit against the Biloxi Municipal School district to desegregate the public schools.

April: Mack Charles Parker, a resident of Poplarville, Mississippi, was jailed for allegedly raping a white woman. A white mob abducted Mr. Parker from his jail cell, beat him, took him to Louisiana, and then shot him. Although Parker's abductors were well known and some admitted their complicity to FBI agents, the judge in the case, Sebe Dale, a white supremacist and member of the Citizens' Council, encouraged the grand jury to return no indictments against the killers.

1960

July: Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) volunteer Robert Moses, traveling for SNCC, meets Amzie Moore in the Mississippi Delta. The relationship would prove to be of major significance in the Mississippi Movement.

May: Civil Rights Act of 1960 is signed into law, allowing for the federal supervision of local voter registrars.

1961

March 27: Nine students from Tougaloo College are arrested for attempting to desegregate the “white only” public library. The group became known as the Tougaloo Nine.

May 4: CORE’s Freedom Ride begins in Washington D.C., with plans to continue throughout the Deep South to New Orleans to test *Boynton v. Virginia*, which outlawed racial segregation in public transportation.

July: SCLC begins citizenship classes; Andrew J. Young is hired to direct the program. Bob Moses arrives in McComb.

September 25: Voter Registration activist Herbert Lee is killed in McComb.

October 4: Burgland High School students are jailed in McComb for leading a walkout of the school in protest of the expulsion of fellow students for civil rights activism.

November 1: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) tests the desegregation of the bus terminal in Albany, Georgia. Once the protestors enter the white waiting room, they are ordered to leave by the police. The attention and experience SNCC gained energized the youth arm of the movement, which later became a powerful force in Mississippi.

1962

April 9: Corporal Roman Duckworth is shot by a police officer in Taylorsville.

September: A series of shootings is carried out around Ruleville, including the homes of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker and Joe McDonald, as well as two girls from the area.

September 30-October 1: Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black orders James Meredith admittance to the University of Mississippi, called "Ole Miss." Despite Gov. Ross Barnett's attempts to prevent it, Meredith enrolls. A riot ensues on the UM campus, led by a white mob protesting the university's integration. French photographer Paul Guihard and Oxford resident Ray Gunter are killed during the riot.

October: Leflore County Supervisors cut off surplus food distribution in retaliation against a local voter registration drive.

1963

February 28: SNCC worker Jimmy Travis is shot outside Greenwood.

April 23: Baltimore postal worker and CORE volunteer William Moore is killed in Atalla, AL, while on a march from Baltimore, MD, to Jackson, MS.

June 9: Activists Fannie Lou Hamer and Euvester Simpson are arrested and beaten by Montgomery County law enforcement in Winona after attending a voter registration workshop.

June 12: Mississippi NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers is assassinated in front of his home in Jackson.

1964

April 26: The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) is founded in Jackson. In August, the MFDP challenged the white establishment of the Democratic Party at the party's national convention in Atlantic City, NJ, giving a national media voice to the plight in Mississippi and galvanizing supporters. It is here that Fannie Lou Hamer testifies before the Credentials Committee about the

economic tactics and violence used against her and other civil rights activists in Mississippi.

Summer: During this period known as Freedom Summer, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) organizes efforts to register black voters.

June 21: CORE workers James Chaney and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner and volunteer Andrew Goodman disappear near Philadelphia, MS.

July 2: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is signed, outlawing racial discrimination and segregation in employment, schools, and public places.

July 12: The lower half of Charles Eddie Moore’s body and the headless body of Henry Hezekiah Dee are pulled from the Mississippi River near Tallulah, LA; FBI believes they were kidnapped near Meadville, Mississippi, and murdered by Klansmen on May 2.

August 4: The bodies of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner are found in an earthen dam near Philadelphia, MS.

September 6: 14-year-old Herbert Oarsby’s body is pulled from the Big Black River near Canton, MS, dressed in a CORE t-shirt.

Black Church burnings occur throughout the state. McComb becomes known as “the bombing capital of the world” for the number of bombings there.

The State attempts to avoid integration of schools by establishing a “Freedom of Choice” plan, by which parents could select the school their children would attend. Black parents who attempted to enroll their children in the white schools suffered various economic and physical reprisals. This ploy to avoid school integration continued through 1969, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* that desegregation had to commence immediately.

1965

June-September: SCLC runs the Summer Community Organization and Political Education (SCOPE) program, registering voters in dozens of Southern counties.

August 6: The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is signed into law, outlawing practices designed to keep black citizens from registering to vote.

1966

January 10: Local NAACP President Vernon Dahmer is killed in a dynamite blast to his home in Hattiesburg, MS.

June 6: James Meredith is shot while on his "March against Fear."

June 7-26: Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, Floyd McKissick, and others continue Meredith's march. SNCC's Willie Ricks leads cries for "Black Power."

June 10: Ben Chester White is killed by Klansmen in Natchez, MS.

October: The Black Panther Party, a self-defense organization established to promote "Black Power," is founded in Oakland, California, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

1967

February 27: NAACP activist Wharlest Jackson is killed by bomb after promotion to a "white" job in Natchez, MS.

May 11: National Guardsmen fire on a black student protest at Jackson State University, killing civil rights worker Benjamin Brown.

June 12: In *Loving v. Virginia*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the prohibition of interracial marriage is unconstitutional.

Robert Clark becomes the first black person elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives since Reconstruction.

1969

January-February: Meridian church bombings and burnings.

1970

January: School desegregation commences following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Alexander V. Holmes County Board of Education*. Private white academies are founded across the state in response to the integration of the public schools. The flight of white students from the public schools results in the transfer of public assets to the private schools, further depleting resources available for public education.

The criminal justice system in the state continues to result in disproportionate sentencing of whites and blacks and an on-going failure to provide effective assistance of counsel in many cases.

After 1970

The public schools, chronically underfunded as a result of the dual school system, continue to be underfunded as they increasingly became primarily for black students and poor white students in some parts of the state.

By the 1973-1974 school year, 2/3 of Mississippi school children are “tracked,” and thus provided with differential instruction.

1982 Education Reform Act

Provided for compulsory education, tightened teacher certification, reorganized the State Department of Education, and provided for sales and income tax financing for schools. Schools in the state remain among the lowest funded in the country.

The drop-out rate results in some 50% of Mississippi children failing to graduate from high school.