



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

RESOLUTION NO. 110395

Introduced May 12, 2011

Councilmember Kenney

RESOLUTION

Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Freedom Riders and the impact that these activists for equality had on the Civil Rights Movement.

WHEREAS, The Freedom Riders were civil rights activists that rode public buses into the segregated southern states to challenge segregation in interstate travel and test the United States Supreme Court decision, *Boynton v. Virginia* (of 1960); and

WHEREAS, The first Freedom Ride left Washington D.C. on May 4, 1961 and was scheduled to arrive in New Orleans on May 17. Riding through Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, the purpose was to challenge local laws and customs that enforced segregation; and

WHEREAS, The Freedom Rides of 1961 were organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), who 14 years earlier organized the Journey of Reconciliation to investigate how and if the upper southern states reflected the earlier Supreme Court ruling that banned racial discrimination in interstate travel; and

WHEREAS, The Freedom Riders' strategy for their journey was to have at least one interracial pair sit in adjoining seats and at least one black Rider sit in the front of the bus. The others would sit in various locations throughout the rest of the bus. In order to assure continued contact with CORE and provide bail if needed, one rider would follow the segregation laws and customs to avoid arrest; and

WHEREAS, During their journey, the Freedom Riders encountered shocking violence. Outside of Anniston, Alabama, a mob firebombed one of the buses and held the doors shut. Remarkably, all passengers were finally able to escape and no one was killed; and

City of Philadelphia

RESOLUTION NO. 110395 continued

WHEREAS, In Birmingham, Alabama, violence was organized by the Ku Klux Klan who had a deal with the police to allow the mob fifteen minutes to attack the Freedom Riders without any arrests being made; and

WHEREAS, There were other events of violence throughout the journey and many Freedom Riders were arrested for trespassing, unlawful assembly, and violating state and local Jim Crow laws; and

WHEREAS, In following Freedom Rides, more than 400 activists participated as riders in over 60 rides. The vast majority of these riders were under 30 years old, mostly male, and nearly equally divided between black and white; and

WHEREAS, The Freedom Riders revealed that much of the South disregarded the Constitution, had police forces that conspired with criminals, and even had some doctors that refused to treat the injured; and

WHEREAS, The Freedom Rides, and the violent reactions they provoked, bolstered the credibility of the American Civil Rights Movement and highlighted the blatant disregard of the law that outlawed racial segregation; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the Freedom Riders and the impact that these activists for equality had on the Civil Rights Movement.