

No Turning Back Timeline

The following is timeline of events before, during, & after MISSION US: “No Turning Back”:

1896–1902—Southern states, including Mississippi, enact new state constitutions and laws—including white party primaries, poll taxes, and literacy tests—that effectively bar all African Americans from voting.

1941–1945—More than one million African American men and women serve in the US armed forces in World War II. Because many believed that African Americans were inferior soldiers, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps segregate them into separate units and keep them out of combat.¹ In the final year of the war, after lobbying from civil rights* groups, the U.S. government changed its position and began sending African American men to serve in combat.

Jan. 1946—Southern Negro Youth Congress organizes march of veterans demanding vote in Birmingham.

1952—The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organizes its first office in Greenwood, Mississippi.

May 1954—In the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students are unconstitutional.

Oct. 1954—The Citizens’ Council is formed by white Mississippians in response to the *Brown* decision and to counter the spread of civil rights activism.

Dec. 1954—Medgar Evers becomes the first NAACP field secretary in Mississippi, at age 29.

Aug. 1955—While visiting Mississippi from Chicago, 15-year-old Emmett Till is murdered in Money, Mississippi, by J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, two white men who accused Till of whistling at Carolyn Bryant, Roy’s wife. The murder makes national headlines, in part because of Mamie Till’s decision to allow photographs of her son’s corpse to be published in the media.

1956—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and others organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) after the state of Alabama makes it illegal to be a member of the NAACP.

Aug. 1958—The first mass sit-down movement by Black youth successfully integrates drug store lunch counters in Oklahoma City.

Feb. 1, 1960—Four Black college students sit down at a “whites only” lunch counter at Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina. Within weeks, similar demonstrations spread across the South, and many students are arrested.

Feb. 1960—Civil rights activists conduct sit-down strikes (which are soon after called “sit-ins”) in Greensboro, Charlotte, and Durham, North Carolina.

¹ Adapted from “[African Americans Fought for Freedom at Home and Abroad during World War II](#)” (The National World War II Museum).

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Students lead desegregation protests in Nashville, Tennessee; Richmond, Virginia; and Tallahassee, Florida.

Mar. 1960—Sit-ins spread across the South, including in communities in North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, and Louisiana.

Apr. 1960—At a youth leadership conference sponsored by the SCLC, students found their own organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Jul. 1960—Woolworth's, the original target of the Greensboro sit-ins, announces that it will serve all "properly dressed and well-behaved" customers.

Dec. 1960—The U.S. Supreme Court rules, in *Boynton vs. Virginia*, that segregation in interstate travel is unconstitutional, and that buses and trains should be desegregated. The court orders that interstate passengers have equal access to any facilities served by the buses and trains. This triggers the organization of several Freedom Rides (based on those originally done in the 1940s).

Jan. 1961—Democrat John F. Kennedy is inaugurated as President.

May 1961—Freedom Rides begin with two buses and 13 riders (7 Black, 6 white) traveling from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Louisiana. They are led by Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) Director James Farmer. The Freedom Riders are attacked by white mobs, including Klansmen, in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama, narrowly escaping being killed.

May-Jul. 1961—The Freedom Rides continue with more than 60 rides traveling across the South. Over 300 student activists are arrested and jailed in Parchman Prison after arriving on buses in Jackson, Mississippi. They request to be put to labor in the fields like ordinary inmates would be, but the prison refuses in order to avoid further bad publicity for the state.

Jun./Jul. 1961—SNCC, SCLC, CORE, and the NAACP combine their efforts in Mississippi, through a new coalition called the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), to launch voter registration projects in communities around the state.

Early 1962—Local Sunflower County resident Celeste Davis starts citizenship classes. Such classes were conducted by civil rights activists across the South to teach African American adults to read so that they could pass the voter registration literacy test. They also helped students learn economic skills such as using bank accounts, and engaged students in discussions of citizenship, democracy, and voting rights. By August, local Greenwood activist Amzie Moore and Mississippi SNCC leader Bob Moses support her classes.

Summer 1962—COFO launches voter registration projects in communities around the state, including Greenwood, Ruleville, Hattiesburg, and Holly Springs.

Amzie Moore brings Sam Block to Greenwood, Mississippi, to lead SNCC's voter registration project there. Block meets with members of the Elks Lodge, World War II veterans, and other adults who are ready to support a renewed voter registration effort. He also responds to the police beating of 14-year-old Welton McSwine by gathering evidence of the incident and

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supporting McSwine's family. Block earns credibility in Greenwood's African American community by standing up to the sheriff.

Aug. 1962—Fannie Lou Hamer attends her first mass meeting about voting rights in Ruleville, Mississippi. On August 31, she and 17 others attempt to register to vote. After being threatened, she flees the plantation where her family lives and becomes an active member of the Civil Rights Movement.

Sep. 1962—Riots begin as James Meredith attempts to register as the first African American student at the University of Mississippi. The Kennedy Administration sends U.S. marshals, military police, troops from the Mississippi National Guard, and officials from the U.S. Border Patrol to keep the peace.

Oct. 1962—The Leflore County Board of Supervisors cuts off surplus food and supply distribution to needy families from the federal government. Activists put out a nationwide call for food in the winter of 1962-63, and they get responses from churches, college campuses, and liberal political groups. Black celebrities such as Harry Belafonte and Dick Gregory participate in the effort.

Feb. 1963—As the food and supply shortage in Greenwood gets desperate, a truck from Chicago with 9,000 pounds of food and clothing arrives. Arsonists burn four Black businesses, including the dry cleaner next to the SNCC office.

Over two days, more than 150 Black citizens go to the courthouse to attempt to register to vote, the largest single registration effort in Mississippi since Reconstruction. SNCC field secretary Jimmy Travis is shot in Greenwood, but survives.

Mar. 1963—As protests, marches, and voter registration attempts continue in Greenwood, violence and intimidation by white mobs and police escalates.

Jun. 11, 1963—In a televised address to the nation, President Kennedy proposes new civil rights legislation. His proposal is an early version of what would become the Civil Rights Act enacted the following year.

Jun. 12, 1963—NAACP state Field Director Medgar Evers is shot and killed by a Greenwood resident and member of the Citizens' Council. His death causes a national outpouring of grief and anger.

Aug. 1963—The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom takes place at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The marchers demand that Congress "guarantee all Americans access to all public accommodations, decent housing, adequate and integrated education, and the right to vote."

Nov. 1963—COFO organizes the Mississippi Freedom Vote for the gubernatorial election. Black Mississippians are encouraged to cast "freedom ballots" that, while not official, demonstrate that they would vote if they were permitted to. This dispelled a myth among white Americans that African Americans were not interested in voting.

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Nov. 22, 1963—President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Civil rights activists use public outrage at Kennedy’s murder to demand that Congress pass a civil rights law.

Apr. 1964—In order to have a political party open to all Mississippians, COFO leaders including Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Bob Moses start the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). The party challenges the state Democratic Party’s all-white delegation at the Democratic National Convention later in the year.

Jul. 1964—President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a landmark civil rights and labor law that prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin. The law outlaws unequal application of voter registration requirements, as well as racial segregation in schools, employment, and public accommodations.

Summer 1964—COFO recruits hundreds of college-aged volunteers throughout the country to come to Mississippi for a “Freedom Summer.” Following the lead of local activists, the mostly white volunteers helped to register Black voters, build the MFDP, set up community centers, and teach in “Freedom Schools.”

Aug. 4, 1964—The bodies of Freedom Summer activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner are discovered, shot to death, six weeks after they disappeared while investigating the fire at a church where a Freedom School was to be held.

Spring 1965—Civil rights activists launch a voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. On March 7, a 54-mile mass march from Selma to Montgomery is stopped at the outset by violence from state troopers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Images of civil rights marchers (such as Amelia Boynton and John Lewis) bloodied and beaten are seen in media reports around the world. The day is known as Bloody Sunday. After a second march two days later, James Reeb, a white minister from Boston who joined the march, is murdered.

Aug. 8, 1965—President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act. The act bans racial discrimination in voting, including literacy tests and poll taxes. It also allows the federal government to take over voter registration in places where discrimination occurs.

1967—Although white supremacists try to retaliate against Black voters, Mississippians elect 22 Black candidates statewide.

1986—Mike Espy is elected as the Mississippi Delta’s first African American congressperson since Reconstruction.