

DAY 2- MONDAY

The tour departs for the community of Longdale, MS and historic Mt. Zion United Methodist Church.

Mt. Zion United Methodist Church

On June 16, 1964 a routine meeting of church officers was held. As the officers were leaving the church, Klansmen met them outside and ordered them out of the vehicles where they proceeded to beat J.R. (Bud) Cole, Georgia Rush and her son John Thomas. The church was burned later that evening leaving only the forty-year old bell that was used to announce the beginning of church services. A tour of the church will be followed by testimony and discussion with family members of those who were beaten by Klan members.

<http://www.visitmississippi.org/events-and-points-of-interest/mt-zion-united-methodist-church-25659>

Rock Cut Road

We then venture to "Rock Cut Road," the 1964 murder site of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were murdered near the town of Philadelphia, Mississippi. They were investigating the burning of Mt. Zion Methodist Church, which had been a site of a CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) Freedom School. Parishioners had been beaten in the wake of Schwerner and Chaney's voter registration rallies for CORE. The Sheriff's Deputy, Cecil Price, had been accused by parishioners of stopping their caravan and forcing the deacons to kneel in the headlights of their own cars, while they were beaten with rifle butts. That same group of white men was identified as having burned the church.

Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price arrested Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner for an alleged traffic violation and took them to the Neshoba County jail in Philadelphia, MS. They were released that evening, without being allowed to telephone anyone. On the way back to Meridian, they were stopped by patrol lights and two carloads of KKK members on Highway 19, then taken in Price's car to another remote rural road. The KKK men shot and killed Schwerner, then Goodman, and finally Chaney, after chain-whipping him. The men's bodies remained undiscovered for 44 days. In the meantime, the case of the missing civil rights workers became a major national story, especially coming on top of other events during Freedom Summer. The federal government quickly assigned the FBI to a full investigation and called in Navy sailors and other forces to aid in the search.

Schwerner's widow Rita, who also worked for CORE in Meridian, expressed indignation publicly at the way the story was handled. She said she believed that if only Chaney (who was black) was missing and the two older white men from New York had not been killed along with him, the case would not have received nearly as much national attention, as other black civil rights workers had earlier been killed in the South.

<https://mscivilrightsproject.org/neshoba/place-neshoba/road-515-or-qrock-cut-roadq/>

Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church

The tour takes us next to Meridian, MS. Before moving to its present location on James Chaney Drive, Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church was located in the building currently occupied by New Covenant Church of God in Christ. One of Mt. Olive's members, Lou Emma Whitlock, was a powerful figure in

voter registration activities. She was actively involved in the Crusade for Voters League and her “telephone trees” were important to politicians seeking office.

On August 4, 1964, approximately 200 people assembled at Mt. Olive to hear folk singer and political activist Pete Seeger. Seeger recalls stopping mid-song as someone whispered the news in his ear. After 44 days of waiting and searching, the worst had been confirmed. Seeger announced to the crowd that the bodies of missing Civil Rights workers James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman had just been found.

According to local activist Roscoe Jones, after a moment of stunned silence, everyone in the church joined hands and sang “We Shall Overcome,” the iconic anthem of the Civil Rights movement. Three days later, a crowd assembled at Mt. Olive and marched to First Union Missionary Baptist Church for Chaney’s funeral. Our tour follows in their footsteps.

<http://www.visitmeridian.com/index.cfm/historic-trail-markers/civil-rights/civil-rights-trail-marker-16/>

First Union Missionary Baptist Church

First Union Missionary Baptist Church has been called the headquarters of Civil Rights activities among Meridian churches. It was the location of numerous meetings, and its pastor at the time, the Reverend R. S. Porter, served as president of the local unit of the NAACP. Church member Obie Clarke also served as local NAACP president for many years. The church was instrumental in forming a group that served as armed watchmen to protect African-American leaders and churches from Ku Klux Klan attacks.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had already achieved national prominence in the Civil Rights movement, spoke at First Union a month after the disappearance of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. The church was overflowing with members of Meridian’s African-American community who had become frustrated by the lack of progress in the investigation.

On August 7, 1964, the church would again be filled, this time with mourners at Chaney’s funeral. Crowds gathered at four area churches and marched through Meridian, meeting at First Union for the funeral service. Mississippi Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) leader Dave Dennis delivered a passionate, and often quoted, eulogy.

<http://www.visitmeridian.com/index.cfm/historic-trail-markers/civil-rights/civil-rights-trail-marker-17/>

Okatibbee Missionary Baptist Church, site of James Chaney’s grave.

We next pay our respects at the site of James Earl Chaney’s grave. James Earl Chaney was a Civil Rights activist and martyr during the turbulent Freedom Summer of 1964. He was born in Meridian on May 30, 1943, and he became active in the Civil Rights movement during his teenage years. He participated in numerous Civil Rights organizations until his life was cut short at the age of 21.

<http://www.visitmeridian.com/index.cfm/historic-trail-markers/civil-rights/civil-rights-trail-marker-18/>

Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Our next stop is the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church which was a starting point for the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965. The church was also the meeting place and office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the Selma Movement. As a result, Brown Chapel played a major role in the events that led to the adoption of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The nation's reaction to Selma's "Bloody Sunday" march is widely credited with making the passage of the Voting Rights Act politically viable in the United States Congress.

<https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/al2.htm>

The Edmund Pettus Bridge

Built in 1940, the bridge is named after Edmund Winston Pettus, a former Confederate brigadier general, U.S. Senator from Alabama, and Grand Dragon of the Alabama Ku Klux Klan. The bridge was the site of the conflict of Bloody Sunday on March 7, 1965, where armed policemen attacked civil rights demonstrators with billy clubs and tear gas as they were attempting to march to the Alabama state capital of Montgomery.

In 1965 voting rights for African Americans were a contentious issue. In Selma, Alabama, voting rolls were 99% White and 1% African American, while the 1960 Census found that the population of Alabama was 30% nonwhite. In February 1965, state troopers and locals in Marion, Alabama, started a fight with some 400 African American demonstrators. Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot in the stomach, and he died eight days later. As word spread, the case became a catalyst for civil rights activists, including Martin Luther King, Jr. SCLC's Director of Direct Action James Bevel strategized a plan for a peaceful march on the state's capitol, which required crossing the bridge.

On March 7, 1965, armed policemen attacked peaceful civil rights demonstrators attempting to march to the state capitol of Montgomery in an incident that became known as Bloody Sunday. Because of the design of the bridge, the protestors were unable to see the police officers on the east side of the bridge until after they had reached the top of the bridge in the center. The protestors first saw the police while at the center of the bridge, 100 feet above the Alabama River. Upon seeing this, protestor Hosea Williams asked his fellow protestor John Lewis if he knew how to swim. Despite the danger ahead, the protestors continued marching without stopping. They were then attacked and beaten by police on the other side.

Televised images of the brutal attack presented Americans and international audiences with horrifying images of marchers left bloodied and severely injured, and roused support for the Selma Voting Rights Movement. Amelia Boynton, who had helped organize the march as well as marching in it, was beaten unconscious. A photograph of her lying on the road of the Edmund Pettus Bridge appeared on the front page of newspapers and news magazines around the world. In all, 17 marchers were hospitalized and 50 treated for lesser injuries; the day soon became known as "Bloody Sunday" within the African American community.

The marchers crossed the bridge again on March 21 and successfully walked to the Capitol building.

Since 1965, many marches have commemorated the events of Bloody Sunday. On its 30th anniversary, Rep. John Lewis, former president of SNCC and a prominent activist during the Selma to Montgomery marches, said, "It's gratifying to come back and see the changes that have occurred; to

see the number of registered voters and the number of Black elected officials in the state of Alabama; to be able to walk with other members of Congress that are African Americans."

On the 40th reunion of Bloody Sunday over 10,000 people, including Lewis, again marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Also, in 1996, the Olympic torch made its way across the bridge with its carrier, Andrew Young, and many public officials, to symbolize how far the South has come. When Young spoke at the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church as part of the torch ceremony he said, "We couldn't have gone to Atlanta with the Olympic Games if we hadn't come through Selma a long time ago."

In March 2015, on the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, U.S. President Barack Obama, the first African-American U.S. president, delivered a speech at the foot of the bridge and then, along with other U.S. political figures such as former U.S. President George W. Bush and Representative John Lewis and Civil Rights Movement activists such as Amelia Boynton Robinson (at Obama's side in a wheelchair), led a march across the bridge. An estimated 40,000 people attended to commemorate the 1965 march, and to reflect on and speak about its impact on history and continuing efforts to address and improve U.S. civil rights

The bridge was declared a National Historic Landmark on March 11, 2013. It is now a symbol of momentous changes in Selma, Alabama, America and the world.

<https://www.nps.gov/semo/learn/historyculture/edmund-winston-pettus-bridge.htm>

Selma Voting Rights Memorial Park and the National Voting Rights Museum

Our day concludes at the National Voting Rights Museum. Located in the historic district of Selma, Alabama, the Museum is the cornerstone of the contemporary struggle for voting rights and human dignity. It opened its doors in 1993 as a permanent memorial to the struggle to obtain voting rights for disenfranchised African Americans. The mission of the Museum is to collect, preserve and display artifacts and exhibits, which document and portray the history of voting rights in America.

The museum honors, chronicles, collects, archives, and displays the artifacts and testimony of the activists who participated in the events leading up to and including the 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches, and passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as well as those who worked for the African-American Voting Rights and Women's Suffrage movements.

The museum's several rooms and exhibit areas include the "Footprints to Freedom" room, which features molded cast-footprints of some of the activists who participated in the Selma to Montgomery marches; a "Women's Suffrage Room," honoring the contributions of African-American and other women who secured women's voting rights in the U.S.; the "Selma Room," also known as the "Marie Foster" room, where voting records, clothes worn by people beaten during the march, and other artifacts of these social movements are displayed; and a room where people who participated in the 1960s marches can leave personal messages and chronicle their memories.

<http://nvrmi.com/>