

Freedom Rides Quotes

"You didn't know what you were going to encounter. You had night riders. You had hoodlums . . . You could be antagonized at any point in your journey."

~ Charles Person, Freedom Rider

"I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws, and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, nor court can save it."

~ Judge Learned Hand

"The contrast could not have been sharper between the well-dressed nonviolent activists and the thugs armed with lead pies and firebombs."

~ Adam Strom, Facing History and Ourselves

"As news spread of the brutality faced by Freedom Riders in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama, the American public had to make a choice: Would it support democracy or mob rule?"

~ Adam Strom, Facing History and Ourselves

"Democracy is a process, not a static condition. It is becoming rather than being. It can easily be lost, but never is fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle."

~ William H. Hastie, the nation's first black federal judge

"The Freedom Riders were remarkable, fearless Americans. They were extraordinary, ordinary people . . . young people who took the reins of history and wouldn't let go."

~ Mark Samels, American Experience Executive Producer

"The Riders' dangerous passage through the bus terminals and jails of the Jim Crow South represented only one part of an extended journey for justice that stretched back to the dawn of American history and beyond. But once that passage was completed, there was renewed hope that the nation would eventually find its way to a true and inclusive democracy."

~ Professor Raymond Arsenault

"Segregation was unfair. It was wrong, morally, religiously. As a Southerner – a white Southerner – I felt that we should do what we could to make the South better and to rid ourselves of this evil."

~ Joan Mulholland, Activist

"When I did see the young people, first the sit-ins and the courage that they had to have, and then a couple years later on the bus in Anniston, and Jim Peck being so brutally beaten, I thought I just had to do something, and simply volunteered and proceeded."

~ Albert Gordon, Freedom Rider, Teacher, Jewish immigrant whose family had been killed by the Nazis during World War II

"Traveling in the segregated South for black people was humiliating. The very fact that there were separate facilities was to say to black people and white people that blacks were so subhuman and so inferior that we could not even use public facilities that white people used."

~ Diane Nash, Freedom Rides Organizer

"Every person operating a bus line in the city shall provide equal but separate accommodations for white people and negroes on his buses, by requiring the employees in charge thereof to assign passengers seats on the vehicles under their charge in such manner as to separate the white people from the negroes where there are both white and negroes on the same car; provided, however, that negro nurses having in charge white children or sick or infirm white persons, may be assigned seats among white people."

~ Montgomery, Alabama City Code 1952

"Through non-violence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supercedes systems of gross social immorality."

~ James Lawson, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

"So that everything would be open and above board, I sent letters to the President of the United States, President Kennedy; to the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy; the Director of the FBI, Mr. Hoover; the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, which regulated interstate travel; to the President of Greyhound Corporation; and the President of Trailways Corporation. And I must say we got replies from none of those letters."

~ James Farmer, CORE Director and Freedom Rides Organizer