

Journey of Reconciliation, 1947

“Power concedes nothing without a demand.” ~Frederick Douglass, 1857

Overview

In 1947, long before the more familiar civil rights events of the 1960s, the movement had already been set in motion. One such incredible challenge to segregation in interstate travel was The Journey of Reconciliation, in which 16 black and white men travelled throughout the upper South. In this lesson, students will examine the events that led up to the Journey of Reconciliation, gaining an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement as being a much longer fight than just one that occurred during the 1950s-1960s, as well as learn about what took place throughout the Journey – including during its North Carolina stops. Students will culminate this lesson by creating a historical marker that honors the Journey of Reconciliation’s riders and educates the public about this important period of history.

Grades

8-12

Essential Questions

- What was the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation?
- When prejudice and racism are supported by both custom and law, what can be done to create a more inclusive society?
- How does nonviolent direct-action expose injustice?
- What does the story of the Journey of Reconciliation suggest about the role of individuals, groups, and organizing in shaping democracy?
- What role has resistance, activism, and resilience played in fighting injustice throughout history to today, including during the Journey of Reconciliation?

Materials

- The Journey of Reconciliation, 1947 Power Point, located in the Database of K-12 Resources at <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/04/JourneyofReconciliationPPT.pdf>
- To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
- To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Journey of Reconciliation, reading and discussion questions attached
- Resolution of Support for State Historical Marker, attached
- Historical Monument/Marker assignment, attached
- “An Account of the Test Trips,” attached and available at <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/world-war-ii-and-post-war.html>
- Additional (related) lesson plans and resources:
 - Plessy v. Ferguson & the Roots of Segregation: <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/05/PlessyvFergusonRootsofSegregation.pdf>
 - The Freedom Rides of 1961: <https://k12database.unc.edu/files/2012/04/FreedomRides.pdf>
 - On the Books: Jim Crow & Algorithms of Resistance: <https://onthebooks.lib.unc.edu/> (This website is a corpus of all NC Jim Crow laws issued by the NC General Assembly between 1866-1967.)
 - NPR’s “Get On the Bus: The Freedom Riders of 1961:” <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5149667> (While the majority of the story is on the 1960 rides, the Journey of Reconciliation is addressed approximately 6 minutes in.)

Duration

- 60-90 minutes

Preparation

- To appreciate the actions of the Journey of Reconciliation participants and other civil rights activists, students must have a firm understanding of the Jim Crow Era and the laws and societal expectations that were at play. See Carolina K-12's lessons [here](#) for related content.
- While Jim Crow and segregation are sensitive topics to discuss with students, it is important for students to explore these historical events and understand how engaged community members fought such injustice. Tackling topics such as racism and violence, while difficult, represents a part of our state's and nation's past and present that students must learn about in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of where we have been, where we are, and where we need to go. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of considerate dialogue and tolerance is present in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12's classroom management activities in the Database of K-12 Resources under the "[Activities](#)" section and our [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#).

Procedure

Warm Up: *Morgan v. Virginia*

1. As a start to the lesson, project [SLIDE 2](#) and present the following scenario to students, asking them to write on a piece of paper the name of the person they believe you are referring to:
 - A black woman refuses to surrender her seat to white passengers and move to the back of the bus she is on. She is arrested and convicted of violating a law requiring racial segregation. What is the name of the woman?
2. After a quick 30-60 seconds, ask students to hold up their answers. It is likely that most will assume the answer is Rosa Parks, the longtime civil rights activist who was arrested in 1955 in Montgomery, AL for refusing to vacate her seat for a white person. This set into motion the long-planned Montgomery Bus Boycott. Project [SLIDE 3](#) and explain to students that you are actually not referring to Rosa Parks, however. Rather, you are referring to Irene Morgan. Ask students if any of them know anything about her, then share:
 - On July 16, 1944 (over 10 years before Rosa Park's planned and coordinated activism), Irene Morgan refused to surrender her seat to white passengers and move to the back of a Greyhound bus while traveling from Gloucester County, Virginia, to Baltimore, Maryland.
 - "I refused to move," she told an interviewer years later. "And that's when he [the bus driver] got off the bus, got the sheriff, and the sheriff said, 'I'm going to arrest you.' And I said, 'That's perfectly all right.'" When the sheriff produced a warrant, Morgan suggested that it could be no such thing; he didn't even know her name. "So I just took it and tore it up and just threw it out the window," she said. "So then he put his hands on me, you know, to arrest me." She kicked him in the groin. "I started to bite him but he looked dirty, so I couldn't bite him," she said, recalling that by then "he was turning all colors."
 - She was arrested and convicted in the Virginia courts for violating a state statute requiring racial segregation on all public vehicles. The NAACP appealed her case to the Supreme Court. On June 3, 1946, by a 6-to-1 decision, the court ruled in [Morgan v. Virginia](#) that the Virginia statute was unconstitutional when applied to passengers on interstate motor vehicles because it put an undue burden on interstate commerce.
3. Discuss:

- Why do you think more people know about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but not about Irene Morgan? Do you know of any similar events that happened even before Irene Morgan’s activism?
 - Project the examples on [SLIDE 4](#), letting students know the fight for equal rights via transportation dates back well before both Rosa Parks and even Irene Morgan. For instance, on July 16, 1854, schoolteacher [Elizabeth Jennings Graham](#) successfully challenged racist streetcar policies in New York City. On April 24, 1867, African Americans in Richmond, Virginia organized [protests](#) against the privately-operated company that refused to allow them to ride its horse-drawn streetcars. In 1883, as teacher Ida B. Wells traveled by train from Memphis to Woodstock, Tennessee, she refused when told to move to a different car because of her race. She was forced off the train, to the cheers of white passengers. She continued her fight by writing about the event and [suing](#). On June 7, 1892 [Homer Plessy](#) (as part of a pre-organized initiative, purchased a first-class ticket and took a seat in the whites-only car, resulting in the Supreme Court’s infamous [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) case.
- How would you describe Irene Morgan? In what ways does she exemplify strength, resistance and courage? What was Irene Morgan risking by taking this action given the realities of life in the 1940s?
- What do you think happened after this case was “settled?” Has history shown that all it takes is a court’s decision to fix injustices? What else, and who else, is typically involved in bringing about true justice and equality?

The Journey of Reconciliation

4. Project [SLIDE 5](#) and let students know that in 1947, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) decided to informally test the decision and resulting law in the Upper South. The so-called Journey of Reconciliation left Washington, D.C., on April 9, with one group of eight white and black activists on a Greyhound bus and another interracial group of eight activists on a Trailways bus. Provide students with the attached reading and questions on The Journey of Reconciliation, and instruct students (individually or in reading partners) to read the handout and answer the corresponding discussion questions.
5. Once students have completed the reading and questions, discuss their thoughts and responses as a class. Throughout the discussion, teachers should pose additional questions and share other relevant information:
 - What was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)?
 - The organization that pioneered non-violence in the US was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), which gave birth to the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942. CORE was founded in Chicago in 1941 by James L. Farmer, Jr., George Houser, James R. Robinson, and Bernice Fisher. Bayard Rustin, while not a father of the organization, was, Farmer and Houser later said, "an uncle to CORE" and supported it greatly. Just like FOR, CORE sought to apply the principles of nonviolence as a tactic against segregation. The group's inspiration was Krishnalal Shridharani's book *War Without Violence* (1939, Harcourt Brace), which outlined Gandhi's step-by-step procedures for organizing people and mounting a nonviolent campaign. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Racial_Equality)
 - What areas of life were segregated during this time (the 1940s) based on the reading, as well as what you learned when examining Jim Crow laws? Of all of these segregated aspects of life, which do you think would have been most difficult to deal with and why?
 - Share with students that while segregation in any venue would have been difficult, author Derek Charles Catsam in *Freedom’s Main Line* contended that there was no greater injustice than that in public transportation: “Even though segregated education would prove to be the central focus for driving out Jim Crow, black schools and universities were often sources of racial pride. Jim Crow at lunch counters often resulted in the emergence of black business establishments. White insurers and bankers refused to provide policies or loans, so black insurance companies and banks stepped into the breach. Black churches were, then as now, a source of pride, spirituality, and organization.

Jim Crow was always onerous, to be sure; all the same, the black community was not a mere collection of supplicants kowtowing to white authority. But there were always the buses to remind them of their station. And the streetcars. And the trains. For it was one thing to develop an insurance agency or a real estate company or a sandwich shop or even a university that could produce a professional class. It was another thing to challenge Jim Crow transportation. At the local and municipal levels, local whites controlled the highways and byways, the contracts and laws governing public transportation. Further, all-black interstate railroads or bus companies were a practical impossibility for a range of reasons."

- Why was the *Morgan v. Virginia* case important?
 - Students might be interested to know that Morgan first represented herself and later in the process, was represented by NAACP.
 - One of the interesting things regarding the Morgan case is that the lawyers used an 1877 Supreme Court decision which ruled that it was illegal for a state to forbid segregation to convince the judge that it was likewise illegal for a state to require it. The United States Supreme Court agreed: "As no state law can reach beyond its own border nor bar transportation of passengers across its boundaries, diverse seating requirements for the races in interstate journeys result. As there is no federal act dealing with the separation of races in interstate transportation, we must decide the validity of this Virginia statute on the challenge that it interferes with commerce, as a matter of balance between the exercise of the local police power and the need for national uniformity in the regulations for interstate travel. It seems clear to us that seating arrangements for the different races in interstate motor travel require a single, uniform rule to promote and protect national travel. Consequently, we hold the Virginia statute in controversy invalid."
- Even though America's highest court (the US Supreme Court) had ruled that segregation on interstate buses was unconstitutional, why did nothing change at the time?
 - There was a disconnect between the branches of government, as well as a lack of communication. While it was not illegal to require segregation on interstate buses, law enforcement was not aware and citizens continued to follow the same seating arrangements they always had on buses and trains. An even greater disconnect was evident when CORE members were arrested for trying to integrate seating areas on interstate buses – they weren't breaking any laws, according to the highest Court in the US!
- What were the goals of the Journey of Reconciliation?
 - CORE hoped to test whether the Supreme Court decision would be upheld or disregarded, as well as to educate people regarding the decision. Also, CORE viewed the Journey as a study in human behavior. They wanted to find out how people would react and whether "an unpopular court decision could be enforced using the spirit of aggressive goodwill or, more accurately, nonviolent direct action."
- Define what is meant by non-violent direct action. Why do you think the Journey of Reconciliation employed non-violent direct action to achieve their goals?
- When employing non-violent direct action, the riders for the Journey of Reconciliation were trained that they could not even fight back when attacked by others. What would be difficult about this? How would you describe the character of the riders given that they were able to maintain their commitment to peaceful protest?
- What were the 16 men risking by participating in the Journey of Reconciliation? What does it say about their characters that they were willing to take such a risk? Do you think you would have done the same? Why or why not?
- In Chapel Hill, why were the four riders arrested? What do you think of the sentence they eventually received? Why do you think three of the four men actually surrendered and served their time on the chain gang in Roxboro, NC?
 - Discuss with students that as an organization, FOR decided that the four men would serve their time on the prison road gang since they believed that by having the men carry out the ridiculous sentence, it would create publicity and also that they would be "calling North Carolina's bluff."

“It is highly doubtful,” a CORE official wrote to Andrew Johnson, one of the riders arrested, that North Carolina “could afford the national publicity of the four of you returning, one from India, another from the Mid West, one from their own state, and another from New York to serve time because they believed that Negroes should have the same rights in interstate traveling as whites.” CORE officials also hoped that the governor would provide a pardon. Regardless, CORE felt that it was “essential to our case that the four be ready to serve their time” and ultimately, prove a point. “On March 20, Bayard Rustin and Igal Roodenko held a press conference at New York’s Penn Station to announce that they were heading south to begin their sentence the next day. The FOR press release stated that Felmet and Johnson would also surrender to authorities, although Johnson...[decided] that he would not do so.” Andrew Johnson was trying to finish his college degree, and his participation in the Journey of Reconciliation has already left him behind in his studies. He felt he had already done his part and did not plan to spend a month on a chain gang only to fall farther behind in school. The three men ended up serving 22 days on a Roxboro, NC chain gang! “CORE leadership made arrangements for Rustin and the others to make speeches at a New York CORE meeting upon their release in late April. CORE and the Fellowship realized the importance of publicizing their actions and making visible the victims of the Jim Crow system. If the three men were going to serve their time, civil rights leaders knew the symbolic power of channeling their victimization into a public relations bonanza. The experience on the road crew was unpleasant, arduous, and degrading for all three men. Rustin left the most complete record of the three, as he wrote an article detailing his experiences for the New York Post that also appeared in the Baltimore Afro-American, “Twenty-Two Days on a Chain Gang,” which FOR later published as a pamphlet.” (Source: *Catsam, Derek Charles. Freedom's Main Line : The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides. Lexington, KY, USA: University Press of Kentucky, 2008*)

- Even though nothing seemed to change immediately after the Journey of Reconciliation, why was it important? What did it accomplish?
 - “In the immediate aftermath of the Journey, it was unclear just what the trip had accomplished. Jim Crow still prevailed throughout the South in most facets of daily life, and transportation, even on interstate conveyances, was no different. Blacks across the region did not follow the lead of the Journey of Reconciliation and sit wherever they chose, even in the Upper South or on the bus routes that the Fellowship had putatively integrated. In his biography of Bayard Rustin, Jervis Anderson asserts that the Journey “achieved no significant breakthroughs” and that instead “the Journey’s achievement was mostly psychological or symbolic, signifying the possibility of future nonviolent mass action in the South.” While this is undoubtedly true, it underestimates the importance of the Journey, which became a direct model for more overt and well-publicized actions in the future. Rustin, Houser, Peck, and many of the others would provide inspiration, advice, support, and leadership in later efforts. Accepting an award in New York on April 11, 1948, Rustin said that he and his comrades had undertaken the Journey “not only to devise techniques for eliminating Jim Crow in travel but also as a training ground for similar peaceful projects for employment and in the armed services.”
 - The Journey stands as evidence of an already active Civil Rights Movement, more than merely a precursor of what would happen in the wake of Brown. The Journey in fact represents a small part of a general post–World War II upsurge in popular protest and direct action. The culmination of this upsurge would be the events of the 1960s, but not until the courts had addressed the status of segregation laws on the highways, byways, and railroads of the United States.” (Source: *Catsam, Derek Charles. Freedom's Main Line : The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides. Lexington, KY, USA: University Press of Kentucky, 2008.*)
 - Segregation in interstate commercial transportation did not end until almost a decade after the *Morgan* decision. In 1950, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Henderson v. United States*, outlawed segregation in the dining cars of interstate railroads. Then, in 1955, just after *Brown v. Board of Education*, two rulings by the Interstate Commerce Commission effectively integrated all interstate buses and trains. In *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated

services, such as shelters and restaurants, intended for the use of interstate bus passengers were also unconstitutional.

Create a Historical Marker for Chapel Hill

6. After discussing the reading and sharing additional information regarding the Journey of Reconciliation, ask students to discuss their feelings regarding the significance and importance of the Journey, then and now:
 - Why was the Journey of Reconciliation important? Why is it important to each of us today? Why should we devote time to study the events and the people involved, even though this took place over 60 years ago?
 - What role has resistance, activism, and resilience played in fighting injustice throughout history to today, including during the Journey of Reconciliation?
 - What are some ways that we can ensure people are educated about these events? How can we make sure the Journey of Reconciliation and the people involved are not forgotten? What are the various ways our communities memorialize events and people we deem important?

7. Tell students that in 2008, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP petitioned the Chapel Hill Town Council to support their effort to have a historical marker placed at the location of the former bus station in Chapel Hill that was visited by Bayard Rustin and others during the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation. Pass out the attached “Resolution of Support for State Historical Marker” and read it out loud as a class. Discuss:
 - What is the purpose of this resolution?
 - Why do you think the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, the Chapel Hill Town Council, and other community members felt a marker was important?

8. Tell students that you want them to imagine that they have been hired to design the historical monument/marker that honors the Journey of Reconciliation and educates the public about this important period of history. Hand out the attached assignment sheet and go over the details with students. Teachers should also provide the attached primary source document, “Account of the Test Trips,” which will provide some specific details about the journey to further inform students as they brainstorm and complete their designs.

9. Let them students that they can create anything within the realm of a monument or a marker (i.e. a statue, a mural, a plaque, etc.) and to imagine that their final monument/marker will be installed at the site of the Chapel Hill bus station where several of the Journey’s riders were arrested and attacked. (The station used to be located at North Columbia and Rosemary Streets in downtown Chapel Hill.) Optionally, teachers may want to show the sample mural on Homer Plessy located on [SLIDE 6](#) and allow students to discuss the piece as a way to prime their thinking. The assignment sheet doesn’t offer any parameters in terms of the size of the sketch – teachers should determine whether they want this done on regular art paper, or whether they want students to work on a larger scale (i.e. poster paper or poster board.) If time permits, allow students to begin brainstorming in class.

Sharing Journey of Reconciliation Monuments/Markers

10. On the due date, allow students to share their monuments/markers. Have students post their work around the room and allow the class to spend approximately 10+ minutes of class doing a “gallery walk,” during which they rotate among all of the monument/mural sketches and observe them. Teachers may want to number each sketch and instruct students to carry paper and pencil with them, writing down “What they liked and learned” for each (or an assigned number) of sketches. This can be followed with a class debrief in which students offer feedback to one another. Optionally, the class could also vote on which sketch they feel best honors the Journey of Reconciliation, and/or which does the best job educating the public.

11. Once students have shared and discussed their own ideas for the historical marker/monument, show the class the actual marker that was created using SLIDE 7. (Let students know that in actuality, the state of North Carolina approved the request, and a marker was installed in 2008. Tell students you'll show them the actual marker after they've designed their own.) :
 - Have you noticed these types of markers when you've traveled around North Carolina? Where?
 - Why do you think our state places these markers?
 - Is this marker enough to memorialize the Journey of Reconciliation? If not, what else would you like to see?

12. Remind students that the Journey of Reconciliation and the Riders' dangerous passage through 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. For the brave activists who led the way, and for those of us who can only marvel at their courage and determination, this link to a brighter future was a great victory. Yet, as we shall see, it came with the sobering reminder that, in the words of Frederick Douglas, 'power concedes nothing without demand.'"

13. As a culminating discussion or written reflection, project the quote by Judge Learned Hand on SLIDE 8 and ask students to comment on:
 - What message is Judge Learned Hand trying to convey?
 - How does this message connect to what we have learned in studying the Journey of Reconciliation?
 - Do you agree with this message and why?
 - How might this message apply to our society today?

Name: _____

The Journey of Reconciliation

Segregation in transportation

There was perhaps no public indignity for blacks as great as **Jim Crow segregation**. Segregation in transportation began as early as 1888, when the first “Jim Crow train car” for blacks made its way into law in Mississippi. Soon after, the rest of the South and some border states followed suit. Both **intrastate** (within a state) and **interstate** (state-to-state) buses and trains were segregated, as were the facilities serving travelers, such as terminals, waiting rooms, and restaurants. Thus, if you were black and worked far from home, or lived far away from family, your options were restricted. You rode the bus, moving to the back, standing when told, and waiting for the next bus when necessary. You took your meals in a separate dining car or terminal eating area if one was provided, or waited to eat until you got to your destination if there were no “colored only” facilities provided. And all the while, you were expected to bite your tongue.

Over the years many individuals tested the limits and challenged Jim Crow on various modes of transportation, intrastate and interstate. Sometimes organized protests would occur. But the status quo prevailed - until, in the aftermath of World War II, the stage was set for change.

Morgan v. Virginia – 1946



Irene Morgan, a twenty-seven-year-old defense plant worker, was still feeling weak when she stepped onto a Greyhound bus in Gloucester County, Virginia bound for Baltimore on July 16, 1944. Recovering from a recent miscarriage and anxious to see her husband who was working in Baltimore, Morgan boarded the crowded bus in the sweltering Virginia heat. She stood for several miles, sat on the lap of a black female passenger for a handful more, and finally took a seat three rows from the back of the bus (but in front of white passengers) in Saluda, Virginia. The bus driver insisted she get up, as the local and state Jim Crow laws mandated segregated seating. After she refused, the driver summoned the police to arrest her. Morgan fought back, kicking, shouting, and tearing up the arrest warrant. She was forcibly removed, tried, convicted, and fined ten dollars.

Irene Morgan appealed her case, but the appellate court of Virginia upheld the conviction. She and her lawyers then appealed her conviction on constitutional grounds all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1946, the justices agreed to hear the case. *Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* was argued by **Thurgood Marshall**, the chief counsel of the **National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP)** and later himself an Associate Supreme Court Justice. **William H. Hastie** was co-counsel.

The case resulted in a landmark ruling in 1946, which struck down state laws requiring segregation in situations involving interstate transportation. Marshall used an innovative strategy to argue the case. Instead of relying upon the **Equal Protection** clause of the **14th Amendment**, Marshall argued successfully that segregation on interstate travel violated the **Commerce Clause** of the U.S. Constitution. (The court did not rule that segregated transportation within the state (intrastate) was unconstitutional, however.)

While the ruling represented a defeat for segregation in written law, it unfortunately did not have an immediate impact. The Supreme Court’s decision was not enforced, so nothing changed. Public transportation systems continued to segregate their passengers throughout the South.

The Journey of Reconciliation

In early 1947, a group of people decided to draw attention to the fact that segregation on interstate buses was still being enforced, even though the Supreme Court had declared it unconstitutional in the Morgan case. The **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)**, which had formed a few years prior in 1942, announced plans to send

eight white and eight black men into the South to ride on interstate buses together. Organized by CORE members **George Houser** and **Bayard Rustin**, the **Journey of Reconciliation** was to be a two week pilgrimage through Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. The activists would divide themselves between Greyhound and Trailways bus lines and ride in interracial pairs sitting in the white-area of the bus. Other activists disguised as disinterested observers would sit in the racial sections that applied to them. The Journey would show whether an unpopular court decision could be enforced using **nonviolent direct action** - regardless of what occurred, the activists were trained to remain peaceful, even if they were attacked. Organizers also included an educational component in their plans. At each stop along the Journey, activists would give talks in churches to members of black, and occasionally white, communities. They would explain what they were doing and why, teaching listeners about the Morgan case and recounting their experiences.



Journey of Reconciliation members in 1947. Left to right: Worth Randle, Wallace Nelson, Ernest Bromley, James Peck, Igal Roodenko, Bayard Rustin, James Felmet, George Houser & Andrew Johnson.

Although **Walter White** of the **National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP)** was against this kind of direct action, he volunteered the service of its southern attorneys during the campaign. **Thurgood Marshall**, head of the NAACP's legal department, was strongly against the Journey of Reconciliation and warned that a "disobedience movement on the part of Negroes and their white allies, if employed in the South, would result in wholesale slaughter with no good achieved."

The Journey of Reconciliation began on April 9, 1947 as the men boarded two Washington, DC buses, one a Trailways and one a Greyhound. They traveled uneventfully through Virginia. However, things changed on April 11, 1947 as several riders boarded buses departing Petersburg, VA for Raleigh, NC. That morning, after sitting in a prohibited section of a Trailways bus, black rider **Conrad Lynn** became the first from the group to be arrested for violating local Jim Crow laws.

North Carolina & the Journey

While additional arrests were made later that day on a Trailways bus departing Durham for Chapel Hill, it was the following day, April 12, that violence ensued in Chapel Hill, NC. As the Pittsburgh Courier wrote in an article describing the event:

"This sleepy little Piedmont village, regarded far and wide as the citadel of democracy in the South, seat of the University of North Carolina, became a scene of sudden mob violence here late Sunday afternoon as taxicab drivers and young hoodlums assaulted an interracial group of young lecturers in the Chapel Hill bus station."

That Sunday afternoon in Chapel Hill, CORE riders **Andrew Johnson** (black) and **Joseph Felmet** (white) had taken a seat in the front of a Trailways bus and remained there after the driver asked them to move. When they refused, calmly explaining why, the driver crossed the street to the police station and had Johnson and Felmet arrested. During this time, a number of taxi drivers began to gather to witness the arrests of the protesters. **Bayard Rustin** and **Igal Roodenko**, also stationed on the bus, then moved from their seats in the back of the bus to take their spots. They, too, were arrested and brought to the police station.

When **James Peck**, the white editor of the Workers Defense League News Bulletin and an avowed pacifist, left the bus to post bail for his four colleagues, one of the taxi drivers smashed him in the head with his fist,

accusing Peck of “coming down here to stir up the niggers.” Peck did not retaliate, which seemed to confuse his assailant. Peck then posted bond for his arrested colleagues.

Igal Roodenko, soon after the confrontation, recounted some of the events that had transpired inside the bus as he and Rustin moved up to take the seats vacated when Johnson and Felmet were arrested. Upon the initial arrest, the bus driver had tried to gather anyone who could back up what he had done, presumably so that he would have witnesses if the cases came to trial. But instead of overwhelming support, the driver encountered some hostility. A Northern woman said, “You don’t want my name and address: I’m a damn Yankee and I think this is an outrage.” Another young white woman was curious about the actions of the two men. She told Roodenko that she was a Southerner (from Asheville) and that she thought that Jim Crow was wrong, “but she felt we were pushing things a little too fast.” The two men used this as an opportunity to teach. Rustin asked her what the moral difference was between a premeditated action and a spontaneous one. Another girl sitting in front of them, according to Roodenko, “suddenly said— and with considerable emphasis—‘None whatsoever.’” It seems clear that part of the plan was to help Southerners reach conclusions about the moral righteousness of the civil rights cause for themselves. Finally, the girl who had spoken up so emphatically told Roodenko, “I think you are doing a brave and wonderful thing.” She gave him her name and address so that they could contact her if they needed her support if the case went to trial.

The Chapel Hill case revealed both the best and the worst faces of white Southerners. While several on the bus were supportive, the white gang outside did not disperse after Peck disappeared into the police station to post bail. If anything, they gained in strength of numbers and intensity. One observer had been heard to say, “They’ll never get a bus out of here tonight.” The four group members were released on bail into the custody of **Reverend Charles M. Jones**, the minister of the Presbyterian Church located across from the UNC-Chapel Hill campus. Jones had a reputation in Chapel Hill as being “liberal minded” and “on the cutting edge of racial and social issues.” But, to some whites in the community, his willingness to host the interracial group of agitators while they stayed in Chapel Hill was a final sign of betrayal.

The mob followed the riders to Reverend Jones’s home, where the cab drivers and their associates grabbed rocks and sticks outside of Jones’s house. Then, for reasons unknown, one of the taxi drivers stood before the crowd and convinced them to disperse. A few moments later, Jones received the first of what would prove to be many threatening phone calls and letters. An anonymous caller threatened, “Get those damn niggers out of town or we’ll burn your house down. We’ll be around to see that they go.” This threat, coupled with the events that had transpired throughout the day, convinced Jones that it would be best to get the riders out of town and on to their next destination. Jones made some calls to students at the university and was able to convince a few to muster up cars to drive the group to their next intended destination. The students and a local officer accompanied the riders out of the county and toward Greensboro.

Chapel Hill marked the emotional pinnacle of the Journey of Reconciliation, but there were still ten days remaining on the trip. By the end of the Journey, the protesters had conducted over 24 “tests” and endured 12 arrests and dangerous mob violence.

About a month after the Journey had finished, the four riders arrested in Chapel Hill had to return for a trial on May 20, 1947. Rustin and Roodenko, represented by NAACP lawyers, appeared before Chapel Hill Recorder’s Court Judge Henry Whitfield. The District Attorney, T. J. Phipps, gave an impassioned argument to Judge Whitfield that “our nigras wanted Jim Crow,” and it was the outside agitators coming in that were the cause of all the trouble. Judge Whitfield agreed and sentenced Rustin to paying court costs, on the grounds that Rustin was “A poor misled nigra from the North” and therefore less responsible than the white agitators accompanying him who should know better. Then Judge Whitfield turned his attention to Roodenko: “I presume you’re Jewish, Mr. Rodenky. Well it’s about time you Jews from New York learned you can’t come down here bringing your nigras with you to upset the customs of the South.” With that, Judge Whitfield sentenced Roodenko to 30 days on a chain gang.

Next, Judge Whitfield considered the cases of the other black/white pair of riders who had been arrested, Johnson and Felmet. The Judge made his view of the “customs of the South” even clearer. He sentenced Johnson (black) to a \$50 fine. Felmet, who the Judge felt had betrayed his race, was sentenced to 6 months on a chain gang. The District Attorney, somewhat embarrassed by the Judge’s sentence, had to point out that one month was the maximum allowed by the law.

The riders appealed to the Superior Court in Hillsborough in March 1948, but the case was rejected by the Court’s Judge Morris, who sentenced all four riders to one month on the chain gang. The NAACP lawyers appealed the case to the N.C. Supreme Court. However, in January 1949 the NC Supreme Court also upheld the lower courts’ decisions and the chain gang sentence stood. Because of money problems, lost evidence (the interstate ticket could not be found), NAACP legal priorities, and differences about how to best build the Movement, the N.C. Supreme Court decision was not appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Bayard Rustin, James Felmut, and Igal Roodenko surrendered at the Hillsborough Court House on March 21, 1949 and were transported directly to the Roxboro Chain Gang. With good behavior, they served 22 days.

What did the Journey accomplish?

In the immediate aftermath of the Journey, it was unclear what the trip had accomplished. Jim Crow still prevailed throughout the South and segregation did not change. Blacks across the South did not follow the lead of the Journey of Reconciliation and sit wherever they chose on buses. However, the Journey of Reconciliation was crucial in that it set the stage and provided a model for more overt and well-publicized actions in the future. Activists such as Rustin, Houser, Peck, and others would provide inspiration, advice, support, and leadership in later efforts.

The Journey of Reconciliation achieved a great deal of publicity and was the start of a long campaign of direct action by CORE. In 1948, the Council Against Intolerance in America gave George Houser and Bayard Rustin the “Thomas Jefferson Award for the Advancement of Democracy” for their attempts to bring an end to segregation in interstate travel. Accepting the award, Rustin said that he and his comrades had undertaken the Journey “not only to devise techniques for eliminating Jim Crow in travel but also as a training ground for similar peaceful projects for employment and in the armed services.”

Bayard Rustin later wrote about his experience on the chain gang in North Carolina in “22 Days on a Chain Gang,” which was serialized in the New York Post and the Baltimore Afro-American newspapers. His writing led to a legislative investigation of the treatment of prisoners in N.C. Prison Camps.

Overall, the Journey represents a small part of a general post– World War II upsurge in popular protest and direct action. These events would directly inspire Ms. Rosa Parks in 1955, and the Freedom Riders of 1960-61. As George Houser later wrote: “We in the non-violent movement of the 1940s certainly thought that we were initiating something of importance in American life. Of course, we weren’t able to put it in perspective then. But we were filled with vim and vigor, and we hoped that a mass movement could develop, even if we did not think that we were going to produce it. In retrospect, I would say we were precursors. The things we did in the 1940s were the same things that ushered the civil rights revolution.”

Name: _____

Discussion Questions - The Journey of Reconciliation

1. Why was the *Morgan v. Virginia* case important?
2. Even though America's highest court (the US Supreme Court) had ruled that segregation on interstate buses was unconstitutional, why did nothing change at the time?
3. What were the goals of the Journey of Reconciliation?
4. Define what is meant by non-violent direct action. Why do you think the Journey of Reconciliation employed non-violent direct action to achieve their goals?
5. When employing non-violent direct action, the riders for the Journey of Reconciliation were trained that they could not even fight back when attacked by others. What would be difficult about this? How would you describe the character of the riders given that they were able to maintain their commitment to peaceful protest?
6. What were the 16 riders risking by participating in the Journey of Reconciliation? What does it say about their characters that they were willing to take such a risk? Do you think you would have done the same? Why or why not?
7. In Chapel Hill, why were four riders arrested? What do you think of the sentence they eventually received? Why do you think three of the four men actually surrendered and served their time on the chain gang in Roxboro, NC?
8. Even though nothing seemed to change immediately after the Journey of Reconciliation, why was it important? What did it accomplish?

**RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR A STATE HISTORICAL MARKER IN CHAPEL HILL
HONORING THE 1947 JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION, THE “FIRST FREEDOM RIDE”**

WHEREAS, The Chapel Hill Town Council enthusiastically supports the application of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP and the Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian Universalist for a state historical marker honoring the Journey of Reconciliation, the “First Freedom Ride.” This First Freedom Ride was one of the most important civil rights protests in North Carolina prior to 1960; and

WHEREAS, When the Freedom Riders tried to leave Chapel Hill on a Trailways bus on April 13, they were beaten by white cab drivers, arrested, their lives threatened, and they were forced to flee in the night to Greensboro. Black and white residents of Chapel Hill, particularly UNC students and Rev. Charles Jones, a Presbyterian minister long active in civil rights and a founder of the interracial Community Church of Chapel Hill in 1953, came to the aid of the Freedom Riders. Chapel Hill was the only stop on the Journey of Reconciliation where the Freedom Riders received such significant white support. This demonstration of white anti-racism was a proud moment for racial justice in Chapel Hill and a sign of things to come; and

WHEREAS, The publicity resulting from the beatings and arrests encountered by the Freedom Riders in Chapel Hill elevated the Journey of Reconciliation and the little known Gandhian tactic of non-violence to state and national media prominence and public debate. The First Freedom Ride encouraged justice-loving African Americans and white allies, particularly in Chapel Hill, to increase their efforts to challenge segregation. In this way, the events in Chapel Hill and the Journey of Reconciliation as a whole, helped pave the way for the civil rights movement of the 1960s that ended Jim Crow segregation; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Chapel Hill is dedicated to achieving civil rights, justice, and racial reconciliation. An important part of that commitment involves preserving local black history. Demonstrating the Town’s commitment to racial justice through historical markers and monuments is an essential part of reaching these goals;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill that we therefore urge the North Carolina Historical Marker Advisory Committee to recommend acceptance of the Freedom Rider historical marker at its next meeting

JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION

AN ACCOUNT OF THE TEST TRIPS

The report of what happened on the test trips should be much more complete than is possible in this brief report. For purposes of brevity many important comments, and many psychological reactions have had to be omitted. A later report will have to fill in what is lacking here both in description and in analysis.

At all times there were between eight and ten men participating in the tests. This made it possible to split the group into two parts -- either for the purpose of having two separate tests on the same bus line, or of having a test of the Greyhound and the Trailways both, when these two companies had buses to the next point on our itinerary.

1. Washington, D. C., to Richmond, Virginia. April 9th.

No difficulties on this leg of the trip. On both the Trailways and the Greyhound the Negroes in our group were seated up front, and the whites in back. Very little notice was paid to this by the passengers, and the bus drivers said nothing. Other passengers tended to cross the color line, too. A white couple sat on the back seat of the Greyhound with two Negroes. A Negro woman sat beside a young white man in the center of the bus when she could have taken a vacant seat by a Negro man. Rustin gave his seat, third from front, to an elderly Negro woman, and then sat by a white lad directly behind the driver. Nothing was said.

2. Richmond, Virginia, to Petersburg, Virginia. April 10th.

Because there have been so many cases in the Richmond courts testing segregation in interstate travel, no more arrests are made there. Both the Greyhound and Trailways groups reached Petersburg without incident. The Trailways bus taken was local, running only between the two cities. The tickets used were interstate, of course. The Greyhound bus was a through bus. It was crowded, but no attempt was made to have Rustin and Johnson move from the front. Nelson and Lynn rode in front, on the Trailways. Many glances at them, but no direct comment. A Negro man in the rear spoke to Houser and Roodenko, saying a Negro might be able to get away with riding up front here, but some bus drivers are crazy, "and the farther South you go, the crazier they get". Two Negro women talking about Peck, sitting in the rear of the Greyhound, reading his New York Times, said: "He wouldn't know what it was all about if he was asked to move." Then they laughed.

3. Petersburg, Virginia, to Raleigh, North Carolina. April 11th.

Lynn was arrested on the Trailways before the bus left the station because he was sitting in the second seat from the front. The bus driver was courteous, but insistent. Lynn explained the Morgan decision quietly. The driver countered that he was in the employ of the bus company, not the Supreme Court, and that he followed company rules about segregation. He said aloud, so all passengers could hear: "Personally, I don't care where you sit, but I have my orders. Are you going to move?" Lynn said that he could not. The driver then got the police. Three police arrived, who were well restrained. There were no threats, nor abusive language. It took about an hour and a half to get a warrant for Lynn's arrest. At first a magistrate in Petersburg would not sign the warrant until the bus company attorney in Richmond had been called, and dictated the statement of the warrant over the telephone. The police urged the bus driver to go to the next town when the first

warrant could not be obtained; they didn't want to bother with the case. The warrant read, when finally issued, that Lynn was guilty of disorderly conduct for not obeying the reasonable request of the bus driver to move to the rear in compliance with the company rules. The bus driver apologized for having to arrest Lynn. In conversation with Houser, one of the police said, referring to equality for Negroes: "I am just not Christian enough." He indicated that environment conditioned the people from that part of the country. Passengers on the bus were patient, and relatively neutral, while they waited almost two hours. A Negro porter at the bus station made the only fuss when he boarded the bus, and, looking at Lynn, said: "What's the matter with him? He's crazy. Where does he think he is? We know how to deal with him. We ought to drag him off." Lynn was released on \$25.00 bond.

4. Petersburg, Virginia, to Durham, North Carolina. April 11th.

On the Greyhound to Durham there was no arrest, but two attempts at arrest. Peck and Rustin seated up front. About ten miles out of Petersburg the driver told Rustin to move. When Rustin refused, the driver said he would "attend to that at Blackstone". However, at the bus station in Blackstone, after consultation with other drivers, the bus went on to Clarksville. There the group changed buses. No further incident occurred until Oxford, N. C. was reached. There the driver got the police. The police refused to make the arrest, while the bus waited for forty-five minutes. Other passengers waiting to get on at Oxford were not permitted to do so during this wait. However, a middle-aged Negro schoolteacher from the community was permitted to board, to plead with Rustin to move: "Please move. Don't do this. You'll reach your destination either in front or in back. What difference does it make?" Rustin explained his reason for not moving. Other Negro passengers were strong in their support of Rustin, one of them threatening to sue the bus company for being delayed. When Durham was reached without arrest, the Negro schoolteacher pled with Peck not to use his name in connection with the incident at Oxford: "It will hurt me in the community. I'll never do that again."

5. Raleigh, North Carolina, to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. April 12th.

Lynn and Nelson riding together on the double seat next to the very rear of the Trailways bus, and Houser and Roedenko in front of them. The bus was very crowded. Only one other Negro passenger, a woman, seated across from Nelson. She moved to the very rear voluntarily when a white woman got on the bus and there were no seats in front. When two white college men got on, the driver told Nelson and Lynn to move to the rear seat so these two men could sit down. When they refused on the basis of their interstate passage, he said the matter would be handled in Durham. A white passenger asked the driver if he wanted any help. The driver replied: "No, we don't want to handle it that way." By the time the group reached Durham, the seating arrangement had changed, since many white people had got off, so that the driver did not press the matter.

6. Durham, North Carolina, to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. April 12th.

Johnson and Rustin were in the second seat from the front on a Trailways bus. The driver asked them to move to the rear almost immediately. Then the station superintendent was called to repeat the order. The police arrived in no more than five minutes. Johnson and Rustin were arrested on the charge of refusing to move when ordered to do so. Peck, who was seated in about the middle of the bus, got up after the arrest and said to the police: "If you arrest them you'll have to arrest me too, for I'm going to sit in the rear." The station superintendent told the police to arrest Peck too. The fellows were taken to the police station, where they were held for half an hour. They were released without charge when an attorney arrived on their behalf. A suit will be taken out against the company and the police for false arrest. The conversation with the Trailways official indicated

Name: _____

ASSIGNMENT:

A Historical Monument or Marker for the Journey of Reconciliation – Chapel Hill, NC

You have been hired to design a historical monument/marker that honors the Journey of Reconciliation and educates the public about this important period of history. The monument/marker will be located at the site of the Chapel Hill bus station where several of the Journey's riders were arrested and attacked. Assume that people who visit your monument/see the marker do not know anything about the Journey of Reconciliation.

1. Brainstorm ideas for your marker or monument and consider:
 - What is most important for people to know about the Journey of Reconciliation? Why are you honoring this event and the people involved?
 - How will you design a monument or marker to educate the public on the Journey, as well as the spirit of the activists who participated?
 - How will your monument/marker encompass and illustrate some of the themes (freedom, justice, peaceful resistance & non-violent direct action, courage, self-determination, perseverance, etc.) of the Journey?
2. You may use any creative medium you choose to design your monument. The monument can be literal or abstract, simple or complex. Examples may include (but are NOT limited to):
 - art work
 - mural(s)
 - statues
 - plaques, written descriptions, quotes from residents, or other text displayed in some way
 - structures or buildings
 - symbolic or abstract shapes
 - inclusion of music or voice over's (i.e. you push a button and narration plays)
 - performance art that takes place live at the monument on a particular schedule,
 - a television screen that plays a particular performance clip or narration
 - PICTURE YOUR OWN CREATIVE IDEAS HERE!
3. Once you have thought through your idea, you will create a detailed sketch of your monument/marker that shows what it will look like when finished and installed in its final location. Your sketch can contain labels, in which you point to certain aspects of the drawing and use text to describe additional details that may not be clear in the visual.
4. You must also turn in a paragraph in which you provide an overview of your monument/marker, describe what it represents, as well as explain why it is important to memorialize the Journey of Reconciliation. You will share your work on the due date.