



HR0341

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, May 4, 2011 is the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Rides; on September 22, 1961, because of the dedication and sacrifice of almost 500 determined and strong men and women, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued an order that all Jim Crow signs must be removed from bus and rail stations in the South; and

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WHEREAS, On May 4, 1961, the Freedom Rides began in Washington, D.C.; originally, 13 men and women boarded two buses and headed for the Deep South to test the federal laws prohibiting segregation; and

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WHEREAS, The plan was to ride in the front of buses and sit in bus stop waiting rooms that were designated "whites only" and "colored"; and

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WHEREAS, The Freedom Rides were organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which trained the men and women to be peaceful and nonviolent in the face of hatred and anger, and to not strike back against the people they would face on their trip; and

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WHEREAS, John Lewis, now a current United States congressman, was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders; on May

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1 9, 1961, after stepping off the bus and into a South Carolina  
2 bus terminal, he was attacked and beaten by an angry white man;  
3 after the beating, he was asked by police if he wanted to press  
4 charges and he responded that he and the other Freedom Riders  
5 were not there to cause trouble, so no charges would be  
6 pressed; and

7 WHEREAS, Elwin Wilson, the man who attacked young John  
8 Lewis that day, went to the congressman's office in 2009 and  
9 offered his apology; for years he had prayed that he could meet  
10 Representative Lewis and make amends for the beating;  
11 Representative Lewis accepted his apology and the two men have  
12 since become friends; and

13 WHEREAS, Other heroes included Hank Thomas, who was on a  
14 bus that was attacked after crossing the Alabama state border;  
15 as he laid in front of a small grocery store, the store owner's  
16 daughter, Janie Forsyth, offered him assistance and water; and

17 WHEREAS, Diane Nash, the leader of the Nashville Student  
18 Movement in 1961, offered to lead the second series of Freedom  
19 Rides, without regard for her own safety; former United States  
20 Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent his assistant, John  
21 Seigenthaler, to the South to represent his office; Mr.  
22 Seigenthaler was attacked by an angry mob in Nashville and  
23 Diane Nash also saw violence during her experience; and

1           WHEREAS, There were so many people who sacrificed a great  
2 amount to see changes in our country; through their love for  
3 others, their ability to remain peaceful in the face of hatred  
4 and bitterness, and their undying courage, change came to the  
5 South, and across the nation as a result of the Freedom Rides;  
6 and

7           WHEREAS, As a result of the examples of the original  
8 Freedom Riders, 40 college students began a journey on May 4,  
9 2011 from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans to retrace the route  
10 of those important and history-changing trips through the  
11 South; therefore, be it

12           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
13 NINETY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
14 we commend Representative John Lewis, Hank Thomas, Janie  
15 Forsyth, Diane Nash, John Seigenthaler, and all the brave men  
16 and women who took part in or supported the original Freedom  
17 Rides; and be it further

18           RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be  
19 delivered to Representative John Lewis, Hank Thomas, Janie  
20 Forsyth, Diane Nash, and John Seigenthaler as symbols of our  
21 pride and respect for their bravery all those years ago.