

**MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS SITES
SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY**

PUBLIC SCOPING REPORT

September 2018

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC OUTREACH

During the public scoping period, the National Park Service (NPS) solicited feedback from the public through a public scoping newsletter, the project website, and six public meetings, which were advertised through press releases in local and regional media and on partner websites. Approximately 1,000 copies of the public scoping newsletter were distributed in early April 2018 to stakeholders, including federal, state, and nongovernmental agencies and organizations. The newsletter included a brief history of Mississippi civil rights, a description of the study, the criteria used in special resource and boundary studies, and an invitation to submit comments via the project website, or mailed correspondence. A letter describing the study process and potential implications for landowners, along with the newsletter, was sent to approximately 42 landowners in the vicinity of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers house in Jackson.

The official public scoping comment period opened on April 16, 2018, and closed on June 8, 2018. Six public meetings were held during the comment period in May 2018 throughout the state of Mississippi. They were held on the following dates and locations:

Monday, May 7th in Cleveland and Sumner
Tuesday, May 8th in northern and central Jackson
Wednesday, May 9th in Philadelphia
Thursday, May 10th in Biloxi

Comments were received via the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website (http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MSCR_SRS), this is considered the project website), comment cards, and flip chart / comment stations set up at the public meetings, and through mailed correspondence.

PUBLIC INTEREST

A total of 248 people attended the six public open house meetings. During these events, members of the public were invited to submit comments to the PEPC website or to use the form provided by the park. During the public scoping period, the park received 151 individual correspondences. Of these, 118 were submitted directly to the PEPC website. Twenty-two of the correspondences were submitted on the park-provided form, seven were submitted via email, and four were mailed letters. These correspondences were entered into the PEPC website by NPS staff. Public comments were submitted from individuals in 24 states, Washington, DC, and three unknown locations. The following table provides the distribution of public comments that were submitted directly to the PEPC website or to the team directly (as of July 1, 2018).

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Correspondences

State	Percentage	Number of Correspondences
Mississippi	43.4%	66
New York	7.9%	12
California	4.6%	7
Louisiana	4.6%	7
Illinois	3.9%	6
Pennsylvania	3.9%	6

State	Percentage	Number of Correspondences
Georgia	2.6%	4
Washington	2.6%	4
Tennessee	2.6%	4
North Carolina	2.6%	4
Florida	2.6%	4
Texas	2.6%	4
Massachusetts	2.0%	3
Unknown	2.0%	3
Washington, DC	2.0%	3
Colorado	1.3%	2
Utah	1.3%	2
Ohio	1.3%	2
Rhode Island	0.7%	1
Alabama	0.7%	1
Arizona	0.7%	1
Oregon	0.7%	1
New Jersey	0.7%	1
Wisconsin	0.7%	1
Maryland	0.7%	1
Vermont	0.7%	1
	Total	151

In addition to general public comments, the National Park Service received letters from official representatives of the following agencies and organizations:

- City of Grenada
- The Delta Center and Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area
- Emmett Till Memorial Commission and Mississippi Center for Justice
- Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Garden and Museum Foundation
- Greenwood Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Knights & Daughters of Tabor
- McComb Black History Gallery
- Most Worshipful Stringer Grand Lodge
- National Council of Negro Women, Inc.
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- State of Mississippi, Office of the Governor
- Town of Glendora

PUBLIC OPINIONS, PERCEPTIONS, AND VALUES

The National Park Service sought feedback on the special resource study by asking the public to answer four questions. The questions were listed in the public scoping newsletter as well as at the comment stations at the public meetings. The questions were:

1. What are the most important stories and people associated with the Civil Rights Movement in the State of Mississippi?
2. Do you have any ideas or concerns about preserving and interpreting Civil Rights sites in Mississippi?
3. What sites or places related to Civil Rights History would you suggest for consideration as part of this study?
4. What ideas or comments would you like to share with us?

The following is a brief overview of the comments made by respondents, broken down by the four main topics covered in the scoping questions listed above. During the analysis process, most of these topics were further broken down into several subtopics.

Most Important Stories and People Associated with the Civil Rights Movement in the State of Mississippi

The most frequently cited important stories associated with the civil rights movement in Mississippi were the murders of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers, as well as the activism of Fannie Lou Hamer in the 1960s. Many commenters noted how the Emmett Till murder brought the dark reality of racism and associated violence to the forefront of the nation's attention and how it ignited the modern civil rights movement. Commenters pointed to the links of the Emmett Till story to other nationally significant events and figures such as Rosa Parks and Medgar Evers. Other frequently cited people associated with the civil rights movement include Vernon Dahmer, James Meredith, Stokely Carmichael, and Robert Moses. Commenters often noted that many people contributed to the civil rights movement as it was a broad and largely bottom-up effort that manifested in all aspects of society. Commenters suggested telling the untold stories of the many people who organized communities at the local level, such as Aaron Henry, Amzie Moore, Dorie Ladner, George Metcalf, Hollis Watkins, Wharlest Jackson Sr., and Rev. George Lee among many others; the people who helped desegregate schools; the youth involved in walkouts and went to jail in the process; as well as the many victims of lynching and murders post-Civil War and throughout the Jim Crow era, such as James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, as well as lesser-known victims such as Birdia Keglal, Adlena Hamlett, Herbert Lee, and Louis Allen. Over 70 people were named by the public as important figures associated with the Mississippi civil rights story.

Commenters provided an extensive list of events associated with the civil rights movement in Mississippi spanning the Reconstruction era through the early 1970s that were deemed important to provide context and share with the public. The most commonly referenced events include:

- Murder of Emmett Till in 1955;
- Freedom Rides of 1961;
- Establishment of first college-level NAACP chapter in Rust College in 1962 and the influence this had on other Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) in Mississippi;
- Integration of public schools throughout the state, including the University of Mississippi by James Meredith in 1962;
- Murder of Medgar Evers in 1963;
- Freedom Summer of 1964 and Freedom Schools operation;

- Black Power Speech in Broad Street Park (1966) in Greenwood, MS;
- Multiple marches including James Meredith's March Against Fear in 1966;
- The murders of civil rights activists and organizers such as Herbert Lee in 1961, Louis Allen in early 1964, and James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in mid-1964; Vernon Dahmer and Birdia Keglur in 1966, Wharlest Jackson in 1967, among many others;
- Poor People's Campaign of 1968;
- Statewide voter enrollment efforts;
- The courageous activism of Fannie Lou Hamer throughout the 1960s; and the
- Bombing and torching of churches throughout the state during this period.

Preserving and Interpreting Mississippi Civil Rights Sites

Many commenters included specific ideas about various ways to preserve and interpret Mississippi civil rights sites as well as some associated concerns.

Telling the Story. Many commenters expressed concern with how the story would be told, who would get to tell it, and who is represented and involved in identifying sites, defining terms, and shaping the interpretation process. Specifically, commenters noted that many aspects of the history that is taught has been misrepresented or glossed over and were concerned about local and state resistance to telling the shameful conditions in Mississippi that propelled the civil rights movement. A few commenters noted the multiple museums already in place that tell the Mississippi civil rights stories including those in Indianola, Cleveland, Clarksdale, as well as the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum that opened in late 2017 in Jackson. Commenters asked that these institutions continue to be supported.

Commenters noted that preserving individual stories and telling them in detail was essential in understanding the harshness of slavery and the Jim Crow era and the heroic nature of activists' actions. Commenters requested continued community involvement throughout the study process and noted that the identification and interpretive process needs to be transparent, inclusive, and representative of the communities whose stories are being told. There was a suggestion to work with locals and families of civil rights activists to collect their stories and develop the narrative. Commenters suggested presenting the story in an inclusive manner so that it reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Emmett Till Sites. One commonly expressed idea was the importance of interpreting the Emmett Till sites as there is no other resource either in the National Park Service nor in the country that can tell this story. Commenters noted the lasting influence of the Emmett Till story and the need to ensure that this story is preserved and interpreted at the national level. Many commenters expressed support for including all Emmett Till-associated sites in the study, including the Tutwiler Funeral Home, Tallahatchie County Courthouse and adjoining Emmett Till Interpretive Center, Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center, Black Bayou Bridge, and the Sunflower County barn, among others. There was some concern with highlighting and protecting sites of injustice such as courtrooms, jailhouses, and the Bryant store as it may glorify aspects of the story. There was concern about who may financially benefit from the establishment of an NPS site. There was a suggestion to demolish Bryant's store and recognizing the site with a historical marker.

Preservation and Management of Sites. Commenters expressed overwhelming support for National Park Service involvement in the preservation and interpretation of the nationally significant story of civil rights in the state of Mississippi and noted that not enough preservation and interpretation is happening at the state and federal level. Commenters noted that establishing a new NPS unit would raise public awareness of this nationally significant story. Many commenters suggested working with community-based, local museums and institutions to develop, preserve, and interpret the different sites spread out throughout the state. Commenters suggested the NPS partner with the existing groups and organizations and provide outreach, preservation, and management support. There was concern with designating sites that were too far apart and directing visitors to small sites where the larger historical context may not be well conveyed. One suggestion was to choose a few sites of great importance and use these few sites to tell the broader story. Another suggestion was to tell the story at the places where they took place. Multiple commenters suggested interpreting the sites as part of a statewide interpretive trail that honors the multiple sites, people, and stories that helped shape the country and history. Finally, there was a concern with displacing locals in poor areas if sites were to be designated.

Suggested Sources of Information. Multiple commenters noted that there are many stories throughout the state that are yet to be collected. They suggested that the NPS work with different groups, communities, and organizations to gather these stories, including from activists who participated in the movement, their families, and independent public historians who have amassed a wealth of documentation. Commenters noted that there is an opportunity to properly archive historic materials currently held by many people.

Education. Commenters noted the significance of the civil rights movement in shaping the history of the country and how little of this history is formally taught in either textbooks or classrooms. Commenters noted that the National Park Service is in a unique position to help teach the American public locally and nationally about this important period of our history. Some of the suggestions to improve education included incorporating sites into local curriculum and developing summer camps for students.

Site Visits and Focus Groups. Commenters requested that the NPS study team spend more time in the state gathering insight and visiting sites throughout the whole state. There was a suggestion for the NPS study team to hold focus group sessions and interviews in the different communities to help identify the most important people, stories, and sites associated with the civil rights movement.

Commemoration of Sites. Multiple commenters noted that many important sites lack historical markers or plaques that convey their historical significance and the difficulty of finding such sites without a guide. There was a suggestion to recognize all important sites with historical markers or memorials, including known lynching sites and facilitating the public finding where the sites are located. A virtual civil rights sites trail was suggested as an option to facilitate access and highlight the different sites and stories.

Time Sensitivity. Commenters noted the poor state of some of the important sites identified and the need for fast action to protect the sites and resources. Many commenters noted the many people who participated in and witnessed civil right events in the state who are already in advanced age and whose oral stories should be collected before their generation passes.

Commenters noted the relevancy of civil rights history and the need for younger generations to hear and learn about it from first-hand sources.

Vandalism. Many commenters expressed concern with current and future vandalism and desecration of historic sites associated with the civil rights movement. Commenters urged the NPS to proactively protect and monitor the identified sites.

Focus of Study. There was concern that the study would concentrate on events that caught the national press attention versus concentrating on the local organizing and the many events and people that fueled the movement. There was a suggestion to include the trail of the Freedom Riders in the study.

Limited Resources. Commenters noted the immense amount of work being done by local organizations all around the state to preserve and interpret Mississippi civil rights history. There was concern that many of these sites are run by volunteers which may not be sustainable in the long run. Commenters noted that many important sites are in urgent need of rehabilitation and repair and could use financial and technical support from the NPS to stabilize and protect them. Continued NPS support for existing institutions, such as local museums, trails, and historical monuments, was advocated.

Sites or Places Related to Civil Rights History in Mississippi

Because the legislation authorizing this special resource study directed the Secretary of the Interior to consider significant civil right sites in the whole state of Mississippi, the National Park Service sought public feedback on what sites or places should be included in the special resource study. Other than the five sites identified in the authorizing legislation whose inclusion in the study was generally supported by the public, additional sites and places throughout the whole state were suggested for inclusion. Suggested sites ranged from post-Reconstruction era sites like the Isaiah T. Montgomery House and the Taborian Hospital in Mound Bayou, to additional sites associated with the Emmett Till story, as well as schools, churches, and other landmarks where activists challenged segregation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Delta Area (northwest and west Mississippi). The majority of sites suggested by the public in the Delta region of Mississippi are associated with the Emmett Till story starting from the Bryant store where the events started, the Tutwiler Funeral Home where his body was prepared for burial, and sites associated with the consequent trial. Various sites in Clarksdale, Mound Bayou, Greenwood, and Greenville associated with voter registration, Freedom Rides, and marches were highlighted. Also mentioned was the site of the Mule Train recruitment in the city of Marks. Leflore County was identified as second in number of lynchings among southern states. Various sites in Sunflower County were identified as associated with Fannie Lou Hamer's activism, including the courthouse where she tried to register to vote, the Freedom Farm cooperative established in the area, and the contemporary memorial garden that honors her legacy.

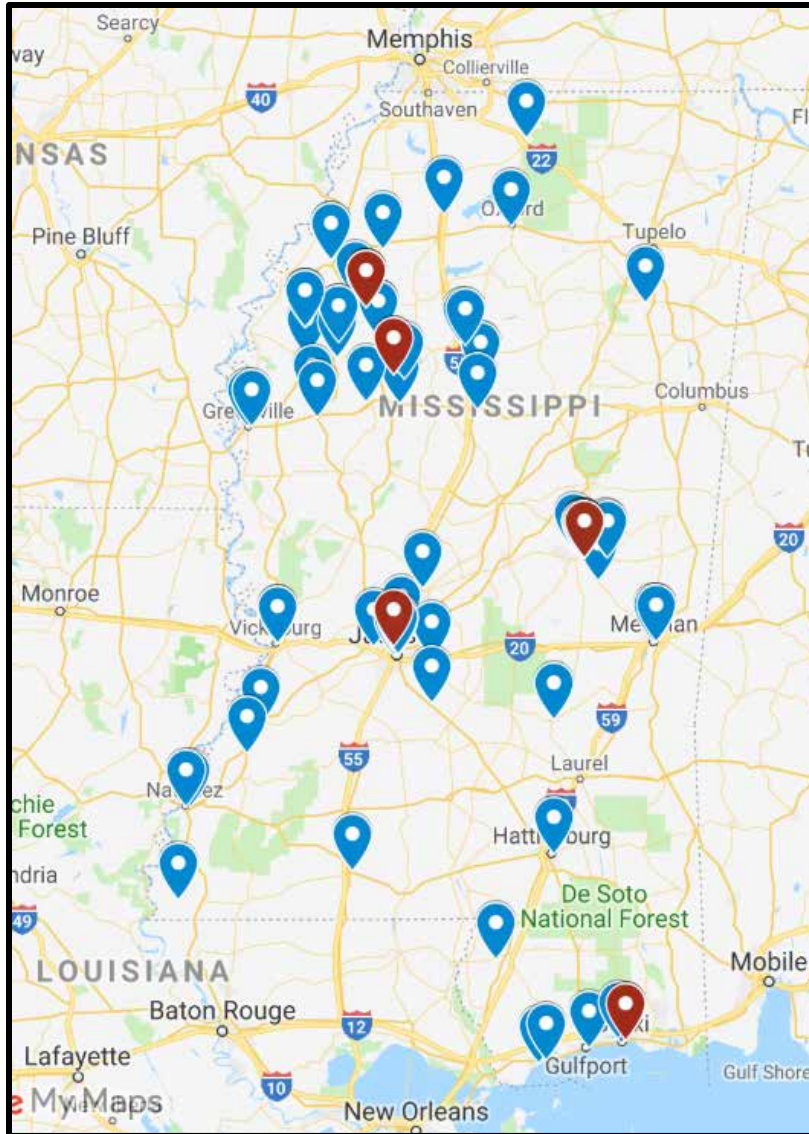
Hills Area (northeast Mississippi). Sites identified in this area include Rust College, the University of Mississippi "Ole Miss" Lyceum, the historic site for Okolona College, and the communities of Grenada, Duck Hill, and Winona. The county of Panola was identified as an area that organized and was very active in the civil rights movement, including the formation of a black farmer's cooperative.

Pines Area (east-central Mississippi). Multiple sites associated with the murders of Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner in Philadelphia and the surrounding area were identified, including Mount Zion United Methodist Church, Westside Park Church, Mount Nebo, the murder site, the FBI command post during the search as well as the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) office and the site of the WHOC radio station. Sites identified in Meridian include the historic First Union Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr. preached on several occasions, the Meridian Federal Courthouse, the site of the Meridian Baptist Seminary and the COFO building. The Rosenwald school in Bay Springs was also identified by the public in this area.

Capital/River Area (central-west Mississippi). Various sites were identified in the City of Jackson and surrounding area, including Jackson State University, M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge, Mount Olive Cemetery, Farish Street Historic District, the homes of midwives after slavery (Scott Ford houses), the former Walthall hotel where the Jackson Citizens Council met, founding site for Republic of New Africa, the transportation terminal associated with Freedom Rides, and the site of the Woolworth's sit-in. Other than the Evers home, sites outside of downtown Jackson identified include various buildings in Tougaloo College, a field near McNeal Elementary School in Canton where a tear gas attack by the state highway patrol took place, the site of race riots in Clinton, the Rankin County Courthouse, and Piney Woods School. The Bethel AME Church and the old courthouse in Vicksburg were identified as important sites to include. Parchment Penitentiary, various churches, and Natchez College Campus were identified as Natchez sites to include. A grocery store in Woodville and Prospect Hill in Lorman were also mentioned.

Coastal Area (south Mississippi). A few sites were identified in the Biloxi, Gulfport, and Waveland coastal areas. Other than the former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason, sites identified in the Biloxi area include Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi Beach where the wade-ins took place, and the post office on Main Street. The Gulf Side Assembly Center in Waveland and a black juke joint in Bay Saint Louis were also identified. Other sites identified in this area include the Rosenwald school in Bay Springs and Pearl River County schools for being the last to integrate.

See Map 1 for a representation of the geographic distribution of sites the public suggested for consideration.



Map 1. Geographic Distribution of Sites Suggested by the Public

In addition to specific sites, a number of cities and communities were also suggested for consideration, including Clarksdale, Grenada, Greenwood, McComb, Meridian, and Natchez for their layered civil rights history and the multiple sites still standing. The city of Hattiesburg was highlighted for its association to Vernon Dahmer.

Other Ideas or Concerns

Building trust. Commenters suggested that enough time be allowed to gather, preserve, and interpret the stories from the different people involved in the civil rights movement. Multiple commenters noted the culture that has discouraged talking about civil rights activism and therefore the need to gain the trust of communities so people will open up and share meaningful stories.

Including Other Groups' Stories. There was a suggestion to include the struggles, contributions, and achievements of other groups in Mississippi who have fought for equality including Chinese and Vietnamese Americans.

Diversity within the National Park Service. There was concern about the lack of African American historic preservationists within the National Park Service.