

Sykes Global Communications

Case Study: "50th Anniversary of the Freedom Rides"

REGIONS OF ACTION AND INFLUENCE:

- **New York State** (and Tri-State Area).
- **National:** Washington DC, Atlanta, Alabama, Mississippi

ABOUT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FREEDOM RIDES: The Mississippi Freedom 50th Anniversary Celebration in Honor of the 1961 Freedom Riders was a once-in-a-life time opportunity to commemorate the 50th anniversary of one of the Civil Rights Movement's keystone campaigns, and to honor the bravery of those courageous Riders from across America.

A weeklong series of events took place in Jackson, MS with the arrival of Freedom Riders from all over the country. This event included various events at locations in the Jackson Metro area, including visits to the old Greyhound bus station and to the infamous, chain-gang Mississippi State Penitentiary, also known as Parchman. In the spring and summer of 1961, several hundred Americans, blacks and whites, men and women, converged on Jackson, Mississippi, to challenge state segregation laws. The Freedom Riders, as they came to be known, were determined to open up the South to the civil rights movement. Many riders were beaten and jailed as they aimed to create effective and lasting changes in the way African-Americans were treated as citizens, as well as in how strongly their rights were protected as equal citizens throughout the region.

Learn and Read More here:

The Oprah Winfrey Show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAyfoyfLsnQ>

USA Today:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/07/02/students-symbolic-civil-rights-bus-ride/12107803/>

The Washington Post:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/freedom-riders-50-years-on-see-todays-youths-as-disconnected-from-racism-fight/2011/05/02/AFbAraKG_story.html?utm_term=.b5eb3216f44f

DESCRIPTION: With limited time to plan, and each and every decision being made by committee on a project that included various moving logistical components, the organizers were looking for a consulting firm who could take the helm and accomplish the project immediately. This was a national, historical 50th Anniversary, and the challenge was to have the stories of the Freedom Riders told, in order to maximize the amount of people attending the event. The commemoration also included a youth aspect and the organizers wanted to spread the message among young people (ages 18-35), as they desired to pass the torch of the movement to the next generation.

Sykes Global Communications (SGC) planned several events around the participation of young people, including a panel discussion on the topic of Civil Rights in the present. It was required that we think and move quickly in order to maximize the effort's desired results. The overall theme for this event was centered on honoring the Freedom Riders and educating the public on the role the people of Mississippi and Anniston, Alabama played during Civil Rights Movement. To keep the effort from becoming entangled in existing political controversies just beneath the surface, we were

required to devise effective methods in driving home the point that the 50th Anniversary was designed to celebrate the spirit of reconciliation.

ROLE: SGC was tasked with being both the effort's event planners and national spokespeople, who had to quickly produce interesting PR angles, and come up with several on the local and national levels that would be best to pitch to the media.

ESSENTIAL RESULTS: SGC organized and managed a press conference as students initially prepared to make the trip south. We ensured the right people took part in the effort, including the principals from each school participating, some of the students who were taking the trip, and community leaders. The press conference included the following media outlets: The Oprah Winfrey Show, USA Today, NY1 (went live and traveled with us throughout the tour—all arranged by SGC), WABC, BET, WB 11, El Diario and the Manhattan News.

We utilized our contacts to suggested additional guests and national media outlets. We also solidified all logistics for the Freedom Ride trip and exclusively made decisions that would make the trip not only a once in a lifetime opportunity for young people to learn about the Freedom Riders, but also ensured the entire trip was marketable and appealing to the media and all influencers involved.

FINAL ANALYSIS: Through our efforts, SGC was able to consistently secure coverage from USA Today and NY1, who were on the bus with students documenting their entire trip from New York City, to Washington, DC, to Atlanta, to Alabama, and finally to Jackson, MS., where the 50th Anniversary took place. We also provided staff on the bus trip down to manage media relations.

SGC worked in partnership with an additional New York Strategy firm in planning and executing related events on-site, including a rally, in which hundreds participated; an awards ceremony; and the opening reception featuring Governor Haley Barbour, and the Mayor of Jackson, MS, Harvey Johnson, Congressman Bennie Thompson and Congressman Bob Filner. SGC immediately identified key spokespersons who the media would be most interested in interviewing. We also co-managed the Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation's bus trip from start to finish.

The 50th Anniversary of the Freedom Rides took place at various locations around Jackson and the Mississippi Delta. Freedom Trail Markers were left at various historic sites of the Civil Rights Movement, while SGC identified those that would be most attractive to various media outlets.

Sykes Global Communications organized and managed the media at every scheduled event where they were invited.