

EXPLORE WITH THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM

Making History: Desegregating Columbus



Columbus Ledger Enquirer, *Columbus bus integration protesters*, 1961, Gelatin silver print, Collection of The Columbus Museum

Like many public spaces in the South, buses became battlegrounds for activists in the Civil Rights Movement. In July 1961, Rudy Allen, a native of Columbus, GA, had just finished his first year at the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, TN. Moved by his religious beliefs and trained in the doctrine of nonviolence, Allen helped to organize a bus sit-in. As were most acts of resistance during the 1960s, this sit-in was planned down to the very last detail, from how the participants would dress to exactly which seat they would occupy on the bus.

Take a moment to look closely at the images above. How are the protestors dressed? How would you describe their body language? How do you think they are feeling?

It was a hot July day when the six students – three men and three women, including Mary Olgetree, Vivian Warren, and Lillian “Bunky” McClung – took their seats at the front of two segregated buses in downtown Columbus. They were not “outside agitators” – a label, often erroneously, given by the press to many activists during the Civil Rights Movement – but citizens of Columbus. What effect might this detail about the students’ residency have on someone’s interpretation of the event? Why does it matter?

While that day ended in several students’ arrests, the movement continued to grow. Participants, both those who practiced the doctrine of nonviolence and those who did not, faced ever increasing threats to their personal safety and civil liberties.

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(Continued)

Imagine that you have accepted an internship at your local newspaper. Your first assignment is to write a headline for each of the photographs you just examined. The headline must capture not only the photographs' most important ideas, but also your readers' attention. Why should they want to know more?



1.

2.



Did you know? The doctrine of nonviolence is both a moral principle and a tool for mass action. It is a principle based on love – including love of one's opponents – in which the practitioner accepts suffering consciously and without retaliation. As a tool for mass action, the doctrine of nonviolence can be expressed through both direct action (petitions, boycotts, vigils, etc.) and acts of resistance or civil disobedience, such as sit-ins. When an individual decides to participate in an act of civil disobedience they openly refuse to obey a law or directive even when faced with jail time. To prepare for the hostility they would invariably face, activists would role-play so that they could experience and experiment with how they might act in a given situation. To learn more about the doctrine of nonviolence and some of its most famous practitioners, visit <https://tinyurl.com/9tjrw9k>.

