



*McComb*  
**CIVIL  
RIGHTS**  
DRIVING TOUR

McCOMB, MS

# McComb,

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**M**cComb, Mississippi, was one of the main battlegrounds for the struggle for civil rights in the United States. The 1950s set the stage for the Mississippi Movement, and the pivotal years for the state and McComb came in the 1960s.

In 1961 local NAACP leaders teamed with Robert Moses, a young activist with SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), to organize voter registration drives in Southwest Mississippi. That October, students at Burglund High School participated in a protest walkout that landed many young people in jail. These two events nurtured a growing group of local activists who helped lead the way for change in Mississippi.

The hold of the Klan over McComb was strong, and progress was slow and hard-wrought. By the summer of 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) committed to an ambitious new campaign in the state called "Freedom Summer," with projects in McComb and other Mississippi communities. That summer saw the mobilization of hundreds of Movement workers arriving from outside the area and teaming with local people. They led "freedom schools," voter registration drives, and other efforts to support local blacks in the pursuit of civil rights.

Klan members and their sympathizers stepped up their efforts at maintaining white supremacy, trying to intimidate the Movement workers into with-

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drawing from the area and local activists into retreating in silence and fear. The Klan carried out their terrorism with no repercussions from law enforcement. In a two-month period, there were more than a dozen bombings—so many that McComb became known as “the bombing capital of the world.” Local law enforcement supported the Klan tactics either directly or by concocting so-called crimes and arresting COFO workers and local blacks in punishment for their activism. Many white business leaders used economic punishment against the black people who worked for them. McComb’s white leadership remained silent. Fear had a hold over the area, and white moderates remained passive. Those who spoke out were targeted themselves. In the words of McComb Enterprise-Journal editor Oliver Emmerich, “Almost everybody was hysterically afraid.”

But many local black people organized despite the fear and terror. They continued to demand assistance from the federal government, despite most of their pleas being ignored. Finally, by mid-November, continued pressure by the NAACP, COFO, and the local black community—combined with a “Statement of Principles” denouncing violence printed in the Enterprise-Journal by a group of white citizens—led to a crack down on Klan violence and ushered in a new phase of the Movement.

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## DRIVING TOUR DIRECTIONS :

Enter from Georgia Avenue, and turn left onto Summit Street, through the old business district (north).

Turn left onto Denwiddie (west) and pass the Freedom House complex on the left and right.

Turn right onto Wall Street (north) and stop at the Black History Gallery on the left.

Continue north/northwest on Wall, and turn right onto Quitman (north).

Stop at the intersection with Martin Luther King, and the Martin Luther King Building is on the left.

Turn right onto Martin Luther King (southeast) and pass Mrs. Aylene Quin's house.

Turn right onto Summit Street (south), and pass the Bates house on the left.

Go to the intersection with Maddock Ave., and Flowery Mount Church is on the corner on the left.

Turn left onto Maddock (east).

Turn left onto Elmwood (north) and pass the African-American Cemetery on the left and Burglund High School (now Higgins Middle School) on the right.

Turn right into the loop at the school, and loop around back towards Elmwood.

Turn left back onto Elmwood (south).

Turn right onto St. Augustine Ave. (west).

Turn left onto Warren Street (south), and pass St. Paul's Methodist Church on the right and then Burglund Supermarket/Masonic Temple on the left.

Stop at the intersection with Desoto Ave., and Nobles Cleaners is to the right down Desoto.

Continue south on Warren, and the Owens house on the left.

Turn right onto Georgia Avenue (southwest) and continue under the viaduct.

Turn left at the light onto Broadway/Highway 51 (south), and pass the old Woolworth's to the left on Main and City Hall on the right. The old Greyhound Bus Station is to the left down Canal Street.

Continue south on South Broadway/Hwy 51 until the large intersection, and then turn right onto Presley Blvd. (Hwy 24 West).

Turn left onto C.C. Bryant Drive (just beyond Rogers Western Store).

Proceed through the stop sign, and pass the Bryant house on the left.

Turn left onto Monroe Avenue (east).

Turn left onto Highway 51 (north), and pass Society Hill Church.



## 1. SUMMIT STREET DISTRICT

The Summit Street District was a vibrant area of African-American businesses. It included the Lyric Theater, whose building housed Holmes Ice Cream Parlor on the north side and Holmes Drug Store on the south side. North of the theater was Holmes Pool Hall and Holmes Chicken Shack. Both places were used as meeting places for Movement workers.



This area included the Desoto Hotel, which housed a thriving restaurant and bar. Another club and restaurant that marked that era was the Ritz. The north end of the district ended with the Elk's Rest, which was originally the Harlem Nightingale. This establishment had entertainers such as Cab Calloway. It had matinees on Saturday for children and adult entertainment in the evenings.



## 2. THE FREEDOM HOUSE COMPLEX

*702 Wall Street (now an empty lot)*

The SNCC Workers Freedom House Complex was a trio of houses on Wall and Denwiddie Streets owned by Mrs. Willie Mae Cotton and Mr. Antoine McNulty. Mrs.



Cotton had opened her home to SNCC workers early in the Movement. In preparation for the 1964 Summer Project, she extended housing to additional workers, and later that summer other houses were made available as the project expanded and workers came to teach in the



freedom school. The third house also served as the Delta Ministry Office.

A core group of experienced SNCC workers and COFO volunteers lived in these dwellings continuously from early 1964 through the summer of 1966. In July 1964, the Freedom House at 702 Wall Street was bombed, injuring activists Dennis Sweeney and Curtis Hayes.

### 3. BLACK HISTORY GALLERY, INC.

*819 Wall St.*

This gallery was started by Ms. Hilda Casin, and admission is free. It houses a variety of African and African-American artifacts, pictures, books, charts, and historical materials.



### 4. HOME OF ALYENE QUIN

*304 Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive*

Mrs. Alyene Quin, or Mama Quin, as she was affectionately called by SNCC workers, owned a small business establishment on Summit Street which became a center of civil rights activity in the McComb Movement. Threats against her home and business came in response to her strong leadership in the movement.



Mrs. Quin's home was bombed on Sunday night, September 20, 1964. The dynamite, which exploded outside the front window, destroyed the entire front of the house and narrowly missed killing her two children. (Society Hill Baptist Church was also bombed that night.) In an outrageous turn, local authorities accused Mrs. Quin of bombing her own home.

Mrs. Quin's café, South of the Border, was at 500 Summit Street. There she hosted Movement people and local black leaders who supported them,

servicing them meals and allowing them to meet. Later, when threatened by the café's white landlord, she began serving meals out of her home.

## 5. HOME OF FRED BATES

*928 Summit Street*

Mr. Fred Bates was very active in the McComb Movement, especially at the time of the 1961 black school student walk-out in protest of the school principal's refusal to re-admit Brenda Travis.



Mr. Bates owned a gasoline station, bus and taxi transportation service, and he transported people to visit Brenda Travis in detention at Oakley. He later transported the protesting

Burglund High School students, who had been expelled from school, to Campbell Junior College in Jackson, where they continued their high school classes.

In April 1963, Mr. Bates's home was shot into. This assault was one of the series of violent attacks made against black people, their homes, and businesses in an effort to keep the movement from continuing in McComb.

## 6. FLOWERY MOUNT BAPTIST CHURCH

*906 Summit Street*

On the third Sunday in June of 1870 sixty-five African Americans met under the brush arbor to organize a church. From 1870-1883, church services were held in an old Union army barracks. According to the county records, the land was sold to the Colored Baptist Church of McComb in 1883, purchased from the Mississippi Valley Company, for the price of \$200.00. The elected trustees were John Webb, Nolan Green, Wade Randolph, Henry Kenny, P.A. Preston, Wilford Washington, and George Walker.



In the spring of 1884, the laying of the foundation took place, but the underground barracks were maintained for the safety of Flowery Mount and community members who feared retribution by the KKK. While construction was being completed, the church held worship service in a tent on the property. In 1885—within one year of laying the foundation—members held their first service in the building. That wood frame building was destroyed by a storm in 1909, and a concrete block building replaced it.

Civil rights meetings were held at Flowery Mount, but it was not bombed during the rash of attacks in McComb. According to the late Argentine Johnson, it was not bombed because the men of the church took turns during the night standing guard.

## 7. BURGLUND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

*1000 Elmwood Street (now Higgins Middle School)*

In 1961, 15-year-old Burglund student Brenda Travis—along with 20-year-olds Ike Lewis and Bobbie Talbert—were arrested and jailed for participating in a sit-in demonstration at the Greyhound bus terminal. The



school's principal, Mr. Commodore Dewey Higgins, suspended Brenda Travis for her arrest, prompting students to request an explanation of his

actions. Mr. Higgins's lack of response led to the October 4 walkout by about 300 Burglund High School students.

As students marched from the school to the SNCC office above the Burglund Super Market, other community people joined in, and the group continued to



the steps of the McComb City Hall. There, the demonstrators, mostly students, attempted to pray on the City Hall steps. As they knelt to pray, they were arrested. After each set of arrests, others stepped forward to pray, until 116 people had been arrested. The youngest students were released, although 76 individuals were held in the City Jail

for three days. Demonstrators over the age of eighteen were transferred to the County Jail in Magnolia, where they were held for 39 days.

After they were released from the jail, a number of students returned to school but were expelled. They attended the McComb Freedom School for a few weeks, before arrangements were made for those students to continue their education at J. P. Campbell Junior College in Jackson, Mississippi.

## 8. ST. PAUL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*711 Warren Street*

St. Paul United Methodist Church was the first church in McComb to open its doors to the McComb Movement. Beginning in 1961, St. Paul



was a principal meeting place for voter registration training and Movement meetings. During the summer of 1961 it was the location of the McComb Freedom School. That

fall, St. Paul served as a temporary high school for the Burglund High School students expelled for their protests, until arrangements were made for them to attend classes at J. P. Campbell Junior College in Jackson.

## 9. THE BURGLUND SUPERMARKET AND THE MASONIC TEMPLE

*630 Warren Street (unoccupied)*

The Burglund Supermarket was a joint business venture established in the 1950s by local black businessmen, Mr. G. W. Martin, Mr. Pete Lewis, Mr. Percy Larry, Mr. Charlie Gavden, and Mr. Jack Morgan.

The Masonic Temple (Eureka Lodge No. 5) was located above the market. It was the site of voter registration classes and housed the SNCC office in the 1960s. The supermarket was bombed on

August 17, 1964, when most of the McComb civil rights workers had gone to New Orleans to a dinner for the Hefners, a white family who had been forced to leave McComb because they supported the Movement.



In the fall of 1961, the Masonic Temple and St. Paul United Methodist Church served as a temporary high school for approximately 100 Burglund High School students who had been suspended for participating in the student walkout. Ninth and tenth grades were held at the Masonic Temple and the eleventh and twelfth grades were held at St. Paul.

The owners of the Burglund Supermarket were part of the community network who provided lunches for the protesting students and gave money and food to support other Movement activities.

## 10. NOBLES CLEANERS

*222 Desoto Avenue*

The entire Nobles family was active throughout the McComb Movement. Mr. Ernest Nobles's establishment was one of the most active gathering places for SNCC workers. He opened his business to the Movement and assisted workers by transporting them, allowing them to use the telephone, and, when necessary, hiding them among the racks of clean clothes.



Nobles Cleaners escaped being bombed because Ernest and his ten brothers and one sister took turns guarding the business for more than two years.

*Rights*

## 11. DOCK OWENS HOME

*528 Warren Street*

The Owens family's interest in Civil Rights was well known throughout McComb. Mrs. Beulah Owens was secretary of the McComb NAACP. When Webb Owens, a retired railroad worker, returned home in 1961, he immediately became involved in the Movement. He assisted SNCC workers in organizing efforts by soliciting donations of food and money for Movement people, and he served as a link between them and the local Black community. Webb Owens is warmly remembered for his "cool" countenance and "dapper" appearance.

Webb Owens lived with his brother, Mr. Dock Owens, whose home was targeted for attack because of Webb's activities. However, the white attackers mistakenly shot into the home of Mrs. Clorine Andrews, who lived next door to the Owens family.



He assisted SNCC workers in organizing efforts by soliciting donations of food and

## 12. McCOMB CITY HALL

*115 Third Street (separate entrance on Broadway)*

The student walkout from Burglund High School ended at the steps of City Hall by the Broadway entrance, where 116 people were arrested. (For more information, see the entry for "Burglund Senior High School".)



## 13. THE GREYHOUND BUS STATION

*206 Canal Street*

The McComb Greyhound Bus Station is remembered by Movement people as a place of violence, of vicious attacks on black people who tried to exercise their rights to equal accommodations on public transportation. During the early

1960s, when the Freedom Rides were in progress, members of the McComb police force regularly met and boarded buses, roughing up black passengers who did not sit at the back of the bus.



In April 1961, the CORE Freedom Ride that originated in New Orleans and was scheduled to end in Jackson was interrupted by the McComb police and an angry

white mob. The police boarded, took the Freedom Riders off the bus, and “lost” them in the crowd, where they were brutally beaten. Members of the McComb Movement took the Freedom Riders to be treated by a doctor and then drove them to their destination in Jackson.

The Bus Station was actually two bus stations—a small, filthy alcove reserved for black people, and a larger, cleaner room for the use of white people. Although efforts to integrate this bus station were successful, many black people in McComb continued to use the ‘black side’ until a new undivided station was built.

## 14. C. C. BRYANT HOUSE

*1521 CC Bryant Drive*

NAACP stalwart C. C. Bryant and his wife, Emogene, have lived in this home for more than fifty years. Bryant’s barbershop, which was adjacent to the home, was a center



for information about the struggle for black equality. There, patrons could read books about Africa, talk about voter registration or police brutality in the early days of the Movement, and read Black Press magazines and newspapers. Movement workers often went to the shop for haircuts, as well as to meet local people.

When NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers vis-



ited McComb, he stayed in the Bryant home, as did SNCC Field Secretary and Freedom Summer organizer Bob Moses. The barbershop was destroyed in a bombing in April 1964, and the house was bombed that June.

## 15. SOCIETY HILL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

*4098 Highway 51 South*

Society Hill has a history of activism, with Rev. Ed Taylor as pastor and C.C. Bryant as deacon. The church helped Bob Moses with voter registration efforts and was targeted for its link to the McComb Movement.



The current church was built after the original wood-frame building was destroyed by a bombing on September 20, 1964, shortly after Alyene Quin's house was attacked.

*Levin*

**For further reading on McComb's  
role in the civil rights movement,  
see the following resources:**

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*I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing  
Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*  
by Charles M. Payne

*The FBI Story: A Report to the People*  
by Don Whitehead

*Freedom Song (movie)*  
directed by Phil Alden Robinson

*Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in  
Mississippi*  
by John Dittmer

*Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to  
the Algebra Project*  
by Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb

*Reunion: A Memoir*  
by Tom Hayden

*So the Heffners Left McComb*  
by Hodding Carter

*Two Faces of Janus: The Saga of Deep South Change*  
by J. Oliver Emmerich

[www.mccomblegacies.org](http://www.mccomblegacies.org)

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