

Lasting Legacy

Take a walk through civil rights history

BY ROBIN ROENKER



Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham, Ala.

The civil rights movement in America is a story of resilience and determination.

It's a story of leaders — trailblazers like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and Medgar Evers — as well as local heroes and everyday citizens who pushed for equal rights in voting booths, on buses, at schools and lunch counters.

It's also a story of place. The culmination of events across the South in the 1950s and 1960s — historic marches and activism in cities like Birmingham and Montgomery, Ala., Sarasota, Fla., New Orleans and more — helped lead to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

These iconic, touchstone sites are now part of the United States Civil Rights Trail, which launched in 2018, covering more than 100 sites across 15 states and Washington, D.C. Many of the marquee destinations are in regions along the Gulf Coast.

Visiting sites along the trail offers the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of America's great civil rights leaders and to learn essential truths about the power of the human spirit and the importance of equality for all. "When you're exploring the civil rights era, you are going to encounter some details that aren't all that comfortable to talk about because it involves a lot of suffering," says Michael Morris, director of public relations for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, which oversees the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson. "But at the same time, you leave (the exhibits) thinking, 'These folks went through a lot, but they were able to accomplish so much.' It makes you wonder what we can accomplish today, now that we're not facing those same barriers."

CHRIS GRANGER



Rosa Parks Museum

FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CIVIL RIGHTS ICONS IN ALABAMA

Alabama is home to nearly 30 sites on the U.S. Civil Rights Trail — the most of any state — so it's a great place to begin your journey.

In Montgomery, see the pulpit where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church. Then, stop by the Rosa Parks Museum, located at the site of her 1955 arrest, for insights on

Parks' life, her decision not to give up her seat and the communitywide bus boycott that followed.

In Birmingham, you can view the actual door from the cell where King wrote his *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and see a replica Freedom Riders bus, among many other exhibits at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

"A lot of people, even those who have lived in Birmingham their whole

lives, come through and tell us, 'I never learned this in my history books,'" says Joi Brown, the institute's marketing manager.

While you're in the neighborhood, make time to visit Kelly Ingram Park, home to several striking statues commemorating the city's civil rights journey, including Four Spirits, a moving tribute to the four young girls killed in the 1963 bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church, just across the street.



Edmund Pettus Bridge



The Redmont Hotel — Alabama's oldest operating hotel — is a 14-story historic landmark that embraces the glamour of its Jazz Age beginnings, while offering newly renovated rooms and easy access to downtown attractions.



John's City Diner serves Southern comfort food with a gastropub approach, for a new take on favorites like meatloaf and macaroni and cheese.

EXPERIENCE CITIZEN ACTIVISM IN FLORIDA

In Sarasota, you can follow the Newtown African American Heritage Trail to learn more about the historic role the African American community played in organizing “wade-ins” at Sarasota’s Lido Beach in the 1950s to advocate for beach integration.

The wade-ins drew national media attention at the time, but the community’s push for desegregation dates back as early as 1914, as outlined by the 15 historic markers on the trail. Enjoy a narrated, two-hour trolley tour of the area — often with insights by activists who share their firsthand experiences — from the community history preservation group Newtown Alive. Don’t be surprised if you break out in song along the way: “Spiritual songs took the African American community through some pretty horrific times,” says Vickie Oldham, Newtown Alive’s consultant and community scholar. “Some parts of the story can be sad for some, so we often sing freedom songs on the tour.”



Siesta Key Palms Hotel offers either studios or suites with beach-inspired décor, plus two pools, rentable bikes, and a yoga and activity deck.



Whether you’re craving classic Southern seafood favorites like lobster bisque, shrimp and grits — or even a cheeseburger or Philly Cheesesteak — **KaCey’s Seafood & More** has you covered.



SEE WHERE BARRIERS BROKE DOWN IN LOUISIANA

You’ve likely heard of Ruby Bridges, known for bravely integrating New Orleans’ formerly all-white William Frantz Elementary School in November 1960 as a 6-year-old student. Tours of the school — including a statue of Ruby that sits in an interior courtyard — are available on a limited basis with advance notice by contacting Akili Academy, a charter school that now operates within the building.

While in New Orleans, be sure to explore the historic Tremé neighborhood, which deems itself America’s oldest African American neighborhood and is home to the New Orleans African American Museum as well as Louis Armstrong Park.



Situated in the heart of the French Quarter, **Hotel MonteLeone** is steps away from celebrated restaurants and entertainment. But you may spend the bulk of your time enjoying the hotel’s heated rooftop pool and iconic Carousel Bar & Lounge — the only revolving bar in the city.



Brennan’s has been serving up classic Creole favorites — with a contemporary spin — since 1946. Order the “Taste of New Orleans Dinner,” and you can enjoy Gulf Fish Amandine, followed by Praline Leidenheimer Bread Pudding.

LEARN ABOUT THE MOVEMENT IN MISSISSIPPI

At the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson, you can explore the lives and impact of the state's civil rights activists such as Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer and Vernon Dahmer. You'll also learn how the brutal 1955 murder of teenager Emmett Till affected black residents in the state and throughout the nation. Be on the lookout for Mississippi Freedom Trail historic markers throughout Jackson — and other cities in the state — that highlight important dates and events in Mississippi's civil rights timeline.

With advance notice, you can also schedule a tour of the Medgar Evers Home Museum in Jackson, site of the activist's 1963 assassination. "People are taken aback, seeing the house restored as it was then and hearing stories about that time," says museum curator and tour guide Minnie Watson.



The Westin Jackson offers easy access to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and other downtown attractions and features an on-site spa and fitness studio.



Specialties at The Iron Horse Grill in Jackson include stuffed Delta catfish and a French-cut pork chop, but be sure to save room for the Mississippi praline cheesecake. Enjoy live music three nights a week.



CELEBRATE FREEDOM IN TEXAS

It was in Galveston that Juneteenth — a holiday celebrating the abolition of slavery — began. On June 19, 1865, Union Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger, who had arrived in the city with 2,000 troops the previous day, announced from the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa the freedom of some 250,000 former enslaved persons in Texas. While more than 24 states now celebrate Juneteenth, Galveston marks the holiday's origin there with more than two weeks of special events each June — including a parade, re-enactments, a gala and barbeque, as well as live music, an emancipation march and a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation from the Ashton Villa balcony.



A Galveston mainstay for more than a century, the **Hotel Galvez** blends history with touches of modern luxury, including full-day cabana rentals and an on-site spa.



Rudy & Paco serves American steak and seafood staples like bone-in ribeye and grilled salmon — while incorporating South American and Central American flavor profiles.

Explore the 100+ sites of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail — including an interactive state-by-state map — at civilrightstrail.com.