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"You Don't Have to Ride Jim Crow": the Freedom Riders of 1961 and the Dilemma of Mobility

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Abstract This article offers an exploration of what it meant to move under "cramped conditions" for African Americans and their compatriots during an era of often violent racial discrimination and segregation in the 1950s and 1960s in the USA. As the example of the Freedom Rides shows, these conditions included both moments of closure and entrapment determined by the rule of law as well as acts of resistance resulting from a century-long legacy of resistances. Particularly, I try to understand the complex "constellations of mobility" as a fragile entanglement of the politics of movement, representations of movement, and the embodied practices of movement. This paper proposes an approach to mobility that takes both historical forms of mobilities and immobilities seriously. On the one hand, my analysis relates to regulatory power and technologies used by state and non-state actors in order to retain white privilege over issues of mobility during the period preceding and accompanying the Freedom Rides. On the other hand, I argue along the lines of "mobility as resistance" by showing the strategies used to transgress written and unwritten laws and normative standards of the Jim Crow era.

Keywords Freedom Rides · Transport segregation · Race · Regulatory power and technologies · Politics · Representations and practices of mobility

> "[The students] set up a new way of acting, the beginnings of a new ritual: one of human acceptance, of—not freedom (that word is too big)—but free movement in the public places of the earth." (James Peck 1962, p. 10)

For a long time, segregated transportation was one of the most detested forms of discrimination for Southern blacks (Barnes 1983, p. IX). Starting out from the seats at the back of a

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bus up to the "colored" waiting room in a rail or bus depot, they received inferior accommodations and service in each facility and frequently abuse from white carrier employees, white passengers, or white policemen. But even the color line in public transit per se was a humiliating personal affront. The autobiographies of Blacks living through Jim Crow almost always describe an incident aboard a carrier as "one of their most infuriating encounters with the South's racial order" (Barnes 1983, p. IX).

Several decades later, in the face of a preoccupation in the social sciences with business men as "astronauts" who ply the airline routes from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China to Pacific Rim cities and of Indian and Korean computer consultants flying into Silicon Valley as if popping next door and young tourists criss-crossing Europe on their interrail trips (see, e.g., Ong 1999; McKeown 2000; Jensen et al. 2015), these examples describing the experiences of the Freedom Riders in an era of severe segregation in the USA may seem out-of-time. Typically, the idea of mobile subjects in a modern world has informed much of the social science analysis during the 1990s. A consensus existed that mass mobilities are one of the central characteristics of globalization since the nineteenth century (Huber 2010, p. 318; Malkki 1992). These assumptions clearly undermined "sedentarist" theories which were prevailing in many studies in geography, sociology, and anthropology up to the 1990s. But even by 2003, the French historian Daniel Roche stated that especially the historical sciences have mainly been interested in stable and firmly established spaces; only with the emergence of transnational and global studies the situation has changed drastically in this field (Roche 2003). Meanwhile, part of the intellectual discourse following the "new mobility paradigm" in the humanities and social sciences has been a trenchant critique of the assumption of sedentarism as the natural order of things as well as its antithetic and more recent expression of a "liquid modernity" and "nomadic metaphysics" (Adey 2006, 2010; Cresswell 2010; Favell 2001; Ley 2011; Revill 2011; Sheller/Urry 2006). Following this new paradigm, certain notions have experienced important challenges.

First, scholars have asked as to the relations between mobility and immobilities. Attention needs to be drawn to mobility in terms of difference and how these differences may constitute mobilities and immobilities. In this context, cultural geographer Doreen Massey argued that it is "not simply a question of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, and that some have more control than others. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people" (Massey 1991, p. 240). Second, diverse and intersecting mobilities have many consequences for different people at different times and at different places. Removed from its historical and cultural context, the language of mobility decontextualizes and conceals difference, universalizing and naturalizing inequalities in the process. Understanding how inequalities of mobility arise and looking at the consequences of such inequalities call for an account of mobilities which is "sensitive to historical and geographical specificity and placed within its distinctive political and cultural political contexts" (Revill 2011 p. 373; see also Cresswell 2001; Dival/Revell 2005). Historians can help by looking closely at the means by which mobilities were produced and consumed in the past—the modes of governance, infrastructures, vehicles, and experiences of "differentiated mobilities" (Massey 1996) which point to the uneven and unequal positioning of different groups and persons in relation to various flows and movements (Chu 2006, p. 401; Dival/Revill 2005, pp. 2–3). Finally, understanding mobilities as more-than-representational and more-than-politics leads to the question of "how mobility is done in ways that may evade the constraints of representational description, analysis and explanation" (Adey 2010, p. 15). Attending to the practices and experiences of mobility, recent studies have explored the

importance of feelings and (collective) emotions that emerge through mobilities as well as the embodied sense of mobility (Adey 2010, chapter 4).

In this article, I follow a notion of "constellations of mobility" (Cresswell 2010) that draws out the power of a politics of mobility, their representations as well as practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis, towards an appreciation with experiences of closure, entrapment, and containment (see, e.g., Cunningham/Heyman 2004; Langan 2001). As Caren Kaplan remarked in 2006, the topic of violence long remained absent from conceptions of mobility (Kaplan 2006). In the meantime, the topic has increasingly found entry into research especially in the fields of border, security, and development studies (see, e.g., Lindley 2014; Spener 2011; Staudt 2008). For an understanding of African American mobilities and especially also their representations, the aspect of violence plays a major role. More specifically, I aim to remap the experience of the Freedom Riders of 1961. The Freedom Riders included small groups of people from all walks of life, including both black and white men and women, attempting to end racial segregation in public transport firmly anchored in the South. They moved within and challenged their "cramped conditions" in creative ways, in their efforts to achieve a share in a mobile style of life through their struggles over such differentiated mobilities (Chu 2006, p. 401). Minorities, unable to pass easily along legitimate social routes within a culture for political, social, and/or economic reasons, are forced to maneuver within each foreign or constrained situation they encounter. This sort of "cramped experience," as Nicholas Thoburn argues (with reference to Deleuze and Guattari), draws "thought and practice back into a milieu of contestation, argument, and engagement, and forces ever new forms of experimentation from the intimacy of cramped experience" (Thoburn 2003, p. 19). As Thoburn outlined, minor politics begins with the experience of those who confront "cramped spaces" and operate in "choked passages" and in the "'impossible positions' of 'small peoples' and 'minorities' who lack or refuse coherent identity (…)" (Thoburn 2006, p. 44; Thoburn in this issue). As the project of the Freedom Riders was to achieve a radical equality of opportunity and participation, it became clear—as it did to many African Americans living under segregation—that "the oppressed had to play a direct role in their own liberation" (Harris/Terborg-Penn 2006, p. 43). According to Jacques Rancière, "[p]olitics occurs during those moments when those 'who do not count', who have 'no part' in the recognized social order, make a claim to be counted." These claims, he argues, appear as an interruption of the established speaking order which elevates citizenship to holding a near monopoly of speech acts. Instead of concentrating on "dissonant speech acts," one can rethink the acts of Freedom Riders as "dissonant mobile acts" which ruptured foundational political understandings of citizenship (Rancière 1999; Nyers 2008). Thinking along these lines, struggles for citizenship can involve the negotiation and management of mobility.

Although rights to move were not actually present within the constitution of the USA, various court cases debated this question as a fundamental part of what it meant to be a citizen of the USA (Adey 2010, p. 105ff.; Cresswell 2006a, 2006b, chapter 6). But more than that, these rights were also challenged on the grounds of what was understood as common, unwritten laws—not just in the court room but out on the streets. In this context, "minor politics" was also very much about producing alternative subjectivities, spatialities, and temporalities, as well as acting and speaking at a time and in a place where you were not expected to speak and act (Katz 1996). As I will show, the actions evolving during the Freedom Rides were not linear and clearly determinable but were often shot through with fleeting imponderableness and moments of uncertainty. There was no semblance of a ready-made dogmatic coherence of a mass movement. The Freedom Riders of 1961—eclectic in

their social and ideological makeup, including young students, movement veterans, blacks and whites, men and women, northerners and southerners, and religious and secular activists—did not possess a coherent identity, rather they were unified in their desired ends. And as I argue in this essay, for the Black participants, another aspect became relevant through what Elizabeth Alexander has named "'bottom line blackness' with regard to violence which highlights race: "It is the stories of violence and the subsequent responsive group knowledge and strategies that compel even as we hold on to the understanding of profound differences among African-Americans" (Alexander 1994, pp. 92, 95).[1]

The following threefold approach aims to understand, first, how the Freedom Riders in their attempt to contest the highly segregated *politics of mobility* challenged the political and cultural conditions that delineated their physical movement on interstate bus travel. Second by focusing on the *representations of mobility*, I show that one of the remarkable features of the whole enterprise was its visibility and the invocation of the power of the visual in the face of extreme violence. Finally, by looking at the *mobile practices* involved, I aim to contextualize and refine assumptions of the mobility of African Americans under "cramped conditions" in its specific historical and spatial context.[2]

African Americans Traveling the South: the Politics of Mobility Under Jim Crow

Self-determined mobility, as Cotten Seiler notes, has generally been a prerequisite of social, political, and economic power (Seiler 2003, p. 10). Likewise, mobility has been understood as one of the cardinal practices of the modern subject (Seiler 2006, p. 1092). Notions of individual freedom in the USA have been bolstered by spatial and social mobility. In this sense, mobility has been idealized as "freedom's inaugural moment and its affirming performance" (Seiler 2003, p. 10).

In the USA, several scholars—reaching from Alexis de Tocqueville in his famous "Democracy in America" (1831) over Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 "Frontier in American History" up to prominent postwar social scientists and historians such as David Riesman, Oscar Handlin or Daniel Lerner—enshrined mobility as the formative and sustaining practice of American life (Seiler 2003).

Against this background, it is important to recall the powerful racial prerogatives of mobility (see Long 1954; Seiler 2007).[3] The struggle for civil rights often focused on issues of mobility from discriminatory treatment of railroad accommodations to bus boycotts and to

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[1] Although it is important to note that although the Freedom Rides were foremost about fighting transport segregation by and in favor of Black Americans, their white allies were often ostracized and punished in multifarious ways. As Jim Zwerg, a then exchange student at Fisk University put it, as a white person participating in such actions you were "a disgrace to the white race, a traitor" Nelson (2010).

[2] Following Jacquelyne Dowd Hall, it is important to understand the effect of these events as reaching beyond its regional Southern spatial fixation and in the context of a "long civil rights movement" with an emphasis on the hidden histories of policies and institutions as well as the agency of the people involved. Jacquelyne Dowd Hall, The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past. In: The Journal of American History 91 (2001) 4: 1233–1263; here 1262. Newer scholarship dealing with the question of democratization in the Deep South from a specifically political perspective can be found in Robert Mickey, Paths Out of Dixie. The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America's Deep South, 1944–1972 Princeton: Princeton University Press 2015.

[3] Besides their raced identity, class, gender, and age issues always accompanied their travels and migration.

the use of busing to desegregate schools. As Tim Cresswell has summarized, "mobilities have played a key role in the definition of blackness at the same time as blackness has been mapped on to particular forms of mobility." In this context, black moves have been "sites of pleasure and resistance but have, at the same time, been sites constitutive of repeated oppression and negation" (Cresswell 2016, pp. 12, 21).[4] By no means did African Americans belong to a static or fixed social group.[5] By the end of the nineteenth century, a small but visible number of Africans had acquired money to travel by trains. By the next century, buses and trains were regularly frequented by this group. But already from their early arrival in the colonies traveling and moving in public space was full of obstacles and degrading for most African Americans, and from the 1880s on, southern transportation routes were "spaces of racial conflict" and the "battle over the racial ordering of modern transportation was on," as Grace Hale put it (Hale 1998, pp. 127–128).[6] For African Americans, as well as other minorities, the American road was far from being a "democratic social space" (Fischer 1988, pp. 64–65 quoted in Seiler 2006). As Cotton Seiler argued,

> [b]ecause spatial mobility has often been a means to or evidence of the social mobility of racial others, regimes of white supremacy have sought to control or curtail those forms and moments of black mobility that they could not instrumentalize for their own purposes (Seiler 2006, p. 1083).

Transportation was one important tool in defining whiteness. According to William Cohen, the "extent of black freedom varied with time and place, but always the right to move without hindrance was one of its most important features" (quoted in Seiler 2006, p. 1093). And as Nicholas Thoburn points out in this issue, the cramped conditions involved "all the coordinates and hierarchies of social being," reaching from temporal dimensions and affective conditions to numerous technologies (Thoburn, this issue). Several technologies—reaching from normative concepts (such as ideas of civilization and racial superiority), over regimes of mobility (buses, trains, and other devices to travel and move in space) to ways of perceiving and controlling space (through laws, signs, interdictions, and violence)—have played a major role in controlling Black American mobility during the Jim Crow era and even beyond. For example, the "deadly signs and separations," as Katharine Lumpkin, a white Southerner put it in her memoirs, reproduced white supremacy through systemized spatial relations. Whites dictated the racial labelling of transportation means which showed the black passengers the "limits of travel" (Hale 1998, p. 131). Signs on restrooms and other facilities attested to white resistance in sharing intimate physical and social spaces which were at the same time highly gendered (Abel 2010, p. 123). One of the chief effects of Jim Crow in the twentieth century was "a geography of thwarted action, of arrested motion" for African Americans (Seiler 2006, p. 1093).

Starting with Emancipation and up to World War I, southern legislatures—besides intervening in employment, housing, education, the legal justice system, and more—attempted to

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[4] For further examples on Black Americans and racial discrimination pertaining to mobility, see, e.g., Anke Ortlepp, Jim Crow Terminals: The Desegregation of American Airports (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, forthcoming).

[5] For example, the Great Migration was just one example of a large-scale movement of blacks within the USA during the first decades of the twentieth century. See, e.g., Hahn (2003).

[6] One should bear in mind that chattel slavery represented the ultimate debilitation of mobility. In the nineteenth century, the opponents of American chattel slavery and later the advocates of full freedom for newly emancipated slaves invoked William Blackstone's precept in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765–1769) that "personal liberty consists in the power of locomotion, of changing situation, or removing one's person to whatsoever place one's own inclination may direct…" (p. 130) See Cresswell (2016) and Cohen (1991).

limit the mobility of African Americans. In 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), under its new national director, James Farmer, came up with the idea to put blacks and whites from all walks of life in small groups on commercial buses who would deliberately violate the segregation laws of the Deep South.[7] Grounded in the Gandhian tradition of non-violence, the Freedom Riders would test compliance with two Supreme Court decisions mandating deseg-regation of interstate travel, *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* (1946) and *Boynton v. Virgina* (1960). Whereas human movement is made meaningful in specific social and cultural contexts (Cresswell 2006b, p. 150), law represents one of the most powerful technologies to regulate the right to mobility. Laws regulating interstate travel and public space have only been one of the few examples how African Americans were pushed into "cramped spaces." In understanding law from a cultural perspective, one important question is how law is put into practice in everyday life (Siemens 2012). In the struggle for the civil rights of African Americans, laws became all the more important for interstate travel on buses because, as Herman Long stated in 1954,

> [w]herever a policy, law, or a set of administrative regulations is so loosely constructed that it is at the mercy of local custom, or what may be termed the 'racial behavior code', they will in turn be compromised and diverted to the arbitrary demands of local practice. Bus transportation seems best as an illustration of this, for regardless of the interstate character of a given trip, the bus, with its frequent stops in small towns and rural areas, is more a part of the local scene than other modes of interstate transport. And it appears generally the case that bus regulations regarding the servicing of Negro passengers are more loosely drawn and more arbitrarily administered. At the same time, the demand for the appropriated and expected forms of racial behavior is greater (Long 1954, p. 220).

It was in traveling by bus that African Americans were "literally caught in a vise between the demands and expectations of the racial code of behavior and actual segregation laws, on the one hand, with no relief given by ineptly administered national transportation policies, on the other" (Long 1954, p. 220f.). Interstate transportation was an important target within the civil rights domain, not only because large segments of blacks were involved in "day-to-day contact and association" with whites but also because "[s]pecial significance also attaches to the interstate transportation area because of the variations and inconsistencies in practice" which existed with respect to segregation (Long 1954, p. 216). When Freedom Riders were boarding the buses, they did so as free civilians under specific laws that were supposed to protect them (Arsenault 2006; Catsam 2008). But despite the impressive national policy gains especially since the 1940s and 1950s, the prevailing general pattern for bus and railway transportation in the South remained "enforced racial segregation" (Long 1954, p. 216).

Laws pertaining to African American mobility have been ever-present in US history and have had a long-standing impact on their lives starting out with *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896 (Plessy v. Ferguson 163 U.S. 573 (1896); Barnes 1983, Long 1954). But the momentous decision in Plessy v. Ferguson which gave constitutional sanction to the "separate but equal" doctrine that prevailed in many part of the nation should not be seen as predetermined since the re-segregation process starting in the early 1890s came in waves; before there was no unified

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[7] It is important to mention that there were historical forerunners to the Freedom Rides of 1961 focusing on the discriminatory limits of mobility for African Americans, such as the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation and the several bus boycotts in 1955 and the following years in Montgomery, Florida and so on. See, e.g., August Meier/ Elliott Rudwick, The First Freedom Ride, in: Phylon 30 (1969) 3: 213–222. From an autobiographical perspective covering both Freedom Rides James Peck, Freedom Ride, New York: Simon and Schuster 1962.

system of racial separation: discriminatory rules, lacking the force of law, were neither consistently nor strictly enforced (Holt 2010, p. 211f.). Such measures were generally piece-meal and unable to prevent the migrations to the north during and after Reconstruction. "Before Brown the conveyances of American public transport, as they carried travelers of colour across geographical space, also carried them through a bewildering range of racist laws and policies" (Seiler 2007, p. 308).

A few decades later, such regulations were attacked as with *Mitchell v. United States* in 1941 challenging discriminatory treatment of railroad accommodations for African American passengers on interstate train coaches passing through Arkansas, where a state law demanded segregation of races but equivalent facilities. The Supreme Court had held in earlier cases that it was adequate under the Fourteenth Amendment for separate privileges to be supplied to differing groups of people as long as they were treated similarly well. Shortly thereafter, *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* followed in 1946 when Irene Morgan refused to ride segregated as an interstate bus passenger in Virginia and the judicial ruling clearly stipulated that segregation laws as applied to interstate bus transportation were unduly burdensome and therefore constitutionally unenforceable. *Henderson v. United States* in 1950 was again a landmark decision that abolished segregation in railroad dining cars. With the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision which rendered unconstitutional the Jim Crow system established by Plessy, public spaces and facilities were finally mandated desegregated.

The *Boynton v. Virgina decision* in 1960 finally overturned a judgment convicting an African American law student for trespassing by being in a restaurant in a bus terminal which was "whites only." It extended the Irene Morgan ruling by covering not only outlawing segregation of interstate passengers aboard the vehicles they traveled but to also cover the facilities used by interstate passengers outside the actual vehicles, such as waiting rooms, rest rooms, terminal restaurants, and so on (Peck 1962, p. 114f.). It held that racial segregation in public transportation was illegal because such segregation violated the Interstate Commerce Act, which broadly forbade discrimination in interstate passenger transportation. It moreover held that bus transportation was sufficiently related to interstate commerce to allow the US federal government to regulate it to forbid racial discrimination in the industry.

These cases draw attention to the experiences of "differentiated mobilities" which were—and still are today—marked by race. Whereas large groups of people—migrants, African Americans, tradesmen, and settlers—appeared to be highly mobile by the end of the nineteenth century, the written and unwritten laws were strongly racialized and did not allow African Americans to easily pass along the legitimate social routes within American culture. Whereas race relations, in the words of George Lipsitz, "take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual places" (Lipsitz 2011, p. 5), public transport in general, and bus transport in particular, was one of these places. The racial imagination that relegates people of different races to different spaces and finds expression in legal discourses and representations produces grossly unequal access to the different spheres of social life (Lipsitz 2011, p. 6).

The CORE intended to test the *Boynton* decision. On May 4, 1961, members of CORE held a news conference in Washington, D.C. to outline the objectives of the Freedom Rides in testing the legal ruling, penetrating not only the Upper South as had the 1947 journey but also hitting the Deep South.[8] Now that the ruling to ban segregation on buses engaged in interstate travel had been extended through the Boynton case to cover segregation in terminals, waiting

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[8] The most thorough analysis of the Freedom Rides up to date are Arsenault (2006) and Catsam (2008). Further information can also be found in Etheridge (2008), Murphy (1992), and Eskew (1996).

rooms, and restaurants, James Farmer and members of CORE felt that the time was right to test the enforcement of the ruling. Dubbed the "Second Journey of Reconciliation," the Freedom Rides would send a group of mainly young people adhering to the tenets of non-violence on a bus trip through the heart of the South. Starting out in Washington, D.C. on May 4, the ride would split between Greyhound and Trailway buses, travel through Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi with the final destination in New Orleans (Clabaugh 1993, pp. 42–3). Whereas desegregation aboard the buses had more or less become reality, segregation still prevailed in terminals and bus stops (Peck 1962, p. 116). The campaign would also target territory not covered by the 1947 journey. Their aim, speaking with Rancière, was to interrupt the prevalent discourse and practices by challenging the external constraints framed not just by the legal system but by the deeply rooted social customs of the Deep South "cramping" the mobility of Black and other colored minorities. CORE felt that the almost violent reaction to the Rides would gather publicity and thereby sympathy for the cause of integration. In the end, it also turned into a struggle over representation.

The Cruel Radiance of Violence: Representing Mobility

As Peter Adey reminds us, the bus has long remained a site of racial politics, highlighted by Rosa Park's refusal to give up her seat for a White woman in 1956 (Adey 2010, p. 111). But the bus does more than highlight the politics of mobility inequalities, it also figures in specific representations related to African American bodies (Hutchinson 2000; quoted in Adey 2010, p. 111). By exploring the media representation of the Freedom Rides, one can understand representations as a "practice," as a set of performative and productive processes with effects on everyday life (Hall 2012, p. 226).

As a series of image-centered events punctuated the Freedom Rides in 1961, I want to discuss their cultural function and understand the visual tensions and absences of such pictures of atrocities and desubjectivication. But even more so, these images underline the concept of "cramped spaces" by highlighting those images in the context of what has been called the "calamitous" in American visual culture (Gessner/Leikam 2013).[9] It points to the plurality of narratives and discourses that evolve in the context of disasters and political violence.

I would like to start by turning to a specific image. It shows a fire-bombed Greyhound Bus, dark smoke pouring from its open door, framed by the foreground figures of its interracial passengers, who were—as we know today—part of an effort by the CORE to test the effect of a recent Supreme Court antidiscrimination ruling. On board were several Freedom Riders, journalists accompanying the group and five other passengers, among them the manager of the Atlanta Greyhound station and two undercover plainclothes agents of the Alabama Highway Patrol.[10] The incident took place in Anniston, Alabama which carried the Freedom Riders on their way to Birmingham on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 14, 1961 (Arsenault 2006, pp. 140–148, 246ff; Barnes, pp. 159–160; Catsam 2008, pp. 149–158; Noble 2003). The bus was attacked by a white mob. White supremacy was a powerful force in Alabama, second perhaps only to Mississippi in its intensity and scope, saturated with the "menace of violence" and at the center of postwar Klan activities. Alabama's laws regarding segregation on common carriers dated back

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[9] For further reflections on visuality and violence, see Baker (2006 and 2015), Batchen (2014), and Martschukat/Niedermeier (2013).

[10] Varying information on the actual passengers is given in different accounts and memoirs.

to 1891, and by 1961, separation of races in public transport as well as at bus stations and train terminals were simply given. Segregationists ruled the day in the political and thus the social and cultural arenas and Governor James Patterson clearly announced before the arrival of the Freedom Riders that he could "not guarantee protection for this band of rabble-rousers" (Catsam 2008, pp. 149–150). What followed were the most explosive days of the Freedom Ride. The Freedom Riders were prepared for violence; it had been announced by the bus driver, but they had only expected severe clashes in Birmingham. Driving into Anniston station the buses, a mob of about 200 men demolished the exterior, tires and windows with bricks, pipes, clubs, rocks, knives, and the more, while they were hindered to enter the bus by the undercover officers and one of the regional managers of the Greyhound bus who had accompanied the bus aware of the rising storm. The bus managed to escape down Highway 202 but was followed by cars a few miles outside of Anniston. Since the tires had been repeatedly slashed and in the meantime had gone flat, the bus was forced to pull over. Several men smashed the windows and hurled an incendiary device— probably a flaming bundle of rags—inside the bus. There was an immediate flash fire, the bus quickly filled with smoke, and the mob was screaming. The passengers tried to debark from the burning wreckage and partly fled to nearby houses for safety; others were lying in the grass, gasping for air. They had just barely escaped smoke poisoning and severe burns. One bystander described the scene in an interview as "living hell" (Nelson 2010) (Fig. 1).

Yet let us return to this image, since all this information available through oral history interviews, memoirs, and other sources were not known at the time of the formation of the photograph. What we see at first sight are people in front of a burning bus, some directly staring at the scene, others turning away from it, almost in exhaustion and despair it seems; but they are close enough to the bus for the spectator to realize that they are not merely bystanders or observers. From the image itself, one cannot grasp the cause of the wrecked bus, nor can we weigh the emotional condition of the people in this scenery, or grasp the subsequent effects and after life of the photograph in public. Consequently, such artifactual records do not necessarily show in plain view the calamity of what—in hindsight—might be understood as a documentary evidence of a violent act. While the image at first sight may be contained within a discourse, which depicts the vulnerability of African Americans, it is important to understand the historical

Fig. 1 Freedom Riders near burning bus after attacked by a group of whites in Anniston, Alabama on May 14, 1961. (Underwood Archives / Kontributor)

and cultural embeddedness of such photographs.[11] Only by putting the photograph back in its context can we restore the complex frame and narrative to the photographs. Only then can we understand how this photograph illuminates "the unbridgeable chasm that separates ordinary life from the extraordinary experiences of political trauma" (Linfield 2010, p. XV) that often plagued African Americans through violent assaults.

In trying to understand the cultural function and visual tensions of such images, a *first* legitimate question would be: Who made this photograph and how was the photograph "read"? Little is known about the photographer. The photo of the immolated bus was taken by a freelance commercial photographer on the scene, Joe Postiglione who went by the name of "Little Joe." Apart from these series of photos, there was very little visual documentation of the attack, since the national media did not swarm in until after the Birmingham events a few days later.[12] As a media man, Postiglione presumably was looking for a "good story" for the local newspaper. But possibly there were also other intentions behind the act.

Concerning the "reading" of the photograph, things become more complex and must be answered on the background of who the "consumers" of such photographs were. According to Elizabeth Alexander, white people—and especially white men—have been the primary stagers and consumers of images of black bodies in pain (Alexander 1994, p. 92). Possibly this photograph must be understood in the tradition of other images of recent decades which were shot and used by white photographers and their audiences. Although lynching photographs clearly are a genre in their own right, they demonstrated how white supremacy acted through violence. Research has demonstrated that lynching photographs were used as souvenirs and allowed a white group to affirm their place in a larger white geography (Apel/Smith 2008; Apel 2003; Bederman 1995). This may show certain parallels to other "atrocity photographs" as evidence of legitimate violence and the control of white people over the mobility of black people (and in the Anniston case over their white allies). Elizabeth Alexander argues that spectacles of institutionalized violence can solidify and even constitute a community's self-identification (Alexander 1994).[13] In this respect, one understands that photography is not only innocent but also can be part of atrocity.[14] By all means, it is worth wondering whether this image of the immolated bus and its weary passengers, when encountered in the 1960s, could have harbored such ambiguities. There is much evidence that the American public, at least in the South, had long been generally hostile or at least apathetic towards African Americans and their struggles and that their humanity and sometimes even the "right to life" were not respected by the people and government (see, e.g., Hale 1998; Holt 2010). For many, such photographs must have had a satisfying, if not ambiguous meaning at best. While it may come across as an oversimplification to conjure up such essentialisms as a "regional" or "national" attitude, even for just one specific

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[11] For an approach on visual history which takes the historical and cultural dimensions of images into account see, for example, Hebel/Wagner (2011) and Paul (2012).

[12] See Cox (2008) and Lifson (2011). As both authors argue, Postiglione had likely been tipped off by the Ku Klux Klan about the planned attack. As the turmoil surrounding the bus gained momentum, a 12-year-old boy who lived nearby rushed to the scene with his new 8-mm camera. Within weeks, the FBI held hearings on the attack and confiscated the boy's camera and film.

[13] More on atrocity, political violence, and photography see Linfield (2010) and Batchen et al. (2014).

[14] Dora Apel makes a direct comparison between lynching and other photographs which show how people were humiliated through violence such as the Abu Ghraib photographs: All these events were sanctioned by a community of peers; all of them represent an abuse of power in a stratified hierarchy of power; all documents were looked at in a private context and their meaning then transformed after circulated in broader publics; all made visible the bodies of "others" who have historically often been presented in highly coded ways. The same counts for the visualization of the Freedom Rides. See Apel (2008, p. 77).

cultural moment, it still is worth asking about the cultural embeddedness and possible readings of such photographs. Yet, this was only one side of the story.

If the civil rights movement was at least partly about gaining equal rights and privileges that only had been enjoyed by whites, then we first need to understand the experience of their negation as well as the profundity of political violence which formed this negation. During the 1960s, photographs started emerging which, in the words of Jacques Rancière, triggered a "dispute over what is visible as an element of a situation, over which visible elements belong to what is common, over the capacity of subjects to designate this common and argue for it" (Rancière 2004; p. 6, quoted in Mirzoeff 2011, p. 478). There was a growing awareness by leaders of the civil rights movement that media coverage, especially of the hitherto unacknowledged violence and terror against Black Americans, was an invaluable aid to their cause and that there was a "performative claim of a right to look where none technically exists" (Mirzoeff 2011, p. 478).[15] This fostered a countervisuality and helped those "who do not count" make a claim to be counted. The movement turned to the ability of photographs to convey political meaning, and many understood the "power of spectacle to do what words could not" (Berger 2010, pp. 105 and 111).

The Anniston image described above and six other images of Postiglione's series produced on that day by Postiglione were purchased by AP, UPI, and the Anniston (Ala.) Star which ran them the next day (Cox 2008, p. 26f.). The Mother's Day attack in Anniston catapulted the Freedom Rides into the national consciousness. Walter Benjamin has suggested that the photograph was a document of history and possibility (Linfield 2010, p. 18). On the one hand, one could argue that such images of political violence can foster feelings of supremacy but also moral inadequacy or helplessness in the viewer. Susan Sontag, among others, was highly skeptical towards photographs of violence because they did nothing to explain their histories or causes, also because they present archetypical abstractions and, as she argued, the "shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewing" (Sontag 2002, pp. 20–21; see also Möller 2013). On the other hand, as several voices counter-argued, such images not only tapped senses and emotions but thereby also mobilized political opposition and condemnation on behalf of individuals, politicians and media—national and international.[16] Ariella Azoulay in her book *The Civil Contract of Photography* has pointed to the role of photographs in the making and unmaking of citizens. In this context, photography can bear witness to injuries and turn into a key component of public culture that demands ethical engagement. In many cases, photography acted as an agent for social change.

The famous Anniston photographs soon came to have an iconic function: A still moment freezing the instant, the photograph as document allowing a symbol to stand for the whole (Batchen 2010, p. 8)—in particular, for the vulnerability of Black people or, more general, as a symbol for the long and arduous struggles for civil rights.

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[15] See also David Weintraub, http://rising.blackstar.com/eye-on-image-making-a-dream-revealed.html (retrieved August 5, 2015). Weintraub states that the marriage of photography and the civil rights movement came about thanks to several concurrent trends: First, the increasing popularity of small, lightweight 35-mm cameras. This allowed for greater flexibility and mobility when working on location and proved invaluable for covering events such as marches and demonstrations, which tended to be fluid, fast moving, unpredictable, and often violent. The *second* was the growing appetite among the nation's newspapers and magazines—including Life, Look, Ebony, and Jet—for photographic images and the response by the Associated Press and United Press International to satisfy that appetite, often through the use of mobile darkrooms and portable drum scanners.

[16] On the international dimension of news concerning civil rights affairs see, for example Dudziak (2000). For examples of international media reporting on the Anniston case, see the Swiss newspaper Neue Zürcher Zeitung, May 23 1961; The British newspaper Guardian, Thursday May 25 1961. One of the first events to receive intense public reactions was the Emmett Till case in 1954, see Baker (2006).

While the photo hit the front page of several newspapers, the images were used by different newspapers for different ends. It was their editorials which gave the pictures a different significance in each case. A comparison, for example, of the media coverage of the Freedom Rides of four newspapers (the three white-owned Alabama newspapers *Anniston Star*, *Birmingham News*, and *Montgomery Adviser* and the national paper *New York Times*) show that the actual coverage did not significantly differ (Clabaugh 1993, p. 55): All four newspapers denounced the violence surrounding the Freedom Rides, and all expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of state and local authorities. They were also unanimous that such incidence of violence were intolerable and must be prevented in the future. Therefore, already in its own period, the Anniston attack was seen as an injustice of some kind. The actual difference between the three Alabama newspapers and the *New York Times* lays as who was to blame in the matter. The Alabama papers depicted the riders as provocateurs and identified with the regional racial customs and mores that stood in direct opposition to the Freedom Rides and the cause of integration concerning mobility in general. The *New York Times* had no patience with what it clearly regarded as "benighted local customs"; rather, the *Times* viewed the Freedom Rides as "a simple legal exercise of constitutional rights"—namely that personal liberty consists in the power of locomotion (Clabaugh 1961, p. 55). In their eyes, the violence that occurred during the Freedom Rides was "alien, unjustifiable, and beyond rational explanation" (ibid.).

The presence of calamity emerging in public after the nationwide and international circulation of these events in press and TV may have made the subjection of and violence towards Black Americans, which also led to enclosure, appear less "natural" as before.[17] Most likely, the often supportive media presence also prompted the actions of the Freedom Riders in a more radical direction and clearly undermined the ability of whites to sustain white supremacy.

"The Beginnings of a New Ritual": the Embodied Practices of Mobility

"The Only Form of Resistance Is to Move" (Harvey 2005)

In their attempt to control black mobilities, whites could never achieve the tight and absolute racial ordering of the expanding spaces of transportation despite their effort (Hale 1998, p. 133). Already long before the solidary actions of the Freedom Riders in 1947 and 1961, there were numerous lawsuits and individual actions by Black Americans against transport segregation (see, e.g., Holt 2010; Thomas 1997; Wasby/D'Amato/Metrailer 1977; Witt 1990). Yet, the Freedom Rides of 1961 differed from the previous actions in important ways: The mixed groups, this time including women, targeted the Deep South and encountered fierce violence, they successfully claimed national and international media attention and developed refined strategies to target transportation segregation in the South. But despite a high degree of coordination, the Freedom Rides were accompanied by unforeseen events and moments which could not be anticipated. This triggered a need to adapt strategies as in the example of the Parchman experience (Arsenault 2006, chapter 9; Lewis 1998; pp. 168–172; Silver 2014): When arriving in Jackson, Mississippi, the Freedom Riders were jailed for "breach of peace"

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[17] It is helpful to turn to other images of the time, also in order to understand the full dimension of the racialization of mobility and transport. For example, the ads of the Greyhound company from the 1950s and 1960s clearly touch upon what Ruth Frankenberg has called the "privilege of whiteness." The ads had an all-white audience in mind and stand in stark contrast to the Anniston incident which stood for the immobility and entrapment of African Americans. See Lüthi (2016 (forthcoming)).

in the Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi—one of the most dreaded prisons in the South which William Faulkner had coined "destination doom." Once there, they were placed in the maximum security wing. Following imprisonment, the Freedom Riders dropped the goal of heading for New Orleans and adopted the strategy of "jail–no bail" and called for other Freedom Riders to descend on Jackson. Following an agreement between John F. Kennedy and Mississippi governor Ross Barnett, the representatives of the federal and state government had hoped that the imprisonment would break the will of the Freedom Riders. Instead, the ride-ins intensified and hundreds of mainly young activists arrived from all over the country. Three hundred Freedom Riders were arrested filling the jails and overwhelming the system.

That the Freedom Rides were more than an abstract idea and not just the result of a predetermined "collective subject" (Nicholas Thoburn) is indicated in the memories of several participants surrounding the Parchman events: "Even though we came from many different places and we had many different cultures and many different home environments, in some ways we were very unified because we all had a common cause. And we were all moving in that direction and we did *believe* in what we were doing" (Nelson 2010). The emergent and "fluid" moment of the actions are illustrated by the former Freedom Rider Pauline Knight-Ofosu: "It was like a wave or wind, that you didn't know where it was coming from or where it was going. But you knew, you were supposed to be there. Nobody asked me, nobody told me. It was like putting yeast in bread. It was a livening effect" (Nelson 2010). As Raymond Arsenault put it, the Freedom Riders became the "shock troops of the nation" (Nelson 2010). On this background, one participant, Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, explained years later, "We were past fear. If one person falls, others take their place (Nelson 2010)." Through courageous acts of political demonstration political subjecthood was (re)claimed. The actuation of mobility and of "how mobility really happens" with its focus on the multi-sensorial and felt characteristics become apparent in memoirs, interviews, and other sources for the specific case of the Freedom Riders but so far have found little attention in research.[18] They speak to the "emotional landscapes of daily life" (Anderson/Harrison 2006, p. 333; see also Harrison 2000). As a column from May 27, 1961 in the newspaper "Afro-American" described the amount of racial violence had long-time corporeal and emotional effects for civil rights activist:

> The courageous Freedom Riders won't ever be the same. They left Washington, D.C. in good spirits with high hopes in their country and fellowmen. As things got rougher, safety began to take a more important role (…). There were no political leaders just people with feelings about how best to do what had to be done. But the beatings, the tensions, the shocks, the depth of the hating, the lawlessness and the bus riding mile after mile took its toll. As they left for their various homes Thursday, some were painfully injured, some considerably nervous and others just weary. It will be a miracle if their physical and psychological wounds ever heal. The Deep South was that tough (Nelson 2010).

As David Bissell argues, one needs to attend to the "ongoing processes of 'micropolitical' transformation that take place through events and encounters, changing relations of enablement and constraint in the process of mobility. (…) Micropolitics refocuses attention from pregiven differences to the moment-to-moment transitions in power that give rise to difference" (2016,

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[18] Directing attention to such a dimension can give a fuller and more embodied sense of mobility which may evade photographic or textual representations. Bodily perceptions, feelings, and sensations unearth a terrain of mobility-in-action that is difficult to portray or represent. It is pertinent to look at life on the move as meaningful and affective. For example, independent of their social status, humiliations, beatings, and physical attacks separated the African American travelers from the often luxurious mobilities of white Americans, despite supposedly legal sanctioning of "all Americans" to travel and move freely and unhindered (Adey 2010, p. 17f).

pp. 394, 399). The civil rights activist Lisa Anderson Todd described a form of corporeal restriction in an interview, namely that they "were not supposed to be traveling alone, ever" in the Deep South (Todd 2010). At the same time, and on a more positive note, several rituals inherently supporting and transforming the mobile practices of the Freedom Riders became relevant for their actions, which can be shown by example of music and singing. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s has been called "one of the most musical movements in American history" (Roy 2010, p. 86). Group singing provided solace for Freedom Riders facing the constant threat of violence on their rides. At the same time, it was also an effective political tool and a generative force. "Singing, the music became a powerful, non-violent instrument. And I often say, without the music, without the singing we would have lost our sense of solidarity," John Lewis stated (YouTube, March 2011). Singing made stronger the sense of unity and sometimes expressed the purpose of their actions such as in songs "You don't have to ride Jim Crow" or "Hallelujah! I'm a-Travelin." In prison, they also served as communication means between the prisoners, sending out messages between male and female prison cells.

As Peter Adey notes, a host of feelings and emotions can be associated with all sorts of mobilities. The act of driving a bus, as one powerful form of auto-mobility, can impress upon specific bodies in different ways and thus produce differing "impressions" or affective dispositions. The transition of movement and so on can produce a variety of feelings from happiness, excitement, or anticipation to fear and anxiety (Adey 2010, p. 163; see also Ahmed 2004; Sheller 2004). In the case of the Freedom Riders, it was the simple act of changing position within the bus—moving from the back seats to the front seats reserved for whites only—that made bus riding an experience of fear for the Freedom Riders. But fear in this specific case was not just restricting but also generated capacities to be mobile. Among other things, songs and singing helped to generate and sustain these capacities and release fear and tension on the one hand and convey a distinct message on the other hand. It is no coincidence that many of the songs explicitly addressed and challenged images of confinement and enclosure as well as the traditional notions of the right to mobility for blacks and whites. Song lines such as "Buses are coming, oh yeah (…), they're rollin' into Jackson, oh yeah (…), better get you ready, oh yeah…" which were invented by the Freedom Riders during their imprisonment in Parchman Prison sent an explicit message to the prison guards that the struggle was in full swing.

While songs had a clear message to the outside world, I would like to make two final arguments that seem important when talking about embodied practices of mobility. First, songs were important for what Peter Adey calls the "formation of an affective collectivity" (Adey 2010, p. 171). Fear, entrapment in the buses, and finally also prisons and courtrooms were not merely immobilizing or restrictive as these songs show, they also affected emotions of the participants as people moved and sang with each other. They helped them focus on their goals and solidify their commitment (Roy 2010, p. 86). The intertwinement of bodies, music, and movement were almost ritualistic moments which triggered a feeling of solidarity and a sense of belonging. Music can contain a power of identification that can link subjects through practices of listening and moving and lead to "affective mobilities." Second, songs also touch the question of how social movements actually move by focusing on the "circulation of culture template organized around several major movements of culture moves": moving across space, moving emotions, moving social-cultural conditions, and so on (Isaac 2008, p. 33). As Larry Isaac argued, one must understand the Freedom Rides as rolling "socio-dramas," meaning that at times they presented "strategic performances" that were replicated at each stage of their rides (Isaac 2008, p. 47; see also Peck 1962, p. 15f.). The civil rights movement also moved by producing and circulating information, vision, tactics, strategies, and inspiration through avenues such as workshops, political cartoons, literature, and music. This represented an

essential cultural modality of the movement and songs were decisive among these strategies—not just as an emotional "mobilizer" but also as a form of contestation, debate, and engagement. For African American citizens, mobility was clearly narrated as an experience of fear but also always as a liberating effect and thereby creating new possibilities. Songs played an important part in repeatedly evoking the idea of liberation, freedom, and solidarity. Black music, as Michael Bertrand has stated in reference to the role of music in African American life in general, has "possessed the power to transform darkness into light and pain into joy," it made its participants "feel human" (Bertrand 2009, p. 402). Songs were an effective part of the attempt in pushing towards new spatial and racial imaginaries—of moving down "Freedom's Main Line," as one song bluntly expressed. It was one important attempt to physically and emotionally counter the "cramped conditions" they had been living in for centuries.

"A Whole Other Story Is Vibrating Within Them": the Repercussions of the Freedom Rides

"Another History Is Always Possible." (Stuart Hall)

As Herman Long already stated in 1954 with reference to issues of transportation desegregation:

The personal experience or injustice, the effective protest, the resort to court action—all of these combine in their frequency and insistence to exert a pressure which galvanizes action to change. Though they may initially appear to be harmless irritants, in the face of practices by responsible public agencies which are contrary to law or public policy, they later become the practical justification and necessity for the adoption of new procedures (Long 1954, p. 221).

The Freedom Rides were constantly in flux, always in need of adapting to new and unforeseen situations. But not only did their non-violent actions derive from a set of regional and global knowledge and age-long struggles against slavery and white supremacy; what is more, is that the Freedom Rides developed new manifestations and significations over time (Thoburn in this issue) and impacted other struggles on a global scale. In 1965, the "Student Action for Aborigines" drew national and international attention to the poor-living conditions of Aboriginal people and gained raised consciousness of racial discrimination in Australia through their Freedom Ride. By bus, they visited NSW towns with a bad reputation for discrimination and conducted a survey to learn what Aboriginal people needed. It was part of the University of Sydney protest against segregation. As one participant argued, it was also a reaction to the events happening in the USA (Curthoys 2002, 2010). In 2011, Palestinian activists

Fig. 2 https://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/

who were inspired by the Freedom Riders started similar actions and applied the same methods in Israel by boarding a bus in Israel from which they were expediently excluded (and this continues up to the present). The original plan was to spend the two last days of the Freedom Ride in Jerusalem (Fig. 2). However, as a symbolic and actual defiance of the enforced separation between Palestinians in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, realities on the ground came in the way. Despite several attempts, the Palestinian members of the Freedom Bus were denied permits and thus could not cross the checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Similar to the Freedom Rides in the USA, they and their international allies started a broad range of connected activities: They stage performances, their allies visit Palestinian groups who are harassed by Israeli soldiers or settlers, and they are well connected to other groups and human rights groups (see https://freedombuspalestine.wordpress.com/). If Deleuze and Guattari argued that "[t]he individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within them," then this definitely applied to the actions of the Freedom Riders.

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