

Mid-South Civil Rights Trek Guide

1. Lorraine Motel

450 Mulberry Street, Memphis 38103

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was fatally shot on the balcony of Room 306 by James Earl Ray. His death sparked riots and unrest in more than 110 cities across the country. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared April 7 to be a national day of mourning for the loss to the civil rights movement. The Lorraine Motel has now been converted to the National Civil Rights Museum.

2. Lewis R S and Sons Funeral Home

374 Vance St.

Memphis, TN 38126

More than 300 people paid their respects to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 5 in an open casket ceremony. The official funeral took place on April 9 in Atlanta, Georgia. Although only 1300 people could attend due to the church's capacity, more than 50,000 people participated in the procession to the cemetery. There was not one incident of violence.

3. Elmood Cemetery

824 S. Dudley Street

Memphis, Tennessee 38104

This historic cemetery is the final resting place of civil rights notaries like Benjamin Hooks, Ernest Withers, Vasco Smith, Odell Horton and Marvin Ratner.

4. Reverend George Lee's Gravesite

George Lee and Silver City Rd.

Belzoni, MS

Rev. Lee was a head of the Belzoni branch of the NAACP and the first black man to register to vote in his county since Reconstruction, until he was assassinated in his car on May 7, 1955. The sheriff attempted to categorize the murder as a traffic accident, claiming the Reverend had gotten into a fight with a woman and lost control of the car. An investigation by the Justice Department yielded no suspect. Rev. Lee's wife chose to hold an open-casket ceremony, which drew more than one thousand people. The granite stone placed at this intersection commemorates his sacrifice to the civil rights movement, although the Reverend was shot a few streets over, along Church Street.

5. Colonial and Quince

Memphis, TN 38117

On February 1, 1968, the violent death of two garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, at this intersection ignited a sanitation strike for better pay and safer working conditions. This strike was the impetus for the iconic "I AM A MAN" marches and also the reason for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s fatal visit to Memphis.

6. Fowler Homes

Formerly at E. H. Crump and 4th Street

Memphis, TN 38126

On March 28, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. started a march in support of the sanitation strike that soon deteriorated into chaos. Witnesses say around two hundred youths began breaking windows, and police retaliated with tear gas and nightsticks. Sixty-two people were injured and one killed. Sixteen year-old Larry Payne was shot upon exiting a basement at the Fowler homes. The police man who shot him in the stomach claimed the youth was raising a knife, though some witnesses claim he had nothing in his hand.

7. Mason Temple Church

938 Mason Street

Memphis, TN 38126

A hub of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 60's, this church is the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Mountain Top" speech, delivered on April 3, 1968, the night before his assassination.

8. Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market

Money, MS

Here in August of 1955, Emmett Till, a 14 year-old black boy from Chicago, allegedly flirted with or insulted the 21 year-old wife of this grocery. Several nights later, Emmett was taken from his great-uncle's house, beaten, shot in the head, and thrown in the Tallahatchie River.

9. Tallahatchie County Courthouse

Town Square

Sumner, MS

In September of 1955, Roy Bryant and his brother, J.W. Milam were tried for the murder of Emmett Till. On September 23, less than one month after the 14 year-old boy's brutal death, an all white jury deliberated for only 67 minutes before they acquitted both men on their charges of capital murder.

10. SNCC/COFO Office

616 Avenue I (between St. Charles and Broad)

Greenwood, MA

This was the temporary base of operations for the SNCC/COFO workers in Greenwood until a white mob armed with guns, bricks, and rope attacked the building on in August of 1962. The attackers trashed the office while the organization members crawled out a window and escaped across the rooftops. The organizations were subsequently evicted from their building and carried on their efforts in Greenwood without an office.

11. Coahoma County Jail

63 Sunflower Ave.

Clarksdale, MS

In the winter of 1962, the SNCC workers of Greenwood, MS sent out emergency requests for food and supplies. The black community was literally starving in the harsh cold. When two Michigan State students, Ivanhoe Donaldson and Ben Taylor, arrived in Mississippi with a truckload of food, they were arrested in Clarksdale for "possession of narcotics," (actually aspirin and vitamins). They were released after 11 days, but their supplies were confiscated. Not to be deterred, Ivanhoe returned to Mississippi a dozen times with food for the Greenwood community.

12. Fourth Street Drug Store

213 Martin Luther King Street

Clarksdale, MS

Aaron Henry (better known as Doc Henry) was the leader of the Mississippi NAACP and owner of this drug store. He used the store as a civil rights meeting place until it was fire-bombed in March of 1963. Henry's home was also burnt. When Henry protested the town police force's relaxed response, he was arrested and imprisoned.

13. 4700 Highway 51 South

Hernando, MS 38632

On this spot, June 6, 1966, civil rights activist James Meredith was shot, but not killed, during his famous March Against Fear. Meredith was the first black man to attend Ole Miss, and, after much protest, became the first black graduate in 1963. On June 6, 1966, Meredith set out on foot from Memphis on a one man March Against Fear to Jackson, MS. Only 30 miles into his journey, Meredith was shot, but his cause was taken up by civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Stokely Carmichael who continued the march to Jackson. On June 25, Meredith rejoined the march, and the very next day, they entered Jackson 15,000 strong.