

Mississippi Civil Rights Sites Special Resource Study

Newsletter, Spring 2018

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



March in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. four days after his assassination. Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

On May 1, 2017, Congress passed Public Law 115-31, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of nationally significant civil rights sites in the state of Mississippi. The law identified the following five sites to be included in the study:

- The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House located at 2332 Margaret Walker Alexander Drive, Jackson, Mississippi;
- The Tallahatchie County Courthouse located at 100 North Court Street, Sumner, Mississippi;
- The site of Bryant's store located at the intersection of County Road 518 and County Road 24, Money, Mississippi;
- The site of the former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason, Sr. located at 670 Division Street, Biloxi, Mississippi; and
- The Old Neshoba County Jail located at 422 Myrtle Avenue, East, Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Based on this legislated directive, the National Park Service (NPS) is beginning a special resource study of nationally significant civil rights-related historic sites to determine the potential for the designation of a new national park unit in the state of Mississippi. Other nationally significant Mississippi civil rights sites, not listed in the legislation, may be identified and added to the list of potential sites to be studied.

The purpose of this special resource study is to gather information about civil rights-related sites through historical research and public input and then report these findings to Congress. The special resource study will evaluate the potential for establishing a new park unit within the National Park Service based on whether congressionally established criteria for national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for direct NPS management are met. The special resource study may also consider other management options for sites evaluated during the study process. Based on the special resource study, the National Park Service will determine whether a site meets the criteria for inclusion in the national park system and will prepare the study for the Secretary of the Interior. The secretary will then submit any relevant findings and recommendations to Congress.

This special resource study will take place over the next two years depending on its findings. During this initial phase, the study will assess public interest and support by providing opportunities for your feedback. Please visit the project website to provide your comments on the study:
http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MSCR_SRS.

We would appreciate hearing from you by June 1, 2018, so we can consider your comments in preparing the study.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about and comment on this study effort. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mississippi Civil Rights Sites Special Resource Study

"This is Mississippi, the middle of the iceberg."



Rally at the Mississippi State Capitol.

*- Bob Moses, Civil Rights activist
Magnolia, Mississippi, 1961*

Many historians identify the 1955 murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till and the exoneration of his killers as one of the defining moments of the modern civil rights movement in Mississippi. This period culminated with the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project to register African American Mississippians to vote and the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party delegation's efforts to be seated at the Democratic National Convention. That year was also marked by the murder of three Freedom Summer volunteers that, like Emmett Till's murder, captured the nation's attention. During the decade in between, the struggle for equal rights in deeply segregated Mississippi was shaped by people who risked their lives and faced adversity in their quest for freedom. This special resource study explores the most significant people and places that represent this period of civil rights history in Mississippi.

The following five sites were initially identified in the study's authorizing legislation, but other nationally significant Mississippi civil rights sites, not listed in the legislation, may also be considered as potential sites to be studied as part of the Special Resource Study.

Medgar and Myrlie Evers House

Working as the Mississippi field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Medgar Evers was a nationally known civil rights activist when he was assassinated in 1963 at his home in Jackson,

Mississippi. The Medgar and Myrlie Evers House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2016 and is part of the Medgar Evers Historic District, a historically African American residential neighborhood in Jackson. Mrs. Evers donated the house to Tougaloo College, a private historically black college, in 1993. The house is open to the public as a museum dedicated to the legacy of Medgar and Myrlie Evers.

Bryant's Store

Bryant's Grocery & Meat Market in Money, Mississippi, is where Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American youth visiting from Chicago in the summer of 1955, was accused of flirting with Carolyn Bryant, who co-owned the grocery store with her husband, Roy Bryant. The subsequent kidnapping and murder of Till led to the trial of Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam. Because Till's mother allowed photos of her son's mutilated body to be published in Jet magazine, the murder attracted international attention and brought hundreds of journalists to the site in 1955. The Bryant's store is now closed, and the structure is in poor condition.

Tallahatchie County Courthouse

The Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi, was the site of the 1955 trial of Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, who were accused of kidnapping and murdering Emmett Till. Historians cite Emmett Till's murder



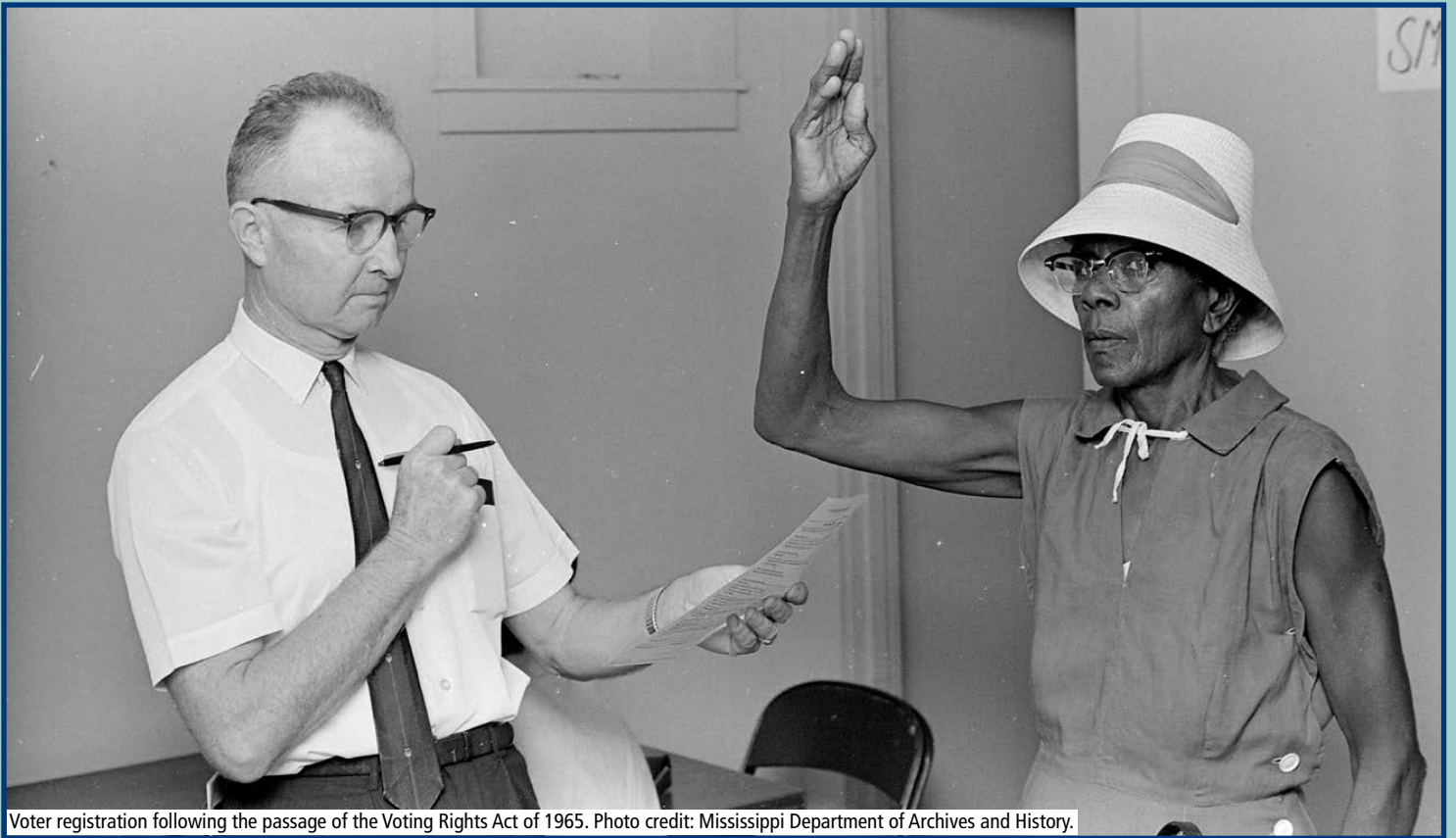
Medgar and Myrlie Evers House.



Historic image of the Bryant's store.



Tallahatchie County Courthouse.



Voter registration following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

and the exoneration of his killers as the beginning of the modern civil rights era in Mississippi. The courthouse was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007, and the courtroom has been restored to its 1955 appearance. The building continues to function as a county courthouse.

Old Neshoba County Jail

The Old Neshoba County Jail in Philadelphia, Mississippi, is the site where three civil rights workers—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—were held for an alleged speeding violation on June 21, 1964. Once released, they were ambushed and killed by Ku Klux Klansmen. The three men had been in the area to register black voters as part of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project and to investigate the burning of Mt. Zion Church, which had occurred five days earlier. In June 1966, a voter

registration march led by Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stopped at this jail before moving to the Neshoba County Courthouse. The jail's exterior is intact, and it is a contributing building to the Downtown Philadelphia National Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places.

Former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason

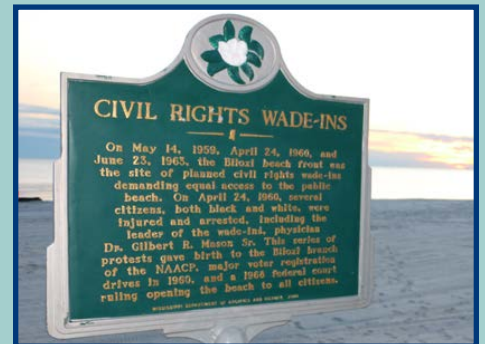
Dr. Gilbert Mason is known for his civil rights leadership, most notably as an organizer of three “wade-ins” that protested the segregation of Biloxi’s public beaches between 1959 and 1963. In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Mason helped organize voter registration drives and led other civil rights initiatives for 33 years. His 1966 office in Biloxi, Mississippi, has been restored and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2017.



Old Neshoba County Jail.

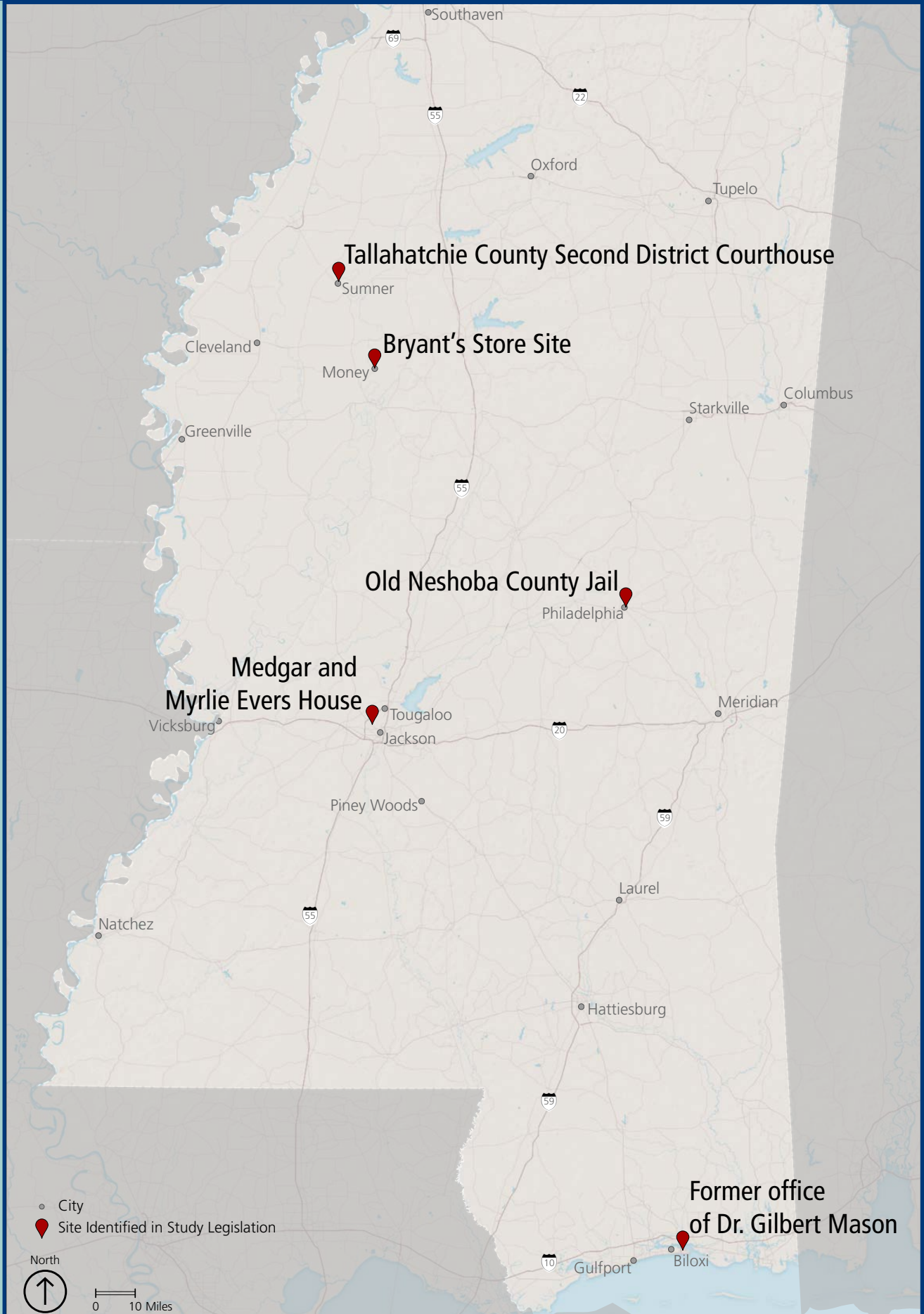


Former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason.



Historic marker, Biloxi, MS.

Initial Sites Identified in the Study's Authorizing Legislation



What is a Special Resource Study?

The National Park Service was created to preserve unimpaired outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The treasures in the national park system have been set aside by the American people to protect, preserve, and share our nation's most important stories. A new unit of the national park system is usually established by an act of Congress. Before passing such legislation, Congress requires reliable information about the quality of resources in the area under consideration and the potential for visitor enjoyment and efficient management. As part of the special resource study process, the National Park Service collects this information and provides an evaluation to the Department of the Interior, which then provides a report of its findings and any recommendations to Congress. This process ensures that only those candidate sites that are most deserving of national designation are included within the national park system.

Special Resource Study Criteria

The 1998 National Parks Omnibus Management Act (54 United States Code 100507) established the process for identifying and authorizing studies of new national park units. Under the law, a study area must meet all four of the following criteria to be recommended as an addition to the national park system:

- Contain nationally significant natural and/or cultural resources.
- Represent a natural or cultural resource that is not already adequately represented in the national park system or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land-managing entity.
- Must be (1) of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure long-term protection of the resources and visitor enjoyment, and (2) capable of efficient administration by the National Park Service at a reasonable cost; important feasibility factors include landownership, acquisition costs, life cycle maintenance costs, access, threats to the resource, and staff or development requirements.
- Require direct NPS management that is clearly superior to other management approaches.



Demonstration on the Forrest County Courthouse steps.



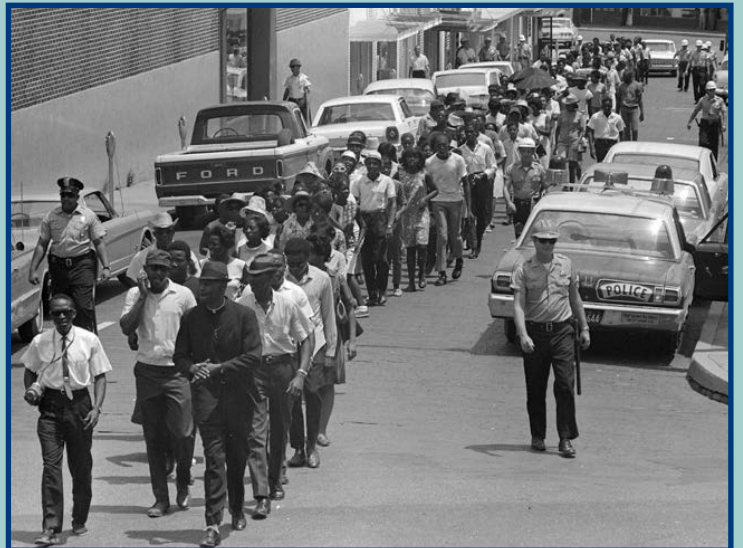
Economic boycott of city buses and businesses, Hattiesburg, MS.



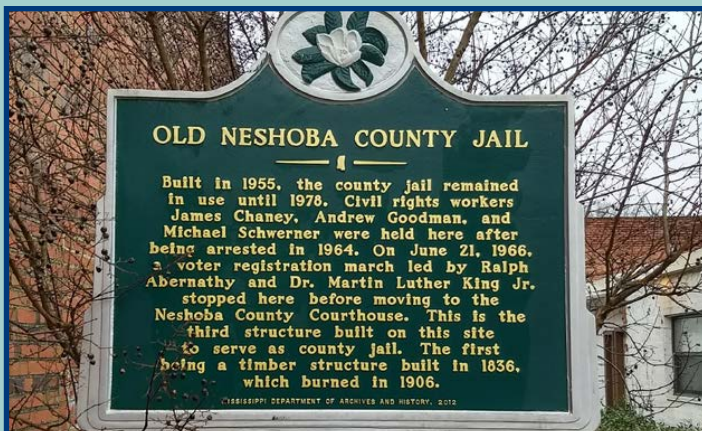
Greenville Air Force Base sit-in.



COFO Freedom Vote campaign event in 1963.



Civil Rights march in Hattiesburg, MS.



Historic marker, Philadelphia, MS.



Medgar and Myrlie Evers House.



Interior of the Tallahatchie County Courthouse.



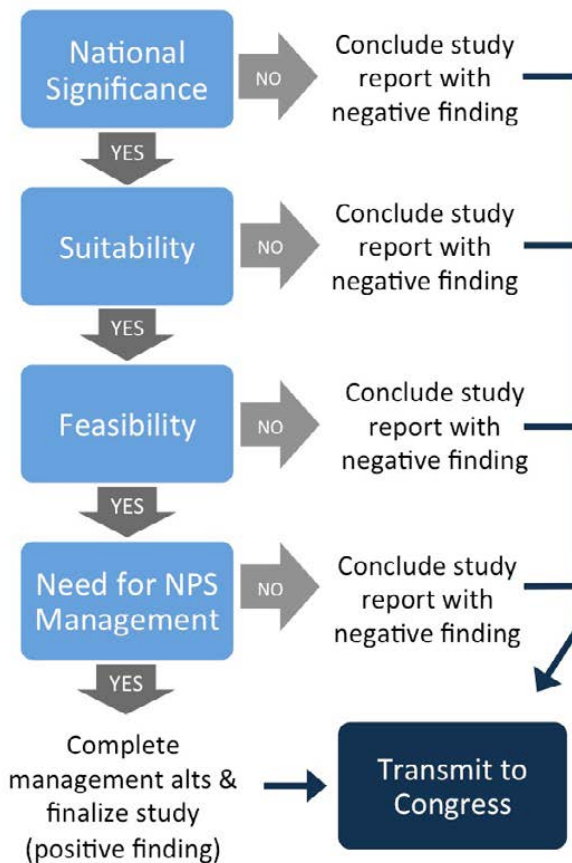
Location of the Biloxi Wade-Ins.

Special Resource Study Process

An NPS planning team has been assembled to prepare the Mississippi Civil Rights Sites Special Resource Study. This team will evaluate the area to determine if it meets the four study criteria outlined on page five. If the area does not meet all four of the criteria, the study will conclude with a negative finding. If a site is found to meet all four of the criteria, then the study team will analyze potential alternatives for managing the recommended sites. The findings of the study will then be transmitted by the NPS Director to the Secretary of the Interior, who in turn will submit the report and any recommendations to Congress. It is then up to Congress to take action on legislation establishing a new unit of the national park system. Only Congress, through legislated action, or the president, through the use of the Antiquities Act, have the authority to establish a new unit of the National Park Service.

The process is depicted in the following graphic.

SRS Completion Pathways



We Would Like to Hear Your Thoughts and Ideas about the Following:

1. What are the most important stories and people associated with the civil rights movement in the state of Mississippi?
2. Do you have any ideas or concerns about preserving and interpreting civil rights sites in Mississippi? What are they?
3. What sites or places related to civil rights history would you suggest for consideration as part of this study? Why?
4. What ideas or comments would you like to share with us?

Please provide your thoughts on the special resource study online at:

http://parkplanning.nps.gov/MSCR_SRS

Or comments may also be submitted through the mail to:

Mississippi Civil Rights Sites Special Resource Study
Attn: Justin Henderson
National Park Service - Denver Service Center
12795 W. Alameda Parkway
Lakewood, CO 80228

Comments received by June 1, 2018, will be the most helpful in preparing the study.



Emmett Till Exhibit at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.



Exhibit at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.



Medgar Evers Exhibit at the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum.



Harold Dahmer, son of Vernon Dahmer, surveys ruins of his father's house.
Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Ruins of Vernon Dahmer's house, firebombed on January 10, 1966.
Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
MISSISSIPPI CIVIL RIGHTS SITES SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY
ATTN: JUSTIN HENDERSON
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - DENVER SERVICE CENTER
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Protest march in Grenada, MS.
Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Stokely Carmichael at a rally at Tougaloo College.
Photo credit: Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

***Thank you for your interest in the Mississippi Civil Rights Sites
Special Resource Study!***