

## **ATLANTA-BOUND: Immigrant Freedom Rides roll**

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### **Body**

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About 100 activists will **roll** into Atlanta from Houston in buses next week, bringing with them what they hope will be echoes of the civil rights movement's **Freedom Rides** of 1961.

This time the message is about **immigrants**' and workers' rights. Dubbed the **Immigrant** Workers **Freedom Ride**, organizers of the national campaign say they are seeking a path to legalization for all **immigrant** workers and their families and protection of workers' rights on the job regardless of their legal status.

The two buses from Houston will stop in cities that were touchstones of the civil rights movement, including New Orleans, Jackson, Miss., and Montgomery, Birmingham and Anniston, Ala., before arriving Monday in Atlanta.  
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The project has garnered support from national civil rights figures such as U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), one of the original **Freedom** Riders, the Rev. James Orange, an associate of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Joseph E. Lowery, a co-founder and former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Lowery sees parallels

The civil rights struggles of decades ago and the present-day problems faced by millions of **immigrants** are connected, said Lowery, who is scheduled to speak Monday evening at a town hall meeting at the United Auto Workers Local 10 office on Buford Highway in Doraville.

"I'm trying to assure human rights for all God's children, particularly those living in this country," said Lowery, who heads the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, a grass-roots organization whose mission includes a public watchdog role. "If companies are going to hire these people, they ought to pay decent wages. I think we ought to provide all people the opportunity that we and our ancestors wanted when we migrated here --- some of us willingly, some of us in chains. . . . I feel like everyone deserves human rights and justice and equal opportunity."

The idea for the national **ride** was born in the summer of 2001 at the annual conference of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union, said David Koff, a spokesman for the **Immigrant** Workers **Freedom Ride**.

Congress to be lobbied

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Buses from nine other cities are wending their way to Washington, where riders --- illegal immigrants among them --- will meet with members of Congress and march Oct. 2 at Farragut Square. The riders will travel on to Flushing Meadow Park in Queens, N.Y., for a rally Oct. 4.

Behind the national movement are the AFL-CIO and a coalition of labor, religious and grass-roots organizations.

"The vulnerability of undocumented workers to exploitation is being recognized by other workers in the unions," Koff said. "Everyone is held down by the fact that our broken immigration system maintains a second-class work force."

For years the AFL-CIO had been among groups expressing concern about the influx of immigrants into the United States. But the growth of the immigrant labor force was among the factors that led to big labor making an about-face, and several unions have launched campaigns to recruit immigrants to boost their dwindling membership.

"These people are here. They pay taxes. They contribute to the economy," said Charlie Fleming, president of the Atlanta Labor Council of the AFL-CIO. Unions need to make sure their rights as workers are protected, he said.

Groups participating in the Atlanta events hope to highlight issues such as driver's licenses for illegal immigrants, workplace abuses and fraud perpetuated on immigrants.

"The driver's licenses is one of the most important issues," said Adelina Nicholls, vice president of the Coordinating Council of Latino Community Leaders.

Groups representing Caribbeans, Africans, Asians and other immigrants are also participating in Monday's events and a Latino civil rights forum is scheduled from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday at Morehouse College to discuss some of the issues.

Last Saturday Agustin Torres handed out fliers to passers-by at Kim Long Plaza in Forest Park highlighting Monday's event.

"When I came here I was in constant fear. I thought the police were Immigration and were going to send me back," said Torres, 37, who came to the United States with a tourist visa in 1984 and never went back. He became a legal resident three years later through a federal amnesty program.

He has worked in construction and at restaurants in metro Atlanta. He recently started the nonprofit Latinos United in South Atlanta to help immigrants with their day-to-day problems.

"I don't forget what it was like," said Torres, who became a U.S. citizen in 1997.

\* ON THE WEB: [www.iwfr.org](http://www.iwfr.org) or call 404-522-4500.

## Graphic

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Photo: Agustin Torres hands out fliers last weekend at Kim Long Plaza in Forest Park to call attention to Monday's arrival of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride in Atlanta. / LAURA NOEL / Staff

## Classification

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## ATLANTA-BOUND: Immigrant Freedom Rides roll

UNIONS (89%); CONFERENCES & CONVENTIONS (89%); TALKS & MEETINGS (87%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (87%); SERVICE WORKERS (77%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (77%); LABOR FORCE (77%); CHILDREN (76%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (76%); FAMILY (76%); CHRISTIANS & CHRISTIANITY (76%); US CONGRESS (74%); WAGES & SALARIES (72%); BUSINESS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (72%); HOTEL STAFF (72%); PREGNANCY & CHILDBIRTH (69%); RELIGION (67%)

**Company:** INTERNATIONAL UNION UNITED AUTOMOBILE AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA (55%)

**Organization:** INTERNATIONAL UNION UNITED AUTOMOBILE AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA (55%)

**Industry:** HOTEL STAFF (72%); RESTAURANTS (61%); HOTELS & MOTELS (60%)

**Person:** MARTIN LUTHER KING JR (79%); JOHN LEWIS (57%)

**Geographic:** ATLANTA, GA, USA (92%); NEW ORLEANS, LA, USA (79%); JACKSON, MS, USA (79%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); MISSISSIPPI, USA (79%); GEORGIA, USA (79%); ALABAMA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

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