



Nationwide Historic Context Study: The Role of the National Guard in the Civil Rights Movement

#07-366

Background:

The mission of the National Guard is rooted in the idea that it is the privilege and responsibility of our able-bodied citizens to be ready at all times to bear arms for the common defense. Holding true to this mandate, the National Guard was called to both state and federal duty during the height of this country's Civil Rights Movement. As many published works document the African-American freedom struggle of the modern civil rights movement and its related historical sites, no such study exists that specifically addresses the role of the National Guard within the movement or their cultural resources. Through research and field surveys, this project establishes a context outlining the Army National Guard's presence during key civil rights disturbances of the 1950s and 1960s, which in turn assists in understanding and interpreting the significance of Army National Guard properties, like armories, in relation to the Civil Rights Movement.

Objective:

Charged with a mandate to identify, inventory, and protect cultural resources, per Sections 110 and 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Guard, as well as other Federal agencies, rely on historic contexts in which to assess the historical significance of their cultural resources. With compliance in mind, the objective of the project is two-fold; first to develop a baseline historic context examining the role of the National Guard in the civil rights movement and secondly, to provide a process by which to survey, interpret, and evaluate related National Guard properties for historical significance within that context.

Summary of Approach:

This project focuses on the development of a historic context regarding the role of the National Guard in the civil rights movement and the identification and evaluation of any related National Guard cultural resources within that context. Four states (Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and California) were chosen for known participation of National Guard troops in civil rights disturbances including school desegregation at Little Rock Central High School (1957), The University of Mississippi (1962), The University of Alabama (1963), and riot control in Watts (1965). A comparison across four states demonstrates the differences in the role of the National Guard at the state level, participation in the movement, and the differences in the movement in separate states. The context serves as a framework within

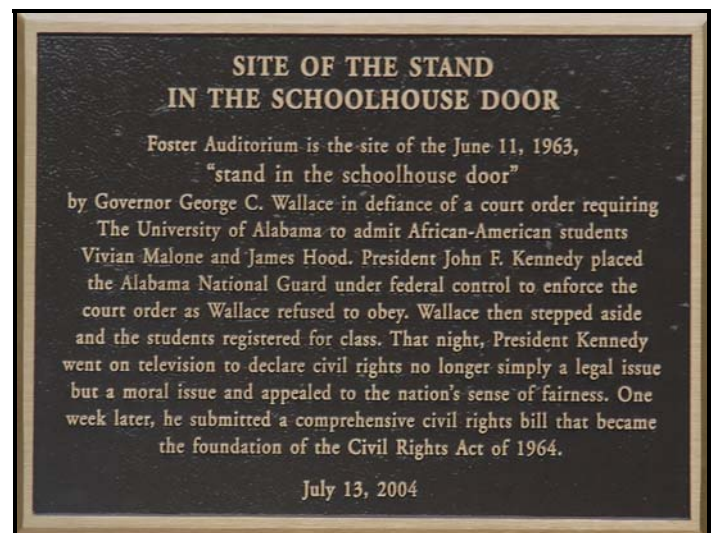
which National Guard properties may be evaluated for their significance within the civil rights movement and establish thresholds of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places. Intensive archival research and site visits pinpointed the National Guard's actual physical locations (armories, staging areas, command stations, schools, etc.) during these incidents.

Benefit:

This project establishes a framework within which the properties held by the National Guard, as well as other Federal agencies, may be evaluated for their significance in the Civil Rights Movement and provides a systematic method to identify, inventory, and evaluate the cultural resources relating to this context.

Accomplishments:

A baseline historic context of the role of the National Guard presents the differences and participation of the National Guard in civil rights disturbances across four states' during the 1950s and 1960s. Properties currently owned by the National Guard relating to these incidents are identified and evaluated for significance within the developed context.



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