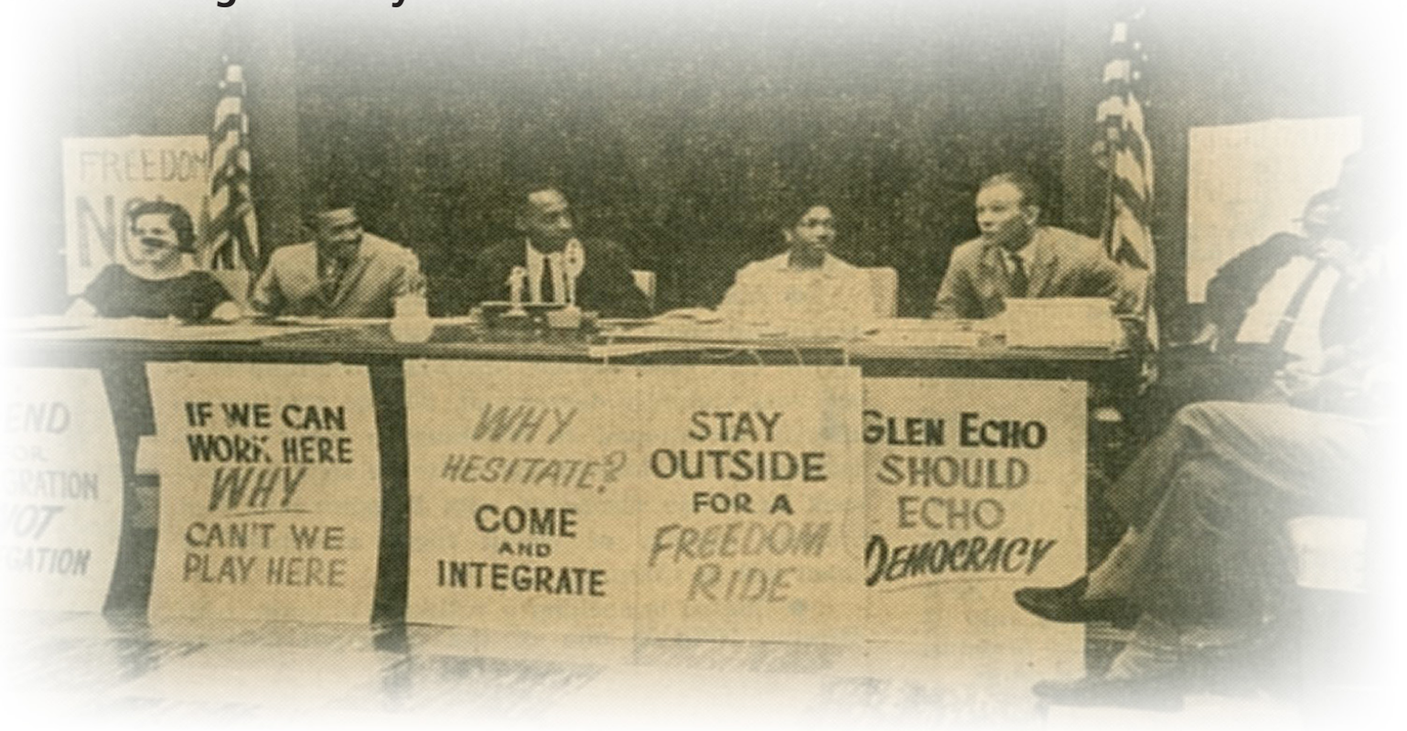
# Glen Echo Park

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Glen Echo Park
is administered by the
George Washington Memorial Parkway

## A Summer of Change:
## The Civil Rights Story of Glen Echo Park




Glen Echo Park Picketing Press Conference

Glen Echo Park c.1945

From its beginnings Glen Echo Amusement Park enforced a strict segregation policy, allowing only whites to enter and enjoy the park grounds. Decades later, in the summer of 1960, this unfair treatment was challenged by a group of brave individuals united by the common goal of equality and justice for all people, regardless of their color or creed. Their actions that summer would forever change Glen Echo Amusement Park's policy and would mark a milestone in their own personal lives.

### The Leg Work

Following the integration of the armed forces in 1948 and the desegregation of American public schools during the 1950s, a cohort of activists sought to spread the principle of equal access to an array of businesses. Modeling themselves on the sit-ins and pickets of Greensboro, NC, local activists encouraged the non-violent protest of segregated public transit services and retailers beginning in the spring of 1960. Thus began a decade of locally inspired change.

The District of Columbia began to integrate, starting with the school system in 1953. Suburban communities in Maryland and Virginia did not follow suit. By 1958, Montgomery County Public Schools were forced to bus African American students to integrated DC pools, while white students continued to take advantage of places like Glen Echo Park's Crystal Pool.

A group of concerned residents, concentrated in the local community of Bannockburn, began to lobby for county-wide accomidation laws and protested the use of public funds for programs at the segregated, privately owned Glen Echo Park.

In the spring of 1960, a group of students - many from Howard University - organized themselves as the "Non-violent Action Group" (NAG) and began protesting Northern Virginia lunch counters, restaurants, & department stores. During the summer of 1960, they came to Glen Echo Amusement Park. The Bannockburn residents would prove a willing ally during the summer of 1960, a summer of change.

### Carousel Sit-in

On the evening of June 30, Laurence Henry, a twenty-six year old Howard University student, led approximately two dozen NAG members and two high school students on a protest of Glen Echo Amusement Park. After the high school students were turned away at the park's entrance, Henry and others rushed the carousel where they were confronted by state-deputized security guard Frank Collins. Their confrontation, a micrososm of American race relations, was captured by radio reporter Sam Smith.

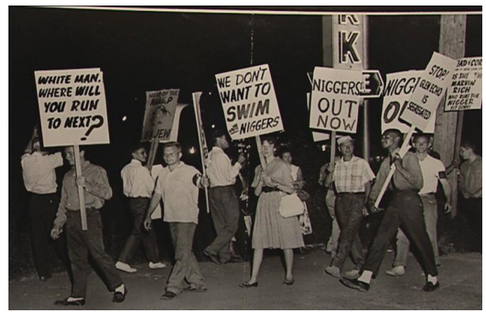
Security guard confronting NAG protester Marvis Saunders

## A Community United

Following the arrest of five of the carousel protesters, Laurence Henry announced that NAG would picket the park until integrated. They were soon joined by sympathetic Bannockburn residents. For the remainder of the park's season, local residents picketed alongside NAG members in hopes of changing the amusement park's policy

But they were neither alone nor unopposed. Shortly after picketing began, a counter-demonstration was instigated by George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party. While no pickters were harmed, there was a constant threat of violence - a rock thrown, a bottle tossed - for those struggling to provoke change.

**NAG and Bannockburn picketers**



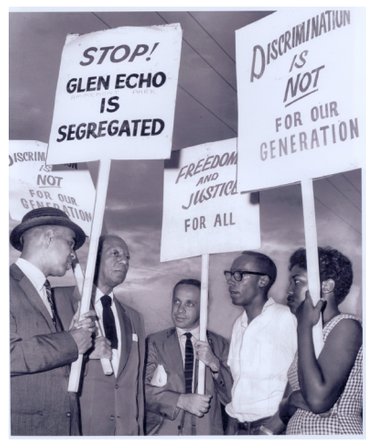

**American Nazi Party counter-protesting NAG and Bannockburn picketers**

## Visions of a Brighter Future Achieved

At the park's close on September 11, 1960, the protesters dispersed and vowed to return. Civil disobedience then sparked political manuevering.

Bannockburn resident and newly appointed assistant to the Secretary of Commerce, Hyman Bookbinder, sought assistance from US Attorney General Robert Kennedy in February 1961. Kennedy threatened to have the federal government revoke the lease upon which the trolley ran.

Such manuevering, in addition to the summer protest, led to the March 14, 1961 announcement that the park would open its doors to any patron, regardless of their skin color.




**Hyman Bookbinder (center) with other protesters**

**Black children enjoying the carousel while eating cotton candy in the 1960s.**

## The Park Today

Though the amusement park shut its doors permanently in 1968, the park today is as vibrant as ever as an artist community with some amusement park flare. There is something here for anyone and everyone.

The original carousel still operates and the trolley tracks are also still around though the trolley car no longer operates on it. Visitors can sit on the same animals the protestors sat on and walk in their footsteps along the tracks as they did over 50 years ago.

## The Picket Anthem

This song below was a common tune sung by the picketers outside of Glen Echo Amusement park. Sung this song to the tune of "I've Been Working on the Railroad," the lyrics are as follows:

"We are picketing Glen Echo and our cause is just;
We'll be picketing Glen Echo till segregation's bust.

Can't you see Jim Crow's a-dyin'. Unwanted in the USA; And there won't be any cryin' when he's passed away.

Don't discriminate. Don't discriminate. Segregration's got to go-go-go-go! Segregation's hate, so take it off the gate; Oh segregation's got to go.

Open up your doors Glen Echo, open up your doors to all-all-all-all! Open up your doors Glen Echo, segregation's wall must fall.

So sing out: fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o-o-o-o fe-fi-fiddle-e-i-o. Segregation's got to go!"