

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

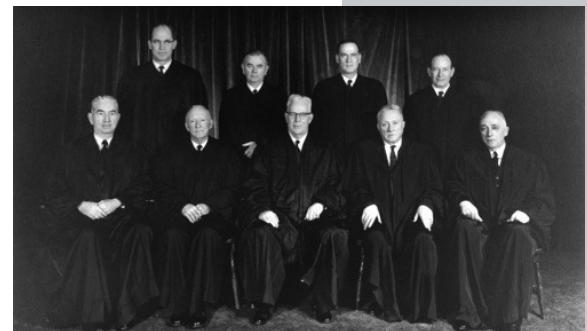
A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #4: Adderley v. Florida

During the [Civil Rights Movement](#) of the 1960s, Tallahassee, Florida often received national attention for its bus boycotts, sit-ins, jail-ins, marches and protests of segregation. The civil rights activists behind most of these demonstrations were students from [Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University \(FAMU\)](#), a historically Black college. One of these students, [Harriet Adderley](#), would become the lead petitioner in the U.S. Supreme Court case, [Adderley v. Florida](#) (1966). On September 14, 1963, a group of FAMU students protested in front of the segregated [State Theatre](#). They were arrested and jailed. In the days following these arrests, Adderley, and others assembled outside the Leon County Jail to protest the arrests of their classmates. During the protest, Adderley and the other demonstrators blocked the entrance to the non-public driveway of the jail. As such, the Leon County Sheriff warned that they were trespassing on county property and would need to leave or be arrested. Roughly 100 students, including Adderley, refused to comply with the sheriff's order. They were arrested, tried, and convicted under Florida's law for "trespassing with a malicious and mischievous intent." Adderley, and others, appealed their convictions, which were affirmed by Florida's First District Court of Appeals. On petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, Adderley and her fellow petitioners challenged their convictions, claiming their arrest violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. In a 5-4 decision, the Court ruled that Adderley's [First](#) and [Fourteenth](#) Amendment Rights had not been violated because the statute under which they were arrested was clear and applied properly. Further, the sheriff used his arresting power to maintain access to the jail house, not because he objected to the message of their protest. In the end, Adderley and the other protesters were convicted for unlawfully blocking access to the jail, not for the content of their speech.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- How does the Court's decision impact the First Amendment right to peaceably assemble?



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