The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church

[5 December 1955]
Montgomery, Ala.

The first mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association attracted several thousand people to the spacious Holt Street Baptist Church, in a black working-class section of Montgomery. Both the sanctuary and the basement auditorium were filled well before the proceedings began, and an audience outside listened via loudspeakers. In addition to reporters, photographers, and two television crews, black leaders from other Alabama cities such as Birmingham, Mobile, and Tuscaloosa were among those in attendance. The meeting opened with two hymns, “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” a prayer by Rev. W. F. Alford, and a Scripture reading (Psalm 34) by Rev. U. J. Fields.

King then delivered an address that he had quickly composed before the meeting. He later recalled the questions in his mind as he considered what to say: “How could I make a speech that would be militant enough to keep my people aroused to positive action and yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds? I knew that many of the Negro people were victims of bitterness that could easily rise to flood proportions. What could I say to keep them courageous and prepared for positive action and yet devoid of hate and resentment? Could the militant and the moderate be combined in a single speech?”

In his speech, King described the mistreatment of black bus passengers and the civil disobedience of Rosa Parks, and then justified the nonviolent protest by appealing to African-American Christian faith in love and justice and the American democratic tradition of legal protest.

A quiet pause followed King’s address, then great applause. Rev. Edgar N. French of the Hilliard Chapel AME Zion Church introduced Rosa Parks and Fred Daniel, a student at Alabama State College who had been arrested that morning on a disorderly conduct charge (later dismissed) for allegedly preventing a woman from getting on a bus. Rev. Abernathy read the resolutions that he, King, and others on the resolution committee had drafted. The assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor, resolving “to refrain from riding buses . . . until some arrangement has been worked out” with the bus company. King appealed for funds, then left to speak at a YMCA fathers and sons banquet.

[King:] My friends, we are certainly very happy to see each of you out this evening. We are here this evening for serious business. [Audience:] (Yes) We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens (That’s right) and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. (Yeah, That’s right) We are here also because of our love for democracy (Yes), because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action (Yes) is the greatest form of government on earth. (That’s right)

But we are here in a specific sense, because of the bus situation in Montgomery. (Yes) We are here because we are determined to get the situation corrected. This situation is not at all new. The problem has existed over endless years. (That’s right) For many years now Negroes in Montgomery and so many other areas have

been inflicted with the paralysis of crippling fears (Yes) on buses in our community. (That's right) On so many occasions, Negroes have been intimidated and humiliated and impressed—oppressed—because of the sheer fact that they were Negroes. (That's right) I don't have time this evening to go into the history of these numerous cases. Many of them now are lost in the thick fog of oblivion (Yes), but at least one stands before us now with glaring dimensions. (Yes)

Just the other day, just last Thursday to be exact, one of the finest citizens in Montgomery (Amen) — not one of the finest Negro citizens (That's right), but one of the finest citizens in Montgomery—was taken from a bus (Yes) and carried to jail and arrested (Yes) because she refused to get up to give her seat to a white person. (Yes, That's right) Now the press would have us believe that she refused to leave a reserved section for Negroes (Yes), but I want you to know this evening that there is no reserved section. (All right) The law has never been clarified at that point. (Hell no) Now I think I speak with, with legal authority—not that I have any legal authority, but I think I speak with legal authority behind me (All right)—that the law, the ordinance, the city ordinance has never been totally clarified. (That's right)

Mrs. Rosa Parks is a fine person. (Well, well said) And, since it had to happen, I'm happy that it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks, for nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. (Sure enough) Nobody can doubt the height of her character (Yes), nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment and devotion to the teachings of Jesus. (All right) And I'm happy since it had to happen, it happened to a person that nobody can call a disturbing factor in the community. (All right) Mrs. Parks is a fine Christian person, unassuming, and yet there is integrity and character there. And just because she refused to get up, she was arrested.

And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. [thundering applause] There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. (Keep talking) There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amid the piercing chill of an alpine November. (That's right) [applause] There comes a time. (Yes sir, Teach) [applause continues]

We are here, we are here this evening because we're tired now. (Yes) [applause] And I want to say that we are not here advocating violence. (No) We have never done that. (Repeat that, Repeat that) [applause] I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation (Well) that we are Christian people. (Yes) [applause] We believe in the Christian religion. We believe in the teachings of Jesus. (Well) The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. (Yes) [applause] That's all.

And certainly, certainly, this is the glory of America, with all of its faults. (Yeah) This is the glory of our democracy. If we were incarcerated behind the iron cur-

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2. By custom bus drivers could request that black passengers move to the rear, one row at a time, when the forward white section was filled and additional white passengers had to be accommodated. See discussion of segregation ordinance in "Statement of Negro Citizens on Bus Situation," 10 December 1955, pp. 81–83 in this volume.
tains of a Communistic nation we couldn't do this. If we were dropped in the
dungeon of a totalitarian regime we couldn't do this. (All right) But the great
glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right. (That's right) [ap-
plause] My friends, don't let anybody make us feel that we are to be compared in
our actions with the Ku Klux Klan or with the White Citizens Council. [applause]
There will be no crosses burned at any bus stops in Montgomery. (Well, That's
right) There will be no white persons pulled out of their homes and taken out on
some distant road and lynched for not cooperating. [applause] There will be no-
body amid, among us who will stand up and defy the Constitution of this nation.
[applause] We only assemble here because of our desire to see right exist. [ap-
plause] My friends, I want it to be known that we're going to work with grim and
bold determination to gain justice on the buses in this city. [applause]

And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. (Well) If we
are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. (Yes sir) [applause] If
we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. (Yes) [applause]
If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. (That's right) [applause] If we are wrong,
Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth.
(Yes) [applause] If we are wrong, justice is a lie (Yes). Love has no meaning. [ap-
plause] And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until
justice runs down like water (Yes) [applause], and righteousness like a mighty
stream.³ (Keep talking) [applause]

I want to say that in all of our actions we must stick together. (That's right)
[applause] Unity is the great need of the hour (Well, That's right), and if we are
united we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly
deserve. (Yeah) And don't let anybody frighten you. (Yeah) We are not afraid of
what we are doing (Oh no), because we are doing it within the law. (All right)
There is never a time in our American democracy that we must ever think we're
wrong when we protest. (Yes sir) We reserve that right. When labor all over this
nation came to see that it would be trampled over by capitalistic power, it was
nothing wrong with labor getting together and organizing and protesting for its
rights. (That's right)

We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are
tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out
for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality. [applause] May I say to you
my friends, as I come to a close, and just giving some idea of why we are assembled
here, that we must keep—and I want to stress this, in all of our doings, in all of
our deliberations here this evening and all of the week and while—whatever we
do, we must keep God in the forefront. (Yeah) Let us be Christian in all of our
actions. (That's right) But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for
us to talk about love, love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian face, faith.
There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. (All
right) Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love. (Well)

The Almighty God himself is not the only, not the, not the God just standing
out saying through Hosea, “I love you, Israel.” He’s also the God that stands up
before the nations and said: “Be still and know that I’m God (Yeah), that if you

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³ Amos 5:24.
[French:] Fellow American citizens. I say "American citizens" because I believe tonight more than any other time in my whole life that we have arrived at the point in life where we can see for ourselves a new destiny. (Yes) Our horizons are broader. I think the record of our racial group speaks with various languages testifying to the fact that we have been, since the lifting of the bands of slavery, law-abiding, honest, tax-paying citizens of America. (Yeah) [applause] And we believe that our record warrants for us (All right) the recognition of citizens of America. (Yes) We don't mean Negro citizens. We don't mean second-rate citizens. We simply mean citizens of America. (That's right) [applause] I have a responsibility to and for a group of students. Like possibly many of you out there before me, I have the responsibility of teaching them democracy. I don't have to remind you that when occurrences like these take place and many of the other things that have happened occur, and when they begin firing questions away at you, you feel just a little unequal to the task of formulating them into real citizens of America. (Yes) But that's our solemn responsibility. And each of us, I'm sure, has accepted that responsibility, and we are going to do our best with molding these [recording interrupted] . . . active in civic and social affairs in the community. [applause] An upstanding, law-abiding citizen, one who would deprive no one of rights that belong to them. (All right) [applause] It has already been pointed out to you time and again that she was ordered from her seat on the bus, a public conveyance for which she had paid the legal fare. (Well) [applause] What dif-

4. King refers to Hosea 11:1 ("When Israel was a child, I loved him"). He may also refer to Psalm 46:10 ("Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!").

5. The phrase "fleecy locks and black complexion" is from a poem, "The Negro's Complaint" (1788), by British poet William Cowper. In later speeches King included longer quotations from this poem (see note 5, "The 'New Negro' of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story," June 1956, p. 283 in this volume).
ference does it make even if the president of the United States—and [he's?] the greatest individual in these United States of America that I know about [applause]—if he had gotten on the bus? Mrs. Parks was a lady, and any gentleman would allow a lady to have a seat. (Speak up) [applause] But because other passengers came after she was seated, she was ordered to leave her seat, and because she refused, she was put in jail. I have the responsibility, and it's not an easy task, to present to you the victim of this gross injustice, almost inhumanity, and absolute undemocratic principle: Mrs. Rosa Parks. [applause] [recording interrupted]

You know, during my life I've heard tell of a number of false alarms, but I have a responsibility of presenting another victim. President, late President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said some years ago, in one of his fireside chats to the people of this nation, that there is nothing to fear but fear itself. (All right) [applause] When we become victims of fear, it is hard indeed to explain our actions. (All right) Thank God I feel that I can say this evening that we are moving sanely and soberly. We are not allowing our emotions to control us. We are guiding and channeling our emotions to the extent that we feel that God shall give us the victory. [applause]

The press would have us believe that someone has organized some goon squads, whatever that is [laughter], whose purpose it was to molest and intimidate those who attempted to board the city buses this morning. But if that kind of thing happened, thank God I don't know anything about it. (That's right) But somebody became a victim of that kind of fear and notion. And you know, the psychologists have a way of saying that if you begin thinking of things strong enough, you can become such a victim of that kind of thing until it becomes a reality to you. [applause] Somebody saw a young man, a citizen of America, attending the courtesies that any young man would attend a lady walking down the street. And he was so engrossed with the idea of intimidation and violence that even the light, gentle touch of the hand appeared to be an act of molesting to this individual. (That's right, Speak up)

Now the press again would have you believe that here was a young man who latched on to a lady who was attempting to board the bus and wrestled her away from the door, saying, "You can't ride this bus. I won't allow you to do it." (Yes) [applause] But I have the responsibility of presenting to you the gentleman that is so erroneously accused. Again we present a young man, an American citizen, one who is preparing himself for greater service to this country, a student at Alabama State College [applause], a member of the First Baptist Church of the city of Montgomery [applause], a young man who is so industrious and zealous about his undertaking and his studies, until he gets up early hours in the morning and carries a paper route before he goes to school and makes good grades in the classroom. I have the responsibility of presenting Mr. Fred Daniel. (Yes) [applause] [recording interrupted]

They have the moral courage to stand. But these alone cannot win this victory

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6. Two months later Parks commented, "I wasn't then and [have] not since then been asked to speak at any of the meetings. I appreciate the fact of not having to make speeches[,] for other people have suffered indignities, and it is really our fight rather than mine" (Parks, interview by Willie Mae Lee, 5 February 1956). (The complete citation, including archival location, for all documents referenced in the notes may be found in the Calendar of Documents.)
that inevitably must be ours. (All right) [applause] Each of us here, and those who are not here tonight, have a responsibility in this great task. (Yes) And I’m pleading to you, this evening, to let every one of us, under God, join our hands and hearts together in this great concerted effort. And let each of us go out from here resolved as never before in our lives, to never give back one inch until we shall be accorded the full respect and rights. [applause] [recording interrupted]

[King:] I think we are moving on with a great deal of enthusiasm this evening, the type of thing that we need in our efforts. And we are certainly very happy to see that, indeed. We at least see that you are with this cause and you are with our struggle. It is a struggle for all of us, not just one, but all (Yeah), and we’re gonna stick with it. I’d like to say just before we move to the next point that I’m very happy to see all over this audience some of the outstanding figures from over the state. (Right) Montgomery is not only here but I see folk here from Mobile and Birmingham and Tuscaloosa and some of our other points in Alabama. [applause] I see Reverend Ware here from Birmingham, one of the outstanding ministers of our state and a great champion of civil rights; and then that stalwart, militant Christian gentleman, Emory Jackson of the Birmingham World, we’re certainly happy to see him here, one of the greats in our struggle for democracy and first-class citizenship; and many others that I will not take our time to mention. I’m very happy to see them here.

Now at this point, Reverend Abernathy, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Montgomery, will come to us and read the resolutions and recommendations. I want you to listen to this, and be very careful in listening to it. Listen with a great deal of interest so that you will know everything he said, because we want you to vote on it after it’s over. Reverend Abernathy of the First Baptist Church.

[Abernathy]: Thank you, Dr. King. All of you who know me, know very well that I would love to make a speech now. [laughter, applause] I, whenever you start talking about freedom and start talking about justice, you know I have something to say about it. (Well) And you further know, those of you who heard me on this past Sunday morning by radio, beyond a shadow of doubt I stand for integration in this American society. (Amen) [applause] But I have been asked to read these resolutions and I want to read them carefully to you in order that you might understand them. I’ve only received them a few moments ago, and it may be that I’ll read slow. I’m sorry that some members of the press have dismissed themselves, because there are some things in here I’d really want them to have. [applause] I certainly hope, I certainly hope that the television man will come back. (Well) [applause] You know, it isn’t fair to get part of it. I want you to get all of it. [applause] I guess I better read. (Read) [laughter, applause] Resolution:

Whereas, there are thousands of Negroes in the city and county of Montgom-

7. James Lowell Ware (1899–1975) was born in Wetumpka, Alabama. He became pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in 1941 and remained there for the next thirty years. He was president of the Birmingham Baptist Ministers Conference for twenty-five years and the first African American to run for council in Birmingham, in 1963. He was secretary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention for many years. Emory Overton Jackson (1908–1975), born in Buena Vista, Georgia, edited the Birmingham World, Alabama’s leading black newspaper.
ery who ride buses owned and operated by the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated, and

Whereas, said citizens have been riding buses owned and operated by said company over a number of years, and

Whereas, said citizens, over a number of years, and on many occasions, have been insulted, embarrassed (Yeah), and have been made to suffer great fear of bodily harm (That's right) by drivers of buses owned and operated by said bus company (Yeah), and

Whereas, the drivers of said buses have never requested a white passenger riding on any of its buses to relinquish his seat and to stand so that a Negro may take his seat. [applause] However, said drivers have on many occasions, too numerous to mention, requested Negro passengers on said buses to relinquish their seats and to stand so that white passengers may take their seats [applause], and

Whereas, said citizens of Montgomery city and county pay their fares just as all other persons who are passengers on said buses (All right) and are entitled to fair and equal treatment (Yeah) [applause], and

Whereas, there has been any number of arrests of Negroes caused by drivers of said buses, and they are constantly put in jail for refusing to give white passengers their seats and to stand. (All right) [applause]

Whereas, in March of 1955, a committee of citizens did have a conference with one of the officials of the said bus line, at which time said officials arranged a meeting between attorneys representing the Negro citizens of this city and attorneys representing the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated, and the city of Montgomery, and

Whereas, the official of the bus line promised that as a result of the meeting between said attorneys he would issue a statement of policy clarifying the law with reference to the seating of Negro passengers on the buses, and

Whereas, said attorneys did have a meeting and did discuss the matter of clarifying the law; however, the official of said bus lines did not make public the statement as to its policy with reference to the seating of passengers on its buses, and

Whereas, since that time, at least two ladies have been arrested for an alleged violation of the city segregation law with reference to bus travel, and

Whereas, said citizens of Montgomery city and county believe that they have been grossly mistreated as passengers on the buses owned and operated by said bus company (All right) in spite of the fact that they are in the majority with reference to the number of passengers riding the said buses. [applause]

In light of these observations, be it therefore resolved as follows:

Number One. That the citizens of Montgomery are requesting that every citizen in Montgomery, regardless of race, color, or creed, to refrain from riding buses owned and operated in the city of Montgomery by the Montgomery Lines, Incorporated [applause], until some arrangement has been worked out [applause] between said citizens and the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated.

Now I'm reading it slow and I want you to hear every word of it.

Number Two. That every person owning or who has access to an automobile will use their automobiles in assisting other persons to get to work without charge. [applause]

Number Three. That the employees, I repeat, that the employers of persons whose employees live a great distance from them, as much as possible, afford transportation for your own employees. [applause]
That the Negro citizens of Montgomery are ready and willing to send a delegation of citizens to the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated, to discuss their grievances and to work out a solution for the same. (All right) [applause]

Be it further resolved that we have not—I said, we have not, we are not, and we have no intentions of—using any unlawful means or any intimidation (Go ahead) to persuade persons not to ride the Montgomery City Lines buses. [applause] However, we call upon your conscience (All right), both moral and spiritual, to give your wholehearted support (That's right) to this worthy undertaking. [applause] We believe we have a just complaint, and we are willing to discuss this matter with the proper authorities. (Yes) [applause]

Thus ends the resolution.8 [applause] Dr. King, prayerfully, spiritually, sincerely, I wish to offer a motion. I move that this resolution shall be adopted. (Dr. King, I second the motion) [applause]

[King:] It has been moved, it has been moved, and seconded that these recommendations and these resolutions would be accepted and adopted by the citizens of Montgomery. Are you ready for the question? (Yes) [thundering response]

All in favor, stand on your feet. [enthusiastic applause] Opposers do likewise. Opposers do likewise. [laughter] There is a prevailing majority.

I certainly want to thank you, my friends, for this tremendous response. [pause] My friends, in order that nothing, that we will not be misquoted, and particularly with the resolutions, copies are prepared for the press; so that if the press would like to secure copies, they may do that, so that we will not be misquoted. [enthusiastic applause] [recording interrupted]

. . . said here this evening because everything is being recorded. Reverend Glasco is here on hand recording everything that is being said, so that we're not doing anything in the dark here. Everything is recorded. [applause] Now my friends, I just want to say once more to you. I've got to leave, I have presided to this point. It so happens that we have a group of very fine men who can do a much better job than I've done, and we're gonna let them do it. You know, we preachers have many engagements sometime. And I've got to go speak to the fathers and sons of this city; so that I'm gonna have to leave.

But just before leaving I want to say this. I want to urge you. You have voted, and you have done it with a great deal of enthusiasm, and I want to express my appreciation to you, on behalf of everybody here. Now let us go out to stick together and stay with this thing until the end. [applause] Now it means sacrificing, yes, it

8. A mimeographed version of these resolutions also included, in King's handwriting, the three demands the MIA presented to the bus company and city commissioners at an 8 December 1955 meeting arranged by the Alabama Council on Human Relations: "Better treatment and more courteous actions"; "That the seating arrangements be changed to a first come-first serve basis"; "That Negro bus drivers be employed, especially on predominately Negro lines. Since about 75 percent of the income for the bus company come from Negroes, some of that money should come back to them." On the verso of the document King added, "Bus drivers to complement Negro Police in Colored district. There are times that Negro Policemen serve whites. "On the predominately Negro routes, run every other bus special for Negroes" (MIA, Resolution with Proposals, 8 December 1955). On 9 December 1955 the Montgomery Advertiser reported that Jack Crenshaw, counsel for Montgomery City Lines, suggested having an exclusively Negro bus (see Tom Johnson, "4-Hour Huddle; Bus Boycott Conference Fails to Find Solution," Montgomery Advertiser, 9 December 1955).
means sacrificing at points. But there are some things that we've got to learn to sacrifice for. (Yeah) And we've got to come to the point that we are determined not to accept a lot of things that we have been accepting in the past.

So I'm urging you now. We have the facilities for you to get to your jobs, and we are putting, we have the cabs there at your service. Automobiles will be at your service, and don't be afraid to use up any of the gas. If you have it, if you are fortunate enough to have a little money, use it for a good cause. Now my automobile is gonna be in it, it has been in it, and I'm not concerned about how much gas I'm gonna use. (That's right) I want to see this thing work.

And we will not be content until oppression is wiped out of Montgomery, and really out of America. We won't be content until that is done. We are merely insisting on the dignity and worth of every human personality. And I don't stand here, I'm not arguing for any selfish person. I've never been on a bus in Montgomery. But I would be less than a Christian if I stood back and said, because I don't ride the bus, I don't have to ride a bus, that it doesn't concern me. [applause] I will not be content. I can hear a voice saying, "If you do it unto the least of these, my brother, you do it unto me." 9 [applause]

And I won't rest, I will face intimidation, and everything else, along with these other stalwart fighters for democracy and for citizenship. We don't mind it, so long as justice comes out of it. And I've come to see now that as we struggle for our rights, maybe some of them will have to die. But somebody said, if a man doesn't have something that he'll die for, he isn't fit to live. [enthusiastic applause]

Now, let me tell you this. You know, it takes money to do what we're about to do. We can't do it clapping hands now and we can't do it saying "Amen." (That's right) That's not enough. That is, that encourages the speaker to go on, but that isn't enough. We need money to do this and we're gonna have to get ourselves some money tonight. And we're gonna ask everybody here, that's everybody outside and inside, to get ready to make a contribution to this cause. (That's right) And the money will be well used. And the committee will tell you, someone will tell you what it will be used for. Now, we're asking Reverend Bonner to come here, from the First CME Church, to come and take this offering. I'm gonna ask Brother Nixon to assist him and we're gonna, I'm gonna ask—huh?—Brother Matthews, also. Where's Brother Matthews? Yeah. Brother Matthews here, the president of our NAACP, to come here and assist.10 Now I want to say this. We're gonna need somebody to go outside and collect money. So that I'm gonna ask about, we'd say about ten people, I'm gonna ask ten of the ministers of the city to assist us in taking this offering. [Rev. Bonner begins calling out names] My friends, let me say this. Just a moment, Reverend Bonner, we don't want anybody to leave until this is over. I'm gonna leave mine as I leave, and this will continue. Reverend Bennett will continue in presiding. I'm sorry I have to leave, but I'm certainly happy to see your enthusiasm.

At. MLKJrP-GAMK: Box 107.

9. King quotes from Matthew 25:40: "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"
10. Robert L. Matthews, president of the Montgomery NAACP branch, would serve on the MIA executive board.
DATE: January 30, 1956
TIME: 11:00 a.m. - 2:35 p.m.

Executive Board "Call" Meeting

This meeting was called because there are some "important" issues to discuss rather than to hold off until Thursday.

Prayer:

Rev. Alford: Said that he had been pondering over a proposal which was made to Rev. Binion by some of his "white friends" some weeks back. (Apparently the Executive Board rejected it then) Rev. Alford feels that it is "worthy of our studying it" "I think we should go back under those conditions.

Rev. Binion: To the question of the nature of the proposal; Mr. Macrosia (his "white friend") explained the proposal to him before the three N. ministers had been "hoodwinked" into a "compromise" The City had decided that if Negroes would give Whites the first two seats on the Jackson, Day and Cleveland*st. routes, and on the rest of the routes give the first six seats to the Whites - an agreement could be reached."

Mr. E. D Nixon: "Did the proposal of two seats mean the long seat plus the next two seats?"

Rev. Binion: "I don't know."

Mr. Nixon: "If you talk about the first two seats, then that's the same as before. We would be returning to the same conditions, and if we accept it we are going to run into trouble, with the people who had been riding the bus. If that's what you're going to do, I don't want to be here when you tell the people."

Mr. White: "This morning was the test. The rain was pouring and they still walked. If they don't want to go back, I don't see why we should decide otherwise, folks just made too much sacrifice. I hold that we should go on to the end. I think we should stay just where we're at."

Rev. King: "I've seen along the way where some of the ministers are getting weary. Says he won't call names. If you have that impression that should go back to the bus under the same conditions. We won't ostracize you. We should "iron it out here" (executive meetings) and show where in we shouldn't go back"

*Jackson, Day and Cleveland streets are predominantly Negro used routes
Rev. Alford: "There's a time in the life of any crisis when you ought to be reasonable; the parties concerned ought to "give and take". If we can get two out of the three demands (Alford called the "concessions"), I think we ought to accept. We have no protection to give these people - our wives and daughters* are not cut there. We can arrive at some type of agreement that is pleasing even to us."

Rev. King: "From my limited contact, if we went tonight and asked the people to get back on the bus, we would be ostracized. They wouldn't get back. We shouldn't give people the illusion that there are no sacrifices involved, that it could be ended soon. My intimidations are a small price to pay if victory can be won. We shouldn't make the illusion that they won't have to walk. I believe to the bottom of my heart that the majority of Negroes would ostracize us. They are willing to walk.

(changing the subject), "I think this is a basic point." We agreed that in the event the Chicago franchise was renewed and ours was rejected, we would go to court. Attorney Gray went to New York last week for a few days to discuss this whole problem with Thurgood Marshall and another lawyer. "Jty. Gray has drawn up two suits: one demanding that the segregation law of the city is null and void because it is unconstitutional in the process of litigation, all intimidation be cut lawed. His joint suit is to be filed in the Federal Court this afternoon or tomorrow. We are in the process of drawing up a list of plaintiffs (those who can stand up under intimidation and who are not susceptible to losing their jobs). So far we have Miss Calvin, Miss Smith, Mrs. Reese, Mrs. Hamilton, and Mrs. McDonald. This suit on the City of Montgomery would go directly to the Federal Courts, but it would be in the name of the NAACP. What are we to do for the people in the process of litigation? The Court has 20 days to answer - don't know how long the litigation would take.

Mr. Saye: Number 1 "issue on ultimatum giving a time limit (leaving out goal 2) to the Commission stating our position to see what they would do; 2, we need to do that to have a point from which to prepare people to return to the buses. We need to train people to go back to the bus. We would disgrace ourselves before the world if we give up now.

Mr. Nixon: "Hold people off the bus for the end of the 20 days, instructing them about going back to the bus. At least for the first 20 days from tomorrow keep them off the bus."

Rev. King: "It is very important that misinformation does not leak out about the NAACP and the Court action until its printed in the newspaper. We want to surprise the whites. Don't mention the 20 days. Some liberal whites say that because of the stigma that has been put on the NAACP, its part in this should not be mentioned because of its effect

*Rev Bennet has referred to the masses of Negroes, those who had once ridden the buses, but who are now walking, as "those in the gutter".
on a public sentiment. We should use the legal structure of the NAACP, but refer to the participants as "legal citizens".

Dr. Says: "Because we can't settle this within the framework of the law, we should state publicly that we're taking it to the Federal Court.

Rev. King: "By the way, I've found out that the Negro lady who was beat up by a Negro man a few days ago is the cook for the mayor; she attends the mass meetings and tells the mayor what happened the next morning. We also found out that Sellers let 3 Negro prisoners attend the mass meetings so that they can tell him what has happened.

Atty Gray: About selection of plaintiff: I think it's good strategy to have at least one minister, people of different ages, and people with different grievances. It's not good strategy to have Rev. King because he's too much in the "limelight".

Rev. King: "I think it's very important in throwing sentiment our way if we have a minister as a plaintiff. Who (of 25 present) will volunteer? after discussion in which Rev. King said that he knew of many in the meeting who had been fired and other wise intimidated, all no one would volunteer.

Rev King reiterated their stand on a policy of non-violence. It was suggested in this connection that we go "on record not to come to the rescue of people arrested for carrying concealed weapons."


Atty. Gray: (A. H. Langford not present) The branch NAACP made an agreement with me about a figure for my work for the Mrs. Parks' case. Explains that the retaining fee ($50/wk for each lawyer) covers anything that comes up other that Court cases.

Rev. King: "I would ask this question even if A. H. Langford was here: Is it necessary to retain two lawyers?"

A. H. Gray: "I'll leave while you discuss it." (He leaves the room)

Dr. Says: "I'll never did see the wisdom of hiring two lawyers."

It was agreed that the lawyers be paid $500 (the figure the two lawyers had submitted) for their work from December 11 to January 4, and from that time retain the two lawyers at $50/wk each until the case is filed in the Federal Court. They will then be paid a "general fee" which will be added to that fee paid by the branch NAACP (this money will come from collections at the mass meetings) Each lawyer will submit a bill for "services rendered" to get away from having to pay the retainer featuring as after Court action.

Announcement: Mass meeting tonight at 7:00 p. m. at First Baptist Church

Meeting ends with prayer.
Executive Board Call Meeting
Monday, January 39, 1956
11:00 A.M. - 2:35 P.M.
Rev. M.L. King, Presiding

Pray.

This meeting was called because there are some important issues to discuss rather than to hold off until Thursday.

Rev. Aldred said that he had been pondering over a proposal which was made to Rev. Binion by one of his white friends some weeks back. Apparently the Executive Board rejected it. Rev. Aldred feels that it is "worth of an studying." I think we should go back under those conditions.

Rev. Binion to the question as to the nature of the proposal:

Mr. Necasie (his white friend) explained the proposal to him before the three N. ministers had been "hoodwinked" into a "compromise." The city had decided that if N. would give W. the first two seats on the Jackson, Day and Cleveland St. route and on the rest of the route give the first six seats to W. -- an agreement could be reached.

Mr. E.D. Nixon: Did the proposal of two seats mean the long seat plus the next two seats? Mr. Binion: "I don't know."

Mr. Nixon: If you talk about the first two seats, then that's the same as before. We would then turn it to the same condition, and if we accept it we are going to run into trouble with the people who had been riding them.

"If that's what you're going to do, I don't want to be here when you tell the people."

Mr. White: "This morning was the test." The rain was pouring and they still walked. "If they don't want to go back, I'm not sure why we should decide otherwise, but just made too much sacrifice. Should that we should go on to the end? I think we should stay just where we're at."

Rev. King: "I see the way where some of the ministers are getting very angry."

Mr. Nixon says he won't challenge. "If I have that impression (that we should go back to the buses), we won't oppose you. We should iron it out here (at a meeting) and show where we shouldn't go back."

* Jackson, Day and Cleveland streets are predominantly Negro residential.
Rev. Alford—"There's a time in the life of any crisis when you go ought to be reasonable. The parties concerned ought to "give and take." If we can get two out of the three demands (Alford called them "concessions"), I think we ought to accept. We have no protection to give these people—our wives and daughters are not out there. We can arrive at some type of agreement that is pleasing to us."

Rev. King—"From my limited contact, if we went tonight and asked the people to get back on the line, we would be ostracized. They wouldn't get back. We shouldn't give people the illusion that there are no sacrifices involved, that it could be ended soon. My intimations are as small a price to pay if victory can be won." We shouldn't make the illusion that they won't have to walk. I believe to the bottom of my heart that the majority of Negroes would ostracize us. They are willing to walk.

Rev. King (changing the subject), "I think this is a basic point."

We agreed that in the event the Chicago franchise was renewed and ours was rejected, we would go to court. A lawyer Gray went to New York last week for a few days to discuss this whole problem with Thurgood Marshall and another lawyer. Mr. Gray has drawn up two suits: 1) demanding that the segregation law of the city is null and void because it is unconstitutional as in the process of litigation, all intimidation be put aside. This suit is to be filed in the Federal Court this afternoon or tomorrow. We are in the process of drawing up a list of plaintiffs (those who can stand up under intimidation and who are not susceptible to losing their job). So far, we have Miss Colving, Miss Smith, Miss Reese, Mrs. Hamilton, and Mrs. McDonald. This suit on the City of Montgomery would go directly to the Federal Court, but it will first be filed in the name of the NAACP.

Rev. King—What are we to do for the people in the process of litigation? The court has 20 days to answer—don't know how long the litigation would take.
(3) giving a time limit

Mr. Saye - Number 1, issue an ultimatum (leaving out goals) to the Commission stating our position to see what they would do. If we do that to have a point from which to prepare people to return to the bus lines. We need to train people to go back to the buses. "We would disgrace ourselves before the world if we give in now."

Mr. Dawson - Hold people off the lines for the end of the 20 days, instructing them about going back to the lines. At least for the first 20 days, from to tomorrow keep them off the lines.

Rev. King - It is very important that this information does not leak out about the NAACP and the court action until it is printed in the newspaper. We want to surprise the whites. Don't mention the 20 days. Some liberal whites say that because of the stigma that has been put on the NAACP, it part in this should not be mentioned because of its effect on public sentiment. We should use the legal structure of the NAACP, but refer to the participants as "legal citizens."

Dr. King - Because we can't settle this within the framework of the law, we should state publicly that we're taking it to the Federal Court.

Rev. King - By the way, I found out that the lady who was shot up last week a few weeks ago is the cook for the mayor; she attends the mass meetings and tells the mayor what happened the next morning. We also found out that Mrs. Ford has let 31 prisoners attend the mass meetings so that they can tell him what has happened.

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I think it's good strategy to have at least a minister, people of different ages, and people with different grievances. It's not good strategy to have Rev. King because he's too much in the 'front line.'

Rev. King - I think it's very important in throwing sentiment your way if we have a minister as a plaintiff. Who (of 25 present) will volunteer?

After discussion in which Rev. King said that he knew of many in the meeting who had been fired and otherwise intimidated, still no one would volunteer.
Rev. King reiterated their stand on a policy of non-violence. It was suggested in this connection that we go on record to come to the rescue of people arrested for carrying concealed weapons?

Rev. King — about lawyers files.

Att. Gray (Att. Langford not present) The branch Naacp made an agreement with me about a figure for my work for the Parks case. Expla that the retaining fee (so/urk for each lawyer) covers anything that comes up other than court cases.

Rev. King — I would ask this question even if Att. Langford were here: Do it necessary to retain two lawyers?

Att. Gray — “I’ll leave while you discuss it.” (He leaves the room.)

Dr. Yates — “I never did see the wisdom of having two lawyers.”

It was agreed that the lawyers be paid $200.00 (the figure the two lawyers had submitted) for their work from Dec 11 to Jan 4, and from that time retain the two lawyers at $50/oh. Each until the case is filed in the Federal Court. They will then be paid a “general fee” which will be added to that fee paid by the branch Naacp (this money will come from collections at the mass meetings).

Each lawyer will be paid submit a bill for services rendered to get away from having to pay the retainers featuring a, after court action. Announcement of Mass meeting tonight at 7:00 p.m. at First Baptist Church.

Meeting ends with prayers.
Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott

20 December 1956
[Montgomery, Ala.]

King reads a prepared statement to about 2,500 persons attending mass meetings at Holt Street and First Baptist Churches. He urges "the Negro citizens of Montgomery to return to the busses tomorrow morning on a non-segregated basis." An audience question about segregated benches downtown prompted King to acknowledge that the Supreme Court ruling applied only on city buses. A Birmingham News account of the meetings reported that he admitted "it is true we got more out of this (boycott) than we went in for. We started out to get modified segregation (on buses) but we got total integration." At six a.m. the following morning King joined E. D. Nixon, Ralph

1. King later remembered that he had "carefully prepared [the statement] in the afternoon" before the meeting. It is reprinted in its entirety in Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 170–172. See also Excerpt, Statement on End of Bus Boycott, 20 December 1956.
For more than twelve months now, we, the Negro citizens of Montgomery have been engaged in a non-violent protest against injustices and indignities experienced on city buses. We came to see that, in the long run, it is more honorable to walk in dignity than ride in humiliation. So in a quiet dignified manner, we decided to substitute tired feet for tired souls, and walk the streets of Montgomery until the sagging walls of injustice had been crushed by the battering rams of surging justice.

Often our movement has been referred to as a boycott movement. The word boycott, however, does not adequately describe the true spirit of our movement. The word boycott is suggestive of merely an economic squeeze devoid of any positive value. We have never allowed ourselves to get bogged in the negative; we have always sought to accentuate the positive. Our aim has never been to put the bus company out of business, but rather to put justice in business.

These twelve months have not at all been easy. Our feet have often been tired. We have struggle against tremendous odds to maintain alternative transportation. There have been moments when roaring waters of disappointment poured upon us in staggering torrents. We can remember days when unfavorable court decisions came upon us like tidal waves, leaving us treading in the deep and confused waters of despair. But amid all of this we have kept going with the faith that as we struggle, God struggles with us, and that the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending toward justice.\(^4\) We have lived under the agony and darkness of Good Friday with the conviction that one day the heightening glow of Easter would emerge on the horizon. We have seen truth crucified and goodness buried, but we have kept going with the conviction that truth crushed to earth will rise again.\(^5\)

Now our faith seems to be vindicated. This morning the long awaited mandate from the United States Supreme Court concerning bus segregation came to Montgomery. This mandate expresses in terms that are crystal clear that segregation in public transportation is both legally and sociologically invalid. In the light of this mandate and the unanimous vote rendered by the Montgomery Improvement Association about a month ago, the year old protest against city busses


\(^5\) This phrase, which became commonplace in King's oratory, may have come to his attention through John Haynes Holmes, "Salute to Montgomery," \textit{Liberation} 1, no. 10 (December 1956): 5; "The great Theodore Parker, abolitionist preacher in the days before the Civil War, answered this doubt and fear when he challenged an impatient world, 'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.'"

\(^6\) This line is from the poem \textit{The Battlefield} (1839) by William Cullen Bryant.
is officially called off, and the Negro citizens of Montgomery are urged to return to the busses tomorrow morning on a non-segregated basis.

I cannot close without giving just a word of caution. Our experience and growth during this past year of united non-violent protest has been of such that we cannot be satisfied with a court “victory” over our white brothers. We must respond to the decision with an understanding of those who have oppressed us and with an appreciation of the new adjustments that the court order poses for them. We must be able to face up honestly to our own shortcomings. We must act in such a way as to make possible a coming together of white people and colored people on the basis of a real harmony of interests and understanding. We seek an integration based on mutual respect.

This is the time that we must evince calm dignity and wise restraint. Emotions must not run wild. Violence must not come from any of us, for if we become victimized with violent intents, we will have walked in vain, and our twelve months of glorious dignity will be transformed into an eve of gloomy catastrophe. As we go back to the busses let us be loving enough to turn an enemy into a friend. We must now move from protest to reconciliation. It is my firm conviction that God is working in Montgomery. Let all men of goodwill, both Negro and white, continue to work with Him. With this dedication we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

TD. MLKP-MBU: Box 2.
December 19, 1956

INTEGRATED BUS SUGGESTIONS

This is a historic week because segregation on buses now been declared unconstitutional. Within a few days the Supreme Court
Mandate will reach Montgomery and you will be re-boarding integrated
buses. This places upon us all a tremendous responsibility of main-
taining, in face of what could be some unpleasantness, a calm and lov-
ing dignity befitting good citizens and members of our Race. If there
is violence in word or deed it must not be our people who commit it.

For your help and convince the following suggestions are made.
Will you read, study and memorize them so that our non-violent deter-
mination may not be endangered. First, some general suggestions:

1. Not all white people are opposed to integrated buses. Accept
goodwill on the part of many.
2. The whole bus is now for the use of all people. Take a vacant
seat.
3. Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete non-violence
in word and action as you enter the bus.
4. Demonstrate the calm dignity of our Montgomery people in your
actions.
5. In all things observe ordinary rules of courtesy and good be-
havior.
6. Remember that this is not a victory for Negroes alone, but for all
Montgomery and the South. Do not boast! It is not brag!
7. Be quiet but friendly; proud, but not arrogant; joyous, but not
boastful.
8. Be loving enough to absorb evil and understanding enough to turn
an enemy into a friend.

NOW FOR SOME SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS:

1. The bus driver is in charge of the bus and has been instructed to
obey the law. Assume that he will cooperate in helping you occupy
any vacant seat.
2. Do not deliberately sit by a white person, unless there is no other
seat.
3. In sitting down by a person, white or colored, say "May I" or
"Fardon me" as you sit. This is a common courtesy.
4. If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck,
do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times.
5. In case of an incident, talk as little as possible, and always in
a quiet tone. Do not get up from your seat! Report all serious
incidents to the bus driver.
6. For the first few days try to get on the bus with a friend in whose
non-violence you have confidence. You can uphold one another by a
glance or a prayer.
7. If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his
defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual
force to carry on the struggle for justice.
8. According to your own ability and personality, do not be afraid to
experiment with new and creative techniques for achieving recon-
ciliation and social change.
9. If you feel you cannot take it, walk for another week or two.
We have confidence in our people. GOD BLESS YOU ALL.

THE MONTGOMERY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
THE REV. M. L. KING, JR., PRESIDENT
THE REV. W. J. POWELL, SECRETARY
561219-001
CSKC, INP
Sermon file
folder 140
"Integrated Bus Suggestions"
December 19, 1956

INTERGRATED BUS SUGGESTIONS

This is a historic week because segregation on buses now been declared unconstitutional. Within a few days the Supreme Court mandate will reach Montgomery and you will be re-boarding integrated buses. This places upon us all a tremendous responsibility of maintaining, in face of what could be some unpleasantness, a calm and loving dignity befitting good citizens and members of our race. If there is violence in word or deed it must not be our people who commit it.

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7. If another person is being molested, do not arise to go to his defense, but pray for the oppressor and use moral and spiritual force to carry on the struggle for justice.
8. According to your own ability and personality, do not be afraid to experiment with new and creative techniques for achieving reconciliation and social change.
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8. According to your own ability and personality, do experiment with new and creative techniques for civil and social change.
9. If you feel you cannot take it, walk for it. Others have been killed and arrested because of what they could not do.}

THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. PAPERS PROJECT

THE REV. M. L. KING, JR., PRESIDENT
THE REV. W. J. POWELL, SECRETARY
December 19, 1956

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9. According to your own ability and personality, do not be afraid to experiment with new and creative techniques for achieving reconciliation and social change.
10. If you feel you cannot take it, walk for another week or two. We have confidence in our people. GOD BLESS YOU ALL.

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SIX PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

1. **Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.** It is active nonviolent resistance to evil.

2. **Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.** The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.

3. **Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.** Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims.

4. **Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.** Nonviolence willingly accepts the consequences to its acts.

5. **Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.** Nonviolence resists violence to the spirit as well as the body. Nonviolence love is active, not passive. Nonviolence love does not sink to the level of the hater. Love restores community and resists injustice. Nonviolence recognizes the fact that all life is interrelated.

6. **Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.** The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

From The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change
Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action

STEP ONE: INFORMATION GATHERING

Identify the issues in your community and/or school in need of positive change. To understand the issue, problem or injustice facing a person, community, or institution, you must increase your understanding of the problem. Your investigation should include all sides of the issue and may include formal research and listening to the experiences of others.

STEP TWO: EDUCATE OTHERS

It is essential to inform others, including your opposition, about your issue. In order to cause change, the people in the community must be aware of the issue and understand its impact. By educating others you will minimize misunderstanding and gain support and allies.

STEP THREE: PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Check and affirm your faith in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Causing change requires dedication and long hours of work. Meet with others regularly to stay focused on your goal. Prepare yourself to accept sacrifices, if necessary, in your work for justice.

STEP FOUR: NEGOTIATIONS

Using grace, humor and intelligence, confront the individuals whom need to participate in this change. Discuss a plan for addressing and resolving these injustices. Look for what is positive in every action and statement the opposition makes. Do not seek to humiliate the opponent but call forth the good in the opponent. Look for ways in which the opponent can become an ally.

STEP FIVE: DIRECT ACTION

These are actions taken to convince others to work with you in resolving the injustices. Direct action imposes a “creative tension” into the conflict. Direct action is most effective when it illustrates the injustice it seeks to correct. There are hundreds of direct action, including:

- Boycotts --- refusal to buy products
- Marches and rallies
- Letter-writing and petition campaigns
- Political action and voting
- Public art and performance

STEP SIX: RECONCILIATION

Nonviolence seeks friendship and understanding. Nonviolence does not seek to defeat the opponent. Nonviolence is directed against evil systems, oppressive policies, and unjust acts, not against persons.

Adapted from the essay, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, Martin Luther King Jr.
# Analyze a Written Document

## Meet the document.

Type (check all that apply):
- [ ] Letter
- [ ] Speech
- [ ] Patent
- [ ] Telegram
- [ ] Court document
- [ ] Chart
- [ ] Newspaper
- [ ] Advertisement
- [ ] Press Release
- [ ] Memorandum
- [ ] Report
- [ ] Email
- [ ] Identification document
- [ ] Presidential document
- [ ] Other

Describe it as if you were explaining to someone who can’t see it.

*Think about: Is it handwritten or typed? Is it all by the same person? Are there stamps or other marks? What else do you see on it?*

## Observe its parts.

- Who wrote it?
- Who read/received it?
- When is it from?
- Where is it from?

## Try to make sense of it.

- What is it talking about?
- Write one sentence summarizing this document.
- Why did the author write it?
- Quote evidence from the document that tells you this.
- What was happening at the time in history this document was created?

## Use it as historical evidence.

- What did you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else?
- What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?