

The Economics of the Civil Rights Movement: An Historical Investigation

High School United States History
Time Required: 1-2 Class Periods



Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) United States History:

History Standard: Students will examine significant ideas, beliefs, and themes; organize patterns and events; and analyze how individuals and societies have changed over time in Maryland, and the United States.

5.4.3.a Explain how boycotts and sit-ins were economic modes of protesting segregation

I. Engage the Students

Have students read Martin Luther King's December 1955 speech. After reading, have them answer the questions that follow.

There Comes A Time

Martin Luther King, Jr.
December 5, 1955

...We are here this evening for serious business. We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens, and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. We are here also because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth.

But we are here in a specific sense because of the bus situation in Montgomery. 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. For many years now, Negroes in Montgomery and so many other areas have been inflicted with the paralysis of crippling fear on buses in our community. On so many occasions, Negroes have been intimidated and humiliated and oppressed because of the sheer fact that they were Negroes...

Just the other day, just last Thursday to be exact, one of the finest citizens in Montgomery- not one of the finest Negro citizens, but one of the finest citizens in Montgomery- was taken from a bus and carried to jail and arrested because she refused to get up to give her seat to a white person. Now the press would have us believe that she refused to leave a reserved section for Negroes, but I want you to know this evening that there is no reserved section. The law has never been clarified at that point...

Mrs. Rosa Parks is a fine person. 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...

And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. 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. 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. There comes a time.

We are here, we are here this evening because we are tired now. And I want to say that we are not here advocating violence. We have never done that... The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest. That's all.

...We only assemble here because of our desire to see right exist. 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.

And we are not wrong; we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong... And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I want to say that in all of our actions, we must stick together. Unity is the great need of the hour, and if we are united we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve. And don't let anybody frighten you. We are not afraid of what we are doing, because we are doing it within the law. There is never a time in our American democracy that we must ever think we are wrong when we protest. We reserve that right. When labor all over this nation came to see that it would be trampled over by a capitalistic power, it was nothing wrong with labor getting together and organizing and protesting for its rights. 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.

...we are only using the tools of justice. Not only are we using the tools of persuasion, but we've come to see that we've got to use the tools of coercion. Not only this thing a process of education, but it is also a process of legislation.

And as we stand and sit here this evening, and as we prepare ourselves for what lies ahead, let us go out with the grim and bold determination that we are going to stick together. We are going to work together. Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, "There lived a race of people, a black people. 'fleecy locks and black complexion', a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization." And we're going to do that. God grant that we will do it before it is too late. As we proceed with our program. Let us think of these things.

Source:

Wright, Kai. The African American Archive: The History of the Black Experience Through Documents. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 2001.

1. Describe life for African Americans in the United States at the time of Martin Luther King's 1955 speech.
2. What methods had African Americans used to protest those conditions prior to the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

Narrative: Read the narrative to the class, stressing the focus question at the end.

The foundation of the modern Civil Rights Movement can be found in the experiences of African Americans during and immediately following World War Two. Despite oppressive social conditions, almost 1 million black men and women served in the United States Armed Forces and nearly 2 million more worked in defense industries. Another 200,000 were employed in the Civil Service. Most of these workers migrated from the South to Northern and Western cities in order to benefit from those economic opportunities. Despite their increasing numbers in these fields, African Americans still suffered from unequal and racist conditions. But because of the emphasis on patriotism and unity during this time, large-scale political movements for civil rights and social justice were suppressed.

Civil rights issues were brought to the national stage once again by the African Americans who had migrated north and gained significant political influence in cities like New York, Chicago and Detroit. This influence was asserted through organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League. The NAACP, founded in 1909, focused on winning civil rights through the justice system. That campaign is best exemplified through the Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The Brown decision declared that separate was not equal in regards to America's public schools. Although enforcement of this decision was slow and spotty, it is considered one of the momentous events of the Civil Rights Movement.

African Americans, although initially excited about the Brown decision, soon came to realize that segregation was not over. Recognizing that the NAACP and its utilization of the legal system were not as successful or as quick as they wished, new groups with new methods of protest emerged. Although some groups, such as the City-Wide Young People's Forum in Baltimore and the New Negro Alliance in Washington, D.C., had already tried economic methods of dismantling Jim Crow, the popularity of such methods didn't soar until the infamous bus boycott in Montgomery Alabama in 1955. Soon groups all across the south were boycotting and staging sit-ins at segregated facilities. It was with this combination of legal and economic protest that the Civil Rights Movement and its mission became undeniable.

References:

“From Montgomery to Birmingham.” *Footsteps* May/June 2000.

Powledge, Fred. Free At Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.

Sitkoff, Harvard. The Struggle for Black Equality. Toronto: Harper & Collins, 1981.

Skotnes, Andor. “‘Buy Where You Work’: Boycotting for Jobs in African American Baltimore, 1933-1934.” *Journal of Social History*, Summer 1994.

“The NAACP.” *Cobblestone* February 2002.

Focus Question: **Determine the significance of economic protests to the success of the Civil Rights Movement.**

II. Conduct the Investigation

In order to answer the question you will examine several documents independently. Analyze each document by answering the following questions on your graphic organizer:

1. How do I know this information is reliable?
2. When was this document written? Who wrote it? What was its purpose?
3. Explain the author’s point of view.
4. How can this document help me answer the focus question?

III. Discussion

Explain to the students: now that the documents have been analyzed, you will have the opportunity to discuss the documents and the focus question with the students in your group. As you discuss interpretations of the documents, cite evidence for your opinions. Multiple interpretations can emerge and may or may not be accepted by all. Write your group responses in the appropriate section of your graphic organizer, “Group Analysis.”

IV. Report the Findings

Once historians complete their research, they formulate a thesis that answers the focus question. You will do the same by writing a summary explaining your conclusions. Your summary should answer the focus question below and be supported with details from the documents.

Focus Question:

Determine the significance of economic protests to the success of the Civil Rights Movement.

Individual Analysis

	How do I know this is reliable information?	When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?	Explain the author's point of view	How can this document help me answer the focus question?
Document 1				
Document 2				
Document 3				
Document 4				

Document 5				
Document 6				
Document 7				
Document 8				
Document 9				
Document 10				

Document 11				
Document 12				
Document 13				
Document 14				

Group Analysis

	How do I know this is reliable information?	When was this document written? Who wrote it? What is its purpose?	Explain the author's point of view	How can this document help me answer the focus question?
Document 1				
Document 2				
Document 3				
Document 4				

Document 5				
Document 6				
Document 7				
Document 8				
Document 9				
Document 10				

Document 11				
Document 12				
Document 13				
Document 14				

**Excerpt from:
PICKETS HURT TRADE
Baltimore Afro-American
May 5, 1934**

A decrease of sixty per cent occurred in the volume of business done by the Tommy Tucker five and ten-cent store on Pennsylvania Avenue, during the picketing carried on by members of the "Buy-Where-You-Work" movement, according to the store's management at the injunction hearing Wednesday in the circuit court.

According to court testimony of Robert Samuelson, white, manager of the store, business returns for Friday and Saturday, December 1 and 2 that were days before the picketing started, amounted to \$1,328.67.

On the following Saturday, December 9, after the picketing had gone into effect, only \$406.09 was reported for weekend business.

Document #2

March 4, 1949

Mr. & Mrs. Sidney Hollander, Sr.
2513 Talbot Road
City-16

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hollander:

For the third successive season, the Baltimore Branch of the NAACP has maintained a picket line at Ford's Theater, protesting the racially discriminatory policy of the management in restricting colored patrons to a few seats in the top balcony. This picket line was put into effect as a last resort after years of conferences, meetings, and correspondence proved on no avail.

This is part of a national effort being made by our organization in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., to eliminate racial segregation in the legitimate theater. Certainly, the field of the arts should know no color line.

Here in Baltimore, the response of the Theater Guild subscribers, other patrons, actors, and the general public, has been most encouraging. Attendance at Ford's Theater has definitely decreased. There are weeks in which no show is scheduled at the Theater. Fewer plays are appearing here than at any season before. Some of the best plays on the road today are refusing to come to Ford's because of the segregation policy, as well be noted in the enclosed brochure. Two weeks ago, Mrs. Lillian Hellman, who wrote "The Little Foxes" and "Another Part of the Forest", called this office to inquire concerning our picket line. She stated that in view of the fact that we are continuing our picket line, she would not open her new play here in Baltimore as she had originally planned.

This means that our community is becoming increasingly aware of its responsibility in a constitutional democracy to abolish superficial barriers against groups of its citizens based on race, color, creed, or national origin. Democracy not only carries privileges, but responsibilities as well.

Victory is imminent. We are, therefore, asking your continued cooperation in not crossing our picket line until this unjust practice at Ford's Theater is eliminated. We would also appreciate your sending letters to the person or organizations listed on the enclosed pamphlet, in support of a democratic policy at Ford's. On request, we will be happy to send a representative to explain the status of this problem and answer any questions.

With gratitude for your support, we are

Very sincerely yours,

Milton P. Brown
Executive Secretary
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Baltimore Branch

Bob Kaufman
Corresponding Secretary
Ford's Theater Committee

Source:
Maryland Historical Society, *Encountering Maryland's Past Volume 5: Rights and Responsibilities*.

Civil Rights Picket Line, Ford's Theatre: Baltimore, c 1951



<http://www.mdhs.org/library/Civilrights39f.JPG>

Photographed by Paul Henderson
MHS Library, Special Collections Department, Henderson Collection

Excerpts From:
Toward Equality: Baltimore's Progress Report
Originally Published in 1960 by the Sydney Hollander Foundation

1952

Three years of picketing and boycott at Ford's Theatre came to an end on the last day of January, when the management of Baltimore's only remaining legitimate theatre announced that Negro patrons could sit anywhere, rather than just in the second balcony. Precipitated by the NAACP, the lengthy boycott had been supported by others in the community. Even those who were willing to cross the picket line had been deprived of productions whose casts boycotted the city rather than play to Baltimore's segregated audience.

1953

For the first time Negro shoppers in the downtown area were able to take a break for lunch, and eat it sitting down. The Committee for Racial Equality, an interracial action group known more familiarly as CORE, had successfully employed persuasion, picketing and "sit-in" demonstrations to overcome the resistance to Negro patrons at lunch counters in some of the chain variety and drug stores in the heart of the retail district.

1961

Among the solid accomplishments in the restaurant field were the changes of policy attained by a small committee of Route 40 restaurateurs headed by Tony Konstant, of Aberdeen. After the persuasive efforts of President Kennedy, Governor Tawes, State Department representatives and others had failed to produce immediate results, and a massive "freedom ride" was scheduled for November 11 by the Congress of Racial Equality, the Konstant committeemen convinced enough of their fellow restaurateurs to serve Negroes to have the ride called off. By December it was believed that roughly 40 out of 75 Maryland eating-places on Route 40 were open to all.

Second Edition Published by the Maryland Historical Society, 2003

The Montgomery Story
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Address before the NAACP Convention, 1956

Mr. Chairman, distinguished platform associates, officers and delegates to this great convention, ladies and gentleman... It was suggested to me that I talk this evening about the Montgomery story... It is the story, a dramatic story, of a handsome little city that for years has been known as the cradle of the Confederacy.

Over the years the bus situation has been one of the sore spots of Montgomery. If a visitor had come to Montgomery prior to last December, he would have heard bus operators referring to Negro passengers as "niggers," "black apes," and "black cows." He would have frequently noticed Negro passengers getting on the front door and paying their fares, and then being forced to get off and go to the back doors to board the bus, and often after paying that fare he would have noticed that before the Negro passenger could get to the back door, the bus rode off with his fare in the box. But even more that visitor would have noticed Negro passengers standing over empty seats. I am sure that visitor would have wondered what was happening. But soon he would discover that the reserved section, the unoccupied seats, were for "whites only." No matter if a white person never got on the bus, the bus was filled up with Negro passengers, these Negro passengers were prohibited from sitting in the first four seats--which hold about ten persons--because they were only for white passengers. But it even went beyond this. If the reserved section for whites was filled up with white persons, additional white persons boarded the bus, then Negro passengers sitting in the unreserved section were often asked to stand up and give their seats to white persons. If they refused to do this, they were arrested.

On December the first, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to move when she was asked to get up and move back by the bus operator. And interestingly enough, Mrs. Parks was not seated in the reserved section for whites as the press has often mistakenly reported, she was sitting in the first seat in the unreserved section. The other interesting thing is that all of the seats were taken and if Mrs. Parks had followed the command of the bus operator she would have stood up and given up her seat for a *male* white passenger, who had just boarded the bus, would take the seat. In a quiet calm dignified manner, so characteristic of the radiant personality of Mrs. Parks, she refused to move. The trial was set for Monday, December fifth. And almost out of nowhere, leaflets were circulating, saying: "This must be stopped. We must, we should stay off the buses on Monday in protest of this situation. We must stand together and let it be known that we don't like it." The word got around. The word got around the Montgomery community amazingly well that Sunday, December the fourth. All of the ministers went to their pulpits and endorsed it heartily and so the word was out.

Then came Monday. Then came Monday, December the fifth. The buses were empty. The Negro passengers, who constituted about seventy-five per cent of the bus riders,

were now united. The bus protest on that day and even now, has been more than ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent effective.

Feeling the need to give some guidance to the protest, the ministers came together-- forgetting about denominations, forgetting about Baptists and Methodists [*words inaudible*] realizing that we strode on in the great struggle, and we came together with civic leaders throughout the community on Monday afternoon, December fifth, and organized what is now known as the Montgomery Improvement Association. This association started out with about twenty-five or [*word inaudible*] persons on the executive board, now it has a membership that goes way up in the thousands, almost as large as the Negro community. And it has been this organization, under the leadership of some of the finest ministers and laymen of the Montgomery community, that has guided the protest throughout.

On Monday afternoon or Monday evening a mass meeting had been called by the ministers at the Holt Street Baptist Church. That afternoon by three o'clock hundreds of people started assembling in the church. About seven o'clock it was reported that more than five thousand persons were jammed and packed in this church and were overflowing in the street. At this meeting these persons, this vast audience went on record adopting this resolution: that the Negro passengers would refuse to ride the buses until more courtesy was extended by the bus operators; until the seating arrangement had been changed to a first-come, first-serve basis with no reserved seats for anybody; and until bus--Negro bus operators had been employed on predominantly Negro lines.

Now I might say that in the beginning we were not out to compromise or to sanction segregation. Some people have wondered why we didn't ask for integration in the beginning. We realized that the first-come, first-serve seating arrangement was only a temporary alleviation of the problem. We felt that the ultimate solution to the problem would be integration on the buses, but we knew that we had a case that would come up in court on that so that we were willing to accept this as a temporary alleviation of the problem, knowing full well that the ultimate solution was total integration. As time went on we discovered that the City Commission didn't even want to work within the framework of the present segregation law. So it was necessary for our brilliant young attorney who is here tonight, attorney Fred Gray, to go into the federal court with the case and it went into the courts and as you know the federal court ruled the other day that segregation in public transportation in Alabama is unconstitutional...

But you can now see that the one-day protest moved out into an indefinite protest which has lasted now for more than six months...

One of the first practical problems that the ex-bus riders [*word inaudible*] is that in finding some way to get around the city. The first thing that we decided to do was to use a taxi, and they had agreed to transport the people for just ten cents, the same as the buses. Then the police commission stopped this by warning the taxis that they must charge a minimum of forty-five cents a person. Then we immediately got on the job and

organized a volunteer car pool. And almost overnight over three hundred cars were out on the streets of Montgomery. They were out on the streets of Montgomery carrying the people to and from work from the various pick-up and dispatch stations. It worked amazingly well. Even Commissioner Sellers had to admit in a White Citizens Council meeting that the system worked with "military precision." It has continued to grow and it is still growing. Since that time we have added more than twenty station wagons to the car pool and they're working every day, all day, transporting the people. It has been an expensive project. Started out about two thousand dollars or more a week, but now it runs more than five thousand dollars a week. We have been able to carry on because of the contributions coming from the local community and nationally, from the great contributions that have come from friends of good will all over the nation and all over the world.

From the beginning the city commission, where there's the reactionary element of the white community, attempted to block the protest. And I say reactionary elements of the white community because I never want to give the impression that all of the white people in the South are downright and low in terms of civil rights. I assure you that there are white persons even in Montgomery, Alabama, who are deeply sympathetic with the movement and who have given us great words of encouragement and even contributions. And from the beginning the reactionary element of the community, the white community, sought to block it. They used many methods. First they tried to negotiate us into a compromise. After that didn't work they tried to conquer by dividing and they spread false rumors throughout the community about the leaders. They had it out that I had purchased a Cadillac car with the money and bought my wife a station wagon. Everybody in the community, in the Negro community, knew that I was driving around in a humble Pontiac and I'll still be driving it five or six years from now. They tried to divide the leadership. They went to the ministers and, the Negro ministers, and said to them, "Now, it's a pity that you gonna have, you oughta be in the leadership. These young men coming here and running over you like this. It just looks bad on you." That was an attempt to establish petty jealousy. But it didn't work. For after the method of conquering by dividing didn't work, they moved out to what the Commissioner Gayle, Mayor Gayle called a "get tough" policy. A "get tough" policy was, turned out to be the arrest of persons in the car pool and other persons for minor or imaginary traffic violations. It was in this period when I was arrested, carried down, and put into jail for supposedly going thirty miles an hour in a twenty-five mile zone. This was the "get tough" policy. After that didn't stop the movement, then came actual physical violence. It was during this period that my home was bombed, along with the home of a Mr. E. D. Nixon, one of the most outstanding and most progressive leaders in our community. Even physical violence didn't stop us. Then after that didn't work came the method of mass indictment. This time more than a hundred persons were indicted, including all of the members of the executive board of the Montgomery Improvement Association, were indicted on the basis of an old anti-labor law of doubtful constitutionality. That law was brought into being in [word inaudible]. It was on the basis of this law that I was convicted, and whether you know it or not, a convicted criminal is speaking to you tonight.

But none of this stopped the protest. Instead of blocking it, all of these things merely served to give us greater momentum and to give the people greater determination. It revealed to me at least one thing. That the Negro in the South has been freed from the paralysis of crippling fear. He is no longer afraid. He is willing to stand up now without any fear in his heart. This is a characteristic also of the new Negro...

http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/papers/vol3/560627.003-The_Montgomery_Story_Address_at_the_47th_Annual_NAACP_Convention.htm

Excerpt from:
Negroes' Boycott Cripples Bus Line
Carrier in Montgomery, Ala., Increases Fares to Offset Loss of Business

Special to the *New York Times*
January 8, 1956

MONTGOMERY, Ala., Jan. 7-

The boycott of Montgomery bus lines by Negro riders entered its second month this week with no conciliation in sight.

As a result of the bus company's loss of revenue in the boycott, the City Commission Wednesday raised fares 50 percent: adult fares from 10 to 15 cents, school fares from 5 to 8 cents. The commission also authorized a 5-cent charge for transfers, which have heretofore been free.

Asking for the increase, the bus company cited losses averaging 22 cents a mile since the boycott began Dec. 5. The losses would run even higher, company spokesmen said, except for a curtailment in service that has reduced mileage by 31 per cent.

Shortly after the boycott began, virtually all service to Negro communities was abolished. Two routes, serving predominantly Negro areas, were abandoned entirely and other routes revised so as to exclude Negro neighborhoods along them.

4-HOUR HUDDLE**Bus Boycott Conference Fails To Find Solution**By **TOM JOHNSON**

Montgomery Negroes will continue to boycott city buses until a "satisfactory" seating arrangement is devised, a spokesman told officials of City Bus Lines yesterday.

The Rev. M. L. King, speaking for a delegation that conferred with bus lines officials four hours, proposed that bus patrons be seated on a "first come—first served" basis with no sections reserved for either race.

Negroes would continue to seat from the rear and whites from the front, he said, but there would be no reassignment of seats once the buses were loaded.

2 OTHER CONDITIONS

He laid down two other conditions sought by Negroes: More courteous treatment and the hiring of Negro drivers on routes "predominantly" Negro.

On all but the "courtesy" proposal, Atty. Jack Crenshaw, counsel for the bus lines, demurred.

He said it would be impossible to accept the proposed seating arrangement "in view of the segregation law" and, he added, the company has no intentions of hiring Negro drivers.

"We do not contemplate and have no intentions of hiring Negro drivers," said Crenshaw. "The time is not right in Montgomery, but who can say what will happen in 10 years."

One of the delegation replied: "We don't mean 10 years we mean this year."

King, who is pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, em-

phasized the group was not trying to change the segregation law.

BETTER ACCOMMODATIONS

"We are merely trying to peacefully obtain better accommodations for Negroes," he said.

Commenting on reports of violence, King said most of his race deplors such acts as much as anyone and promised to report "anyone we know to be guilty."

But, he added, the boycott will continue "until something is done."

J. H. Bagley, manager of the bus line, was asked if this statement would cause the company to reduce its service immediately. He replied

"We will continue to provide service adequate to the public needs."

He added that service has already been curtailed on some routes but declined to name them.

A Negro attorney, Fred D. Gray, questioned whether the state law applied to city bus lines and urged that a ruling be obtained from the attorney general.

Mayor W. A. Gayle later said the City Commission had not decided whether to seek the ruling.

Crenshaw told the protesting delegation the bus company would do everything possible to serve its passengers but could not "change the law."

He said the company would mark every other bus "special" on the Washington Park-South Jackson Street runs and transport only Negroes. They could still use the regular buses which run at seven and one-half minute intervals.

The boycott grew out of the arrest last week of Rosa Parks, a seamstress who refused to move to the rear of a crowded city bus. She was fined \$14 in Recorder's Court.

Several instances of violence have been reported.

Four city buses have been fired on. But Police Chief G. J. Ruppenthal said there was "no evidence to date" of any connection between the incidents and the boycott.

Two Negro houses including the home of Policeman A. G. Worthy, were hit by shotgun blasts Wednesday night but no one was reported hurt.

CLASS OF SERVICE This is a fast message unless its deferred character is indicated by the proper symbol.	WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM <small>W. P. MARSHALL, President</small>	SYMBOLS DL = Day Letter NL = Night Letter LT = International Letter Telegram
<small>The filing time shown in the date line on domestic telegrams is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.</small>		
NSA267 PA254	(17)	1201
P TRB088 PD=WUX TRENTON NJER 26 213PME= MAR 26 PM 1 27		
CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE EUGENE CARTER=		
MONTGOMERY ALA=		
HAVE CANCELLED PLANS FOR BUILDING IN ALABAMA 150,000 SQ FT MANUFACTURING SPACE UPON CONVICTION OF REV MARTIN LUTHER KING JR=		
DIAMOND BROTHERS SOL DIAMOND VICE PRES TREASURER=		
<small>THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE</small>		

Tallahassee Democrat
June 15, 1956

To the City Commission:

Since 1939, we have been engaged in operating a transit system in the city of Tallahassee pursuant to the terms of a franchise granted by the city. We began our operations here modestly, but with confidence in the potential of this community. Over the years, we have grown with the city. To keep abreast with its progress, we have improved our facilities and expanded our service so as to provide a modern and first-class transportation system. In building up the Tallahassee system, there were many lean years, but when profits were made, they were reinvested in the system.

The stockholders have never received a dividend, and the principal stockholder and the president of the corporation has loaned his salary back to the company in all but two years during the operation. We have been content to plow all of the operating profits into building a better transportation system for Tallahassee.

Like any other business, we have had our share of operating problems. We do feel, however, that, on the whole, we have been able to render to the city good and courteous service. We think our operation will compare favorably to that of any city of comparable size anywhere. On the 26th day of May, 1956, a segment of the population of Tallahassee, for reasons which are beyond our control, decided to organize an economic boycott against the bus company. It is because of the results of this boycott that we are now addressing you.

In discussing the situation, we confine ourselves herein solely to the economic phrases.

To the extent that it was directed toward curtailment of our operating income, the boycott has been successful. Our revenue has decreased by approximately 60 percent. This is a severe blow to any business.

We have been willing to continue operating at a loss for a reasonable period of time, but our resources are such that we cannot continue indefinitely. With no solution in sight, and being an independent company without unlimited resources, we cannot continue to impair our financial position under circumstances as they now exist. Only because of our sense of obligation to the community and to our employees have we continued to operate as long as we have.

We realize that any growing community needs a transportation system and that the lack thereof is reflected in a reduction of real estate values in certain areas, causes serious inconvenience to working people and constitutes a serious barrier against further expansion and, particularly, industrial expansion. At the same time, the situation is not of our making or choosing and our best efforts to solve it have been unavailing.

To those who are responsible for the boycott, we would like to say that you have seriously impaired our operating earnings and you have left us with no alternative except to liquidate our holdings quickly so as to keep our losses as low as possible. If this was your objective, you have succeeded and may take full credit. To you, however, must also go the blame for the long-range results on this community. The real loser, as we see it, will be the community and all of its citizens, including those whose ambitions the boycott was designed to further.

We are writing to explain the situation in order that the people of Tallahassee and everyone concerned might have ample notice of our problem and intentions.

To the City Commission, the public officials of this community and to the people of Tallahassee and everyone concerned might have ample notice of our problem and intentions.

Under existing circumstances, it is our intention to suspend operation of buses in this community as of July 1, 1956 for an indefinite period.

To the City Commission, the public officials of this community and to the people of the city of Tallahassee, we wish to express our deep appreciation of the cooperation and consideration we have received since we began operations in Tallahassee to the present date. We wish this to be recorded regardless of the outcome of the present dilemma.

CITIES TRANSIT, INC.

J.S.D. Coleman
President

http://www.geocities.com/malcolm_b_johnson/citybusad.html

“Tote dat barge! Lift dat Boycott! Ride dat bus!”



**Washington Post
March 25, 1956**

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/herblock/images/s03530u.jpg>

Boycott Against Nashville Stores, 1960

Memories of John Lewis

It had begun quietly, almost invisibly, in late March. No one quite knew where it started, but it became organized and communicated through the churches. “Don’t buy Downtown” was the simple slogan, and it was amazingly effective. Estimates were that black Nashville spent as much as \$60 million a year in the city, a figure which meant even more to downtown merchants who had seen many of their white customers move to the suburbs in recent years and were depending increasingly on the black buyers who remained.

By the beginning of April, those stores stood virtually empty. One leader at a local black Baptist church asked every person in the congregation who had not spent penny downtown in the previous two weeks to stand. Everyone in the room rose.

White people, too, were staying away. Some were wary of the violence and disturbances caused by the sit-ins. Others joined the boycott as a sign of support for our cause. A few white women went down to their favorite Nashville stores and made a visible show of turning in their credit cards as their own act of protest.

Easter was fast approaching, normally a boom time for the clothing stores. Everybody wants to get a new outfit for Easter. A new dress, a new hat, a new pair of shoes, something to show off at church on Easter morning- it’s a tradition, certainly among the black community. But black Nashville’s motto that month was “No Fashions for Easter,” and it had its effects. One downtown storeowner stood staring out his door at the deserted sidewalks and said to a reporter, “You could roll a bowling ball down Church Street and not hit anybody these days.”

Source:

Lewis, John. Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1998.

RAPO20204-2/2/60-GREENSBORO, N.C.: A group of Negro students from North Carolina A&T College, who were refused service at a luncheon counter reserved for white customers, staged a sit-down strike at the F.W. Woolworth store in Greensboro 2/2. Ronald Martin, Robert Patterson and Mark Martin are shown as they stayed seated throughout the day. The white woman at left came to the counter for lunch but decided not to sit down. UPI TELEPHOTO fwb



<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/09/0909001r.jpg>

This Was Our Time

In communities all across the South, young Negroes participated in sit-ins. In many cases the demonstrations were held, as they were in Greensboro and Nashville, at downtown business that happily accepted blacks' money for merchandise but refused them equal treatment at the lunch counter. But the technique spread to other places of public accommodation- movie theaters, which in the South segregated Negroes into balcony seats; public libraries, courtroom seating; and full service restaurants. ...

In many places, sit-ins resulted in relatively quick desegregation, without protracted argument of the legal or moral issues, clearly because the matter was so closely tied to downtown merchants' income. Furthermore, citizens who were in sympathy with the demonstrators mounted picket lines and organized boycotts in the South, bringing more intense economic pressure for quick settlements. A survey by Vanderbilt law school showed that by August, 1960, demonstrations had led to desegregation of some eating places in Alexandria, Arlington, and Richmond in Virginia; Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Galveston, and San Antonio in Texas; Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Salisbury in North Carolina; and Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Nashville in Tennessee. Further evidence of the success of the sit-ins was found, said the survey, in the fact that both major political parties spoke approvingly of the technique in their 1960 campaign platforms.

Source: Powledge, Fred. Free At Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.

Stand-ins at Nashville Movie Theaters, 1961

Memories of John Lewis

Our target this time was the movie theaters, and this time we would not be sitting in. This time we would be standing.

Just as the movie theater in Troy had done when I was a boy, the theaters in Nashville forbade blacks to sit among whites. Not only were we relegated to balconies, but to get there, black customers in some instances actually had to walk outside, go into a dark alley and climb an exterior fire escape. I had never been to a movie in Nashville, but I was familiar with the theaters. There was a string of them running down Church Street for several blocks...

Our tactic was one borrowed from students at the University of Texas in Austin who had staged a "stand-in" outside some businesses there. We set up "revolving" lines of picketers in front of each theater, ten or fifteen people to a line, each line moving from one theater to the next, working its way down one side of the street, then back up the other.

Starting on the first of that month, and every night for the next two weeks, we would leave from the church at about six- the same time most moviegoers were arriving at the theaters to buy their tickets. We would approach the ticket window of each theater, form a long line and, one by one, ask for a seat inside. When refused, we would either return to the end of the line or move to a line at the next theater. Not only were we visibly demonstrating against the segregationist policies of these theaters, but we were tying up their ticket lines as well. ...

The demonstrations went on, with no increase in violence but no decrease either... [O]n the night of February 20, a group I was leading decided to push things further, to try something we hadn't done so far. Rather than simply stand in line, we deliberately blocked the entrance to the Lowe's Theater...Twenty-six of us were arrested that night...

Not long after that, the theaters in Nashville relented and opened their seating to blacks.

Source:

Lewis, John. [Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement](#). New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1998.