

# TAYLOR BRANCH

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PARTING

America

in the

King Years

1954-63

THE

WATERS



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## FIVE

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# THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT



A few days after the Holt Street mass meeting, one of the teachers at a Methodist missionary school near Nagpur, India, rushed outside to investigate a bellowing noise that had pierced the early morning stillness. In the hut next door, he found his colleague James Lawson still in a fit of shouting and clapping and foot-stomping. Such joyous abandon was almost as alarming to the teacher as the violence he had feared, because he knew Lawson as the essence of the cerebral personality—a man who had worn spectacles since the age of four, whose superior manner and precise articulation smothered any hint of emotionalism in his character. Yet now, even after Theopolis burst through the door, Lawson was still dancing, and could only point to a story in the English edition of the *Nagpur Times* about how thousands of Negroes were refusing to ride segregated buses in a small American city.

This was the beginning, cried Lawson. This was what he had been dreaming about, what he had gone to prison for, what he had come halfway around the world to find at its source, only to discover that Gandhism without Gandhi was dissolving into power politics and petty quarrels. Lawson was overwhelmed by the ironic news that the spirit of the Mahatma was breaking out only six or seven hundred miles south of his home in Ohio. He sensed immediately that he would come to know M. L. King, who was described in the *Nagpur Times* as a man of exactly Lawson's age, race, and profession.

In Montgomery, Juliette Morgan, the reclusive city librarian, watched the empty buses roll for a few days and then penned a letter to the *Montgomery Advertiser*. "Not since the First Battle of the Marne has the taxi been put to as good use as it has this last week in Montgomery," she wrote. "However, the spirit animating our Negro citizens as they ride these taxis or walk from the heart of Cloverdale to Mobile Road has been more like that of Gandhi than of the 'taxicab army' that saved Paris." Morgan declared that the bus boycotters had "taken a lesson from Gandhi, and from our own Thoreau, who influenced Gandhi." She recommended that her fellow white citizens read Edmund Burke's speech "Conciliation with the American Colonies," and warned them against "pharasaical zeal." "One feels that history is being made in Montgomery these days, the most important in her career," she concluded.

These last words confirmed her status as something of a ninny, even among those white people who admired the grandeur of her learning. Who of sound mind could write that a shift by Negro maids in their common mode of transportation was more important than all the past glories of Montgomery? Morgan's letter brought down upon her a prolonged harassment by young people who threw rocks through her windows, insulted her on the streets, and played tricks on her in the library. Her flighty sensitivity only provoked them to do worse. A little more than a year later, she would be found poisoned in her house, an apparent suicide. By way of explanation, whites would stress her emotional vulnerability or alleged mental problems, while Negroes remained certain that she had been persecuted to death on account of the "Battle of the Marne" letter.

Only the rarest and oddest of people saw historical possibilities in the bus boycott. Of the few people who bothered to write the *Advertiser* at first, most were white women who saw it as a justifiable demand for simple decent treatment. One woman correspondent did speculate that there must be a Communist hand behind such strife, but the great mass of segregationists did not bother to address the issue. In its first editorial, the *Advertiser* described the principal MIA demand—for bus seating by race, with Negroes from the back of the bus and whites from the front, eliminating the reserved section—as a compromise within the principles of segregation. Editor Grover Hall, Jr., advised white Montgomery simply to accept the proposal and be done with it. The very moderation of the demands led civil rights groups such as the national NAACP to frown upon the boycott as a wildcat movement for something less than integration.

As for the boycotters themselves, the religious fervor they went to bed with at night always congealed by the next morning into cold practicality, as they faced rainstorms, mechanical breakdowns, stranded relatives, and complicated relays in getting from home to job without being late or getting fired or getting into an argument with the employer, then getting home again, perhaps having to find a way to and from the grocery store, and cooking and eating supper, dealing with children and housework, then perhaps going back out into the night for a mass meeting and finally home again, recharged by the "rousements" of Abernathy and the inspiration of King, and then at last some weary but contented sleep before the aching chill of dawn started the cycle all over again. To a largely uneducated people among whom the most common occupations were maid and day laborer, the loss of what was for many their most important modern convenience—cheap bus transportation—left them with staggering problems of logistics and morale.

The bus boycott was a day-to-day operation. When the Montgomery police commissioner dropped hints during the first week that he would order the arrest of any taxi drivers who charged less than the minimum forty-five-cent fare, it became clear that the emergency ten-cent fare—and therefore the "taxicab army"—was doomed. King immediately called his college friend T. J. Jemison, who, as secretary of the National Baptist Convention, was a prince of the national church on a much higher level than the Kings.\* Jemison, who knew King well enough to call him Mike, had led a bus boycott in Baton Rouge during the summer of 1953 and organized a car pool after the authorities banned the use of cut-rate and unlicensed taxi service. King gleaned from Jemison every useful detail within memory about how to organize a massive car pool. That very night he took the pulpit at a mass meeting to explain why they had to maintain the boycott without benefit of the eighteen Negro taxi companies. The good news, King announced bravely, was that they could organize a car pool similar to the one in Baton Rouge. To do this, car owners must volunteer cars, and drivers must volunteer to drive. No money could change hands directly, but passengers could make contributions to the MIA, and the MIA could in turn subsidize the costs of the car pool.

King described his proposal in the most glowing terms possible, but he knew that the complicated new system would introduce a host of prac-

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\* In a dynastic compromise of the kind often made in the baronial politics of the National Baptist Convention, Jemison was serving under President J. H. Jackson, who had ousted Jemison's blind father at Miami in 1953. It would take the younger Jemison twenty-nine years to oust Jackson.

tical problems. Cars lent to the boycott by the wealthier Negroes doubtless would be wrecked, worn, soiled, and abused by student drivers or by passengers. The automobile was still among the prime status symbols in the United States, and therefore to volunteer one's car as public transportation was a radical act of togetherness. Passengers, for their part, might resent becoming dependent on the largesse of their betters. Knowing such things, King was stunned once again when the crowd greeted his proposal with a church-rocking roar of approval. Whatever it took, they would do it. That first night, more than 150 car owners signed up to lend their cars to the boycott. The fractious classes of Montgomery's Negroes now promised to blend their daily lives. Several thousand of them floated from the mass meeting of December 8 on a buoyant new cloud of optimism, leaving the harsh arithmetic to the future, or to God. Between 30,000 and 40,000 Negro fares were being denied to the buses every day. Subtracting generously for walkers and for people who were simply staying at home, the car pool would have to supply 20,000 rides, which worked out to more than 130 rides a day for each of the volunteered cars. By herculean efforts, King knew, Jemison had kept his boycott going in Baton Rouge for two weeks before it fell apart.

At the first negotiating session, on December 8, the three co-equal city commissioners parried King's arguments before a large crowd of reporters, boycotters, and white spectators. Commissioner W. A. "Tacky" Gayle (who was designated mayor because he supervised the employees at city hall) finally suggested that the negotiating parties retire to talk more frankly in private, and there the bus company's lawyer, Jack Crenshaw, performed the stickler's role, as he had in the Colvin case. He had no objection to the rather vague MIA demand for greater courtesy on the part of bus drivers, but he rejected the demand that the bus company hire Negro drivers for predominantly Negro routes. This, said Crenshaw, was a matter of private enterprise. As to the third and principal demand—bus seating—Crenshaw said the MIA plan was illegal. When Crenshaw leaned back to huddle with the other white negotiators, King thought he heard him whisper that if the whites gave in on this point the Negroes would go around boasting of a victory, which would be unacceptable. Some time later, Crenshaw recalled objecting that under the MIA plan a Negro man could be "practically rubbing knees" with a white woman. Pride and deep feeling stalemated the talks, which were adjourned after four hours.

At their next meeting, on December 17, King opened with a concession. The MIA was no longer asking that the bus company hire Negro

drivers immediately, only that the company accept applications from qualified Negroes, with the intention of hiring them when job positions became available. Three eminent white ministers dominated the awkward, exploratory deliberations in the Chamber of Commerce conference room. A Methodist preacher, whom negotiator Jo Ann Robinson described as "stately, reverential, almost godly," sought to cut through the tension with an eloquent speech stressing the common religious values of the two races. In the end, however, he disappointed the MIA delegation by portraying the boycott as an exaggerated response to the frailties of human nature. Yes, he was sure that bus drivers had behaved discourteously toward Negro passengers, but he was also sure they had mistreated white ones too. The province of the soul was much larger and more spiritual than bus seats, and for that reason he was especially sorry to see ministers of the gospel leading a political campaign. When he finished, a Presbyterian minister (brother of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia) observed that it was nearly impossible to conduct discussions in good Christian faith while one side was inflicting damage on the other. Therefore, he proposed that the MIA leaders first call off the boycott to establish an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. This remained Dr. Henry "Jeb" Russell's position from start to finish.

Rev. Henry Parker of the First Baptist Church, out of which Abernathy's church had been born eighty-eight years earlier, attempted to bridge the substantive differences. The problem, said Parker, was a narrower one than most people believed, and from what he could tell most of the bus incidents could be traced to uncertainty among the Negro passengers as to just where the reserved white section ended. To eliminate this confusion, he proposed that signs be installed in all buses designating the first ten seats for whites and the last ten seats for Negroes, with those in between to be filled by overflow passengers of either race. King and the other Negroes objected vehemently to the detested "White Only" signs, which had been eliminated from Montgomery buses twenty years before. The whites replied that they were open to any other proposal that promised to eliminate the confusion. They drew the attention of the Negro delegation to technical flaws in the MIA proposal. Suppose that a bus filled completely with Negroes seating themselves from the back, as the MIA wanted, and then, at a certain stop, ten Negro passengers left the bus from scattered seats while ten white passengers boarded. Where would the white passengers sit? How could they call such a bus segregated, in compliance with state law? On such hypotheticals, the delegations circled to exhaustion.

Six days before Christmas, a newcomer took a seat on the white side of the conference table at the Chamber of Commerce. Someone whis-



pered to King that he was Luther Ingalls, secretary of the Montgomery White Citizens Council. When Ingalls rose to speak, King jumped up to object that he was not a member of the committee. "Furthermore," King said rather testily, "we will never solve this problem so long as there are persons on the committee whose public pronouncements are anti-Negro." When someone replied that the mayor had approved Ingalls' presence, King said the mayor had acted unfairly by adding to the committee without consulting the MIA representatives.

King's statement provoked Reverend Parker of First Baptist to defend Ingalls. "He has just as much right to be on this committee as you do," Parker said heatedly. "You have a definite point of view, and you are on it." Some of the other whites, following Parker's lead, criticized King for introducing hostility and mistrust into the meeting before Ingalls had spoken a word. These comments set off an acrimonious exchange between white and Negro delegates over what was objective and who had cast the first stone. Each side moved to adopt its own proposals, and the other side always voted as a bloc to stop them. Some of the whites criticized King for dominating the discussion on the Negro side. He was inflexible, they said, an obstacle to negotiation. This accusation hung in the room until Abernathy stood up to say that Dr. King spoke for him and all the other Negro members. From there, negotiations resumed in a rather bitter mood. Finally, King made a motion to recess. The whites, he said, had come to the meeting with "preconceived ideas."

This time there was no need for Reverend Parker to lead the counter-attack. Mrs. Logan A. Hipp, a white woman who had been serving as secretary for the meeting, rose to speak. "You are the one who has come here with preconceived ideas," she told King, trembling with indignation. "I resent very deeply the statement that we have come here with preconceived ideas. I most certainly did not." As proof, she mentioned that she had come to the conclusion that she would vote in favor of hiring Negro bus drivers. Negroes already served as chauffeurs, she said, and therefore could no doubt adapt to the buses. A white man seconded Mrs. Hipp, saying that he had come prepared to vote for some of the MIA proposals.

A few hours later, King left the utterly unproductive meeting burdened by what he called a "terrible sense of guilt." He had come to the negotiations expecting to find that the more enlightened whites would acknowledge the soundness of his moral claims, like the whites at Crozer and Boston University, and that the less enlightened ones would expose themselves in defensive hatred, like the more abusive segregationist whites he had encountered in his life. Instead, he found that the whites sincerely believed that morality was neutral to the issue, that the White

Citizens Council was more or less a natural counterpart of the MIA as a racial interest group. The whites had spoken as the diplomats of a large country might defend their interests to diplomats from a small one. Their technical approach had deprived King of the moral ground he had occupied all his life. Frustrated, King had spoken in anger and resentment, which had served only to ruin the negotiations and convince the more reasonable whites that if there was indeed a moral battle at hand, they and not King held the advantage. Filled with self-reproach, King called Reverend Parker on the telephone to apologize for any of his comments that had given offense. Parker seemed taken aback by the very sound of King's voice, and by the unprecedented overture that was at once humble and gentlemanly, suggesting equality. He fell into a nervous, perfunctory recitation of the points he had made earlier in the day.

Parker called no more meetings, and the pressure of continuing the boycott fell heavily on the MIA. They passed the Baton Rouge car-pool record and struggled onward. Every day's transportation brought slightly less chaos but more strain and fatigue; every mass meeting brought renewal. Speakers built morale at the predominantly female meetings by singling out some of the walking women as heroes. One of the more conservative ministers told the crowd about a group of women he had seen walking to work early one morning. They were walking in pride and dignity, he declared, with a gait that would "do justice to any queen." The same preacher quoted an elderly woman who had told him that if her feet gave out she would crawl on her knees before riding the buses. Another preacher told the crowd of his effort to give a ride to an ancient woman known to almost everyone as Mother Pollard. She had refused all his polite suggestions that she drop out of the boycott on account of her age, the preacher announced. He inspired the crowd with a spontaneous remark of Mother Pollard's, which became a classic refrain of the movement: "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested."

King took to the pulpit to say that he knew everyone was worrying about how to do their Christmas shopping. He proposed that they all rally to the boycott and to the original meaning of Christmas at the same time by refusing to shop at all. They should take the money they were planning to spend on presents and divide it into thirds—putting one part into their savings account, giving another part to charity and the third to the MIA. If they had to go somewhere, they should visit someone in need or go to church or a mass meeting. By restoring the true spirit of Christmas, they could give each other a lasting gift that no amount of money could buy.

A sharp decline in Christmas purchases by Negroes caused Montgomery store owners to wince, but they were not greatly alarmed. Negro

purchasing power accounted for a small fraction of their business, and the effect of the drop-off was spread among a large number of merchants. City Bus Lines enjoyed no such cushion, however. Its financial distress reached quickly to Chicago, headquarters of the parent company, and the men running the Montgomery subsidiary spoke the blunt, empirical language of financial pain. From the beginning, their public statements that the boycott was 99 percent effective gave no comfort to the Montgomery politicians who were minimizing the boycott to the same news reporters. In the first week of 1956, bus company managers told the three city commissioners that they faced imminent bankruptcy. White people were not even beginning to make up the loss of Negro riders, they said. No matter how much the mayor and the White Citizens Council urged whites to patronize the buses, most of them drove cars and could not bring themselves to climb aboard a bus. Therefore, the bus company demanded an emergency fare increase. The commissioners had no choice but to approve, but they felt a strong political incentive to make sure that if there was to be blame, the voters would lay it elsewhere.

Three days after the increase was approved, a crowd of some 1,200 people gathered at the Montgomery City Auditorium for a rally of the White Citizens Council. The first of two guest speakers from Arkansas told the audience of the *real* boycott, the white boycott, in which Arkansas council members were cooperating to cut off credit, supplies, sales, and all other forms of economic sustenance to Negroes identified as anti-segregation activists. Just as the speaker was making sarcastic remarks about the few fainthearted Arkansas businessmen who were afraid of alienating Negro customers, a booming voice rang out from the back of the auditorium. "I don't have any Negro customers!" shouted Clyde Sellers, the Montgomery city commissioner in charge of police. Sellers walked grandly down the aisle to the stage, and as the hushed crowd recognized him they erupted row by row into a prolonged standing ovation. Lifted to the podium and introduced, Sellers assured the crowd that he would never "trade my Southern birthright for a hundred Negro votes." This brought a roar of applause that was topped only by his dramatic pledge to join the White Citizens Council that very night. A large photograph of Sellers shaking hands with one of the Arkansas speakers appeared the next day at the top of the *Advertiser's* front page, above the headline "Sellers Draws Applause at White Citizen Parley." The story said he "stole the show."

Daddy King, arriving on January 8 to preach at Dexter, found his son under nearly unbearable pressure. The boycott had lasted a month. Transportation chairman Rufus Lewis had dragooned nearly every

Negro-owned vehicle into the car pool—between 275 and 350 a day—and there were no replacements for those who wanted to drop out. The MIA treasury was exhausted, which meant that Lewis relied increasingly on goodwill, and the inspiration of the mass meetings was wearing down under the hardships of another day's resistance. Accordingly, the day after Daddy King's sermon, the MIA leaders sued for peace. They asked for a fourth negotiating session, this time with Sellers and the two other city commissioners. Fred Gray, not King, presented a new MIA plan. This was a conciliatory gesture in itself, and Gray's legal presentation made it clear that the MIA was bending to the city's technical view of the seating problem. He announced that the MIA was now willing to make a major concession: Negroes would move voluntarily to fill seats that became vacant toward the back of the bus, and white passengers would move forward to fill vacancies toward the front. This meant that under busy conditions the passengers would be resegregating themselves continuously, and, as a practical matter, the Negroes would be doing nearly all the moving. On a full bus, many Negro riders would never be able to relax in their seats. They would be obliged to keep looking to the rear to see if they had to move. But at least they would not have to stand up over empty seats in the white reserved section, nor would they have to vacate seats on the order of bus drivers who anticipated the arrival of whites.

The city commissioners rejected the new offer categorically. There were remote technical objections, such as what would happen if disagreement arose among the passengers as to which of them needed to move, but the more powerful objections were political and psychological. Under the new proposal, white passengers would be obliged to move forward to fill vacant seats to make room for Negroes standing in the back. This was unheard of—the law had never required whites to move for Negroes. The commissioners held fast to the whites-only section as a requirement of the segregation laws. Their position was hardening, the more so because they saw the MIA weakening.

At the next MIA executive board meeting, the members admitted gloomily that they had misconstrued the nature of the contest. It was no longer—if indeed it ever had been—a question of finding the proper wording for the best possible compromise. According to the official minutes of the meeting, the board agreed that the negotiations had broken down into a siege, testing "which side can hold out the longer time, or wear the other down." This new strategic situation boded ill for the MIA. It could hold fast until forced to surrender, or it could try to reverse its retreats by taking a wild gamble to offset the steady erosion of strength. Ironically, the Montgomery Negroes faced a strategic disadvantage not

unlike that of the Confederates in 1862, when daring counterstrokes made Southern legends of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

This kind of historical twist was just the thing to appeal to Grover Hall, Jr., the editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Hall was anything but a conventional white citizen of the town. Scorning piety and most social orthodoxy, he cultivated his own eccentricity to the point of decorating his apartment with mynah birds and large stands of camellias. Hall was a dandy. He seemed to enjoy the stories that circulated of his elegant bachelorhood—of his wry humor and his scotch and his music collection, and the effects of the combination upon a succession of fine young women who possessed just a touch of wildness. Hall cherished the image of himself as a self-taught historian and *philosophe*, who had inherited the editorship despite his lack of college training. His idol was H. L. Mencken, notwithstanding Mencken's celebrated satires on the South as a land filled with pretentious buffoons. In fact, Hall took a rather perverse pleasure in tweaking his fellow Southerners with Mencken-like observations on their peculiarities. When Clyde Sellers made his Hollywood entrance at the City Auditorium, Hall wrote derisively that "in effect, the Montgomery police force is now an arm of the White Citizens Council."

In January, concluding reluctantly that the boycott had endured long enough to require special journalistic attention, Hall summoned a young reporter named Tom Johnson to his office for an assignment: find out "who is behind the MIA." Perhaps the Negroes would talk with him. Johnson received the challenge with trepidation. Never before had the *Advertiser* approached Negro life as a subject for serious journalism. As the paper had no reliable news sources among Montgomery's Negroes, Johnson talked first with the police and with every knowledgeable white leader in town. The most common opinion he found was that the NAACP was secretly directing the boycott. This was everywhere, but it was vague. Probing further, Johnson found an intriguing current of suspicion pointing toward a man who worked ceaselessly for the boycott but professed to have little to do with its direction. The suspect's humility, it was thought, might be the perfect disguise. After discussing his preliminary findings with Hall, Johnson wrote the first article of his boycott series about Reverend Graetz, who, as a white man, seemed uniquely qualified for the role of hidden mastermind. With this thesis, Hall and Johnson bravely took their readers across the racial barrier.

Johnson's story, "The Mechanics of the Bus Boycott," appeared on January 10 and gave white citizens their first specific news about the



inner workings of the MIA—its budget (nearly \$7,000 spent so far), the number of cars in the car pool (up to 350 daily), and the ideas of the leadership. Johnson wove these facts into a profile of Graetz, but he did not write explicitly that Graetz was the "brains behind the boycott." He had come to disbelieve the rumors himself, partly because he found Graetz to be almost suicidally ingenuous. Unfazed by interrogation, Graetz volunteered stories animated by a childlike faith and utter disregard of political reality. He recalled, for instance, that he had once been introduced to the NAACP's Walter White, and that White had complimented young white people for doing so much to advance the NAACP cause. "Naturally, I just beamed," Graetz told Johnson, "because that really fit me." Such statements floored Johnson (who regarded White as an "incendiary"), convincing him beyond doubt that Graetz was incapable of the deviousness required to run the boycott covertly.

The next Saturday morning, Johnson kept his appointment at the Dexter Avenue pastor's office, where King was finishing work on his sermon for the next day, "How to Believe in a Good God in the Face of Glaring Evil." It was the day before King's twenty-seventh birthday. Johnson, who was about King's age, was among the first of many reporters who found that King looked and acted much older than his years. He spoke slowly and formally, seeming to protect himself with a great wall of dignity. Johnson returned to the *Advertiser* offices with a notebook full of information, including the full title of the dissertation on Tillich and Wieman. He told Hall that he was "relatively unimpressed." For the editor's benefit, he read notes of King's quotations on Tillich and Kant, even Nietzsche, which Johnson interpreted as evidence of King's eagerness to use philosophical patter to impress people. Maybe it worked on the Montgomery Negroes, he conceded, because Johnson had seen some of the oldest Negro ministers in town treat King with extraordinary respect, bordering on sycophancy. King spoke with authority on the boycott and might well be the leader. Unlike Graetz, he seemed to have the capacity for tactical maneuver. King had told Johnson that although as MIA leader he was seeking concessions within segregation, he was personally for "immediate integration" because as a minister of the gospel he believed segregation to be evil. This candor supported what Montgomery whites had been saying all along—that the radical Negro leaders were not really for segregation, that they were lying.

Johnson wrote up many of the pertinent facts of King's history, including the exact number of years that grandfather A. D. Williams had been pastor of Ebenezer, and went so far as to search out Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy* to give his readers a definition of "dialectics," about which King talked so much. The publication in the *Advertiser* of a full-scale

portrait of a Negro was a historic event in itself. And while hostile readers could draw from it inferences that King was uppity and devious, as Johnson himself believed, the tone of the article was generally neutral. Hall wanted it straight. If angry whites objected, Hall would tell them that the city fathers had bollixed things up in pretending to know everything about the local Negroes. Perhaps it was time to learn something about those inciting this rebellion. In the article, Johnson committed himself to only one judgment about King, in the headline: "The Rev. King Is Boycott Boss." Then he hedged. "There seems to be uncertainty in the minds of the white community of Montgomery over the identity of the director of the bus boycott," he began. "Who is the acknowledged boycott leader? He seems to be the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr."

The *Advertiser* published Johnson's article on January 19, just in time for it to be stirred into the cycles of frustration and mistrust that were rising in Montgomery. Ignorance and fear in various combinations gave rise to the possibility of a blind man's brawl. That same week, Police Commissioner Sellers told the Jaycees that the boycott was continuing only because white citizens were "sitting by." Ninety percent of the Negroes wanted to ride the buses, he declared, but were intimidated by goon squads under the command of the Negro elite, which had never ridden the buses and never would. The Sellers speech made the front page. In combination with the Johnson article, it inspired a rumor campaign directed personally against King. He was an outsider, whites said to each other and to Negroes they knew. He had never even been on a bus in Montgomery. He was a highfalutin preacher who was mainly interested in getting his name in the newspaper. Whites repeated among themselves what became the standard joke, purporting to quote one of the poor foot soldiers of the boycott: "Those Negroes are making things awful tough on us niggers."

Myths circulating between and within the races reinforced one another to produce bizarre, unintended effects. Some of the white women who needed the services of their maids badly enough to drive them to and from Rufus Lewis' car-pool pickup spots seized upon the commissioner's story, saying that they transported the maids only to protect them from the goon squads—not, of course, to support the boycott. Some Negroes, frightened by the rising white anger against the boycott, rallied to the conservative NAACP idea of bringing the case to court, even though that meant the radical step of challenging segregation, while others rallied more strongly to the boycott precisely to avoid the tinderbox of the NAACP. The city commissioners, meanwhile, focused their attention on the fact that practically none of the former bus riders would tell a white person that they thought the boycott was a good idea. Ordinary

Negro folk would tell even known MIA supporters like the Durrs that their regular bus had "broken down" that day, or that they were walking for medical reasons, or, in a pinch, that they "just stays off the buses and leaves that boycott alone." The commissioners, blinkered by myth and deception, devised a brazen political gamble to put the Negroes back on the buses.

On Saturday night, January 21, a reporter named Carl Rowan saw an item moving on the AP wire in Minneapolis: the *Sunday Advertiser* would break the news that the Negroes had agreed to end the boycott. All Negroes would return to the buses Monday morning, said the story, which spelled out settlement terms including more courtesy from the bus drivers, special "all-Negro" buses during rush hours, and preservation of the existing seating arrangements on normal bus runs. Rowan already had been to Montgomery to cover the boycott. Finding it difficult to believe that the MIA leaders would accept such a minimal settlement, he called King in Montgomery to find out whether the story was true.

Listening to Rowan read the AP ticker, King felt the bottom fall out of his composure. He admitted that he knew nothing of such a deal. Privately, he feared that some of his MIA colleagues might have betrayed him behind his back. It was possible, King knew, for rivals to plot privately with the white people, especially because he was so exposed as a young outsider. Now that there was scant hope of negotiating an honorable settlement or of holding out long enough to force one, he was the natural scapegoat for almost certain humiliation. Compressed tensions could have caused a hemorrhage within the MIA leadership—but who? Rowan told him that the *Advertiser* story identified no one on the Negro delegation, saying only that it included "three prominent Negro ministers." King asked Rowan to call Commissioner Sellers to find out if the story was really true and, if possible, to learn the names of the ministers.

Rowan agreed. King hung up and waited. The timing of the story was clever. It would spring upon Montgomery just in time to cause mass confusion in the Negro churches at Sunday morning services. Many of the boycotters would be angry with the meager terms, while others would be happy that the ordeal was over and proud that they had given the white folks a run for their money. The fragile psychology of the boycott would be broken. And the MIA leaders would face the impossible choice of endorsing the settlement or admitting that it was not theirs.

Rowan called back. Sellers had confirmed the story, he reported, but had refused to name the three ministers on grounds of confidentiality. The most Rowan could pry out of Sellers was their church affiliations:



one was a Baptist, one a Presbyterian, and the third the pastor of a Holiness church. King's mind pounced on these clues. A Holiness church? Was Rowan sure? There was no such thing as a "prominent" Holiness minister among Montgomery Negroes—nor were there any Holiness preachers among the MIA leadership. A crack of hope appeared to King. With Rowan's clues, he thought he might find out who the conspirators were, if they existed. The Baptist preacher could be any one of a multitude, but there were very few Negro Presbyterians to investigate.

Fortified by such hope, King placed calls to the MIA leadership. His tone and his words put this crisis so far above all the other ones attendant to the 20,000 daily rides of the car pool that the essential preachers were all sitting in his living room within half an hour. King told them the shocking news of the story that would be in the paper the next morning. The immediate response of his colleagues brought great relief to King. No one rallied to the settlement as inevitable. They all denounced it. Everyone was alarmed, but no one wanted to give in to the destructive potential of the story without a fight. In short, they reacted as King himself had reacted, which confirmed his belief that the conspirators were not among them.

The first thing to do was to identify the three preachers in league with the commissioners. They learned all three names before midnight, and the results were as favorable as the King group could have wished. The three preachers who had met with the city commissioners were neither MIA members nor influential citizens. They were country preachers, who said Mayor Gayle had called them to city hall to discuss unspecified "insurance matters" and then handed them a copy of the bus settlement when they got there. That was it. The audacity of the city commissioners registered: they were engineering a naked hoax on the calculation that it would dissolve the boycott instantly or, failing that, at least divide the Negroes so that the boycott could never last. The ministers in King's home faced the calamitous prospect that the ruse might work. The commissioners had surprise and authority working for them, and the Negroes lacked a means of mass communication that could compete with the *Advertiser*.

They decided to wake up every single Negro minister in Montgomery, plus Graetz, in the hope that all of them would from their pulpits denounce the *Advertiser* story as a fake. Half the ministers went back to the telephones for this task, while King went off into the night with a group that admitted knowing the locations of the country "dives." This was Saturday night. By virtue of Rowan's warning, they had a chance to catch large numbers of their fellow citizens at the only traditional Negro meeting places other than the churches. A few of them, such as Rufus

Lewis' Citizens Club, approached the atmosphere of a ballroom, but the masses gathered at unmarked spots far out in the country, where people of King's dress and demeanor were never seen. There the laborers, farmers, and maids, often still in their work boots and dirty uniforms, came to lose themselves in loud music and strong drink and hugging and sweaty dancing. King and his coterie of prim preachers must have made quite a sight as they shouldered their way into the flesh and the noise, got the music to stop as it did only for police raids and major fights, cleared their throats, and finally introduced themselves to say that the white people were trying to call off the boycott with a trick, that the boycott was still on no matter what the *Advertiser* said in the morning, and that they should tell everybody that Reverend King and the others said in person to stay off the buses and come to the mass meeting Monday night. Then, after a few cheers and some grunts, and perhaps a question or two, the preachers moved out across the back roads to the next juke joint.

On Monday morning, the day after the *Advertiser* announced that the boycott had been settled, empty buses rolled through the streets once again. The bus company manager announced tersely that there was "no noticeable increase on the Negro routes." The city commissioners were of no mind to accept stark physical realities that contradicted their public assurances of the previous day. Cornered, faced with public ridicule, they fought back in all directions at once. Mayor Gayle immediately issued what Joe Azbell, on the next day's front page, called a "dynamic statement." He first blamed the collapse of the weekend agreement on the duplicity of the three Negro ministers he said had approved it. The commissioners had tried "with sincerity and honesty to end the boycott," but now it was "time to be frank." The government had "pussy-footed around long enough." The Negroes believed they had "the white people hemmed up in a corner," said the mayor, but the whites "have no concern" and "do not care" and "are not alarmed" about Negro bus riders. "It is not that important to whites that the Negroes ride the buses," he repeated. "When and if the Negro people desire to end the boycott, my door is open to them. But until they are ready to end it, there will be no more discussions."

Hard upon this statement came the announcement from city hall that Commissioner Frank Parks and Gayle were following Sellers into the ranks of the White Citizens Council, making it unanimous. The next day, Mayor Gayle was back on the front page urging the white women of the city to stop helping their servants. "The Negroes are laughing at white people behind their backs," he said. "They think it's very funny and amusing that whites who are opposed to the Negro boycott will act

as chauffeurs to Negroes who are boycotting the buses." Commissioner Sellers announced at the same time that he was instructing the Montgomery police to toughen up on Negroes standing around on the streets waiting for rides. Commissioner Parks announced that dozens of businessmen had volunteered to lay off employees who supported the boycott. All three commissioners said they were surprised by the outpouring of public support for their new hard line. Mayor Gayle held up a thick stack of congratulatory telegrams. Sellers said people had walked into his office volunteering to help the police. The city hall switchboard operator said she was swamped with calls praising the mayor, and Joe Azbell found excited white people all over town. "I hope the Negroes walk until they get bunions and blisters," one man told him.

Among MIA leaders, gratification over the success of the weekend rescue mission was restrained severely by fear. It was one thing to defy the city authorities for eight weeks, and still another to humiliate them and call them outright liars from every pulpit in town. A grim King offered his resignation to the MIA board that same Monday. Now there was no chance at all of a negotiated settlement with him as the MIA leader, but his offer lay on the table. No one would pick it up, as the other prospective leaders knew that to change was to split, and to split inevitably was to lose. Rev. S. S. Seay, one of the most respected of the senior ministers, was moved to call King back to duty in the language of the Messiah. "You are young and well-trained in the spirit," he told King. "I will drink my portion of this cup, but you can drink of it deeper."

The executive board gave King a unanimous vote of confidence. Then it turned to the more difficult task of devising a new strategy. One faint hope was that the city would allow a group headed by Rufus Lewis to operate a Negro-owned bus line, which would take the pressure off the car pool. The city would almost certainly deny Lewis' application for a franchise, however, lest it be accused of donating the economic benefits of segregation to the Negroes. Assuming that the Lewis plan would fail, the board members discussed their ultimate weapon—a federal lawsuit against bus segregation. Fred Gray, knowing that white Alabama would react to such a step as the social equivalent of atomic warfare, had been quietly seeking advice on the possibility since the first week of the boycott, when he wrote to NAACP lawyers in New York. Also, he had talked extensively with Clifford Durr and with several of the more experienced Negro lawyers in the state. All agreed that the federal suit offered the best hope of a court-ordered solution, certainly much better than the Rosa Parks appeal, which was bogged down in the state courts. Durr warned Gray to be sure of his plaintiffs, saying that if the white authorities could bring enough pressure to make a plaintiff back out of a suit,

they could then bring criminal prosecution against Gray himself on the obscure charge of "barratry," or false legal representation. Durr knew of a Negro lawyer who had been driven from the state by such means.

A thousand pitfalls lay in the path of the federal suit, some technical and others political. Gray reported to the board that he was having trouble locating potential clients—people who had been mistreated on the buses and were willing to stand firm as plaintiffs. He had been unable to find a single Negro male in Montgomery willing and able to be a suitable plaintiff. But he had found several women, including Claudette Colvin and her mother. He told the board that he could be ready to file a case in a matter of days. Legally, the case appeared to be sound, but it would take many months, if not years, to resolve. This presented the MIA leaders with unpleasant choices. If they called off the boycott pending the outcome of the legal proceedings, they might as well not have had the boycott in the first place. If they continued it, they would face for the first time the likelihood of a more or less permanent car pool, at a time when strain was putting new cracks in the operation every day. Under pressure, the MIA board members were second-guessing themselves even as they voted to direct Fred Gray and the strategy committee to prepare final recommendations on the lawsuit by the next week. There was no celebration. The white people across town were doing the celebrating that Monday. By the peculiar jujitsu of the boycott, the white people were excited after their weekend fiasco, while the Negroes were bemoaning the implications of their successful rescue mission. Every action seemed dwarfed by reaction in the next round. It had been so since the bus driver's first words to Rosa Parks.

From the next day forward, Montgomery policemen stopped car-pool drivers wherever they went—questioning them, checking their headlights and windshield wipers, writing traffic tickets for minute and often imaginary violations of the law. Car-pool drivers crept along the road and gave exaggerated turn signals, like novices in driving school. Policemen ticketed them anyway. Jo Ann Robinson, known as a stickler in everything from driving to diction, would get no less than seventeen tickets in the next couple of months—some for going too fast, others for going too slow. Traffic fines mounted, diverting into the city treasury money that might have gone into the MIA car-pool fund. Drivers feared that their insurance would be canceled or their licenses suspended. Backbiting increased, with some people saying that Rufus Lewis was too dictatorial to run the car pool and others saying that he sympathized too readily with the drivers as opposed to the riders.

On Thursday afternoon, January 26, King finished his day at the Dexter church office and started home with his secretary and Bob Williams, his friend from Morehouse. King was driving. When he stopped to pick up a load of passengers at one of the downtown car-pool stops, two motorcycle policemen pulled up behind him. All the passengers in King's car tried to behave normally, but three blocks down the street the motorcycles were still close behind. Williams told King to creep along, maybe they would go away. Nothing happened during the drive to the next pickup station, but when the passengers started to leave the car, one of the motorcycle policemen pulled up next to the driver's window and said, "Get out, King. You're under arrest for speeding thirty miles an hour in a twenty-five-mile zone."

Stunned, King did not protest. Telling Williams to notify Coretta, he stepped out of the car and soon found himself in the back of a radio-summoned police cruiser, whispering to himself that everything would be all right. King said nothing to the policemen, even when he realized that the cruiser was heading away from downtown. Panic seized him. Why weren't they going to the jail? The farther they went, past strange neighborhoods toward the country, the more King gave in to visions of nooses and lynch mobs. When the cruiser turned a corner on a dark street and headed across a bridge, his mind locked onto a single fear of the river. He was trembling so badly that it took him some time to absorb the meaning of the garish neon sign ahead, "Montgomery City Jail." He felt a tumbling rush of emotions—first joy that he was not going to be killed by a mob, then embarrassment that he had never even known where the city jail was and had assumed it was downtown, then guilt that he had blocked the jail out of his mind so thoroughly even when some of the boycotters were going there, then a colder though less piercing fear again as he realized he was going there, too. This last fear swelled up inside him in the corridor as he smelled the foul cell long before he got there, and when the jailer said, "All right, get on in there with all the others," he stood numb. King heard the iron door clang shut for the first time on him and a lifetime of distinctions.

The moment did not last forever, though, and before he finished staring at the wood-slat bunks and the toilet in the corner, the other prisoners recognized his face. Then King himself recognized a schoolteacher from the bus boycott. The teacher joined the drunks and common criminals who rushed up to King wanting to hear his story. Jail was not the end of the world to them, of course, and every new prisoner had a story. Before King could finish his, one of the prisoners interrupted to ask his help in getting out. Another did the same, and then others, until King finally shouted out, "Fellows, before I can assist in getting any of you out, I've



got to get my own self out." At this, the entire cell erupted in laughter. King was such a mixture of the exalted and the common—the formal "assist" of the educated leader and the plaintive "own self" of all prisoners. For him, the shock of his first arrest was already over.

Abernathy was the first to arrive at the jail after Williams and Coretta spread the alarm. His frantic urgency to get King out ran smack into the bureaucracy of the constabulary, and after finally accepting the fact that it was too complicated and too late in the evening to get King out on a property bond, Abernathy raced off to scrounge up enough currency to make a cash bond. Leaving, he passed carloads of Dexter members and MIA supporters who were converging on the jail. On the inside, King thought he was being bailed out when the jailer came after him. So did the prisoners, one of whom shouted, "Don't forget us when you get out." King shouted back that he wouldn't, but soon found himself rolling his fingers across an inkpad. Fingerprinted, hopes dashed, he was soon back in the cell. By the time the jailer came for him again, he had already learned to expect nothing. He held himself in check even when he began to realize that now it was the jailer, not he, who was frightened—a large crowd of Negroes had practically surrounded the building. The jailer hurried King out the front door on his own recognizance, and King, who had entered the jail in the grip of terror a couple of hours earlier, walked out to address a huge throng of well-wishers. It was some time later, at that night's mass meeting, before Abernathy caught up with the switches and reversals that rendered his cash unnecessary.

Word of King's arrest radiated through all of Negro Montgomery, stimulating rumors, horror stories, and vows of retribution. A restive crowd gathered outside the packed mass meeting. Inside, King and the other MIA leaders feared that the latecomers who could not squeeze into the meeting might do something violent. Besides, they wanted to share King's story and the joyous unity of the mass meeting with everyone possible. So the leaders took the unprecedented step of sending criers outside to announce that there would be a second mass meeting at another church immediately after the present one. With this news, the outside crowd moved off, mostly on foot, to the second church, which they filled, then to a third one.

This phenomenon repeated itself that night until there had been no fewer than seven mass meetings. Many people attended more than one of them. No one could believe it. In a floating conversation among several of King's friends and peers, mostly Dexter members, it was decided that it was too dangerous to let King drive anymore. To protect him, they would form themselves into a corps of drivers and bodyguards. It was agreed that they must override any objections from King and start that

very night. Richmond Smiley went off to fetch his little .25-caliber Barretta. Bob Williams, another of those who would be a driver for the next few years, was so moved by the night's events that he went back to his studio and worked until morning, arranging what would become his first published choral work, "Lord, I Just Can't Turn Back." His choir at Alabama State performed the composition that week.

King woke up the next morning to a fresh day of pressure. For him, time was fluctuating too rapidly between moments of deep fear and those of high inspiration. Late the next night, his mind was turning over as he lay in bed. Coretta had fallen asleep. The phone rang again. "Listen, nigger," said the caller, "we've taken all we want from you. Before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery." King hung up on the angry voice. Hope of sleep receded further. He paced the floor awhile before giving in completely to wakefulness, which drove him to the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. Some of the Negro callers were just curious about his arrest, while others wanted to complain about the car pool. He never knew what to expect. The sensations of the incoming images pressed in upon him—the hatred of the whites, the burdened, offended rectitude of the middle-class Negroes, the raw courage or neediness of the plain folk. He associated the Negro voices with the sea of enraptured black faces he had seen from the pulpit at mass meetings. The pressure of the Negro callers worked against this image, as did the white callers against his memories of Crozer. There was no idea nor imaginable heart large enough to satisfy all of them, or to contain them. The limitless potential of a young King free to think anything, and therefore to be anything, was constricted by realities that paralyzed and defined him. King buried his face in his hands at the kitchen table. He admitted to himself that he was afraid, that he had nothing left, that the people would falter if they looked to him for strength. Then he said as much out loud. He spoke the name of no deity, but his doubts spilled out as a prayer, ending, "I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." As he spoke these words, the fears suddenly began to melt away. He became intensely aware of what he called an "inner voice" telling him to do what he thought was right. Such simplicity worked miracles, bringing a shudder of relief and the courage to face anything. It was for King the first transcendent religious experience of his life. The moment lacked the splendor of a vision or of a voice speaking out loud, as Vernon Johns said they did, but such differences could be ascribed to rhetorical license. For King, the moment awakened and confirmed his belief that the essence of religion was not a grand metaphysical idea but something personal, grounded in experience—something that opened up mysteriously beyond the predicaments of human beings in their frailest and noblest moments.

The next day, a Saturday, King worked until early evening at the MIA and at the Dexter office. Among other chores, he wrote a letter to thank Roy Wilkins for the NAACP's "fine contribution" to the MIA, which had arrived not long after King publicly criticized the NAACP for scorning the boycott. Appropriately to their long future together, this first exchange between King and the famous civil rights leader, whom he addressed as "Mr. Wilkins," was concerned with money, tinged slightly with suspicion, and smothered with politeness. Among the day's crises, the one commanding the most attention was a rumor that the police were going to raid the MIA offices at Rufus Lewis' Citizens Club. King worked the phones to find an alternate site, which was not easy to do given the scarcity of centrally located, Negro-owned real estate in Montgomery. Intelligence reports of an imminent raid came so thickly that King and the other MIA leaders spirited away the MIA records that night in the trunks of the automobiles of trustworthy Citizens Club patrons. The next morning, they transferred them stealthily to the basement of the First Baptist Church while Abernathy was conducting the morning service upstairs. Some weeks later, E. D. Nixon secured permanent space for MIA headquarters in a building owned by the all-Negro Bricklayers Union.

At the Monday executive board meeting, members voted to proceed with the federal suit against bus segregation in Montgomery. They all knew it was a fateful step. For reasons of tactical consistency, they resolved to tell both the city fathers and their own followers that the boycott would continue as a separate matter. If the city agreed to the MIA's current segregation reform proposal, Negroes would return to the buses on those terms pending the outcome of the lawsuit. If the city tried to combine the two matters, offering to modify segregation on the buses if the MIA would drop the lawsuit, the MIA would consider such offers as they came. Frankly, King and his colleagues expected no such offers, anticipating correctly that their NAACP-style lawsuit would bring down nothing but increased hostility from the city. Against the punishment ahead, the MIA leaders offered the vision of a great victory over all bus segregation—no more technical hypotheticals about who might have to move where on the bus under what conditions. Freedom would be so simple. People could sit anywhere there was a seat.

King tried to explain this at the mass meeting that night in Abernathy's church, which was packed with a crowd of two thousand people. He tried to rally everyone's courage behind the lawsuit decision and the boycott, pulling the distant hopes nearer while dispelling the fears close by. It was not one of his best speeches. After he finished, old Mother Pollard got up



and made her way slowly to the front of the church. This was not unheard of. Since being enshrined as walking heroes of the boycott, some of the more outspoken old people were moved to speak from the floor at the mass meetings. Their folk wisdom and their tales of daily life inside the homes of powerful white people—how the boss lady had slipped them five dollars for the boycott with a warning not to tell the boss man, and later that same day the boss man had slipped them another five with a warning not to tell the boss lady—had become a special treat at the mass meetings, bringing both entertainment and inspiration.

Mother Pollard drew a hush of recognition and the automatic right to speak. "Come here, son," she said to King, and King walked over to receive a public, motherly embrace. "Something is wrong with you," said Pollard. "You didn't talk strong tonight."

"Oh, no, Mother Pollard," King replied. "Nothing is wrong. I am feeling as fine as ever."

"Now you can't fool me," she said. "I knows something is wrong. Is it that we ain't doing things to please you? Or is it that the white folks is bothering you?"

Pollard looked right through a smiling but flustered King. Before he could say anything, she moved her face close to his and said loudly, "I done told you we is with you all the way. But even if we ain't with you, God's gonna take care of you." With that, Mother Pollard inched her way back toward her seat, as the crowd roared and King's eyes filled with tears. Later, King said that with her consoling words fearlessness had come over him in the form of raw energy.

He first noticed that something was wrong a few minutes later when a messenger slipped in to Abernathy, who rushed down into the basement and then returned, looking worried. King was standing in the front of the church as the collection plate was being passed. He saw Abernathy whispering furtively with other MIA preachers. More messengers came and were dispatched. Perhaps the MIA records had been seized. The organ played and King watched calmly. A couple of the messengers seemed to start toward him and then to hesitate and retreat. Finally, one of the ushers waved King to the side of the platform to give him a message, but S. S. Seay stepped between them, shaking his head in the negative. This caused King to wave Abernathy over to him. "What's wrong?" he whispered.

Abernathy and Seay looked at each other, stalling. "Your house has been bombed," said Abernathy.

"Are Coretta and the baby all right?"

"We are checking on that now," said a miserable Abernathy, who had wanted to have the answer before telling King.

In shock, King remained calm, coasting almost automatically on the

emotional overload of the past few days. Nodding to Abernathy and Seay, he walked back to the center of the church, told the crowd what had happened, told them he had to leave and that they should all go home quietly and peacefully, and then, leaving a few shrieks and a thousand gasps behind, walked swiftly out a side door of the church.

Near his house, King pushed his way through a barrage of ominous sights and sounds. Little boys dashed around carrying pop bottles broken in half for a fight. Negro men brandished guns and knives, and some confronted the barricade of white policemen shouting for them to disperse. One berserk man, struggling to break the grasp of a policeman, challenged whites to shoot it out with .38s. Shouts of anger and recognition competed with sirens and the background noise of earnest Negro women singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Flanked by MIA leaders, King walked across the broken glass on his front porch and into the living room, which was jammed with Dexter members. Among them was an isolated group of first-time visitors to the King home, including several white policemen, reporter Joe Azbell, Mayor Gayle, Commissioner Sellers, and the fire chief. King brushed by them and into a back room, where a group surrounding Coretta and little Yoki, now ten weeks old, parted to make way for him. King hugged Coretta, and gave thanks that they were all right. Then he assumed the remote calm of a commander. There was much to do. Bombers were loose, and a riot was threatening to erupt outside. He leaned forward and whispered, "Why don't you get dressed, darling!" to Coretta, who was still in her robe.

King moved back into the front room to receive a crime scene report from Sellers and the mayor, both of whom assured him that they condemned the bombing and would do everything in their power to punish the bombers. "Regrets are fine, Mr. Sellers," an authoritative voice called out from behind King's shoulder. "But you created the atmosphere for this bombing with your 'get tough' policy. You've got to face that responsibility." It was C. T. Smiley, King's board chairman at Dexter and the older brother of the driver with the Baretta. More important to every Negro in the room, Smiley, as principal of Booker T. Washington High School, was utterly dependent on the city commissioners for his continued livelihood.

Sellers and Gayle said nothing. Joe Azbell and a couple of other white reporters wanted to leave the house to file their stories. They worked as stringers for national publications, and they knew this bomb story would sell. But they could not get out of the house, which was surrounded by angry, armed Negroes. A policeman rushed in huffing and said that some people in the crowd were saying they wouldn't leave without assurance from King that everything was all right.

King walked out onto the front porch. Holding up his hand for silence,

he tried to still the anger by speaking with an exaggerated peacefulness in his voice. Everything was all right, he said. "Don't get panicky. Don't do anything panicky. Don't get your weapons. If you have weapons, take them home. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. Remember that is what Jesus said. We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love." By then the crowd of several hundred people had quieted to silence, and feeling welled up in King to an oration. "I did not start this boycott," he said. "I was asked by you to serve as your spokesman. I want it to be known the length and breadth of this land that if I am stopped, this movement will not stop. If I am stopped, our work will not stop. For what we are doing is right. What we are doing is just. And God is with us."

King stepped back to a chorus of "Amen's," but as soon as Sellers stepped forward to speak, the mood vanished as suddenly as it had arrived. The mob booed him. When policemen tried to shout them down, they booed even louder.

King raised his hand again. "Remember what I just said," he cried. "Hear the Commissioner."

Sellers began anew, promising full police protection for the King family. Mayor Gayle seconded him and announced that the city would pay a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest of the bombers. When they finished, King urged the crowd to disperse. "Go home and sleep calm," he said. "Go home and don't worry. Be calm as I and my family are. We are not hurt. I am all right and my wife is all right."

"Show her to us!" cried a voice in the crowd, and Coretta came outside to stand with him. The crowd began to trickle away, followed by the reporters and white officials. Everyone took with them yarns that would be repeated throughout the city the next day, including the white policeman who said he would sure enough be dead if it hadn't been for that nigger preacher. Many of the Negroes would liken the sight of King with his hand raised to the famous poses of Gandhi or to Jesus calming the waters of the troubled sea. And the story of C. T. Smiley raced from mouth to mouth: imagine a Negro school principal telling off the police commissioner like that in front of everybody. For many, this was the most shocking event of the long night.

King took his rattled family to the Brooks home—where he had spent his first night in Montgomery two years earlier after eating the prophet's dinner with Vernon Johns. Long before dawn, both Daddy King and Coretta's father Obadiah Scott showed up there separately, each pounding on the door, scaring the sleepers inside. The two fathers had come to take their children away from bombings. Daddy King in particular was

all thunder. "Well, M.L.," he said, "you just come on back to Atlanta." King, stalling, said that the bomb had not done much damage and that he had to think of the important principles at stake there in Montgomery. Daddy King cut him off. "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion," he said. They argued for several hours, both afraid, with Daddy King stressing that the movement had gotten out of hand, that the danger was all out of proportion to Rosa Parks, and his son saying yes, it was bigger than bus seats now. Meanwhile, Coretta resisted her own father's command to go home with him. After the fathers retreated, King took his wife aside and emotionally thanked her for being such a soldier. She was deeply moved to hear that King, with all his strength, needed her.

Fred Gray filed the papers in federal court the next day, February 1, just as President Eisenhower asked Congress to raise the price of first-class postage stamps by a penny, to four cents. Both actions made the front pages of newspapers across the country, as had the King bombing two days earlier. Ike's news was bigger news, of course, but the boycott was rising to consciousness outside Montgomery.

February dawned cold and dangerous. The night of February 1, a bomb exploded in E. D. Nixon's yard, drawing another angry crowd. Three days later, the *Advertiser* reported that one of Gray's clients said she "was surprised" to see herself listed as a plaintiff, and that she had told Mayor Gayle, "You know I don't want nothing to do with that mess." Jeanatta Reese, who worked as a maid for one of the mayor's relatives, broke down under the pressure as visitors of both races trampled a path to her door, urging her to stick to the contrary assurances she had given them. The police car that had been parked outside King's house since the bombing disappeared and then reappeared for continuous station outside the ex-plaintiff's house. MIA boycotters took this as a telltale sign that the woman was in great fear, which under the circumstances meant that she was throwing in with the whites, who promptly decided that she was more deserving of police protection than was King. Fred Gray was in trouble, as Durr had warned.

Three days later, white students rioted at the University of Alabama against the court-ordered admission of the first Negro student in the school's history. Rumors circulated that the violence had been triggered by the angry reaction of a few whites to the sight of Autherine Lucy's arrival in a Cadillac, or to a report that she had paid her registration fee with a hundred-dollar bill. In reaction, the university trustees suspended Lucy, citing reasons of her own safety. She and the NAACP, which had litigated her case for three years, expressed shock that the university held her rather than the mob responsible for the riot, and promptly went to court seeking reinstatement. Outraged and bewildered, Roy Wilkins

said in New York that he never dreamed anything like a riot would occur. It had been "a routine case" like many others, he said, and therefore he had "figured it was a well-established principle, it's oiled, it's greased, it's going."

In Montgomery, Fred Gray's draft board revoked his minister's deferment on the day after the riot. Four days after that, the Mississippi and Alabama White Citizens Councils drew ten thousand people to the Montgomery Coliseum for what was described as the largest segregation rally of the century, with all three Montgomery city commissioners on the stage as featured stalwarts. "I am sure you are not going to permit the NAACP to control your state," declared the star speaker, Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, whose "one prescription for victory" was for Southern white people to "organize and be militant." Three days after the rally, a Montgomery judge impaneled a special grand jury to investigate racial unrest in the city, and local prosecutors summoned before the jury more than two hundred Negro witnesses to testify about who was leading the boycott. Word leaked out that the grand jury was preparing criminal indictments against MIA leaders under a 1921 statute prohibiting boycotts "without just cause or legal excuse." During the parade of witnesses, police arrested, booked, and fingerprinted Fred Gray on the charge of barratry. In the *Advertiser*, Joe Azbell wrote that the city was on the verge of a "full scale racial war."

King escaped on February 20 to preach at Fisk University's Religious Emphasis Week. He was still in Nashville when Bayard Rustin made his appearance in Montgomery. Of those outsiders who would be drawn prominently into King's life, Rustin was the first to show up in person. He opened up two-way traffic with movement tacticians of the outside world, bringing with him experiences and influences far beyond the confines of the Negro church spirit that had sustained the boycott thus far. Rustin was an internationally respected pacifist, as well as a vagabond minstrel, penniless world traveler, sophisticated collector of African and pre-Columbian art, and a bohemian Greenwich Village philosopher. Nearly forty-six years old when he got to Montgomery, he had lived more or less a hobo's life, committed to the ideals of world peace and racial brotherhood. Abernathy and E. D. Nixon could tell from the first sight of him—tall and bony, handsome, animated, and conspiratorial, full of ideas that spilled out in a high-pitched voice and a proud but squeaky West Indian accent—that Rustin was a colorful character. It would have taxed the creative powers of Dickens or Hugo to invent him.

Born in 1910, the last of nine children in a family of Negro caterers,



Rustin grew up in a sixteen-room mansion on one of the broad, tree-lined streets of West Chester, Pennsylvania. Unlike its grimy sister city of Chester, site of Crozer Seminary, the town had all the advantages of enlightened wealth. It was the home of an influential Quaker meeting, to which the Rustins belonged, and of experiments in progressive, integrated education. Rustin knew that his family did not own the enormous house in which they lived, but he never found out exactly how they got there. The usual answer was that the white folks "didn't need it" and liked having their favorite cook and caterer nearby. There were also stories that Rustin's mother's family had sued the town long ago to repossess properties once owned by an Indian tribe from which the family was descended, but Rustin could never figure out to his satisfaction how or whether the stories related to his house.

As a precocious eleven-year-old when Harding was President, Rustin won one too many school contests and provoked jealous students to taunt him, saying he didn't know who his mama was, or his daddy. This made no sense to Rustin, but more taunts and a few questions at home turned his entire world upside down. The woman he had always known as his older sister Florence was in fact his mother. His mother and father, the uneducated caterers, were actually his grandparents, and his other brothers and sisters were actually his aunts and uncles. Since his birth, all the family members had created the fiction that an illegitimate grandson was a legitimate son. Among the greatest leaps young Rustin faced when attempting to realign his emotions was to take notice of the man who before had been only Florence's controversial and inconsequential boyfriend, whom Rustin suddenly beheld as a kind of stepfather. This man, like the one Rustin learned was his long-vanished natural father, was controversial because he was a West Indian. American Negroes tended to dislike the West Indian immigrants, because of their arrogance and their British accents and their extreme color consciousness. Rustin, having grown up hearing Negroes call them "monkey chasers," struggled to control his prejudice against them, including the one in his house. His first shocked response was to listen more carefully to his new stepfather, and within a few weeks he had picked up a pompous West Indian accent that he kept all his life.

When the Depression and family poverty forced him out of college, Rustin went to live with a relative in Harlem. There he waited tables, sang on street corners, talked jazz and revolution, catered private meals for white people, went to free night classes at City College, and otherwise practiced his own art of survival. During 1931, the year he arrived, the hottest political story in Harlem was the Communist International's "show trial" of an immigrant Finn named August Yokinen, charged with

acting discourteously toward three Negroes at a Harlem nightclub run by the Communist Party. The trial, attended by 1,500 spectators and covered on the front page of *The New York Times*, proved spectacularly successful in advertising the International's strict policy of brotherhood on the race question. The Communist Party ran the only integrated social clubs in Harlem. Rustin attended them regularly. Although as a Quaker he had been inclined toward the gentlemanly pacifism more associated with the Socialists, he was bitterly disappointed by the official Socialist position that racism would disappear automatically upon the establishment of socialism. By a corollary of this doctrine, the Socialists ruled out as wasteful any special agitation on the race issue. As a practical matter, it meant that white Socialists stayed out of Harlem. Disgusted with the Socialists, Rustin joined the Young Communist League.

His musical talents flourished during the thirties. Faithful to the spirit of the International, Rustin learned an amazing assortment of workers' songs, English madrigals, and folk classics. He earned jobs singing backup for folk singer Leadbelly in New York cafés, and he traveled for nearly two years with Josh White. Everywhere he went, he recruited for the Young Communist League. His qualities made him an ideal organizer. He could entertain crowds with speeches or songs, write pamphlets skillfully, and run a meeting. Fearless, unattached, able to get along with whites and Negroes alike, Rustin rose quickly as a youth recruiter for the Communist Party.

Within days after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the party's Central Committee ordered Comrade Rustin to shut down his Jim Crow work immediately. Policy had shifted overnight. Now comrades were to stop anything that might divert the attention of the United States from the menace of Hitler. Stunned, Rustin asked for a night to think it over. The past few years had been the happiest of his life. He had crisscrossed the country many times, speaking at colleges and high schools and union halls. Having found himself, he could not quit his work just because the party cared more about the Soviet Union than about race. On the other hand, he could not leave the party without giving up most of his friends and his most stable point of reference over the past decade. The next morning, Rustin went back to the Central Committee and resigned, cutting himself adrift again.

Some weeks later, he secured an appointment with A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Until recently, the Communist Rustin had scorned Randolph as a lifelong Socialist. Now, suddenly, it was Randolph who was the most militant of the Negro leaders, having threatened publicly to lead a massive march on Washington unless President Roosevelt issued an order banning racial discrimi-

nation in defense industries. Randolph's most vociferous critics were American Communists, including the Negro Communist leader who had just shoved Rustin out of the party. They called Randolph a traitor for attempting to interfere with American war preparations. In Randolph's office, Rustin confessed blindness for having worked so long for the Communists, and the ever tolerant Randolph told him to forget it. Recognizing his talents, Randolph gave him temporary work in his March on Washington movement. When Roosevelt capitulated, signing the order on defense jobs, Randolph made an appointment for Rustin to see A. J. Muste at the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

As FOR's youth secretary, Rustin began his career as an itinerant Gandhian. FOR leaders, recognizing that pacifist recruitment was going nowhere so long as Hitler was making war, decided to emphasize the anti-colonial aspects of Gandhian nonviolence. By the seesaw habits of ideological politics, activists for Negro rights came suddenly to the fore in Gandhian circles even as they became taboo in Communist ones. The FOR developed during the war a new organization called the Congress of Racial Equality. Rustin worked both for FOR and CORE, as did a young Negro aristocrat named James Farmer. Together they sat at the feet of a traveling Gandhi disciple named Krishnalal Shridharani, author of *War Without Violence*. This book became the semiofficial bible of CORE, and by example the hard-drinking, cigar-smoking, woman-chasing Shridharani taught the wide-eyed young Americans that Gandhian politics did not require a life of dull asceticism.

It did require sacrifice, however, and in 1943 Rustin renounced as an unconscionable privilege his right to Quaker war duty in a hospital, spending the remainder of World War II in Lewisburg Penitentiary. Upon his release, he headed a Free India Committee and was frequently arrested for picketing outside the British Embassy in Washington. In 1947, Rustin joined a CORE-sponsored bus ride through the South to test a new Supreme Court ruling that Negro passengers on interstate routes could not be forced to sit in the back of the bus. White opponents met the challenge with beatings, and Rustin was among those convicted under local segregation laws. A showcase appeal proceeded until the day Roy Wilkins called the freedom riders to his office to say that the NAACP lawyers had misplaced their interstate bus tickets, which was essential evidence. Therefore, the appeal could not go forward. "You boys have got to go on the chain gang," said Wilkins. Amid the instant recriminations, in which some of the riders charged that the local NAACP officials were crumbling under pressure, Rustin took the Gandhian position that cheerful acceptance of punishment might make a better witness for the cause than lawful evasion. "If we got to go, we got to go," he



told Wilkins with a smile. After the chain gang, he went to India for six months on the invitation of Gandhi's Congress Party, and later to Africa, where he worked with young African anti-colonists like Kwame Nkrumah and founded the Committee to Support South African Resistance. Stories of his travels became legend within the restricted circles of Gandhian intellectuals.

Rustin welcomed more jailings and a few beatings, including one in New Orleans that left him without some of his front teeth. On June 25, 1951, he led a motley group of religious idealists, Marxists, and FOR activists on a march from Central Park to Times Square in protest against the Korean War. One of the passersby was so infuriated by the speeches that he seized a picket sign, ripped off the placard, and rushed toward Rustin with the stick, screaming that they were a bunch of Commies. Rustin calmly handed the man a second stick, inviting him to strike with them both. Nonplussed, the man threw both sticks on the ground, but later he decked another marcher with his fists, while Rustin shouted excitedly to passersby that there was nonviolent power in the acceptance of the blows.

He could make such a solemn speech and then abruptly break into a grin of delight and say he needed to go "Gandhi" somebody into giving some money for a march. He had a strong sense of the absurd and a gift for parody, both of which were enhanced by his modified Cary Grant accent. These charms were appreciated in the bohemian culture of Greenwich Village. He drank at the White Horse Tavern along with Dylan Thomas, Norman Mailer, and other literati, and entertained people by singing obscure ditties back at his apartment, accompanying himself on the harpsichord. His personal life was generally a mystery, even to most of his friends, but it was widely assumed that he was a homosexual. This proclivity would suit or explain some of the eccentricities of Rustin's life—his hobby of cooking gourmet meals for rich people on Park Avenue, his sponsors who kept him going at times with gifts of money or art. In the Village of those years, homosexuality caused little stir, but when Rustin began to get into public trouble, his political colleagues worried that there might be a self-destructive urge at the core of him.

After several such incidents threatened to engulf the FOR in public scandal, A. J. Muste told Rustin and the top leaders of FOR that he loved Rustin like a son but that he would have no choice but to dismiss him if anything happened again. Not long thereafter, on January 21, 1953, Rustin and two other men were arrested in the back of a parked car in Pasadena, California, convicted on morals charges, and sentenced to thirty days in jail. Rustin resigned from the FOR staff the next day. Upon

his release, he went back to New York a much reduced man, having lost the confidence of Muste's circle of leaders, which included all those capable of employing Rustin in what he regarded as the struggle of the century. This made the third time that Rustin had been crushed—once by his family, once by the Communist Party, and now by his own inner drives. Unemployed, a bastard, a Negro, an ex-Communist, an ex-con, and a homosexual, he was a misfit by any social standard, but Rustin still believed that he could not only rescue himself but also have a positive moral impact on the entire country. To him, this was cosmic logic and the romance of the ages. He saw a chance in the Montgomery bus boycott before anyone else.

Rustin left New York for Montgomery by car on the same day that King began Religious Emphasis Week at Fisk University in Nashville. His timing was exquisite. That morning, Ralph Abernathy received from the city commissioners and a group of white businessmen what was billed as an ultimatum: if the Negroes promptly accepted the settlement terms they had previously rejected, there would be "no retaliation whatsoever" against those taking part in the boycott; if they did not, the law would take its course. Abernathy did not have to guess what this meant, as the whole town was abuzz with the news that the grand jury had returned a fistful of criminal indictments. He bargained without result and then walked outside to tell reporters that the city was offering nothing more than segregation and increased bus fares. "We have walked for eleven weeks in the cold and rain . . ." he said. "Now the weather is warming up. Therefore we will walk on until some better proposals are forthcoming from our city fathers."

That was for public consumption. Abernathy proceeded directly to a tense meeting of the executive board. It was all very well to say they were going on, it was agreed, but could they continue the boycott if the leaders and the car-pool drivers were all in jail? What were the white people really going to do? The general consensus was that the whites wanted to "cut off the head" of the boycott. They wanted to get King first. No one said outright that this was a reassuring idea, but several did say that they could keep going even if King were lost. Avoidance was in the air. Few if any of the people in the room had ever been arrested. Finally, S. S. Seay rose to speak as though possessed. "We all know they're gonna try to separate Dr. King from the rest of us," he said. "He knows it, too. He's talked about it, and I have seen that disturbed look in his face. I'd know it anywhere. I say let's all go to jail!"

These words snapped through the room. One minister headed for the

door, caught himself, and then broke the silence with "How we gonna do that?" It was a logical question, but met with an emotional response. Board members and observers jumped to their feet to second Seay, and all the meandering talk of tactics and procedure was washed over by a tide of bravado. That night they took a unanimous recommendation to a huge mass meeting at St. John's A.M.E. Church. Of four thousand people in attendance, only two voted to end the boycott on the city's terms.

The next morning, Abernathy formally notified the city of the MIA's decision by telegram. Not long thereafter, Bayard Rustin knocked on his door. Abernathy recognized some of the references Rustin offered, but otherwise he did not know quite what to make of him. Citing the chaos of the moment, which was evident by the constant flow of messengers and the guards posted on the porch, Abernathy begged off a long discussion about the boycott. He advised Rustin to draw the shades on the windows and bolt the door of his hotel room.

E. D. Nixon accorded Rustin a lengthier reception, being less busy than the acting MIA leader. Besides, he struck up an instant bond of trust and rapport with Rustin because of Philip Randolph, their common mentor. Randolph had raised the money for Rustin's trip to Montgomery. The reason for the nearly martial state of preparation around Abernathy, Nixon explained, was that they all expected the deputy sheriffs to start rounding up the indicted people any day now. If that was so, said Rustin, then the MIA leaders might be making a tactical mistake by waiting anxiously for the deputies to come after them. Such behavior reinforced the psychology of the crusading lawman and the skulking criminal. Rustin gently suggested a more Gandhian response—something on the order of handing an attacker a stick. That evening, after leaving Nixon's, Rustin walked up to South Jackson Street to take a look at King's house. Floodlights had been strung around the roof to illuminate the perimeter for security. Volunteer guards stood outside even though, as Rustin had learned to his disappointment, King and his family were out of town.

Abernathy was on the phone to Nashville that night, finally telling King that it was certain. The grand jury had returned the largest wholesale indictment in the history of the county. Deputy sheriffs, prosecutors, and white reporters had been busy around the courthouse all day, and now were saying that the dragnet operation would begin the next day. King promised Abernathy he would return to Montgomery first thing in the morning. He made airline reservations to fly back through Atlanta, where he had left his wife and daughter for the week, then skipped the rest of the schedule in Nashville. As his early morning flight touched down in Atlanta, he knew that he must weather a family ordeal before he could step off into the unknown abyss of prison in Montgom-

cry. His mother had been confined to bed for most of the three weeks since the bombing. As for Daddy King, who had never thought his son should go to Dexter in the first place, King was aware that this final crisis could not have come on a worse day. By a telling coincidence, Daddy King was to sign the legal instruments securing a loan of \$150,000 for the Ebenezer building program. Few preachers anywhere had the standing to borrow such a sum in 1956. The dollar amount of this ambition had been for some time the centerpiece of Daddy King's self-description in church programs, and it would remain so until he did something even bigger. King, approaching his parents on the concourse of the Atlanta air terminal, knew by their downcast expressions and slow, trudging walks that he had already ruined what would otherwise be a proud day in their lives.

Daddy King opened his attack during the drive home to Boulevard. M.L. should not go back to Montgomery at all, he said. Their phone had been ringing all morning with calls. The morning *Advertiser* said that an incredible 115 Negroes had been indicted and that deputies were beginning a massive roundup, and the news was being broadcast over the radio, even in Atlanta. The elder King said that he had already talked with his friend Herbert Jenkins, the Atlanta police chief, and learned that Montgomery detectives had come to Atlanta in the hope of finding an old charge on which King could be arrested. Jenkins said the Montgomery authorities wanted to get King out of Alabama. That was how serious it was, said Daddy King. Until things cooled down, at least, M.L. should stay in Atlanta, where he had the support of powerful Negroes and even of some powerful whites, like Chief Jenkins and Mayor Hartsfield.

As usual, King let his father's monologue run its course. Daddy King said he was sure he was right, but just in case his son had any doubts, he had invited Dr. Mays and some of the other men M.L. most respected to come by the house that afternoon. These men of stature and proven judgment all cared personally for M.L., having known him since he was a small boy. M.L. could hear for himself what they had to say. When the question was put, King agreed to stay for the summit meeting, although the delay meant that he missed his connecting flight to Montgomery.

At the appointed hour, Dr. Mays was there in the King home, along with President Rufus Clement of Atlanta University, the local bishop of the A.M.E. church, the editor of the *Atlanta Daily World*, and a half-dozen of the most influential money men on Auburn Avenue. Daddy King repeated his speech for their benefit. If anything, it was more emotional than the one he had made in the car. At its conclusion, those present murmured their assent. This came as no surprise to King, who realized that, given his father's shrewd willfulness, anyone who disagreed

would not have been invited. One by one, the assembled leaders began their own speeches in support of Daddy King, until King finally interrupted in pain. "I must go back to Montgomery," he said. His friends were being arrested and hauled off to jail at that very moment. How could he hide here in Atlanta?

The silence that hung in the room was broken only when Daddy King burst into tears, in front of the same men with whom he was to swap six-figure securities that day. His sobs made the stillness all the more excruciating. King looked pleadingly at Dr. Mays, who soon spoke up to say that perhaps young King had a point, that perhaps those in the room would do well to turn their influence toward defending him in Alabama. His words broke the tension in many respects, not least by giving people something to do. One of the lawyers ran off to place a call to no less a personage than Thurgood Marshall. He returned shortly with the good news that Marshall promised to throw the entire weight of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund behind young King's defense. This and other assurances helped Daddy King recover, and soon he was saying that he was going back to Montgomery himself. He was going to stick by his son. He would accompany him to the jailhouse. Daddy King was himself again, but at the same time he was stalling—at least by the urgent timetable that was beckoning his son. Daddy King was going, but he had the loan business to take care of. And he did not want to fly. He wanted to go by car, but he did not want King or himself or either of the wives to drive. It was too dangerous. He would find a driver for them. They would leave in the morning.

All this delay in Atlanta caused King to miss a different kind of drama in Montgomery. E. D. Nixon, the first to be arrested under the boycott indictment, did not wait for the deputies to come for him. On Bayard Rustin's suggestion, he walked inside the county courthouse to the sheriff's office and said, "Are you looking for me? Well, here I am." The deputies looked quizzically at each other and then welcomed Nixon to jail. Within a short time, he was booked, fingerprinted, photographed, and released on bond. No sooner had a smiling Nixon walked past a few Negroes milling around the courthouse than word of his feat began to spread through Negro Montgomery. Nixon had turned the dreaded process of being apprehended into something quite different—quicker and less painful than a trip to the dentist. Soon Nixon's dignified old pastor walked into the courthouse, and the news flashed that he had actually traded jokes with the deputy who arrested him.

Such behavior set off a chain reaction. Word of what was happening went everywhere, drawing more indictees and more spectators. Some of the arriving smiles were forced, but the ones on leaving jail were always



genuine. As the crowd grew into the hundreds, applause and words of encouragement began to lift the mood. Those already out on bail advised the others on ways to post the \$300 bond as quickly as possible. Those picked up by deputies, like Abernathy, passed through the crowd waving and hugging people. Soon the deputies out on the dragnet were coming up empty because so many of the Negroes were on their way downtown voluntarily. Laughter began to spread through the crowd. A joke went around that some inquiring Negroes were upset upon being told by phone that they were not on the arrest list. Some of the white deputies, infected by the good humor, began to enjoy themselves too. Sheriff Butler, exasperated by this perversion of the penal spirit, came outside to shout, "This is no vaudeville show!" But he had little effect. The jailhouse door, which for centuries had conjured up visions of fetid cells and unspeakable cruelties, was turning into a glorious passage, and the arriving criminals were being celebrated like stars at a Hollywood premiere.

Rustin worked joyfully in the background. When it developed that a shortage of bondable property might pose a threat to the swift release of boycotters yet to be arrested, he persuaded a friend to wire him a loan of \$5,000, which he turned over to Nixon. At the end of the day, Rustin took his second consecutive night walk, ignoring repeated warnings from boycotters who said the Montgomery authorities were itching to find an "outsider" upon whom to blame all their troubles. This time he went to the home of Jeanatta Reese, the embattled woman who had withdrawn from the MIA lawsuit. Two police cars still sat outside. Rustin marched up to the officers on sentry duty and asked breezily to see Mrs. Reese. The officers, doubtless having never seen or heard anyone like Rustin, eyed him warily. At first they questioned him on the suspicion that he might want to hurt Mrs. Reese, but the more he talked, the more they simply wanted to know who he was. Their questions posed a threat, as his true identity might expose the MIA to scandal. "I am Bayard Rustin," he said, drawing himself up to full height. "I am here as a journalist working for *Le Figaro* and the *Manchester Guardian*." The officers wrote that down, as Rustin explained to them something of the importance of the French and British papers. It took Rustin ten minutes of persistent conversation to talk his way to Mrs. Reese's door for a conversation that turned out to be hardly worth the effort. "I had to do what I did or I wouldn't be alive today," she told him.

The King family pulled up to the Montgomery parsonage at nine the next morning, to be greeted by television cameras and a contingent of boycotters still exuberant over the jailings of the previous day. Within a few minutes, King, Daddy King, and Abernathy were off to the courthouse, trailed by a small caravan of Dexter members. On the way, Aber-

nathy briefed them about procedures at the county jail (as opposed to the city jail, where King had been booked a month earlier). He also described his own arrest as one of the best things that had ever happened to him. King, facing jail again, struggled to believe him, and an utterly mystified Daddy King did not believe him at all until he experienced for himself the holiday atmosphere around the courthouse. The crowd cheered all three of them. King was processed again—photographed this time, with jail number 7089 hanging under his chin—and released back into the embrace of his followers. He was the twenty-fourth minister to be booked.

On the recommendation of Nixon and Abernathy, King invited Rustin to a meeting of the strategy committee afterward, at which it was decided to change the mass meeting into a prayer meeting from that night forward. The idea was to foster spiritual commitment for the long ordeal ahead. Each meeting's agenda would be organized around five prayers, including one for the strength of spirit to be nonviolent, one for the strength of body to keep walking, and a "prayer for all those who oppose us." Rustin was impressed by the intuitive Gandhian method at work in the plan. Privately, he told King that he had been all over the world and not seen a movement that could compare with what he had seen already in Montgomery. He wanted to help spread the word, particularly among believers in nonviolence. There were articles to be written, funds to be raised, specialized techniques to be taught. He realized the dangers involved with "outside agitators," particularly Northerners, but he would work behind the scenes if King thought it wise. King, beholding Rustin for the first time, said they needed all the help they could get.

Rustin drifted by Abernathy's church, site of that night's mass meeting. To his amazement, he found that the church started filling up at four o'clock, and he watched the crowd sing hymns and pray on their own for three hours. The meeting began when all ninety of those arrested thus far walked out onto the church podium. Instantly, the audience of mostly plainer folk rose to its feet, and parents brought their children forward to touch them as the ovation rolled on. King said that the spirit of the boycott was for "all people, black and white." Abernathy declared that the solidarity of the movement during King's absence proved that the boycott was "not a one-man show." The leaders, feeling a superabundance of support, called for a day of thanks—no car pool, no taxis, no private cars. Everyone would walk tomorrow on "Double-P Day," the day of prayer and pilgrimage.

What distinguished this meeting from all previous ones was not so much its fervor or content but the presence of some thirty-five reporters from all over the country. For the first time, the Montgomery bus boycott

had drawn a press contingent of accredited correspondents. Unfortunately for Rustin, none of these reporters knew him as the man from *Le Figaro*, but several of them did know of him as a resplendent figure in Greenwich Village. As they talked with the host reporters at the *Advertiser*, who were constantly in touch with the local police, further doubts sprang up about his identity. These became serious enough that there was talk of calls being placed to Paris and London to check up on him.

Rustin knew the baleful signs. He called John Swomley, executive director for the FOR, in New York, with an urgent message for Muste and the others. Rustin described what he had seen in Montgomery, saying that the MIA people were at once gifted and unsophisticated in non-violence. (As an exhibition of the latter, Rustin had in mind his first visit to the King home, when he shouted to stop someone from sitting on a loaded pistol that was lying on the couch.) These people *must* have somebody come in who was qualified to teach nonviolence. There were only four or five such people in the country, including Rustin, and he told Swomley sadly that he would not be staying long. He knew he had no claim on his old organization, but he implored Swomley to trust his judgment and send someone in on the next plane.

Rustin attended Dexter services that Sunday and then spent the evening in the King home, going over the history of the boycott in some detail. Coretta remembered hearing Rustin give a speech at Antioch some years earlier. Neither she nor King expressed any objection to Rustin's long history in left-wing politics, and King spoke knowledgeably of figures like Muste. He was trying to practice nonviolence, he told Rustin, but he did not subscribe to Muste-style pacifism because he believed no just society could exist without at least a police power. Rustin quibbled some, but nevertheless these were not the views he had expected of a Montgomery preacher.

It was the worst of worlds for Rustin. His affection for the MIA people and his vision of the role he could play expanded even as his position deteriorated by the hour. Word came that the white people were saying *Le Figaro* had never heard of him and was offering a reward for the identification of the impostor. About that time, an influential Negro reporter from Birmingham got word that Rustin was in town. Knowing Rustin's background, he burst into a leadership huddle to announce that the white people were sure to find out about him and would use the information to discredit everything the boycott had accomplished thus far. Now Rustin was in a cross fire. On Monday, word came that the whites might arrest him for fraud or for inciting to riot, and the Negro reporter clinched things by threatening to expose Rustin in his newspaper if MIA leaders did not get him out of town. Rustin stalled. He had



become fixated on a desire to transfer his informal role personally to the new nonviolence tactician from the FOR staff. The ensuing scenes could have been condensed from a Western movie. Glenn Smiley, the replacement, came into town and received a hurried, rather sad briefing from the departing Rustin, whom he had known for fifteen years. Then Rustin introduced Smiley to King and managed chipper good-byes before King was obliged to have him smuggled to Birmingham in the back of a car.

Like Rustin, Smiley had traveled on the FOR staff since his own imprisonment for pacifist resistance to service in World War II. By appearance and temperament, however, the two friends were utterly different. Smiley was a mild-mannered white Methodist preacher from Texas, who looked and sounded like one until he spoke on the subject of violence or race. His first act was to trade in his New York license plates for Georgia ones. His first advice to King was to get rid of the guns around his house. Smiley thought King's most striking quality was his stubbornness—how he would give in to fears and then almost angrily sweep them aside as irrelevant to the choices at hand. "Don't bother me with tactics," he said more than once. "I want to know if I can apply nonviolence to my heart." At such times, Smiley was much burdened by the inadequacy of his Gandhian advice. For four years, he would go in and out of Montgomery on call, often arriving for midnight MIA strategy sessions. Invariably, King would jump up at two or three o'clock in the morning to say that the work of the Lord could not go forward unless they sent out for some soul food, and Smiley, to the astonishment of himself and his relatives, learned to love pig's-ear sandwiches. So did the Lutheran missionary, Robert Graetz.

Within a week of King's second arrest in Montgomery, cabinet secretary Maxwell Rabb summoned E. Frederic Morrow, the first Negro professional ever to serve on the White House staff, for an old-fashioned chewing out. Rabb was tired of getting Morrow's memos urging the President to speak out in favor of desegregation, he said, and what galled him most was that Negro voters still seemed to prefer the Democratic Party of Eastland and Byrd in spite of all Eisenhower had done in civil rights, such as the desegregation of nearly all public facilities in the nation's capital and the official support for the NAACP position in the *Brown* case. Negro voters were ungrateful, Rabb charged. He said he was disgusted with the whole issue and would not stick his neck out anymore.

Morrow swallowed his disagreement in retreat, as he often did. A public relations expert on leave from CBS-TV, the son and grandson of preachers, Morrow had obtained a secretary from the White House pool only after a tearful woman from Massachusetts volunteered, citing the

obligations of her Catholic faith, and now staff women were under strict orders to enter and leave his office in pairs, so as to allay suspicions of sexual misconduct. Morrow walked softly. He had been working at the White House nearly nine months but had not yet been sworn in for duty. This was another uncomfortable subject. Morrow and everyone else knew that the Administration had already gotten credit in the Negro media for his presence, and that the traditional ceremony would only generate negative results among white voters. (Morrow would not be sworn in for another three years. A private, unannounced ceremony—without the President—made his prior service retroactively official.)

A few days after being lectured by Rabb, Morrow was called into the office of the man who hired him, Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's chief of staff and alter ego. Adams was worried about race again. The previous year it had been Mississippi—the sensational Emmett Till lynching and a rash of lesser atrocities that had generated political pressure to hire Morrow. This year it was Alabama. A federal judge had revoked Autherine Lucy's suspension from the University of Alabama, only to have the trustees expel her permanently the next day. The case was a bundle of lunacy; Lucy had been suspended and expelled before she had ever enrolled. What worried Adams was the prospect of violence. Alabama whites were crowing about how the riot had "worked"; it had restored segregation. As for the Negroes, the latest FBI intelligence reports revealed that the Communist influence was pervasive, Adams said, and the Negro leaders were not sophisticated enough to control planted insurrectionists. Morrow did not argue. He valued Adams for his personal kindnesses, not for his advanced views on civil rights. In fact, Morrow knew that Adams was the most powerful figure among those urging that Eisenhower do as little as possible in civil rights.

Practically speaking, the fight within the Eisenhower Administration over civil rights was a contest for the President's ear between Sherman Adams and Attorney General Herbert Brownell. The President asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to present a classified briefing about race on March 9, 1956, for the cabinet meeting at which the Administration would decide whether to approve, modify, or cancel Brownell's plans to ask Congress for a new civil rights bill. No such legislation had passed since Reconstruction.

Hoover arrived with a brace of aides, easels, and display charts. His peek into the inner world of Negro protest, though couched in the language of secret revelation, was superficial and riddled with error. Cursory remarks on Montgomery, for instance, misstated several dates and laws while distorting the nature of the bus boycott. No one in the Cabinet Room knew better, however, and the facts were of secondary importance anyway. Politically speaking, Hoover cut masterfully along the fault line

of the Administration. He expressed no sympathy for civil rights and painted an alarming picture of subversive elements among the integrationists. As an example of a clearly subversive development, Hoover informed the cabinet that Chicago mayor Richard Daley had come close to public criticism of President Eisenhower for not taking stronger action in the Emmett Till lynching case. "I hasten to say that Mayor Daley is not a Communist," Hoover added gravely, "but pressures engineered by the Communists were brought to bear upon him." These comments hinted at political danger, but Hoover stopped short of saying that Republican civil rights legislation would reflect Communist influence. Instead, he put the imprimatur of the FBI upon some of the worst allegations of anti-Negro brutality by militant segregationists, particularly in Mississippi. He described the White Citizens Councils ambiguously as new organizations that "either could control the rising tension or become the medium through which tensions might manifest themselves." Overall, his performance left just enough political room for Brownell's program, minus any anti-lynching legislation. One of the FBI charts showed that the number of lynchings had dropped from twenty to less than three per year since the FBI had begun informal investigations in 1939. Hoover wanted no formal legal responsibility in this area.

Brownell promptly gave the cabinet a speech defending his plan to submit legislation to create an independent Civil Rights Commission to gather facts about voting rights violations and economic reprisals against Negroes. Also, the bill would create a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department, and strengthen the Attorney General's legal standing to seek enforcement of voting rights in the federal courts. When Brownell finished, Secretaries Ezra Taft Benson of Agriculture and Marion Folsom of Health, Education and Welfare spoke up in opposition. Benson wanted to wait until there was a Republican Congress. Folsom said that anything beyond the fact-finding commission would be imprudent because it would "anticipate" its results.

The President interrupted. "Where do you think that the Attorney General's suggestions are moving too rapidly?" he asked. "They look to me like amelioration." As always, his word shifted the tone of the debate. A few objections as to the practicality of the legislation followed, but Brownell soon asked permission to proceed. "Okay," said Ike. "But put into your presentation a statement that what is needed is calmness and sanity. The great mass of decent people should and will listen to *these* voices, rather than to the extremists. Make your statement like your brief to the Supreme Court. Don't take the attitude that you are another Sumner."

The most Sherman Adams could win at the cabinet meeting was a delay: Brownell must bring the historic legislative package back to the

White House for final clearance. In the interim, Adams benefited by the release of the "Southern Manifesto," which equated integration with subversion of the Constitution and pledged the entire region to fierce resistance. The document was signed by some ninety Southern congressmen and all the senators except the two Tennessee mavericks, Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore, and the Senate Majority Leader, Lyndon Johnson of Texas. Johnson was saying privately that the manifesto's only effect would be to push Negro votes into the Republican column in key swing states of the North. In the White House, Adams was hoping just that. He managed to weaken a few of Brownell's proposals and to make sure that when the bill was submitted to Congress, it came from the Attorney General and not, as was customary for major bills, from the President.

*Advertiser* editor Grover Hall pronounced the mass indictments "the dumbest act that has ever been done in Montgomery." From the standpoint of local whites, the move backfired immediately by recharging the boycotters' morale and severely weakening the time-honored stigma of jail as a weapon of social control against Negroes. This was just the beginning of the miscalculation. As days went by, the hordes of reporters attracted to town by the mass indictment wrote stories that stimulated a great shower of public support—and money—upon the MIA from across the nation and even from distant lands. The city fathers, show-boating as they delivered what they believed would be a crushing blow, had blithely ignored the possibility that their show would not play well to audiences beyond the horizon. "Everybody now concedes that this was dumb," Hall wrote.

For the puckish editor, who found himself serving as "duenna and Indian guide to more than a hundred reporters of the international press," the media influx caused an intense, personal exposure to the vagaries of the race issue on both its grand and prosaic stages. One early effect was that Hall ventured inside Dexter Avenue Baptist to meet King, in his role as escort to reporter Peter Kihss of *The New York Times*. To Hall, King was "largely inscrutable," a self-possessed man without humor, in whose statements about death, suffering, and violence Hall found a "conspicuous thread of thanatopsis." Still, Hall admitted that King was an "authentic intellectual," and not a polysyllabic charlatan with cereal-box degrees. King's discourse on philosophy, Hall found, was "comprehending, forceful exegesis." He committed these judgments to print, along with many others that offended his white readers. When he asked one frantic caller how she knew that the Communists were running the boycott, she replied, "It just stands to reason." This comment amused Hall enough to publish it too.

By the time the boycott case went to trial, the encampment of Negro

reporters and domestic "war correspondents" had been augmented by journalists from more than ten foreign nations, including Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Australia. There was M. K. Kamath of the Press Trust of India and Daniel Morgaine of *France-Soir*. From England came Keith Kyle of the London *Economist* and, eventually, the distinguished Alastair Cooke of the *Manchester Guardian*. (Ironically, in view of that paper's leftist perspective and Rustin's invocation of its name, Cooke may have been the foreign journalist most sympathetic to the local segregationists. He wrote of King as "the cat's-paw of the NAACP.") Of these, Hall's favorite seemed to be Morgaine of France, who once called just before a scheduled cultural briefing at the *Advertiser* saying, "I am so soorry, Meester Hall. I must break ze appointment, for I have achieved an appointment with the Reverend King." For Hall, this fawning attention made King like yesterday's bee sting—a tiny, throbbing thing that tickled and hurt at once, and above all that he could not leave alone. Local prosecutors concentrated the attention into an exclusive preoccupation by announcing that they intended to hold eighty-nine of the indictments in abeyance. They prosecuted King alone as a test case.

Eight lawyers sat around King at the defense table when the four-day trial opened on March 19, 1956. One part of the legal team guided King and other MIA witnesses through a line of defense testimony that flirted with perjury. The minister of Holt Street Baptist could not recall seeing King at his church on the night the boycott began. Graetz testified that he could not remember ever hearing King urge people to boycott the buses. Fear and legalism combined to produce a defense based on evasive denial that King had anything to do with any boycott, if there was one. Other King lawyers tried to establish that the boycott was "not without just cause" by summoning a stream of Negro women to the stand to testify about cruelties they had seen and endured on the buses.

Neither of the legal strategies mattered very much to the outcome of a trial that had become symbolic to all sides. The judge, who taught a men's Bible class at a church across the street from Dexter, pronounced King guilty immediately at the conclusion of the summations. He sentenced the defendant to pay a \$500 fine or serve a year at hard labor. Newspapers recorded the exact moment, 4:39 P.M., when King emerged from the courthouse to tell a cheering crowd that the bus protest would continue. "Behold the King!" shouted someone, and others answered "Hail the King!" and "King is King!" Returning that evening to Holt Street, where it had all begun, King was presented to the first of that night's series of enormous mass meetings with the words, "Here is the man who today was nailed to the cross for you and me." King declared,



"This conviction and all the convictions they can heap on me will not diminish my determination one iota."

He had been a public figure among Montgomery's Negroes for nearly four months, but now fame spilled into the outside world. W. E. B. Du Bois himself, who had known Negro leaders stretching back to Frederick Douglass, wrote that if passive resistance could conquer racial hatred, which he doubted, then Gandhi and Negroes like King would have shown the world a way to conquer war itself. *Jet* magazine put King on its cover, calling him "Alabama's Modern Moses." *The New York Times*, in a "Man in the News" profile published during the trial, described King as a man who believed that "all men are basically good," and whose pulpit oratory "overwhelms the listener with the depth of his convictions. . . . He is particularly well read in Kant and Hegel."

King learned immediately that the astonishing personal impact of the trial reached far beyond Montgomery. At his first Northern fund-raiser since the boycott began, he received in New York what one newspaper called "the kind of welcome [the city] usually reserves for the Brooklyn Dodgers." Some ten thousand people tried to crowd into Gardner Taylor's Concord Baptist Church to hear him. Collection plates gathered \$4,000 for the MIA. The president of the City Council made an appearance at the church. Mobs of admirers pressed upon King, and the Negro press reported sighs among groups of doting women.

The phenomenon of mass adulation far from home struck like a sudden bolt, but King had to work for other support gained on the New York trip. Harry Belafonte responded cautiously to his invitation for a private meeting at Adam Clayton Powell's church in Harlem. Belafonte could be temperamental. He had recorded but not yet released the calypso album that would make him an international star—the first solo album ever to sell a million copies—and he wondered why King insisted that they meet alone. He was wary of preachers and established Negro leaders, partly because he thought they never had supported his idols Du Bois and Paul Robeson. Only curiosity about this new kind of preacher lured him to the church. King said he had heard that Belafonte cared deeply about the race struggle, quite apart from his career in show business. This flattered Belafonte's political side, but what broke down his resistance was King's air of humility, in sharp contrast with the circus of adulation surrounding him. While he found King sophisticated, clearly not the hick or holy roller he had feared, King's offstage personality struck him as a mixture of determination and almost doe-like vulnerability. "I need your help," King said repeatedly. "I have no idea where this movement is going."



Within a week of the mass arrests in Montgomery, King and the NAACP's Roy Wilkins had entered what would become a long-standing quarrel over money. King protested in a letter to Wilkins that the NAACP seemed to be gathering money for itself "in the name of our movement." Wilkins defended his instructions that all proceeds from the boycott fund-raisers be routed through his office, saying that the NAACP expected to absorb many of the MIA legal expenses, but he did not specify which ones. He added a warning to King: "I am certain I do not need to stress that at this time it would be fatal for there to develop any hint of disagreement as to the raising and allocating of funds." NAACP officials, who saw themselves in the climactic stages of a twenty-year legal battle to integrate public institutions such as the schools, were reluctant to endorse the radically new approach of a mass boycott. Negotiations over legal support stalled further, so that by the time of King's trial only one of his eight lawyers came from Thurgood Marshall's legal staff. During the trial itself, the NAACP issued a droll statement that it would await the final outcome of the boycott before deciding whether passive resistance techniques could be useful.

Wilkins became more accommodating when the trial established King as a national symbol. Three weeks after the conviction, he notified King that the NAACP would pay all costs for its attorneys to represent King and any of the other mass-indictment defendants brought to trial, as well as the MIA in its federal suit against bus segregation and Rosa Parks in her own ongoing case. In addition, Wilkins offered to pay half the \$9,000 fee charged by one of the local Alabama firms in the King case. Oddly enough, Wilkins extended this generous offer at a time when fame had made the fledgling MIA wealthier than the national NAACP, and King accepted the offer even though he did not need the money at the time. The MIA cases might wind up in the U.S. Supreme Court, King reasoned, where the NAACP lawyers had an unsurpassed record in civil rights cases. "We are quite conscious of our dependence on the NAACP," King wrote Wilkins in a conciliatory letter, mentioning that his church had just purchased a \$1,000 life membership in the NAACP. Within a week, Wilkins invited King to address the NAACP's annual convention in San Francisco.

On June 1, 1956, some weeks before the NAACP convention, Alabama attorney general John Patterson obtained an extraordinary court order banning most NAACP activities within the entire state of Alabama, including fund-raising, dues collection, and the solicitation of new members. Patterson based his request for the order on the assertion that the NAACP was "organizing, supporting, and financing an illegal boycott by Negro residents of Montgomery." The order transformed this old rumor

into the factual predicate for effectively outlawing the organization, and when the NAACP resisted a corollary order to surrender its membership and contribution lists to Patterson, the judge imposed a \$100,000 contempt fine as well. It took the NAACP eight years and several trips to the U.S. Supreme Court to void these sanctions. During all that time, the Alabama NAACP was disbanded. On one level, this shocking development threw King and Wilkins together as common defendants. But Wilkins could hardly forget that it was King's boycott that had put the NAACP out of business in an entire state, at a critical time in the school desegregation cases, and this handicap would grow more serious as other Southern states tried to follow Alabama's example.

One hidden effect of the Patterson order was to drive some of Alabama's former NAACP leaders into closer alliance with King. The most unusual and significant of them was Fred Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, a volatile, rough-cut man who had been raised in the backwoods of Alabama. Convicted of running the family still in 1941, Shuttlesworth had wandered around Alabama as a truck driver and cement worker, discovering in the process that the natural gift his mother so prized in him, his memory, was well suited to the work of a country preacher. Accepting the "call," Shuttlesworth bought a cow to help support him and his young wife while he pitched himself into colleges and seminaries, built a house out of World War II scrap materials, and preached as many as five times each Sunday. At his first full-time pulpit in Selma, Shuttlesworth had quarreled ceaselessly with his deacons over the prerogatives of the minister, finally receiving what he called a vision from God telling him to persevere and subdue them.

Only a few days after the Patterson court order, Shuttlesworth received another divine message, saying, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." He interpreted this to mean that the demise of the faction-ridden NAACP was a blessing in disguise, and that he should replace it with his own organization, like King's in Montgomery. He knew King, having gone to Montgomery several times to deliver contributions, and the idea of an organization free of the NAACP bureaucracy appealed strongly to him. His public summons to create a new group attracted publicity in the white press as a blatant circumvention of the court order banning Negro agitation, as well as an unprecedented challenge to Birmingham's pugnacious police commissioner, Eugene "Bull" Connor. One troubled Negro preacher went so far as to tell Shuttlesworth that he had received his own vision from heaven, in which God told him to tell Shuttlesworth to cancel the meeting. "When did the Lord start sending my messages through you?" Shuttlesworth hotly replied. "The Lord has told me to call it on." Ordinary folk, drawn by the tension and

the publicity, packed the church on the night of June 5 to hear Shuttlesworth announce the formation of his own Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. This deed first singled him out as the preacher courageous enough or crazy enough to defy Bull Connor.

In Montgomery, King and the other MIA leaders were celebrating a tangible victory. On June 4, a panel of three federal judges ruled in the MIA's favor in the suit Fred Gray had filed back in February, two days after King's house was bombed. By a 2-1 vote, the judges struck down Montgomery's bus segregation ordinances as unconstitutional. Attorneys for Montgomery and for the state of Alabama immediately appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. Although the segregation laws remained in effect pending that ruling, which for the boycotters meant that months of walking and car-pooling stretched ahead, thousands of hallelujahs were raised at mass meetings in Montgomery. For the first time, they were on the winners' side in a white man's forum, and now would go into the Supreme Court seeking to sustain the ruling of three white Southern judges. The odds for ultimate legal victory shifted heavily in their favor.

Optimism broke out like an epidemic. Every hardship, every funeral of a faithful walker who had died, became grist for inspiration to keep walking another six months if necessary. Everybody knew that the first six months had been the hard ones. They were cresting. The MIA was rich. It was buying and operating its own fleet of more than a dozen new station wagons, sparing much of the wear on the cars of private volunteers. At the time of the court victory, the MIA had stowed away deposits totaling more than \$120,000 in banks scattered from New York to Oklahoma—outside Alabama and therefore safe from legal raids by Attorney General Patterson. King decided that the MIA was secure enough for him to take a vacation. With Coretta and the Abernathys, he vanished by car toward the coast of California, planning to make his way to San Francisco for the NAACP convention.

Shortly after they left, MIA secretary Uriah J. Fields held a press conference in Montgomery to charge that the boycott leadership was riddled with corruption. It involved thousands of dollars in misappropriated funds, he said, and leaders who had become "too egotistical and interested in perpetuating themselves." "I can no longer identify myself with a movement in which the many are exploited by the few," Fields declared. His public resignation created the most sensational news since the mass arrests. Fields was an outspoken, unconventional, bootstrap leader, about King's age. He had worn a goatee since his student days at Alabama State, which marked him as an outsider among the more image-conscious leaders. Campaigning as a rebel, Fields had defeated in a stu-

dent election the heavily favored fraternity candidate, who was now a protégé of King's at Dexter Avenue. Fields believed that on their records as activists he, and not King, should have been elected MIA president, and he openly begrudged Abernathy his growing role as second in authority. It galled him that King was in demand for speaking engagements all over the country, whereas he had landed only one out-of-town appearance in Pittsburgh.

By timing his gambit to coincide with the absence of King and Abernathy, Fields hoped other disgruntled leaders would rally to demand a restructuring of the executive board. However, he grossly underestimated the bond between King and the great masses of Montgomery's boycotters. Ordinary people called Fields a traitor, and his own church voted without dissent to strip him of the pastorate. By the time King landed in Montgomery, having aborted his California vacation to face the insurrection at home, Fields already was so thoroughly discredited that King's task was more to protect than to prosecute him. At a mass meeting, King made a long speech denying the charges but calling on the MIA membership to forgive Fields as a prodigal son. Defending his leadership was easy for King—too easy, in a sense, because he did not have to address the elements of truth in Fields's charges. Thousands of dollars had in fact been misappropriated out of the MIA treasury, as car-pool drivers and assorted hustlers were charging the MIA for oceans of gasoline and truckloads of imaginary spare tires. A reorganized transportation committee was trying to plug the holes in the reimbursement system. As for the alleged high-handedness and egotism of the MIA leadership, there was a good deal of it, and it was resented not only by Fields. Some, like E. D. Nixon, believed they were being shunted aside for lack of polish or education, and a few of the lay people thought they were out because they were not preachers. Now such criticism would be confined forever to privacy. The defection and swift decapitation of Fields demonstrated that public criticism of the MIA would not only be seized upon by white opponents but also taken as a personal criticism of King, which would not be tolerated.

King flew back to San Francisco to address the forty-seventh NAACP convention. Hundreds of delegates pressed upon him to shake his hand, including Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi. Evers invited King to Mississippi, saying that "your presence would do more . . . than any" to raise hopes in his state. The idea of a mass movement by nearly fifty thousand Negroes in a single city captivated the delegates, whose customary role in the NAACP was limited to support of the lawyers fighting segregation in court. Delegates on the convention floor drafted numerous resolutions in favor of the nonviolent methods of the

bus boycott. Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall opposed them in a protracted struggle that put King in the awkward position of the insurrectionary guest. He tried to make himself as scarce as possible, but when reporters cornered him with questions about whether he thought nonviolent methods might help desegregate the schools, he replied that he had not thought about it much but that they probably could do so. This comment prompted an annoyed Thurgood Marshall to declare that school desegregation was men's work and should not be entrusted to children. Some reporters quoted him to the effect that King was a "boy on a man's errand." Wilkins worked more diplomatically to smother the threat of a runaway convention, finally engineering passage of a resolution calling merely for the executive board to give "careful consideration" to the use of the Montgomery model.

In July, sensitive to criticism that he had been neglecting his church, King started a newsletter, the *Dexter Echo*, to keep in touch with his members. He devoted his own column, "From the Pastor's Desk," mostly to problems of church finances. To offset slow collections during the summer months, King supervised the second annual Prettiest Baby Contest, which netted more than \$2,000. The winning baby, on the strength of the \$645.60 raised by the sponsoring August Club, was King's daughter Yoki, now eight months old.

King was off on a speaking tour of the Midwest. In his absence, the *Echo* published a FLASH bulletin announcing that his photograph was on display at the Brussels World's Fair. When King went on to Canada to address a convention of Negro morticians, E. D. Nixon called to say that A. Philip Randolph had secured an invitation for King to testify before the platform committee of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. King, more conscious than ever of seniority and protocol among leaders, told Nixon that he did not want to testify unless Roy Wilkins approved. Nixon called Wilkins, who said, "I agree with you, Brother Nixon. He ought to be there, although it will take some of the spotlight off me." With this clearance, Nixon then made the arrangements for King to tell the Democrats that civil rights was "one of the supreme moral issues" of the age. Perhaps because he was so intent on soothing leaders of national stature, such as Wilkins, King neglected to give enough credit for his convention appearance to E. D. Nixon—or so Nixon came to believe. Thereafter, he spoke to King only when necessary, and the coolness between the two of them became the subject of private gossip. This was to be King's portion—new realms of success, blurred by aggravations striking randomly on all sides.

On August 25, two or three sticks of dynamite exploded in Reverend Graetz's front yard, shattering the windows in nearby homes. Graetz returned from out of town to find that the police had confiscated personal



records and correspondence from his home as part of the bombing investigation. Detectives promptly interrogated Graetz himself, in a manner that provoked the two-year-old Graetz boy to shout, "Go away, you bad policemen!" The ever-repentant Graetz later confessed to a fleeting surge of pride in his son's combative spirit. The next day's *Advertiser* reported Mayor Gayle's suspicions that Graetz had bombed his own home in order to stimulate out-of-state contributions to the MIA. "Perhaps this is just a publicity stunt to build up interest of the Negroes in their campaign," he said. Two days after the bombing, King composed his first letter of protest to the White House, telling Eisenhower that Montgomery Negroes were living "without protection of law." Cabinet secretary Maxwell Rabb replied perfunctorily for the President that "the situation in Montgomery has been followed with interest."

Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic candidate for President, worried about the Negro vote, especially after Roy Wilkins sharply criticized his desire to keep the civil rights issue out of the campaign. "We must recognize that it is reason alone that will determine our rate of progress," Stevenson replied to Wilkins, who proceeded to denounce the candidate's blithe vagueness in such blistering language that Stevenson's friend Eleanor Roosevelt threatened to resign from the board of the NAACP. In October, Stevenson's concern over the issue prompted his appearance at a rally in Harlem, where he criticized as too passive Eisenhower's statement that it "makes no difference" what he thought personally of the Supreme Court's school desegregation decision. "I support this decision!" cried Stevenson. His supporters argued that his statement set him apart from Eisenhower as more friendly to Negroes, while his detractors replied that it meant little for a candidate to say he supported the law of the land, as did Eisenhower, while refusing to say what he would do to enforce it.

Eisenhower campaigned differently. On October 10, he attended a World Series game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Yankees at Ebbetts Field. Sitting with him as a guest in the presidential box was E. Frederic Morrow. There was no official announcement of his presence, but word spread immediately through the Negro press, which noted that Stevenson could not afford to socialize with Negroes for fear of alienating Southern Democrats. The next day, Eisenhower invited Harlem congressman Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., to the White House for a private meeting that became big news when Powell, a Democrat, emerged to endorse Eisenhower for reelection, saying that he would do more for civil rights.

The Negro issue was lost for the remainder of a campaign that finished memorably in the grip of two major world crises, the Hungarian revolt



against Soviet domination and the combined effort of Israel, Great Britain, and France to take the Suez Canal from Egypt by war. Eisenhower made scathing private remarks about the "mid-Victorian style" of the Suez attack. If the United States supported such blatant colonialism, he said, the reaction "might well array the world from Dakar to the Philippine Islands against us." His implicit threat to cut off American oil supplies to Europe helped rescue Nasser, a man Eisenhower loathed, and made a fiasco of Britain's last effort to salvage an empire.

Fear of war turned a probable Eisenhower reelection into a landslide margin of nearly 10 million votes. On election night, an aide danced joyfully into Eisenhower's hotel suite with the news that the Republican ticket had carried the city of Montgomery, Alabama, for the first time in history. No one quite knew why, since Montgomery's white citizens were known to be furious over the Administration's private efforts to help Negroes in their eleven-month boycott of the bus system.\* Post-election analysis showed that Negroes had voted Republican in substantial numbers for the first time since the New Deal, giving Eisenhower about 60 percent of their votes. Republican strategists looked forward to a major realignment of American politics, in which fiscal conservatives, educated suburbanites, and Negroes would combine to form an enlightened majority. This was among the many aspects of the election results that disheartened Stevenson. "I am quite bewildered about the Negroes," he said.

In Montgomery, city officials petitioned a state court for an injunction banning the MIA car pool as an unlicensed municipal transportation system. The injunction was the legal weapon King's lawyers had feared most, knowing that court orders had the power to regulate behavior in advance of substantive court decisions. A prime illustration of such power was Attorney General Patterson's order that outlawed the Alabama NAACP pending the outcome of protracted litigation. A similar injunction in Montgomery would mean that boycott leaders who persisted in operating the car pool would be subject to peremptory jailing on contempt charges. It would shift all the advantages of judicial delay from the MIA to the city.

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\* General Lewis B. Hershey, director of the National Selective Service System, repeatedly blocked attempts by the Montgomery draft board to induct MIA attorney Fred Gray into the Army. Local draft board members across Alabama resigned in protest against "political interference" by the Eisenhower Administration, as did George C. Wallace, then a judge handling draft appeals near Montgomery. Shortly before the election, both U.S. senators from Alabama called for a congressional investigation of the Fred Gray draft case.

At the *Advertiser*, Grover Hall fulminated that the move came almost a year too late, being just "another blunder" now that the issue of segregation itself was before the U.S. Supreme Court. Hall wanted to prod the city fathers into thinking about more fundamental lines of defense. His purpose was not to give solace to King, of course, and King took none. To him, the Supreme Court decision lay somewhere in the unpredictable future, whereas the dreadful impact of the proposed injunction could be only hours away. It threatened to destroy all the accrued benefits of the car pool—the MIA-owned station wagons, the entire support budget, and the organized driver system. The boycotters would have to walk into their second winter, which was fast approaching.

On Tuesday, November 13, one week after the Eisenhower landslide, King sat glumly at the defendant's table as city lawyers told Judge Eugene Carter why he should not only ban the car pool by injunction but also impose a \$15,000 fine on the MIA to compensate the city for lost tax revenues. A surprise city witness testified that the MIA had deposited \$189,000 in his Montgomery bank, a sum that city lawyers used to ridicule King's contention that the car pool was a voluntary, "share-a-ride" cooperative. Both sides mounted arguments that seemed highly ironic even at the time. Conservative city lawyers charged that the car pool was a "private enterprise" and therefore should be regulated or banned; King renewed his amnesiac defense that the boycott occurred spontaneously and without any organization or leadership that he could remember very well.

During a recess, an AP reporter slipped to the front of the courtroom and handed King a note. Inside was a bulletin the reporter had ripped off the AP ticker: "The United States Supreme Court today affirmed a decision of a special three-judge panel in declaring Alabama's state and local laws requiring segregation on buses unconstitutional. The Supreme Court acted without listening to any argument; it simply said 'the motion to affirm is granted and the judgment is affirmed.'"

It was over. With blood pounding in his ears, King rushed to the back of the courtroom to tell Abernathy, E. D. Nixon, and Coretta. There was commotion at the plaintiff's table, as word was reaching the city lawyers. The news sprinted through the courtroom on whispers, until one Negro, unable to bear the silence any longer, rose to declare, "God Almighty has spoken from Washington, D.C.!" Judge Carter was obliged to bang his gavel many times to restore order, and he handed down his injunction against the car pool even though the Supreme Court decision made it irrelevant.

Montgomery's Negroes did not care about the injunction now. They were celebrating. That night, at the first of two enormous mass meetings,

S. S. Seay reported that the Ku Klux Klan was preparing to march on Montgomery. No matter, he cried out, "we are not afraid, because God is on our side." Seay burst into tears at the pulpit, and, said the *Advertiser*, "several women screamed with what appeared to be a religious ecstasy." The newspaper noted that King entered the meeting at precisely 7:23 p.m., touching off a standing ovation that lasted until Abernathy managed to quiet the crowd for the reading of the Scripture. A hush settled tentatively over the assembly as Robert Graetz walked to the pulpit. The skinny, jug-eared white preacher began to read from the famous love chapter of I Corinthians: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man I put away childish things." Before he finished the sentence, everyone in the church rose en masse to cheer the passage, which struck the chord of their new self-respect with the force of an epiphany.

Legal technicalities delayed the implementation. The Supreme Court decision would not take effect until appropriate orders reached Montgomery, King learned, whereas the spiteful injunction banning the car pool was in operation already. This meant that during the interim, bus segregation remained the law and the MIA could provide no alternative transportation system. To endure this delay without provoking the whites to legal harassments, MIA leaders summoned up the last reserves of energy within their followers to keep boycotting the buses until the integration orders arrived. They would walk. In effect, they would struggle through a victory lap.

Euphoria propelled them. The statement King issued after hearing word of the decision was filled with the youthful enthusiasm that sometimes overran the bounds of his rhetoric. "Often we have had to stand amid the surging murmur [*sic*] of life's restless sea," he said. "Many days and nights have been filled with jostling winds of adversity." But he recommended the prudent course: "For these three or four days, we will continue to walk and share rides with friends." This time estimate from King's legal experts proved highly optimistic, as slow Court paperwork extended the victory lap through five arduous weeks.

Celebrities called King from the first day. Mahalia Jackson wanted to come to Montgomery to sing in celebration. Several Negro seminary presidents offered to deliver theological evaluations of the boycott's Christian spirit. Such a flurry of impressive offers inspired King to organize an entire week of seminars and church services, which he called the Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change. Reporter Carl Rowan, novelist Lillian Smith, and white Unitarian leader Homer Jack agreed to

participate, as did the most powerful national figures in the Negro Baptist Church. Daddy King's rival William Holmes Borders came from Atlanta to speak. Gardner Taylor came from his enormous "million-dollar" Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, and T. J. Jemison came up from Baton Rouge.

King opened the Institute program on December 3 with an address at the Holt Street Baptist Church, where his speech almost exactly a year earlier had electrified the first mass meeting. He announced that the last year had taught six lessons: "[1] We have discovered that we can stick together for a common cause; [2] Our leaders do not have to sell out; [3] Threats and violence do not necessarily intimidate those who are sufficiently aroused and non-violent; [4] Our church is becoming militant, stressing a social gospel as well as a gospel of personal salvation; [5] We have gained a new sense of dignity and destiny; [6] We have discovered a new and powerful weapon—non-violent resistance."

To King, the lessons of leadership and unity came first, the militancy of the church next, and the "discovery" of nonviolence last. His list was aptly chosen and properly ordered as a distillation of the boycott experience. Nonviolence, like the boycott itself, had begun more or less by accident. The function of the boycott leaders had been to inspire, to react, and to persevere. Not until Birmingham, more than six years later, would King's idea of leadership encompass the deliberate creation of new struggles or the conscious, advance selection of strategies and tactics. For now, his notion of leadership emphasized the display of learning. He said many wise things in his address—on technology, colonialism, the pace of time, but the speech as a whole went sprawling. King quoted notables from Heraclitus to Bob Hope. His anthem was a yearning for justice, and he extolled the value of martyrdom in a meditation on courage, but his oratory suffered markedly from abstraction once he was cut loose from the specific pressures of the boycott.

Sunday, December 9, was a banner day for King. In the morning, he turned over his Dexter pulpit to Vernon Johns, who preached a sermon commemorating the seventy-ninth anniversary of the church's secession from First Baptist. In the afternoon, King presided at First Baptist over a huge service culminating the events of the Institute week. Visiting choirs warmed up the crowd with an hour of music. Vernon Johns, swallowing his pride and his distaste for the National Baptist Convention, offered up the invocation in his inimitable growl. Then, after a solo by King's friend Bob Williams, J. H. Jackson made his entrance. He never had openly endorsed the boycott, and he said almost nothing of it that day. Nevertheless, his presence as the titular head of the largest and most powerful organization controlled by American Negroes guaranteed an

enormous, respectful crowd, estimated at up to eight thousand people. His was the kind of power King and Abernathy dreamed about when they spoke of spreading the movement through the instruments of a militant church. At the last NBC convention, in September, Jackson had bestowed a sign of recognition on King by inviting Coretta to give a solo recital at his church in Chicago. Now Jackson acknowledged King among the few royal figures of the Negro Baptists—Jackson, Gardner Taylor, the Jemisons, and, to a lesser extent, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. King had surpassed his father within the ranks of the organized Negro clergy. In the long Institute program, King's name and everything about him was spelled entirely in capital letters. This was also true of Jackson but of no one else.

On December 20, Supreme Court notifications arrived at the federal courthouse in Montgomery, and deputy U.S. marshals served notices on city officials. That night, King told a mass meeting that the walking was over. He stressed reconciliation, saying that the boycott had brought a victory for justice that would benefit both races. It was not a victory over the white people, he said, but most white politicians seemed to believe otherwise. Mayor Gayle and Police Commissioner Sellers managed to be out of town, unavailable for comment. A local judge who was forced to dissolve his pro-segregation decrees denounced the Supreme Court decision as based on "neither law nor reason" but an "evil construction."

King, in his suit and dress hat, followed by Fred Gray, Abernathy, Glenn Smiley, and a flock of cameramen and reporters, boarded a city bus before dawn the next morning. "We are glad to have you," the bus driver said politely as he rumbled off down the street. Photographers on board took pictures of King sitting next to Smiley near the front of the bus. The integrated group achieved a convivial banter with the driver, who went so far as to make an unscheduled stop to pick up Reverend Graetz. Summoned outside by the bus horn, Graetz was treated to the sight of Smiley leaning casually out the front door of a city bus. "What time do you want me for dinner tonight?" Smiley shouted grandly, as though he had transformed the bus into a personal limousine. Graetz joined King and all those on the bus in laughter. It was a moment of innocence, dearly paid for.

King asked Bayard Rustin to come to Montgomery. Only the extraordinary burst of post-victory activity produced the invitation, as both men knew Rustin's physical presence could be a dangerous matter. Local whites still remembered the mysterious impostor from *Le Figaro*, and King felt a greater political threat from his own colleagues, especially the preachers, among whom tolerance for homosexuals was shunned as the



wedge of evil. Some of the Negroes around King remembered Rustin less than fondly as the bizarre, imperious man who had caused a great alarm in their camp back in February. Even worse, Rustin had just arranged the publication in his Socialist magazine, *Liberation*, of an article by E. D. Nixon, in which Nixon claimed more than his share of credit for the creation of the boycott.\* The article earned Nixon a fresh burst of ridicule from some of King's more intellectual friends. King's desire to hide Rustin from practically everyone was so strong that he asked him to fly into Birmingham instead of Montgomery. Bob Williams met Rustin there and put him face down in the backseat of his car. King's instructions were that Rustin was not to raise his head until the car was parked safely at the Dexter parsonage.

Rustin arrived on Sunday, December 23, in time to inspect the damage from a shotgun blast fired into King's home early that morning. Everyone was scared, but no one was hurt. King huddled privately with Rustin on a host of matters, including New York fund-raising, Randolph's efforts to facilitate better relations between Wilkins and King, future publications by King, a possible King trip to meet with Gandhians in India, and, most important, King's response to the Negroes across the South who were besieging him for help in their desire to integrate their bus systems. King and Rustin had just finished one of their strategy sessions when Daddy King burst through the front door of the parsonage like a G-man leading a raid. The shotgun news had propelled him to Montgomery in high dudgeon. Coretta asked him if he would like something to eat.

"I have not come to eat," Daddy King declared. "I have come to pray." He commanded M.L. to get down on his knees and then prayed out loud. Rustin retreated into an adjoining room, from where he heard Daddy King talking to God in such a way that God seemed to be telling the younger King that the boycott was over and that God now had things for him to do outside of politics. The prayer went on for some time. At its conclusion, Daddy King spoke more directly on the same theme, and the tension of the ensuing argument soon reduced his son to tears of anger and frustration. The younger King said little in his own defense until the end, when he blurted out that he would just have to do what he felt he had to do. Somehow this ended it. The force of the moment was such that Rustin felt he had witnessed a unique crisis between the Kings.

The next day, Christmas Eve, a car pulled up to a Montgomery bus

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\* In the same issue of *Liberation*, A. Philip Randolph endorsed the activism of nonviolence, and the aged Harry Emerson Fosdick, pastor emeritus of New York's Riverside Church, called the boycott a "godsend." Fosdick quoted one of King's favorite lines, from the abolitionist preacher Theodore Parker: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."



stop where a fifteen-year-old Negro girl was standing alone, and five men jumped out, beat her, and quickly fled. In Birmingham, Fred Shuttlesworth announced that he would lead a group onto the front of the buses the day after Christmas. He was preparing himself for the test on Christmas night, sitting in his parsonage with one of his deacons, when some fifteen sticks of dynamite exploded beneath them, virtually destroying the house. Investigating police shining flashlights through the dense clouds of smoke heard shouts from the basement, where Shuttlesworth and his deacon had fallen. "I'm not coming out naked!" cried the preacher, who was dressed for bed. The police draped Shuttlesworth with blankets, pulled fallen lumber off the deacon, and pronounced it a miracle that either was alive. When several officers advised Shuttlesworth to leave town, he proclaimed loudly that he would never do it. "God erased my name off that dynamite," he declared, his sense of destiny renewed. The next day, he led two hundred of his followers into the white sections of Birmingham buses. More than a score of them were arrested and convicted on charges of violating the segregation laws.

In Montgomery, after shotgun snipers fired on an integrated bus, King issued a statement calling on city authorities to "take a firm stand" against such violence. City Commissioner Parks, one of the few whites to speak up in response, announced that the city would have to suspend bus service if the shootings continued—a statement that dismayed King's followers because they believed that stopping the only integrated public institution in Alabama was precisely what the snipers wanted to accomplish. Two days later, bushwhackers fired another volley at an integrated bus, this time sending a pregnant Negro woman to the hospital with bullet wounds in both legs. The city commissioners halted night bus service.

King sent out invitations to what he called the first Negro Leaders Conference on Nonviolent Integration. Sixty preachers from ten Southern states responded, gathering in Atlanta at Ebenezer early in January of 1957. They represented a pitifully small portion of the Negro preachers in the region, but their ranks included many of the most influential mavericks. Fred Shuttlesworth came from Birmingham, and Rev. C. K. Steele from Tallahassee, Florida, where he was leading a Montgomery-inspired campaign to integrate the buses. William Holmes Borders attended from Atlanta, where his own nonviolent bus demonstration provoked Georgia's governor to put the state militia on standby alert just before the conference. Bayard Rustin came down from New York to work quietly on drafting resolutions and an organizational charter.

Abernathy stayed with King in the Atlanta family home. At 2:30 A.M. on January 10, the day the conference was to begin, Mother King shook

Abernathy awake to take an emergency phone call. "Ralph, they have bombed our home," said a shaky Juanita Abernathy from Montgomery. "But I am all right and so is the baby." She reported that the porch and front room of the house were practically demolished, and that the arriving policemen seemed frightened too, because other blasts had been heard since. They said the Hutchinson Street Baptist Church was destroyed, its roof caved in. People were calling or driving around the street in dumb panic, some too afraid to go outside and others too afraid to stay home.

The King home in Atlanta was lit up and buzzing as Abernathy relayed the news. The preachers offered prayers, and then Abernathy worried out loud about First Baptist. "I don't want Reverend Stokes's church bombed," he said plaintively. Daddy King was pacing the floor angrily. "Well, they are gonna bomb it," he said. Abernathy grew so agitated that he tried repeatedly to get a call through to his wife. When he finally succeeded, he learned that the panic in Montgomery was growing worse. There had been another blast, loud enough to be heard all over town. It was definite that Hutchinson Street Baptist had been hit—people had seen the ruins—and the Gractz home had been bombed again. Mrs. Abernathy went off the line briefly and came back to say that another one had just gone off, close to their home. She felt the rumble. And another church had been hit. She was not sure which church and had no idea yet about where the latest bomb had struck.

Later reports confirmed Abernathy's fears that it was First Baptist. He and King, leaving Coretta and Rustin to run the Atlanta conference, departed before dawn for Montgomery, where they surveyed the night's total of four bombed churches and two houses. Of the churches, First Baptist was the least severely hit, as the bomb had torn apart the basement but done little damage to the sanctuary above. Still, city authorities condemned it as structurally unsound for use.

King returned hastily to Atlanta, where the assembled preachers voted to form an organization that, after several name changes, would be called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They elected King president. In the name of the new organization, he sent telegrams to President Eisenhower, Attorney General Brownell, and Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Sherman Adams replied for the President that it was not possible for Eisenhower to schedule a speech in the South against segregationist violence, as King had requested. An aide to Brownell replied that the Justice Department would look into the bombings and other incidents but that the primary authority for the maintenance of law and order was lodged in state governments. Nixon did not reply.

Abernathy stayed in Montgomery, supervising church volunteers who

worked frantically on Friday and Saturday to shore up the basement beams and sweep out the debris at First Baptist. City inspectors, granting Abernathy's desperate wish to hold Sunday services there, stipulated wisely that no one was to go upstairs, as their weight might cause the temporary beams to collapse. Abernathy agreed. A piano was hauled in, a makeshift pulpit erected, and on Sunday the members took seats on chairs in the basement. They cast anxious looks toward the fresh carpentry above them and the grit on the floor. A pall hung over the service until Mrs. Beasley, mother of church clerk William Beasley and one of the oldest members of the congregation, rose to speak. "I don't like what I see here today," she said. "Brother Pastor, you can't leave no church worried and troubled. I remember in 1910, when this church was just a big hole in the ground after the fire. And two fine ladies from Dexter walked by and said, 'What is *this*? Unborn generations will say this hole is where the First Baptist Church was *supposed* to be.' But they were wrong! Dr. A. J. Stokes built this church, and I want you to have a vote of confidence that we will build it again!" As the congregation jumped to its feet, church pianist Dorothy Posey spontaneously began to play the "Hallelujah Chorus."

The inspiration that surged through First Baptist derived in part from community rivalries, and MIA leaders discovered to their dismay that a new and uglier side of crisis psychology emerged simultaneously with the most inspired goodwill. Even those who had lived through the boycott could not explain it, except to say that the MIA community was suffering a natural letdown. Once the endeavor was behind them, crisis emotions slipped easily into depression or jealousy. Some resented the fact that Abernathy's prestige rose dramatically because he was the only leader bombed both at church and at home. Graetz's stature grew because on the most recent night of terror his home had been the target of two bombs, one of which did not go off. (An intrepid neighbor snipped the smoldering end off a fuse leading to eleven sticks of dynamite.) When the rumor mill passed the word that one of the Graetz bombs had been meant for a Methodist preacher within the MIA, that preacher actually became consumed with regret that he had not been bombed—to the point that he later had a mental breakdown. Rev. Uriah J. Fields, the "traitor" of the previous summer, was temporarily restored to leadership because the church he had regained, Bell Street Baptist, suffered the most destruction on the night of the bombs.

E. D. Nixon, who was not bombed this time, became openly hostile to King's manner and importance. Not long after the bombing, Nixon resigned as MIA treasurer with a bitter "Dear Sir" letter to King, in which he complained of being "treated as a child." Some of King's partisans

looked upon Nixon with the same tart condescension that moved one of them publicly to refer to Rosa Parks as "an adornment of the movement." In this spirit, the most sophisticated leaders around King agreed that the next desegregation target should be the Montgomery airport. Graetz, Fred Gray, and a few others objected to this notion as absurd and selfish, inasmuch as only a tiny fraction of MIA members ever had been on an airplane. But the leaders, including Abernathy, wanted to hit the airport. They had moved up from the bus.

A roiling undertow ensured that the MIA would never again play a major part in American racial politics. Although the force of the boycott would reach the country by delayed reverberation, Montgomery's contribution was already history. King himself suffered a corresponding let-down. He was fearful of the bombs, saddened by the backsliding on bus integration, hurt by criticisms within the MIA that he traveled too much and received too much attention, and depressed by the carping disunity among the MIA leadership. Instinctively, he took the fears and failures upon himself, feeling guilty and miserable, and the overload of guilt spilled over into self-reproach. On the Monday night after Abernathy's basement church service, King took the pulpit at an MIA mass meeting. Praying publicly for guidance, he said, "Lord, I hope no one will have to die as a result of our struggle for freedom in Montgomery. Certainly I don't want to die. But if anyone has to die, let it be me!" His outcry threw the audience into pandemonium. Shouts of "No! No!" clashed with a wave of religious ecstasy. In the midst of it, King became overwrought. He gripped the pulpit with both hands, unable to speak. He remained frozen there long after the crowd stilled itself, which produced an awkward silence and then a murmur of alarm as the seconds went by. King never spoke. Finally, two preachers draped their arms around him and led him to a seat.

Two weeks later, Bob Williams was on Saturday night duty at the Dexter parsonage. Coretta and Yoki were in Atlanta. There was the usual mix of friendly and hateful phone calls, but something disturbed King so much that he got up from his bed to wake Williams. "Bob, I think we better leave here tonight," he said. The two of them promptly went to Williams' house. Several hours later, before dawn, a bomb exploded on the corner nearest the parsonage. The blast crushed the front part of a house, damaged an adjacent Negro taxi stand, and shattered the windows of three taxis parked there, sending the drivers to the hospital with cuts. During the alarm that followed, someone went to the empty parsonage to check on King and found twelve sticks of dynamite lying on the front porch, the fuse giving off an acrid smell. An hour later, after a tense drama inside the police cordon and a near riot on the outside, the state

of Alabama's chief munitions expert defused the bomb. Two Negroes who denounced the police for failing to catch any of the bombers were arrested and later convicted for incitement to riot. King, summoned by telephone, arrived to quiet the crowd with a speech.

That morning, from the Dexter pulpit, King told the congregation of his experience in his kitchen exactly one year earlier, just before the first bombing. He had heard an inner voice telling him to ignore the confusions and fears swirling about him and do what he thought was right. An *Advertiser* reporter was attending the service that morning because of the bomb, and his report set off a venomous delight within Grover Hall. In the pages of the *Advertiser*, Hall ridiculed what he called the "vision in the kitchen speech," distorting it to imply that King's will to fight segregation had come to him from an alleged kitchen conversation with God. A few days later, Hall came across a passage in an obscure newsletter from a Methodist college outside Alabama, in which a professor wrote that King's nonviolent bearing during the boycott had been worthy of Christian saints. Hall developed this item into a scathing editorial entitled "Dr. King Enters Hagiology of Methodist Church," which touched off a heated controversy throughout the South. Some Alabama churches voted to cut off all financial support for Methodist higher education.

A few days after the taxi-stand bombing, Montgomery police charged seven white men with that crime as well as most of the prior bombings. Hopes for justice swelled within the MIA, until a jury acquitted the first two defendants in spite of their signed confessions. About the same time, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled against King's appeal of his "illegal boycott" conviction. It was a technical ruling—Fred Gray had missed a procedural filing deadline—and King ruefully decided not to press the case to the U.S. Supreme Court for fear of losing on the same technicality. He paid his \$500 fine painfully, hating to lose, hating especially to be blocked from getting a substantive ruling on the legality of the protest. He hoped that one of the eighty-nine remaining defendants might be vindicated on constitutional grounds, or on the strict finding that the boycotters had "just cause," but Montgomery prosecutors closed off this avenue by dismissing all these cases. Simultaneously, the prosecutors dropped charges against the remaining white bombing defendants.

King deplored the import of this twin amnesty, which Judge Carter accepted as a package, because it perversely equated the boycott with the bombings, many of which were capital crimes under Alabama law. He did not attack the linkage publicly, however. Doing so would have accomplished nothing practical, and it would have risked further separating him from the eighty-nine MIA leaders now spared prosecution. King's helplessness was evidence of the political shrewdness of the prosecutors'



move. Segregationists could take solace from the fact the Negro leader stood proven wrong—tried, convicted, given every chance to appeal, and deemed finally a criminal. They had his money to prove it. The Negro population at large had just absorbed a historical reminder of local law and random violence. What little had been lost to the segregationists in the boycott case had since been avenged many times over. Nighttime bus service was quietly restored, and the bombing attacks ceased.

E. Frederic Morrow marched in Eisenhower's second inaugural parade on January 20, 1957. Later that day, by special invitation, he and his wife became the first Negroes ever to sit in the presidential reviewing stand. Clare Boothe Luce—the first female ambassador in U.S. history, and wife of *Time* founder Henry Luce—introduced herself to King in a fan letter that January. A Republican globalist who had just returned from duty in Italy, she wrote King that "no day passed but the Italian communists pointed to events in our South to prove that American democracy was a 'capitalistic myth.' . . . Our enemies abroad have profited greatly from the efforts of these Americans who would deny their own Constitution. No man has ever waged the battle for equality under our law in a more lawful and *Christian* way than you have."

Within a few weeks of Luce's letter, a *Time* correspondent was assigned to write the story of Montgomery in the form of a sympathetic, full-length profile of King. *Time's* New York editors objected to a mention in the story draft that "Onward Christian Soldiers" was sung at MIA mass meetings, saying that the song's warlike spirit clashed with *Time's* Gandhian slant on King. "Above all," said *Time* in describing King's education, "he read and reread everything he could find about India's Gandhi." Many adjustments of image were crammed into the frantic revision period attendant to major stories. An artist prepared a strikingly handsome, close-up portrait of King to fill most of the space within the celebrated red borders of *Time's* cover.

The *Time* story established King as a permanent fixture of American mass culture. *The New York Times Magazine* soon followed with a history of the boycott, which was mostly about King, and NBC's Lawrence Spivak invited him to become the second Negro ever to appear on "Meet the Press." After the boycott, the mantle of fame fell ever more personally on King, who told *Time* that he and his father had chosen to call themselves after Martin Luther, the founding Protestant, and that "perhaps we've earned our right to the name." It was a proud but tentative "perhaps." The boycott had touched him indelibly—astonished, battered, broadened, and inflamed him. Now that it was over, the turmoil



within his own world at home served only to drive him more quickly toward a larger constituency.

In February, just before the *Time* cover story hit the stands, he spent an evening at Oberlin College in Ohio, where Vernon Johns had gone to school forty years earlier. A campus YMCA official named Harvey Cox, himself fresh out of seminary, arranged for King to address a general convocation. Afterward, Cox hosted a private dinner, at which the invited students and faculty behaved somewhat shyly around King. During the meal, King found himself isolated, with no one sitting on either side of him, but a student did move nonchalantly to sit directly across the table. Introducing himself as James Lawson, he said he had looked forward to this meeting since first reading King's name in the *Nagpur Times* more than a year earlier. King's interest perked up instantly. He asked about India, saying he hoped to go there soon, and Lawson replied with a description of his Methodist missionary work. Lawson had returned by way of Africa, spending a month there with some of the leaders of the independence movements. King brightened again; he told Lawson he had just received an invitation from Kwame Nkrumah to attend the ceremonies marking the end of British colonialism in Ghana.

The two men fell headlong into conversation. They discovered in a rush that they had similar histories and interests. They knew many people in common and had read many of the same theology books. Lawson had grown up the son of a Republican minister who preached the gospel of love but also wore a .38 on his hip as a precaution against harassment from white people. His mother, said Lawson, was the love influence in his life. As a champion debater in high school and college, he had argued in 1946 that preventive atomic warfare against the Soviet Union was justified to stop the threat of Communism—a memory that made him wince slightly. Two years later, Lawson had decided that the law of love as demonstrated by Jesus did not permit violence except to lay down one's life for another, and had developed theories linking the conscription and segregation laws in principle as denials of religious conscience. In 1951, while serving as national president of the United Methodist Youth Fellowship, he had refused induction into the Army on pacifist grounds, for which he served more than a year in federal prison. Bayard Rustin had come to Ohio to counsel him. So had Glenn Smiley.

These names, like almost everything else Lawson said, struck sparks of recognition in King. The affinity between them was such that they could almost anticipate each other even while first getting acquainted. They were two different personalities on the same quest. In many respects, Lawson was ahead of King as an activist, but King had already realized Lawson's dream of starting a nonviolent mass movement. Now,

King said, he was trying to figure out how to extend the Montgomery model across the South. His best idea so far was to work through the Baptist Convention or the NAACP, but he was not sure what that would mean in practice. Most probably nothing, said Lawson, remarking caustically that the NAACP was by nature an organization of lawyers and banquets, limited by the small numbers and cautious temperament of the Negro middle class. King said ruefully that he was probably right, but how could you build something out of nothing to attack the segregation practiced daily by millions of whites and Negroes?

By the end of the dinner, King was recruiting Lawson to come South to find or create an answer. Lawson said he planned to do just that as soon as he finished the graduate work he had interrupted for prison and India.

"We need you now," King implored him. "We don't have any Negro leadership in the South that understands nonviolence." Lawson promised to hurry. The two men began an association that lasted until Lawson invited King to Memphis to help the sanitation workers in 1968, but now they shared a vision of destiny unmixed with fate.