The Montgomery Bus Boycott

"My feets is weary, but my soul is rested."
-- Mother Pollard

The Montgomery Bus Boycott officially started on December 1, 1955. That was the day when the blacks of Montgomery, Alabama, decided that they would boycott the city buses until they could sit anywhere they wanted, instead of being relegated to the back when a white boarded. It was not, however, the day that the movement to desegregate the buses started. Perhaps the movement started on the day in 1943 when a black seamstress named Rosa Parks paid her bus fare and then watched the bus drive off as she tried to re-enter through the rear door, as the driver had told her to do. Perhaps the movement started on the day in 1949 when a black professor Jo Ann Robinson absentmindedly sat at the front of a nearly empty bus, then ran off in tears when the bus driver screamed at her for doing so. Perhaps the movement started on the day in the early 1950s when a black pastor named Vernon Johns tried to get other blacks to leave a bus in protest after he was forced to give up his seat to a white man, only to have them tell him, "You ought to knowed better." The story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott is often told as a simple, happy tale of the "little people" triumphing over the seemingly insurmountable forces of evil. The truth is a little less romantic and a little more complex.

The simple version of the story leaves out some very important people, such as Jo Ann Robinson, of whom Martin Luther King, Jr., would later write, "Apparently indefatigable, she, perhaps more than any other person, was active on every level of the protest." She was an educated woman, a professor at the all-black Alabama State College, and a member of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery. After her traumatic experience on the bus in 1949, she tried to start a protest but was shocked when other Women's Political Council members brushed off the incident as "a fact of life in Montgomery." After the Supreme Court's Brown decision in 1954, she wrote a letter to the mayor of Montgomery, W.A. Gayle, saying that "there has been talk from 25 or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses." By 1955, the Women's Political Council had plans for just such a boycott. Community leaders were just waiting for the right person to be arrested, a person who would anger the black community into action, who would agree to test the segregation laws in court, and who, most importantly, was "above reproach." When fifteen year old Claudette Colvin was arrested early in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat, E.D. Nixon of the NAACP thought he had found the perfect person, but Colvin turned out to be pregnant. Nixon later explained, "I had to be sure that I had somebody I could win with." Enter Rosa Parks.

Rosa Parks is probably the most romanticized personage in the Montgomery cast of characters. She is often portrayed as a simple seamstress who, exhausted after a long day at work, refused to give up her seat to a white person. While this is not untrue, there is more to the story. Parks was educated; she had attended the laboratory school at Alabama State College because there was no
high school for blacks in Montgomery at that time, but had decided to become a seamstress because she could not find a job to suit her skills. She was also a long-time NAACP worker who had taken a special interest in Claudette Colvin's case. When she was arrested in December 1955, she had recently completed a workshop on race relations at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. And she was a well-respected woman with a spotless record.

On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a city bus and sat with three other blacks in the fifth row, the first row that blacks could occupy. A few stops later, the front four rows were filled with whites, and one white man was left standing. According to law, blacks and whites could not occupy the same row, so the bus driver asked all four of the blacks seated in the fifth row to move. Three complied, but Parks refused. She was arrested.

When E.D. Nixon heard that Parks had been arrested, he called the police to find out why. He was told that it was "[n]one of your damn business." He asked Clifford Durr, a sympathetic white lawyer, to call. Durr easily found out that Parks had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Nixon went to the jail and posted bond for Parks. Then he told her, "Mrs. Parks, with your permission we can break down segregation on the bus with your case." She talked it over with her husband and her mother, then agreed.

That night, Jo Ann Robinson put plans for a one-day boycott into action. She mimeographed handouts urging blacks to stay off the city buses on Monday, when Parks' case was due to come up. She and her students distributed the anonymous fliers throughout Montgomery on Friday morning. That evening, a group of ministers and civil rights leaders had a meeting to discuss the boycott. It did not go well. Many ministers were put off by the way Rev. L. Roy Bennett took control of the meeting. Some left and others were about to leave. Those remaining, however, agreed to spread word of the boycott through their sermons on Sunday, then meet again on Monday night if the boycott went well to decide whether or not to continue it.

Martin Luther King, Jr., minister at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, thought that "if we could get 60 percent cooperation the protest would be a success." He was pleasantly surprised when bus after empty bus rolled past his house that morning. "A miracle had taken place," King would later write. "The once dormant and quiescent Negro community was now fully awake." The group from Friday night met again that afternoon and decided to call themselves the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). They elected King as president. The next decision was whether or not to end the boycott. Some ministers wanted to end it as a one-day success. Then E.D. Nixon rose to speak:

What's the matter with you people? Here you have been living off the sweat of these washerwomen all these years and you have never done anything for them. Now you have a chance to pay them back, and you're too damn scared to stand on your feet and be counted! The time has come when you men is going to have to learn to be grown men or scared boys.

The MIA decided to let the people vote on whether or not to continue the boycott at the mass meeting that night. There, the decision was unanimous. The boycott would continue.
When the boycott began, no one expected it to last for very long. There had been boycotts of buses by blacks before, most recently in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1953. A one-day boycott, followed three months later by a week-long boycott, resulted in buses that were more desegregated but that still had some seats reserved for whites as well as some for blacks. On Thursday, December 8, the fourth day of the boycott, King and other MIA officials met with officials and lawyers from the bus company, as well as the city commissioners, to present a moderate desegregation plan similar to the one already implemented in Baton Rouge and other Southern cities, including Mobile, Alabama. The MIA was hopeful that the plan would be accepted and the boycott would end, but the bus company refused to consider it. In addition, city officials struck a blow to the boycott when they announced that any cab driver charging less than the 45 cent minimum fare would be prosecuted. Since the boycott began, the black cab services had been charging blacks only 10 cents to ride, the same as the bus fare, but this service would be no more. Suddenly the MIA was faced with the prospect of having thousands of blacks with no way to get to work, and with no end to the boycott in sight.

In response, the MIA worked out a "private taxi" plan, under which blacks who owned cars picked up and dropped off blacks who needed rides at designated points. The plan was elaborate and took a great deal of planning; consequently, the MIA appointed a Transportation Committee to oversee it. The service worked so well so quickly that even the White Citizens Council (whose membership doubled during one month of the boycott) had to admit that it moved with "military precision." Whites tried to end the boycott in every way possible. One often-used method was to try to divide the black community. On January 21, 1956, the City Commission met with three non-MIA black ministers and proposed a "compromise," which was basically the system already in effect. The ministers accepted, and the commission leaked (false) reports to a newspaper that the boycott was over. The MIA did not even hear of the compromise until a black reporter in the North who received a wire report phoned to ask if the Montgomery blacks had really settled for so little. By that time it was Saturday night. On Sunday morning Montgomery newspapers were going to print the news that the boycott was over and the city's blacks were going to believe it. To prevent this from happening, some MIA officials went bar-hopping to spread the word that the stories were a hoax, that the boycott was still on. Later, the black ministers told King that they hadn't understood the proposal.

When that effort to break up the boycott failed, whites turned to violence. King's home was bombed on January 30, and Nixon's home was bombed on February 1.

Next, whites turned to the law. On February 21, 89 blacks were indicted under an old law prohibiting boycotts. King was the first defendant to be tried. As press from around the nation looked on, King was ordered to pay $500 plus $500 in court costs or spend 386 days in the state penitentiary.

Whites also tried to break down the "private taxi" system that many blacks relied on as their only means of transportation to and from work. Some churches had purchased station wagons, usually called "rolling churches," to be used in the private taxi service. Liability insurance was canceled four times in four months before King found insurance through a black agent in Atlanta, underwritten by Lloyd's of London. The police also arrested drivers for minor traffic offenses.
When King dropped by a pickup point to help transport blacks waiting there, he was arrested for driving thirty miles per hour in a twenty-five mile per hour zone.

Despite all the pressures to end the boycott, blacks continued to stay off the buses. One white bus driver stopped to let off a lone black man in a black neighborhood. Looking in his rear view mirror, he saw an old black woman with a cane rushing towards the bus. He opened the door and said, "You don't have to rush auntie. I'll wait for you." The woman replied, "In the first place, I ain't your auntie. In the second place, I ain't rushing to get on your bus. I'm jus' trying to catch up with that nigger who just got off, so I can hit him with this here stick."

By this point, some members of Montgomery's business community were becoming frustrated with the boycott, which was costing them thousands of dollars because blacks were less likely to shop in downtown stores. Although they were as opposed to integration as the next white Montgomery resident, they realized that the boycott was bad for business and therefore wanted the boycott to end. They formed a group called the Men of Montgomery and tried negotiating directly with the boycotters. Eventually, however, these discussions broke down, and the boycott continued.

But blacks had already begun to fight to end the boycott in court. They would no longer settle for the moderate desegregation plan that they had first proposed. Now, they would accept nothing less than full integration. The city was fighting a losing battle. The blacks were armed with the Brown decision, less than two years old, which said that the "separate but equal" doctrine had no place in public education. Surely it must follow that the doctrine had no place in any public facilities. In addition, the city was not in the prejudiced local courts but in federal court, where even a black man could hope to have a fair trial. When the city defended segregation by saying that integration would lead to violence, Judge Rives asked, "Is it fair to command one man to surrender his constitutional rights, if they are his constitutional rights, in order to prevent another man from committing a crime?" The federal court decided 2-1 in favor of the blacks, with the lone dissent coming from a Southern judge. The city, of course, appealed the ruling, but on November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal court's ruling, declaring segregation on buses unconstitutional. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was officially over.

Blacks continued, however, to stay off the city buses until the mandate from the Supreme Court arrived. During that time, MIA officials tried to prepare blacks as best they could for integrated buses. But, as Martin Luther King, Jr., noted wryly, "not a single white group would take the responsibility of preparing the white community."

Blacks returned to the buses on December 21, 1956, over a year after the boycott began. But their troubles were not over. Snipers shot at buses, forcing the city to suspend bus operations after 5 P.M. A group tried to start a whites-only bus service. There was also a wave of bombings. The homes of two black leaders, four Baptists churches, the People's Service Station and Cab Stand, and the home of another black were all bombed. In addition, an unexploded bomb was found on King's front porch. Seven white men were arrested for the bombings, and five were indicted. The first two defendants, Raymond D. York and Sonny Kyle Livingston, were found not guilty, even though they had signed confessions. The remainder of the bombers were set free.
under a compromise that also canceled the cases of blacks arrested under the anti-boycott laws, although King still had to pay his $500 fine.

The KKK also tried to scare the blacks, but "it seemed to have lost its spell," King wrote. "...[O]ne cold night a small Negro boy was seen warming his hands at a burning cross." The violence died down after several prominent whites spoke out against it, and the integration of the Montgomery buses was ultimately successful.

On January 10 and 11, 1957, ministers from the MIA joined other ministers from around the South in Atlanta, Georgia. They founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and elected Martin Luther King, Jr., as president. SCLC would continue to work in various areas of the South for many years, continuing the nonviolent fight for civil rights started in Birmingham.

Although the gains of the Montgomery Bus Boycott were small compared with the gains blacks would later win, the boycott was important start to the movement. The lasting legacy of the boycott, as Roberta Wright wrote, was that "It helped to launch a 10-year national struggle for freedom and justice, the Civil Rights Movement, that stimulated others to do the same at home and abroad."

**Dred Scott: Introduction**

"Slavery is founded on the selfishness of man's nature--opposition to it on his love of justice. These principles are in eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely as slavery extension brings them, shocks and throes and convulsions must ceaselessly follow."

(Albraham Lincoln) [1]

During the 1850's in the United States, Southern support of slavery and Northern opposition to it collided more violently than ever before over the case of Dred Scott, a black slave from Missouri who claimed his freedom on the basis of seven years of residence in a free state and a free territory. When the predominately proslavery Supreme Court of the United States heard Scott's case and declared that not only was he still a slave but that the main law guaranteeing that slavery would not enter the new midwestern territories of the United States was unconstitutional, it sent America into convulsions. The turmoil would end only after a long and bloody civil war in which an important issue was the question of slavery and its extension into America's unorganized territories. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* helped hasten the arrival of the American Civil War, primarily by further polarizing the already tense relations between Northerners and Southerners.

**Background**

Scott's beginnings were quite humble. Born somewhere in Virginia, he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, with his owners in 1830 and was sold to Dr. John Emerson sometime between 1831 and 1833. Emerson, as an Army doctor, was a frequent traveler, so between his sale to Emerson and Emerson's death in late 1843, Scott lived for extended periods of time in Fort Armstrong,
Illinois, Fort Snelling, Wisconsin Territory, Fort Jessup, Louisiana, and in St. Louis. During his travels, Scott lived for a total of seven years in areas closed to slavery; Illinois was a free state and the Missouri Compromise of 1820 had closed the Wisconsin Territory to slavery. When Scott's decade-long fight for freedom began on April 6, 1846, he lived in St. Louis and was the property of Emerson's wife.

The famous *Scott v. Sanford* case, like its plaintiff, had relatively insignificant origins. Scott filed a declaration on April 6, 1846, stating that on April 4, Mrs. Emerson had "beat, bruised, and ill-treated him" before imprisoning him for twelve hours. [3] Scott also declared that he was free by virtue of his residence at Fort Armstrong and Fort Snelling. He had strong legal backing for this declaration; the Supreme Court of Missouri had freed many slaves who had traveled with their masters in free states. In the Missouri Supreme Court's 1836 *Rachel v. Walker* ruling, it decided that Rachel, a slave taken to Fort Snelling and to Prairie du Chien in Illinois, was free. Despite these precedents, Mrs. Emerson won the first *Scott v. Emerson* trial by slipping through a technical loophole; Scott took the second trial by closing the loophole. In 1850, the case reached the Missouri Supreme Court, the same court that had freed Rachel just fourteen years earlier. Unfortunately for Scott, the intervening fourteen years had been important ones in terms of sectional conflict. The precedents in his favor were the work of "liberal-minded judges who were predisposed to favor freedom and whose opinions seemed to reflect the older view of enlightened southerners that slavery was, at best, a necessary evil." [4] By the early 1850's, however, sectional conflict had arisen again and uglier than ever, and most Missourians did not encourage the freeing of slaves. Even judicially Scott was at a disadvantage; the United States Supreme Court's *Strader v. Graham* decision (1851) set some precedents that were unfavorable to Scott, and two of the three justices who made the final decision in Scott's appearance before the Missouri Supreme Court were proslavery. As would be expected, they ruled against Scott in 1852, with the third judge dissenting. Scott's next step was to take his case out of the state judicial system and into the federal judicial system by bringing it to the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Missouri.

The Supreme Court's Decision

When the Court met for the first time since the reargument to discuss the case on February 14, 1857, it favored a moderate decision that ruled in favor of Sanford but did not consider the larger issues of Negro citizenship and the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise. The majority chose Justice Nelson as the writer of a decision that avoided these important but highly controversial issues, and Nelson went to work on it. When Nelson presented his opinion to the majority, however, he discovered that his "majority" opinion turned out to be the opinion of only himself. [11] The Court elected to throw out Nelson's decision and instead chose Chief Justice Roger B. Taney as the writer of the true majority opinion for the court, an opinion that would include everything under consideration in the case, including Negro citizenship and the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise. According to Justice Catron, one of the members of the majority, "the court majority. . .had been `forced up' to its change of plan by the determination of [Justices] Curtis and McLean to present extensive dissenting opinions.
discussing all aspects of the case." [12] The majority decided that if the dissenters covered all the issues, they must also. Ironically, the two most antislavery justices may have forced a more proslavery opinion than what the majority originally planned to decide.

By mid-February 1857, many well-informed Americans were aware that the conclusion of the *Scott v. Sandford* case was close at hand. President-elect James Buchanan contacted some of his friends on the Supreme Court starting in early February; he asked if the Court had reached a decision in the case, for he needed to know what he should say about the territorial issue in his inaugural address on March 4. By inauguration day 1857, Buchanan knew what the outcome of the Supreme Court's decision would be and took the opportunity to throw his support to the Court in his inaugural address:

A difference of opinion has arisen in regard to the point of time when the people of a Territory shall decide this question [of slavery] for themselves.

This is, happily, a matter of but little practical importance. Besides, it is a judicial question, which legitimately belongs to the Supreme Court of the United States, before whom it is now pending, and will, it is understood, be speedily and finally settled. To their decision, in common with all good citizens, I shall cheerfully submit, whatever this may be. [13]

Just two days after Buchanan's inauguration, on March 6, 1857, the nine justices filed into the courtroom in the basement of the U.S. Capitol, lead by Chief Justice Taney. Taney was almost 80 years old, always physically feeble, and even weaker as a result of the effort he had put forth to write the two-hour-long opinion; therefore, he spoke in a low voice that Republicans deemed appropriate for such a "shameful decision." [14] He first addressed the question of Negro citizenship, not only that of slaves but also that of free blacks:

Can a Negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by that instrument to the citizen? [15]

One of the privileges reserved for citizens by the Constitution, argued Taney, was the "privilege of suing in a court of the United States in the cases specified by the Constitution." [16] Taney's opinion stated that Negroes, even free Negroes, were not citizens of the United States, and that therefore Scott, as a Negro, did not even have the privilege of being able to sue in a federal court. Taney then turned to the question of the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise. The territories acquired from France in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, Taney stated, were dependent upon the national government, and the government could not act outside its framework as set forth in the Constitution. Congress, for example, could not deny the citizens of the new territory freedom of speech. Similarly, Congress could not deprive the citizens of the territory of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law," according to the Fifth Amendment. Taney continued:

And an act of Congress which deprives a citizen of the United States of his liberty or property, merely because he came himself or brought his property into a particular territory of the United
States, and who had committed no offense against the laws, could hardly be dignified with the name of due process of law. [17]

The Constitution made no distinction between slaves and other types of property. Taney reasoned that the Missouri Compromise deprived slaveholding citizens of their property in the form of slaves and that therefore the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. Scott's case had one last hope: the Chief Justice could decide that Scott was free because of his stay in the free state of Illinois. Taney made no such decision, instead stating that "the status of slaves who had been taken to free States or territories and who had afterwards returned depended on the law of the State where they resided when they brought suit." Scott had brought suit in Missouri and hence he was still a slave because Missouri was a slave state. Taney ruled that the case be dismissed for lack of jurisdiction and sent back to the lower court with instructions for that court to dismiss the case for the same reason, therefore upholding the Missouri Supreme Court's ruling in favor of Sanford.

Impact of Dred Scott

The Dred Scott decision served as an eye-opener to Northerners who believed that slavery was tolerable as long as it stayed in the South. If the decision took away any power Congress once had to regulate slavery in new territories, these once-skeptics reasoned, slavery could quickly expand into much of the western United States. And once slavery expanded into the territories, it could spread quickly into the once-free states. Lincoln addressed this growing fear during a speech in Springfield, Illinois on June 17, 1858:

Put this and that together, and we have another nice little niche, which we may, ere long, see filled with another Supreme Court decision, declaring that the Constitution of the United States does not permit a State to exclude slavery from its limits. . . . We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free, and we shall awake to the reality instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State. [32]

For many Northerners who had remained silent on the issue, this very real possibility was too scary to ignore. Suddenly many Northerners who had not previously been against the South and against slavery began to realize that if they did not stop slavery now, they might never again have the chance. This growing fear in the North helped further contribute to the Civil War.

Four years after Chief Justice Taney read his infamous Scott v. Sanford decision, parts of the proslavery half of the Union had seceded and the nation was engaged in civil war. Because of the passions it aroused on both sides, Taney’s decision certainly accelerated the start of this conflict. Even in 1865, as the long and bloody war drew to a close with the Northern, antislavery side on top, a mere mention of the decision struck a nerve in the Northern Congress. A simple and customary request for a commemorative bust of Taney, to be placed in a hall with busts of all former Supreme Court Chief Justices, was blocked by the Republican-controlled Congress. Charles Sumner, the leader of those who blocked the request, had strong words on the late Chief Justice and his most notorious decision:
I speak what cannot be denied when I declare that the opinion of the Chief Justice in the case of Dred Scott was more thoroughly abominable than anything of the kind in the history of courts. Judicial baseness reached its lowest point on that occasion. You have not forgotten that terrible decision where a most unrighteous judgment was sustained by a falsification of history. Of course, the Constitution of the United States and every principle of Liberty was falsified, but historical truth was falsified also. . . .

Clearly Scott v. Sanford was not an easily forgotten case. That it still raised such strong emotions well into the Civil War shows that it helped bring on the war by hardening the positions of each side to the point where both were willing to fight over the issue of slavery. The North realized that if it did not act swiftly, the Southern states might take the precedent of the Scott case as a justification for expanding slavery into new territories and free states alike. The South recognized the threat of the Republican party and knew that the party had gained a considerable amount of support as a result of the Northern paranoia in the aftermath of the decision. In the years following the case, Americans realized that these two mindsets, both quick to defend their side, both distrustful of the other side, could not coexist in the same nation. The country realized that, as Abraham Lincoln stated, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." . . . This government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." Scott's case left America in "shocks and throes and convulsions" that only the complete eradication of slavery through war could cure.

SIT INS

On February 1, 1960, Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair, Jr., walked into an F.W. Woolworth Company store in Greensboro, North Carolina, purchased some school supplies, then went to the lunch counter and asked to be served. They knew they probably would not be. The four freshmen at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College were black, and this lunch counter was segregated. Still, as one of the students told UPI, "We believe, since we buy books and papers in the other part of the store, we should get served in this part." When they were forced to leave as the store closed, they still had not been served.

This first sit-in had very little effect. C.L. Harris, manager of the store, said of the students, "They can just sit there. It's nothing to me." But when a larger group of students returned the next day, wire services picked up the story, and civil rights organizations began to spread the word to other college campuses. Gordon Carey, a representative from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), came down from New York to organize more sit-ins. Ella Baker of the SCLC contacted students on many college campuses. In two weeks, students in eleven cities held sit-ins, primarily at Woolworth's and S.H. Kress stores. Soon stores put signs in the window, saying "NO TRESPASSING," "We Reserve the Right to Service the Public As We See Fit," and "CLOSED - In the Interest of Public Safety."

The basic plan of the sit-ins was that a group of students would go to a lunch counter and ask to be served. If they were, they'd move on to the next lunch counter. If they were not, they would not move until they had been. If they were arrested, a new group would take their place. The
students always remained nonviolent and respectful. Students in Nashville had some "Do's" and "Don'ts" during sit-ins:

Do show yourself friendly on the counter at all times. Do sit straight and always face the counter. Don't strike back, or curse back if attacked. Don't laugh out. Don't hold conversations. Don't block entrances.

Another part of the sit-ins was that the students would be dressed up in their best Sunday clothing. James J. Kilpatrick, the editor of the *Richmond News Leader* and an vehement segregationist, noted that this created an interesting contrast with the whites who came to harass them:

Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe and one was taking notes from a biology text. [The students often brought schoolbooks with them to sit-ins so they could study.] And here, on the sidewalk outside was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a ragtail rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern States in the last war fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause. [20]

When Northern students heard of the movement, they decided to help their Southern counterparts by picketing local branches of chain stores that were segregated in the South. Martin Smolin, a Columbia student who led picketing at Woolworth's, explained, "People have asked me why northerners, especially white people, who have been in the majority in our picketing demonstrations in New York, take an active part in an issue which doesn't concern them. My answer is that injustice anywhere is everybody's concern." And when a reporter asked Congressman Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem if he was advocating that Negroes in New York stay out of national chain stores such as Woolworth's, he answered, "Oh no. I'm advocating that American citizens interested in democracy stay out of these stores." [21]

The first few weeks of sit-ins were fairly quiet. Blacks were not served, but they were not harassed much either. Then, on February 27, sit-in students in Nashville were attacked by a group of white teenagers. Police arrived, but they let the white teens go while arresting the protesters for "disorderly conduct." As each group of protesters was arrested, a new group would take its place. "No matter what they did and how many they arrested, there was still a lunch counter full of students there," explained Diane Nash, one of the leaders of the sit-in movement in Nashville. Z. Alexander Looby, a prominent black lawyer, represented the protesters in court; however, as he began his arguments, the judge literally turned his back. Looby stopped his argument and said, to the judge's back, "What's the use!" [22] The judge found the defendants guilty, and they were fined $150 plus court costs. A few days later, 63 protesters were arrested during sit-ins at Nashville's Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals.

Over Easter Weekend, Ella Baker of the SCLC helped organize a conference of sit-in students from around the nation. Held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, the conference was dubbed the "Sacrifice for Dignity." Older organizations such as SCLC, CORE, and NAACP hoped that the students would create a youth organization inside of them. Baker, however,
encouraged the students to form an independent organization. They formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "snick") to lead the sit-in effort.

On April 19, Z. Alexander Looby's home was destroyed by a powerful dynamite blast. Looby was considered to be fairly conservative, so the bombing enraged not only the black community but many whites as well. 2,500 students and community members staged a silent march to City Hall that day. When they reached it, Mayor Ben West was waiting for them. Diane Nash asked him, "Do you feel it is wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of their race or color?" West said yes. He later explained, "It was a moral question -- one that a man had to answer, not a politician." Nashville merchants were somewhat relieved by West's answer. "The merchants were afraid to move on their own, were almost looking for an excuse to say `Well if that's what the mayor thinks, then maybe we ought to go ahead,'" explained Bernie Schweid. A few weeks later on May 10, six Nashville lunch counters began serving blacks. [23] The students in Nashville had won an important victory.

The sit-ins, however, were not over. By August 1961, they had attracted over 70,000 participants and generated over 3,000 arrests. [24] They continued in some areas of the South until and even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared segregation at lunch counters unlawful. In addition, the technique of the sit-ins was used to integrate other public facilities, such as movie theaters, and SNCC, the student group that rose out of the sit-ins, continued to be involved in the civil rights movement for many years. Perhaps most importantly, the sit-ins marked a change in the civil rights movement. In the words of journalist Louis Lomax, "They were proof that the Negro leadership class, epitomized by the NAACP, was no longer the prime mover in the Negro's social revolt. The demonstrations have shifted the desegregation battles from the courtroom to the marketplace." [25] They showed that nonviolent direct action and youth could be very useful weapons in the war against segregation.

**Freedom Rides**

"At our first stop in Virginia . . . I [was] confronted with what the Southern white has called `separate but equal.' A modern rest station with gleaming counters and picture windows was labelled `White,' and a small wooden shack beside it was tagged `Colored.'"

-- Freedom Rider William Mahoney [26]

In 1947, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) planned a "Journey of Reconciliation," designed to test the Supreme Court's 1946 decision in the Irene Morgan case, which declared segregated seating of interstate passengers unconstitutional. An interracial group of passengers met with heavy resistance in the upper South. Some members of the group served on a chain gang after their arrest in North Carolina. [27] The Journey of Reconciliation quickly broke down. Clearly the South, even the more moderate upper South, was not ready for integration.

Nearly a decade and a half later, John F. Kennedy was elected president, in large part due to widespread support among blacks who believed that Kennedy was more sympathetic to the civil rights movement than his opponent, Richard Nixon. Once in office, however, Kennedy proved less committed to the movement than he had appeared during the campaign. To test the
The president's commitment to civil rights, CORE proposed a new Journey of Reconciliation, dubbed the "Freedom Ride." The strategy was the same: an interracial group would board buses destined for the South. The whites would sit in the back and the blacks in the front. At rest stops, the whites would go into blacks-only areas and vice versa. "This was not civil disobedience, really," explained CORE director James Farmer, "because we [were] merely doing what the Supreme Court said we had a right to do." But the Freedom Riders expected to meet resistance. "We felt we could count on the racists of the South to create a crisis so that the federal government would be compelled to enforce the law," said Farmer. "When we began the ride I think all of us were prepared for as much violence as could be thrown at us. We were prepared for the possibility of death." [28]

The Freedom Ride left Washington DC on May 4, 1961. It was scheduled to arrive in New Orleans on May 17, the seventh anniversary of the Brown decision. Unlike the original Journey of Reconciliation, the Freedom Ride met little resistance in the upper South.

On Mother's Day, May 14, the Freedom Riders split up into two groups to travel through Alabama. The first group was met by a mob of about 200 angry people in Anniston. The mob stoned the bus and slashed the tires. The bus managed to get away, but when it stopped about six miles out of town to change the tires, it was firebombed. The other group did not fare any better. It was greeted by a mob in Birmingham, and the Riders were severely beaten. Birmingham's Public Safety Commissioner, Bull Conner, claimed he posted no officers at the bus depot because of the holiday; however, it was later discovered that the FBI knew of the planned attack and that the city police stayed away on purpose. Alabama governor John Patterson offered no apologies, explaining, "When you go somewhere looking for trouble, you usually find it . . . . You just can't guarantee the safety of a fool and that's what these folks are, just fools." [29]

Despite the violence, the Freedom Riders were determined to continue. Jim Peck, a white who had fifty stitches from the beatings he received, insisted, "I think it is particularly important at this time when it has become national news that we continue and show that nonviolence can prevail over violence." [30] The bus company, however, did not want to risk losing another bus to a bombing, and its drivers, who were all white, did not want to risk their lives. After two days of unsuccessful negotiations, the Freedom Riders, fearing for their safety, flew to New Orleans. It appeared that the Freedom Ride was over.

At that point, however, a group of Nashville sit-in students decided to go to Birmingham and continue the Freedom Ride. Diane Nash, who helped organize the group, later explained, "If the Freedom Riders had been stopped as a result of violence, I strongly felt that the future of the movement was going to be cut short. The impression would have been that whenever a movement starts, all [you have to do] is attack it with massive violence and the blacks [will] stop." [31] The Nashville students traveled to Birmingham and asked the bus company to let them use their buses. Attorney general Kennedy also leaned on the bus company and the Birmingham police. He was determined to enforce the Supreme Court's decision that called for integration of interstate travel, and he worried that if the Nashville students remained in Birmingham much longer, violence might erupt. On May 17, the Birmingham police arrested the Nashville Freedom Riders and placed them in protective custody. At 2 AM on Friday, the police
drove the Riders back to Tennessee, dumping them by the side of the highway at the state line. After they got a ride back to Nashville, 100 miles away, they went right back to Birmingham.

Meanwhile, Governor Patterson agreed to meet with John Seigenthaler, a Justice Department aide and a native of Tennessee. In the meeting, Floyd Mann, head of the state highway patrol, agreed to protect the Freedom Riders in between Birmingham. Attorney General Robert Kennedy then pressured the Greyhound bus company, which finally agreed to carry the Riders. The Freedom Riders left Birmingham on Saturday, May 20. State police promised "that a private plane would fly over the bus, and there would be a state patrol car every fifteen or twenty miles along the highway between Birmingham and Montgomery -- about ninety miles," recalled Freedom Rider John Lewis. Police protection, however, disappeared as the Freedom Riders entered the Montgomery city limits. The bus terminal was quiet. "And then, all of a sudden, just like magic, white people everywhere," said Freedom Rider Frederick Leonard. [32] The Riders considered leaving by the back of the bus in hopes that the mob would not be quite as vicious. But Jim Zwerg, a white rider, bravely marched off the bus first. The other riders slipped off while the mob focused on pummeling Zwerg. Floyd Mann tried to stop the mob, but it continued to beat the Riders and those who came to their aid, such as Justice Department official John Seigenthaler, who was beaten unconscious and left in the street for nearly a half an hour after he stopped to help two Freedom Riders. Mann finally ordered in state troopers, but the damage was already done. When news of the Montgomery attack reached Washington, Robert Kennedy was not happy. He decided to send federal marshals to the city.

Martin Luther King, Jr., flew to Montgomery and held a mass meeting, surrounded by federal marshals, in support of the Freedom Riders. As night fell, a mob of several thousand whites surrounded the church. The blacks could not leave safely. At 3 AM, King called Robert Kennedy and Kennedy called Governor Patterson. Patterson declared martial law and sent in state police and the National Guard. The mob dispersed and the blacks left safely.

After the violence at the church, Robert Kennedy asked for a cooling-off period. The Freedom Riders, however, were intent on continuing. James Farmer explained, "[W]e'd been cooling off for 350 years, and . . . if we cooled off any more, we'd be in a deep freeze." The Riders decided to continue on to Mississippi. They were given good protection as they entered the state, and no mob greeted them at the Jackson bus terminal. "As we walked through, the police just said, 'Keep moving' and let us go through the white side," recalled Frederick Leonard. "We never got stopped. They just said 'Keep moving,' and they passed us right on through the white terminal into the paddy wagon and into jail." [33] Robert Kennedy and Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland had reached a compromise. Kennedy promised not to use federal troops if there was no mob violence. Both men kept up their end of the bargain. Unfortunately, the Freedom Riders were now at the mercy of the local courts. On May 25, they were tried. As their attorney defended them, the judge turned his back. Once the attorney finished, he turned around and sentenced them to 60 days in the state penitentiary.

More Freedom Riders arrived in Jackson to continue the Freedom Ride, and they were arrested too. Freedom Riders continued to arrive in the South, and by the end of the summer, more than 300 had been arrested.
The Freedom Riders never made it to New Orleans. Many spent their summer in jail. Some were scarred for life from the beatings they received. But their efforts were not in vain. They forced the Kennedy administration to take a stand on civil rights, which was the intent of the Freedom Ride in the first place. In addition, the Interstate Commerce Commission, at the request of Robert Kennedy, outlawed segregation in interstate bus travel in a ruling, more specific than the original Supreme Court mandate, that took effect in September, 1961. The Freedom Riders may not have finished their trip, but they made an important and lasting contribution to the civil rights movement.