

MONTGOMERY BUS VICTORY IN THE STREETS AND IN THE COURTS

The Montgomery Bus Boycott is considered the first large-scale campaign against racial segregation in the United States. Public bus systems in many cities required black people to sit in a separate section at the back of the bus. Organizers in Montgomery, Alabama were looking for the right moment to launch both a boycott and a court challenge to this racist policy. Rosa Parks was a long-time volunteer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and had been trained in nonviolent protest tactics. While she did not set out to get arrested, on December 1, 1955, when the driver demanded she and others give up their seats for a white man, she refused. Others had previously been arrested on buses, but community leaders saw an opportunity with Parks' arrest to spark a larger boycott campaign. She was an upstanding member of the Montgomery black community—a person even conservative religious figures could get behind.



Source: npr.org

The local NAACP President contacted people whose leadership he felt to be essential to a boycott campaign, including a reluctant Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (who was 26 years old at the time). Forming the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), organizers decided to launch a one-day boycott on December 5th, the day Parks was due in court. They announced the boycott during church services and by distributing more than 50,000 flyers. The boycott was a huge success and a meeting of 4,000 community members voted to continue the campaign. For 381 days, approximately 48,000 of the 50,000 black residents of Montgomery stayed off the buses. People walked or took taxis, while churches created a highly organized parallel institution providing 20,000 free rides a day. Meanwhile, lawyers also challenged bus segregation in court filing *Browder v. Gayle*, a lawsuit based on the case won in the Supreme Court that made segregation illegal in public schools.



Source: montgomerybusboycott.blogspot.com

When negotiations stalled, organizers trusted that the boycott would result in significant revenue loss for the bus company and city government and increased their initially moderate demands to full desegregation of buses. Intimidation by police, government, and white opponents escalated throughout the campaign, but the violence and harassment only served to unify the protesters. On November

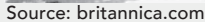
13th, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's segregation laws for buses were unconstitutional. Bus riders had achieved one of the greatest examples of civic engagement of the 20th century, signaling to the entire nation that segregation was no longer the law of the land and inspiring the decade long U.S. Civil Rights Movement to follow.

ISSUE

WHO

WHERE

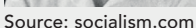
ISSUE FRAMING



GOALS

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STRATEGY



1. *Journal of Management Studies*, 1996, 33, 1, 1-14.

PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?

The Montgomery bus boycott was a planned campaign to challenge the overall segregation system. While Rosa Parks' act itself was spontaneous, she had been trained in protest methods. Community leaders were ready too since there had been other women arrested before and many had discussed a potential response. The 381 day boycott was a highly organized mass movement.

LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, ALLIES INCLUDING ELITES

Leaders:

- E.D. Nixon – labor organizer, lawyer, President of local NAACP, Founder and Treasurer of MIA, and one of the lead organizers and thinkers behind the boycott
- Jo Anne Robinson – English professor at Alabama State University and President of the Women's Political Council, a driving force behind launching and carrying out the boycott
- Rosa Parks – longtime local NAACP organizer whose civil disobedience sparked the bus boycott
- Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) – an organization of community leaders created to execute and organize activities around the boycott
- Fred Gray – a young attorney, representing Rosa Parks and arguing (along with Charles Langford) the Browder v. Gayle case in the U.S. Supreme Court
- Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. – elected President of MIA and one of the lead organizers of the boycott, he was new to Montgomery so was a neutral figure in the community. Hesitant to join at first, the boycott launched him into the spotlight for the Civil Rights Movement
- Reverend Ralph Abernathy – local minister and organizer in MIA
- Link to biographies: <http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/biographies/>



Participants:

- Almost 50,000 African Americans in Montgomery – staying off the buses for 381 days, their effort was the heart of the campaign and why it succeeded
- Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith, Aurelia Browder, and Susie McDonald – arrested for not giving up their seats in the year before Rosa Parks. Became plaintiffs in U.S. Supreme Court case Browder v. Gayle that ultimately ended Montgomery bus segregation



Source: Don Cravens/Time Life/Getty Images.

- Black ministers – rallying their congregations to support the boycott. Many were reluctant initially but were convinced to join largely by E.D. Nixon

Allies:

- Reverend Robert Graetz – white Lutheran leader actively organizing in support of the boycott
- Veteran activist Bayard Rustin – visited Montgomery and passed on to King advice on the use of Gandhian nonviolence techniques, as well as raising money for the effort from afar
- White people giving rides – some because they needed black employees at work and some because they believed in racial justice, though many stopped from community pressure

TARGET

- 1) City of Montgomery officials, including Mayor W.A. Gayle
- 2) City bus officials of National City Lines
- 3) A panel of three federal judges hearing the Brower v. Gayle case and then the Supreme Court

OPPONENT(S)

- 1) City of Montgomery officials, including Mayor W.A. Gayle
- 2) City bus officials of National City Lines
- 3) White citizens and Ku Klux Klan members (vigilante white supremacists) opposed to desegregation

TACTICS

- 1) Boycott of buses
- 2) Lawsuit in federal court
- 3) Leafleting
- 4) Public speeches for inspiration and placing the boycott in a wider context of the freedom struggle
- 5) Prayer, worship, and singing
- 6) Creating a parallel institution (the carpool system)
- 7) Rallies (two mass rallies every week to raise spirits and money and to help coordinate the boycott, including democratic decision-making by thousands of residents)

The boycott was concentrated to buses in Montgomery but dispersed in the city. At different points, organizers strategically added tactics, like an alternative transportation system and a legal challenge.

Many strategic judgements were made like escalating demands when negotiations were stalled and continuing the boycott for more than a month past the Supreme Court decision to make sure it was implemented before stopping. Even as violence against protesters escalated, organizers continued to urge the black community to remain nonviolent throughout.

RESPONSE BY OPPONENT

The mass nature of protest afforded some protection to individuals, but harassment and violence took many forms. Carpool and taxi drivers were interfered with by police and white vigilantes, and a court order was issued just before the final Supreme Court ruling to shut down the carpools. Officials spread false reports that MIA officials had ended the boycott and people were fired from their jobs. Insurance companies canceled carpool policies. Black riders were assaulted on buses. Eighty-nine leaders were arrested for inciting a boycott without "just cause." Leaders and participants received death threats and constant harassment by phone and mail, and multiple houses and churches were bombed.

In addition to the violent responses, the boycott's impact on businesses prompted white downtown business owners to try and negotiate an end to it.

Robert Graetz said, "Dr. King used to talk about the reality that some of us were going to die and that if any of us were afraid to die we really shouldn't be there." Organizers reported that the violent responses from opponents just grew the boycott, though, uniting the black community.

MEDIA & MESSAGING

While the white newspapers in Montgomery did not report on the boycott, more than one hundred outside reporters visited the city to profile the effort and its leaders. This brought the U.S. civil rights struggle to national and international attention, putting pressure on power holders in Montgomery.

OUTCOMES

As of December 20th, 1956, black people in Montgomery could sit wherever they wanted on buses. The backlash, though, was severe. Within the first month, snipers fired into two buses as well as Dr. King's home, and black bus riders faced assaults. On January 10, 1957, bombs destroyed five black churches and the home of Rev. Graetz. The seven Klansmen charged were all acquitted. Montgomery also soon strengthened other segregation ordinances, such as banning any kind of mixed-race sporting events. By the late '60's, even though the buses were integrated, many black riders had returned to sitting at the back of the bus. The boycott was nonetheless a defining moment and launched a ten-year national civil rights struggle, inspiring a movement that eventually dismantled segregation nationwide.



Source: www.emaze.com