

The crisis in Little Rock forced Eisenhower to act. He placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal control and ordered a thousand paratroopers into Little Rock. The nation watched the televised coverage of the event. Under the watch of soldiers, the nine African-American teenagers attended class.

But even these soldiers could not protect the students from troublemakers who confronted them in stairways, in the halls, and in the cafeteria. Throughout the year African-American students were regularly harassed by other students. At the end of the year, Faubus shut down Central High rather than let integration continue.

On September 9, 1957, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first civil rights law since Reconstruction. Shepherded by Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, the law gave the attorney general greater power over school desegregation. It also gave the federal government jurisdiction—or authority—over violations of African-American voting rights. **E**

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

E What effect do you think television coverage of the Little Rock incident had on the nation?

KEY PLAYER

ROSA PARKS
1913–2005

Long before December 1955, Rosa Parks (shown being finger printed) had protested segregation through everyday acts. She refused to use drinking fountains labeled “Colored Only.” When possible, she shunned segregated elevators and climbed stairs instead.

Parks joined the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP in 1943 and became the organization’s secretary. A turning point came for her in the summer of 1955, when she attended a workshop designed to promote integration by giving the students the experience of interracial living.

Returning to Montgomery, Parks was even more determined to fight segregation. As it happened, her act of protest against injustice on the buses inspired a whole community to join her cause.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

The face-to-face confrontation at Central High School was not the only showdown over segregation in the mid-1950s. Impatient with the slow pace of change in the courts, African-American activists had begun taking direct action to win the rights promised to them by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Among those on the frontline of change was Jo Ann Robinson.

BOYCOTTING SEGREGATION Four days after the *Brown* decision in May 1954, Robinson wrote a letter to the mayor of Montgomery, Alabama, asking that bus drivers no longer be allowed to force riders in the “colored” section to yield their seats to whites. The mayor refused. Little did he know that in less than a year another African-American woman from Alabama would be at the center of this controversy, and that her name and her words would far outlast segregation.

On December 1, 1955, **Rosa Parks**, a seamstress and an NAACP officer, took a seat in the front row of the “colored” section of a Montgomery bus. As the bus filled up, the driver ordered Parks and three other African-American passengers to empty the row they were occupying so that a white man could sit down without having to sit next to any African Americans. “It was time for someone to stand up—or in my case, sit down,” recalled Parks. “I refused to move.”

As Parks stared out the window, the bus driver said, “If you don’t stand up, I’m going to call the police and have you arrested.” The soft-spoken Parks replied, “You may do that.”

News of Parks’s arrest spread rapidly. Jo Ann Robinson and NAACP leader E. D. Nixon suggested a bus boycott. The leaders of the African-American community, including many ministers, formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to organize the boycott. They elected the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 26-year-old **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, to lead the group. An ordained minister since 1948, King had just earned a Ph.D. degree in theology from Boston University. “Well, I’m not sure I’m the best person for the position,” King confided to Nixon, “but if no one else is going to serve, I’d be glad to try.”



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MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

E What effect do you think television coverage of the Little Rock incident had on the nation?

MAIN IDEA

Synthesizing

F Why was Rosa Parks's action on December 1, 1955, significant?

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

G What were the central points of Dr. King's philosophy?



◀ During the bus boycott, Montgomery's black citizens relied on an efficient car pool system that ferried people between more than forty pickup stations like the one shown.

WALKING FOR JUSTICE On the night of December 5, 1955, Dr. King made the following declaration to an estimated crowd of between 5,000 and 15,000 people.

A PERSONAL VOICE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. . . . I want it to be known—that we're going to work with grim and bold determination—to gain justice on buses in this city. And we are not wrong. . . . If we are wrong—the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong. . . . If we are wrong—justice is a lie."

—quoted in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63*

King's passionate and eloquent speech brought people to their feet and filled the audience with a sense of mission. African Americans filed a lawsuit and for 381 days refused to ride the buses in Montgomery. In most cases they had to find other means of transportation by organizing car pools or walking long distances. Support came from within the black community—workers donated one-fifth of their weekly salaries—as well as from outside groups like the NAACP, the United Auto Workers, Montgomery's Jewish community, and sympathetic white southerners. The boycotters remained nonviolent even after a bomb ripped apart King's home (no one was injured). Finally, in 1956, the Supreme Court outlawed bus segregation. **F**

Martin Luther King and the SCLC

The Montgomery bus boycott proved to the world that the African-American community could unite and organize a successful protest movement. It also proved the power of nonviolent resistance, the peaceful refusal to obey unjust laws. Despite threats to his life and family, King urged his followers, "Don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them."

CHANGING THE WORLD WITH SOUL FORCE King called his brand of non-violent resistance "soul force." He based his ideas on the teachings of several people. From the teachings of Jesus, he learned to love one's enemies. From writer Henry David Thoreau he took the concept of civil disobedience—the refusal to obey an unjust law. From labor organizer A. Philip Randolph he learned to organize massive demonstrations. From Mohandas Gandhi, the leader who helped India throw off British rule, he learned to resist oppression without violence. **G**

"We will not hate you," King said to white racists, "but we cannot . . . obey your unjust laws. . . . We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom, we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process."