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Drive toward freedom: African American: The story of black automobility in the fight for Civil Rights

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Drive Toward Freedom: African American: The Story of Black Automobility in the Fight for
Civil Rights
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Dedication

For my parents, my brother Drew and sister Violet, Mathew, Papa, and all the named and unnamed drivers and passengers of the 1955-1956 Montgomery carpool

Acknowledgements

Although my name sits alone as the author, this project was far from a solo endeavor. First and foremost I must give thanks and praise to my mentor and advisor Dr. Kevin Borg. His advice, edits, commitment, and tireless work are appreciated more than any acknowledgment could do justice and I am forever grateful to him. Similarly, my other committee members, Dr. Steven Reich, Dr. Jessica Davidson, and Dr. H Gelfand demonstrated levels of patience and support I did not know to exist. They pushed me to further develop my arguments and writing, always encouragingly coaxing me to do better, and convincing me of just that. This project would also not have been possible without the reassurance and help I received from Tessa Evans and Matt Darroch, who bravely journeyed with me deep into the South and could not have been better friends to me. The rest of my cohort also cannot go unacknowledged as they are a major reason I survived this endeavor and the graduate school in general. Thank you particularly to MaryAnn Mason my confidant and co graduate representative who cheered me on throughout this process. I must thank Dr. Andrew Witmer. Throughout my time at JMU Dr. Witmer was a mentor, advisor, teacher, supporter, and perhaps most importantly, a friend. I cannot thank him enough for everything he has done for me. Finally I must also thank Tyler Rousselle, John Brislin, Jessica Reed and Julia Aymonin. Better friends could not be found and without them I would likely have abandoned hope and run to the hills.

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Abstract

Looking across the 20th century, this thesis seeks to understand the relationship African Americans developed between automobility and the fight for civil rights, filling a gap left in the historiography of both the automobile and the Civil Rights Movement. Historians of the automobile have almost exclusively focused their lens on white suburbia and the “autotopias” that Americans created, while historians of the Civil Rights Movement ignored the automobile entirely. This thesis hopes to begin to fill that void by explaining how African Americans exploited the technological system of the automobile to create forms of transportation accessible to African American communities, yet separate from segregated public transportation systems. African Americans used the automobile to repeatedly undermine white authority that dominated the spaces of public transportation. African Americans were not absent from the story of the automobile rather the transformative technological system was perhaps more powerful from African Americans than any other group of people. They actively used cars to change the rules that governed legal and social interaction between themselves and whites.

Almost as soon as the automobile was invented, African Americans used the technological system to assert power for themselves and developed transportation options and corporations aimed at giving African American options not governed by White Authority. The first of these options was the exploitation of jitney buses (automobiles outfitted for maximum passenger capacity) to challenge the segregated streetcars that dominated urban transportation in the early 1900s.

African Americans also gained agency and power through the pooling of resources, particularly in the form of a carpool that financially crippled the Montgomery public bus company and forced segregation into a national conversation on the tails of the *Brown v. Board* decision and became one of the first applications of law that tested the Supreme Court's stance on segregation.

African American history and the story of the automobile are not mutually exclusive, rather are intricately connected. This connection can be ignored no longer.

Introduction

This study examines the historical relationship between power, race, and technology through a study of African Americans' use of automobiles to combat segregation in public transportation—and by extension public space—during the first half of the twentieth century. The rise of segregation in the 1880s was not inevitable. It was a system built from active choices aimed at re-cementing African Americans into second-class status following the gains of Reconstruction.¹ Whites wrote and voted segregation laws into city codes and state constitutions, helping to create what many southerners called, “the Southern way.”² White supremacy however was not limited to the South and dominated the political and social order of major swaths of the United States.³ Whites dictated where African Americans could and could not reside, shop, eat, worship and even school their children. Whites could move freely through the resulting black-dominated communities without facing legal or violent retaliation while African Americans faced arrest, physical abuse, or death should they enter spaces deemed white only. However, with the rise of Jim Crow, came resistance to the laws of segregation. African Americans organized opposition, often pooling resources from a network of people that spanned across class, age, and gender.⁴ They took steps to challenge

¹ This is not to say that Reconstruction was a success, but certainly African Americans for a short period gained constitutional rights, ones for which they would and still continue to fight.

² J.R. Robinson Sr. to Montgomery City Bus Lines, March 14, 1956, J.H. Bagley Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama.

³ Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15. In this work Self explores the relationship of segregation in liberalism through his focus on control over space in Oakland, CA. Self explains that segregation, while not law, still dominated many aspects of social and lived space in cities outside of the South.

⁴ An astute study of African Americans resource pooling can be found in Allison Calhoun-Brown, “African American Churches and Political Mobilization: The Psychological Impact of Organizational

segregation on every level; the battleground for resistance was just as likely to be found on city streets as it was to be found in courtrooms.⁵ Well documented by historians, successful resistance to segregation required African Americans to know and use the law.⁶ Yet in day-to-day encounters with segregation, as well as organized campaigns against it, African Americans took advantage of a powerful technological system in their resistance to and subversion of Jim Crow segregation, one that has come to define daily transportation across America: the automobile.⁷

Resources," *The Journal of Politics* 58, no. 4 (November, 1996), 945. In this study, Calhoun-Brown examines the networking and pooling of resources conducted through African American religious organizations, placing emphasis on churches as community centers for social and economic organization.

⁵ Scholars have done a phenomenal job of documenting the diverse forms resistance to segregation. Paul Gilroy, "Driving While Black" in *Car Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2001) specifically ties the automobile to resistance of segregation and other forms of white power and argues this resistance is a contributing factor to the reason that African Americans make up 30% of those who purchase automobiles but only make up 12% of the population. Resistance to streetcar segregation is specifically analyzed in Blair Murphy Kelly, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's, "The Boycott Movement against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906," *The Journal of American History* 55, no.4 (March 1969): 756-775; Ross D. Eckert and George W. Hilton, "The Jitneys," *Journal of Law and Economics* 15, no. 2 (October 1972): 293-325 which demonstrate the creativity and resourcefulness that African Americans brought to the fight against streetcar segregation. A fantastic introduction to the various forms of resistance that African Americans utilized in the struggle for civil rights can be gained from John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Higginbotham, *From Slavery to Freedom: The Story of African Americans*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010) which is a helpful reference to any historian studying African American history.

⁶ The role of the legal system in the struggle for civil rights is beyond extensive. Historical works that document this relationship are Glenn Feldman eds., *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2004); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Random House inc., 2004); Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Alexander Tsesis, *We Shall Overcome: A history of Civil Rights and the Law* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Herman Mason Jr., *Politics, Civil Rights and Law in Black Atlanta, 1870-1970* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Burt M. Reiff, "Browder v. Gale: The Legal Vehicle of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," *Alabama Review* 41, no.1 (Spring 1998): 193-208; Robert Jerome Glennon, "The Role of Law in the Civil Rights Movement," *Law and History Review* 9, no. 2 (1991): 59-112.

⁷ One of the pioneering works in regards to the analysis of physical artifacts is Langdon Winner, "Do Artifacts have politics?," *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (Winter, 1980): 121-136 in which Winner demonstrates how African Americans were the victims of power gained through technology and the ways in which

Historians have largely focused their attention regarding the automobile on white motorists, white car culture, and on white flight to suburban “autotopias.” However recent scholarship has begun to stray away from this problematic schema, providing more attention to minorities and their cars.⁸ For decades, the automobile served as a powerful tool in the fight against segregation. Black automobility threatened white control over space, one of the core sources of power underpinning Jim Crow segregation. However, African Americans’ challenge to Jim Crow in the form of black automobility came with limitations. Cars could not ensure success or safety. The automobile could not help James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner the night the Ku Klux Klan ripped them from their car and murdered the three

technology limited the abilities and agency of African Americans but as Rayvon Fouché, “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud: African Americans, American Artifactual Culture, and Black Vernacular Technological Creativity,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (September 2006): 639-661 points out, African Americans also gained agency and power through the use of technology and the automobile was one of the systems that African Americans successfully utilized in efforts to mitigate and circumvent white supremacy as manifested in Jim Crow laws.

⁸ There is deep historiography on minority car culture that historians have developed in the past fifteen years and a good introduction can be found in Paul Gilroy, “Driving While Black” in Daniel Miller eds., *Car Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2001) in which Gilroy searches for an understanding to why African-Americans make up a disproportionate number of car owners in the United States. Gilroy briefly explains that historians can no longer ignore the automobile as an important technological system in the lives of African Americans, and challenges historians particularly in the field of vernacular history to look closer at cars in black culture. Five years after the publication of Gilroy’s challenge Rayvon Fouché began to address similar themes. In Rayvon Fouché, “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud: African Americans, American Artifactual Culture, and Black Vernacular Technological Creativity” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (September 2006): 639-661 Fouché focuses his lens on African American technological culture, and while he does not specifically focus on the automobile, he begins the process of understanding the ways and language in which African Americans and African American communities have thought and expressed their thoughts about artifacts of technology. Ben Chappell, *Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2013) applies exactly what Gilroy called for in regard to African Americans to the culture of Latino Americans particularly in the custom lowriders that, as Chappell argues erect images of gangsters in the minds of white, middle class Americans. Chappell analyses the interaction between lowriders and both physical and audiological space, as well as a host of historical factors leading to their proliferation in certain Mexican American communities.

young men.⁹ Yet for more than half a century, African Americans gained power, mobility, and authority over space through the use of the technological system of the automobile as a means of challenging Jim Crow segregation.

The study that follows began as an investigation into how African Americans used the automobile to challenge segregation during the seminal yearlong boycott of buses in 1956 Montgomery and evolved into a much larger story. This study's scope spans the first half of the 20th century, and focuses on African Americans' sustained use of automobile technology to challenge the segregation of public transportation—including streetcar lines and buses—that treated them as second-class citizens. Through the exploitation of a growing web of automobile technology African Americans fought Jim Crow transportation demanding better for themselves and their communities. Some of the most significant gains of power, mobility, and authority over space were made following this exploitation, and it is in this context that this study seeks to complicate familiar stories, looking at the challenge for Civil Rights through the lenses of spatial and technological history.

Power, mobility, and authority are loaded and ambiguous terms, so it is important to discuss their direct meaning as they pertain to this study. Power is used throughout this study in the context of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory. Giddens' theory is well summarized by historian Kevin Borg who explains that, "Structuration, in Giddens' use of the term is a process: the ongoing, dynamic use,

⁹ Claude Sitton, "Experts Identify Mississippi Bodies as Rights Aides'," *New York Times*, August 6, 1964 <http://www.nytimes.com/1964/08/06/experts-identify-mississippi-bodies-as-rights-aides.html> (accessed April 8, 2015)

reproduction, and mutation of tacit rules of routine social interaction.”¹⁰ In this way, white supremacy became the implicit rules that dominated social interactions between whites and African Americans, and power can be understood as the ability to reinforce or to challenge the rules of those interactions. Resources of power can be used to change structures and relationships. Subversive power can be understood as the ability to upset even a small part of the social rules of white supremacy. African Americans gained such power through a variety of means ranging from writings letters demanding that streetcar operators curb their abusive behavior, to organizing massive boycotts designed to force the integration of city buses. Each draws on different resources of power: from language and discourse to technology and money.

While power is a term that historians use with regularity, the study of mobility is a more recent development.¹¹ Historians predominately utilize mobility to explain movement through and between social classes, however in the context of African Americans’ struggle against segregation, mobility should be understood as the ability to navigate through contested space. Studying automobility can thus do more than document the rise of a suburban nation by specifically analyzing mobility through, or within, contested space. Space in turn is best defined in the context of Michel Foucault’s discussions on *heterotopia*. Foucault explained that space can be conceived as, “a set of relations” inherently tied to geographic concepts of physical

¹⁰ For a discussion on the usefulness to historians of Giddens’ structuration theory and an example of such theory applied to a study regarding both race, technology, and the linking of social control and space see Kevin Borg, “The ‘Chauffer Problem’ in the Early Auto Era: Structuration Theory and the Users of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 40, no. 4 (October, 1999): 797-832.

¹¹ One indication of this is the 2000 launch of *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies*.

space. The differences in space are laid out by Henri Lefebvre who established three categorical distinctions regarding space: physical space as perceived space, mental space as conceived space, and social space as lived space.¹² In places and spaces examined in the following study, the three categories collide. Physical space can be found on the seats of buses, on the roads of cities, and in the pews of churches but become social space with the introduction of human agents, while simultaneously following the rules of mental space. The structuration of such spaces in this study is understood as the dynamic interaction of actors employing differing resources of power and authority over the lived spaces of black and white urban mobility. Those who create the rules of the mental space within these physical and social spaces hold the authority and thus dominate power by defining interactions within those spaces, until met by novel applications of countervailing resources.

Racial segregation violated the basic idea of an inherent right granted by the U. S. Constitution. Habeas corpus, literally translating from Latin to “that you have the body,” typically was and is legally applied to detainment and imprisonment. But its basic meaning falls upon the freedom of movement, of mobility.¹³ By denying African Americans the right to move freely through spaces, those who championed segregation deprived African Americans of habeas corpus. In the system of segregation, African Americans held no authority over their own bodies. Rather their bodies were subjected to white authority. Much like in antebellum slavery,

¹² Both Foucault’s definition of space and Henri Lefebvre’s conceptions of space are gleaned from Miriam Kahn, “Tahiti Intertwined: Ancestral Land, Tourist Postcard, and Nuclear Test Site,” *American Anthropologist* 102, no.1 (March 2000): 7-26.

¹³ Wex Legal Dictionary, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/habeas_corpus (accessed April 1, 2015)

whites dictated the spaces acceptable for the movement and residence of black bodies. That Jim Crow segregation arose in the 1870s and took hold in the 1890s is largely uncontested, but the question of why segregation took a firm grip over city and state politics remains hotly debated. It seems directly counter to the rules of slavery, in which slaves often worked alongside their masters, and lived in close proximity to whites, and historians have struggled to explain and understand how such a change took place in the late nineteenth century.

C. Vann Woodward was one of the first historians to tackle the issue, and his 1954 work, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, laid out reasons and ways that segregation took hold of the South. Woodward contended that segregation developed gradually and primarily through social attitudes that sought to unify white southerners. Social attitudes pitted whites against African Americans and in turn the goal of whites became to separate themselves from African Americans. Woodward argued that southern whites saw Reconstruction as a disruption to otherwise normal relations between the races, and that it was only when the “carpetbaggers” left the South that race relations returned to their natural state. The question then remained: why did segregation, a system that did not exist under slavery, take such a strong hold of southern race relations? Woodward agreed that segregation during slavery was “impractical” and that the establishment of segregation was not a restoration of race relations following Reconstruction but rather a new establishment that used the same hierarchical structure.¹⁴

¹⁴ W. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) 13-14.

Woodward argued that segregation began gradually, first occurring in Protestant churches through, “the voluntary withdrawal of the Negroes and their establishment of independent organizations of their own.”¹⁵ This line of thinking seems to hold water. African Americans likely did not view their former masters as friendly neighbors with whom they wanted to share their life experiences. After being forced to work and live in close proximity to those who withheld freedom and human rights, African Americans opted out, and physically removed themselves from some the spaces shared by whites. Woodward further argued that segregation of public schools was created during Reconstruction as a means of educating African Americans, and constructing a system in which they would have a sense of safety. Furthermore the segregation of military units in the Civil War did not vanish, but rather became the model that the armed forces would rely upon for over eighty years. However, despite these first early instances of segregation, Jim Crowism did not take the south by storm. On the contrary, many southerners held philosophies regarding race relations that often strongly opposed segregation. These practices often included remnants of paternalistic ideology, placing whites as the custodians of African Americans, and “burdened” whites with the responsibility of pulling African Americans up and out of slavery and into their modern ideal of civil rights. Woodward was quick to point out that while some origins of segregation can be found in the Reconstruction period, the South developed the policies of segregation-as-law decades after Reconstruction, and while racism reigned supreme,

¹⁵ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 15.

segregation was not the immediate answer for the South. But how then did Jim Crow become universal law?¹⁶

Woodward explains, “all the elements of fear, jealousy, proscription, hatred and fanaticism had long been present. . . . What enabled them [whites] to rise to dominance was not so much cleverness or ingenuity as it was a general weakening and discrediting of the numerous forces that had hitherto kept them in check.”¹⁷ According to Woodward, African Americans’ civil rights were chipped away rather than being revoked all at once. Prior to segregation came disenfranchisement. Woodward then explains that following disenfranchisement came physical attacks on African Americans as mob violence in the form of riots and lynching became common practice within the South.¹⁸ It was only then that segregation was allowed to take hold in the South, gradually moving from state to state, and according to Woodward, the older states such as Virginia and South Carolina were the last to adopt segregation as law, whereas newer states such as Mississippi began to call for Jim Crow segregation in the 1880s.¹⁹

Woodward is not the only historian to adopt this view of the rise of segregation. In *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, Edward L. Ayers states that, “segregation begun in the decade following the end of the Civil War did not spread inexorably and evenly across the face of the South. The 1880s

¹⁶ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 13-15; 19-33; 47.

¹⁷ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 51.

¹⁸ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 71. It is important to note here that lynching was not confined to the South but rather became prominent across the United States predominantly targeting African Americans as well as Mexican Americans, migrant workers and Latino immigrants.

¹⁹ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 79.

saw much uncertainty and much bargaining, many forays and retreats.”²⁰ Ayers is in agreement with Woodward. Both see segregation as beginning during Reconstruction but evolving through the 1880s and 1890s taking hold in the latter part. Both agree that it was social anxieties and behaviors that led to Jim Crow segregation. Ayers describes more specifically how segregation took place and for Ayers transportation was key. Railways were the first to see segregation laws because they were unavoidable physical spaces of black and white interaction. Ayers explains, “While some blacks resisted their exclusion from white-owned hotels and restaurants, they could find and often preferred accommodations in black-run businesses. Travel was a different story, for members of both races had no choice but to use the same railroads. . . . By all accounts, the railroads of the 1880s were contested terrain.”²¹ Ayers correctly identifies railways as a different sphere of segregation, and I hope to extend that argument to the streetcars and buses, with automobiles as the primary tool used to combat segregation within those physical spaces. While Woodward laid out the map and path of Jim Crow segregation, he failed to explain why segregation specifically took hold. Ayers filled that gap, arguing that segregation as a social practice evolved into law when it became inconvenient or impossible for segregation to take place in certain spaces. Economic efficiencies of particular forms of transportation including railroads, streetcars, and later buses constrained the voluntary removal of African Americans from spaces aboard public transportation shared by whites and vice versa. What Ayers does not note however

²⁰ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 135.

²¹ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 137.

is that segregation was not desired by all or even necessarily a majority of whites, rather the possibility for some whites to segregate themselves from African Americans was seen as a necessity. Since some whites desired to be segregated from African Americans, they demanded the ability to do so, an ability that did not informally occur on railroads, or streetcars, which were new spaces of the post Civil War generation. Once segregated, these spaces would serve as models to transfer spatial rules to the buses that came later.

Federal segregation developed not long after the establishment of segregation on railways and streetcars, and unsurprisingly, it was the use of these transportation technologies that brought forth the first Supreme Court ruling dealing with segregation. *Plessy v. Ferguson* stemmed from Homer A. Plessy's attempt to ban segregation laws from railroads, however the ruling instead gave federal backing to the state and city laws that established segregation as the dominant spatial rule on public transportation. The Court's reasoning was also then extended to other public spaces, leading to a legally segregated south.²²

The first use of automobiles to resist segregation came as whites linked the racialized system of Jim Crow to urban streetcar lines. Streetcars did not just happen to become segregated. As streetcar companies sought to downsize their larger cars, adopting smaller cars known as "one-man cars" or "safety cars." These cars were more cost effective as they allowed the streetcar to be operated by one driver, and thus companies saved money. However the cars also contained less interior space and fewer seats, requiring closer proximity of passengers. White

²² *Homer Adolph Plessy v. John H. Ferguson.*

passengers voiced increased concern about sitting close to black passengers, and even more concern about the fact that the “safety cars” were constructed with only one door. This meant that African American patrons would use the same entrance as white patrons, increasing interaction even more.²³ These concerns inspired more permanent fixtures of segregation to be built onto the streetcars in the forms of signs denoting black and white seats. This is the system that stirred African Americans’ strongest resistance, as mechanized transportation had become necessary to urban life in many major cities by the turn of the twentieth century.

African Americans in cities across the south enacted boycotts against the streetcars and used modified automobiles known as “jitneys” as substitutes to the streetcars.²⁴ Jitney companies offered customers rides in automobiles retrofitted to hold the maximum number of passengers. The jitneys were a fairly successful technological system regardless of whether passengers and drivers alike used them to challenge segregation, or provide passengers of any race with a more direct, less crowded, and more private means to their destination. Yet under the guise of public safety they were largely done away with. Whites created laws that regulated jitneys to the point of virtually outlawing them. Nonetheless for the time that jitneys were used to circumvent segregated streetcars, African Americans empowered themselves, and also injected money into black businesses. The new technology of

²³ “Birmingham’s Race Problem: Company Will Try Out Twenty-Five One-Man Cars Using New Equipment for Segregation” *Electrical Railway Journal* 54, no. 22 (1919), 1064.

²⁴ These augmented automobiles came to be known as “jitneys” as they typically charged a nickel, colloquially termed a jitney, for each ride. It is not truly clear whether the buses or nickels were first called jitneys. Multiple etymology dictionaries bring up this contention, but typically side with the idea that the buses acquired the name from the coin. Douglas Harper, “jitney” Online Etymology Dictionary, 2014 <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=jitney> (accessed April 6, 2015)

the automobile—in particular its rail-free mobility and relative inexpense—injected new resources that African American reformers employed to challenge the system of segregation. African Americans used jitney buses to offer black passengers spaces free of legal segregation, and provided a cheap means to escape the streetcars. While the black jitney companies were almost entirely done away with in the wake of increased regulation—a result of countervailing mobilization of resources by whites—it was not the last time black resistance to segregation used the automobile as a tool of mobility and power in the fight for civil rights. But for the time being racial segregation of passenger space on public transportation was established and cemented on the streetcars and in the stations.²⁵

By the middle decades of the century, many cities replaced streetcars with buses. When faced with physical abuses and segregation on public bus lines, African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama started the Montgomery Bus Boycott using the car as a tool to subvert segregated public transportation. Beginning in 1955 and lasting an entire year, the black citizens of Montgomery organized and ran a carpool that employed over 400 cars with hundreds of drivers transporting thousands of passengers.²⁶ This was a much larger and more concentrated effort than any of the individual jitney lines that were launched in scattered southern cities in the early

²⁵ The intersection between race and automobility has not been completely ignored. An introduction to this can be found in Paul Gilroy, “Driving While Black” in Daniel Miller eds., *Car Cultures* (New York: Berg, 2001); Kathleen Franz, “The Open Road: Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years” in Bruce Sinclair eds., *Technology and the African American Experience: Needs and Opportunity for Study* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Rayvon Fouché, “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud: African Americans, American Artifactual Culture, and Black Vernacular Technological Creativity” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (September 2006): 639-661; Ben Chappell, *Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican American Custom Cars* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2013)

²⁶ Xavier Macy, Montgomery Bus Boycott Carpool Database (MBBCD) in this database in which hundreds of cars are listed from data collected from police reports filed by police and supplemented by city directories to fill gaps left by police such as the race and sex of the driver.

1900s. In Montgomery the carpool was the most important element of the boycott; without it the boycott would not have succeeded. African Americans used the carpool to provide Montgomery's black population with a viable substitute to the segregated buses, which like the streetcars in the early 1900s, were necessary to daily life. Every day, the boycotters piled cars full of black passengers and traveled to over thirty different stops around the city. Police officers followed close behind, harassing the boycotters through traffic stops, tickets, and arrests. The police mounted a surveillance campaign against the boycott, and dedicated their resources to forcing African Americans out of the cars of the carpool and back onto the buses controlled by whites. African Americans' pooled their knowledge and financial, legal, and social resources, thereby keeping the boycotters one step ahead of the police. The modus operandi for police during the boycott was constant inspection of African American motorists, yet simultaneously the same African American drivers provided authorities with prepared answers that kept the carpool within the framework of existing Montgomery laws.

While this study does not focus solely on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a discussion of the historiography pertaining to the boycott is required. Too often has the assumption been that everything has been written about the boycott, when in reality there is still much to learn about this seemingly familiar story. The boycotters played a formative role in challenging Jim Crow and thus they warrant sustained attention in order to understand how African Americans gained civil rights through the technological system of the automobile.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott has been heralded by historians as one of the most important events in the Civil Rights Movement. It has been seen by some as the first true beginning of the movement, and as the first leadership role of one of the most iconic figures in both the movement and United States history in general: Martin Luther King Jr.²⁷ Despite all of this, historians have largely ignored the day-to-day workings of the bus boycott, as there is not a single credible historical work dedicated to understanding the nuances of the critical year-long struggle. Furthermore, the carpool—the tool for mobility and empowerment, and the medium to most strongly challenge white supremacy—has rarely made an appearance in the historiography and has never benefited from any sustained analysis, especially regarding the interplay between race and technology.

While the historiography lacks studies singularly devoted to the boycott, attention to the boycott can be found between the pages of many biographies and monographs dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement. The most successful of these include, *King: A critical Biography* by David Levering Lewis, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr.*, and *The Southern Christian Leadership Conference* both by David J. Garrow, and of course *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years: 1954-1963* by the most prominent historian of Martin Luther King Jr., Taylor Branch.

One work that describes the boycott in some detail comes from one of the boycotts leaders, Martin Luther King Jr. In his 1958 book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, King gives a firsthand account of the boycott from the

²⁷ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989, 78.

perspective of the MIA's leader and the public face of the boycott.²⁸ King recalled the carpool and the inner workings of the boycott just two years after its conclusion, leaving historians with an important and informative eyewitness account. Yet, lacking the perspective of time, it leaves many questions still unanswered.

Coming only two years after King's assassination, Lewis' biography, *King*, provided one of the first critical approaches to Martin Luther King Jr., and unlike the few works prior was not solely created to praise the life and times of the iconic figure.²⁹ *King* served as more than just a biography of the man that became and has remained the face of the Civil Rights Movement. Lewis also created a work that effectively analyzed the Martin Luther King Jr.'s leading role in many events of the Civil Rights Movement, not fearing to also examine some actions outside the King's reach in order to provide necessary context.

While Lewis' inaugural work was a good beginning to understanding the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Civil Rights Movement, it left historians with questions that needed more nuanced, analytical answers. Lewis acknowledged the existence and importance of the carpool during the bus boycott, but limited its significance to merely an option to walking and more a symbol than a foundational element in the boycott. Lewis argued, "Many people had chosen to walk to work to advertise their resolve, but they did not walk every day. Furthermore the car pool was symbolic of the boycotts success and efficiency . . . blacks knew they had the

²⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1958)

²⁹ David Lettering Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York: Allen Lane, 1970), 67.

option of riding in a spanking new MIA station wagon or a private citizen's auto."³⁰ While it is encouraging to find reference to the carpool, Lewis provided only a cursory understanding of the organized transportation system, with no reference to how the carpool was planned, operated, funded, run, or targeted by the police. Lewis did note that the city attempted to outlaw the carpools, but failed to explain how Montgomery officials set out to do so and never mentioned the organized police campaign against the carpool.³¹ Lewis also focused solely upon the leadership of the boycott. This is understandable considering the biographical lens of his study. While biographies can be useful for understanding certain individuals in history, the same strength gained through specificity of focus can also be a weakness in distorting the views of history presented. The boycott certainly needed leadership, but was born out of the participation and activism of Montgomery's black community. Leaders would have been meaningless had the masses decided that the fight against Jim Crow was not worth it. And the challenge to segregation would have been fleeting if every boycotting black working in the city had had to walk every day. Without the African Americans of Montgomery, Martin Luther King Jr. may never have gained national prominence, and most assuredly the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement would be powerless without the masses of participants.

Although Lewis' biography of Martin Luther King Jr. was the first of its kind, it most certainly was not the last. Taylor Branch's body of work on King is nothing short of astounding. Branch's four works spanning the life of King are the essential

³⁰ King: A Critical Biography, 78.

³¹ This is likely because the sources that would speak to this police campaign have gone undiscovered by academia until now.

monographs used when examining King's life and the Civil Rights Movement. Branch provides complex analysis of the events in which King played a major role, crafting a compelling narrative to draw in readers. Branch's volumes on King are masterful, but Montgomery is relegated to *Parting the Waters* where it is largely used to introduce the young minister and mark his emergence as a leader.³² He does not provide much commentary on the carpool itself and, similar to Lewis, focuses more on the leadership of the boycott, particularly Martin Luther King Jr.³³ The chapter dedicated to the Montgomery Bus Boycott paints a clear picture of the events associated with boycott, including the carpool. But again it fails to provide the carpool, or automobiles in general, with any sustained analysis and lacks the necessary sources to give any meaningful detail on the police campaign against the boycott. Thus it overlooks the power dynamics that shifted due to the automobile. This is unsurprising as Branch's goal was not to examine understandings of power in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but rather to show King's role in the boycott and the Civil Rights Movement as a whole.

Branch's work came during an eruption of attention being paid to the Civil Rights Movement, and much of that attention fell upon Martin Luther King Jr. Two other historians, David Garrow and Adam Fairclough similarly focused on King, but did so in an effort to diminish King's role in the Movement. As historian Richard H. King explains in his review of Branch's work, "Their [Garrow and Fairclough] purpose lay more in minimizing the importance of King as a great leader and in

³² Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989)

³³ Taylor Branch, 145.

underscoring the extent to which he was, as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) mentor, Ella Baker, asserted, ‘Made by the Movement.’”³⁴ Branch hoped to counter this view of King in *Parting the Waters*, instead placing King as “the best and most important metaphor for American history in the watershed postwar years.”³⁵ This explains Branch’s focus on King throughout *Parting the Waters*, and his particular emphasis on King’s role in the bus boycott. While the question of King’s role in the Civil Rights Movement is an important one, the answer will not be found in this study which seeks instead to examine the relationship between power, race, and technology.

The other two aforementioned authors’ works, while strong in their own right, give little attention to the carpool that made the bus boycott possible. Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross* and Fairclough’s *To Redeem the Soul of America* both mention the carpool, but similar to Branch provide only a rough chronology and passing comments regarding the organized transportation without providing any analytical understandings. For Garrow and Fairclough, the carpool is an important facet of the boycott, but the power dynamics of the carpool go ignored. Furthermore, neither of the authors examines the police campaign against the carpool.³⁶ While Garrow describes King being pulled over by the police, he attributes this to general

³⁴ Richard H. King, “Review of *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* by Taylor Branch” *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 1 (June, 1990): 267, www.jstor.org

³⁵ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, xii.

³⁶ This is the standard treatment of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Another biography, Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013) similarly gave details about the carpool as well as police harassment but does not provide any analysis as to the meaning of African Americans utilizing the automobile as a tool for empowerment. Furthermore Theoharis glosses over the sheer magnitude and importance of the carpool giving more credence again to leadership in the boycott.

police harassment, ignoring that cars are at the heart of the issue, and that the police department is obsessed with them.³⁷

Following the publication of Fairclough, Garrow, and Branch's respective works, Historian David Chappell sought to fill some of the gaps left in the historiography. Chappell's biography of King, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, focuses on King through religion and rhetoric.³⁸ Due to this focus, in the context of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Chappell examines the rhetoric of Sunday mass and the mass meetings carefully, but does not give much attention to any of the products of those meetings, particularly omitting the carpools from his sections dealing with the boycott. Chappell is however aware of the carpool, as he does include minimal information about it in another of his works on the Civil Rights Movement, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement*.³⁹ As the title denotes, in this work Chappell directed his attention to the white southerners who aided the Civil Rights Movement, whom prior to *Inside Agitators* were often mentioned but their general presence never examined. What did it mean for a white man or woman to aid African Americans in a racially stratified society? This is the question at the heart of Chappell's work and he does provide some insight into the Montgomery Bus Boycott, particularly focusing on the Durr and Graetz families, whites who drove and aided the carpool and boycott. Chappell largely ignores the

³⁷ David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1986), 54.

³⁸ David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004)

³⁹ David Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

carpool, as the goal of his historical work was to examine white individuals leading the boycott, rather than looking at the masses who kept the boycott going.

Another monograph published in 2006 by Mary Stanton, *The Hand of Esau: Montgomery's Jewish Community and the Bus Boycott*, vowed in the prologue to examine the Jewish communities reaction to the boycott, however it instead provided a narrative documentary history of the boycott, with no attention paid to the carpool, and offered virtually no analysis of the boycott itself.⁴⁰ While this work provides important sources to understanding the diverse makeup of Montgomery in the 1950s and may spur historians to look deeper into Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, *The Hand of Esau* it is not significantly helpful to the historiography of the bus boycott.⁴¹

African American exploitation of the technological system of the automobile changed the landscape of transportation. African American pooling of resources of automobility to fight for equal rights bore significant consequences that reach into the present and demand further analysis from historians. This study is a part of that story, and seeks to explain how African Americans throughout the 20th century applied long-held pooling skills to automotion, both in jitney buses and cars, in an effort to shake free the binds of white supremacy.

⁴⁰ Mary Stanton, *The Hand of Esau: Montgomery's Jewish Community and the Bus Boycott* (Montgomery: River Publishing, 2006.)

⁴¹ Another peculiar book on the boycott focused solely on "God's" role in the boycott. *Let My People Go!: The Miracle of the Montgomery Bus Boycott* by Robert J. Walker, examines the role of the divine in the success of the boycott. The book's jacket proclaims the work to be, "historically based, but mostly inspirational..." and throughout the book Walker gives "God" the role of an "outside agitator" actively working through individuals to shape the boycott. Walker does acknowledge mortal actors in the boycott but does not provide a nuanced, secular analysis of the pivotal event. While one should not look to this book for historical information or analysis, it does provide some very useful footnotes, however one should be careful to check the reliability of some sources used.

Chapter One: Jitney Buses and African American Desires for Alternative Public Transportation

The creation of a streetcar transportation system was not a benign addition to the urban landscape. As with any technology people quickly applied engrained values and hierarchies to them. America's racial hierarchy became inseparable from streetcars, and segregation soon regulated that social space. Many African Americans immediately rejected the idea of segregation laws and looked for ways to challenge the white dominated power hierarchy. The most prominent of these challenges came during the early 1900s in the form of black owned, operated, and patronized transportation systems that revolved around one piece of technology: the jitney bus. Jitney buses were automobiles outfitted to fit more people than the car they are built upon was originally designed to carry. Jitneys got their name from the nickel the operator typically charged as a passenger's fare. Five cents was colloquially referred to as a jitney and thus the jitney bus got its name. These buses typically sat at least eight people and had space on the outside of the cab to hold on to so that more passengers could be accommodated and allowed passengers to break free from the streetcars without purchasing their own automobiles. The automobile, modified into a jitney, was the premiere tool used by African Americans to gain power in a system that largely left them powerless.⁴²

⁴² There have been several historical studies of jitney buses, specifically August Meier and Elliott Rudwick's, "The Boycott Movement against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906" *The Journal of American History* 55 no.4 (March, 1969): 756-775; Ross D. Eckert and George W. Hilton "The Jitneys," *Journal of Law and Economics* 15, no. 2 (October 1972): 293-325, www.jstor.org (accesses November 29, 2014); Blaine A. Brownell's, "A Symbol of Modernity: Attitudes toward the Automobile in Southern Cities in the 1920s," *American Quarterly* 24 no. 1 (March 1972):20-44; and Julian C. Chambliss, "A question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta: 1915-1925,"

By the 1900s jitneys were a major factor in public transportation with one North Carolinian city being home to over twenty-two black owned jitney companies employing a total of thirty-five jitneys, all within the confines of a fairly small city.⁴³ Jitneys became the most promising means of challenging streetcar segregation for African Americans however white legislators brought their own challenges to the rise in jitneys, and a fluid tug of war for power over public transportation space ensued.

Streetcars were not initially segregated. While there may have been segregation in practice, such was unlikely or at least uncommon as indicated by the initial resistance with which segregation laws were met. African Americans along with the streetcar companies fought segregation laws, albeit each for very different reasons. African Americans understood that separation from whites meant they would not be guaranteed the same quality environment that whites enjoyed. This was thoroughly apparent on train cars where black passengers were relegated to the lowest class car, while economic class further divided acceptable social and mental spaces for whites. Poor whites who could not afford first class tickets inhabited the lower class coaches, often sharing those social spaces with African

Georgia Historical Quarterly 92, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 486-506 www.jstor.org (accessed November 29, 2014) All of these historical works pushed jitneys into the conversation, but did not fully examine the power dynamics that arose out of the jitney operations. Historians have covered segregated streetcars for some time, the most recent and most relevant to this study being Blair Murphy Kelly, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy V. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) in which Kelly maps the various boycotts that took place challenging streetcar segregation but oddly only makes passing reference to substitutes to the streetcars once in regards to taxi cabs (jitneys) in Richmond, Virginia (151)

⁴³ For more on this particular community in Winston-Salem see Bertha Miller Hampton, "Blacks in Winston-Salem, North Carolina 1895-1920: Community Development in an Era of Benevolent Paternalism" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1981), 246.

Americans. African Americans knew they would loose out in a legally segregated system.⁴⁴

The majority of streetcar company owners resisted segregation as being economically nonsensical. Costs were at the heart of these businessmen's distaste for segregation laws as there was no clear model to use in the implementation of such laws, and every option required increased spending, decreased revenue, or both. As one newspaper explained the arguments against segregation laws on streetcars were, "chiefly based on considerations of expediency and business."⁴⁵ Owners felt that segregation laws resulted in decreased black patronage, especially where other transportation options existed, and therefore decreased profits.⁴⁶ Separate cars could be bought to carry black passengers, but that solution required the increased spending on the car itself as well as the regular maintenance costs for the extra streetcar. Streetcar owners did not see it as cost effective to have entirely separate cars for white and black passengers. The most pragmatic solution was to create separate sections of the streetcars, one for black passengers and one for whites. This however would require enforcement of the rules, which also did not come free. However, despite initial resistance on the part of streetcar owners, white public opinion at times swayed these businessmen who then retracted their previous contestations of segregation.⁴⁷ Segregation within cars enabled companies to conform to the desires of the law. The streetcar companies' solution allowed the

⁴⁴ W. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 30-32.

⁴⁵ "The Separate Car Bill," *The Daily Picayune*, New Orleans, July 3, 1900 infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed April 5, 2015)

⁴⁶ Kelly, *Right to Ride*, 115.

⁴⁷ Meier and Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906"

corporations a great deal of flexibility when it came to segregation as they could adjust the number of spaces allocated for each race depending upon the demand at any specific time, day, or route. The result was a system in which African Americans in many southern cities, could not avoid segregated aspects of society on a daily basis, and were forced to have some amount of interaction with the hostile whites of the community, or at least those who both rode, and operated the streetcars. African Americans who could not opt out of streetcar transportation, therefore could not opt of segregated social and physical spaces.

Once city councils and county supervisors began to follow the segregation pattern set by state legislators on railroads, Jim Crow rapidly came to dominate streetcar operation. As the South completed its nearly uniform segregation of railcars, a wave of segregation laws swept through southern states, beginning with Georgia in 1891.⁴⁸ The earliest laws regarding segregated streetcars did not require segregation in every detail, but rather “as much as practicable” leaving much of the application of the laws up to the streetcar companies, judges, police officers, and lawyers.⁴⁹ This led to a fairly heterogeneous and inconsistent implementation of actual segregation upon streetcars, leaving many whites unsatisfied. What followed was a string of laws passed at the city and county level that sought to supplement the state segregation laws, making segregation a requirement for streetcars throughout the South.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Meier and Rudwick, 754-755.

⁴⁹ Meier and Rudwick, 756.

⁵⁰ Meier and Rudwick, 758.

An important note here is that segregation laws pertaining to other social spaces existed previously, but did not specifically involve local transportation, however transportation the first space that segregation laws were challenged.⁵¹ Segregation on a transportation level, for African Americans, was something different. A segregated pool or theatre did not require African Americans to interact with whites, and they largely could avoid hostile whites in these physical spaces. Unlike swimming pools and water fountains, streetcars were not constructed and owned by the city or state. They were instead the property of private corporations, which held profit as a major factor in decision-making. Separate facilities were constructed or separate days and times established for African Americans and whites to use a recreational facility. Thus a black swimmer would likely never engage a white person in a pool. Furthermore, segregated recreational facilities typically involved activities that African Americans could opt-out of in general.⁵² There is nothing of necessity involved with a segregated swimming pool, nor a movie theatre. Most African Americans did not rely upon any of these facilities to maintain a job, buy groceries, or carry out any of the typical daily chores that were required of them. Recreation was not a requirement. The same could not be said for transportation.⁵³

⁵¹ While trains were some of the first physical spaces that came under the authority of legalized segregation, they likely were not social spaces that the majority of Americans both white and black experienced on a daily basis.

⁵² Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-3. Wiltse's monograph explains the complexities and ramifications of segregated recreational facilities, and the introduction explains the effects of "opting out" of some of these facilities.

⁵³ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 137.

Historian Edward L. Ayers takes a similar view on segregated transportation in the form of the railroads. Ayers explains that African Americans often preferred to use black run businesses in order to avoid the exclusion faced in and on white owned businesses, however both races could not avoid the use of railroads which did not have separate trains entirely and thus set about creating the first shared segregated space.⁵⁴ The biggest difference between the trains and the streetcars was that trains easily adopted separate coaches while streetcars almost unanimously relied on imaginary lines drawn in an shared open air space. Regardless of this difference, the framework Ayers placed on transportation via rail fits with transportation via streetcar, or bus for that matter.

Unlike recreational facilities such as swimming pools, these streetcars were a necessity. Because of entrenched racial economic inequalities very few African Americans could afford the new automobiles being cranked out of factories. In fact very few urban dwellers, black or white, owned cars in the early 1900s.⁵⁵ They turned instead to the streetcars as a means of getting back and forth to work, to shops, and to see friends or families that were not within walking distance.⁵⁶ While urban centers often give the impression that walking is a viable means of transporting oneself, walking was often unreasonable for both African Americans and whites. Urban sprawl and a lack of equal business representation extended the

⁵⁴ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 137-138.

⁵⁵ Franz, "The Open Road: Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years", 142.

⁵⁶ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 324.

physical space that city dwellers needed to travel.⁵⁷ By 1924, Atlanta which had a bustling streetcar system, was roughly fifty square miles with the average streetcar lines covering approximately four miles of distance.⁵⁸ This was too far to reasonably walk, especially if one was carrying anything. People did not always have to get themselves all the way across town, but even going from just outside the heart of the urban center into Atlanta's downtown was a distance of more than three miles. Streetcars were essential to urban travel.⁵⁹

On the streetcars, if a driver was not content with the behavior of an African American passenger, or simply desired to lord power over an unsuspecting black individual, he or she could demand the passenger leave the streetcar, alert the authorities, contrive an offense, or at times physically beat a passenger with unsurprisingly no legal ramification. These drivers benefitted from the system of white supremacy. While the regularity of physical abuse on the streetcars may not be determined, in Atlanta in 1921 the regularity of abuse in general can be inferred from an interracial meeting held in which members of the African American community called for white streetcar drivers who were "found guilty of brusque, and unpolite treatment" to be dismissed at once.⁶⁰ The problem of abuse on streetcars was clearly severe enough that a meeting was called between leaders of

⁵⁷ For a superb introduction on the history, effects, and causes for urban sprawl see Paul L. Knox and Linda McCarthy, *Urbanization: An Introduction to Urban Geography* (New York: Pearson, 2012), 70-74.

⁵⁸ The Beeler Organization Consultants "Map of Atlanta Streetcar Network, 1924" <http://www.librarything.com/work/13658114>

⁵⁹ Meier and Rudwick, 762.

⁶⁰ "Inter-Racial Meeting at Allen Temple a Success," *Atlanta Independent*, August 25, 1921. <http://news.google.com/newspapers> (accessed November 25, 2014).

both the black and white community to solve the problem, and one of the main discussion points addressed precisely that abuse.

The fact that African Americans had to demand that any abusive driver be dismissed indicates that prior to this meeting, drivers harming black patrons received little or no repercussions from the law or the streetcar company. Furthermore, the inclusion of abuse amongst claims of brusque and “impolite” behavior indicates that an actual physical assault could be as common as a rude gesture. While assault was clearly against the law, little must have been done about physical violence, because African Americans sought means of punishing these drivers that did not involve the authorities: namely the firing of abusive drivers. This can be explained either by the failure to arrest or prosecute those who committed such acts, or by African American’s distrust in the legal system to successfully prosecute such offenders. In either scenario, the law was not effectively dealing with the African American abuse at the hands of streetcar drivers. The fact that this meeting made it into the news was a further indication of the severity and regularity of abuse on segregated streetcars. Whether anyone of the *Atlanta Independent’s* subscribers ever read this article is not anything that historians can ever hope to prove, but this is also of little importance. The editor of the *Atlanta Independent* and the author of the article saw the problem important enough to publish in the newspaper indicating that abuse was not a fringe occurrence. The article does not ever mention one incident in particular. Had abuse at the hands of a streetcar operator been a singular event, it is highly likely that a singular event would have been specifically mentioned, but the absence of any mention of this type

of individual occurrence illustrates the commonality of the abuses and mistreatments.⁶¹

The most permanent of structures on segregated streetcars (and the one most clearly translated onto buses later) were signs denoting the African American seating sections from the white ones. As streetcar companies sought to increase revenue by decreasing overhead, they converted many traditionally two-coach large streetcar lines that required two operators, to smaller “one-man” cars that as their name denotes, only required one operator. This smaller space, when coupled with only one entrance and exit door created racial space anxiety amongst whites who were accustomed to and vocally in favor of as little interaction with African Americans as possible within public transportation spaces. While streetcar companies were unwilling to convert back to two coach cars, they were willing to install signs that marked black and white sections of the car.⁶² African Americans would be seated in the back, with whites located at the front, and the signs were permanent visual reminders of Jim Crow and the second-class status of African Americans. In other instances the anxiety of shared space between African Americans and whites was alleviated through the increase in cars that serviced predominately black sections of the city. In this practice, “White people then finding a car full of blacks, understand that there will be another car very shortly which will not be thus loaded. There is however no law or rule to prevent a white person from

⁶¹ “Inter-Racial Meeting at Allen Temple a Success,” *Atlanta Independent*

⁶² “Birmingham’s Race Problem: Company Will Try Out Twenty-Five One-Man Cars Using New Equipment for Segregation” 1064.

getting onto a car full of negroes if he wants to do so..."⁶³ Streetcar companies accommodated white desires and assuaged white anxieties, but had no concern for the welfare or desires of African Americans. Furthermore the law banned African Americans from entering white allocated spaces, while whites were permitted to enter black dominated spaces per their pleasure. African Americans were clearly second-class citizens in the minds of streetcar company owners, and while these owners accommodated whites, they seemed to "put up with" black patrons. Black passengers were moved to the back of the streetcar or limited to certain cars as if they were a part of the coach itself; furniture that could be moved about without question or placed in separate coaches without any consultation. However, African Americans would not sit as idle furniture, instead they organized their own means of public transportation, or took advantage of other options.

African Americans across the country almost immediately resisted segregated streetcars. They opposed segregation laws through political action, mass meetings, and more commonly, boycotts.⁶⁴ While black community leaders called for boycotts, they did not suggest an alternate form of public transportation, largely due to the lack of viable options. Ida B. Wells was one of the first African Americans to suggest boycotts as a means of resistance. In 1892, before the dawn of the automobile age, Wells called for a boycott of Memphis streetcars in retaliation to the

⁶³ "Segregation with Safety Cars: Race Separation Not Found Difficult in Raleigh—Some Cars are Short-Routed" *Electrical Railway Journal* 54, no. 19 (1919), 877.

⁶⁴ Whites did not as a whole publicly demonstrate racist or bigoted sentiments toward African Americans, nor did the most vocal African Americans identify segregation as coming from the white community as a whole, rather, as Meier and Rudwick demonstrate, African Americans understood there to be a connection between the hostile wing of white America and segregation. African Americans were by no means seeking to not interact with whites entirely, however many unsurprisingly did hope to avoid those who were hostile to other races.

extensive lynchings that took place in Memphis earlier that year.⁶⁵ Segregation on streetcars was not inherently tied to lynching, yet Wells viewed the two as being connected. For Wells, segregation was not the object she wished to fight against but rather white supremacy in general. Wells saw the entire system of white supremacy as connecting all that were complicit in the hierarchical structure, and therefore it made sense for her to call for a boycott of the segregated streetcars. Along with the boycott Wells encouraged African Americans living in Memphis to abandon the city and move elsewhere. This was met with decent success as an estimated 4,000 African Americans left the city.⁶⁶ The abandonment of the city was more viable for the Memphis black community than the boycott, which faded as no other means of transportation was established to replace the streetcars, and the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision gave the Supreme Court's nod to segregated transportation.⁶⁷

In 1905 one group of black ministers in Jacksonville, Florida called for the community to boycott the streetcars, "in order to retain our self respect...Don't be Jim Crowed, Walk!"⁶⁸ This urge to walk came largely because of the lack of a successful jitney program within Jacksonville. Black jitney companies and cooperatives were not found in every city in the United States however, in those that did exist, jitneys would be the predominant tool for resistance to Jim Crow

⁶⁵ Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells Barnett and American Reform 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 77. Schechter provides a great biography of Wells and should be the first stop for any historian looking to understand Wells or black activism in the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

⁶⁶ Schechter, *Ida B. Wells Barnett and American Reform 1880-1930*, 78.

⁶⁷ United States Supreme Court *Plessy V. Ferguson* 1896.

⁶⁸ "Negros Challenge Segregation," *Florida Times-Union*, July 26, 1905 <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/> (accessed November 25, 2014).

transportation and at times worked in tandem with streetcar boycotts.⁶⁹ Again in 1905, in Nashville, Tennessee, a streetcar boycott was organized to fight segregation. The boycotters first organized a horse drawn carriage as an alternative to the streetcars but the system was not sufficient as the number of black patrons overwhelmed the slow carriages. The boycotters organized into a company and sold stock as a means of raising funds. By September they raised over \$7,000 and purchased electric buses to replace the carriages. Initially these buses, which carried fifteen passengers at a time, were a major success. However, as patronage increased the buses were met with major issues. The buses' electric motors were not powerful enough to take full loads of passengers up and down the steep Nashville hills. While efforts were made to increase their power, the measures were not enough and further battery problems caused frustrated black passengers return to the streetcars by winter.⁷⁰

While these electric buses did not create a long-term replacement to the streetcars, they did successfully extend the boycott months past the failing use of horse drawn carriages. The buses served as a social and mental space where African Americans avoided whites, and avoided the degrading social space of the streetcars. Electric buses were just not reliable enough, did not recharge quickly enough, and were not powerful enough to meet the demands of traffic and terrain.

⁶⁹ Robert Cassanello, "Violence, Racial Etiquette, and African American Working-Class Infrapolitics in Jacksonville during World War I," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Fall, 2003), 163-167. This look at Jacksonville race politics provides ample detail on southern race relations specifically focusing on Florida's capital and the African American community that called it home. Cassanello similarly examines the affects of Cuban Americans' presence with a Marxist approach to understanding race in Florida.

⁷⁰ Meier and Rudwick, 766.

Gas powered jitneys on the other hand would suit those needs perfectly. Black Passengers could be dropped off all across cities, without being subject to racist abuse, or the mere degradation of streetcar segregation that one black reverend and community leader described as “unjust, barbaric...and cowardly.”⁷¹ The jitneys, unconfined to any preset or pre-established route, could drop passengers off at specific locations, rather than waiting for a stop that is nearest their actual destination. Not all jitneys were black owned and operated though. The jitneys were also a successful means for challenging corrupt streetcar companies and were used to do just so. The jitneys African Americans did frequent were predominately operated by African American drivers and owned by African American businessmen. This was immensely important, as passengers were not subjected to the abuse that they could find themselves subject to on the segregated streetcars.⁷²

The most permanent of structures on segregated streetcars (and the one most clearly translated onto buses later) were signs denoting the African American seating sections from the white ones. As streetcar companies sought to increase revenue by decreasing overhead, they converted many traditionally two-coach large streetcar lines that required two operator, to smaller “one-man” cars that as their name denotes, only required one operator. This smaller space, when coupled with only one entrance and exit door created racial space anxiety amongst whites who were accustomed to and vocally in favor of as little interaction with African

⁷¹ *Savannah Morning News*, July 10, 1902, Sept. 12, 13, 1906 <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/> (accessed November 25, 2014).

⁷² Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, 324.

Americans as possible on spaces of public transportation. While streetcar companies were unwilling to convert back to two coach cars, they were willing to install signs that marked black and white sections of the car.⁷³ African Americans would be seated in the back, with whites located at the front, and the signs were permanent visual reminders of Jim Crow and the second-class status of African Americans. In other instances the anxiety of shared space between African Americans and whites was alleviated through the increase in cars that serviced predominately black sections of the city. In this practice, "White people then finding a car full of blacks, understand that there will be another car very shortly which will not be thus loaded. There is however no law or rule to prevent a white person from getting onto a car full of negroes if he wants to do so..."⁷⁴ Streetcar companies accommodated white desires and assuaged white anxieties, but had no concern for the welfare or desires of African Americans. Furthermore the law banned African Americans from entering white allocated spaces, while whites were permitted to enter black dominated spaces per their pleasure. African Americans were clearly second-class citizens in the minds of streetcar company owners, and while these owners accommodated whites, they seemed to "put up with" black patrons. Black passengers were moved to the back of the streetcar or limited to certain cars as if they were a part of the coach itself; furniture that could be moved about without question or placed in separate coaches without any consultation. However, African

⁷³ "Birmingham's Race Problem: Company Will Try Out Twenty-Five One-Man Cars Using New Equipment for Segregation" 1064.

⁷⁴ "Segregation with Safety Cars: Race Separation Not Found Difficult in Raleigh—Some Cars are Short-Routed" *Electrical Railway Journal* 54, no. 19 (1919), 877.

Americans would not sit as idle furniture, instead they organized their own means of public transportation, or took advantage of other options.

By the 1920s black-owned jitneys provided new mobility, and new power to African Americans tired of degrading streetcar policies and practices. In Atlanta, another topic on the agenda at this meeting was the creation of, “an exclusive bus line operated by colored capitalists.”⁷⁵ The term bus line here can be read as “jitney service” for African American bus lines at this period bore no distinct difference between the services jitneys provided.⁷⁶ Atlanta’s African American community demonstrated their clear desire to remove themselves from institutions of segregation where possible. African Americans saw the mere existence of legal segregation as demeaning. As August Meir and Elliot Rudwick point out, “protests through mass meetings, petitions to city councils and legislatures, and even an occasional boycott, often began while the segregation bills were being considered.”⁷⁷ While the community leaders at this meeting demanded that abusive drivers be dismissed from their jobs, they also likely did not trust that this demand would be met, or at least did not see segregated streetcars even with polite drivers as the best form of transportation they could utilize.

There existed a seeming irony of segregation within this community. While meeting in an “inter-racial” group, seeking to rectify injustices of the segregated system, these African Americans were not trying to topple the system of segregation, but rather remove themselves from physical spaces in which white

⁷⁵ “Inter-Racial Meeting at Allen Temple a Success,” *Atlanta Independent*

⁷⁶ Blaine A. Brownell, “A Symbol of Modernity: Attitudes toward the Automobile in Southern Cities in the 1920s,” *American Quarterly* 24, (March 1972): 20, www.jstor.org (accessed November 29, 2014).

⁷⁷Meier and Rudwick, 760.

dominated social systems dictated the terms of segregation. They clearly stated the desire for an “exclusive” form of transportation. These African Americans used the word exclusive to design a system that, like streetcar segregation, was to be based upon skin color. The difference between this system and that of the streetcars was that there was actually further separation between African Americans and whites. Rather than share a streetcar in which seating would be separated, the African Americans of this community, and every community that utilized black owned jitney companies, decided that if segregation was to be enforced they wanted it on their own terms. The establishment of an entirely separate transportation line was far more segregated than that of the streetcars, but it was segregation on African American terms or rather African Americans dictated the rules to be enacted in the space of the jitneys. This marks a difference that African Americans drew between Jim Crow segregation and the separation of races. The point brought up at the Atlanta meeting was that if possible, African Americans should, “Buy a car of your own and escape Jim-Crowism from street car service.”⁷⁸ Separation from whites did not in this case mean the same thing as Jim Crow segregation, as long as it was separation at the hands and under the power of African Americans. While it may have been ideal for African Americans to purchase their own cars, the majority were not in the financial situation to be able to make such a purchase. If African Americans opted out of the segregated streetcars, they voluntarily removed themselves further from spaces where whites maintained authority. Jim Crow segregation meant that whites *told* African Americans where they could and could

⁷⁸ “Inter-Racial Meeting at Allen Temple a Success,” *Atlanta Independent*.

not be; it meant that whites *allowed* African Americans into white spaces. Whites were rarely if ever fined, arrested, or prosecuted for using “colored” facilities.⁷⁹ This was because in Jim Crow America whites were superior; whites held authority, and whites controlled space. This is why the “exclusivity” of the black line that was being proposed was so powerful. This would have been an instance in which African Americans controlled the space of the bus or jitney; in which African Americans could tell whites that they were not welcome. As jitneys or privately owned cars, automobility injected new power-granting resources into established racial transportation structures. This power of black exclusivity threatened white supremacy. This threat was one that those who sought to maintain white supremacy reacted against. Whites drew up legislation to drive the jitneys off the roads.

While jitney buses allowed African Americans to claim authority over their own transportation systems, it is very unlikely that whites would ever have tried to use these separate systems. However, white supremacists did not react to the jitneys because they desired to actually use any black owned and operated system, but rather they reacted because the jitneys were taking power and authority out of the hands of white supremacists. The very idea that an African American could deny admission to a white citizen, could tell a white citizen that they were not allowed into a particular space, and could escape the system in which whites controlled the authority for delineating acceptable spaces for races was unacceptable to white

⁷⁹ Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Rollercoasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 24. This work on segregated recreational facilities give analysis on segregation politics outside of the usual venues tackled by historians. Wolcott demonstrates that segregated recreational facilities bore significant ramifications for both African American and white citizens.

supremacists. White supremacists operated under the notion that they could never give up power, as in the minds of many white supremacists, the relinquishing of even some power threatened white supremacy as a whole.⁸⁰ Under the guise of public safety, those who desired to maintain Jim Crow America largely expunged the jitneys, which up to their prohibition in the 1920s were the most successful tool African Americans had in the fight against segregation. These laws, enacted throughout the South as well as western states such as California, never directly engaged or acknowledged the fact that African Americans, for a time, stole away a portion of power typically reserved for whites, and it was this near loss of power that most threatened the entire body of segregation politics.

Following the advent of the jitneys the first decade of the 1900s saw massive opposition from streetcar companies, legislators, white supremacists, and a host of others who desired to maintain the streetcar systems. The legislation that arose to do away with the jitneys has been effectively documented by historians Ross D. Eckert and George W. Hilton. Rather than focus on race, Eckert and Hilton viewed the legislation through an economic lens, highlighting how loss of revenue from the streetcar companies was a strong motivator in outlawing the jitneys.⁸¹ Money most certainly played a major role in legislation aimed against jitneys and while it is clear that race was not the only factor at play when jitneys were virtually outlawed, white supremacists most certainly reacted to the threat the jitneys posed by embracing

⁸⁰ Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 56. *Dark Journey* gives the historiography yet another look at the ways that African Americans navigated jim crow, focusing on day-to-day happenings as well as resistance to the racist systemized segregation of Mississippi during the early 1900s.

⁸¹ Ross D. Eckert and George W. Hilton "The Jitneys," *Journal of Law and Economics* 15, no. 2 (October 1972): 293-325, www.jstor.org (accesses November 29, 2014).

the economic argument as well. White supremacists, streetcar corporations, and those that held streetcar stock shared a common desire to do away with the jitneys. African American jitney companies faced the same threats and were done away with through the same means as other jitney systems. Economic were a powerful motivating force against the jitneys, but race also played a significant part in specifically targeting black jitney systems.⁸²

Segregation legislation continued to be a major tool in regulating the jitneys as white authority sought to recuperate the power being taken by African American jitney companies. A 1915 Houston a law created segregation among all jitneys within the city.⁸³ By introducing segregation to the jitney buses the city officials established regulations that took authority from the jitney owners. Previously, jitney owners dictated appropriate space within the cabs of the jitneys, providing African Americans jitney owners the rare and powerful ability to exclude whites. Even if this power was never exercised the ability for African Americans to relegate appropriate space based on race or any other means was unacceptable to those benefiting from white supremacy.

The anonymous author of "Jitney Bus Wins Favor Quickly" in conjunction with the Houston ordinance identified other regulations that included surety bonds, patron regulations and regulations aimed at stratifying and cementing routes that jitneys could run.⁸⁴ These were all forms of regulation that targeted jitneys, and

⁸² Eckert and Hilton "The Jitneys" 314-315.

⁸³ "Jitney Bus Wins Favor Quickly," *New York Times*, March 21, 1915.

⁸⁴ "Jitney Bus Wins Favor Quickly," *New York Times*, March 21, 1915.

while racial motivations certainly contributed to the addition of such regulations it was not the sole motivating factor.

In Jacksonville, Florida in 1917, race was however at the forefront of increased regulations made on Jitney buses. Legislators drafted a law demanding that jitneys stop for any person regardless of race.⁸⁵ At face value this seems to be a challenge to segregation, however one must take into account the context within which this law was created. Jacksonville had several jitney systems, one of which was a successful black owned and operated system. The law was supported by members of the Georgia Railway and Power Company (GRPC), a Georgian company that supported and advocated for streetcars and actively campaigned to outlaw and regulate jitney buses.⁸⁶ The law in Jacksonville did not exist within a vacuum and caught the attention of some outside of Florida. At a meeting called four years later by the GRPC members of the group identified that a major reason for the success of jitney buses in Jacksonville, and across the country was in part the regular use of black owned jitney buses by black communities in various cities. The GPRC correctly identified that the exclusive jitney service African Americans enjoyed in Jacksonville was a successful means of not only avoiding the Jim Crow streetcars, but also creating a successful, competitive, black owned company. The black owned jitneys of Jacksonville were operating at strength for several years, and were not showing signs of failure while simultaneously refusing to pick up white passengers, maintaining a technically segregated space without making African Americans

⁸⁵ *Charter and Ordinances of the City of Jacksonville (1917)*, sec. 591.

⁸⁶ Chambliss, "A question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta: 1915-1925", 498,

second-class citizens.⁸⁷ By forcing the jitney buses to pick up passengers of any race, the power of exclusivity and the delegation of space that black owned jitney bus operators enjoyed was done away with. These jitneys that previously serviced only black passengers, now would have to meet the demands of white passengers as well. Furthermore the jitneys would have to create segregated seating since they were required to service both black, and white passengers. This law allowed power to be placed back into the hands of Jacksonville police, who could in theory enforce the law upon African American jitney operators, while allowing white jitney operators to continue to pick up only white passengers.⁸⁸ Thus white control of the law trumped the temporary power granted by automobile technological resources. What is important here is that the power that was gained by black jitney owners was lost through the establishment of this law, and furthermore, that power was again placed back into the hands of authorities. While jitneys, which became desegregated, would vanish from Jacksonville, no law would end segregation on the streetcars or buses that grew out of streetcar operations until the 1960s.⁸⁹

The GPRC's attention to the Jacksonville law was a rare case. It is the only instance yet to be found in which the GRPC supported laws requiring businesses to service both races. It does not seem that the GPRC ever challenged some of the cabs

⁸⁷ Chambliss, "A question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta: 1915-1925," 499.

⁸⁸ While there is no evidence that can speak to any form of application of this law, Chambliss demonstrates that following the law and others that regulated jitney buses and placed fees and surety bonds upon jitneys, the black owned jitneys and jitneys in general were regulated out of existence.

⁸⁹ Abel A. Bartley, *Keeping the Faith: Race, Politics, and Social Development in Jacksonville, Florida 1940-1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 79. This work while primarily dealing with Jacksonville in the 1940s through the 1970s is one of the only works to describe Jacksonville specifically in decades prior. Bartley's knowledge of local laws is of immense aid to any historian seeking to understand legal practice in Jacksonville Florida between 1910 and 1970.

and jitneys that refused to service black patrons. The GPRC would simultaneously champion for increased regulation of all sorts, including but not limited to streetcars and jitneys.⁹⁰

While there were numerous motivations that brought forth jitney regulation, the excuse given was one which conflated racial and commercial motivations: public safety. In the same *New York Times* article that listed the 1915 Houston Law numerous other laws were identified all of which connected in some way to the idea of public safety. Ordinances on segregation were justified through ideas that, “the mixing of races is seen to be dangerous for all involved” with special attention paid to “a large number of complaints received from young girls.”⁹¹ White anxiety regarding African American men among young girls while not new, was still effective in helping to pass the segregation regulations and restrictions on routes. The article explains the ramification of one popular regulation that limited the routes of jitneys stating the regulation would, “put them (the jitneys) in a different category from that in which they began. The earliest jitneys bore the slogan, ‘Take you anywhere for a jitney’; meaning that the limitations of rails and franchises were to be abolished...”⁹² The lack of free mobility of the jitney would take away one of the key technical features that made it such a success. It would do away with the freedom of movement that jitney operators and passengers enjoyed, and force jitney

⁹⁰ Chambliss, 496-498.

⁹¹ “Jitney Bus Wins Favor Quickly,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1915.

⁹² “Jitney Bus Wins Favor Quickly,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1915.

drivers into a rigid route. Segregation, fixed routes, extensive licensure and a volley of other regulations largely brought an end to the jitneys.⁹³

One company however prevailed. The Safe Bus Co. out of Winston-Salem, North Carolina is the sole shining success story of the jitney age. Jitneys emerged as a popular form of transportation for the black community of Winston-Salem, not only because of the segregation implemented on the streetcars of the city, but also due to the simple fact that streetcars largely did not run within the black community. The jitneys of the North Carolina city, like other urban cities across the country, experienced immense success.⁹⁴ Numerous black owned jitney services arose and provided the black citizens of Winston-Salem with a means of transportation that avoided segregation, economically empowered the community, and perhaps most important, gave them an exclusive space of control. The Safe Bus Co. was actually created out of increased regulations on numerous Winston-Salem jitney services. These regulations threatened the continuance of any and all jitneys in Winston-Salem. This call for regulation was again came with the excuse of “public safety.”⁹⁵ By 1926, the Winston-Salem jitneys faced similar regulations that others came under, but instead of folding due to the financial pressures that increased regulation brought, the numerous Winston Salem jitney operations banded together and incorporated.⁹⁶

By 1926 the city was home to, “22 Negroes operating 35 jitneys...” a number that provided strength to the cause of African American transportation in Winston

⁹³ Chambliss, 506;

⁹⁴ Hampton, “Blacks in Winston-Salem, North Carolina 1895-1920”, 246.

⁹⁵ “Dixie Bus Company at a Crossroads” *Ebony*, December 1965, 74.

⁹⁶ Hampton, “Blacks in Winston-Salem, North Carolina 1895-1920”, 246.

Salem.⁹⁷ The owners of these jitney operations raised the money necessary to pay incorporation fees and in 1926, “organized at a \$100,000 capitalization.”⁹⁸ The ability to overcome the regulations often designed to cripple the jitney companies speaks to the economic power that could be generated through black transportation culture. The economic success of the Winston-Salem jitneys is what provided the means to successfully organize and incorporate, and this success would follow the company out of the jitney period and into that of the bus line.⁹⁹

The Safe Bus Co. is a singular instance of sustained success of the jitney service, bears a significant place in the history of African American utilization of the jitney bus, and stands as a lasting example of the success of black business in an era in which black businesses captured power that previously was denied. The ability of Winston Salem’s jitney operators to rapidly organize and incorporate helped them maintain at least some of that new power, despite white control of the regulatory process. These jitney owners maintained power through black mobility achieved from the technological resource of automobiles. It also is a prime example of the methods and strengths that came emerge out of black exclusivity, black economic power, and black organization all of which were key to later successful instances of resistance to Jim Crow.

Streetcars largely never faced desegregation as they gave way to buses. The replacing of one technological system with another led to the increased implementation of bus lines, which offered many of the basic advantages enjoyed by

⁹⁷ “Dixie Bus Company at a Crossroads” *Ebony*, December 1965, 74.

⁹⁸ “Dixie Bus Company at a Crossroads” *Ebony*, December 1965, 74.

⁹⁹ “Dixie Bus Company at a Crossroads” *Ebony*, December 1965, 71.

both African American and white jitney passengers and operators. Buses, while tied to a set route, could navigate through city blocks much more effectively than streetcars. One route may take a bus onto more than a dozen streets and since they were unconfined to the rails that streetcars relied upon, routes could be more effectively set and changed as the market demanded. Buses replaced streetcars as the preeminent mode of urban public transportation and in many cities, African Americans became the primary patrons of the buses.

Alongside buses developed a rich and extensive black automobile economy that mirrored national trends. Black motorists utilized copies of “The Negro Motorist Green Book” to navigate while traveling finding within the pages lists of restaurants, hotels, service stations and numerous other travel necessities welcome to African Americans. African American service stations became hubs for black motorists to fill their tanks as well as repair their cars. The mechanics that worked on these cars developed a vast amount of knowledge while providing an essential service to the black community in an environment that welcomed black customers, rather than rejecting or abusing them.¹⁰⁰ The black auto economy became one of the backbones of black business as cars became available to more African Americans.

Although the jitney largely vanished from the streets of major cities, it served as a prime example of the empowerment that could be grasped through the use of the automobile, and African American communities would again look to the car as a tool to fight white supremacy. The lasting legacy of the jitney bus should African

¹⁰⁰ Kevin Borg, *Auto Mechanics: Technology and Expertise in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 5.

Americans' ability exploitation of the jitney in navigate through segregation on their own terms, temporarily claiming power through mobility and spatial authority. Although regulation mostly restored white control over urban black mobility prior to World War II, the automobile was again brought to the frontlines in the fight for civil rights in the 1950s to help topple Jim Crow, and again empower black communities through automobility.

Chapter 2: Pooling: African Americans, Automobiles, and Black Organization in the Montgomery Bus Boycott

It was a mild afternoon in Montgomery the day the police arrested Claudette Colvin.¹⁰¹ There was nothing abnormal about that day and there was little abnormal about her. Her mother was a maid and her father a day laborer, both with little education.¹⁰² This was more than common it was the experience of the majority of Montgomery's black citizens.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, despite her normality she fought the status quo. She sat on the Montgomery City Bus Lines' bus refusing the bus driver's demands for her to move further back, and that refusal carried consequences. Bus drivers in Montgomery held "the powers of a police officer of the city while in actual charge of the bus" and any refusal to obey the driver's commands was dealt with sternly.¹⁰⁴ The actual police were then called but she refused to obey them as well. The police manhandled her, dragged her off the bus, and threw her in the back seat of the patrol car. Even in her arrest she fought the authority of segregation, "kicking

¹⁰¹ "Weather Reports From Throughout the Nation," *New York Times*, March 2, 1955 media.proquest.com (accessed March 27, 2015.)

¹⁰² "Interview with Claudette Colvin" www.montgomerybusboycott.com (accessed March 27, 2015) While it is not clear who this interviewer was or when this interviewer took place, the interview can be trusted. The interviewer was a staff member of the Montgomery Advertiser a well-respected and major newspaper that likely kept journalistic integrity in mind while conducting the interviews. Furthermore the information gleaned from this interview is not anything that likely would change had the interviews been conducted by another under different circumstances. The basic background of Colvin's life speaks to her as a typical black Montgomery resident, and this information can be trusted in the interview.

¹⁰³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989), 145.

¹⁰⁴ *The Code of the City of Montgomery, Alabama*, "Separation of Races" 1952, 44. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015068281776;view=1up;seq=5> (accessed March 27, 2015)

and clawing” as the white officers placed her in custody.¹⁰⁵ Claudette Colvin was only fifteen when she challenged bus segregation in 1955 Montgomery.¹⁰⁶

The rules that governed space on buses in the south followed those that ruled over space on streetcars holding strong as Jim Crow laws remained and in some spaces expanded.¹⁰⁷ Still though, public transportation was one of the predominant spaces for black and white interactions as just on the streetcars, all passengers on the buses sat within the close proximity of each other confined to the fairly small space of public buses. It made sense then that it was there that the rules that governed pace would be contested. Like the African Americans jitney passengers and operators before them, the black citizens of Montgomery Alabama looked to the automobile as a means toward freedom, however unlike in the early 1900's, the car would not be used to avoid segregation laws, it would instead be used to challenge them as Montgomery's black community rallied a massive carpool system that consisted of over 300 individual cars operated by hundreds of drivers and servicing thousands of passengers. This was no small undertaking and the carpool bore significant ramifications for Montgomery's citizens, and for Americans across the country changing the way that African Americans communities, and authorities that police them interact with the automobile.

¹⁰⁵ “Segregation Case Reset for March 18th” *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 10th, 1955 <http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/segregation-case-reset-for-march-18/> (accessed March 27, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Officer Headley Ward of the Montgomery Police Department, “Claudette Colvin Arrest Record” March 2, 1955. (Rosa Parks Museum Archive) This is a little known fact in the popular memory of the Montgomery bus boycott. Typically the only black woman to be acknowledged for refusing to relocate her seat to the back of the bus is Rosa Parks. One superb work that does thrust Colvin to the front of the story is Phillip Hoose, *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* (New York: Square Fish Publishing, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ While Jim Crow segregation began on public transportation it certainly did not stop there and by the 1950s took hold of nearly every facet of public life.

Buses were vitally important to Montgomery's African American Community in 1955. Historian Steven A. Reich contends that African Americans' "fight for citizenship—for basic social recognition—was thus intimately connected to African Americans' workplace experiences."¹⁰⁸ Reich emphasizes the fact that, as Martin Luther King explained it, African Americans were, "a working people." If African Americans were in fact "a working people" then buses were the way many got to work in the 1950s. Work was certainly a major part of African American life in Montgomery and a large reason why black bus riders rarely challenge segregation in those spaces. They could not afford a loss of their service.¹⁰⁹

Colvin's arrest illustrated the polarization of Montgomery's community across lines of race. Whites saw the arrest as just one witness of the event, a white woman named Cameron Collins, expressed her respect for the officers involved noting in a letter to the local newspaper, "they [the police officers] used only the amount of force necessary and then only when sorely provoked."¹¹⁰ These were not the same sentiments held by Colvin who described being "dragged from the bus."¹¹¹ It is unlikely that Colvin, a fifteen-year-old girl weighing 115 pounds could give two grown police officers much difficulty that would as Collins described, provoke the officers to use any amount of force.¹¹² One may never know just how abusive or

¹⁰⁸ Steven A. Reich, *A Working People: A history of African American Workers Since Emancipation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 2. Reich provides a look at African American labor relations, framing the Civil Rights Movement as a labor movement. Reich points out that many of the leaders and participants in the Civil Rights Movement were members of labor unions and parties, with ample experience in organization obtained through labor struggles.

¹⁰⁹ Branch, 142.

¹¹⁰ Cameron Collins, "Letter to the Editor of the Montgomery Advertiser" March 2, 1955. (RPMA)

¹¹¹ "Interview with Claudette Colvin" www.montgomerybusboycott.com (accessed March 27, 2015)

¹¹² Officer Headley Ward of the Montgomery Police Department, "Claudette Colvin Arrest Record" March 2, 1955. (RPMA)

composed the officers were, nonetheless the arrest made waves among the black citizens of Montgomery and was one of the real beginnings of pooling resources for the bus boycott that came months later. Edgar Daniel Nixon, a public leader among the black community, met with the Women's Political Council (WPC), various religious leaders of Montgomery's black churches, the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Clifford Durr, a white lawyer who made his reputation defending the civil rights of those in need of legal defense.¹¹³ This was a powerful group of activists.¹¹⁴ The WPC was started by Jo Ann Robinson as a reaction to segregation a decade prior to Colvin's arrest. In 1946 Robinson organized the women of Montgomery, establishing the WPC with a goal to have members in every important branch of socio-political structure in the city.¹¹⁵ The WPC remained active and organized, reaching over 300 members by 1955. Their three chapters met regularly, discussing issues that Montgomery's African American community faced, and were prepared to mobilize as soon as Robinson gave the call. As Robinson herself put it, "Wherever there were more than 10 blacks employed we had a member there and we were organized to the point that we knew that in a matter of hours we could corral the whole city."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Durr previously made a name for himself defending Americans accused of disloyalty during the McCarthy era red scare that took place during the 1940s and 1950s. Durr was sympathetic to African American desires for increased quality of life, was well versed in the law, and had a vast array of connections throughout Montgomery and Alabama. He was an ideal contact for Nixon.

¹¹⁴ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963*, 120-122.

¹¹⁵ These women held positions in the numerous black schools of every level in Montgomery, as well as federal state and local institutions within Montgomery. Being the capitol of Alabama, the idea was that having WPC members in all of these positions the black women of Montgomery could attempt to shut Montgomery down. While this course of action never was implemented, these women were aware of the power they could wield and did not stand idly by.

¹¹⁶ Jo Ann Robinson interview by Production Team D, *Eyes on the Prize*, August 27 1979.

Like Robinson and the WPC, the religious leaders of Montgomery provided an avenue for Nixon and other black leaders to reach the larger black community. African Americans used churches as venues for religious and political discussion for decades, and Montgomery's black churches in 1955 were no different. Black churches were spaces over which whites bore little to no authority and from which they were almost entirely absent.¹¹⁷ This absence meant that African Americans could discuss common issues they faced as second-class citizens in the largely white dominated hierarchy of society. The spaces of black churches were venues that allowed for organization, mobilization and dispersal of legal information provided by the NAACP.¹¹⁸

Nixon served for five years on the executive board of the NAACP and knew the benefit they would provide any mass action in Montgomery.¹¹⁹ For decades the NAACP was at the forefront of legal change regarding African Americans, and in 1954 they experienced a major victory against segregation in the *Brown V. Board of Education* overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruled upon over half a decade earlier. Although *Brown V. Board* found that separate was inherently unequal, the federal ruling had not yet been implemented by authorities to challenge state power, let alone any city power that Montgomery held. Nixon thought it was time that changed. The lawyers of the NAACP knew the law. However, despite their legal prowess, the

¹¹⁷ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 15. This monograph examines early organizing movements that sought to push for African Americans' civil rights, and demonstrates the effectiveness of African American resource pooling.

¹¹⁸ Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Investigating Meeting," January 24, 1956 (RPMA)

¹¹⁹ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 124.

NAACP, “had never been able to organize a mass base.”¹²⁰ Nixon was connecting legal organizers with social ones. It was a brilliant move.

Nixon was experienced with pooling political and social resources as he was president of the Alabama chapter of the brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters, an organization run by Phillip A. Randolph, a man who himself fought for African Americans’ rights, at one point calling in 1941 for a march on Washington to protest racial discrimination in the wartime industrial production. A direct result of Randolph’s black protests and organization was the executive order 8802 which outlawed all racial discrimination in the federal defense industry.¹²¹ This was the man who Nixon looked up to, the man that helped shape Nixon’s political understandings, and the man who in part inspired Nixon to organize for African American civil liberties. Nixon knew what would be required for any hope of change to Jim Crow, assembled the necessary collaborators, and they all set out to see what could be done about buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

The group of activists closely examined Colvin’s case. They hoped Colvin’s arrest, and Colvin herself would be ample reason for Montgomery’s black community to rally support and make some kind of change, however what they found was not what they were looking for. Colvin was a fifteen-year-old girl, still in high school, and one thing that fifteen years olds often do is make mistakes. Colvin

¹²⁰ Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 15.

¹²¹ “Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense industry, 1941” www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=72 (accessed April 1, 2015)

was an unmarried pregnant teenager with especially dark skin.¹²² Colvin herself explained the significance of her skin tone saying light skin was the complexion, “that most black people accept when they are with the middle class.”¹²³ African Americans were not an amorphous body of cohesion, and there were hierarchies even within black communities. Light skin was a physical trait with complex social ramifications that could benefit or hinder African Americans depending on the circumstances.¹²⁴ Even disregarding Colvin’s complexion the fact that she was a teenager, and a pregnant one at that, did not make her an ideal candidate for a public, moral cause. Nixon, the WPC and the NAACP agreed that Colvin would not be made the “icon” of change in Montgomery.¹²⁵ Mobilization for civil rights was put on the backburner but plans for action did not fade away, and the resources remained pooled and remained connected waiting for the time to spring into action: enter Rosa Parks.

Rosa Parks repeated Colvin’s defiance and wouldn’t budge. On a cold December 1st in 1955 the small 43-year-old secretary for the NAACP boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus in Montgomery, Alabama, taking a seat in the last vacant “black” spot. When a handful of white passengers boarded the bus, the driver hollered for the African American riders seated in the middle of the bus to stand up. One man and two women in the first of the “black rows” complied, while Parks did

¹²² Claudette Colvin, interview by Margot Adler, March 15 2009 National Public Radio www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=101719889&m=101923672 (accessed April 2 2015)

¹²³ Claudette Colvin, interview by Margot Adler

¹²⁴ Margaret L. Hunter, “If You’re Light You’re Alright’: Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color,” *Gender and Society* 16, no., 2 (April, 2002), 176.

¹²⁵ Claudette Colvin, interview by Margot Adler

not budge an inch. The bus driver asked if she was going to give up her seat, only to be met with a simple short answer of, “No I am not.” The driver then called the police; two officers arrived, boarded the bus and asked Parks, “Why don’t you stand up?” She answered the officers with a question of her own replying, “Why do you push us around?” The officers waited a moment and one answered, “I do not know, but the law is the law and you’re under arrest,” placed the Parks under arrest, and took her to jail. Rosa Parks’ actions that day would almost immediately initiate the Montgomery bus boycott.¹²⁶

Rosa Parks was a woman trained in nonviolent civil disobedience, and while December 1st was not planned to be a challenge to segregation, Parks knew challenging the driver could potentially be the spark for which E.D. Nixon, the WPC, the black ministers of Montgomery and the NAACP had prepared.¹²⁷ Parks attended the meetings months prior when Nixon gathered the groups together to discuss Colvin’s case. She was a part of political action in Montgomery and had been for over a decade. Parks joined the NAACP in 1943 and was elected secretary, and over a decade later in the summer of 1955 attended a seminar in nonviolent civil disobedience alongside other white and black civil rights supporters and activists.¹²⁸ It was a trained, calculated mind geared toward nonviolent resistance, and civil disobedience that Rosa Parks brought with her onto the bus that December day.

¹²⁶ Rosa Parks, interview by Production Team: *A, Eyes on the Prize*, November 14, 1985 digital.wustl.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=eop;cc=eop;rgn=main;view=text;idno=par0015.0895.080 (accessed March 26, 2015)

¹²⁷ Rosa Parks, interview by Production Team: *A, Eyes on the Prize*

¹²⁸ Jeanne Theoharris, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 47. This biography follows the life of Rosa Parks, and while focusing on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, does provide ample information on Parks’ life both before and after the boycott. A good starting point for anyone looking to know more about Parks and the bus boycott she helped start and maintain.

After her arrest, Rosa Parks phoned Nixon, for whom she worked. Nixon made his way down to the local jail, posted bail for Parks, and accompanied her home.¹²⁹ There the two discussed the situation with Parks' family, and when Nixon returned home he summed up the conclusion telling his wife, "Baby, we're going to boycott the Montgomery buses."¹³⁰ But, it was not as simple as just deciding not to ride the buses. If the boycott was to be effective massive numbers of people needed to join the movement, and with no other way to get to work, that was not a likely case. All of the leadership Nixon gathered needed to pool and mobilize Montgomery's black population.

Jo Ann Robinson spearheaded the initial call to boycott and knew the WPC were the most effective tool to do so. She was not overestimating the WPC's ability.¹³¹ Robinson wasted no time. As soon as she got news of Park's arrest she set the WPC network into motion. She called every member of the three WPC chapters, disseminated directions of action and prepared for the call to boycott the buses. The directions for the WPC primarily dealt with logistics regarding distribution of leaflets that Jo Ann Robinson herself worked through the night printing and cutting out. WPC members stood at school campuses and other public venues and received the leaflets from Jo Ann Robinson, via her car. Robinson described the system

¹²⁹ E.D. Nixon, interview by Production Team: D, *Eyes on the Prize* digital.wustl.edu/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=eop;cc=eop;rgn=main;view=text;idno=nix0015.0307.078 (accessed March 26, 2015)

¹³⁰ Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The memoir of Jo Ann Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 77.

¹³¹ This ability came from the fact that the WPC prepared to challenge bus segregation for over three years. They planned to make some kind of demonstration but were not yet set on a boycott and were waiting for the right time and the right case to spark that challenge to segregated buses. Rosa Parks, being an older black female could be seen as a sympathetic character that Montgomery could rally behind.

explaining, "I ran of 35,000 copies...I took them in my car. The packages were already there. It would take about a half minute to drive on the school campus, the kid would be there, in a just a minute they would disappear."¹³² In this way, Robinson was able to rapidly distribute the 35,000 leaflets calling for a boycott of the buses. Prior to even any organization of the carpool the car was filling a vital role needed for the boycott. Using her car, Robinson could zip across the city and onto the school campuses while carrying the boxes full of leaflets, hand them off to members of the WPC and their supporters, and then quickly get to the next stop all within the privacy of her car. This was important as time was a major factor in rallying for the boycott, and the car directly provided rapid, independent mobility.

Robinson's leaflets were quickly distributed among the black community. The leaflets explained that another African American woman was arrested tying Rosa Parks to Claudette Colvin, and set out the reasons that the black community should boycott the buses. The leaflet stated, "Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something about these arrests they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother."¹³³ Gender played a major role in the Montgomery bus boycott. Robinson included the idea that a mother or daughter could be arrested because she knew that the black community would sympathize with a female more so than a male due to the innocence that was tied to femininity. Femininity could be

¹³² Jo Ann Robinson interview, *Eyes on the Prize*.

¹³³ "Don't Ride the Bus. Come to a Mass Meeting on 5 December" *The Martin Luther King Papers* http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/leaflet_dont_ride_the_bus_come_to_a_mass_meeting_on_5_december/

an empowering factor in Montgomery in the 1950s as it both allowed women to often be exempt from the most violent or forward acts of racism, and also meant that there would be a stronger reaction from the black community should they fall victim to public displays of racism at the hands of the white citizens of Montgomery.¹³⁴ Jo Ann Robinson explained that often, “black women and the white man were the freest people in the southern states.”¹³⁵ This is clearly an overestimation. Black women were not always exempt from the violence of racism in the south, however the fact that Robinson even made this overestimation gives credence to the idea that black women could move throughout Montgomery with more ease than black men. This is the reason that the WPC was able to garner so much support without disrupting the white supremacy hierarchy of Montgomery, Alabama. Whites were less suspicious of black women, and their seeming innocence meant they could in fact go against that innocence without being detected. However the empowerment of femininity did have limitations.

Robinson initiated the boycott but could not see it through. She describes the limitations of feminine empowerment stating that, “the Women’s Political Council planned it [the boycott] for Monday only, and it was left up to the men to take over after we had forced them to really decide whether or not it had been successful enough to continue, and how long it was to be continued.”¹³⁶ The black women of

¹³⁴ Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7 Anderson provides a useful analysis of gender pertaining to the Central High School Crisis of 1954, and the analysis there can and should be applied to many other events of the Civil Rights Movement. Anderson’s insight demonstrates well how African American girls and boys threatened white notions of acceptable practices pertaining to gender.

¹³⁵ Jo Ann Robinson interview, *Eyes on the Prize*.

¹³⁶ Jo Ann Robinson interview, *Eyes on the Prize*.

Montgomery forced the issue to the forefront of the discussion on racial politics, but it was left up to the black male leaders to lead the way. While it was acceptable, necessary even, for women to be active in the fight for civil rights, their gender excluded them from leadership, or at least visible, public leadership. Jo Ann Robinson, despite her gender, certainly remained a leader of the boycott, working in tandem with black male authority figures throughout the struggle against the bus lines and the city of Montgomery. Robinson rallied with Martin Luther King, E.D. Nixon and other black ministers at the first mass meeting and set out plans for a boycott.¹³⁷

Through the leaflets Robinson urged the black community to stay off the buses that Monday stating, "You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out from town one day."¹³⁸ This was true, the black community could afford one day of abstaining from transportation. They may even be able to afford two, but eventually they would have to go to school, go to town, and go to work. A seemingly obvious point, that is often overlooked in the historical record, is that in this urban environment of 1955 Montgomery Alabama, some form of transportation other than walking was essential to life in Montgomery, and an extended bus boycott impinged on that necessity.

Nixon knew that they had their work cut out for them and the next morning called various community religious leaders, among whom were both Reverend

¹³⁷ E.D. Nixon interview by Production Team: D, *Eyes on the Prize* August 24, 1979

¹³⁸ "Don't Ride the Bus. Come to a Mass Meeting on 5 December," December 3, 1955. (Martin Luther King Papers)

Ralph Abernathy, and Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. If the boycott was to survive past that Monday, these religious leaders needed to establish a central organizational body.¹³⁹ The result was the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which elected Martin Luther King Jr. as its first president, and they immediately began organizing the boycott.¹⁴⁰ The MIA also that day drafted a letter to be presented to city officials and the bus company demanding improvements in the treatment of black passengers, but not calling for an end to segregation.¹⁴¹ Their demands were not radical. While segregation was the heart of the problem on Montgomery buses, it was not the central concern for all black leadership in the December of 1955. The MIA was not demanding desegregation but rather for courtesy from the bus drivers, a change to the seating policy that maintained segregation but worked on a first-come first-served basis, and the employment of African American drivers to service the predominately African American sections of Montgomery.¹⁴² The omission of any reference to Jim Crow segregation in the letter is telling. Their demands demonstrated the settled and largely uncontested nature of segregation within Montgomery's community in 1955. They threatened drastic measures such as the boycotting of public transportation, but were not calling for anything that would appear to be drastic requests. This could be seen as both pragmatic and radical. The African American community in wanting their demands

¹³⁹ E.D. Nixon interview, *Eyes on the Prize*

¹⁴⁰ Martin Luther King, *Stride Towards Freedom*, 98.

¹⁴¹ Ralph Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 135. It should also be noted here that the leadership of the MIA consisted of many people other than Martin Luther King Jr. This included E.D. Nixon, Ralph Abernathy, Rosa Parks, and a multitude of others too numerous to list.

¹⁴² The Montgomery Improvement Association, "To the National City Bus Lines, Inc., December 8, 1955," The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/national-city-lines-inc>: (accessed December 12, 2014).

met, did not seek a sudden upheaval of white power and white authority. They wanted instead slight changes to the existing system of segregation, and were willing to work within Jim Crow to improve their lives. Segregation was in fact not the focal concern of the MIA at the beginning of the boycott; abuse of black passengers was. As the MIA explained, black passengers, “have, at various times, been pushed around, embarrassed, threatened, intimidated and abused” by white drivers.¹⁴³ Violence often came indirectly as was the case with one African American mother and passenger of the City Bus Lines would experience. According to the MIA:

One Negro mother, with two small children in her arm, put them on the front seat while she opened her purse for her fare. The driver ordered her to take the children from the seat, and without giving her the chance to place the children elsewhere, lunged the vehicle forward, causing the small children to be thrown into the aisle of the bus.¹⁴⁴

Stopping these abuses was more important to the MIA than challenging segregation head on, and so they were willing to make demands for rules that would not drastically change those in existence. The MIA demanded, “seating of Negro passengers from rear to front, and white passengers from front to rear on ‘first-

¹⁴³ The Negro Ministers of Montgomery and Their Congregations, “To the Montgomery Public,” *Alabama Journal*, December 25, 1956., [http://mlk-](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/to_the_montgomery_public/)

¹⁴⁴ The Negro Ministers of Montgomery and Their Congregations, “To the Montgomery Public,” *Alabama Journal*, December 25, 1956., [http://mlk-](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/to_the_montgomery_public/)

come-first-serve' basis with no seats reserved for any race."¹⁴⁵ African Americans would still be seated in the back of the bus and whites in the front. The only real change would be that African Americans would not be asked to stand for whites, something that was already supposed to be enforced by the current law.¹⁴⁶ The MIA's demands, while certainly pragmatic in their desire for actual and immediate change, were certainly also radical. These demands were voiced by African Americans, and called for a change in behavior from whites, specifically whites in power positions, as well as demanding whites relinquish some of their authority over space. This is the most radical of the demands made by the MIA. If drivers could not demand that African American passengers stand for white ones, then black passengers would have authority over the spaces in which they sat, and their own bodies.

The impinging of movement and mobility was one of the major issues faced by Montgomery's black community, and whites were the ones with nearly full authority over space, and the defining of acceptable movement through those spaces. The space of the bus, like streetcars and railroads before, was legally dominated by whites, who dictated where African Americans could reside as passengers.¹⁴⁷ This authority was supposed to have its limits. While Rosa Parks

¹⁴⁵ The Montgomery Improvement Association, "To the National City Bus Lines, Inc., December 8, 1955,"

¹⁴⁶ As the current law existed, there were two sections of any bus, one for whites and one for African Americans. The law was supposed to provide for certain seats for African Americans no matter how many whites were on the bus, but in practice African Americans were often asked to stand for whites even if the seat in question was in the black section of the bus. This was in fact the case with the seat that was demanded from Rosa Parks.

¹⁴⁷ Again this idea of space within means of transportation stems from frameworks set by Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 137. Trains, streetcars, and buses bear many similarities in their function as people movers in

legally was within her right to refuse to move as she was sitting in a section that was supposed to work under the first-come first-served rule, the fact that she was black trumped the law.¹⁴⁸ Within the domain of the bus, the bus driver held ultimate authority, backed up by police if necessary.

While the MIA's demands would not require much action from whites, they could serve as a symbol of power. The MIA, a black organized and black operated group sought to dictate *to* whites what behavior was appropriate. This was atypical. Whites predominately wrote the laws, whites overwhelmingly held political office, and whites made up the majority of law enforcement.¹⁴⁹ The MIA's letter was assuredly radical for the time, and while it did not call for a permanent shift in any of these power hierarchies, it did serve as a moment of empowerment for the black community of Montgomery. Thus simultaneously radical and pragmatic their demands spurred a movement that would not simply disappear when whites refused.

The MIA's lack of demanding desegregation held ramifications on a larger scale. In fact segregation was a main point of contention between the MIA and the NAACP in the early stages of the boycott. In a letter to William C. Patton, a field secretary for the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, the recently appointed executive secretary of

which 1 driver, or multiple conductors in the case of trains, operates a vehicle carrying dozens more people. The largest difference between trains and streetcars and the buses of Montgomery was that conductors and streetcar operators did not bear the same legal authority as the drivers of buses in Montgomery. Whites however nearly always held the authority to dictate space on all these transportation systems the largest exception being that of the Safe Bus Co. which being a private black owned entity, serving the black community bore much more authority over their streetcars and later buses.

¹⁴⁸ Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, 517.

¹⁴⁹ Emilye Crosby, *Civil Rights from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 466.

the NAACP, stated that, "Obviously when our national programs call for abolishing segregation and our lawyers are fighting on that basis...we could not enter an Alabama case asking merely for more polite segregation."¹⁵⁰ If the MIA wanted legal and financial backing from the NAACP, they needed to push for complete desegregation of the buses, a decision that was made much easier after Montgomery officials refused the MIA's initial demands. The MIA, WPC, NAACP and all other members of the blossoming boycott would demand the desegregation of the Montgomery's buses.

The MIA, the WPC, and the NAACP were not content to simply make demands of the bus lines and the city. They planned on backing them up too. They decided to go about printing more leaflets, distributing them again around the community as a means of organizing a mass protest and boycott of the buses.¹⁵¹ One line of the leaflets printed again by Jo Ann Robinson read, "Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or any where on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk."¹⁵² This line would come to sum up the three major forms of transportation that would be used, and noted the leadership's understanding that walking, while a possibility for some, was not going to be viable for many in Montgomery's black community. Most African Americans could not walk to work, to school, or to do errands. This led to the MIA's organization of a complex and highly structured

¹⁵⁰Roy Wilkins, Letter to W.C. Patton, December 27, 1955, NAACP Papers, www.proquest.com (accessed July 8, 2015.)

¹⁵¹ Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, 513.

¹⁵² Montgomery Bus Boycott Leaflet, December 5, 1955, in Clayton Carson eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67.

system centered around transportation, and more specifically, the automobile. They started a carpool.

A common adage for judging the importance of one factor among many is to “follow the money.” Over the year-long boycott the MIA money went to the carpool more than any other budget item.¹⁵³ The MIA spent \$5,998.33 on gas, oil, tires and tags, \$4,537.03 on drivers and dispatchers, \$733.73 on auto parts and repairs to carpool vehicles, and \$163 on fines and penalties all totaling in \$11,432.09 spent on the carpool. This was the budget for just one month.¹⁵⁴ This total was \$5,000 more than any other sector of expenditures per month, marking the deep significance of the carpool in the MIA’s eyes. They dedicated a majority of their resources to keeping the carpool going because they knew it was the most important sustaining the boycott. But how did this spending materialize on the ground for the carpoolers?

On January 24, 1956, eight weeks into the boycott, a Montgomery police officer noted in a memo to the police chief, that one driver pulled over, John H. Garrison received free gas from Oliver’s service station.¹⁵⁵ This service station also happened to be one of those that received a check from the MIA as recorded by police on January 16th.¹⁵⁶ Similar to Oliver’s service station, within the first three months of the boycott more than ten service stations were receiving weekly checks

¹⁵³ Montgomery Improvement Association, “Financial Report” December 19, 1956 (National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture)

¹⁵⁴ Montgomery Improvement Association, “Financial Report” December 19, 1956 (NCSCRAAC)

¹⁵⁵ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Investigation of the Bus Boycott” January 24, 1956. (Rosa Parks Museum Archive) It is important to note here that often the police are referred to in a general manner, not citing any particular officer due to the frequent uncertainty of the arresting officers, authors of the police memos, or investigators of the boycott and carpool. Certainly individuals carried out these actions, but in Montgomery in 1956 there is no evidence of the police acting as individuals. The surveillance of the carpools seems to have included a clear majority of the police department’s attention and resources.

¹⁵⁶ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford” January 16th 1956. (RPMA)

from the MIA covering the costs of carpoolers' gas, maintenance, and repairs.¹⁵⁷ The MIA was paying the tab for the carpoolers. The MIA either prepaid for gas, or the service station kept track of the amount owed, which the MIA covered later. The cars were at the center of an intricate economic web that pooled money both from the local and national community supporting the MIA, spread it out to pro-boycott and predominately black automobile businesses, and then benefited the boycotters through the dispersal of funds through the form of gasoline. This web made the carpools an affordable alternative to the buses.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore the MIA ensured accessibility to the carpools by having thirty-three separate dispatch locations and forty pick up stations across the city that ran on a time schedule and a calling system.¹⁵⁹ Dispatchers received calls and had the nearest dispatch stations send a car to pick passengers up creating a system that functioned well enough to keep those in need of transportation off the buses. This system was a complex, massive, and organized network that kept hundreds of cars fueled, the riders mobile, and the buses empty. Hundreds of cars, even more hundreds of drivers, and thousands of passengers made up this carpool.¹⁶⁰

The night of Garrison's traffic stop police sent officers to try and gain information from a mass meeting held at the Bula Baptist Church, and noted in their

¹⁵⁷ "State's Exhibit 7-14" *The State of Alabama v. Martin Luther King Jr., et all* (Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama)

¹⁵⁸ Donations to the MIA were predominately made through two means. The first was collections made at the local churches during mass meetings and regular service as documented in the MIA's meeting minutes found in "State's Exhibit 44-45" *The State of Alabama v. Martin Luther King Jr., et all* (ADAH) and through extensive national donations collected by the MIA and the NAACP, a portion of which can be found in Clayton Carson eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. 3, 112 and Montgomery Improvement Association, "Financial Report" December 19, 1956 (NCSCRAAC)

¹⁵⁹ "State's Exhibit 47" *The State of Alabama v. Martin Luther King Jr., et all* (ADAH)

¹⁶⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, 49, 62; Macy, MBBCD

Memo to the police chief outlining the meeting that, “There was about 500 Cars [sic] parked near this church last night.”¹⁶¹ Similarly throughout the boycott the police recorded over 300 different vehicles that they stopped, all of which participated in the carpool.¹⁶² The MIA’s fundraising abilities, and coordination were on display here as it took large sums of money, and supreme organization to keep such a large number of cars operating in the carpool. The African Americans of Montgomery became masters of pooling and systematizing resources pertaining to the technological system of the automobile. These tasks were not easily executed, and those operating, running, and organizing the carpool needed keen managerial skills. Their abilities to fundraise, organize, and construct a mass public transportation system, paired with a detailed knowledge of the law allowed the boycotters to avoid police efforts to dismantle the carpool.

The MIA’s complex methods of paying gas stations with donated money, then allowing carpoolers to receive free gas, allowed them to circumvent a law on the books that made any unlicensed taxicab service illegal. The boycotters were made well aware through mass meetings dispersing legal information from the NAACP that the police could arrest any driver who accepted money from a passenger. Had a driver accepted money, he could be charged with running an illegal taxi service.¹⁶³ A taxicab could be defined as any vehicle that charged a fare to passengers. If any car is deemed to be a taxicab it the driver then came under an extensive set of

¹⁶¹ Montgomery Police Department, “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Investigating Meeting,” January 24, 1956 (RPMA)

¹⁶²Macy, MBBCD

¹⁶³As stated in the *Montgomery City Code book of 1952*, 477

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015068281776;view=1up;seq=489>

regulations including the need for a state taxicab license, a special driver's registration and license, and more poignantly must be segregated and not deny passengers. This meant that if the police could prove the carpool was in fact a taxicab service, they could bring the carpool under state regulation and effectively abolish the carpool. Furthermore they could arrest and fine every driver of the carpool for illegally operating a taxicab. In this way the police could end the carpool and effectively end the boycott. This was the police's hope. Throughout the entire boycott police tried to prove that drivers were accepting donations directly. This was the reason for the MIA's payment systems. In this way the African American community of Montgomery was able to pool their money and financially support the boycott, and pro-boycott businesses without breaking any laws.¹⁶⁴ The service stations were crucial to the success of the carpools, and therefore the boycott, and the businessmen who owned these stations took active steps to assist the carpools.

One such businessman, Fletcher Smith, was an African American born and raised in Montgomery. Smith owned the College Hill Service Station and not only worked with the MIA to pay for carpoolers' gas, but also provided a vehicle to assist in the carpool. On January 24th police officers pulled over Burl Mack Averhart, a reverend and active boycotter in a Willy's station wagon. The police recorded that Averhart, "drives this station wagon all day for Fletcher Smith owner of the College Hill Service Station. Hauls negroes all day. Fills up with gas anytime he needs it.

¹⁶⁴ Money also poured in from across the country as donations came addressed to the MIA and at time specifically Martin Luther King Jr.

Made (2) trips in and out of this pickup station.”¹⁶⁵ Smith was a black businessman dedicated to the boycott efforts, and used his successes as a businessman to make his work vehicle available for the carpool. The boycott was not going to work without carpoolers; the carpoolers were not going anywhere without vehicles; and the vehicles were useless without someone filling their tanks. Smith filled several of these crucial roles. He provided a vehicle, and gasoline and could afford to do so in part because of the increased business generated by the boycott itself. Between December 1st and March 7th the MIA paid Smith \$419.48.¹⁶⁶ This money went to gas for the cars in the carpool, and was what allowed for Burl Mack Averhart to fill up “any time he needs it.” Not only was the black community of Montgomery supporting black businesses in the form of service stations, they were also bringing new income to those businesses. Furthermore, black business owners served an activist role to better the lives of their community, and it all centered on the automobile. When cars broke, drivers needed them serviced. When the tank was empty, it needed to be filled. And when the MIA needed to buy station wagons, they turned to car dealers.

Along with buying gasoline, the MIA used the pooled money to purchase dozens of station wagons. These cars were typically brand new Chevrolet station wagons, and while Chevrolet is a blue-collar company, these specific station wagons were fully loaded with numerous available options. This included power steering,

¹⁶⁵ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott” January 24 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁶⁶ Alabama Attorney General’s Office, “Montgomery Bus Boycott trial transcript,” 1956, exhibit 12.

Powerglide automatic transmissions, turn signals, heaters, and the V8 engines.¹⁶⁷ The police officers stated it best, “in other words they paid several hundred dollars more for the wagons they bought...”¹⁶⁸ The MIA and leadership of the boycott were concerned with more than just the utility of the station wagons. They wanted vehicles that could give many passengers rides, but they also wanted them to be as easy to drive as possible. The power steering and automatic transmissions made operating the vehicles enormously easier than station wagons without these options. The automatic transmissions particularly added to the ease of operation as the driver would not need to know how to use a clutch and therefore would not stall the car while in operation. The turn signals allowed the drivers to only need to know how to operate a simple lever rather than remember the hand signals that were otherwise required when turning. The powerful V8 engines allowed the cars to easily haul large loads of passengers, an aspect that was important to the success of the carpool. The V8 engines were an investment to insure that each car could haul as many passengers as possible increasing the efficiency of the station wagons. The heaters while not making the car necessarily easier to drive, made them far more comfortable for both drivers and passengers in the cold winter weather of Montgomery. Making the cars safer and easier to drive meant that drivers could volunteer without having large amounts of expertise or experience driving. This also meant that drivers were less likely to place themselves in situations that made them open to tickets. If a driver were to stall the car in the middle of the road, fail to use

¹⁶⁷ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁶⁸ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

hand turn signals, or impede traffic the driver could be subject to tickets from the police. By paying more for these options the MIA was investing in the longevity of the carpool and thus the boycott.¹⁶⁹

These station wagons came to be called “rolling churches” as they each bore bumper stickers of the respective churches that purchased them.¹⁷⁰ A church bought a vehicle through the donations made directly to that church, or more commonly the car was purchased in a church’s name, and the MIA later reimbursed that specific church.¹⁷¹ In this way, the MIA could again keep from breaking any laws regarding illegal taxi services. If the vehicles were all in the name of churches, or religious leaders they were not considered owned by one business or organization. Had they all been owned by the MIA, the police might have had an avenue to prosecute the MIA leadership. The black citizens of Montgomery successfully and rapidly armed their bus boycott with the tools required, and the streets filled with automobiles.¹⁷² For police this only cemented their continued surveillance efforts.

The experience of driving and riding in the carpools was a drastic change from the transportation of Montgomery buses. The passengers of the carpools were not subject to racialized abuses that threatened them on the buses. By removing themselves from the buses, the drivers and passengers of the carpools were seizing

¹⁶⁹ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁷⁰ Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 167. This is a textual collection of oral histories taken by teams associated with the Eyes on the Prize series produced for PBS and is a rich source for any historian of the Civil Rights Movement.

¹⁷¹ State’s Exhibit 15-30” *The State of Alabama v. Martin Luther King Jr., et al* (Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama)

¹⁷² In one case, the streets were so filled with cars that a white business actively aided the police telling them that 7:30 in the morning was the best time for officers to check one of the carpool pick up stations and explained that, “is when they have the most trouble with them. (we) can’t get (our) trucks out and in.” The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott” February 1, 1956. (RPMA)

power where they previously were denied. Like the jitney buses forty years earlier, the carpool arguably increased segregation. Black drivers and black passengers overwhelmingly dominated the cars of the carpool, leaving the buses with exclusively white drivers and white passengers.¹⁷³ And again recalling the jitney experiment, this segregation was no longer on white terms. Whites had previously won control over transportation and mobility and established the shape and form segregation would take: white drivers with white passengers in the front of buses, and black passengers in the back of them as subjects of white authority just like on Gilded Age railroads, and turn of the century streetcars. Whites told African Americans where they were allowed to be.¹⁷⁴ But in the new segregation of the carpools, like the black run jitneys before them, African Americans decided where to be. White authority, represented by the police, wanted to get African Americans out of the carpools and back onto the buses. Authority over physical and social space was a cornerstone in the great cathedral of white supremacy, and any changes threatened the status quo.

Cars not only changed the spaces of segregation, but also served as tools of change for spatial conceptualizations. Cars provided security, and with security came a shift in individuals' understanding of actual physical space. Cars shortened distance. Perceptions of spaces were continually shifting and as one boycotter, John F. Sawyer Jr., explained, nightfall dramatically changed these conceptualizations of space and time. Sawyer walked to Alabama State University during the day in order

¹⁷³ "Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott," *New York Times*, February 24, 1956 <http://query.nytimes.com> (accessed April 10, 2015)

¹⁷⁴ *The Code of the City of Montgomery, Alabama*, "Separation of Races" 1952, 44.

to get to classes, but at night used the carpool system. Sawyer perceived the distance from his home during the day to be short enough to walk, but the danger that night brought made it feel much longer. This lengthened space was “too far to walk” and that is when Sawyer used the carpool as a tool of transportation, and also safety.¹⁷⁵ The distance between the same two points shifted from being short enough to walk, to too long to walk due to nightfall, and then back to a safe distance when Sawyer rode in a car.¹⁷⁶ Cars had the power to change an individual’s perceptions of space, provide safety, aid the boycott, and ultimately serve their designed purpose of transportation.

The African Americans of Montgomery were not seeking to overthrow white supremacy over all social spaces. As clearly stated in their demands to the city they were not boycotting to rid Montgomery of segregated pools, theaters, or water fountains; just buses.¹⁷⁷ But even then, any contention over space was not going to be won by African Americans easily, and the whites seeking to maintain Jim Crow were not going to give in without a fight. In Montgomery this resistance came in the forms of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that terrorized African Americans for decades, the White Citizen’s Council, a volunteer organization whose members often

¹⁷⁵ John F. Sawyer Jr., “Interview with the Author”, tape recording, August 17, 2014.

¹⁷⁶ The impact that technology can have on spatial conceptualizations is eloquently described in Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2011), 146-150.

¹⁷⁷ The Montgomery Improvement Association, “To the National City Bus Lines, Inc., December 8, 1955”

were also part of the Klan, and most publicly, consistently and principally, the Montgomery Police Department.¹⁷⁸

White authority was faced with a problem. African Americans were challenging white power, and the Montgomery Police Department was not willing to let that challenge go unanswered. While it is not clear if there were any African American members of the Montgomery Police Department, the police most certainly acted against the boycott and specifically against the carpool seeking to curb any success gained by the civil rights activists in Montgomery. A challenge to segregation was a challenge to the law and therefore a challenge to police authority and white supremacy. Jim Crow laws forced the white supremacy agenda upon law enforcement, and while many officers likely were in agreement with this agenda and welcomed its reign over law enforcement, even those who might disagree were legally obligated to uphold white supremacy. They began a campaign against the boycott, but before anything else was to be done, they needed information. The Montgomery Improvement Association was careful about what they shared with the Montgomery public and officials. Aware of the power of information, the MIA disseminated their demands to the public, but did not disperse full information regarding their plans for boycotting the buses in the same manner.¹⁷⁹ While the MIA made their goals clear via paper leaflets and a formal letter to the mayor of Montgomery, W.A. Gayle who consistently encouraged the Montgomery Police

¹⁷⁸ There was in fact crossover between all three of these groups with some law enforcement sitting on the WCC's board whose members typically were also members of the Ku Klux Klan.

¹⁷⁹ The Montgomery Improvement Association, "To the Montgomery Public" December 25, 1955. mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/to_the_montgomery_public/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

Department's surveillance efforts, they remained insular when it came to the strategies they would employ to subvert the bus system.¹⁸⁰ This information was reserved to the mass meetings that were organized at various black churches within the Montgomery community. The First Baptist Church, and the Holt Street Baptist Church primarily hosted these meetings.¹⁸¹ This allowed the MIA and the NAACP to organize, and disperse information within their own community. This information included instructions from the NAACP on how to avoid arrest, "pep talks" from black ministers, and any other pertinent information that was called for on a day-by-day basis.¹⁸² If the streets and parking lots of Montgomery became the spaces for pooling of cars, the churches became the spaces for the pooling of legal and social resources. The churches were also spaces in which African Americans held authority, and they could exclude the prying eyes and ears of Montgomery's police officers.

The insular nature of the MIA meant that police could not readily gain access to the MIA's plans, something that they themselves recognized would be a major obstacle to the campaign to get African Americans back onto the buses. This led the Montgomery Police Department to pool resources themselves as they organized a formal investigation into the MIA and other bodies associated with the boycott.¹⁸³

While the NAACP was at the legal forefront of the boycott, preparing a case to be

¹⁸⁰ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Meeting with Mayor Gayle" January 27 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁸¹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 67.

¹⁸² "State's Exhibit 44-45" *The State of Alabama v. Martin Luther King Jr., et al* (ADAH)

¹⁸³ There were numerous groups associated with the boycott, illustrating even further the boycotters' knack for organization. The Alabama Council on Human relations, was another one of the twenty five organizations that aided the boycott in some way, however all the organizations took direction from and consulted the MIA. Furthering the complexity of the boycott was the over thirty churches that were involved in the boycott, but again they followed the suggestions of the MIA.

tried before the Supreme Court, the MIA was the primary face of the boycott, making them the primary target for the police. This investigation quickly turned into what today is called a task force, as police pooled resources, officers, and willing civilians to focus their attention on the bus boycott.

Early in the investigation the police were desperate to obtain any information they could get their hands on. Police questioned members of the black community, hoping to glean some sense of the organization and plans of the boycott, and they were willing to listen to virtually anyone, including an anonymous informant described as X2 an “informant” who was recognizably drunk and disorderly during the police’s interaction and most likely sought financial gains from the police who were offering rewards for information.¹⁸⁴ The meeting with X2 indicates that police were willing to talk to virtually anyone, and desperate for information.

As early as January 13, 1956, only a little over a month into the boycott, police officers started systematically checking the bank accounts of members of the MIA and the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR) including leader Robert E. Hughes who previously served as an intermediary who facilitated the first meeting between the MIA and city officials.¹⁸⁵ The ACHR was an offshoot of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, a national group that as early as 1919 was organized in response to intense racial violence faced by African Americans

¹⁸⁴ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Informant” January 28, 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁸⁵ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott” January 13th 1956. (RPMA)

following World War I.¹⁸⁶ The ACHR largely consisted of the African Americans who sought the most pragmatic of solutions. They were the ones who pushed strongest for the MIA to make their initial demands tamer, and prior to the bus boycott were the body that typically raised issues of the black community that did not seek to challenge white supremacy.¹⁸⁷ However as it became clear the boycott was not an ephemeral attempt to secure civil rights but rather a dedicated campaign to force the desegregation of the buses with the mass of Montgomery's black population involved, the ACHR then worked in tandem with the MIA to keep the carpools rolling. The initial facilitation seems to have been what made Hughes a target for police surveillance.¹⁸⁸ The police not only checked Hughes' personal bank accounts, those shared with his wife, but also the accounts that Hughes held under the name of the Alabama Council on Human Relations. The bank that held these records, The First National, also gave the investigators information regarding Martin Luther King Jr.'s bank accounts, but explained that they did not have the information police wanted regarding the accounts of E.D. Nixon and the NAACP.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Charles Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard eds., *Race and Racism in the United States: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO LLC, 2014), 28-29 s.v. "Alabama Council on Human Relations." By Mary Stanton

¹⁸⁷ Mary Stanton, *Journey Toward Justice: Juliette Hampton Morgan and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁸ While there is no evidence that a warrant, subpoena, or any other legal document for the checking of Hughes' bank records, or any records that the police searched in the January 13, 1956 memo, it is possible that the police did in fact obtain a subpoena or a warrant. However while it is possible, the causal consistent nature of the police checking of bank records, suggests that at times the police may not have waited for these official documents to be acquired. It is quite possible that officers, comfortable with the trend of denying or ignoring African Americans rights, did not see any reason to obtain the proper documents necessary for conducting a legal search.

¹⁸⁹ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott" January 13 1956. (RPMA)

Police were quickly placing emphasis upon donations and funds that were held by leadership of the boycott. If they could find the money, they could also find where the money was going. Within the January 13th memo, regarding Hughes' family account information, police reported that, "They now have \$12.00 in the account. The most they have ever had in it was \$339.00 They also have a checking account for the Ala. Council on Human Relations...It now has \$225.00 in it. The most it has ever had in it was \$340.00." The memo similarly explains Dr. King's account balance and the max balance, as well as stating that King primarily deposits small checks. This fixation on the movement of money does not have a clear explanation until later in the memo the police note that the staff at the bank made it known to officers that, "the NAACP had gone to the Bosswell Motor Co. and had put in an order for 12 large station wagons. We checked on this and this Motor Co. has been asked to bid on from six to twelve station wagons, we haven't checked yet but assume that some of the other Motor CO. [sic] has been asked to give a bid also." For the Montgomery officers, the movement of money was tied directly to the acquiring of cars. This became a trend in police searches of bank records, and follow-ups to car dealers and other businesses associated with automobiles. This link led officers to focus on just that: they became obsessed with cars.¹⁹⁰

The MIA was not just content with organizing the carpool and funding it. They continued to purchase vehicles for the carpool throughout the boycott and

¹⁹⁰ The Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott" January 13 1956. (RPMA)

shopped around in search of the best deals that they could get.¹⁹¹ Furthermore they were seemingly always one step ahead of the police. At the mass meetings they knew that police might well try to use the taxi-cab law to go after the boycott and they were correct.

Following their investigation into Robert E. Hughes' private bank accounts the police immediately set to establish what would become the center piece of police activity against the boycott: the regular surveillance campaign and harassment of black drivers. Police placed patrol cars at the stops of the carpools. On January 23, 1956, police pulled over twelve vehicles, all driven by African Americans and packed with African American passengers. They questioned the drivers, took down the make and model and license plates of the cars, recorded the addresses of the drivers and specifically focused on finding out if any passengers were paying for their rides.¹⁹² One driver, David Harris, stated that the only people in the car were his family. This seems a benign inclusion, however this was a common tactic employed by the carpools. In attempts to keep themselves from arousing suspicion or further harassment from the police, carpools often claimed that their passengers were all related to the driver, possibly exploiting racist white perceptions that all African Americans look alike.¹⁹³

In addition to collecting information from cars they pulled over, police also issued numerous tickets to carpools, hoping to financially hurt the boycott, and

¹⁹¹ The Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott" January 23 1956 (RPMA)

¹⁹² The Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott" January 23 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁹³ Interview of John F. Sawyer Jr., *Voices of the Past*, video recording, www.montgomeryboycott.com/john-f-sawyer-jr/

also arrested drivers on unfounded bases. Martin Luther King Jr. explained that police issued drivers with, "...a series of arrests for minor and often imaginary traffic violations. People who had never received a ticket were booked, and on several occasions taken to jail."¹⁹⁴ Jo Ann Robinson further explained that, "many of those policemen would just give hundreds and hundreds of tickets every day to people who were not violating any traffic laws."¹⁹⁵ While this tactic was meant to deter the carpoolers, the MIA countered the police's aggressive ticketing and arrests by using the money they were collecting to aid drivers who received tickets, establishing a budget specifically for "fines and penalties."¹⁹⁶ The ticketing, while certainly another obstacle for the boycotters, would not end the carpool. But the police continued their ticketing and surveillance efforts.

On a nearly daily basis police conducted surveillance at various carpool hubs and, "stopped every car that had a load of negroes."¹⁹⁷ Police were not pulling drivers over because of infractions, not pulling them over for breaking the law, but pulling them over because they were black. By pulling these drivers over police were using the driver's race as reason enough to stop their vehicle and conduct a search. No warrants were issued, and no probable cause established other than the driver's complexion. These cars full of black passengers were a common sight on the streets of Montgomery during the year-long boycott.¹⁹⁸ If the police saw any car full of black people, it was reason enough to pull the car over, check the license of the

¹⁹⁴ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*., 161.

¹⁹⁵ Jo Ann Robinson interview, *Eyes on the Prize*.

¹⁹⁶ Montgomery Improvement Association, "Financial Report" December 19, 1956 (NCSCRAAC)

¹⁹⁷ The Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott" January 23 1956. (RPMA)

¹⁹⁸ Macy, MBBCD

driver, record the license plate number and make and model of the car as well as ask the driver and passengers questions, seeking to gain further information about the carpool. But they couldn't prove that anyone was paying for their rides, and therefore couldn't shut the carpools down. The police lacked the power to stop the carpools, and the carpoolers knew it. The carpoolers consistently based their interactions with the police on the knowledge being fed to them by the NAACP at the mass meetings. They knew not to volunteer information and knew specifically not to let the officers in on how the money got from the MIA to the service stations. Despite being systematically racially profiled, ticketed and fined the drivers and passengers alike kept their composure and did not provide incriminating information to the police.¹⁹⁹ It was a rare moment in Montgomery's history. One in which white supremacy was showing signs of wear. The threat of power slipping through the fingers of white authority pushed police past surveillance and ticketing. They sought legal advice in order to take back the power they were losing, to find or create a means to return to the status quo, before that early December morning when the busses first ran empty of black passengers..

In May of 1956 police met with Mr. Burchfield and Mr. Brooks from the Public Service Commission (PSC), a quasi-official community organization that legally aided in fighting the boycott.²⁰⁰ During this meeting the police recorded that,

¹⁹⁹ The Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Corrected to Negro Boycott (RPMA); The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation" May 1, 1956 (RPMA)

²⁰⁰ The Public Service Commission was an entirely white comprised community service organization that focused on maintaining segregation and white supremacy. Along with the White Citizens Council the PSC fed the police information, raised funds for lawyers, and volunteered general aid to the police and bus lines.

“They stated they were ready to work with us on anything and as long as it took to get the results that we’re after. We talked about these station-wagons that was [sic] being used to haul negro’s back and forth to work.”²⁰¹ The police conducted this outreach as a means of obtaining further information and aid against the boycott. The topic of most interest, as usual for the Montgomery police during 1956, was cars. The police and the members of the Public Service Commission wanted the boycotters out of the station wagons and back onto the buses, but once again they were faced with the reality that they did not hold the legal power to realize this desire. The police explained, “We [the police and PSC members] checked the law books, both city and state and we could not find any law that we could work on unless we could prove that the negro passengers were paying to ride these station wagons.”²⁰² The police were searching for anything they could use to break the boycott. The only law that could conceivably be used against the carpool was that taxicab registration, but police failed thus far to prove the passengers were paying fares. The police were faced with the reality that the black community discovered a means of subverting white authority, white-controlled segregation, and white supremacy and the police had no idea what to do to stop it. Their desperation once again showed as they searched for some form of power they could deploy or exploit to break up the carpools, and it did not matter if the boycott was not breaking any laws. It was as if the police were operating under the assumption that anything that threatened the status quo, anything that could take power out of the hands of white

²⁰¹ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

²⁰² The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

authority, and anything that they just flat out did not like, was therefore illegal, or should be. [In a sense they were operating on the generally accepted notion that the intent of the law can be a guide to interpreting its application to novel situations. In this way their efforts might be read as acknowledging that the intent of the laws in Montgomery were, indeed, to keep blacks suppressed and support white supremacy.] The police refused to accept that power could be taken from them within the system they helped build. The carpool was operating well within the law that had been established, and had for so long helped maintain white supremacy. While boycotters built upon knowledge gained through the experience with jitneys, police clearly had not, however the same tactics used against the jitneys could not succeed against the carpools in large part due to the *Brown v. Board* decision and in part because of the prevalence of the automobile. The cars used in the carpools were, for the majority, unmodified, unlike the jitneys used decades before.

The police did not stop searching for a means to pull the wheels off the carpool, and understood that they were not experts in the field of interpreting laws to repress black power. That was a job for a lawyer. With this in mind police officers accompanied by a member of the PSC, drove to Birmingham to meet with a lawyer named Maurice Bishop.²⁰³ Bishop confirmed the officers' fears explaining that he, "read our [Montgomery's] city code and that he could not find anything in the code that would be of much help."²⁰⁴ The police did not desire to simply enforce the law, rather they hoped to bend the law to their desire. The police whose job is not

²⁰³ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation" May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

²⁰⁴ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation" May 1, 1956. (RPMA)

supposed to entail arresting or fining those they simply wish to, but rather enforce the law and arrest those who break it, once again demonstrated that they viewed their job in other terms. For the police officers in 1956 Montgomery, their job was to maintain white supremacy, and they did not stop trying to do their job. Police officers and Bishop colluded in order to design a means to indirectly keep the carpools from continuing.²⁰⁵ Bishop explained that the “City Commissioners could meet and pass an ordinance requiring any person or person’s using a vehicle to haul more than (5) or more than (6) persons to show proof of a certain amount of liability insurance.”²⁰⁶ Bishop inspired police to look further into insurance as a means of stopping the carpool. If they could revoke the registration of the cars, they in theory could arrest the drivers for operating a vehicle without insurance and thus they in theory could stop the carpool.

The police continued on their quest to end the boycott. Police brought private white businesses into the fold and took an activist stance to end the boycott. Car insurance became part of the focus for police. They met with Richard Hanna, a good friend of one of the police officers who was “connected with the Lawyer’s insurance Co.”²⁰⁷ After talking to Mr. Hanna, police learned that thirteen of the station wagons had insurance policies held by Lawyer’s Insurance Co. Mr. Hanna also informed police that he and the rest of Lawyer’s Insurance Co. would agree to not write any more insurance policies for the station wagons. Not only did Hanna agree to not write any more policies, but he also decided to cancel the existing

²⁰⁵ Bishop agreed to work at length with police, free of charge.

²⁰⁶ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 4, 1956. (RPMA)

²⁰⁷ The Montgomery Police Department “Memo to Capt. Brown: Investigation” May 4, 1956. (RPMA)

policies. Other insurance companies followed suit, and as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, “Insurance agents decided, almost overnight, to refuse to insure out station wagons, contending that the risk was too high. The liability insurance on our station wagons was cancelled no less than four times within four months. (We had no trouble with the collision insurance because it was a negro company.)”²⁰⁸ Clearly money talked in Montgomery, Alabama. Although the Lawyer’s Insurance Co. and other like it were willing to stop issuing and even cancel insurance to the boycotters, they initially seemed to have no problem selling the first policies. It is unlikely that the owners and employees of the companies suddenly changed their feelings about the boycott. What is more likely is that the companies were willing to take anyone’s money for policies, including boycotters who they did not politically agree with. Money was power. African Americans used money to change the rules of social interaction, and as King stated, they drew further power through working with black owned businesses. If the black community brought enough money to the table, some conservative members of the white community were willing to work with them. The police however took an active role in trying to get insurance companies to cease writing policies, which could then provide police with a means to end the boycott. Insurance was necessary for vehicles to legally drive on the streets, and while King was told the policies were cancelled due to the risk being “too high” it is no coincidence that the string of cancellations directly followed the police’s visit to Mr. Hanna. Overnight insurance companies got on board with the police.

²⁰⁸ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 150-151

The carpool was not the only place that the automobile was employed to get black members of Montgomery's community to and from work. Support at times came from white wealthy women, who did not want to lose their black maids and help. Virginia Durr, a rare white supporter of the movement, and friend to many of the boycott's leaders explained, "The mayor of the town issued an order that all black maids must be dismissed in order to break the boycott. Well, their reply was, 'Tell the mayor to come and do my work for me, then.' So white women went and got the black women in the car."²⁰⁹ This was a new twist that neither the mayor, the police, or the leaders of the boycott had seen coming.²¹⁰

During the post-war period of the 1950s consumerism had encouraged households to purchase his and her cars, and now the "her" cars were going downtown and aiding the boycott. White women used their cars to purposefully help themselves, but in turn helped the boycott as well. Loosing household labor was significant enough for some white women to break from the white norm of not assisting African Americans with transportation during the boycott.²¹¹ For African Americans, the motives of the wealthy white women did not matter: these women utilized their cars to bring a new source of transportation to the movement, and used the freedom of their cars to ignore and even challenge prominent male figures' desires. Often the wealthy white women would make excuses for their actions saying, "The bus broke down and there was no other way the help could get

²⁰⁹ Virginia Forster Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985.), 154. One of the few works produced by or about whites in the bus boycott, Durr's memoir serves as a source for historians to understand the bus boycott through the lens of a middle class, white woman who aided the boycott.

²¹⁰ Chappell, *Inside Agitators*, 78.

²¹¹ Chappell, *Stone of Hope*, 145.

here.”²¹² However, these excuses were simply made to save face because according to Jo Ann Robinson, “Not a single maid was riding those buses.”²¹³ Some white women truly did believe these excuses though. Marian Young, a black maid was asked by her white employer in front of Virginia Durr, whether Young or her family had anything to do with the boycott. Young replied that not a single one of them was part of the boycott and didn’t support it. When the employer left, Durr turned to Young and exclaimed that she very well knew just about every one of her family had an active role in the boycott. Young then replied, “Well you know, when you have your hand near the lion’s mouth, its best to just pat the lion on the head. Besides, you know Mrs. Durr, I didn’t want to stop getting rides in that fancy Cadillac.”²¹⁴ These white women were exempt from police surveillance. That fact that their transportation of their black maids was largely self-serving meant that police officers had no reason to stop and harass these white women. Furthermore these women, being part of the white community and typically as Young’s employers was, against the boycott itself, nevertheless their need for black maids outweighed their desire to maintain segregation.

Despite all of the activism, and continued surveillance and harassment of carpoolers, the police could not get the cars off the roads. The boycotters had set up an entirely separate transportation system that was highly organized and arguably more effective than the buses, drawing all of the income generated by black passengers away from the buses, and circulating it back into the black community.

²¹² Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle*, 167.

²¹³ Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, 103.

²¹⁴ Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle*, 157.

The white-owned buses folded eventually because of the financial havoc the boycott was wreaking upon the bus company's profits. Cars in the Montgomery Bus Boycott literally and figuratively carried the movement. Cars were utilized in many ways by many people, ranging from average boycotters to wealthy white housewives, and were the primary reason for the success of the boycott. The financial blow that the cars enabled led to enormous economic incentive to abandon segregation on city buses. Just as the jitneys of the 1910s had, the carpoolers of the boycott proved that cars were a viable and effective way to challenge the status quo of transportation culture.

Browder v Gayle was the final blow to segregation on the Montgomery Bus Lines.²¹⁵ The NAACP successfully petitioned the courts and brought Claudette Colvin's arrest to the federal level when it reached the Supreme Court. Indeed Colvin's refusal to leave her seat did not come without its fruits. Her case was the one that the NAACP worked on to bring to the Supreme Court in part because hers came prior to Rosa Parks' and also being a child going to school made public transportation all the more necessary.²¹⁶ In accord with the *Brown v. Board* decision two years earlier, the court ruled that bus segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment. With a federal ruling that specifically applied to Montgomery bus segregation, along with the Montgomery City Lines' desire to integrate in order to keep the business from filing for bankruptcy, legal segregation officially ended on December 20th 1956. Montgomery's black community filled the seats, both in the

²¹⁵ Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 53.

²¹⁶ Hoose, *Claudette Colvin*, 50-52.

front and back, of the Montgomery City Lines buses. On that day African Americans and whites sat alongside one another and Martin Luther King Jr., who as the president of the MIA newspapers made the figurehead of the boycott, declared the boycott a success.²¹⁷ The boycott officially lasted 381 days surviving police surveillance, mass ticketing, violence and intimidation via the Klan typically in the form of church bombings, mass arrests, and daily challenges too numerous to list. The most important tool that kept the boycott alive was the automobile.

Despite *Browder v. Gayle*, and despite the integration of Montgomery's buses, the struggle wasn't over just because the boycott was over. Montgomery did not suddenly become a paradise of racial understanding and equality. In fact directly following the integration of the buses, Montgomery experienced a spree of seemingly unconnected violent crimes aimed toward buses and black motorists.²¹⁸

On the same day that the supreme court ruling was handed down making bus segregation illegal, B.D. Lambert, a black preacher and active member in the boycott, filed a complaint with the police department alleging that a motorcycle police officer threw acid onto Lambert's brand new 1957 Mercury. Throwing acid on a car does not impinge on the use of the vehicle. It still drives, still turns, still can bring people to and fro. But it does damage the image of the vehicle, and image was a major selling and buying point for the 1957 Mercury. The Lamberts likely held a sense of pride owning brand new Mercury. Cars have long been a status symbol, but they

²¹⁷ "Negroes to Ride Montgomery Buses in Bias Test Today," *New York Times*, December 20, 1956.

²¹⁸ There is little evidence other than police reports and newspaper articles regarding these attacks, none of which give any information regarding the identity of the perpetrators other than that they were white males. In each attack a different number of whites were reported to carry out the assaults, and a variety of weapons and strategies were used pointing to likely unorganized terrorist attacks rather than a connected organization of violent whites.

were even more meaningful in 1956 Montgomery as they were the tools used to work towards equality under the law, and a Mercury was not considered a blue collar car, adding to the sense of accomplishment that likely came with the purchase of the vehicle. The Lamberts were also likely one of the first families to own a 1957 Mercury in Montgomery. The winter of 1956 was the beginning of the new car season, so it is fairly remarkable that the lamberts were able to purchase their car. A 1957 Mercury bears a sense of presence with it's tapered creased fins, skylight dual curve windshield, extra wide chromed grill, push button transmission, projectile side theme, large dual squared bumpers, v-angle tail-lights.²¹⁹ The thing was sleek. And the Lamberts' mercury was now marred.

The police went to Lambert's house, inspected the car finding that some substance had ruined the paint on a portion of the car, questioned the Lamberts and then dropped the case with no further investigation.²²⁰ While it may never be known whether an officer actually did such an act, it is difficult to conceive of a reason Lambert would make up such a tale. Assuming that the report was truthful, the idea that the same day that control over black mobility was taken away from the Montgomery City Council the police retaliated on a citizen in such a way demonstrates the clear frustration that came along with the loss of authority on the police's part, and cars were clearly still seen as a source of power and as a symbol of African Americans' success.

²¹⁹"Straight out of Tomorrow 1957 Mercury with Dream-Car Desgin." Mercury Brochure www.oldcarbrochures.com/static/NA/Mercury/1957%20Mercury/1957_Mercury_Foldout/1957%20Mercury%20Foldout-01.html

²²⁰ Assistant Chief H.E. Jackson to Chief G.J. Ruppenthal, "Acid Thrown on Car" December 18, 1956. (RPMA)

Days following the acid incident another act of aggression and violence targeted black motorists. On December 24th following the first integrated busing in Montgomery, Henry Jackson Sr. and his family, while driving home from picking their son up from jail, were engaged by two cars full of angry, armed, violent white males. Jackson was forced by gunpoint to pull the car over and then his daughter-in-law was dragged from the car and beaten as the fourteen white men brandished pistols and shotguns repeatedly threatening Jackson and the other black men in the car. One of the white men then yelled, "You niggers can't ride the bus with the white folks and you can't ride a car around here." Jackson was then struck over the head opening a cut and the family fled.²²¹ The law and police failed to keep segregation on the buses, so those prejudiced whites who refused to accept the supreme court ruling took matters into their own hands. These fourteen men believed that the status quo of white supremacy gave them authority to intimidate and attack African Americans in the pursuit of preserving that same white supremacy. Following the end of the boycott and carpool, cars were still seen by both the black and white community as objects of power, a perception cultivated nationally by automobile advertising.²²² The threat of violence to black automobile drivers specifically signifies that these white men, in attempting to preserve white power and white supremacy, sought to take the power of the automobile away from the black community. Furthermore they clearly demonstrated their desire to maintain segregation and even bring it to a higher level on the buses and affirmed that if the

²²¹ Montgomery Police Department "Supplementary Police Report: Henry Jackson" December 25, 1956. (RPMA)

²²² Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 69-70.

law would not enforce segregation they would use violence to do so. These men did not contend that African Americans could not sit where they pleased on the buses, they demanded that they not use the buses at all. While the buses had been virtually white only for an entire year, it was by black choice and design. In this case the violent whites were now attempting to bar African Americans from the space of the bus entirely. They wanted to maintain the absence of African Americans on the buses, but wanted to do so on their own terms, not on those of the black community. Violence was going to be their tool to reestablish white supremacy on the buses. Violence was going to be the tool with which the whites attempted to reclaim authority over black mobility, over mental, social, and physical space. Similar white reactions proved again and again to be a prominent factor in Montgomery in the following days, weeks, and months.²²³

Violent attacks escalated quickly. On December 26th, following the Jackson's assault gunshots rang out on the streets of Montgomery two times, all directed toward the buses. The first of these came from a shotgun that shattered a bus window while the bus was in operation.²²⁴ Behind that window was a young black girl whose name is unknown. While the bus driver, a white man named H.L. Warren, asked that all four of the black passengers on the bus write their names down so they could be contacted later, all refused. This is likely due to the fear and distrust of

²²³ W.A. Gayle, Letter to J.H. Bagley, March 14, 1956, J.H. Bagley Papers (ADAH)

²²⁴ Montgomery Police Department, "Supplementary Offense Report: H.L. Warren" December 26, 1956. (RPMA)

the police created in part by the year-long police campaign against the carpool. For the black citizens of Montgomery, it was clear which side the police were on, still.²²⁵

The next attack came two days after.²²⁶ Another shooting at another bus; this time someone was actually shot.²²⁷ Rosa Jordan, a 22 year old black woman was shot in the legs while eight months pregnant.²²⁸ Jordan could not have the bullet removed for over a month, as it was deemed too dangerous for her to have the surgery to extract the bullet. This was again an act of violence that was in direct retaliation to the bus boycott. The most extreme of the white segregationists were those willing to shoot at buses and bomb churches. These were more than just acts of violence. They were acts of terror. The goal of shooting a bus was to terrorize African Americans into not riding the buses at all. The whites went from trying to force the black community back onto the buses, to trying to force them off. When the law no longer provided whites the legal authority to dictate the racial division of space, they attempted to do so through raw power, through violent acts of terrorism. And under the correct assumption that white power still reigned

²²⁵ This is not to say that all black people in Montgomery feared and distrusted the police. The Jackson's went to the police and filed a complaint after the assault. B.D. Lampert filed a complaint following the acid incident. However nothing was done about either case, and it is likely that after the police campaign to keep African Americans from subverting the buses, large portions of the black community did not believe the police would aid them in any way. The fact that these four passengers refused to even give their names indicated that there existed a fear in making themselves known to the police.

²²⁶ Fannie Curtis, "Police Report" December 28, 1956. (RPMA)

²²⁷ Montgomery Police Department, "Supplementary Offense Report: Mr. W.H. Fullilove" December 31, 1965. (RPMA)

²²⁸ Montgomery Police Department, "Supplementary Offense Report: Rosa Jordan" December 31, 1965. (RPMA)

supreme, no arrests were ever made in connection to such retaliatory acts of terrorism.²²⁹

Attacks continued on the buses in the form of sniper campaigns, and violence in Montgomery escalated with numerous bombings of black churches. Roughly two months following *Browder v Gayle*, in a letter drafted to the President Eisenhower, black leadership in the south requested the President to come to the south and give, “A major speech in a major southern city urging all southerners to abide by the Supreme Court’s decision as the law of the land.”²³⁰ The leaders justified their request explaining:

In Alabama Christian Churches literally have been destroyed by dynamite and T.N.T. Numerous individuals including women have been beaten on the streets. The homes of Negro leaders have been bombed. Men and women, black and white, sitting in buses peacefully have been targeted by snipers. A fortnight ago a 15 year old girl was brutally beaten. A few days ago the legs of a woman 8 months pregnant were shattered by a gun...A state of terror prevails.²³¹

²²⁹ It is important to note that several of these violent acts are mentioned in Branch, *Parting the Waters*, but in little detail. Branch does not establish the terror campaign that swept through Montgomery. I seek to extend Branch’s work here and apply it directly to the automobile. Violence was predominantly aimed at vehicles of mobility, and Branch does not fully develop the meaning of this violence, rather uses it as anecdotes to show that things were not simply over following the integration of buses in Montgomery. Branch, 154.

²³⁰ M.L. King Jr., C.K. Steele, F.L. Shuttlesworth, and T.J. Jemison to President Eisenhower, “Extreme Violence Continues” January 11, 1957 in Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shardon, and Kieran Taylor eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV: A Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 100.

²³¹ M.L. King Jr., C.K. Steele, F.L. Shuttlesworth, and T.J. Jemison to President Eisenhower, “Extreme Violence Continues” January 11, 1957 in *The Papers of Martin Luther King Jr., Volume IV: A Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, 99.

The leaders sought out a higher authority to reestablish law. This spree of violence, along with the need to appeal to the president, further indicated that the segregationists' saw white supremacy as more powerful than the law. The word spree is specifically relevant here. The immediate and intense nature of these violent attacks cannot be overstated. These were acts of terror directly related to the legal and active success of the boycott. While intimidation and bombings did occur during the boycott, the violence had not been this extreme, routine and severe. These acts were directly correlated to the Supreme Court decision and the integration of the buses. The buses for an entire year were devoid of black faces, and while integration became law, the actual space of the bus and segregation of that space did not experience drastic change.

Violence continued in Montgomery even after the pleas to Eisenhower. On April 16th, 1957 Montgomery police officers responded to a call regarding a fight on a bus. When officers arrived they discovered that a white man named James Brice attacked four black teenage girls with a wrench after demanding that one of the teenagers, Josephine Boldin "get her black ass back to where she belongs"²³² Brice then engaged in a "tussle" with Annie Burch, one of the other teenagers, hitting her in the head with the wrench and wrestling on the bus floor.²³³ After falling out the front of the bus, Brice stood and shouted, "I should go get my gun and kill all you dam [sic] niggers."²³⁴ When the police arrived on the scene, Brice was the only member of the fight still present. Police took his story down, which left out attacking

²³² Annie Burch, "Witness Testimonial Statement," April 16th 1957. (RPMA)

²³³ Johnnie Mae Eaves, "Witness Testimonial Statement," April 16th 1957. (RPMA)

²³⁴ Josephine Boldin, "Witness Testimonial Statement," April 16th 1957. (RPMA)

the girls with a wrench and threatening to kill them, and issued warrants for the arrest of the teenagers. Upon taking the girls' testimonies though it became clear that Brice was not providing the full truth as all four girls provided similar testimonies. Space was clearly still being contested on the buses of Montgomery, however an important change took place, the officers no longer bore the power to arrest the four teenage girls for sitting wherever they pleased. Unlike Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, the girls were not violating any part of the law, and while James Brice was not content with their seating arrangements, the police could do nothing to stop them. Segregation, at times, however did continue in a more subtle form.

After the boycott, while the Supreme Court decision made forced segregation illegal, in practice segregation was still alive, but only by the choice of Montgomery's citizens. Bus driver H.L. Warren explained that in practice, the African American passengers sat in the back while the white passengers sat in the front.²³⁵ Again in the initial report regarding Rosa Jordan's shooting the driver of that bus, W.H. Fullilove, made it clear that black passengers were in the back of the bus while white passengers took up the spaces in the front.²³⁶ Legal integration clearly was not equal to racial cohesion. The report filed by H.L. Warren was the first reported physical attack on buses, and the fact that he reported that all the African American passengers sat in the back while whites sat in the front suggests that perhaps some of those black passengers were not segregating out of fear but rather something

²³⁵ Montgomery Police Department, "Supplementary Offense Report: H.L. Warren" December 26, 1956. (RPMA)

²³⁶ Montgomery Police Department, "Supplementary Offense Report: Mr. W.H. Fullilove" December 31, 1956. (RPMA)

else. Perhaps they did not wish to sit with the whites who so strongly opposed integration. Clearly race was still a strong dividing line. African Americans and whites were choosing to separate themselves on the buses, but held the power to make that choice. It is this power to choose that so agitated white segregationists as is evident through the police officer's desperate attempts to get African Americans back onto the buses during the boycott. Police did not want African Americans opting out of segregation as dictated by whites. They previously held authority over space and ordained where was acceptable for African Americans and where was not. Montgomery was not the last instance of whites attempting to maintain this authority and was not the last civil rights battleground that thrust the automobile onto the frontlines, however it was a moment when the strategy to resist the civil rights movement, and the strategy to regulate black behavior changed. It was a moment when lynchings were largely left behind, when police incorporated new strategies of engaging black motorists. It was the moment that "driving while black" became an informal offense, one that police continued to use as reason enough to pull over black motorists.

“What went through my mind was I felt like I was in the ‘40s or the ‘50s”

—Rodney King

Epilogue

The story of the Civil Rights movement is akin to a game of tug of war; a continuous and fluid give and take that saw power gained and lost by black communities and individuals. Following the integration of Montgomery buses the carpool system dissipated despite the fact that it was more efficient for Montgomery’s black citizens than the buses ever were. But efficient transportation was not the primary goal of the MIA, of Rosa Parks, Claudette Colvin, E.D. Nixon, Martin Luther King, the carpools, or any of those involved in the boycott. Their goal was equality. Similarly as segregation laws lost power over spaces of public transportation across the country, so too vanished the organized pooling of automobiles as a means of challenging white supremacy. Public transportation largely dissipated from the fight for civil rights, and while the freedom riders certainly tackled issues of transportation, they were aimed at interstate bus laws. The strategy chosen was to break the state laws and test the will of the Kennedy administration to enforce federal court rulings, driving integrated buses through the South. Carpools were not necessary, nor a viable means for challenging the laws as those riding the integrated buses did so voluntarily, and did not actually need to use interstate busing as a means of transportation. Unlike the community of Montgomery, it was not necessary to the riders’ daily lives to ride the buses across state lines. They did so purely to fight segregation, not establish a better system that they themselves would continue to regularly use.

Civil Rights Activists lost the need for black run carpools, as they turned their attention away from public transportation and towards other spaces controlled by whites such as public education.²³⁷ Integrating Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas could not be done through mass automobile action. While cars could get the nine black children to school in relative safety, they could not keep the children safe once inside the physical space of the school.²³⁸ Likewise carpools could not theoretically aid those who marched from Selma to Montgomery in protest of Jimmy Lee Jackson's slaying and the general lack of black voting rights. The power gained through that march was specifically drawn from the marching; from the difficulty of walking the fifty miles through the contested space of rural Alabama.²³⁹ The act of walking specifically meant something there. Carpools did not provide aid to those fighting for civil rights in schools and polling stations and two factors best explain this: the aforementioned lack of further issues pertaining to the pairing of segregation and public transportation, and the individualization of black car culture.

When Montgomery police pulled over black drivers, they did so by targeting a group, yet they questioned individuals and made individuals stop their

²³⁷ Schools are of particular interest as moderate whites in the 1970s found the idea of governmental control over where they could and could not school their children to be the mobilizing reason for moderate white resistance to integration as pointed out in Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.) Indeed whites seemed to largely ignore the inherent irony in using the control over where their children went to school to deny African Americans the freedom to break free from segregated school, spaces that the government, both state and municipal, dictated acceptable or unacceptable for black children.

²³⁸A station wagon was the primary mode of transportation that got the nine children to school the first week, but eventually due to mass hostility from whites, the 101st airborne division was called in to escort the children to and within the school. Armed soldiers ensured the relative safety of the children, and their authority and weapons were largely what maintained that insurance. Mass carpooling could not provide that same level of safety once the children were inside the space of the school walls.

²³⁹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 361.

automobiles. The automobile, by design, is geared toward individuality.²⁴⁰ An individual drives the car; an individual or at most a small group of individuals use the space within the vehicle while in operation, and police simply could not pull over a group of cars in any meaningful way.²⁴¹ In this manner the car also became an extension of one's individuality. Throughout the twentieth century African Americans used cars and customization to express their own individuality, but also to create a visual representation of their existence.

While the black citizens of Montgomery successfully forced (largely through the efficient carpool system) the desegregation of the buses, they simultaneously made the car a symbol toward which whites and police could direct their anger and hatred. There is perhaps no better illustration of this than the incident of the motorcycle officer throwing acid on Reverend Lambert's brand new Mercury.²⁴² Cars were given a deeper symbol of freedom by the boycotters, and also became a physical target for white frustration. Similarly, with the collapse of segregated transportation, black motorists became the subjects of directed white irritation as Montgomery officers continued to pull over black motorists for being black and driving cars.²⁴³

Throughout the boycott police officers in Montgomery self reported pulling over black drivers due to their race, explicitly stating that they pulled over any cars "hauling negroes," however the admittance of this practice existing was a rarity

²⁴⁰ John Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life* (New York: McFarland, 2009), 4.

²⁴¹ Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 134.

²⁴² Assistant Chief H.E. Jackson to Chief G.J. Ruppenthal, "Acid Thrown on Car" December 18, 1956. (Rosa Parks Museum Archive)

²⁴³ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Capt. Brown: Black Motorists" May 15, 1957. (RPMA)

following the Civil Rights Movement, and it is often difficult to demonstrate that any traffic stop was solely based on race.²⁴⁴ Regardless of the difficulty one does not have to look too hard to see that a pattern of police behavior emerged, and continues in present day. Montgomery police officers did not try to hide the fact that a black driver's blackness was, in their minds, enough to justify pulling the driver over, recording their license, address, make and model of the car, questioning them and often times ticketing the driver and or placing them under arrest.²⁴⁵ This behavior became commonplace. And reactions to it could turn violent.

In 1967 after a string of riots, the largest of which took place in Detroit, Michigan, President Lyndon B. Johnson established the Kerner Commission, led by Governor Otto Kerner Jr. of Illinois, and charged it with the task of determining the underlying causes of the riots. The Kerner Commission interviewed over 130 people and one of the most common complaints among the testimonials was police abuse of power, specifically, "the stoppage of Negroes on foot or in cars without obvious basis."²⁴⁶ Police harassment was certainly nothing new, but stopping black drivers for being black was one of the latest evolutions in police regulation of black behavior.

The commission did not address police traffic stops in their recommendations.²⁴⁷ The commission did however address rampant racism across the country stating, "Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a

²⁴⁴ Montgomery Police Department, "Memo to Solicitor Thetford: Investigation of the Boycott" January 4, 1956. (RPMA)

²⁴⁵ The Montgomery Police Department "Memo to Solicitor Thetford" January 16th 1956. (RPMA)

²⁴⁶ Kerner Commission "Report on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders," 1968.

²⁴⁷ Kerner Commission Report, 402.

destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans.”²⁴⁸ The report continued explaining, “What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society, is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it and white society condones it.”²⁴⁹ The white maintenance and condoning of systems that generate poverty among certain African American communities are behaviors that still need addressing. Racialized traffic stops, and violent racist dealings with African American motorists did not subside following the turbulent 60s, and riots continued to be a common response. Also continued was the “breaking up of street groups, indiscriminate stops and searches [which] is frequently directed at youths, creating special tensions in the ghetto where the average age is generally under 21.”²⁵⁰ It is of little wonder then why African American males under the age of twenty-one disproportionately make up the prison population. They are pulled over at higher rates, questioned at higher rates, and detained at higher rates so it should be no question then as to why they are convicted at higher rates.²⁵¹ The automobile continued to be a space in which African Americans found themselves at the mercy of police action.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Kerner Commission Report, 301

²⁴⁹ Kerner Commission Report, 301-302

²⁵⁰ Kerner Commission Report, 303.

²⁵¹ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 5.

²⁵² Of what little has been written on racial profiling, David A. Harris, *Profiles in Injustice: Why Racial Profiling Cannot Work* (New York: The New Press, 2002) is perhaps the best place to start for anyone seeking to learn more on the subject. While Harris’ work is meant to meet the arguments for racial profiling head on, rather than provide an in depth history on the subject, but Harris does provide some contextual detail that historians of race will find illuminating and a fantastic place to begin any work on the subject. Furthermore much more research can be done in finding early cases of racial

On March 3, 1991 Rodney King, a taxi driver in Los Angeles was driving home after drinking beers and watching a basketball game with friends. King was followed by police officers and attempted to evade them after they signaled for King to pull over. King led officers on a high-speed chase, and after being cornered, King and the other passengers were ordered out of the car. King's passengers, Bryant Allen and Freddie Helms, were manhandled, racially taunted, kicked and stomped. King, with his hands up, was tazed by officers twice and then beaten by officers who kicked him and used batons to strike him multiple times.²⁵³ The majority of the attack was caught on camera by George Holiday, who upon seeing the incident from his house, grabbed his camera and filmed as five officers struck King over and over with their batons. The shaky, low-resolution video clearly shows officers hitting King in the legs, torso, back and head, while also repeatedly kicking King who slowly rolled on the ground. King was then placed in handcuffs, dragged to the side of the road, and finally put in the backseat of a patrol car.²⁵⁴

King never demonstrated any resistance once emerging from the police car. Police never successfully documented any initial reason for attempting to pull King over in the first place, and while it was later discovered that King was in fact inebriated, officers were not aware of this while in pursuit of King. The officers that initially tried to pull King over explained that King was slightly speeding, although they had no evidence to substantiate their claims. He was yet another black driver

profiling which was largely unreported by newspapers until the late 1980s and early 1990s. Likely oral history will play a major role in uncovering these stories.

²⁵³ "Passenger Describes L.A. Police Department Beating of Driver, Calls it Racial," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1991.

²⁵⁴ George Holiday, "Rodney King Beating Video" www.rodnykingvideo.com accessed May 14, 2015.

pulled over for “suspicious behavior” which more often than not should be read as “being black.” King and his automobile, like the automobiles and carpoolers in 1956 Montgomery, was guilty of driving while black.

The video was shown to the public by numerous television news stations, and resulted in the officers being brought to trial. The trial took place over a year after King’s beating and resulted in the exoneration of the five officers that beat King, sparking a wave of violence and riots in Los Angeles and surrounding areas, as well as some other major cities across the country.²⁵⁵ It was a rare moment. The beating of a black motorist was not a novel occurrence, nor were riots caused by racial tension, but Holiday’s capturing of the incident on film certainly was uncommon and placed police misconduct on national television showing the American public what the ramification can be for being black and driving an automobile.²⁵⁶

The phenomenon of “driving while black” is much more commonplace than headlines of it are. In fact the practice is treated as a fact of life that African Americans are forced to live with. In a 1999 issue of *Ebony*, journalist Joy Bennett Kinnon tried to explain a wave of attacks on black motorists at the hands of police

²⁵⁵ Robert D. McFadden, “Riots in Los Angeles: Eruption; Some Violence on the Streets of New York,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1992.

²⁵⁶This points to another drastically important technological system in the history of black motorists’ encounters with police, and encounters with police in general: the handheld video camera. While it is not within the scope of this study to delve deeper into the ramifications of the mass distribution and consumption of handheld video cameras in American society (both black and white) it is a nonetheless a significant development in American culture and society, particularly in African American culture as nearly every modern reported police beating or shooting of African Americans that makes its way into mass news media is accompanied by film footage often recorded by the cellphones of onlookers. With widespread video coverage, abuses of power are continually being caught on tape, and thus hard evidence can be brought against the officers involved, seen by the American public, and credibility can be given to the claims of widespread racism.

officers, and included in the article a short public service announcement entitled, “What To Do If You Are Caught Driving While Black.”²⁵⁷ The suggestions were however not Kinnon’s creation but rather were produced by the NAACP, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), and Allstate Insurance Foundation. Kinnon explained that the three organizations produced a pamphlet aimed at instructing, “young Blacks on their rights and how to avoid a situation that could escalate into brutality.”²⁵⁸ The suggestions include eight separate steps that include overtly calm and “polite” behavior, carrying a lawyer’s phone number, and consistent direct communication of one’s actions with the police. These are words that African American motorists must live by if they want to decrease their chances of violent altercations with police when in the midst of a traffic stop. These are not just unspoken rules, but now published guidelines that dictate social interaction, and are signifiers of minority motorists’ lack of power to change those rules. The fact that the NAACP, NOBLE, and particularly Allstate produced this pamphlet speaks to the pervasive nature of racism dictating the interaction of minority traffic stops. While NOBLE and the NAACP both focus their efforts on African American social issues, Allstate Insurance does not make a habit of addressing racism on the road. It is a sign that the company acknowledged that “driving while black” was significantly affecting a large portion of those insured by the company, and Allstate wanted those customers to know they were aware of the

²⁵⁷ Joy Bennett Kinnon, “DWB, Driving While Black: What’s Behind The Wave Of Attacks On Black Motorists?,” *Ebony*, September 1999, 66.

²⁵⁸ Kinnon, “DWB, Driving While Black: What’s Behind The Wave Of Attacks On Black Motorists?,” 66.

practice and wanted to help assuage interactions between minority motorists and police.

Kinnon supplements the list ending the article with a quote from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stating, “No person of color is safe from this treatment anywhere, regardless of their obedience to the law, their age, the type of car they drive or their station in life. In short skin color has become evidence of the propensity to commit crime, and police use this ‘evidence’ against minority drivers on the road all the time.”²⁵⁹ The ACLU was well aware that minorities and whites operated under different social rules when interacting with police while on the road. The ACLU explicitly stated how often race was used as the motivating factor for traffic stops and ensuing brutality. With the advent of video cameras nearly everywhere, it is no surprise that the American media increasingly found stories and footage of the unfolding of “driving while black” instances. Indeed “waves” (as Kinnon called it) of these cases continued to be thrust into headlines.

One of the latest cases of driving while black thrown to the front of media headlines came in April of 2015 when Walter Scott an African American motorist was stopped in his 1991 Mercedes by North Charleston police officer Michael Slager for having his vehicle exhibiting a broken taillight. While broken taillights are not cause enough to make a traffic stop in North Charleston, South Carolina, officer Slager signaled Scott to pull over. Scott, who was heading to an auto parts store to fix his taillight, fled his vehicle after Slager’s initial contact.²⁶⁰ An onlooker captured

²⁵⁹ Kinnon, “DWB, Driving While Black: What’s Behind The Wave Of Attacks On Black Motorists?,” 66.

²⁶⁰ “White South Carolina Policeman Charged With Murdering Black Man,” *The New York Times*, April 7, 2015.

the event that followed on camera through the use of his smartphone. The video shows Scott running from Slager, and then the officer shooting Scott in the back eight times. Following the shooting, the officer can be seen calling the incident in, and while other officers arrive on scene, Slager drops a gun shaped object onto the body of Michael Scott.²⁶¹ Slager later claimed that Scott attempted to grab the tazer secured on Slager's belt, however in the video it appears as though the officer drops the tazer onto Scott's body after shooting Scott and placing him in handcuffs.²⁶² Scott was yet another victim guilty of driving while black, and Slager yet another officer who, because of Scott's skin color, chose to pull a black driver over. This is the pattern that can be seen amongst the traffic stops in Montgomery during the boycott, the stop of King, and countless other cases since the bus boycott: black drivers pulled over, and the encounter ranging from minor secondary charges to police shootings of the driver. The pattern continues.

While it is certainly not the historian's job to predict or create solutions for the problems that grip the past, and often the present, there is one suggestion that must be made. The United States would do well to remember the advice given by the Kerner Commission. To deny the existence of widespread cyclical patterns and presences of racism is to deny history. Too often are repudiations of racial problems heard through the halls of even the highest learning institutions and from those with the highest degrees in their field. Racism today exists in more subtle forms than in the early twentieth century. It is not as blatantly obvious as a streetcar operator

²⁶¹ "Video Shows Fatal Police Shooting," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2015.

²⁶² "White South Carolina Policeman Charged With Murdering Black Man," *The New York Times*, April 28, 2015.

abusing black passengers while yelling racial epithets; not as obvious as a bus driver demanding that black passengers move to the back of the bus. Instead it goes unsaid and unpronounced. It is no longer as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, “dripping” from southern mouths.²⁶³ Instead it can be heard muffled through words like “thug” and “hoodlum.” In the wake of the riots that broke out in Baltimore in April of 2015, in an interview on CNN, Baltimore City Councilman Carl Stokes voiced his frustration over hidden yet ubiquitous racism explaining, “Of course its not the right word to call our children thugs. These are children who have been set aside, marginalized, who have not been engaged by us. No we do not have to call them thugs....So calling them thugs, just call them niggers.”²⁶⁴ Similarly it is unlikely that police officers make conscious decisions based upon race when pulling over automobiles operated by African Americans, however racial bias and tension is still at play.

In 1956 Montgomery, it was clear that officers thought, “they are black, I will pull them over,” but as time progressed the word black became substituted for the word suspicious in justifying police interactions with black motorists. Often racism has bled unknowingly into individual and communal perceptions of people and cultures, and there become two victims of racism: those who it is directed at, and those who fall prey to its grip. Rarely are children raised as they once were to consciously hate African Americans. Instead racism is passed on through depictions in the media, through honest misconceptions about groups of people, through

²⁶³ Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream Speech” Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963.

²⁶⁴ Carl Stokes, interview by Erin Burnett, CNN, April 28, 2015.

subtlety.²⁶⁵ The Subject of race makes people afraid, but it cannot be avoided. It has not died off due to ignoring it.

The story of black automobility is an unfinished one, with much left to uncover and still much more to be written, however from the pieces known, knowledge can be gleaned. Through pooling resources African Americans gained an immense amount of power found in the changing of social rules of interaction. African American jitney owners and operators forced jitney corporations and white supremacists to restructure laws, and however brief, provided African Americans a viable option for avoiding the hostile spaces of segregated public transportation. Black carpoolers through constructing an efficient means of boycotting the segregated buses similarly established a system that empowered black passengers, drivers, business owners, and laborers. The carpools were the key to changing the rules that regulated the social life of public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama. Unknowingly they also changed the rules that established social interactions between black motorists and police; rules that still linger. As is all too common though, there are still many gaps to be filled. The job of the historian is yet again unfinished, and this study is merely a mile marker. The intersection of race and the technological system of the automobile is an important one, with long lasting impacts across a range of cultural and social understandings and just as the automobile has been a tool in reshaping the physical, economic, political, and cultural structures of the world, it has similarly reshaped the many nuances of racial interactions.

²⁶⁵ Dr. Neal Lester, interview by Wilbert L. Cooper, Vice News, March 22, 2015.

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