

5 Dec
1955Minutes of Montgomery Improvement
Association Founding Meeting, by U. J. Fields5 December 1955
Montgomery, Ala.

The one-day bus boycott on Monday, 5 December, exceeded the organizers' expectations. Only a few black passengers rode the buses. That morning, after her brief trial at the city recorder's court, Judge John B. Scott found Rosa Parks guilty of violating the state segregation law and fined her fourteen dollars. Attorney Fred D. Gray appealed the verdict to the state's court of appeals.¹ That afternoon, Montgomery's black leaders gathered at Rev. L. Roy Bennett's Mt. Zion AME Zion Church to plan the evening mass meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church. A smaller group withdrew to Bennett's study and, as these minutes by Rev. U. J. Fields indicate, created an organization called the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA).² Rufus A. Lewis, a businessman and active member of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, moved that his pastor become chairman,³ and King was elected without opposition. After choosing other officers and forming committees, the group "agreed that the protest be continued until conditions are improved" and decided on the agenda for that evening's mass meeting.

1. Fred David Gray (1930–), a native of Montgomery, was one of two black lawyers in the city. He earned his B.A. from Alabama State College (1951) and his LL.B. (1954) from Ohio's Case Western Reserve University. Ordained as a teenager, Gray ministered to the Holt Street Church of Christ during the boycott. After he filed a federal suit challenging the constitutionality of the bus segregation laws, the local draft board reclassified Gray's exempt status as a minister and ordered him to report for induction into the armed services. The situation was resolved only after the director of the Selective Service intervened, indefinitely postponing Gray's induction. Gray served as a lawyer for both the local branch and the state conference of the NAACP and for the Montgomery Progressive Democratic Association. Gray later wrote an account of the boycott titled *Bus Ride to Justice* (1994).

2. L. Roy Bennett, pastor of Mt. Zion AME Zion Church, was president of Montgomery's black Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. On the day after Parks's arrest he had chaired a meeting of ministers and other leaders at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to plan the one-day boycott. He was also among the ministers indicted for participating in the boycott. During the boycott Bennett was called to the First AME Zion Church in San Francisco, where he served until 1965.

Uriah J. Fields (1930–), born in Sunflower, Alabama, served as a chaplain's assistant in the army during the Korean War. He received his B.A. (1955) and M.Ed. (1956) from Alabama State College and his M.Div. (1959) from Atlanta's Interdenominational Theological Center. Inspired by Montgomery leader E. D. Nixon's campaign for a local office, Fields ran successfully for student body president of Alabama State in 1954. When the boycott began Fields was interim pastor of Bell Street Baptist Church. He later published *The Montgomery Story: The Unhappy Effects of the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (1959).

3. Rufus Andrews Lewis (1906–), born in Montgomery, graduated from Fisk University. A librarian and athletic coach at Alabama State College from the mid-1930s to 1941, he later taught World War II veterans in night school. In 1958, after his wife's death, Rufus began operating her family's company, Montgomery's largest black funeral business. A member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the NAACP, Lewis organized the Citizens Club, a social club that provided voter registration assistance and required members to be registered voters. Lewis also headed the Citizens Education Committee and traveled throughout Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi training voter registration workers. During the Montgomery bus boycott he headed the MIA's transportation committee and co-chaired its committee on registration and voting.

A group of 18 persons met at the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Zion Church at 3 P.M.
Officers were elected:

5 Dec
1955

Chairman—Rev. M. L. King
Vice Chairman—Rev. Roy Bennett
Recording Sec.—Rev. U. J. Fields
Corresponding Sec.—Rev. E. N. French⁴
Financial Sec.—Mrs. Erna Dungee⁵
Treasurer—E. D. Nixon⁶

NAME

The Montgomery Improvement Association

Moved and second that the 16 persons here and a suggestion that 9 names be brought in making 25 which constitute the Executive Committee

It was recommended that resolutions would be drawn up.

Resolution Committee & Recommendations

Rev. Abernathy⁷ Chairman
Rev Alford
Mr Gray

4. Edgar Nathaniel French (1921–1979), born in Mount Gilead, North Carolina, received his B.A. from Livingstone College, M.Div. from Hood Theological Seminary, and M.A. from Columbia University. During the bus boycott French served as pastor of Hilliard Chapel AME Zion Church in Montgomery and was a member of the NAACP. He was indicted for his participation in the boycott. He later served as dean of Livingstone College and pastor of Trinity AME Zion Church in Greensboro, North Carolina.

5. Erna A. Dungee (ca. 1909–1984) was born in rural Alabama. She moved to Montgomery in the 1920s and graduated from the Montgomery Industrial Schools and Alabama State College. After teaching for several years in rural black schools she married Dr. A. C. Dungee, participated in voter registration efforts in the 1930s and 1940s, and helped found the Women's Political Council. A member of the local NAACP, she served on the MIA's finance committee.

6. Edgar Daniel Nixon (1899–1987) was born in Lowndes County, Alabama. As a Pullman porter (1923–1964) based in Montgomery, Nixon organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' local union and served for many years as its president. His union experience, his involvement in the March on Washington movement of the 1940s, and his observations of nonsegregated facilities inspired his fight for racial equality in Montgomery. He served terms as president of both the state and Montgomery NAACP and organized voting drives. After bailing Rosa Parks out of jail on 1 December, Nixon organized the meeting the next day of the city's black leadership that endorsed the one-day boycott. His union contacts and organizing ability helped the MIA raise thousands of dollars in support of the boycott. Nixon was among the black leaders indicted for violating Alabama's antiboycott law.

7. Ralph David Abernathy (1926–1990), born in Linden, Alabama, was chair of the MIA executive committee and was among the ministers indicted for their role in the boycott. He also chaired the MIA's program and public relations committees, co-chaired the committee to establish a bank and savings association, and was a member of the strategy committee. He assumed leadership of the MIA (1960–1961) when King became co-pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. Abernathy served as pastor of Montgomery's First Baptist Church (1952–1961) and then of Atlanta's West Hunter Street Baptist Church (1961–1990). Upon the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 Abernathy became secretary-treasurer and took over as president following King's death in 1968, in which capacity he served until 1977. He later wrote an autobiography, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (1989).

5 Dec
1955

Mr. Nixon
Rev. Glasco⁸

The president, Rev. M. L. King, attorney Gray and attorney Langford is on the committee.⁹ The program would be tape recorded at its Holt Street Baptist Church.

It was agreed that the protest be continued until conditions are improved.

Transportation Committee

Finance

It was passed that the recommendations from the committee be given to the citizens at the night meeting.

AGENDA

1. Opening Hymn Onward Christian Soldier
2. Prayer—Rev Alford¹⁰
3. Scripture Rev. Fields
4. Occassion—Rev. King
 Presentation of Mrs. Parks—Rev. French
 Fred [*Daniels*]
5. Resolutions—Rev. Abernathy
 Vote on Recomendations
6. Offering—Rev Bonner¹¹
7. Closing Hymn—My Country Tis of Thee
8. Benediction—Rev. Roy Bennett

TD. AAGR-A-Ar: Box SG 8423.

8. Roseby James Glasco, Sr. (1916–1986), born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, earned his B.S. (1939) from Tuskegee Institute, B.D. (1941) from American Baptist Theological Seminary, and M.Th. (1951) from Central Baptist Theological Seminary. A member of the NAACP, Glasco served as director of the Alabama Negro Baptist Center (1951–1957) and as pastor of First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Alabama (1953–1957). During the boycott he was an officer of the transportation committee, chaired the MIA's finance committee, served as secretary of its housing committee, and was a member of the committee on registration and voting. When the MIA hired a staff to run the office, Glasco became King's executive secretary. He was also among the indicted boycott leaders. He left Montgomery in 1957 to continue his work in religious education at churches in Kansas City and St. Louis. He was pastor of Mount Bethel Baptist Church in St. Louis from 1967 until his death.

9. Charles D. Langford (1922–), born in Montgomery, received his B.A. (1948) from Tennessee State University and his LL.B. (1952) and J.D. (1967) from Catholic University of America. Langford and Fred D. Gray provided legal services to King and the MIA until 1960. In 1968 Langford joined Gray's legal firm as a partner.

10. Willie Frank Alford (1915–1989), born in Florala, Alabama, had served several churches in Alabama before becoming pastor of Montgomery's Beulah Baptist Church in 1953, where he remained until his death. An underwriter with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company and a public school teacher, Alford was a member of the MIA's committees on resolutions and on relief. An indicted boycott participant, he advocated an early end to the boycott and later resigned from the MIA because of disagreements over tactics.

11. J. W. Bonner was pastor of the First CME Church of Montgomery. A member of the MIA's executive board, he also chaired its speakers' bureau and served on the committee charged with drafting the MIA's constitution. He was among those indicted for participating in the boycott.