



DECEMBER FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

DECEMBER 2

On December 2, 1952, in testimony before the Supreme Court, Secretary of State Dean Acheson made the following statement: "The continuation of racial discrimination in the United States remains a source of constant embarrassment to this government in the day-to-day conduct of its foreign relations, and it jeopardizes the effective maintenance of our moral leadership of the free and democratic nations of the world." At last, a government official had said the right thing, albeit for the wrong reasons.

DECEMBER 3

Using strategic legal attacks on segregation to undermine its foundations in "separate but equal" law, Charles H. Houston had become one of major architects restructuring a nonracist America. His 1944 appointment to the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) was hailed as a major step forward. Then things began to crumble. "Aside from the emasculation of the Full Employment Bill," wrote Herbert Aptheker, a noted historian and Du Bois protégé, "the most dramatic occurrence in the fight for fair employment" came with Houston's intense public criticism of President Truman's wobbly stance and a letter of resignation dated December 3, 1945.

DECEMBER 5

Just four momentous days earlier, a seamstress boarded a Montgomery, Alabama, bus bound for history. Taking the last available seat in the "colored" section, she relaxed for the trip home and thought of Christmas. When the white seats were filled, the driver told the blacks in her row to get up so that a white passenger could be seated in a row with no blacks. Three of the black passengers moved; one did not. "You'd better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats," the driver warned. "If you don't stand up, I'm going to have you arrested." The woman who held on to her seat and her self-respect even as she was removed from the bus, arrested, jailed, and fingerprinted was Rosa Parks. Would she allow hers to be the test case that could bring the degrading system of segregated bus seating to an end? Yes.

Parks had not planned her protest. But Montgomery's blacks spent the weekend planning a response. Fliers were posted and blacks spent the weekend planning a response. Fliers were mim-

students to distribute, a local newspaper headlined the story, ministers took to pulpits in support: a one-day bus boycott would begin Monday morning as Mrs. Parks went to court.

Just after 6 a.m. on December 5, 1955, as the first bus prowled the dim morning street in search of former victims, Coretta Scott King called her husband, Martin, to the window. "Darling, it's empty!" she exclaimed. By afternoon, Martin Luther King Jr., the new minister in Montgomery, would be elected to lead the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association. By evening a one-day protest became a movement: the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A historic mass meeting was held at Holt Street Baptist Church that night. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his first Civil Rights movement speech.

DECEMBER 8

December 8, 1964, found Dr. and Mrs. King, their family, and their friends landing in Oslo, Norway, for the Nobel Prize ceremonies. As they gathered for a private dinner party two days before the event, Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. rose in tribute to his son and the moment. "I want to say something to all of you now, and I want you to listen," said Daddy King in a manner befitting the patrimony for which he had become so respected and loved. As he spoke, invoking the spirit of the ancestors watching over them, tears welled in the eyes of the faithful.

Radiant glow of his family's pride, he concluded, "When my head is cold and my bones are bleached, the King family will go



Photo credit: U.S. World and News Report
Following Dr. King's death, a contest of leadership between Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson began simmering at SCLC. On December 18, 1971, it boiled over into Jackson's resignation and his founding of PUSH (People United to Save Humanity). Rev. Ralph Abernathy (second left) is shown with Rev. Andrew Young, Rev. Joseph E. Lowery and Stoney Cooks at SCLC headquarters in Atlanta.

down not only in American history but in world history as well, because Martin King is a Nobel Prize winner." Two days later, he would see those words fulfilled...

DECEMBER 18

Following Dr. King's death, a contest of leadership between Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jack-

Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson began simmering at SCLC. On December 18, 1971, it boiled over into Jackson's resignation and his founding of PUSH (People United to Save Humanity).

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