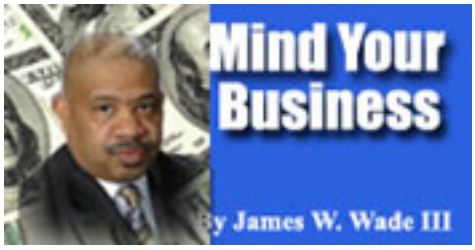

Resolved not to end the boycott until the order to desegregate the buses actually arrived in Montgomery, the MIA operated without the carpool system for a month. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling and on December 20, 1956 King called for the end of the boycott; the community agreed.

Keeping the dream and hope alive

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would have been 83 years old this year. Have you taken the time out to listen to his speeches? He had a way if delivering a speech that was awesome and just listening to some his words could get the average person fired up.

This past weekend, we celebrated his legacy through many events.

King died April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tenn. He was a Baptist minister and social activist who led the Civil Rights Movement in the United States from the mid-1950s until his death by assassination in 1968.

His leadership was fundamental to that movement's success in ending the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other parts of the United States. King rose to national prominence as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Sparked by the arrest of **Rosa Parks** on December 1, 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott was a 13-month mass protest that ended with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling segregation on public buses as unconstitutional.

The **Montgomery Improvement Association** (MIA) coordinated the boycott, and its president, Martin Luther King, Jr., became a prominent civil rights leader as international attention focused on Montgomery. The bus boycott demonstrated the potential for nonviolent mass protest to successfully challenge racial segregation and served as an example for other southern campaigns that followed.

In " ***Stride Toward Freedom*** ," King's 1958 memoir of the boycott, he declared the real meaning of the Montgomery bus boycott to be the power of a growing self-respect to animate the struggle for civil rights. Could Blacks be that affective in 2012?

The roots of the bus boycott began years before the arrest of Rosa Parks. The **Womens' Political Council** (WPC), a group of Black professionals founded in 1946, had already turned their attention to Jim Crow practices on the Montgomery city buses.

In a meeting with Mayor W. A. Gayle, in March 1954, the council's members outlined the changes they sought for Montgomery's bus system: no one standing over empty seats; a decree that Black individuals not be made to pay at the front of the bus and enter from the rear; and a policy that would require buses to stop at every corner in Black residential areas, just as they did in white communities.

When the meeting failed to produce any meaningful change, WPC president **Jo Ann Robinson** reiterated the council's requests in a letter to Mayor Gayle, telling him, ''there has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of busses''(''A Letter from the Women's Political Council'').

A year after the WPC's meeting with Mayor Gayle, a 15-year-old named Claudette Colvin was

arrested for challenging segregation on a Montgomery bus. Seven months later, 18-year-old Mary Louise Smith was arrested for refusing to yield her seat to a white passenger. Neither arrest, however, mobilized Montgomery's Black community like that of Rosa Parks later that year.

King recalled in his memoir that "Mrs. Parks was ideal for the role assigned to her by history" and because "her character was impeccable and her dedication deep-rooted," she was "one of the most respected people in the Negro community" (King, 44). Robinson and the WPC responded to Parks' arrest by calling for a one-day protest of the city's buses on December 5, 1955.

Robinson prepared a series of leaflets at Alabama State College and organized groups to distribute them throughout the Black community. Meanwhile, after securing bail for Parks with Clifford and **Virginia Durr** , **E. D. Nixon** , past leader of the Montgomery chapter of the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP), began to call local Black leaders, including **Ralph Abernathy** and King, to organize a planning meeting. On December 2, Black ministers and leaders met at **Dexter Avenue Baptist Church** and agreed to publicize the December 5, boycott. The planned protest received unexpected publicity in the weekend newspapers and in radio and television reports.

On December 5, 90 percent of Montgomery's Black citizens stayed off the buses. That afternoon, the city's ministers and leaders met to discuss the possibility of extending the boycott into a long-term campaign. During this meeting the MIA was formed, and King was elected president. Parks recalled, "The advantage of having Dr. King as president was that he was so new to Montgomery and to civil rights work that he hadn't been there long enough to make any strong friends or enemies" (Parks, 136).

On June 5, 1956, the federal district court ruled in **Browder v. Gayle** that bus segregation was unconstitutional and, in November 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed Browder v. Gayle and struck down laws requiring segregated seating on public buses. The court's decision came the same day that King and the MIA were in circuit court challenging an injunction against the MIA carpools.

Resolved not to end the boycott until the order to desegregate the buses actually arrived in

Montgomery, the MIA operated without the carpool system for a month. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling and on December 20, 1956 King called for the end of the boycott; the community agreed.

The next morning, he boarded an integrated bus with Ralph Abernathy, E. D. Nixon, and Glenn Smiley. King said of the bus boycott, "We came to see that, in the long run, it is more honorable to walk in dignity than ride in humiliation. So… we decided to substitute tired feet for tired souls, and walk the streets of Montgomery."

King's role in the bus boycott garnered international attention and the MIA's tactics of combining mass nonviolent protest with Christian ethics became the model for challenging segregation in the South.

In 2012, we must still dream and keep hope alive as we continue to make great strides in becoming a better person.

, or e-mail him at jwade@call-post.com. Comments and questions are welcome but, because of the volume of mail, personal responses are not always possible. Please note that comments or questions may be used in a future column.