

AUTHOR: Morgan, Juliette
TITLE: Lesson From Gandhi, 12/12/55.
IN: The Montgomery Advertiser, "Tell It To Old Grandma"
DESCRIPTION: 2 p. (Printed, Letter, ~~copy~~)
SUMMARY: Letter to the editor supporting bus boycott.

TOPICS: Montgomery Bus Boycott
PLACES: Montgomery, AL
LOCATION: Original in: Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers, 1954-1968, Boston
University, Boston, Mass.
Copy in: MLKPP

ACCESSION NO.: 551212-000

Added: 03/03/88; Updated: 03/03/88
Verified: 03/04/88
Indexed dates: 12/12/55
Type of document: Letter

★ Tell It ★
To Old Grandma

Your name and address must be given on letter ★ But upon request, name will often be withheld at the Editor's discretion ★ We reserve the right to shorten letters ★ No poetry, please ★ Repeat. No letter will be printed unless Editor knows who wrote it.

Lesson From Gandhi

EDITOR, THE ADVERTISER—Not since the First Battle of the Marne has the taxi been put to as good use as it has this last week in Montgomery. However, the spirit animating our Negro citizens as they ride these taxis or walk from the heart of Cloverdale to Mobile Road has been more like that of Ghandi than of the "taxicab army" that saved Paris.

As you remember, Gandhi set out on his "Salt March" from Sabarmati to the sea — about 150 miles — as a boycott against the government's salt monopoly. He took with him only a loin cloth, a bamboo walking stick, and a consuming idea. He vowed that he would not return until India was independent. Depending on their point of view, people laughed, sneered, or shook their heads, but 17 years later India was free. Passive resistance combined with freedom from hate is a power to be reckoned with.

The Negroes of Montgomery seem to have taken a lesson from Gandhi—and our own Thoreau, who influenced Gandhi. Their own task is greater than Gandhi's, however, for they have greater prejudice to overcome.

One feels that history is being made in Montgomery these days, the most important in her career. It is hard to imagine a soul so dead, a heart so hard, a vision so blinded and provincial as not to be moved with admiration at the quiet dignity, discipline, and dedication with which the Negroes have conducted their boycott. Yes, there have been "incidents," but the actual damage inflicted has been rather less than that done by the Lanier students in their protests against the abolition of sororities and fraternities. And a great deal less than in most strikes.

Of course, the fewer "incidents," the stronger the case for the Negroes. Their cause and their conduct have filled me with great sympathy, pride, humility and envy. I envy their unity, their good humor, their fortitude, and their willingness to suffer for great Christian and democratic principles, or just plain decent treatment. The other side is willing to fight all right, say cruel things, and to make others suffer, but the case is such that it calls for no suffering or sacrifice on their parts. That weakens their case.

IT IS SAD indeed that the most reasonable and moderate requests presented to the bus company and City Commission by the Rev. M. L. King were met with such a "Ye rebels! Disperse!" attitude as voiced by their attorney and others. No, the law must be enforced with all pharisaical zeal and inflexibility. Well, I say the law ought to be changed. And I recommend to those in authority Edmund Burke's Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies.

I am all for law and order, the protection of person and property against violence, but I believe the Constitution and Supreme Court of the United States constitute the supreme law of the land. I find it ironical to hear men in authority who are openly flouting this law speak piously of law enforcement.

I also find it hard to work up sympathy for the bus company. I have ridden the buses of Montgomery ever since they have been running. I have ridden them from once to four times a day for the past 14 years until this October. Personally I have received courteous and friendly treatment. I consider many of the drivers my good friends. With no exception I have never seen any human being give such excellent service to the public as Mr. Alton Courtney. Mr. Elliot I. Newman and others are fine too. On the other hand, I have heard some bus drivers use the tone and manners of mule drivers in their treatment of Negro passengers. (Incidentally Negroes pay full fare for fourth class treatment.) Three times I've gotten off the bus because I could not countenance treatment of Negroes. I should have gotten off on several other occasions. Twice I have heard a certain driver with high seniority mutter quite audibly "black ape." I could not tell whether the Negro heard or not, but I did and felt insulted.

IT IS INTERESTING to read editorials on the legality of this boycott. They make me think of that famous one that turned America from a tea to a coffee drinking nation. Come to think of it, one might say that this nation was founded upon a boycott.

The likening of the bus boycott to those of the White Citizens Councils is misleading. The difference in the causes and in the spirit behind each is vast. Just compare the speeches delivered at Selma and here in the City Hall with those at the Holt Street Baptist Monday night. Read them side by side as reported in *The Advertiser*—and blush. Joe Azbell's account of the Holt Street meeting is the best reporting I have ever read.

Instead of acting like sullen adolescents whose attitude is "Make me," we ought to be working out plans to span the gap between segregation and integration to extend public services—schools, libraries, parks—and transportation to Negro citizens. Ralph McGill's is the best advice I've heard: "Segregation is on its way out, and he who tries to tell the people otherwise does them great disservice. The problem of the future is how to live with the change."

This may be a minority report, but a number of Montgomerians not entirely inconsequential agree with my point of view.

Montgomery JULIETTE MORGAN.