

# Primary Source

Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery Bus Boycott speech, 1955



To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans during the civil rights movement?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice in the civil rights movement
- ☐ I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest for liberty, equality, and justice for African Americans.
- ☐ I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- ☐ I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

## Essential Vocabulary

Incarcerated	Jailed
Totalitarian	Characteristic of a government, such as a dictatorship, with total control over its citizens
Disinherited	Deprived

## Building Context

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus. Four days later, a boycott of the Montgomery bus system was planned. On December 5, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave this speech, urging those who had just voted for the boycott to persevere in their struggle to obtain justice.

## Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery Bus Boycott speech 1955

Source: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1955-martin-luther-king-jr-montgomery-bus-boycott/>

... We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its meaning. We are here also because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth.

But we are here in a specific sense, because of the bus situation in Montgomery. We are here because we are determined to get the situation corrected. This situation is not at all new. The problem has existed over endless years. ...

And certainly, certainly, this is the glory of America, with all of its faults. This is the glory of our democracy. If we were **incarcerated** [jailed] behind the iron curtains of a Communistic nation we couldn't do this. If we were dropped in the dungeon of a **totalitarian** [a government with total control over its citizens] regime we couldn't do this. But the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right.

We, the **disinherited** [deprived] of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality. ... But I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love, love is one of the pivotal points of the Christian face, faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love ...

Notes

## Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. What does King mean when he describes a “deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest form of government on earth”?

2. According to King, why is the Montgomery Bus Boycott possible only in the United States?

3. What does King say is the goal of the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

4. How does King combine a reference to Founding principles with Christian faith?