

**A Woman's Good Works: The Life of Inez Jessie Turner Baskin and Her Fight for
Civil and Human Rights in the Cradle of the Confederacy**

by

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Abstract

Inez Jessie Turner Baskin (1916-2007) was an African-American, female, journalist who covered the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956 in Alabama's capital for the *Montgomery Advertiser* as well as functioning as a central conduit for reporting on the protest for African-American media outlets around the country. Throughout her life she served as an advocate for underprivileged women, children, minorities, and senior citizens. This thesis examines Baskin's emergence as an activist by first portraying the living conditions of African-Americans in Montgomery, Alabama in the first half of the twentieth century in order to expose the city as Baskin would have experienced it as a child, adolescent, and young adult. It argues for Baskin's historical significance by describing her unique situation as an African-American, female journalist for the white-owned and operated *Montgomery Advertiser*. Beyond her role as a journalist trailblazer, she played an important role during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in her own right, and her additional contributions to the city as a civil rights activist and humanitarian help to illuminate the contours of African-American female activism in the civil rights era and beyond.

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List of Abbreviations

ANP	Associated Negro Press
ACAH	Alabama Coalition Against Hunger
ACHR	Alabama Council on Human Relations
AMPC	Alabama Manpower Planning
BPOE	Benevolent and Protective Order of ELKS
FOCAL	The Federation of Community-Controlled Child Care Centers of Alabama
HMBC	Hutchinson Missionary Baptist Church
IBPOEW	Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World
LISCAC	Low-Income Senior Citizen Advisory Council
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
SIAC	Spiritual Impact Advisory Council

Introduction

When Inez J. Baskin died in 2007 her home was a maze of small paths that wound through a collection of rooms, each one piled high with newspapers, documents and old photographs that paid tribute to a lifetime spent in the service of advocacy and activism. These documents chronicled Baskin's life story, but due to a number of extenuating circumstances only a very small percentage of that life story became preserved as archival material. Today, the Alabama Department of Archives and History holds eight boxes of materials from Baskin's house – a relatively small collection to commemorate such an extraordinary woman. History will never remember Baskin's entire story, but the subject files, correspondence, newspaper articles, photographs, and scrapbooks contained within those eight archival cartons will not allow her to be completely forgotten either. Inez Baskin lived an important and extraordinary life, and so no matter how rare sources concerning her life may be, her life is one that history will remember.

Inez Jessie Turner Baskin moved to Montgomery, Alabama when she was two years old, and after that day she would never call another city home. She would grow up there, receive a Bachelor's degree from Alabama State University, become the first woman to graduate from Selma University with a degree in Divinity, and marry her husband Wilbur Baskin in the Baptist church. She would serve as one of the first African-American, female to work as an editor for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, actively

participate in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, begin many different programs for underprivileged children and senior citizens in her fight for human rights, and contribute to many more causes. After eighty-nine years in Montgomery, her small dark eyes could look out over a city completely changed, and when she died on June 28, 2007, a few days after her ninety-first birthday, the city mourned the loss of a stalwart activist, and a minister who had given her life to see Montgomery become a better place for all of its citizens, black and white alike.

This thesis examines the significance of Inez Baskin in three chapters. Little is known about Baskin's early years. Therefore the first section of this work will discuss the history of the city of Montgomery in the decades spanning from Baskin's birth in 1916 through the Montgomery Bus Boycott in order to establish a background for the events that will be discussed throughout the work. It will also to introduce the reader to the world as Baskin encountered it as a child and a woman growing up in Montgomery, Alabama in the first half of the twentieth century. The second chapter addresses Baskin's role as a reporter during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. It will begin by discussing her role as a reporter during the 1950s and then move on to discuss the events of the boycott and how her writing helped to shape the protest. A third chapter examines Baskin's ongoing activism in the post-Boycott period as a leader, activist, and humanitarian for an additional half century until her death in 2007.

Up to this point, Inez Jessie Turner Baskin has been little more than an obscure footnote in the historiography of the civil rights era. She deserves a place far closer to the center of the narrative, however, as one of an ever expanding cast of characters in the struggle for black equality, as well as the broader historical canvass of twentieth century

African-American life in the Deep South. As an African-American woman born at the beginning of the last century, Baskin became a journalist recognized as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement” for the articles she published during the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and 1956. She also spent a majority of her life as a civil rights and human rights activist in Alabama. Chronicling her contribution to the Montgomery Bus Boycott not only sheds new light on that pivotal event in the early history of the civil rights movement, but it also reinforces the growing body of literature which emphasizes the roles of “everyday people” in making the movement a success. Not least, a biographical treatment of an individual as remarkable as Inez Baskin serves as a reminder of the power of maintaining strength and determination in the face of adversity.

Chapter 1: Montgomery: From Civil War to Civil Rights

When Inez J. Baskin died in 2007, shortly after her 91st birthday, obituaries remembered her as the African-American journalist who told the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Friends and family remembered her as a spunky, bluntly honest, yet passionate woman who devoted her life to God, activism, and teaching.¹ Her words, preserved in *Jet Magazine* and the many newspapers that carried her articles through the Associated Negro Press (ANP), chronicle the story of the 1955-1956 bus boycott and capture her passion for the civil rights movement. Moreover, her quest to put an end to racism endures in the memory of the many children and adults she taught throughout her life.² Baskin (preferably known as I.J. and often referred to as Mother Baskin) stood on the front lines of arguably the most monumental moment in the civil rights movement and continued on for over half a century as both an advocate and activist for the disenfranchised. This work will tell her story, as well as argue that she played an important role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and should be remembered as an important civil rights and human rights activist. However, it is first necessary to explore Montgomery's past, especially the role it played in the lives of its African-

¹ Robyn Bradley Litchfield and Darryn Simmons, "Boycott figure Baskin dies," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 29, 2007.

² Teri Greene, "Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

American residents, in order to give context to Baskin's life and how the city contributed to her character.

The Turner family moved to Montgomery, Alabama in 1918 after Ku Klux Klan activity in their former town, Florala, Alabama, forced them to seek refuge from the violence in the city.³ The couple, Cora and Albert, settled into a small house on the western edge of town with their two-year-old daughter Inez Jessie Turner and hoped that this new city would be kinder to their only daughter than their previous residence had been to them.⁴ Moving from Florala, known as the lynching capital of the South, they did escape the harsh conditions suffered by most African-Americans who inhabited the more rural areas of the state. However, Montgomery was no paradise, and the short distance between Florala and the state's capital was not enough to leave behind racism, white supremacy, or Jim Crow.

Half a century before Inez Baskin's birth in 1916, the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the beginning of the Reconstruction Era inspired hope for African-Americans living in the South. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 took the first step in promising a better life to the men, women, and children who struggled beneath the weight of slavery.⁵ Soon after, the election of 1864 swept the abolitionist supporting Republicans into Congress in numbers that swamped the Democrats.⁶ On the last day of January 1865, Abraham Lincoln signed a piece of legislation that was ratified as the 14th

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ National Archives & Records Administration, "Featured Documents: The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives & Records Administration, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/ (accessed January 13, 2009).

⁶ HarpWeek, "The Presidential Elections: 1864 – Events," HarpWeek, <http://elections.harpweek.com/1864/Events-1864.htm> (accessed January 13, 2009).

Amendment to the Constitution of the United States that December, effectively abolishing slavery in the United States.⁷

There was also talk in Congress of a piece of legislation that would provide each emancipated slave with forty acres of land and a mule as recompense for having suffered the injustices of slavery.⁸ During the Reconstruction Era each southern state drafted and approved a new Constitution and ratified the 14th Amendment, guaranteeing citizenship to the newly freed slaves and promising them the rights and privileges guaranteed to all Americans.⁹ Each one of the events mentioned above brought the hope of a better future to African-Americans, but as Reconstruction began to flounder and Federal troops left the South, that hope quickly slipped away beneath the reviving wave of the Southern Democrats.

Alabama did not escape the storm surge. When Reconstruction ended, the Republican Party (the party favored by Alabama's black population) held the majority in the state's legislature. However, hope for the party's continued reign of influence wavered when African-Americans realized that they could not expect much help from their chosen pool of political support. It quickly became apparent to black Republicans, after receiving minimal support in promoting a bill to end certain segregation laws, that the Republican party (or at least its white members) was only interested in support from African-Americans for the numbers it drew the party at the polls. Hope vanished in 1874

⁷ U.S. Constitution, amend. 14, sec.1.

⁸ Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, eds., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement From the 1950s Through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), xxiii.

⁹ Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney, "Rights and Power: The Politics of Reconstruction," *America's Reconstruction: People and Politics After the Civil War*, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/reconstruction/section4/section4_intro.html (accessed January 14, 2009).

when Alabama's old (and exclusively white) party, the Southern Democrats, returned to power after the Republican Party failed to remain unified.¹⁰

Under the Democrats segregation would expand, the black vote would dwindle to under two percent of the eligible population, education for black children would remain pathetic at best, for the majority sharecropping would remain the best way to make a living even after industry moved into the state, and wages for those who moved into the cities would linger at less than half of what white counterparts were compensated for their efforts. The circumstances varied by region throughout the state, as well as by population density, but the conditions described above would essentially remain unchanged for the next seventy years of Alabama history. Montgomery would not be an exception.

Even though the life experiences of the different races were radically divergent it is important to understand certain objective characteristics about Montgomery. It was a good sized city nestled in a bend of the Alabama River as it passed through the middle region of the state of Alabama.¹¹ Its center was built on the bluffs overlooking the river, and as time passed it expanded to the south and to the east. It possessed a large cattle market, manufactured a large amount of fertilizer, and laid claim to Maxwell Air Force Base.¹² It was also run by a political machine headed by the city's mayor, William A.

¹⁰ Willam Warren Rogers et al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 260-261.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Census of Population and Housing," <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/index.htm> (accessed January 12, 2009).

¹² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1958), 27-28.

Gunter, Jr., under whose reign the first seedlings of the environment that fostered the civil rights movement would take root.¹³

Gunter and his machine ruled Montgomery for 25 years. He found favor with the rich, burdened the city beneath a mountain of debt in his attempts to win favor with the poor during the Great Depression, and drew the ire of most of the city's religious leaders in his adamant disapproval of prohibition. However, the importance of Gunter's reign concerning the roots of the civil rights movement rests in the decade of the machine's decline.¹⁴ In short, while Gunter was building his machine and Inez Baskin was growing up in the city, Montgomery was changing in both size and shape. In 1910, when Gunter began his reign over Montgomery, the city's population rested at 38,136 people. When Baskin turned four, the city had added another 5,328 residents. The first time Baskin saw a new mayor elected in 1940, the city was closing in on 80,000 people. Ten years later it surpassed 100,000.¹⁵

The composition of those numbers is important. In 1890 nearly 60% of Montgomery's total population was African-American, and by 1950 that percentage had dropped to just beneath 40%.¹⁶ This decrease in the city's black population was caused by the migration of black individuals and families to the north in an attempt to escape the prejudices they faced in the South.¹⁷ Regardless, Montgomery's population did not dwindle. Instead it continued to climb at increasing rates of growth so that between 1920 and 1930 the general population increased by 52%, whereas it only managed an increase

¹³ J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 20.

¹⁴ Thornton, 22.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, "Census of Population and Housing," <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/index.htm> (accessed January 12, 2009); Thornton, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Stewart Burns, ed., *Daybreak of Freedom: The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.

of 14% over the previous decade. The city's white population was growing almost twice as fast as the black population and this growth had a large impact on elections since the white population comprised a majority of the eligible voting pool.¹⁸ The rapid growth of the population led to the city's expansion, which in turn led to the creation of new voting districts. This redistribution had benefits for two portions of the city's population: lower middle class whites and blacks. It was the white lower middle class, armed with their own voting district that brought on the waves of change.¹⁹

As the city grew, new neighborhoods were built, and the lower middle class portion of Montgomery's population resettled around the eastern edge of the city. Such resettlement is important because, while the white lower middle class remained intermingled with the upper and lower classes at the city's center, their votes could be masked by votes from the upper and lower classes. However, having established their own voting districts in East Montgomery, the lower middle class was able to have a much larger impact on the outcome of elections. The separation meant that "questions of policy decided the outcome of elections," and that politicians could no longer rely on "personal acquaintance[s]..., family alliances and personal favors" to receive votes.²⁰

African-American voters, in the latter half of the 1940s, also began to have a larger impact on Montgomery politics. While the white lower middle class segregated themselves from the white upper class, black Montgomerians were subject to the city's segregation laws and formed their own neighborhoods in the northern and western areas of town.²¹ Originally, the fifteenth amendment had given African-Americans the right to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Thornton, 23-25.

²⁰ Thornton, 26.

²¹ Thornton, 29.

vote in 1865 at the conclusion of the Civil War; in spite of the amendment it remained difficult for blacks to register to vote due to the strict requirements states placed on voter registration.²² For example, in order to be qualified to register to vote, under Alabama's 1901 constitution, a citizen of Alabama had to be literate or own property with a minimum value of five hundred dollars. Later the state required that a potential voter prove their understanding of any article of the U.S. Constitution the board chose to present to them. After this practice was voted unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court, the Alabama Supreme Court approved the use of a "general voter qualification questionnaire" which remained in use until the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965.²³

However, a group of prominent, black Montgomerians, including E.D. Nixon, challenged the state of Alabama on flagrant efforts to thwart the registration attempts of black citizens, and by 1955 there were 1,678 black voters in a total voting pool of 22,210 voters. It remained a small percentage, but because of the layout of the voting districts, black voters grew to represent up to 31% of the electorate in some districts and could therefore have an impact on the election in those areas.²⁴ It was enough to have an impact on the 1947 election of David Birmingham, who promised to push for the hiring of black police officers in Montgomery.²⁵ It was also enough to serve as one of the first seedlings that would gradually grow and mix with other circumstances to give rise to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the larger civil rights movement.

²² U.S. Constitution, amend. 15, sec. 1.

²³ Thornton, 27.

²⁴ Thornton, 29.

²⁵ Thornton, 37.

The city's rapid physical growth and its changing political atmosphere were both factors in the overall experience of Inez Baskin's early life. However unaware she might have been as a child of the changes occurring in the city, they would not have escaped her notice as she grew into a young woman. As an African-American resident of the city, she would have noticed the migration of the white lower middle class as well as the emergence of new black neighborhoods around the outskirts of the city as it expanded. As someone who supported the Young Alabama Democrats (YADS), as someone who recognized E.D. Nixon as a community leader, and as someone who supported the idea of "full citizenship," Baskin was certainly aware of the drive to register black voters in the early 1940s.²⁶ An image of her in the driver's seat of a convertible with a banner across the front door that displayed the YADS name suggests that Baskin even participated in the voter registration drives with E.D. Nixon.²⁷

Even after the small victory of registering over a thousand African-Americans to vote in Montgomery, many battles remained for the young Inez Baskin and all of the city's black residents who overcame the discrimination African-Americans faced on a daily basis. Baskin reported that her parents raised her to be "color-blind," but no matter how Baskin chose to view the world and those who lived in it, white supremacy was something that all black Montgomerians were staunchly aware of during the first half of the twentieth century. In order to understand the environment forced upon Inez Baskin by white supremacy the environment, it is important to understand how the idea of white supremacy evolved after the Civil War and the way of life it created across the South.

²⁶ Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Inez Jessie Turner Baskin Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama; Donnie Williams and Wayne Greenhaw, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2006), 40-41.

²⁷ Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Baskin Papers.

David R. Goldfield states in his book, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* that after the Civil War “southerners, especially whites, had adopted a siege mentality. They had been set upon, first by abolitionists, then by preachers and politicians, and eventually by an invading army.”²⁸ These traumas allowed for the adoption of a southern etiquette, “a complicated set of rules and customs designed in part to ‘place’ individuals in a racial and class hierarchy that would retain its fixity regardless of the tensions and pressures swirling in and about the South.”²⁹

Southern etiquette created rules for acceptable social interactions between the races for every imaginable situation. Growing up, Baskin would have been expected to obey these societal rules when in the presence of any white person. For example, she would have been expected to address any white male or female, regardless of their age, in formal terms such as “sir” and “ma’am.” Conversely, any white person would have addressed her very informally as “auntie,” and her father would have been referred to as “uncle.” She would have been expected to avert her eyes, adopt a certain tone of voice, gesture in certain ways, avoid certain subjects of conversation, and even sit or stand a certain way. The etiquette was also completely controlled by the white race and, furthermore, it became fluid in its application. The rules could and did change, and it was left to the black population to note the changes, adjust accordingly, and respond to them correctly. The whole process grew so complex that Goldfield likened southern towns to theaters “where everyone had to learn his lines and adhere to the script.”³⁰

²⁸ David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture – 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Goldfield, 2-3.

However, in her youth, Baskin was subject to more than just southern etiquette. There was also another system in place in the South that dictated interactions between the two races. In 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* established the legal separation of facilities between the two races and served as the successor of the Jim Crow laws that swept across the South during Reconstruction.³¹ These laws promised to adhere to Plessy's "separate but equal" standard and separated blacks and whites regarding "water fountains, rest rooms, entrances, seating, eating facilities, schools, and even days to shop."³² At first "blacks and sympathetic whites promoted [segregation] as an improvement over the exclusion blacks faced from schools, theaters, parks, and public conveyances." It soon became clear to the black population that while they gained access to their own facilities, these accommodations were far from equal to the facilities the white population enjoyed. They may have had separate rest rooms, but as John Williams, a black writer notes, "because you are black you may have to walk a half mile further than whites just to urinate."³³ The same writer continues, "because you are black you have to receive your food through a window in the back of a restaurant or sit in a garbage-littered yard to eat."³⁴

The implications of southern etiquette and the confines of segregation under Jim Crow reached into every aspect of daily life for African-Americans. Usually, ensuring proper conformity began early in childhood, as parents stripped their children's minds of any dreams extending beyond a life of mediocrity in order to maintain their "proper" place in southern society. This practice stemmed from fear of the white man's retaliation.

³¹ Goldfield, 55.

³² Goldfield, 11.

³³ Goldfield, 12.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Obviously, as Baskin's assertion concerning her upbringing suggests, there were exceptions to the rule. Very little evidence of Baskin's early life exists; however, one can imagine the punishments she may have suffered at the hands of the city's white population if she did not adhere to their code of conduct. Or perhaps as a child she obeyed the expectations of southern etiquette and the confines of Jim Crow. Either way, as someone who later became an active participant in the launching of the civil rights movement, encountering both the southern etiquette and segregation laws served as one of the many catalysts that later resulted in her acting out against racial segregation and discrimination.

Baskin's public school education in Montgomery can also be understood as a catalyst that led her toward fighting for equality among the races. David R. Goldfield provides evidence that the public education system in place for black children in the South reinforced their subordinate status in southern society. He notes that, "the black child came out of the public school system handicapped for life in the 20th century, but generally suited to assume his position in southern society."³⁶ Like most schools for African-American children, Baskin's grammar school most likely avoided subjects such as civics and social studies in favor of subjects that "discouraged learning or thinking about the 'duties and privileges of citizenship.'"³⁷ Instead black grammar schools taught "character building... courtesy, humility, self-control, satisfaction with the poorer things of life, and all the traits which make a 'good nigger' in the eyes of the southern whites."³⁸

³⁵ Goldfield, 6.

³⁶ Goldfield, 57.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Goldfield, 56.

The black public school system also focused on vocational training in occupations such as “domestic service and waiting tables.”³⁹

It is also likely that Baskin was subject to a number of inferior teachers who were less educated and poorly compensated compared to their white counterparts.⁴⁰ Also, Baskin probably spent less time in school than most white children. School terms for African-American children ranged from three months out of the year in rural areas to seven months in urban areas, while white children attended school between eight and nine months a year. Despite not meeting *Plessy vs. Ferguson*'s standards, this theme of inferiority continued from the black school system's establishment well into the twentieth century until such standards were proven unconstitutional by *Brown vs. Board of Education* and desegregation was forced upon the southern school system in the 1950s.⁴¹

The inferior educational system for African-American children was legalized in the ratification of Alabama's 1901 constitution. The constitution allowed individual towns to distribute state money for education between black and white schools on a basis of need. By 1908, the results of a survey taken to address the conditions of schoolhouses throughout the state noted that the conditions of black schools in Alabama's Black Belt were “all too poor to comment.”⁴² Between 1908 and 1911 funding for white schools increased from \$557,700 annually to \$787,302 annually, an increase of 41%. During the same time period funding for black schools increased from \$82,625 annually to \$94,287

³⁹ Goldfield, 57.

⁴⁰ Michael Fultz, “Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900-1940,” *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no.2 (Spring 1995): 196.

⁴¹ Goldfield, 61-62.

⁴² Glenn Sisk, “Section E: The Educational Awakening in Alabama and its Effect Upon the Black Belt, 1900-1917,” *Journal of Negro Education* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1956): 193.

annually, representing an increase of merely 14%.⁴³ The differences in the initial annual amount given to each school system and the incongruities in the increasing percentages of their funding allude to the injustices that the black school system faced at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a trend that would not show much improvement over the next forty years.

Baskin faced a poor grammar school education but, she was lucky to receive a high school education. Legislation passed in 1907 that allowed each county to build one public high school but did not include plans for black high schools. However, Montgomery did provide a high school for its African-American students, and Baskin was able to attend Booker T. Washington High School.⁴⁴ The John F. Slater fund contributed funds for technical schools for blacks that were designed to enhance their education in fields such as agriculture, industry, and teaching. These schools provided an education for black students in areas where state money was not allotted to sustain a high school for African-Americans.

The state legislature also began discussing the idea of compulsory attendance laws for children in 1907 and succeeded in passing mandatory attendance laws through 1919. Nonetheless, the laws went largely unenforced in the black school system.⁴⁵ In rural areas this allowed attendance to remain low when sharecropping families needed all hands on the farm during planting and harvesting, but in both rural and urban areas whites preferred the black population poorly educated and ignorant. William C. Oates, as

⁴³ Ibid.; For the purpose of this paper, which strives to stress the conditions that existed in Montgomery it is important to note that black schools outside of Alabama's Black Belt region experienced an increase in funding of seventy-five percent during the same time period.

⁴⁴ Certificate of Merit from Booker T. Washington High School, May 31, 1929, Baskin Papers.

⁴⁵ Sisk, 194.

quoted in Harvey H. Jackson's *Inside Alabama: A Personal History of My State*, sums up the white public opinion concerning black education:

It is not the duty, nor is it to the interest of the state to educate its entire population beyond the primaries. Universal experience teaches that if a boy, regardless to his color, be educated beyond this point, he declines ever to work another day in the sun.⁴⁶

In summation, the white population did not want to lose their labor force. Oates denies that his opinion is attached to the black race, but while education for white children gradually improved over the course of the first half of the 20th century, black pupils did not benefit from any state plans to better its educational system.

By 1920 less than half the black elementary age school children in Alabama had a school to attend and only three black public high schools existed in the state.⁴⁷ The remaining poorly trained educators being forced to work in one room school houses with large numbers of students ranging in ages from six to seventeen years old, and the state's continued lapse in enforcing school attendance laws in black schools manifest themselves in the black illiteracy rate between 1900 and 1920.⁴⁸ In 1900 the number of illiterate blacks in Alabama towered over the 100,000 illiterate whites at close to 450,000. By 1920 the number had fallen to just beneath three hundred thousand. The numbers show progress, but compared to the 60,000 illiterate white Alabamians in 1920 the statistics remained grim at best.⁴⁹ However, although conditions in the black elementary education

⁴⁶ Harvey H. Jackson, *Inside Alabama: A Personal History of My State* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 134.

⁴⁷ Jackson, 165.

⁴⁸ Goldfield, 55-56.

⁴⁹ Rogers, 326.

system remained poor, the situation progressed more quickly within city limits than in some rural school systems which received no money from local townships.⁵⁰

The 1930s saw improvement if only in the fact that better training for teachers had emerged, predominantly due to the existence of two black colleges in the state.⁵¹ One of these colleges, the Alabama State Teacher's College (Alabama State University) began in Montgomery. The college provided the city with better trained teachers, allowing Baskin and other African-American children in Montgomery to receive better educations than their counterparts in rural Alabama. The two colleges, however, paled in comparison to the ten institutions in place for white students seeking college educations. While white college students graduated with a degree after completing a four year program, the state's two black colleges could not offer degrees to its students who were forced to seek those from more expensive out-of-state institutions.⁵²

The injustices of segregation followed Baskin and the rest of the black population beyond their school years: the disparities continued into the working world. Black families that lived in rural areas were most likely to be employed as sharecroppers, and those black citizens who made their homes in the city did not find the job situation much improved beyond farm labor. First, southern etiquette, as well as the Jim Crow system, forbade white men and women to work alongside black men and women, and though the city of Montgomery was not especially known for its industry, blacks were cut off from any of the few factory jobs that were available near the city.⁵³ Instead, as Reverend Ralph Abernathy recounts, black men and women were hired only for the most menial

⁵⁰ Fultz, 198.

⁵¹ W.E. Anderson, "The Education of Negroes in Alabama," *Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1947): 315.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Goldfield, 26-27.

jobs and, even more, they were always the last to be hired and the first to be fired.⁵⁴ Sixty-three percent of black women in the city found work as domestic servants, and 48% of black men were employed as laborers and domestic workers.⁵⁵ An infinitesimal black professional class existed, providing black physicians and business owners. This group of black citizens addressed needs “which due to racial barriers were not met by whites,” and the majority of the black professional class consisted of either teachers or preachers.⁵⁶ To illustrate the black professional class’ scarcity, in 1955 there was only one black lawyer offering his services in the city, Fred Gray, and he would play a part in the bus boycott.⁵⁷

Before the Great Depression black men found jobs as skilled laborers: as carpenters, masons, and painters. If they did not possess those skills they usually worked as barbers, waiters, hotel doormen, elevator operators, messengers, and janitors. However, as the Great Depression settled across the nation in the 1930s, the jobs usually available to black men and women were instead offered to white men who sought work in the failing economy. Goldfield notes that this transfer of black jobs into white hands is largely due to the National Recovery Act (NRA) which made work hours shorter and pay higher, in turn making the “Nigger work” more appealing to the white population.⁵⁸

Another injustice that blacks faced in the work force concerned their rates of pay. The average annual income for a white family in Montgomery in 1949 came to \$2,870, whereas the average income for a black family living in Montgomery reached only

⁵⁴ Burns, 18.

⁵⁵ King, 27.

⁵⁶ Burns, 2.

⁵⁷ Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 44.

⁵⁸ Goldfield, 26.

\$1,267. To further illustrate the point, 23.8 % of all black families in Montgomery collected an annual income of less than \$500, and 85.6 % of all black families brought in less than \$2,500 a year. On the other hand, only 11.3 % of all white families brought in less than \$500 annually, and the majority of white families (57%) made more than \$2,500 a year.⁵⁹

It was the unfair rate of pay forced upon the black workforce that Martin Luther King, Jr. in his book, *Stride for Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, concludes is the reason for the squalor of most black housing and living conditions compared to the more conveniently located, better built, and modernly equipped housing of white Montgomerians.⁶⁰ Mary Church Terrell, in her memoir, discusses another reason the housing available for African-Americans was so undesirable: the only houses available were the older, run down ones discarded by their white tenants. Such undesirable housing was the only option for black families and, Terrell, who, after being forced to purchase a less than satisfactory home in a black neighborhood, notes:

It is not because colored people are so obsessed with the desire to live among white people that they try to buy property in a white neighborhood. They do so because the houses there are modern, as a rule, and are better in every way than are those which have been discarded and turned over to their own groups.⁶¹

Goldfield supports her findings in his book as well, noting that one of the easiest ways to point out black neighborhoods in the South, Montgomery included, was by the “unpaved streets, unpainted houses, absence of sewers, running water, and electricity.”⁶² In keeping with this dismal theme, King also points out that while 94% of white families in

⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “Census of Population and Housing,” <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/index.htm> (accessed January 12, 2009).

⁶⁰ King, 27-28.

⁶¹ Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington D.C.: Ransdell Inc. Publishers, 1940), 119.

⁶² Goldfield, 10.

Montgomery had flush toilets, only 31% of black families in the city shared the simple commodity.⁶³

Graduating from the Alabama State Teacher's College in 1953 and choosing to pursue a career in teaching kept Baskin from a lifetime of domestic service or waiting tables.⁶⁴ However, her education did not allow her to escape the other restrictions placed on the African-American community at that time. She taught in the black public education system where she received a salary far less than her white counterparts. She also took jobs in the rural areas surrounding Montgomery where budgets for education were significantly less than budgets in the city, so her pay was poor, even for an African-American teacher.⁶⁵ After surviving a poor educational system and graduating from one of the only colleges in the entire state of Alabama that would accept her as a student, Baskin was thrust out into the working world as a teacher. There she was met with a poor salary, a segregated, underfunded school, and students who knew that their best hope at a future was to work as a Pullman porter or clean the house of a rich family. Combine this with Baskin's other experiences as a child and a young adult and it is not hard to imagine a woman emerging from those experiences with the desire to spark change.

Thus far, the majority of this work has chronicled the impacts of southern etiquette and segregation on Inez Baskin's life, as well as the lives of other African-Americans living in Montgomery, Alabama. As such, much of the discussion has focused on the ways in which the white world affected the city's black community.

⁶³ King, 28; Keep in mind that this description of Montgomery refers to the city as he witnessed it in the early 1950s.

⁶⁴ Obituary of Inez Jessie Turner Baskin, Los Angeles Times, July 8, 2007, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jul/08/local/me-baskin8> (accessed August 6, 2008).

⁶⁵ Anderson, 313.

However, the question still remains: during all of this time spent living as second class citizens denied access to many basic human rights, what was happening inside of Baskin's community? The Montgomery Bus Boycott may be known as the start of the civil rights movement and may have been the city's first monumentally successful protest against segregation, but there is more to the history of civil rights in Montgomery than the boycott of 1955-1956. In order to fully understand it, and therefore understand Inez Baskin's dedication to its cause, three things need to be discussed. First, Montgomery's black community was a fractured collection of individuals. Furthermore, this community held particular attitudes towards the white community as well as towards each other. Finally, the actions they took in the years leading up to the 1955 boycott must be explained.

During the Montgomery Bus Boycott (and the years after), the city's black population rallied together in an undeniably strong presentation of unity. In spite of this future solidarity, in the years, months, and weeks leading up to the protest, unity was not a strong factor in Montgomery's black community. Perhaps the city's black population stood unified in one opinion: segregation was not good. However, the black community in Montgomery was fractured, divided along two lines: geography and income. The tension between the two classes was not as marked as that between the two races, but the members of each class tended to limit their social activity within their own separate spheres.⁶⁶

On the surface, the separation was not complicated. The small black professional community consisted of the city's business owners and those residents who were well educated, including doctors, lawyers, and teachers. A large portion of the black upper

⁶⁶ Burns, 4.

class consisted of the faculty of the all black Alabama State Teacher's College, and, as such, most of the inhabitants of this social circle found homes near the college.⁶⁷

Members of Montgomery's black lower class lived around the northern and western outskirts of the city in neighborhoods designated for black families.⁶⁸ This section of the black population made up the city's laborers and domestic servants, or, in other words, those black men and women who could not claim work as a shop owner, teacher, or other educated professional. This separation may not seem incredibly important at first, but as each class grew more and more frustrated within the confines of segregation and as each class began to dream up ways to emerge from the oppressive cloud that had hung over them for their entire lives, it is easy to see with hindsight that neither portion of the black population would gain any ground without aid from the other.⁶⁹

Before either section of the black community could succeed in taking action against the injustices they faced within the Jim Crow system, they had to move beyond the attitude of passivity that overwhelmed a large portion of each class.⁷⁰ King notes that the educated black citizenry of Montgomery was "crippled" by an indifference that "expressed itself in a lack of participation in any move toward better racial conditions, and a sort of tacit acceptance of things as they were."⁷¹ However, that indifference did not rise from the presence of any kind of agreeable situation present in the South for African-Americans in first half of the twentieth century. King suggests that it stemmed from fear. He notes that, "many of the educated group were employed in vulnerable positions, and a forthright stand in the area of racial justice might result in the loss of a

⁶⁷ Burns, 2.

⁶⁸ Thornton, 29.

⁶⁹ Burns, 4.

⁷⁰ King, 35-36.

⁷¹ King, 35.

job.”⁷² Fear for the loss of their financial stability outweighed their ability to act out against prejudice and racism, at least in any way that would be effective enough to make a difference.

David Goldfield suggests another angle to the black professional class’ silence in the face of segregation. He proposes that a number of the members of the black professional class benefited from segregation because they offered services to the citizens of the black community that the white community would not provide for them. Also, some members of the black professional class had ties with the “white elite” that provided them with a leadership role among the black population. If they spoke out against segregation, they risked losing their leadership role in the black community as well as the protection they received from the white community. So in addition to fear, Goldfield also suggests that the stakes were merely too high for some middle class blacks to make a move against the white community that offered them some small degree of power and influence.⁷³ However, King lays the blame for most of Montgomery’s educated black residents’ lack of action on “sheer apathy” that he sensed for a time was “incurable.”⁷⁴

Some of the reasons behind this apathy were the same for both sections of the city’s fractured black community. Fear gripped the black lower class in Montgomery and shackled them against action. They too feared the loss of their jobs and economic hard times, but King proposes that the majority of the black lower class became resigned to their position of inferiority. He notes, “not only did they seem resigned to segregation

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Goldfield, 90-91.

⁷⁴ King, 35.

per se; they also accepted the abuses and indignities which came with it.”⁷⁵ After years, and years spent toiling under the harsh, unfair conditions, Montgomery’s poor blacks “were so conditioned to the system of segregation that they submissively adjusted themselves to things as they were.”⁷⁶ For some, the idea was so ingrained that they “chafed when fellow blacks departed from their assigned place.”⁷⁷ Goldfield calls them the “the slave drivers of the 20th century” and concludes that they ensured “conformist behavior even apart from whites.”⁷⁸

However, it must be mentioned that there was a portion of each section of the black community that acted out against the influence of southern etiquette and the injustices of segregation. As a teacher who was shunned by the black professional class and as a resident of one of the poorer sections of town, Baskin did not fit into Montgomery’s African-American caste system well. It is no surprise that she did not act the part either. Never the conformist, Baskin was a member of the small percentage of the African-American population that had been acting out against the unjust conditions they had faced since the times of slavery and that continued to fight for their rights even as a majority of their peers remained passive. Goldfield notes that “the tendency had appeared in the runaway slave, in the faithful field hand who fired a tobacco barn, [and] in the trusted house servant who secretly learned to read and write.”⁷⁹

Black resistance to white supremacy was not a trend that died out after Lee surrendered his army in 1865. It remained persistent throughout the South after the Civil War with hundreds of individual and collective attempts to thwart the oppression laid

⁷⁵ King, 37.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Goldfield, 8

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Goldfield, 91.

down by white society. Specific details of Baskin's non-conformity and the actions she took against segregation will be discussed in the next two chapters. Nonetheless, there were avenues of defiance in the South and in Alabama that Baskin would have been aware of in the years leading up to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. They were not demonstrations that she became a part of, but given her involvement in the civil rights movement, they were demonstrations that she must have supported from the sidelines.

Much of the continued fight against the unfair conditions that existed in the South under segregation laws is seen in the area of education reform. Progress for black students occurred at a rapid pace at the end of the 1930s and continued to accelerate through the 1940s and 1950s until the Supreme Court's critical decision to desegregate public schools emerged from *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954. Higher education in the South saw less segregation than education at any other level, and Goldfield attributes this difference to the white view of the emergence of a black professional class.⁸⁰ To white southerners, the idea of an educated black man or woman was an impossibility, and therefore considerations to accommodate the possibility never materialized. Despite the rampant injustices in the black school system, black men and women fought for their rights to a post-graduate education and slowly chipped away at the legitimacy of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision.

In 1938 in the case of *Missouri ex rel. Gaines vs. Canada* a young black man interested in pursuing a law degree was turned down from the state's law school and told to seek a degree outside of the state. The court ruled in his favor, citing that the state of Missouri violated the "equal" portion of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* by not providing students access to a black law school within the state. Similar cases received similar rulings

⁸⁰ Goldfield, 58-59.

across the South, and though black students entered post-graduate programs at white universities, the schools took actions to keep the black students separate from white students by roping off desks, providing different lunch hours at campus cafeterias, and establishing separate entrances for blacks at university libraries.⁸¹

A 1948 ruling in the *Sweatt v. Painter* case brought *Plessy vs. Ferguson* even closer to destruction by ruling that even though Texas provided a law school for blacks, the quality of education there was so far diminished from that of an education received at the University of Texas law school that it was declared unequal – the plaintiff was granted entrance into the white law school. The battle in court for better black education came to a head with *Brown vs. Board of Education* when a Chief Justice Warring announced, “segregation generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone,” thus declaring the idea of “separate but equal” unconstitutional.⁸²

As well as being aware of the national struggle for equal rights, Baskin was aware of a very similar fight occurring in her own backyard. While civil rights lawsuits rolled through the national court system, Montgomery was home to many local and national organizations dedicating to fighting racial discrimination at a local level. Black Montmerians like Baskin, who refused to live with an attitude of passivity in an unjust system of segregation, joined organizations such as the Alabama Council on Human Rights (ACHR), the National Alliance for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Progressive Democrats, the Citizens Steering Committee (CSC), the Women’s Political Council (WPC), and the Citizens Coordinating Committee (CCC) in

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Goldfield, 61.

order to fight for their rights as American citizens. These organizations shared different leaders and different approaches to accomplish their stated purposes, but in the end they were all pushing for the same outcome: progress in the arena of civil rights.

Just like the black community, these organizations were operated in their own separate spheres. Martin Luther King, Jr. expresses frustration with the different organizations of Montgomery upon his return to the city in the early 1950s. He views them as further divisions in the African-American community, noting that “their separate allegiances made it difficult for them to come together on the basis of a higher unity.”⁸³ However, while the organizations did not necessarily unify the community, they successfully launched campaigns against white supremacy and segregation. They told the white citizens of Montgomery, as well as the black population, that African-Americans were being treated unfairly and that they would not sit back and accept a life ruled by prejudice. They were the precursors, the launching pads to the larger movement that would follow.

Inez Baskin joined a number of local organizations in Montgomery, and even founded a few of her own, all of which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, it remains important to discuss a number of these organizations and their involvement in Montgomery’s black community in order to fully establish the environment that surrounded Baskin before the emergence of the civil rights movement. Therefore, a selection of the organizations active in Montgomery before the bus boycott will be discussed below.

Rufus Lewis organized the Citizen’s Coordinating Committee (CCC) in Montgomery to help African-Americans successfully register to vote and to promote the

⁸³ King, 34.

idea that the black community was “entitled to full citizenship in Montgomery.”⁸⁴ It also became involved in the larger spectrum of civil rights and took part in a protest against a grocery store owner, Sam E. Green, who had raped a black, teenage girl. The protest succeeded in putting the grocer out of business, and having him arrested for rape. Green was acquitted, but that “a white man had been indicted and tried for the rape of a black woman was itself a triumph in 1951.”⁸⁵

E.D. Nixon, while active in the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was president of an organization known as the Progressive Democrats. This organization focused on attacking the political injustices Montgomery’s black community faced. Nixon and other members of the Progressive Democrats were well connected with black as well as white citizens throughout the city. Their connections with affluent and/or powerful members of society including judges, jailers, lawyers, and police officers allowed the organization, and especially Nixon, to aid those who suffered injustices. Jo Ann Robinson notes, “when violations of human rights occurred, the victims involved would telephone Mr. Nixon, and he would go to their rescue.”⁸⁶ Robinson mentions Nixon specifically, but her comment may be applied to the whole organization and its method of helping the black community.

Women also played a vital role in the civil rights arena, and they also had their own organization from which to launch attacks on injustice. The Women’s Political Council (WPC) was started in Montgomery in 1946 by Mary Fair Burks, a teacher at Alabama State Teacher’s College. Like the organizations that developed before the WPC, Burks wished to combat “the hypocrisy of race separation.” Jo Ann Robinson, the

⁸⁴ Thornton, 30.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robinson, 28.

WPC's second president, recalls that the "WPC was formed for the purpose of inspiring Negroes to live above mediocrity, to elevate their thinking, to fight juvenile and adult delinquency, to register and vote, and in general to improve their status as a group."⁸⁷ The council carved a unique place for itself in the black community by taking an active role among the people, fostering growth, and promoting values that would allow the future generation to rise above the barriers that were forced upon them. Robinson notes that, "since the WPC worked in community projects, sponsoring Youth City among high school seniors to train them in government and also sponsoring projects to encourage adults to become qualified voters, the community people came to the WPC for advice on many of their civil problems."

Of course many more civic organizations existed in Montgomery in the years leading up to the boycott and the civil rights movement. However, the actions taken by organizations discussed above revealed to Baskin that, although the black community was divided, there were African-Americans willing to fight for their rights. Baskin's exposure to these organizations showed her that she was not alone in her fight and provided an outlet for the passion she fostered for ending racial discrimination.

In conclusion, all of the conditions, circumstances, and situations discussed above describe the southern environment into which Inez Jessie Turner Baskin was born on June 18, 1916.⁸⁸ Because of the color of her skin, she was expected to meet the prescriptions of the unwritten southern etiquette that had evolved in the South after the Reconstruction Era and was forced to live within the confines of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Because of the South's manipulation of *Plessy v. Ferguson's* "separate but

⁸⁷ Robinson, 22-23.

⁸⁸ Teri Greene, "Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin," The Montgomery Advertiser, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

equal” clause, Baskin received an inferior primary and secondary education within the state of Alabama. Being a black woman, she also faced discrimination in the workforce. After completing her education she became a teacher in the black public education system, where she was only allowed to work with black students and was paid at a much lower rate than her white counterparts. Her entire life was dictated by color lines until the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956.

Before she took up arms in the fight against segregation in the boycott, Baskin did not exist passively within a system that she wholeheartedly believed was unjust. Instead she became part of a portion of Montgomery’s black population that challenged the barriers of segregation and spoke out against racial discrimination. She drew from the experiences of her childhood and the existence of people and organizations that harbored the same beliefs and spirit as herself. From these experiences and beliefs, she grew into a woman who recorded one of the greatest moments in civil rights history: she grew into a woman dedicated to ensuring the rights of all citizens, regardless of color.

Chapter 2: Inez Baskin and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

On a cold Monday evening in December of 1955 Inez Baskin stood amongst thousands of African-American citizens of Montgomery, Alabama who had assembled at the Holt Street Baptist Church for a scheduled mass meeting. It was the fifth of the month and the conclusion of the first successful day of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Like the rest of the bodies teeming around her, Baskin was there to see if the protest would continue. As she waited, she looked into the faces of the men and women surrounding her, noting their expressions of frustration, hope, anxiousness, fear, and anticipation. After a moment of observation she noticed some movement on the alter set at the front of the church and turned her attention to the figure of a man taking his place behind a large podium. She listened as Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the thousands of Montgomerians who had gathered, listened as he called them together as a community to continue their boycott of Montgomery's public transportation system. As she listened, Baskin, a female, African-American journalist scribbled his words and her observations on a small notepad she carried with her on assignment.⁸⁹

That night she would send a telegram to her contact at *Jet Magazine* and become the first journalist in Montgomery to send official news of the boycott out of the city.⁹⁰ She would also publish news concerning the events of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in

⁸⁹ Burns, 41.

⁹⁰ Inez Baskin, *Inez J. Baskin Interview*, VHS, ASU Oral History Project (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State University, 1994).

the section reserved for black news in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, as well as wire related news to *Jet* and the Associated Negro Press throughout the protest.⁹¹ On the surface her actions seem simple. She was a journalist out on assignment, and she relayed her observations to her employers. However, the fact that these actions occurred in 1955 in the heart of the segregated South and that they were taken by an African-American woman makes them, as well as the woman who took them, extraordinary.

Even more extraordinary is that Baskin called her nine year stint with the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the job that put her in the position to play an important role during the bus boycott, a fluke.⁹² During the fall of 1954 she was a recently unemployed school teacher with a few years of teaching and a Bachelor's degree from Alabama State Teacher's College tucked beneath her belt.⁹³ It was by chance that she met E.P. Wallace, the "news editor and advertising solicitor of the *Advertiser's* branch office for the 'Negro News Events' section." He offered her a job typing up the news sent to the office from the African-American community.⁹⁴ Less than two years later she would sign her outgoing correspondence as the Assistant Editor of the African-American section for the *Montgomery Advertiser*.⁹⁵

Baskin took up her position with the paper during a time when women were not easily accepted as journalists and African-American women in journalism were even rarer still. From its foundations, to the later decades of the 20th century, journalism was

⁹¹ Teri Greene, "Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

⁹² Ishmael Ahmad, "Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages 'Making Waves,'" *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

⁹³ Inez Baskin, Editorial, *The Selma University Chronicle*, January 1965, Baskin Papers.

⁹⁴ Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages 'Making Waves,' *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991.

⁹⁵ Horace Speigner to Inez Baskin, November 26, 1955, Baskin Papers.

an industry dominated by white men.⁹⁶ So, in working for the *Montgomery Advertiser* as a journalist and assistant-editor, Inez Baskin overcame prejudices against both her race and sex in order to tell the news.

With few exceptions, women were largely excluded from the profession, and did not come to represent a large percentage of the industry until the re-emergence of the women's movement in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁷ Before World War II their exclusion was largely due to the idea that women were not suitable for the workforce and should remain in the home as wives and mothers. However, in the years after World War II it became more socially acceptable for women to join the workforce, and women began entering the field of journalism in droves.⁹⁸ Between the years of 1950 and 1960 the percentage of women in public relations jumped 258% so that they grew to represent 37% of the entire industry.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, upon entering the journalism profession women were paid less and "were confined to jobs on women's pages and society sections of newspapers" instead of covering the "hard news" stories (i.e. crime stories, or political news) that were always taken by men.¹⁰⁰

While white women struggled for equality in a sexist work environment, African-American men and women who entered the world of journalism faced discrimination when dealing with white publishers. Rejected from the larger, white run realm of journalism, prejudice and segregation spawned the growth of African-American "protest journalism" that published newspapers and magazines run both locally and nationally.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington D.C.: The American University Press, 1993), 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Beasley and Gibbons, 13.

⁹⁹ Beasley and Gibbons, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Beasley and Gibbons, 3.

¹⁰¹ P.L. Prattis, "Racial Segregation and Negro Journalism," *Phylon* 8, no.4 (4th Qtr. 1947): 306.

While this African-American news industry was much smaller than the white news industry, African-American men and women worked as journalists for publications such as the *Chicago Defender*, and *Jet Magazine*.¹⁰² These publications, as well as church newsletters, became popular sources of news for the black community and “became grounded in a tradition of advocacy.”¹⁰³ They published articles and editorials that spoke out against the injustices faced by the African-American community and the tyranny of Jim Crow, and they called for action to fight for equality among the races.¹⁰⁴

While African-American men faced discrimination because of their race, African-American women faced a double stigma: that same racial discrimination coupled with the fact that they were women. They were turned away from jobs at white publishers because they were black and also because they were female. However, author Rodger Streitmatter suggests that within the African-American press women faced less gender discrimination than did their white counterparts who worked for white newspapers and magazines. Of course the stereotype of women being meant to tend the home and the children was not lost amongst the African-American community, and women were often subject to discrimination within the black community because of their gender. However, the poor economic situation of most African-Americans suffered within the confines of segregation forced many African-American women to seek employment outside of the home. This diluted the idea of women as the weaker sex within the black community, because as Gertrude Bustill Mossell put so well, “our men are much too hampered by their contentions with their white brothers to afford to stop and fight their black sisters.”

¹⁰² Prattis, 306.

¹⁰³ Rodger Streitmatter, *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The effect on the journalism industry was that women were able to work along side men in the newsroom on more equal terms (even though both African-American genders earned far less than white women working as journalists).¹⁰⁵

Even though they were fewer in number, confined for the most part within a smaller segregated portion of the journalism field and were paid lower wages, African-American women became publishers, editors, and journalists who not only covered fashion and women's news but who covered "hard news" as well. African-American journalist and woman Ida B. Wells founded the anti-lynching movement through the editorials she published in the *Memphis Free Speech*.¹⁰⁶ Fearless journalist Ethel Payne covered news at the White House during the 1950s and once asked President Eisenhower "when he was going to ban segregation in interstate travel?"¹⁰⁷ Charlotta A. Ross bought a newspaper, the *California Eagle*, for fifty dollars at a public auction, and under her guidance as publisher, the paper went on to play an important role in the battle against discrimination in Southern California.¹⁰⁸ These women, and many more like them, are remembered for their significant contributions to the field of journalism and to the African-American fight for equality. This chapter, as well as discussing its originally stated purposes, will also provide evidence to suggest that Inez Baskin deserves a place among them for her significant contributions as a journalist to the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956.

As was previously stated, Baskin began working for the *Montgomery Advertiser* as a typist in the fall of 1954. At that time citizens from the African-American

¹⁰⁵ Streitmatter, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Streitmatter, 52.

¹⁰⁷ Streitmatter, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

community mailed or brought in news to the branch office where it was typed and then published in the daily section of the paper, which consisted of a single page that replaced the stocks and bonds page in the edition that went out to the African-American neighborhoods. Rewriting the small news articles spawned Baskin's initial interest in journalism, and it was only a few months before she approached her editor, E.P. Wallace, about the possibility of going out into the community to cover the news instead of having it brought into the office. His response was negative, but as Baskin recalled in an interview given to the *Montgomery Advertiser*, "during that time you didn't tell me what I couldn't do until I'd tried it," so she opted for a second opinion. She offered to take that day's finished page down to the main branch of the *Advertiser*, a task Wallace usually completed, and while there took the opportunity to speak with the section's editor. Her second attempt received a more favorable response, which was then passed on to E.P. Wallace. So after only a few months with the *Advertiser*, Inez Baskin began going out into the African-American community to cover the news.¹⁰⁹

Baskin had successfully fought for the opportunity to report the African-American community news, but at that time, even though she had a college education, she had no formal or informal training in the field of journalism. While explaining how she became versed in the art of article writing, Baskin stated:

When I began to write the news, I would look at the white page of the paper, and I can't think of the lady's name now, but... she was the fashion editor, and I would see how her news was written up when I had to write up a wedding or something like that.

¹⁰⁹ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, "Video: Interview of Inez Baskin," The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

A white reporter at the *Advertiser* also approached her when he became aware of the change in procedure at the African-American branch of the paper.¹¹⁰ “If you’re gonna write it” Baskin recalled him telling her, “you may as well write it right,” and she credited him as her teacher, saying “that man taught me how to write an article.”¹¹¹

The actions Baskin took during the first few months of her career with the *Advertiser* set the tone for the next nine years she spent working for the paper. First, her refusal to take “no” as an answer is a testament to both her personal strength and drive. She would later go on to say, “I was never afraid of ‘no.’ I was always afraid of not asking.”¹¹² Her determination to acquire the necessary skills to become an effective journalist further reveals her drive to succeed and also unveils an element of craftiness. She knew how to get what she needed, and as a black female journalist during the mid 20th century, that character trait would continue to work to her advantage. Both of these incidents contribute to the beginning of a portrait of Baskin as the woman who would become known as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement.”¹¹³

As a journalist, Baskin is most known as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement” for the articles she wrote during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but outside of those 13 months, who was Inez J. Baskin as a journalist?¹¹⁴ Her job was to cover news associated with the African-American community, and she did. Her headlines and bi-lines announced local club meetings, special church services, and school events, but she also wrote “harder” news about Ku Klux Klan activity and civil rights events such as the

¹¹⁰ She could not recall the reporter’s name.

¹¹¹ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, “Video: Interview of Inez Baskin,” The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Inez Baskin, *Inez J. Baskin Interview*, VHS, ASU Oral History Project (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State University, 1994).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Selma to Montgomery March, as well as editorials and a weekly column.¹¹⁵ Anyone with the right training and a knack for words can describe events occurring in their own backyard. Baskin, however, took the news one step further: her news developed a mission and a voice.

Baskin confessed to an interviewer that at that time a majority of African-American coverage in the white news concerned crime. “Whites got the bad part,” she said, “but they didn’t know the good things about the blacks.”¹¹⁶ After reading her articles, it becomes clear that she made a few commitments to her community as a journalist. The first two constitute her mission: to cover positive aspects of the African-American community ignored by white news, and to reveal the injustices that the black community faced. The third commitment developed her journalistic identity as a guiding voice for the community through columns and editorials.

Her scrapbooks are full of articles with titles such as “Women’s Club Stimulates Business Interests Here,” “At Holt Street Baptist Church: Big Crowd Jams Auditorium For Meeting of BTU Congress,” “Nick LaTour To Sing Here,” “School Attendance Head Sets Soaring Street Cleaning Drive,” and “YAD Working on Program to Aid Youth,” revealing her dedication to document positive news in the black community.¹¹⁷ These headlines alone begin to paint a picture of Baskin as a journalist. Another aspect of Baskin’s writing that her articles illuminate was her ability and desire to report the news objectively. Her articles merely recount the events as she witnessed them, leaving out her

¹¹⁵ Teri Greene, “Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Ishmael Ahmad, “Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages ‘Making Waves,’” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

¹¹⁷ Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Baskin Papers.

personal opinion, an aspect of journalism that was important to her.¹¹⁸ Despite this journalistic integrity, the topics she chose to pursue reveal important aspects of her character. The African-American community in Montgomery, at the time when Baskin was writing for the *Advertiser*, stood at just below half of the city's entire population, so there was more news to cover than there was space on the single page she and the staff at the *Advertiser* branch was given to fill each day. Her choices indicate that women, faith, and education were among her top priorities when writing the community's news.

There are multiple articles related to women's groups, or directed toward women in general. In many pieces, she chronicles the development and outreach activities of the Montgomery, Alabama Chapter of the National Association of Negro Business & Professional Women's Clubs, an organization that promoted heritage, economic security, recognition of community service, intellectual growth, and social growth among women.¹¹⁹ Baskin also published a letter she received from a friend studying in Nigeria detailing the struggle of women living in an oppressive society in that country.¹²⁰ These articles related to women reveal her desire to showcase women as an important aspect of the black community, and they also show that, as an individual, she was an advocate for the female gender.

Her personal portfolio of articles also includes many stories that cover ceremonies, services, and events held in the area's many Baptist churches. For example, many of the articles chronicle the 1955 meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Sunday School and Baptist Training Union Congress at the Holt Street Baptist Church in

¹¹⁸ Teri Greene, "Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹¹⁹ Inez Baskin, *The Montgomery Advertiser*, Baskin Papers.

¹²⁰ Inez Baskin, "Teacher's Letter Reveals Role of Nigerian Women," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, August 12, 1959, Baskin Papers.

Montgomery. For those articles and for others, her coverage faithfully summarizes the songs, prayers, and sermons delivered during each service; she also notes the ministers and important members of the community in attendance. The articles related to area churches are the most numerous among her writings, making it easy to surmise that the role the church played in the community was important to Baskin. As an institution that played a large role in the African-American community, it was an important subject of local news. Also, with the large role the church played, Baskin, as a journalist for and member of the community, knew that news about the church would draw readers. Finally, with the white community portraying the black community so negatively, a good way for Baskin to capture the community's good deeds was through news about events and services held at local churches.¹²¹

During her time at the *Advertiser*, Baskin also devoted many of her articles to the topics of youth and education, which is not surprising due to her background in teaching. Her articles on this subject include coverage of a school play, a science fair, the local YMCA, a youth program called Young Alabama Democrats (YADs), and more specifically a program instituted to encourage African-American children to stay in school called "Project Street Cleaning." The stories discuss a wide variety of topics related to Montgomery youths and education, but they all carry a theme of promoting involvement and continuing education. Due to the number of self published articles in her scrapbooks related to the street cleaning project, it was obviously an effort that caught her attention and one that met with her approval. Her opinion is made clear in an article titled, "15 School Age Youngsters Rounded Up For Caddying:"

¹²¹ Ishmael Ahmad, "Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages 'Making Waves,'" *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

Children do not change, only the guidance they receive. No group or persons are more interested in the welfare of your child than you. ... In this highly mechanized society, a high school education is essential to even the most menial of positions. ... Where will your child stand in the years to come? ... Will he be able to hold up his head with his friends who remained in school? ... Look yourself in the face and ask yourselves these questions. What are your answers?¹²²

She is sending a message out to the parents of Montgomery, and her interest in the success of the city's youth is so great that it throws her journalistic objectivity out of the proverbial window.

Besides gaining insight concerning the city of Montgomery and its African-American community during the civil rights movement, anyone who reads Inez J. Baskin's words comes to understand three significant qualities about her as a person. First, the reader acknowledges her talent as a journalist and a writer. Second, he/she understands the issues and aspects of the black community that Baskin found significant and newsworthy. Third, and perhaps the most important, through her words, the reader becomes aware of the strength of Baskin's voice. This strength of voice may be found in her articles, but it is best revealed in her editorials and columns.

Many African-American reporters (male and female), who wrote during the civil rights movement are remembered for their blatant attacks on Jim Crow and their demands for equality.¹²³ Inez Baskin, however, did not use her position as a journalist as a soapbox from which to vehemently launch her attacks on racism and segregation. Instead, her approach was more subtle. Her columns and editorials did not scream from the pages of the *Montgomery Advertiser* for blacks to take up arms against their oppressors. They offered advice to her readers – words of wisdom that were meant to

¹²² Inez Baskin, "15 School Age Youngsters Rounded Up For Caddying," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, Baskin Papers.

¹²³ Streitmatter, 1-4.

guide and challenge her African-American readers to bring peace to their community. Her words suggest that she believed in fixing the problems within the African-American community, that she believed in finding solutions to segregation and white supremacy from the inside out. Baskin fought the ideas of white supremacy and segregation with words of encouragement, faith, and self-betterment. “People aren’t born hating other people; they’re trained in it, and they assimilate it into their lives”, Baskin said, and she focused on the opposite in her opinion pieces.¹²⁴

In her weekly columns, “They Say,” and also in her editorials, Inez J. Baskin wrote about the importance of faith, values, education, and the spirit of service as weapons against hate – the gateway to racism. In a column about knowledge, Baskin wrote “one of the basic ills underlying the controversies of our present age is failure to understand our fellowmen, failure to understand the foibles of the human race,” alluding to the idea that knowledge is vital in the fight for equality. The article goes on to address the importance of educating oneself, and ends with an anonymous quote:

With advancing knowledge, that hatred, fear, pain and tears may subside. Man would then exemplify knowledge, in that he would know how to eradicate and alleviate those ills, realizing that if you never stick your neck out, you’ll never get your head above the crowd.¹²⁵

The column subtly addresses the problem of racism and segregation while also stressing the importance of knowledge and education, successfully defining knowledge as a non-violent weapon in the fight for equality.

In another edition of “They Say” she approaches the topic of judging others:

“How many tragedies may have been averted, on local, state and national levels if this

¹²⁴ Teri Greene, “Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹²⁵ Inez Baskin, “They Say” Column, *The Montgomery Advertiser*, Baskin Papers.

motto had been utilized by humanity?” Though her words are general she goes on to say, “it is wrong to judge one from the standpoint of race, creed, or color until we have walked a mile in that man’s shoes,” thereby bringing an element of the wrongs of racism into the discussion. The column closes with a challenge for readers to imagine themselves in someone else’s situation before passing judgment, and the conclusion that “by the time you have walked this mile then you will not be as quick to judge, criticize, to decry the actions of a fellow human.”¹²⁶ The column addresses two subjects simultaneously – one of them almost subliminal. The reader may make out allusions to arguments concerning racism and inequality, but on the surface the column reads as a lesson designed to make the reader think about judgment. This piece is yet another example of Baskin subtly weaving her ideas concerning civil rights into her writing.

While it is inline with Baskin’s character, as well as her talent as an educator, to dispense messages in an indirect but effective way, Baskin may have had another reason to camouflage her ideas concerning segregation and white supremacy in her writing: she was writing for a white owned news publication. Other African-American journalists who took part in “protest journalism” worked for African-American owned and operated publications. Think of Ida Wells and Ethel Payne. Both worked for publications operated by and geared toward African-Americans, so attacks on segregation and racial inequality were encouraged. Baskin, on the other hand, worked for a paper that only published news about African-Americans if it concerned their involvement in crime. So it makes sense that she would have faced serious repercussions by publishing any news or opinion pieces advocating the fight for civil rights.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

So why did Baskin submit to the rules imposed upon her by the *Montgomery Advertiser*? If she was a civil rights activist, why did she not choose to work for another publication instead? There are a few reasons. First, Baskin aided the civil rights cause through other avenues (which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3). Second, she took the job with the *Advertiser* on a whim based in need, not because she had a lifelong dream to become a protest journalist. Baskin realized her interest in journalism only after she took the typist position, and, as was previously stated, Baskin developed her own mission once on the *Advertiser's* staff as a journalist. She became devoted to promoting the good side of the African-American community and dispensing advice and challenges to that community concerning their own betterment. The fact that she managed to slip in some messages concerning civil rights while working for a white run newspaper is a victory.

As was previously discussed, Baskin's advice column and editorials did not directly address the challenges African-Americans faced during the civil rights movement. However, when the Montgomery Bus Boycott began in December of 1955 those challenges were brought front and center in the articles she wrote for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, *Jet Magazine*, and the Associated Negro Press. Looking back at her involvement in what became the beginning of the modern civil rights movement, Baskin said that she felt privileged to have been a teeny part of such an important moment in history.¹²⁷ The part Baskin played was not "teeny." Instead, Baskin became one of the key players during the boycott, and her role as a journalist relating news to the African-American community contributed to the overall success of the boycott. The

¹²⁷ Inez Baskin, *Inez J. Baskin Interview*, VHS, ASU Oral History Project (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State University, 1994).

articles she wrote reached millions of African-American readers who gained insight about the movement from a trustworthy source at the center of the protest. She also served as a voice of truth for her local community who faced scrutiny from the white population. In short, Baskin's strength, determination, and far reaching voice allowed her to play a large role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and assume a role that aided the boycott in its success. Hers was a role that not many African-Americans at that time could have created for themselves. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will first demonstrate Baskin's role as a key player through an exploration of the boycott's history as well as her writing during the protest and will then discuss how Baskin's character allowed her to create an important role for herself in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

The chapter began with a description of Inez Baskin's perception of the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a moment that had been a long time in the making for the African-American citizens of Alabama's capital city. Before the official start of the modern civil rights movement, it was not uncommon for African-Americans to act out against the discrimination they experienced as a result of segregation laws painting them as second class citizens. Arthur J. Riggs founded the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks of the World when he was denied admission to the original Elks organization based on his race.¹²⁸ E.D. Nixon started the Montgomery branch of the NAACP and organized programs to help African-Americans register to vote.¹²⁹ Willis Reed, frustrated with unfair seating arrangements on buses in Baton

¹²⁸ Nina Mjagkij ed., *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 267.

¹²⁹ Donnie Williams and Wayne Greenhaw, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2006), 41.

Rouge, staged a successful eight day bus boycott in June of 1953.¹³⁰ A number of African-Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, living in the heart of the Confederacy, vented their frustrations as well and stood up against the prejudices of Jim Crow in attempts that, for the most part, were unsuccessful.

In Montgomery, many of those attempts occurred on city buses. Jim Crow laws dictated that “black people paid at the front of the bus, got off, entered through the rear door, and sat behind the colored-only line.”¹³¹ African-American bus riders were also expected to give up their seats for white passengers if there was no available seating in the first ten rows of the bus that were reserved for whites only. These strictly enforced, prejudiced laws caused discontent among black bus patrons, who made up 70 % of the bus company’s business.¹³² However, black bus riders’ poor experiences on Montgomery’s buses were only made worse by the poor treatment they received from many of the white bus drivers.

African-Americans riding Montgomery city buses were subject to racist comments and verbal abuse as they stepped on the bus to pay their fares.¹³³ Many times as black patrons stepped off the bus to re-enter at the rear the driver would close the doors and leave the rider, ten cents poorer, on the side of the road.¹³⁴ An irate and abusive bus driver yelled at Richard Jordan and his pregnant wife, on their way to a doctor’s appointment, to vacate their seats on a Montgomery bus for white passengers. Sadie Brooks, another Montgomery resident, once watched a bus driver force an African-

¹³⁰ Ishmael Ahmad, “Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages ‘Making Waves,’” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

¹³¹ Williams and Greenhaw, 11.

¹³² Robinson, 31.

¹³³ Robinson, 28.

¹³⁴ Robinson, 35-36.

American passenger from the bus at gunpoint after he asked the driver for change.¹³⁵

After accidentally taking a seat in the white section of a bus, while on her way to the airport during the holidays, Jo Ann Robinson was so startled by the harassment she received from the bus driver that she ran from the bus in tears and nearly missed her scheduled flight home to visit family.¹³⁶ Five years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, soldier Thomas Brooks was shot and killed by Montgomery police after refusing to enter a bus through the rear door and then requesting a refund when told to exit the bus.¹³⁷

These are just a few examples of the thousands of incidents Montgomery's African-American community experienced while utilizing the city's public transportation. Jo Ann Robinson recalled, in her memoir *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, that everyone she knew could remember some kind of bad experience they had been subject to at the hands of a white bus driver.¹³⁸

The combination of abuse and degrading segregation laws inspired many black bus patrons to fight back in their own small ways. As was previously mentioned, the soldier, Thomas Brooks, died for acting out against city bus laws. Claudette Colvin, a sixteen year old student, was arrested March 2, 1955 for refusing to give up her seat in the "colored-only" section for a white passenger.¹³⁹ Mary Louise Smith was arrested the same year under similar circumstances. On December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks sat calmly and firmly in her place on a Montgomery city bus after the bus driver shouted for her to vacate her seat. After her refusal, a police officer placed her under arrest and escorted her

¹³⁵ Inez Baskin, "Battle for Dignity Heads for High Court: 30 Witnesses Tell World Why They Don't Ride ALA. Buses," *Jet Magazine*, April 5, 1956, 9.

¹³⁶ Robinson, 15-16.

¹³⁷ Williams and Greenhaw, 10-12.

¹³⁸ Robinson, 22.

¹³⁹ Burns, 73.

from the bus.¹⁴⁰ These few examples represent the experiences of many men and women who stood up to the harassment of white bus drivers as well as city policemen.

Nonetheless, in Montgomery Alabama, until Rosa Park's arrest, these examples were just stories of experiences repeated in frustration throughout the African-American community. December 1, 1955 represents the point at which all of those experiences, all of those built up frustrations were redirected into action. The arrest of Rosa Parks served as the catalyst that African-Americans in Montgomery, Alabama needed. It was the catalyst that set off a thirteen month protest against Montgomery public transportation that culminated in the end of segregated seating on the city's buses.

Two days later, Inez Baskin sat quietly at the back of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church taking notes while listening to a gathering of local ministers argue about the idea of a bus boycott and the proper way to approach its execution.¹⁴¹ The meeting was not the first time that Baskin or the ministers had been introduced to the idea of a bus boycott. The eight day bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1953 had made the local papers. In 1954, New York congressman, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell spoke to Montgomery's Progressive Democratic Association about his role during the successful Harlem Bus Boycott in 1941 and went on to discuss "how the people could force social change by using economic pressure."¹⁴² In May of that same year Jo Ann Robinson sent a letter of warning to Mayor Gayle concerning the possibility of a citywide bus boycott if conditions on the city's buses did not improve.¹⁴³ In short, the idea of a bus boycott was

¹⁴⁰ *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York: Dial Books, 1992) 116-117.

¹⁴¹ Williams and Greenhaw, 63.

¹⁴² Williams and Greenhaw, 43.

¹⁴³ Burns, 58.

swarming in the city, but the atmosphere of frustration lacked two important elements for success: a leader, and the willingness of the entire black community to participate.¹⁴⁴

The “germ” of segregation, as author Donnie Williams calls it in his book, *The Thunder of Angels: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the People Who Broke the Back of Jim Crow*, spread like wildfire through the population of African-Americans living in the South at the beginning of the 20th century. Williams writes that Jim Crow “locked black people into second-class citizenship without access to the rights that were guaranteed all people under the U.S. Constitution.”¹⁴⁵ Under Jim Crow, blacks were subject to poor housing, low paying jobs, ineffectual education, and harassment by the white community. On that subject, E.D. Nixon commented, “I wish I could sell the people on this one idea of full citizenship and that we could be free if we make up our own minds that we really wanted [sic] to be free, but these crackers here have did [sic] a good job of keeping the Negro afraid and also keeping him unlearned.”¹⁴⁶ However, on December 5, 1955 after almost a century living under segregation and decades of suffering at the hands of many of Montgomery’s white bus drivers, the African-American community came together to make a stand against the abuse. Nearly all of Montgomery’s African-American citizens had stayed off the bus that Monday, and after hearing Martin Luther King, Jr.’s encouraging words that night, they would not ride the buses again for more than a year.¹⁴⁷

Over the span of the next thirteen months news about the boycott circulated the globe and Inez Baskin turned her attention toward writing articles concerning Montgomery’s bus boycott. Shortly after publishing news of the boycott in the local

¹⁴⁴ Williams and Greenhaw, 58-59; Robinson, 40-43.

¹⁴⁵ Williams and Greenhaw, 41.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Robinson, 58.

Advertiser, she was picked up as a stringer by *Jet Magazine* as well as the Associated Negro Press. From that point on, her news concerning the boycott was published nationally in *Jet* and in more than 100 newspapers that carried articles from the Associated Negro Press.¹⁴⁸ Although the articles she wrote for the *Montgomery Advertiser* during the boycott have since been lost, Baskin, as well as those interviewed about her involvement in the boycott, recall the articles she wrote during that time period.¹⁴⁹

It makes sense that Baskin related news to *Jet Magazine* and the Associated Negro Press, but with Montgomery's white population demanding an end to the boycott, how did Baskin get away with writing boycott related articles in the *Montgomery Advertiser*? First, while the *Advertiser* would have looked down on Baskin publishing articles that attacked segregation laws, the paper did allow her to write articles that objectively related the news. Also, Joe Azbell, a white reporter for the *Advertiser*, published many articles relating the events of the boycott in the paper. So it is safe to say that Baskin found her loophole in her objectivity. She wrote news about the boycott objectively, and, therefore, she did not attract any attention from the paper's white editors. On the other hand, she did fail to mention to any of her white editors that she was covering the boycott. John Johnson, the publisher of *Jet Magazine*, asked Baskin if the *Advertiser* knew she was running articles concerning the boycott. When she shrugged

¹⁴⁸ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, "Video: Interview of Inez Baskin," The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹⁴⁹ See following page for explanation.

and told him that she did not know, he encouraged her to keep writing, saying, if “they don't say anything to you, you don't say anything to them.”¹⁵⁰

While Baskin never faced any repercussions concerning her coverage of the boycott from the *Montgomery Advertiser*, it was not long after the start of the boycott that she began to suffer repercussions for her bold actions from other sources. Boycott leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., E.D. Nixon, Fred Gray, Rosa Parks, and others began receiving threatening phone calls and letters soon after the protest organized. White reporter, Joe Azbell, who covered the boycott for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, also began receiving threatening phone calls after he published a number of objectively written articles detailing the facts of the boycott. Baskin was not to be excluded from receiving her fair share of threats either as Azbell, who told her not to worry, recalls in *The Thunder of Angels*.¹⁵¹ Many years later, Baskin would tell her goddaughter, Lawanda Goodwine, she was grateful that not many people knew her by appearance because she believed it protected her from any further acts of violence.¹⁵² Even through the threats, Baskin's coverage did not cease until the boycott's conclusion.

Baskin later learned that the *Montgomery Advertiser* did not keep copies of the African-American section of the newspaper.¹⁵³ Further research found that copies of the section were neither archived nor microfilmed, and many archivists and civil rights professors in Alabama who are familiar with her work agree that they were destroyed. However, the story she told about the Montgomery Bus Boycott was preserved in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Williams and Greenhaw, 88.

¹⁵² Lawanda Goodwine, interviewed by author, September 10, 2008.

¹⁵³ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, “Video: Interview of Inez Baskin,” The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

pages of *Jet Magazine*. Her first story ran two weeks after the start of the boycott in the December 15th issue of the magazine. The story was short, simple, and to the point, but it explained the arrest of Rosa Parks, the decision made by the black community to stay off the city buses, and included a quote from the manager of the bus company, Bagley, stating his opinion on the situation. Ignoring the protests of mistreated African-American passengers, the article notes Bagley reporting that the “company’s ‘biggest trouble’ was handling telephone calls from white persons who complained that their Negro servants had notified them that they couldn’t be at work because city bus drivers refused to stop and pick them up.”¹⁵⁴

The next article concerning the boycott that Baskin published in *Jet* ran in the December 22nd issue. The news about the boycott now attracting national attention, the article is much longer than the first and includes a spread of photographs that show the empty buses, crowds of protestors, and boycott leaders. The article includes quotes from boycott leaders like King, who she quotes as saying, “this is Democracy being transformed from thin paper to thick action. Negroes, long infected with the crippling paralysis of fear, are tired of the long nights in captivity and are now reaching out for the daybreak of freedom.” The article also notes actions taken by the white community and cites that the manager of the bus company reported a daily loss of \$3,200 without black passengers.¹⁵⁵

Baskin’s articles continued to appear in the pages of *Jet magazine* on a regular basis throughout the entirety of the boycott. Some articles are no longer than a few quick sentences, while others are longer and more in depth, but together they tell the story of

¹⁵⁴ Inez Baskin, *Jet Magazine*, December 15, 1955, 5.

¹⁵⁵ Inez Baskin, “Alabamans Apply ‘Economic Squeeze:’ Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow,” *Jet Magazine*, December 22, 1955, 12.

the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In January, she spread the word about the stalemated meetings between the boycott leaders and Montgomery's mayor. The delegation had entered into negotiations with the bus company seeking specific changes to the company's policies regarding its African-American passengers.¹⁵⁶ First, the delegation called for a first come first serve seating policy on Montgomery buses where white passengers fill the bus from the front to the back, and black passengers would fill seats from the back to the front until all the rows were filled. Second, they requested that African-American bus drivers be hired for routes that operated in predominately black sections of the city. Third, the boycott representatives also asked that bus drivers treat African-American passengers in a more courteous manner.¹⁵⁷

Baskin's articles in February were largely spent putting out proverbial fires and reassuring African-American readers outside of Montgomery that the spirit of the boycotters had not been broken. That month the city commission met with the few black ministers in the area not participating in the protest and after speaking with them, declared the boycott resolved. The news went to the press, but the Montgomery Improvement Association (the organization formed to lead the boycott) and the African-American community in Montgomery were quick to deny the rumors that the boycott had ended. Word concerning the falsity of the rumor reached *Jet* readers on February 5th.¹⁵⁸

The last week of January 1956 also saw the first bombings that occurred during the boycott. On January 31, Joe Azbell reported that a bomb had exploded on Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s porch at approximately 9:15 P.M. on the previous night. There were no injuries; however, King's wife was home with a friend and her newborn child.

¹⁵⁶ Inez Baskin, "Negroes Keep 'Economic Squeeze' On Ala. Buses," *Jet Magazine*, January 5, 1956, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Burns, 97-98.

¹⁵⁸ Inez Baskin, "Negroes Keep 'Economic Squeeze' On Ala. Buses," *Jet Magazine*, January 5, 1956, 4.

An angry crowd of 300 gathered in the street in front of King's house as he returned home from a mass meeting, but after a few words from the boycott leader, the crowd dispersed.¹⁵⁹

In March, the city officially responded to the protesters' unwavering dedication to their cause by digging up an archaic state law, "dating back to October 1921 that outlawed boycotting and blacklisting."¹⁶⁰ Shortly thereafter, Baskin reported that ninety-three suspected boycott leaders were "charged with persuading members of their race to stop riding city buses rather than take a backseat to whites." In the end, three of those arrested were released due to lack of evidence, and ninety were indicted and then released to await trial with Martin Luther King, Jr. at the front of the list. Baskin notes the response of the black community in an article published March 15th:

If whites were hopeful of forcing an end to the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott by indicting 90 Negroes under an old state law, their strategy was having an opposite effect. With their 'lawbreakers' (including 24 ministers) being idolized, and their cause offered help in coin and prayer from all quarters, the city's colored people were walking more proudly than ever before.¹⁶¹

In June, Baskin released an article that after months of little progress spread the hopeful news of success to *Jet's* readers after a federal court ruled that segregation on city buses was unconstitutional. Follow-up articles revealed the city's appeal to the Supreme Court, which would not meet again until October of that year. The protesters continued to remain off the buses through the summer and received news of their triumph on November 13, 1956.¹⁶² Baskin reported to *Jet*, which ran the article on November 29th, that the Supreme Court upheld the federal court's decision and that the city would

¹⁵⁹ Joe Azbell, "Blast Rocks Residence of Bus Boycott Leader," *Montgomery Advertiser*, January 31, 1956.

¹⁶⁰ Williams and Greenhaw, 164.

¹⁶¹ Inez Baskin, "Montgomery Indictments Fail," *Jet Magazine*, March 15, 1956, 4.

¹⁶² Bob Ingram, "Supreme Court Outlaws Bus Segregation," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 14, 1956.

be forced to integrate public transportation. The boycott remained in effect for another month until the city received its official orders to desegregate the buses.¹⁶³ The Montgomery Bus Boycott officially came to an end on December 21, 1956 and that same morning Baskin along with Martin Luther King, Jr., E.D. Nixon, and Rosa Parks took the first officially desegregated bus ride in Montgomery, Alabama.¹⁶⁴

When Baskin composed her articles about the Montgomery Bus Boycott she was fulfilling her duty as a journalist with the responsibility of reporting news to the black community. Years after segregation ended on the Montgomery city buses she became known as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement” because her words told the story of a race of people in Montgomery, Alabama who challenged those who stood in the way of their civil rights.¹⁶⁵ Baskin’s words tell a powerful story, but it is also true that her words, as well as the woman behind them, helped shape the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The exposure of her writing to the national African-American community, her personal relationships with leading members of the boycott, her status as the only African-American reporter in Montgomery covering the protest, and her drive and inability to take “no” for an answer all contribute to her importance during the boycott.

Writing for the African-American section of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, and sending stories to the Associated Negro Press as well as *Jet Magazine* drew readers locally as well as nationally to Baskin’s coverage of the boycott. Of course the white media picked up the story locally and nationally as well, so black readers had other sources of information to turn to when following the boycott. However, it is likely that

¹⁶³ Inez Baskin, “High Court Backs Negroes, End Ala. Bus Boycott,” *Jet Magazine*, November 29, 1956, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Edward Pilley, “Bus Desegregation Order Served Here; Negroes Vote To Call Off Boycott Today,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 21, 1956; Williams and Greenhaw, 254.

¹⁶⁵ Inez Baskin, *Inez J. Baskin Interview*, VHS, ASU Oral History Project (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State University, 1994).

African-American readers preferred news published by the black press as opposed to the white press. As was previously discussed, Baskin stated in an interview that the only coverage African-Americans received in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, outside of the African-American section, concerned their involvement in crime. She also mentioned that the *Montgomery Advertiser* was hounded with calls of complaint whenever African-American readers failed to receive the African-American news section with their daily paper.¹⁶⁶ John H. Johnson, publisher of *Jet Magazine*, began his publishing company because of the lack of coverage for African-Americans within the white press. White run newspapers failed to publish black birth announcements, educational achievements, sports news, or even include them in their coverage of World War II. The first issue of *Jet* “sold out instantly and within half a year was selling 300,000 copies a week, making it the largest selling Black news magazine in the world.”¹⁶⁷ So African-Americans were interested in news written for the black community by the black community, and Inez Baskin made that coverage possible for the African-American community during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Providing news about the boycott as a stringer, Baskin was able to spread news about the boycott to literally hundreds of thousands (if not more) of African-Americans across the country. Besides running in *Jet*, her articles were published in over a hundred newspapers that carried news from the Associated Negro Press. This meant that exposure concerning the boycott reached African-American readers in all parts of the country, and

¹⁶⁶ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, “Video: Interview of Inez Baskin,” The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹⁶⁷ “From Negro Digest to Ebony, Jet and Em - Special Issue: 50 Years of JPC - Redefining the Black Image,” *Ebony*, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1077/is_n1_v48/ai_12811539/ (accessed October 18, 2009).

because Baskin sent the first news concerning the boycott out of the city after the first successful day of the boycott, news reached African-American readers throughout the country quickly.¹⁶⁸ However, besides circulating accurate, reliable, unbiased news about the boycott so quickly, Baskin's largest contribution to the success of the boycott stems from the results of that massive exposure.

In short, her news helped bring in money to support the boycott's cause. With a 250 car carpool, and with the MIA paying traffic tickets, reimbursing contributors for car repairs, keeping a small staff, etc., sustaining the boycott was not cheap. On December 22, 1955 *Jet* ran an article titled "Negros Stop Riding Montgomery Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow" that stated, "negroes began praying and paying to aid the fight," revealing that donations for the cause had already begun to arrive.¹⁶⁹ Three months later, in March, a story listed the top out-of-state contributors to the boycott. The donations received from the few contributors listed alone totaled ten thousand dollars.¹⁷⁰ Donations came from across the country and Baskin, by contributing articles to news sources around the country, played an important role in bringing in those donations. She relayed the news to the African-American community and they responded with their support.

The impact her news had on the boycott was also made possible because of her close connection to the community that began and led the boycott. Being a resident of the city, and also maintaining personal relationships with boycott leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Reverend Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon, and Fred Gray allowed her to report news about the boycott from first hand experiences. She knew Martin Luther

¹⁶⁸ Inez Baskin, *Inez J. Baskin Interview*, VHS, ASU Oral History Project (Montgomery, AL: Alabama State University, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ Inez Baskin, "Negros Stop Riding Montgomery Buses in Protest Over Jim Crow," *Jet Magazine*, December 22, 1955, 12-15.

¹⁷⁰ Inez Baskin, "3 Ala. Boycotters Freed; 90 Face One-A-Day Trial," *Jet Magazine*, March 22, 1956, 7.

King, Jr. as a member of the religious circle and later became his part-time secretary.¹⁷¹ She had a relationship with Reverend Ralph Abernathy that stemmed from a shared interest in faith, as well as their participation in the boycott.¹⁷² E.D. Nixon was a member of the Holt Street Baptist Church, the church she had attended since childhood, and she knew him as a community leader as well as a close friend (she and Nixon would later go on to co-found an organization dedicated to low-income senior citizens).¹⁷³ It was Nixon who originally introduced Baskin to Attorney Fred Gray. Because of these connections, these friendships, Baskin was able to sit in on some of the boycott leaders' most private moments. For example, it was Nixon who invited Baskin to the first meeting of the Montgomery ministers before the start of the boycott.¹⁷⁴ Her personal connections with the boycott leaders also allowed her access to MIA meetings and other discussions concerning developments in the protest about which someone outside of the boycott's inner circle would not have known. Later she reported that news to the African-American community as the only African-American reporter covering the boycott in Montgomery, and also the reporter with the best access to the latest and most accurate information concerning the protest.¹⁷⁵

Baskin, of course, was not the only reporter covering the boycott. Neither was she the only African-American reporter covering the boycott. After news of the boycott became national and the media realized that the protesters in Montgomery were more than serious about their chosen endeavor, reporters (black and white) flooded into the

¹⁷¹ Williams and Greenhaw, 17.

¹⁷² Edinboro University Student Newspaper, "Civil Rights Journalist Keynote Speaker at Luncheon," February 2, 2007, Inez Baskin Profile, ASU archives.

¹⁷³ Williams and Greenhaw, 64.

¹⁷⁴ Williams and Greenhaw, 62.

¹⁷⁵ Lawanda Goodwine, Interview.

city.¹⁷⁶ *Jet* even sent one of their reporters, Robert Johnson, to the city to compose a few articles for the magazine.¹⁷⁷ However, even with journalists from all over the country covering the boycott in Montgomery, Baskin still retained an edge on all of them. Throughout the boycott, Baskin remained the only African-American reporter native to Montgomery, and therefore the best source for information regarding the African-American community in Montgomery, and for news concerning boycott developments. Years later, in an interview she gave to the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Baskin recalled journalists coming to her for information to fill in their stories. She knew the names of the people involved and explained the events to the out-of-state reporters.¹⁷⁸ She also had access to events, such as MIA meetings, that were not publically announced or publically attended. Other reporters gathered information concerning meetings and MIA decisions from interviews with boycott leaders. Baskin, however, quickly scribbled the information into her notepad from her place at the back of the chosen church as she listened to discussions between MIA members as they unfolded.

Continuing with the discussion that Inez Baskin, as an individual, greatly contributed to the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the fact that she overcame many obstacles to claim her position as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement” cannot be overlooked. Upon first glance it seems like luck. It seems that she was in the right place at the right time and she was, but putting herself in a position to cover the boycott did not stem from luck. Instead, Inez Baskin painstakingly carved out a place for

¹⁷⁶ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, “Video: Interview of Inez Baskin,” The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

¹⁷⁷ Robert Johnson, “How Ala. Negroes Are Winning The Bus Fight: Bombing Harassment Don’t Stop Foot-Wearry Negro Boycotters,” *Jet Magazine*, February 16, 1956.

¹⁷⁸ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, “Video: Interview of Inez Baskin,” The Montgomery Advertiser: MontgomeryBoycot.com, Windows Media Player video file, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/video_voices_baskin1.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

herself as a journalist at the *Montgomery Advertiser* and when the protest began she perched herself on the front lines, pen in hand. The question is, would anyone else who began in her position at the *Advertiser* have been able to overcome the same obstacles as Baskin? Rather, if Inez Baskin had not challenged her boundaries at the *Advertiser*, would there have been another African-American journalist in Montgomery who covered the Montgomery Bus Boycott? These are not questions that can be answered with complete certainty, however, the following evidence suggests that each should be answered in the negative.

Part of Inez Baskin's significance stems from her ability to overcome the obstacles set before her. She pushed against boundaries and the boycott (as well as many of her other undertakings, which will be discussed in the next chapter) benefited from that rebellious nature. One of the first challenges she overcame early in her career with the *Advertiser* stemmed from her editor, E.P. Wallace, when he declined her request to work as a journalist instead of a typist. If Baskin had been intimidated by the prospect of approaching a white editor at the paper, or if she had not challenged the constrictive policies governing the *Advertiser's* African-American branch office, would any African-American authored articles concerning the boycott have come out of Montgomery? With so few employees working at the African-American branch office, and with only E.P. Wallace as another potential journalist it does not seem likely, especially when the fact that he refused to consider the idea of requesting a change to the policies put in place by the *Advertiser's* main office is added to the equation. If Wallace dared not challenge the way in which news was brought into a single paged section of the paper, it seems unlikely that he would have decided to compose articles favoring the greatest challenge

to segregation the city of Montgomery had ever faced. However, Baskin did take a position at the *Montgomery Advertiser*, she did challenge the way in which the African-American section of the paper was run, and her character did lead her to the opportunity to aid in the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

In conclusion, Inez Baskin's gender, her race, as well as the time and place of her birth all seem to negate the fact that she became a fearless journalist who made a home for herself at the African-American section of the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Nonetheless, Baskin became a reporter during a time when women, and especially African-American women, did not enter the journalism profession. Through the articles, columns, and editorials she crafted in her position at the *Advertiser* she used her natural talent and her strong voice to empower the black community. Furthermore, Baskin overcame the prejudices against both her race and gender to document the Montgomery Bus Boycott and aid in the protest's overall success. She became the first journalist to send news of the boycott outside of the city, became a stringer for *Jet Magazine* and the Associated Negro Press making her coverage of the boycott national, and for her stories became known as the “chronicler of the civil rights movement.” Coupled with the obstacles that failed to restrain her, Baskin's position as a nationally read journalist within the African-American community during the Montgomery Bus Boycott makes her a relevant and extremely important supporter of the protest.

Chapter 3: A Woman's Good Works

At approximately 2:30 PM on September 23, 1956, Inez J. Baskin stood at the front of the congregation gathered at the Oak Street AME Zion Church. It was Women's Day Sunday at the church, and she had been approached at an earlier date to speak on a topic related to the service's theme: "The Role of Women in a Changing World." She smiled as the pastor introduced her, and was met with a round of applause as she took her place behind the podium. She greeted her audience calmly; she was not nervous in this role as a keynote speaker, as an educator, as a guiding voice. Before she looked down at her notes, she took a deep breath and then met the eyes of many of the women sitting throughout the church as she spoke to them about "A Woman's Good Works."¹⁷⁹

After spending time with Inez Baskin's collection at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, reading the articles she left behind, reading the few articles others were inspired to write about her, and listening to interviews in which she described her personal experiences as a journalist and participant in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, one can begin to imagine just what advice she bestowed upon the women of Montgomery's Oak Street AME Zion Church that Sunday afternoon. It also becomes clear that the subject Baskin chose for her speech, "A Woman's Good Works," should be applied as a theme for her own life. At the core of everything she did, Baskin was a civil rights activist, an advocate for the disenfranchised, and a spiritual leader for her community.

¹⁷⁹ Inez Baskin, "Negro News Events," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, September 23, 1956, Baskin Papers.

She spent her life fighting for a better world. Therefore, it is the purpose of this chapter to argue that the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Baskin's stint as a journalist should not be the end of what is remembered of Inez Baskin's life. Instead, Baskin should be remembered for the "good works" she initiated and participated in both before and for the many decades after the conclusion of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Inez Baskin's role during the Montgomery Bus Boycott represents only one chapter in a lifetime of advocacy and activism. She worked with local, state, and world wide organizations as well as the church to complete her life's work. However, she also chose careers that allowed her to remain active in the community. Even the choices she made concerning her education allowed her to further her role in the community and the church. Baskin received her degree in early childhood education from Alabama State Teacher's College in 1953 just before she took a job with the *Montgomery Advertiser*.¹⁸⁰ As was previously mentioned, Baskin called her nine years with the Advertiser a fluke. Nonetheless, the last chapter makes it clear that Baskin brought her education as well as her passion for activism into the field of journalism. Baskin's educational accomplishments after 1963 and many of the jobs she took after resigning from her assistant-editorship catered more to her spirit as an educator and an advocate and activist for the underprivileged.

After turning in her letters of resignation to the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Baskin enrolled in Selma University to begin a degree in theology.¹⁸¹ In an editorial she composed for the school's paper she revealed that "diversity of employment, even nine

¹⁸⁰ Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸¹ Inez Baskin to Mr. Robert Hugger, August 31, 1963, Baskin Papers; Selma University Graduation Program, January 15, 1965, Baskin Papers.

years on the job did nothing to dull the longing for preparation for Christian service.”¹⁸² She had been a school teacher in Clanton, Bullock County, and Wetumpka, as well as a journalist, but her heart was dedicated to teaching children about God. In 1965, two years after entering the university, she graduated as the first woman to receive a degree in theology from the school.¹⁸³ In 1969 she received her teaching certification from the Sunday School Publishing Board, went on to receive a special certification in preschool education from the University of Alabama and completed 25 hours in guidance and counseling from Alabama State University.¹⁸⁴ She also enrolled in the Master’s program at Southern Christian University and received a Doctor of Letters degree from the Interdenominational Institute of Technology.¹⁸⁵

After nine years as a journalist for the *Advertiser*, Baskin took a job with the state of Alabama as the assistant medical social worker for the Alabama Department of Public Health.¹⁸⁶ The position was not necessarily related to her passion for Christian education, but it did allow her to work with the public and contribute to the betterment of the community. She was able to attend meetings, such as the Health Services Incorporated meeting for the Board of Directors, allowing her to stay informed about important local issues.¹⁸⁷ There are also many letters addressed to Baskin at the state department concerning the development of programs for children and teens. An example is a letter from the Health Education Coordinator for the Alabama Department of Public Health

¹⁸² Inez Baskin, Editorial, *The Selma University Chronicle*, January, 1965, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸³ Ishmael Ahmad, “Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages ‘Making Waves,’” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸⁴ Paul B. Calloway to Inez Baskin, September 30, 1970, Baskin Papers; Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸⁵ Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸⁶ Muriel Oberleder to Inez Baskin, November 21, 1972, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸⁷ Minutes of the Health Services Incorporated meeting of the Board of Directors, Baskin Papers.

requesting help with the development of a program to address the problem of teen pregnancy and infant mortality in the state.¹⁸⁸

After retiring from the Department of Public Health, Baskin took a part-time job with Montgomery's Cleveland Street Y.M.C.A., an organization she had supported since her time with the *Advertiser*. Her resignation from the position in February of 1993 reveals the work she did for the association, the most important of which falls under the heading of "programmatically duties." She developed and implemented an adult class entitled "Practical Bible Study," and a summer course in African-American history to "enhance the self-esteem of the children through educating them about their true ROOTS." The classes allowed her to put to use her education in theology as well as her passion and experience as someone dedicated to the betterment of the community.¹⁸⁹

She was also an advisor and recorder for the Spiritual Impact Advisory Council (SIAC), a council developed by the Y.M.C.A. in 1991 to "elevate the C in Y.M.C.A." and to "find remedial as well as preventative measures for dealing with the youth of today and their problems." Baskin added her own voice to the group with her thought that "although the group would be networking with other groups with similar goals, there would be one difference, all of the decisions and conclusions of SIAC would be derived from Judean-Christian principles."¹⁹⁰ The statement paints her as someone who is concerned with keeping the group's work within the realm of Christian values, reiterating her dedication as a Christian educator, as well as someone invested in the children of the community.

¹⁸⁸ Ed Meehan to Inez Baskin, April 19, 1979, Baskin Papers.

¹⁸⁹ Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

¹⁹⁰ Minutes of the Spiritual Impact Advisory Council, January 19, 1991, Baskin Papers.

Before her career as a journalist and after retiring as an assistant social worker, Baskin spent 12 years on Christian radio. Her first experience in the radio business was as a community news commentator for a station out of Columbus, GA called WRMA sometime before the 1950s.¹⁹¹ Her second stint, after her retirement, was with local Montgomery station WZTN where she hosted her own religious themed show called “Life-line” and interviewed leaders of Christian community programs.¹⁹² Both positions represent her as a person who was interested in working for Christian companies, but they both also present her as someone who was genuinely interested in her community. Her second position, with WZTN, really shows the progression she made in life towards combining her dedication to education, community, and faith.

Baskin chose to work in environments that allowed her to draw on her natural passion and expertise, but Baskin fed that passion through many more outlets outside of her professional life. Even before her involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Baskin was an active participant in the modern civil rights movement, and she continued that role as an activist long after segregation had ended and the Civil Rights Act had been signed. She has also left behind a long history of advocacy through the many organizations she worked with throughout her life. And of course, she also spent much of her time in the role as an educator for the community, and for the area’s many churches.

Beginning with her history as an activist for civil rights, after resigning from the *Advertiser* in 1963 in order to pursue a degree from Selma University, Baskin continued to act as a stringer for *Jet Magazine* and the Associated Negro Press and also joined

¹⁹¹ Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

¹⁹² WZTN “Life Line” Radio Script, September 1, 1984, Baskin Papers.

Selma University's editorial staff.¹⁹³ During her time as a student at Selma University she witnessed the voting demonstrations that erupted in the community and culminated in the Selma to Montgomery March for the Right to Vote. While she did not participate in the march, she did play an activist role by following the movement and reporting the news to her contacts at *Jet* and the ANP.¹⁹⁴ So even after nine years with the *Advertiser*, and while completing her education for a career in Christian education, she was still carrying on her role as the "chronicler of the civil rights movement."

Aside from journalism, Baskin was also a member of a national group known for advocacy and activism concerning civil rights and equal opportunities for African-Americans. After many years of membership, in 1959 she was inducted as "Local Director of the Grand Temple Music Department at Southern Pride Temple No. 644" of the Daughters of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOEW), and also reined as their queen for a year.¹⁹⁵ The Daughters of the IBPOEW is the female half of an African-American fraternal organization known as the IBPOEW, which formed in 1898 after black registrants were denied entrance into the "white only", Benevolent and Protective Order of ELKS (BPOE).¹⁹⁶ The organization adopted the same purpose as the original ELKS organization, which was:

To inculcate the principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity; to recognize a belief in God; to promote the welfare and enhance the happiness its Members; to quicken the spirit of American patriotism; to cultivate good fellowship; to perpetuate itself as a fraternal organization, and to provide for its government.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Inez Baskin to Mr. Robert Hugger, August 31, 1963, Baskin Papers; Claude A. Barnett to Inez Baskin, August 21, 1957, Baskin Papers.

¹⁹⁴ Lawanda Goodwine, Interview.

¹⁹⁵ Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Baskin Papers.

¹⁹⁶ Nina Mjagkij, 267.

¹⁹⁷ ELKS, "Our Mission," <http://www.elks.org/NewsStory.cfm?StoryID=17263> (accessed September 3, 2009).

The African-American organization “offered leadership training, professional networking opportunities, social fellowship and community service,” to its members and also became known for its promotion of “racial uplift.” During the reign of Jim Crow and the KKK, the men and women of the IBPOEW “fought to eradicate African-American illiteracy, challenged segregation, and advocated integration, political rights, and equal economic opportunities,” in their communities. The organization “fearlessly supported anti-lynching bills, published detailed pamphlets illustrating lynch victims, and called on African-Americans to take action against those who supported or tolerated mob justice.” In addition, the organization also formed a department of Civil Liberties in 1926 to further fight “Jim Crow, lynching, and segregation in housing and the armed forces.”¹⁹⁸

The integral role Baskin played during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, her active participation in the protest, her continued coverage of the movement into the 1960s, and her dedication to the IBPOEW illustrates her as a woman who thoroughly believed in the fight for civil rights. The same actions and associations also illustrate her as a woman who was dedicated to the betterment of her community. Her fight for equal rights and opportunities did not end with the conclusion of the modern civil rights movement. Instead, it continued on as she worked with organizations that advocated minorities, women, children, senior citizens, and low income individuals and families. Her dedication to the welfare of the disenfranchised even inspired her to start her own organizations. The first organization she developed, LaCheerios, became the first organization in Montgomery to offer a free hot breakfast and lunch program to underprivileged children.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Nina Mjagkij, 267.

¹⁹⁹ Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Baskin Papers.

Baskin also co-founded another organization with E.D. Nixon called the Low-Income Senior Citizen Advisory Council (LISCAC). This organization formed an advocacy group designed to assist the older members of the state's communities who often struggled with poverty. The council, organized as an outreach program in association with the Alabama Coalition Against Hunger (ACAH), in response to "the need to give low-income senior citizens control of the programs that affect their lives and to provide a vehicle through which they can bring about effective changes for the betterment of all in the state." Nixon, the council's president, and Baskin, the council's secretary, designed and implemented the program in 1979.²⁰⁰ The fact sheet distributed by LISCAC defined itself as "a voluntary organization in the State of Alabama, primarily for low-income senior citizens, but generally for minorities of any age or income who believe in the dignity of the individual."²⁰¹

An area that seems to have been of particular interest to Baskin was the problem of housing for low-income citizens. She wrote letters on behalf of LISCAC to the Montgomery County Administration to recommend certain needy senior citizens for low income housing in the county.²⁰² She also wrote to Senators Richard Shelby, Ben Erdreich, and Heflin in 1987 to plead for their support of certain articles contained in a bill pertaining to the pending housing legislation that would allocate more funding to low-income housing. "890 families are on the waiting list for public housing," she wrote,

²⁰⁰ ACAH publication, "E.D. Nixon Poor Senior Citizens In State Organized," Spring 1979, Baskin Papers.

²⁰¹ Inez Baskin, LISCAC Fact Sheet, Baskin Papers.

²⁰² Inez Baskin to Henry W. Suddath, April 7, 1981, Baskin Papers.

“and the vacancy rate is 3 percent,” shedding light on the serious problem faced by low-income individuals and families in Alabama.²⁰³

LaCheerios, as a group developed for children, and LISCAC, a group developed for low-income seniors, are representative of the breadth of Baskin’s interest in the community. Not only did she want to help children and senior citizens, but she was also devoted to the African-American community, minorities, women, the poor and even prisoners on death row. Recounting Baskin’s involvements with different organizations, many of which focused on more than one special interest group, reveal her progression. She began her journey as a woman devoted to civil rights, developed experience as someone with a passion for activism and advocacy for the disenfranchised, and then also became interested in the broader realm of human rights. Therefore, in order to show Baskin’s progression from civil rights activist to human rights activist, the organizations she joined and worked with will be presented in chronological order.

As a woman during an era that expected the fairer sex to remain in the home as mothers and homemakers, Inez Baskin expressed her disagreement with society’s opinion by becoming an advocate for women. In the 1950s she joined the Montgomery Chapter of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, which listed its purposes as “the publicizing, promoting, [and] stimulating by educational process and workshops [,] better business and professional interests, also to encourage the youth to enter into the ever-expanding area of business and also for a better understanding of the problems of all groups in the business world.” Baskin was employed at the *Montgomery Advertiser* during the time of her association with the

²⁰³ Inez Baskin to Senator Richard Shelby, Senator Heflin, and Representative Ben Erdreich, August 13, 1987, Baskin Papers.

organization and covered many of its events during the late 1950s, including a Founder's Day Banquet and a business clinic for local business owners.²⁰⁴ She also served the organization by compiling a scrapbook that documented the history of the club's local chapter.²⁰⁵

Inez Baskin also served as an advocate for the cause of her sisters overseas. In 1959 she published a letter written by a friend, a teacher in West Africa, who studied the condition of women in the country of Nigeria. The published letter describes the hardships faced by the women who were forced to do "the most laborious work ... [while] babies dangle all day tied to their backs," and discusses the formation of the Women's Civic League of Kadua, the country's first civic group devoted to the empowerment of women. The letter describes their plight and having revealed the women's struggle to the African-American community in Montgomery, Baskin closes her article with instructions on how to help "emancipate Nigerian women" from their suffering.²⁰⁶

Another link to Baskin's contributions to the women of Nigeria, as well as the children, is in the form of a letter written directly to Baskin from Zik's Academy (the school at which her friend in Nigeria taught). The letter is a plea for help from the school and asks for a donation so that it may continue in its efforts to educate the country's children so that they may experience a future brighter than that of their parents. A note at the bottom of the letter, written in Baskin's hand, reveals that she has been sending the school reading materials.²⁰⁷ The positive effects of the contribution are two fold. First, it

²⁰⁴ Inez Baskin, "Montgomery Negro BPW Club Holds Founder's Day Banquet at State," *Montgomery Advertiser*, Microfilm, Baskin Papers.

²⁰⁵ Inez Baskin, Montgomery Chapter of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Inc. Scrapbook, Microfilm, Baskin Papers.

²⁰⁶ Inez Baskin, "Teacher's Letter Reveals Role of Nigerian Women," *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 12, 1959, Microfilm, Baskin Papers.

²⁰⁷ J.J. Nquku to Inez Baskin, October 21, 1959, Baskin Papers.

helps keep the school open, which allows the children's mothers to take "the babies off their backs" during their work hours. Second, the materials enhance the children's education.

Baskin also joined the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR) after its formation in 1954, dedicating herself to another organization committed to helping the African-American community. The council formed as "a non-political, non-denominational, interracial organization that worked for equal opportunities for all people of Alabama during the 1950s and 1960s," and dealt with issues such as school desegregation, and voter registration.²⁰⁸ It worked with "biracial committees" comprised of "a cross-section of white and African American community leaders that worked to prevent the emergence of new racial problems."²⁰⁹ Today the council focuses on providing "social service programs... which address educational, nutritional, health and social services needs of children and families."²¹⁰

When Inez Baskin joined the ACHR it was a program dedicated to promoting better relationships between black and white communities, a cause that Baskin who was raised to be "colorblind" avidly supported. She believed that children were not born with the knowledge of hate, but that it was something taught to them, so to Baskin the ACHR was another way to alleviate hate and promote understanding and acceptance between the races. As a program born at the beginning of the civil rights movement, to Baskin, the biracial organization represented yet another weapon against white supremacy and racial inequality. It is also no surprise that Baskin continued to support the organization as it

²⁰⁸ Alabama Council on Human Relations, "ACHR Home," <http://www.achr.com/> (accessed August 15, 2009).

²⁰⁹ Nina Mjagkij, 23-25.

²¹⁰ Alabama Council on Human Relations, "ACHR Home," <http://www.achr.com/> (accessed August 15, 2009).

transformed into a venue for the “promotion and implementation of programs that improve economic conditions, education, and racial relationships for all people, resulting in an increased self-sufficiency and overall improvement in their quality of life.” ACHR began working with programs such as Head Start, WIC, and Housing Counseling that promoted better lifestyles for poor children and families.²¹¹

Inez Baskin also worked with The Federation of Community-Controlled Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL), an organization founded in 1972 that remains thoroughly dedicated to the betterment of the African-American community.²¹² Their philosophy states:

We believe that there is Black leadership in Alabama. That with fundamental resources Black leaders can organize themselves, educate themselves, and work together at all levels in the community for the positive development of African Americans.

However, FOCAL also expresses its dedication to other groups such as “low-income people” and poor and minority children by providing “leadership, community service, and advocacy.” Their group also breaks into the realm of activism as “a voice for the people... people commissioned and committed to the empowerment of Black people in their communities.” A few examples of their goals include “revitalizing programs that care for children of poor families in America,” and “providing training to child care providers designed as Leadership Development opportunities.²¹³” Baskin was involved with the last example and helped train child care professionals during the training conferences and workshops the organization sponsored. Therefore, as a member of

²¹¹ Alabama Council on Human Relations, “ACHR Home,” <http://www.achr.com/> (accessed August 15, 2009).

²¹² Sophia Bracy Harris to Inez Baskin, March 23, 1977, Baskin Papers.

²¹³ The Federation of Community-Controlled Child Care Centers of Alabama, “About Us,” <http://www.focalfocal.org/aboutus.htm> (accessed August 15, 2009).

FOCAL Inez Baskin was able to use her talents as an educator to support both the African-American community, as well as underprivileged members (both young and old) of the larger community of Montgomery.

In 1974 the governor of Alabama appointed Inez Baskin to the Alabama Manpower Planning Council (AMPC) where she served as a member of the State Manpower Advisory Council.²¹⁴ By the early 1970s Baskin's dedication to organizations such as FOCAL and the ACHR, as well as her experience in education and social work defined her as someone with a genuine interest in the welfare of Montgomery's citizenry. So it is no stretch of the imagination to believe that she was appointed to a state committee committed to funding and implementing "Manpower Programs" which catered to the state's youth and veterans. The council was responsible for the development of employment training programs for young adults and veterans, for ensuring that the programs met specific guidelines and for allocating designated funds to the various programs.²¹⁵

In 1979 Inez Baskin became active in a group called the Alabama Prison Project and lent her support to another disenfranchised group: prisoners on death row. Her activity in the group began when she began corresponding with ten inmates and sending them answers to Bible questions, general advice, pictures cut from magazines, and puzzles.²¹⁶ In November of that year the director of the program, Jennifer Johnston, invited Baskin to join a delegation meeting with Governor Fob James to discuss the

²¹⁴ Robert E. Weller to Inez Baskin, May 23, 1974, Baskin Papers.

²¹⁵ Minutes of the State Manpower Advisory Council Organizational and Business Meeting, May 30, 1974, Baskin Papers.

²¹⁶ Inez Baskin to Thomas Haigh, January 13, 1982, Baskin Papers.

inhumane conditions that prisoners experienced on death row.²¹⁷ She accepted the invitation and in doing so, broadened her horizons from that of civil rights activist, to that of a human rights activist.²¹⁸

Inez Baskin also made many contributions and donations to different groups and causes without the backing of any particular organization. Baskin never had any biological children, though she did have a godchild, and she never formally adopted but as an educator she treated her students as her own. She corresponded with many of them as they grew, giving them advice on their education and career goals. She also gave them advice, helped them find jobs, and offered a helping hand when they wrote to her about personal troubles. Just as she thought of them as her children, they looked up to her as a parent, addressing their letters to “Dearest Mom,” “Mother Baskin,” or “Mommie.”²¹⁹

Baskin also made herself known as a voice for the community through the letters she wrote to local government representatives, either asking questions or holding them responsible for their actions. For example, she addressed a letter to “President James & Constituents of the Greater Washington Park Community Organization” and made it clear that she was not satisfied with the way the “funds appropriated for District IV” had been spent. Her letter, which discussed her disappointment with a recreational center that had failed to be completed, demanded answers concerning the reasons behind the project’s failure and where the money allocated for the project had been spent. Apparently it was not the first letter she sent to the organization for she concluded her demands with this: “I quite agree it is a virtue to be patient, but nowadays it is the noisy

²¹⁷ Jennifer Johnston to Inez Baskin, November 1, 1979, Baskin Papers.

²¹⁸ Jennifer Johnston to Inez Baskin, November 16, 1979, Baskin Papers.

²¹⁹ “Son” to Inez Baskin, November 9, 1972, Baskin Papers; Charles Austin to Inez Baskin, August 14, 1970; Edna Warner to Inez Baskin, June 16, 1966, Baskin Papers.

wagon that gets the grease.”²²⁰ There is also another group of letters in which Baskin approached the attorney general of Alabama, Charles Graddick, with the idea of sending prisoners into war instead of “our American boys,” as a solution to “the problem of Capitol Punishment.”²²¹

When Inez Baskin was not busy participating in the many organizations in which she belonged, writing letters to her informally adopted children or pressuring answers out of the local government, Baskin was giving back to the community monetarily. She donated money to the Sunday School Publishing Board when it sponsored a drive to purchase new computers for school children.²²² She sent gifts to needy girls at the Alabama State Training School for Girls, gave money to the political campaigns she supported, and also donated regularly to the local Y.M.C.A.²²³ Also, her goddaughter recalled finding receipts of donations that Baskin made to museums that preserved the history of minority cultures.²²⁴

Even though Baskin only officially used her degree in early childhood education for a few years in the Alabama public school system, Baskin devoted much of her life to education. Her students were not always children but the future generation was the driving force behind Baskin’s passion for education. When asked about her plans to write a book, Baskin responded, “I said, ‘I really don’t have time.’ And then I thought about it. I hope I am writing a book, but I’m not using paper for pages. I’m using the

²²⁰ Inez Baskin to President James & Constituents of the Greater Washington Park Community Organization, May 17, 1985, Baskin Papers.

²²¹ Inez Baskin to Charles Graddick, September 13, 1983, Baskin Papers.

²²² Nancy A. Brown to Inez Baskin, January 24, 1991, Baskin Papers.

²²³ Inez Baskin to Eileen Slack, February 21, 1975, Baskin Papers; Receipt for donation to Larry Lee campaign, 1984, Baskin Papers; Receipt for donation to Cleveland Avenue Y.M.C.A., 1995, Baskin Papers.

²²⁴ Lawanda Goodwine, Interview.

minds of children. That's better than my writing a book, isn't it?"²²⁵ Much of her education took place within the church, which will be discussed in the next section, but she also spent a lot of time speaking to students about her experiences during the civil rights movement as well as the time she spent as a journalist. "These days," a journalist wrote about her, "Baskin tries to extend that message [of being color-blind] when she speaks to groups of young children from around the country, both about her work during the civil rights movement and her quest to erase hatred."²²⁶ After speaking to a journalism class at Edinboro University, she told a student reporter, "I hope I am communicating ideas and experiences that if used by others will afford them a better quality of life."²²⁷ As her words reveal, her wish was that her life experiences would become a vessel from which the future generation could learn.

Another area in which Baskin was active is the church. Baskin's faith and her dedication to the church greatly contributed to her active role in the community, and the work she did there reached out to women, children, senior citizens, and minorities – all of the special interest groups she worked with through a number of other organizations. The church allowed her to reach everyone at one time with the common theme revolving around a strengthening of faith. Aside from addressing the Oak Street AME Zion Church about "A Woman's Good Works," Baskin also spoke to many other congregations around the state of Alabama, taught religious education classes, organized programs for youths at local churches, and wrote sermons for most of the ministers in Montgomery.²²⁸

²²⁵ Teri Greene, "Voices of the Boycott: Inez Baskin," *The Montgomery Advertiser*, http://www.montgomeryboycott.com/profile_baskin.htm (accessed August 6, 2008).

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Rashelle Carey, "Journalist at MLK Luncheon," Inez Baskin Profile, Alabama State University Archives, Montgomery, Alabama.

²²⁸ Lawanda Goodwine, Interview.

In 1989, Sadie G. Penn, President of the Women's Council at the Dexter Avenue Memorial Baptist Church, referred to Baskin as a "biblical scholar," and as a recipient of a doctor of letters from a theological institute, Baskin, just like any male minister, was an authority in biblical interpretation.²²⁹ Being a woman and a religious scholar did not make her life easy. She commented that male instructors and students at Selma University saw her as a threat. "They thought I wanted to preach," she told a reporter for the Advertiser in 1991, "but I wanted to teach."²³⁰ However, an education in theology, combined with her passion for teaching merged into a talent that became invaluable to the Christian community of Montgomery. Instead of being shunned in the community, Baskin became a valuable resource sought after by both male and female leaders of local churches.

The scenario presented at the beginning of the chapter shows that she was a requested guest at area churches before she received her formal education in theology. This reveals the strength of her voice, her pre-existing knowledge concerning the Bible, as well as her natural talent as an educator. Her pastor, Reverend G.W.C. Richardson of Hutchinson Missionary Baptist Church describes her well: "She was creative, a great writer and a great educator, and she was always willing to share with others."²³¹ Her records show that following her graduation from Selma University, invitations from local churches requesting her presence as a speaker increased and did not waver.²³² Many of the requests and thank you letters were received from women's groups to which she

²²⁹ Sadie G. Penn to Inez Baskin, October 13, 1989, Baskin Papers; Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

²³⁰ Ishmael Ahmad, "Reporter Who Covered Boycott Encourages 'Making Waves,'" *The Montgomery Advertiser*, October 21, 1991, Baskin Papers.

²³¹ Robyn Bradley Litchfield and Darryn Simmons, "Boycott figure Baskin dies," *Montgomery Advertiser*.

²³² Inez Baskin, Scrapbook, Baskin Papers.

spoke on topics such as “A Woman’s Challenge in Today’s World” or simply led the review of the day’s lesson (as she did at the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery).²³³ She also accepted invitations to speak to the general congregation as well, covering topics such as “stewardship” as a guest speaker each year at a church in Auburn, Alabama.²³⁴

Baskin also combined her two passions, teaching and faith, in order to develop, implement, and facilitate religious education courses as well as outreach programs both for adults and children within the Christian community. As was previously mentioned, Baskin taught Bible classes at the Cleveland Street Y.M.C.A. but she also used her knowledge as a religious scholar to teach Bible and introductory classes to new church members.²³⁵ She also taught continuing education courses related to relevant issues in the church. For example, in 1987, during the “Christian Education Workshop Week” Baskin ran a workshop titled “Sunday School and The Church,” in which she addressed both the role and importance of Sunday school to the Baptist church.²³⁶

The programs she developed and delivered to the children in the church community were similar in quality to the programs she developed for adults, with the exception that they focused on issues related to younger church members. For example, in 1993, Baskin taught a course called “The Days of Youth – Your Days” that addressed questions concerning sex and love.²³⁷ Her lecture provides many examples of the problems faced by youth, gives explanations as to why they may make poor decisions, and then challenges them to rebel against the evils in the world instead of the “their

²³³ Sadie G. Penn to Inez Baskin, October 13, 1989, Baskin Papers.

²³⁴ K.M. Young to Inez Baskin, May 10, 1967, Baskin Papers.

²³⁵ Inez Baskin to Mr. W. R. Jones, October 1, 1992, Baskin Papers.

²³⁶ Inez Baskin, “Sunday School and The Church” lecture outline, October 29, 1987, Baskin Papers.

²³⁷ Inez Baskin, “The Days of Youth – Your Days” lecture, May 26, 1993, Baskin Papers.

parents, against governments, and law and order.²³⁸ In other words, Baskin's knowledge and her passion for education also includes the talent of understanding and reaching out to the needs of specific groups of people, which in turn, makes her more effective as an educator.

Another of Baskin's talents found a home within the church community as well. The previous examples of her work with the church provide examples of how Baskin used her voice, verbally, to reach out to the community. However, she used her background in journalism and editing as an avenue to address the community as well. She wrote a column called the Matron's Corner for a church newspaper for a number of years, and also became the editor of several church newsletters.²³⁹ She even began her own newsletter, the Monitor, toward the end of her life, a name that was also dedicated to her church's (HMBC) newsletter in her honor before her death.²⁴⁰

All of the examples discussed in this chapter contribute to the theme surrounding Baskin's life: "A Woman's Good Works." Her good works began early through social clubs and organizations such as the IBPOEW. Her first experience with radio as a community news announcer kept her in touch with the community, and her degree in early childhood education showed her interest in helping children. After the work she did for the *Advertiser*, Baskin took an incredibly active role in the community of Montgomery. She did not limit herself in her humanitarian efforts; she reached out to the church community, the African-American community, as well as the poor, the young, the old, and anyone else who needed help.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Inez Baskin, Inez Baskin Profile, Baskin Papers.

²⁴⁰ *The Hutchinson MBC Monitor*, May, 2007, 2.

Baskin worked with many out reach and advocacy organizations and founded more than one organization throughout her efforts. Inez Baskin was responsible for the first free hot lunch program for underprivileged children in Montgomery and served as an appointed member of a state committee dedicated to help Montgomery's youth and war veterans receive job training. She fought for better conditions for inmates on death row in Alabama, hounded state representatives for better housing options for low-income seniors and stood in front of classrooms and congregations to share her experiences with both the young and the old. Through her words and through her actions Inez Baskin left an impact on the city of Montgomery that will not be forgotten.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King, Jr., E.D. Nixon, Rosa Parks, Ralph David Abernathy, Claudette Colvin, Clifford and Virginia Durr, Fred Gray, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson: these are all names of participants in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, all citizens of Montgomery recognized over time by historians and the lay public alike as key players in the storied thirteen month protest. Leaders like King, Nixon, and Parks were known instantly as news of the boycott circulated in the media, however, the stories of some important participants were not revealed until much later. For example, it took decades for Jo Ann Gibson Robinson to release her memoir concerning the boycott, unveiling the important role that Montgomery women played in the successful launch of the boycott.

Inez Baskin never wrote a book about her involvement in the boycott, and no author pursued her story while she was alive. Her story survives, in part, in a few newspaper articles, a few paragraphs of a book written by Donnie Williams, the articles she wrote for *Jet Magazine*, and her rich collection on deposit at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. Her obituaries remember her as an important player in the boycott, however, Baskin's story has never been fully told. As an African-American woman, born at the height of segregation in the South, who became a journalist and an assistant-editor for a white-owned newspaper, and someone who dedicated her life to the betterment of others, Inez Baskin deserves a place in the

pantheon of civil rights heroes and heroines. For her role in the boycott, for her activism, for her character in the face of a harsh world, hers is a life worth remembering.

In order to become the extraordinary, accomplished woman chronicled herein Baskin had to overcome multiple hardships. The social and political environment of Montgomery, Alabama where she spent nearly nine decades of her life shaped her activist trajectory. The unforgiving baseline of Jim Crow segregation set the stage for the years that shaped Inez Baskin as a child, adolescent, and then as an adult. The southern etiquette in place at the start of the 20th century as well as her encounter with a segregated educational system attempted to push Baskin into a role of submission, of inferiority. However, her parent's lessons on racial matters and her tenacious spirit allowed her to overcome her childhood experiences in Montgomery. Instead, those early experiences served to propel Baskin into a life dedicated to advocacy and activism.

One of the many lessons Baskin taught her students was to go out and get what they needed out of life to succeed; it was a lesson Baskin applied to her own life continuously. Her career as a journalist, the position that allowed her to play such an important role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, began as a stint as a typist. She saw a flaw in the system, recognized the need for a more efficient and effective way to provide news to the African-American community and she took action. That same attitude, that ability to reach fearlessly for what she wanted, became a success factor for the boycott. When the protest began in Montgomery Baskin knew that African-Americans throughout the country needed to be aware of the revolution beginning in central Alabama. Without hesitation, she became the first journalist to release news of the boycott outside of Montgomery. She spread word of the monumental event across the nation and

effectively fostered financial support for the protest. Also, by bringing word of the boycott to hundreds of thousands of African-Americans, she let the nation know that the black community of Montgomery, Alabama was no longer divided, and that it was no longer content to live in fear and submission. She told African-Americans across the country that it was time for a change and that the black citizens in Montgomery were going to fight for their civil rights.

Baskin's passion towards the struggle for civil rights, and her ability to get what she needed from life did not cease with the disbanding of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in December 1956. Instead, the boycott was just one incident in a lifetime spent fighting for civil and human rights. In the years before and the many decades after the boycott, Baskin embraced the role as an advocate and activist for women, minorities, children, and senior citizens, as well as the impoverished. She worked with local organizations, joined organizations in a leadership role in order to strengthen and expand their programs, and founded a few organizations dedicated to advocacy on her own. Baskin can then be defined as a woman who dedicated her life to helping those less fortunate than herself, as someone with a genuine concern for making the world a better place.

The time Baskin dedicated to helping the disenfranchised, as well as the strength and courage she displayed during the Montgomery Bus Boycott are extraordinary. However, what makes Baskin's achievements even more extraordinary is the time period in which she pursued them. The 20th century was not extremely kind or just in its treatment of women until its last few decades. There were many factors determining societal views on the woman's rightful place during a large part of the 20th century. The prevailing opinion before the success of the Women's Rights Movement in the 1960s and

1970s placed women in the home as mothers and homemakers rather than in the workplace. This opinion became irrelevant in families that faced financial hardships where women needed to work in order to provide an income to help support their families. Even then, women who worked out of necessity faced menial positions that paid miniscule wages compared to their male counterparts. African-American women struggled even more beneath the added weight of racial discrimination. These social stigmas, these symbolic roadblocks, did not stop Baskin from taking the roughest of two difficult journeys. That choice alone makes Baskin extraordinary, but her long list of achievements and successes while travelling that road makes her even more astonishing.

At the core of everything she did, Baskin strove to contribute to the creation of a better world. By writing about and participating in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and by supporting other events in the civil rights movement, Baskin was actively pursuing the end of discrimination. By taking leadership roles in the organizations she supported, she pursued better conditions for the disenfranchised and fought for human rights. Taking on these challenges in the face of so much discrimination illuminates the depth of Baskin's strength, determination, and passion. Inez Baskin lived an extraordinary life devoted to the expansion of civil and human rights, and for that she deserves a central place in our collective memory, as an exemplar of the unique nature of twentieth century female and African-American activism and as a leading figure in some of the events that transformed the historical possibilities for millions of "the children coming on."

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