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THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

NIXON, EDGAR
RESEARCH

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Edgar Nixon

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Edgar Daniel Nixon (July 12, 1899 – February 25, 1987) was an American civil rights leader and union organizer, and played an important role in organizing the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Nixon was the head of the Montgomery branch of the Pullman Porters union and president of the local NAACP, as well as the Montgomery Welfare League and the Montgomery Voters League at various times.

Nixon had been campaigning for civil rights, particularly voting rights, for years before the bus boycott. He had served as an unelected advocate for Montgomery's black community, interceding for those who asked for his help with white office holders, police and civil servants. He organized a group of 750 men who marched to the Montgomery county courthouse in 1940 to attempt to register to vote. He ran for a seat on the county Democratic executive committee in 1954 and questioned candidates for the Montgomery City Commission on their position on civil rights issues the following year.

At that same time Nixon and members of the Women's Political Council began looking for a way to challenge the discriminatory seating practices on Montgomery's buses that a local ordinance required. He rejected several potential plaintiffs—one because she appeared to lack the fortitude to see the case through, another because she was an unwed mother, a third because her father had drinking problems—before Rosa Parks, the elected secretary of the Montgomery NAACP, was arrested on December 1, 1955.

Nixon went to bail her out after a family friend called to tell him she had been arrested. Nixon felt certain, based on his years of working with Parks, that she was the ideal candidate to challenge the discriminatory seating policy. Even so, Nixon had to persuade Parks to lead the fight and only succeeded in doing so after she conferred with her mother and husband. Nixon arranged for Clifford Durr, a local white lawyer, to represent her.

Nixon then called a number of local ministers to organize support for the boycott; the third one he called was a relatively young and newly arrived minister, Martin Luther King Jr., who asked for time to think about it. By the time King called back Nixon informed him that the meeting had already been arranged to meet at his church. Nixon, who was unable to attend because work took him out of town, took precautions to see that no one was elected to lead the campaign until he returned.

On his return he met with Rev. Ralph David Abernathy and Rev. E.N. French to plan the program for the next meeting. Between them they came up with a list of demands, a name for the organization—the Montgomery Improvement Association—and a President for the organization, Dr. King. Nixon recommended King to Abernathy and French because King had not, in his view, been compromised by dealing with the local white power structure.

Things did not go as Nixon envisioned when he met with a larger group of ministers to prepare for that next meeting, however; the ministers were timid, trying to organize a boycott that would be so discreet that white Montgomery would not notice it. Nixon threatened to denounce them all as cowards, which spurred King to respond that he was no coward. King accepted the presidency of the MIA and delivered the keynote address that evening. Nixon became the treasurer of the MIA.

A bomb was set off in front of his home on February 1, 1956. The boycott ended successfully, after lasting for 381 days, following the United States Supreme Court's decision holding that Montgomery's segregation policy was unlawful. Nixon later described the Montgomery Bus Boycott to an audience of supporters in New York City's Madison Square Garden:

I'm from Montgomery, Alabama, a city that's known as the Cradle of the Confederacy, that had stood still for more than ninety-three years until Rosa L. Parks was arrested and thrown in jail like a common criminal. Fifty thousand people rose up and caught hold to the Cradle of the Confederacy and began to rock it till the Jim Crow rockers began to reel and the segregated slats began to fall out.

Nixon continued to have sharp disagreements with others in the MIA during those years, expressing resentment at those, including King and Abernathy, who received more credit than those local activists who had put in years struggling against racism. He ultimately resigned as treasurer of the MIA with a bitter letter to King complaining that he had been treated as a child. He continued to feud with Montgomery's black middle class community for the next decade, losing his leadership status in the wake of political defeats in the late 1960s. After retiring from the railroad he worked as the recreation director of a public housing project.

External links

- Article on ED Nixon
- E.D. Nixon: organizer of Montgomery bus boycott [1]
- Rosa Parks: a working-class militant [2]

Further reading

- My Soul Is Rested, The Story Of The Civil Rights Movement In The Deep South, by Howell Raines, ISBN 0-14-006753-1
- Parting The Waters; America In The King Years 1954-63, by Taylor Branch, ISBN 0-671-46097-8
- Stride Toward Freedom, by Martin Luther King Jr., ISBN 0-06-250490-8
- The Origins Of The Civil Rights Movement, Black Communities Organizing For Change, by Aldon D. Morris, ISBN 0-02-922130-7 he wa a very smart man and a girls love took into his arms

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Categories: 1899 births | 1987 deaths | African Americans' rights activists | History of Alabama | People from Alabama

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See E.D. NIXON

PARTING THE WATERS

AMERICA IN THE
KING YEARS
1954-63



TAYLOR BRANCH

1988

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