

FEARLESS TRAVELER

FEARLESS, From E1

The boycott ended only when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation on the city's bus lines was unconstitutional.

This important win gave major impetus to the civil rights movement. In the new museum, the events are retold in photos and signboards. But the highlight of the boycott exhibit is a large yellow and green Montgomery bus from the 1950s. You can climb aboard, but if you choose to sit in a front seat a recorded voice will order you to the rear. Parks, who started it all, is scheduled to attend this week's dedication.

The museum's focus is on the years 1954 to 1968, when the movement was at its height. The year 1954 marks the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that made segregation in public schooling illegal. Certainly 1968 is a logical concluding date, because of King's death. But also by this time the movement was splintering. King's plea for nonviolence was being strongly challenged by black power advocates.

In this 14-year time frame, 15 exhibits chronicle such important chapters in the civil rights movement as the lunch-counter sit-ins; the desegregation of Little Rock's schools; the bloodied freedom bus rides into the South; James Meredith's enrollment at the University of Mississippi in Oxford; King's famous letter from his Birmingham jail cell; the glorious March on Washington, where King gave his inspiring "I have a dream" speech; and the tragic first attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery, interrupted when participants were attacked and beaten.

The story remains enormously compelling, and its impact will be

heightened by the museum's high-tech audiovisual accompaniment. Old TV newsreels that capture the segregationist hatred that the civil rights movement unleashed are sure to stun younger visitors who had not been born when the movement began. Indeed, some exhibits are especially designed so that visitors will "feel the horror the demonstrators experienced," says D'Army Bailey, who heads the National Civil Rights Museum Foundation.

A civil rights activist in his youth, Bailey was expelled from college because of his involvement in protest demonstrations. Ultimately, he obtained a law degree from Yale, and he recently was elected to an eight-year term as judge of the Circuit Court of Tennessee in Memphis. He describes many of the leaders in the movement as old friends.

A guiding hand since the museum's inception, Bailey sees its primary purpose as educational. Perhaps fewer than one-third of Americans today have a firsthand knowledge of the long struggle for equal rights in this country. For older generations who were witnesses, he says, "I think the museum will serve as a national center of remembrance for those who helped, who suffered and who struggle still."

Bailey hopes too that the museum will become a motivational force for young blacks. King was an exceptional person, he says, but most of the participants in the movement "were ordinary people" who nevertheless managed to turn around an entire nation. "Kids should understand that they can make a difference. I want them to see that you don't have to be a Martin Luther King to make a change."

And he sees it having an inspirational purpose, especially for the

black community. "It's aimed to give our people a sense of courage, of pride and of spirit. And it's aimed to ignite another generation of protest."

The dedication at 11 a.m. Thursday culminates a week of ceremonial events bringing many participants in the civil rights movement to Memphis. Coretta Scott King, King's widow, will be the guest speaker Tuesday at a "Salute to Legends" banquet honoring Parks and others. Tomorrow through Wednesday, some of the movement's veterans will recount their experiences at scheduled symposia.

The museum at 450 Mulberry St. will be open to the public for preview tours from Thursday through next Sunday. However, the general opening has been postponed until Aug. 31. Heavy rains this spring delayed construction, and the installation of several major exhibits is incomplete.

The museum complex, owned by the state of Tennessee, occupies about two square blocks in what was once an industrial area within a predominantly black neighborhood. The complex is about three blocks south of Beale Street, Memphis's famous entertainment district, and not much farther from the city's commercial center. Plenty of parking is provided.

After King's death, the Lorraine Motel went into decay. Until the museum acquired the structure, says Bailey, it was a haven for "prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers and other unseemly elements. It was an embarrassment to all."

Much of the two-story motel was demolished, but the museum retained the yellow-brick, L-shape wing where King was staying and where he was shot. A new auditorium, entrance gallery and exhibit hall were constructed around it in the same yellow-brick color. King's room and a similar room two doors away through which he passed to

reach the balcony are being furnished as they were the day of his death. Outside, a row of cars dating from the '50s and '60s will be parked as they might have been back then.

At least one person, Jacqueline Smith, a former resident of the motel, is upset at the alterations. Since 1988, when she was evicted, she has taken up a nearly around-the-clock vigil from across the street in protest and vows to continue "as a constant reminder of what's gone wrong." She contends the motel should shelter the homeless and other unfortunates as a more fitting tribute to King's memory.

The museum's modernistic entrance gallery is dominated by a soaring bronze sculpture, "Movement to Overcome." It depicts a multitude of figures attempting to ascend what looks like two soaring mountain peaks. Artist Michael Pavlovsky, however, conceived the work as a wall. The teeming figures are said to symbolize the timeless nature of the struggle to overcome injustice wherever it is found.

A 10-minute video presentation in the 100-seat auditorium provides a brief historical look at race relations in America from slavery to the 1950s. The museum's exhibits, obviously carefully chosen, carry the story from there.

To challenge the Jim Crow laws, civil rights activists launched a campaign in 1961 called the Freedom Rides. They boarded public buses and headed south, where some were met by violence. In Anniston, Ala., one Greyhound bus was stoned and burned. This event is depicted by a large, burned-out bus. According to Bailey, the museum acquired an old Trailways bus, painted it Greyhound's colors and had it burned until it looked like the Anniston bus.

In 1965, demonstrators set out on a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. At the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the outskirts of Selma they were beaten back by state patrolmen. In the museum, visitors cross a replica of the bridge between life-size photo images of armed troopers in helmets.

From the Lorraine Motel balcony, you can see across Mulberry Street to a window in the former boardinghouse where James Earl Ray fired the shot that killed King. A laser

beam is projected symbolically from that direction to the blood spots on the balcony pavement, and then the beam soars into the sky. A permanent wreath will decorate the balcony where King fell.

I was in college in California when the Montgomery bus boycott began, and I followed its developments with fascination. And yet as I walked through the National Civil Rights Museum on a preview tour, I was amazed and saddened at how much of the movement's history I had forgotten. This museum should ensure that it won't be.

Throughout the country, the history of black Americans is told in many places—restored homes, black churches, Civil War battlefields, parks, statues and other monuments, black colleges, city museums, old theaters, courthouses and, ultimately, cemeteries. Many of these sites highlight heroic deeds, and a few recall somber tragedies. Notable accomplishments in science, the arts, business, education, entertainment, sports and other pursuits also are not overlooked.

And black history is told in many ways. Alabama's Bureau of Tourism publishes a free guidebook describing more than 150 historical sites in the state, including the Florence home of W.C. Handy, the "father of the blues." Boston has mapped out a Black Heritage Trail, a walk through a part of Beacon Hill that became the center of the city's black community from 1800 to 1900. Along the way is the African Meeting House, the oldest black church building still standing in the United States.

At least seven places significant in American black history have been designated national historic sites or monuments. They are:

■ *Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, Tuskegee Institute, Ala.* The site preserves the Oaks, the home of educator Booker T. Washington, who founded the college for blacks. Also on the site is the George Washington Carver Museum, displaying memorabilia of the botanist who developed 300 byproducts from peanuts and sweet potatoes.

■ *Frederick Douglass Memorial Home, Washington, D.C.* An orator, statesman and publisher, Douglass

was a leading black spokesman in the late 19th century.

■ *Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District, Atlanta.* Located here are King's birthplace, church and grave site.

■ *Boston African American National Historic Site.* Within a concentrated area of Beacon Hill are numerous black history sites of the pre-Civil War period.

■ *George Washington Carver National Monument, Diamond, Mo.* Established in 1943, the monument, which preserves Carver's birthplace, was the first national memorial to the achievements of a black.

■ *Booker T. Washington National Monument, Hardy, Va.* Washington's birthplace and early childhood home are preserved here.

■ *Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, Richmond.* A leader in Richmond's black community, Walker in 1903 was the first American woman to establish a bank. Her large Victorian home is open to tours.

In addition, many city museums and other places reflecting the black experience in this country are of major interest. Among them:

■ *Civil Rights Memorial, Montgomery.* The names of activists who died in support of the civil rights movement are etched in a marble table beside a fountain. Maya Lin, architect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, was the designer.

■ *Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, Jackson, Miss.* Depicts the troubled history of blacks in Mississippi.

■ *Jefferson National Expansion Memorial National Historic Site, St. Louis.* This is the site of the Old Courthouse, where the famous Dred Scott case was heard. Dred Scott was a slave, and his case accentuated the differences between anti- and pro-slavery Americans prior to the Civil War.

■ *National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Wilberforce, Ohio.* One of the nation's largest black history museums. Other black history museums can be found in Columbia, S.C.; Macon, Ga.; Annapolis; Cleveland; Los Angeles; Oakland; Denver; Austin, Texas; Chicago; Detroit; and Dallas.