I. Lesson Summary

Summary
Not long after (and possibly inspired by) the famous Rosa Parks incident and subsequent bus boycott led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Montgomery, Alabama, the African-American community in Tallahassee staged their own protest of unfair practices on the part of their local transit company. Led by a local minister named Reverend C.K. Steele, the Tallahassee bus boycott not only ended years of segregated seating on Tallahassee’s public transportation, but also inspired black people all over Florida to battle for equality in other areas as well.

Objectives
Students will:
1.) understand the sequence of events that transpired during the Tallahassee bus boycott;
2.) discuss the similarities and differences between bus boycotts in Montgomery and Tallahassee;
3.) examine the character traits of Reverend C.K. Steele to understand how they made him an effective leader of the Tallahassee bus boycott;
4.) use primary sources in order to scrutinize how the bus boycott unified the black community of Tallahassee.

U.S. History Event or Era
This lesson should be used in any unit in which students are learning about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ’60s. For best results, this lesson should be used immediately after students have demonstrated mastery of content matter dealing with Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956.

Grade Level
This lesson is intended for high school use; however, with some modification it could be used in the middle school classroom as well.

Materials
"Reading Passages #1-4," Discussion Questions for all four reading passages, transparency of photo found online at http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/PhotoAlbum/rc11500.cfm, and some method of showing a short, 38-second interview with the Rev. C.K. Steele found online at http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/VideoFilm/video.cfm?VID=17.

Lesson Time
This lesson can be completed in one block period.
II. Lesson Procedures

1. **Preview Activity #1**: As students enter the classroom, have them answer the following question (which is written on the board for everyone to see, or on the overhead projector): “Have you ever been the victim of discrimination? If so, what happened and how did it make you feel? If not, why do you think that you have not, and briefly describe how you think you would react if you ever had felt discriminated against.” After 5-7 minutes, allow several students to share their responses. Then, inform students that in this lesson they will be learning about a group of people who lived in our state’s capital city that successfully fought discrimination. Using a projection device connected to your computer, show the students the 38-second-long clip of an interview with the Rev. C.K. Steele, found at http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/VideoFilm/video.cfm?VID=17. (you will need RealOne Player to view this clip; for instructions on how to download RealOne Player onto your computer, go to http://proforma.real.com/real/player/blackjack.html). After the clip ends, explain to your students who the man speaking was, and tell them that the only statue of a person in the state’s capital is not of a governor, statesman or military leader. It stands at a bus terminal on Tennessee Street and it is of the Rev. C.K. Steele.

2. **Preview Activity #2**: (this activity is based on a lesson in Teacher Curriculum Institute’s high school unit on the Civil Rights Movement; to see more about Teachers’ Curriculum Institute, go to www.teachtci.com) Follow the same procedures as for “Preview Activity #1,” but predetermine a small group (for example, all those wearing glasses or those with jeans on, or even those with blue eyes) to be “segregated” from the rest of the class. For instance, arrange all of the shoddy desks or chairs in the classroom in the furthest corner away from where you will be talking and showing the short interview with Rev. Steele. If possible, provide seats for fewer students than what will be actually sitting there. When students in the front ask questions, answer them enthusiastically and heap them with praise for asking such good questions and participating. Whenever students in the back corner have a question or comment, ignore them. Expect for some of these “segregated” students to become unruly or even upset. **IMPORTANT!!!** Before moving on to the next activity, be sure to debrief your students on the purpose of segregating a certain number of them to the back of the room. Otherwise, some students will leave your classroom angry or hurt. Ask them how they felt being shunned by you and the rest of the class. Ask them if they felt disrespected, or like second-class students. Then, allow them to draw parallels between their experience and the experience of African-Americans before and during the Civil Rights Movement.

3. Pass out “Reading Passage #1” and “Discussion Questions” to each student, or mixed ability pairs. Explain to students that their task is to read the passage and answer the questions pertaining to the passage. When students are finished, have them bring their answers to you to be checked for accuracy. If they are correct, give them the next passage; if not, allow them to change their answers. Then give them the next passage. Follow this procedure until each student or group is finished. OR give all four passages at one time and have students read them and answer all of the questions. Then discuss as a class.

4. As a closing activity, project the picture from http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/PhotoAlbum/rc11500.cfm onto the front wall or the screen. Choose several students to stand in front of the picture. These students will be playing roles from the picture. You will take on the role of the “reporter,” on the scene of this large protest at the movie theater in Tallahassee. Choose students for the following roles: two girls to represent the young ladies singing and clapping on the left side of the picture; one student to be the young African-American man with hat in background on left; one student to be one of the white male students in the background in front of the movie poster, and two students to play the roles of the two police officers on the right. Have the role players stand in front of the screen while you interview each one about why they are at the movie theater. At the end of the “on the spot interviews,” ask all of the students if they feel that what the black students are doing in the picture (protesting segregated seating in Tallahassee’s movie theater) is in any way related to the outcome of the Tallahassee bus boycott. Then ask them how this scene might be different if the outcome of the boycott had been different.
There are many similarities between the bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama, and Tallahassee, but the incidents which resulted in the boycotts were much different. Tallahassee’s bus protest began as a student movement. Twenty-six year old Wilhemina Jakes of West Palm Beach and 21-year-old Carrie Patterson of Lakeland, both students at the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), could not have anticipated the ultimate results of their actions on May 27, 1956, when they both sat in a pair of vacant seats in the “whites only” section of a Tallahassee city bus rather than stand in the colored section. Questioned later, the pair claimed they were simply tired from shopping, but the example of the bus boycott in Montgomery, then in progress, cannot be discounted. It was an “established rule” in the South (at that time) that African-American riders had to sit at the back of the bus. African-American riders were also expected to surrender their seat to a white bus rider if it was needed. When the bus driver demanded that they move to the rear of the bus, the women refused but offered to leave if their fares were refunded. The driver, Max Coggins, probably could have diffused the situation at this point. Instead he flatly refused the students’ request. When the two again declined to move to the rear of the bus, Coggins drove to a service station and telephoned the police. The two women were arrested and charged with “inciting a riot.” Bus drivers were notorious throughout the Jim Crow South for mistreating their black passengers. A few years later, in the landmark book Black Like Me, John Howard Griffin gave several examples of discriminatory behavior he encountered when riding the bus as an African-American. In his November 10-12 entry (p. 46), he described an incident in New Orleans in which the bus driver shut the bus door and wouldn’t let him off until a white passenger wanted to get off.

Jakes and Patterson were later released on twenty-five dollar bonds, and the matter was given over to FAMU officials to settle. Later the charges against both students were dropped. The local newspaper, The Tallahassee Democrat, treated this violation of segregation laws as a minor incident, worthy of only a brief paragraph. The newspaper article, however, did report the women’s address at 123 West Jennings Street in Tallahassee.

On the night of their arrest, a cross was burned in front of the Jennings Street residence. FAMU officials moved the two women into a dormitory for their own safety. Rather than intimidating the black community, and especially African-American students at FAMU, the cross-burning fired up the city’s black population.

The following day at noon, FAMU students held a mass meeting. The student government association, led by President Broadus Hartley, called for a boycott of city buses. The boycott was to be enforced for the two weeks remaining in the school term. Students boarded buses passing through FAMU’s campus and urged all black passengers to disembark. Most people complied, but one local minister, the Reverend R.N. Webb, refused and students removed him by force. This incident and pressure from the state Board of Control prompted FAMU administrators to prohibit students from boarding city buses to carry out the boycott. The school’s administration wanted to lessen the very real possibility of violence and ensure student safety.
Reading Passage #2

On May 29th, several leaders in the Tallahassee black community scheduled a meeting for later that night at the Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, where the Reverend C.K. Steele was pastor. Steele was also acting president of the Tallahassee chapter of the NAACP. Some 450 people attended that evening’s meeting, and two significant results emerged; the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council (ICC) was organized, and Rev. Steele was elected its president. Upon being elected president of the ICC, Steele privately stated that he would have preferred the NAACP conduct any boycott, but he also recognized the need to have a locally based organization. This would ensure that boycott opponents could not make the commonplace charge that the protest was the result of outside agitation.

The Reverend Charles Kenzie Steele seemed the perfect choice to lead a local movement that would combat segregation. He had a reputation for being unbendable, brave, well-spoken, and extremely shrewd in the art of strategy. Born in 1914 in West Virginia, he later attended Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1934. In his home state of West Virginia, there was almost certainly racial prejudice, but blacks there encountered less resistance to their pursuit of equality than in other Southern states (in fact, West Virginia became a state in 1863, when many white mountaineers in the western part of the Confederate state of Virginia, hostile to the Confederate cause, broke away from their home state and joined the Union). While in Atlanta, Steele was appalled by the open hostility black people faced daily. The strict enforcement of segregation he observed in Atlanta had a profound effect on Steele. He concluded at an early age that the struggle for social justice must be part of any African-American minister’s mission. It was a significant turning point for a man who had begun preaching at the age of 15.

The ICC’s stated goal was the immediate desegregation of the city’s bus service. Its methods were nonviolent but directly confrontational. The Council made three specific demands on the transit company: first, seating on the buses should be on a first-come, first-serve basis; second, African-Americans were to be treated with courtesy by white bus drivers; and finally, black drivers were to be hired to drive routes through the black community. The ICC promised the boycott would continue until all three conditions were met. It also began operating a carpool system to transport workers, most of them domestics employed in white suburban homes, during the boycott.

The Tallahassee City Commission’s first response to the boycott announcement was to ignore it. City commission members claimed they had not received a written statement of what the black community wanted, even though the ICC’s three conditions had been published in the Tallahassee Democrat. Charles H. Carter, the bus company manager, announced that his contract with the city had a segregation clause he could not violate. Opposition to the boycott also came from an unexpected source; within the city’s African-American community, including the membership of Steele’s own church.

For Steele, the protest had an immediate personal impact. After he was identified as the ICC’s president, his family was subjected to threats and constant harassment. By phone, by mail, and sometimes by more dire means there were attempts to intimidate Steele. One of Steele’s sons, the Rev. Henry Marion Steele, recalled that rocks and sometimes gunfire were directed at the Steeles’ home on the corner of Boulevard and Tennessee Streets. “Bullet holes were still visible in the walls almost ten years later when the home was torn down,” Henry Steele said. And even in Steele’s own congregation at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church, the congregation’s disapproval of their pastor’s civil rights activity spilled out in their treatment of his wife, Lois, at first with polite indifference, and later in the boycott with thinly disguised hostility. Other church members counterbalanced this hostility with kindness and assistance to the family.
When it became obvious the boycott was not going to somehow fade away, the city commission tried to divide the black community. The commission, after business hours on a Saturday, met privately at the Leon Federal Savings and Loan with prominent leaders in the city’s black community, including Father David Brooks, businessmen Dan Speed and George W. Conoly, and FAMU head football coach Jake Gaither. Not surprisingly, no members of the ICC were invited to attend this meeting. The next day, the Rev. Steele inadvertently gave the city commission’s divide-and-conquer strategy some unwitting assistance. Unaware of the secret meeting held the day before, he chose as the topic for his Sunday sermon, “Judas' betrayal of Jesus.” Those church members who had attended the secret meeting were convinced that the sermon was a veiled attack upon them. The sermon created a rift in Tallahassee’s black community that would take years to heal. Indeed, some of the dissension that arose in Steele’s own congregation never went away, and this lingering resentment plagued Steele’s ministry until his death.

Steele did his best to repair the damage, fearing the controversy would destroy the boycott. But despite his best efforts, people active in the boycott displayed resentment towards those who had attended the secret meeting. George Conoly lost so much patronage that he was forced to close his gas station. He withdrew from active participation in the boycott but continued to help raise money for the bail of those arrested by the police. Father Brooks lost considerable credibility, too.

In each biweekly mass meeting, Steele stressed the critical need for unity. Years later, he declared that if he had known about the secret meeting, he never would have preached that particular sermon. The boycott continued as Steele managed to ease friction within the community, and inspire the widespread cooperation necessary to maintain the carpool. As was the case in Montgomery, Alabama, the carpool was critical to the boycott’s success. Reverend Dan Speed’s masterful administration of the carpool blunted community resentment of his attendance at the secret meeting. Also, the character of Tallahassee’s black community was a key factor in the success of the boycott.

African-Americans in Tallahassee were aggressive, obstinate, and organized despite the constraints of segregation. Church and civic groups had long received strong support. The campus of FAMU was the site of numerous cultural events. Its student body provided a pool of willing volunteers for community activities. There was a strong sense of unity in the black community that could not easily be undone. FAMU employees and public school teachers made up most of Tallahassee’s black middle class. This group enjoyed relative prosperity but still lagged far behind the income of whites in similar occupations. In 1950, for instance, the average annual income for African-Americans in Tallahassee was $1,144, while whites made an average of $2,952 annually. Despite progress made by the middle class, the majority of the city’s blacks lived below poverty level with little hope of relief. For all of Tallahassee’s 10,622 black residents, segregation was an environment permeating every aspect of their lives. It also contributed, however, to a strong sense of community.

The city commission began to recognize the toughness of its opponents and the importance of the carpool to the success of the boycott. A campaign to disrupt the carpool began almost immediately. Carpool participants were systematically harassed by the police as traffic citations and arrests were issued in large numbers. As president of the ICC, Steele was a special target. Once, he was arrested three times in one day.

On June 6th, a three-judge panel ruled that the segregated seating laws in Montgomery were unconstitutional. This called Tallahassee’s seating laws into serious question, but the city commission refused to yield. Bus service to black neighborhoods was suspended. The city fathers hoped this action coupled with the attack on the carpool would end the boycott. Also a group of blacks led by Father Brooks issued a statement opposing the boycott and urging cooperation with the city commission. But the majority of the black community displayed considerable hostility to this group of accommodationists.

The boycott quickly began to take its toll on the bus company’s finances. Even a fare increase and reduction of the company’s franchise tax could not prevent a total suspension of bus service on July 1st. The ICC-sponsored boycott had cost the bus company 60 percent of its total revenue. Montgomery’s bus boycott, begun six months before the protest in Tallahassee, did not produce such dramatic results. Tallahassee’s African-American community demonstrated a high degree of discipline and cooperation and successfully exerted its economic power.

Although the city commission stood firm on segregation, the bus company’s management wavered. It proposed the resumption of bus service on August 2nd with only the sideways seats at the front of the buses reserved for whites. The company also promised to hire black drivers for routes in the black community. Steele and his ICC executive board rejected the compromise.
Governor Leroy Collins in the July 3rd issue of the Tallahassee Democrat criticized the protest leadership for "pushing too hard, too fast." Collins' motives for making these statements have never been firmly established. Perhaps the governor felt the necessity of taking a firm stand on the boycott in response to criticism from diehard segregationists. In any case, the comments contrast sharply with Collins' later stand as a moderate champion of civil rights. Steele believed that the governor's statements probably encouraged the city commission's continued opposition. On July 4th, Steele told the press, "We cannot sit quietly by and wait for freedom to come to us on a silver platter…No Negro worth his salt can afford to stand for anything other than the complete liberation of our people." Steele's uncompromising stance earned him the hostility of both black and white conservatives fearful of the rapid change starting to occur in Tallahassee.

Pictures F-6-5 & F-6-6: Correspondence between Rev. Steele and Florida governor Leroy Collins dealing with the issue of the ICC-mandated carpool
In the fall of 1956, those arrested by police for carpool participation went to trial. The city based its case on their alleged violation of the state’s “for hire” tag law. ICC members claimed that since no fares were charged, no laws were broken. On October 17th, all 22 defendants including Steele were found guilty. Each was sentenced to 60 days in jail and fined $500. The jail sentences were suspended, but the fines totaling $11,000 were to be collected. This was an obvious attempt to bankrupt the ICC and end the boycott. The city had convinced the court that the ICC was an illegal business rival of the bus company.

To the dismay of city officials, the ICC abandoned its carpool but continued its boycott, and intensified a voter registration drive begun over the summer of 1956. The black community was determined to remove from public office officials it felt abused their positions. The church, the most feasible and stable institution in the community, was the driving force behind the renewed political activism. Because of the number of African-American churches and various civic organizations, black people in Tallahassee had the resources to mount a sustained voter registration campaign. Reverend Steele also recognized that a diversified attack on segregation had the best possibility for success. He tried to defuse community resentment of gradualists like Father Brooks because he understood all had a role to play.

On Christmas Eve, 1956, Steele, A.C. Reed, and H. McNeal Harris rode in the “whites only” section of a city bus. The city commission responded by revoking the company’s charter. Since the three ministers were the only passengers, company officials contended no violation of segregation laws had occurred. The company then filed suit to challenge the validity of the segregated seating ordinance. It also sought and obtained a temporary restraining order prohibiting city commission interference in company operations. While the city and the bus company fought in the courts, Steele’s family endured gunshots and cross-burnings in front of their home in January 1957. To curtail the trend of violence, Governor Collins suspended bus service on January 3rd. That was lifted within weeks.

Despite the controversy and rising violence, the black community remained unified and active. The Reverend King Solomon Dupont became the first African-American in 20th-century Tallahassee to run for the city commission in February 1957. He failed to unseat segregationist Davis Atkinson, but the election was marked by increased black voter turnout. The Feb. 28th issue of the Tallahassee Democrat noted that the increased percentage of blacks on the voter rolls was a direct result of the ICC registration campaign.

Ironically, events that had begun in an atmosphere of tension and drama ended in an anticlimactic calm. The final process of integration was evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. By December 1957, the segregation clause had been removed from the bus company’s franchise contract, and by May of 1958, buses were completely integrated in Tallahassee.

The settling of the bus boycott was just the start of a long sequence of related protests. Under Steele’s leadership, the ICC continued to support civil rights activity throughout the 1960s, often cooperating with other civil rights organizations. Between 1958-63, the ICC provided support to the Congress of Racial Equality’s (CORE) campaign to desegregate stores, housing, theaters, and schools in Leon County. Thanks to the inspired leadership of C.K. Steele, the Tallahassee bus boycott served as the successful catalyst for social change and improved race relations.

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Discussion Questions for Reading Passage #1

Directions: Answer these questions on your own paper while reading the appropriate passages. Be prepared to share your answers.

1.) The reading passage states that it was an “established rule” in the South during segregation that black people were to sit in the back of a city bus, and were also expected to give up their seat to a white passenger if the bus was full. Read the Montgomery City Code, Section 10; was this “established rule” stated in the code? Is this an example of de facto segregation or de jure segregation?

2.) Does the media have the right to publish addresses of people who have been arrested? State an argument for this practice, and one against this practice.

Reading Passage #2

3.) What were the two results of the meeting held at Bethel Missionary Baptist Church on May 29, 1956?

4.) What three demands did the ICC make on the Tallahassee transit company? Do you think that they should have gone ahead with their all-or-nothing approach, or would it have been better to undertake a more gradual approach in dealing with the transit company? Explain your answer.

5.) Read the following quote attributed to Rev. C.K. Steele on May 27, 1957, the one-year anniversary of the start of the boycott: “Freedom is on the march. We come up tonight out of the smoke of shotgun firing and the debris of broken windows to say the fight is still on, the war is not over…They have thrown rocks, they have smashed car windows, they have burned crosses. Well, I am happy to state here tonight that I have no fear of them and praise God I have no hate for them.” List three words that come to mind that would describe Reverend Steele. Does he remind you of another civil rights leader you have recently learned about?

Reading Passage #3

6.) Why do you think that no members of the Tallahassee ICC were invited to the meeting held between the city commission and some of Tallahassee’s prominent black leaders?

7.) Based on the use of the word patronage in the sentence, “George Conoly lost so much patronage that he was forced to close his gas station,” what other word could be a synonym for “patronage”?

8.) Despite all of the disadvantages that Tallahassee’s black population experienced during the 1950’s, what one positive existed as a result of these disadvantages, according to the author of this article?

9.) How do you see Steele’s character traits in his refusal of the bus company’s compromise? Would you have made the same decision? Why or why not?

10.) Based on the correspondence between Rev. Steele and Gov. Collins, how would you rate Gov. Collins’ feelings towards the bus boycott and the carpool: Very supportive, somewhat supportive, neutral, somewhat against, or completely against? Explain your answer.

Reading Passage #4

11.) For what reason did Tallahassee’s African-American community abandon the carpool? What did they do instead? In what ways was this new endeavor successful (you’ll need to read further to find the answer)?

12.) What do you think the word ‘gradualist’ means, when used in the following sentence: “Reverend Steele tried to defuse community resentment of gradualists like Father Brooks because he understood all had a role to play”?

13.) What was the end result of the bus boycott? Was there a lasting legacy achieved by the efforts of Rev. Steele and his supporters?
IV. Assessment

1.) How is the impact of the Tallahassee bus boycott of 1956-1958 seen in the following pictures?

Picture F-6-9: Sit-in at Woolworth's lunch counter in Tallahassee, Florida, 1960; several African-American students protest segregated seating at a local eatery by sitting in the “whites-only” section.

Picture F-6-10: Civil rights demonstration in front of segregated theater, Tallahassee, Florida, 1963; African-Americans protest segregated seating at a Tallahassee movie theater.

Picture F-6-11: Integration at Vinland Elementary School, Dade County, Florida, 1971; black and white students play together after many schools in Florida finally complied with a federal order to integrate all public schools.
2.) If your students have studied the Montgomery bus boycott as well as the Tallahassee bus boycott, have them create a Venn diagram in order to compare and contrast both boycotts.

3.) The leader of the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council, as well as the organizer of the Tallahassee bus boycott, was _______________________.
   a. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr  b. Rev. C.K. Steele  c. Harry T. Moore

4.) Which one of the following was not one of the demands made by the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council to the city bus transit company in order to end the boycott?
   a. seating on the buses would be on a first-come, first-serve basis;
   b. African-Americans were to be treated with courtesy by white bus drivers;
   c. black drivers were to be hired to drive routes through Tallahassee’s black community;
   d. white passengers would be forced to give up their seats to all African-American passengers

5.) True or false. The bus company’s management offered a compromise in order to resume routes in black neighborhoods. They agreed to reserve only the front seats of buses for whites, and to hire black drivers to drive routes through the black community. Steele, seeking a quick end to the boycott’s inconveniences, accepted the compromise on behalf of the Inter-Civic Council.

6.) What did many of Tallahassee’s black citizens do in order to offset the hassle of the bus boycott?
   a. organized and used a carpool system  c. bought automobiles
   b. took the subway  d. used taxi services

7.) True or false. After successfully integrating Tallahassee’s public transportation system through their nonviolent protest, Tallahassee’s black community lived in peace with their white neighbors, never again to protest segregation on other levels, such as schools or seating in restaurants or theaters.
V. Resources


http://www.americanradioworks.org/features/remembering/public.html#buses - “Remembering Jim Crow: Segregation in Public Places” (oral histories from the Jim Crow era)


http://www.floridamemory.com/OnlineClassroom/PhotoAlbum/civil_rights.cfm - “Photo Album of the Civil Rights Movement in Florida”


http://www.holidays.net/mlk/rosa.htm - “Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott”

http://www.sdc.x.k12.ca.us/score/blm/blm1.html - “Segregation on Public Transportation”

http://www.theledger.com/static/top50/pages/steele.html - The Lakeland Ledger’s Top 50 Most Influential Floridians of the 20th Century