



PHOTOS BY JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Passengers, including Natasha Dennis (left) and Manny Montero, found ways to pass the time during the ride from Boston to Alabama.

Ride to Selma fueled by legacy

By Meghan E. Irons
GLOBE STAFF

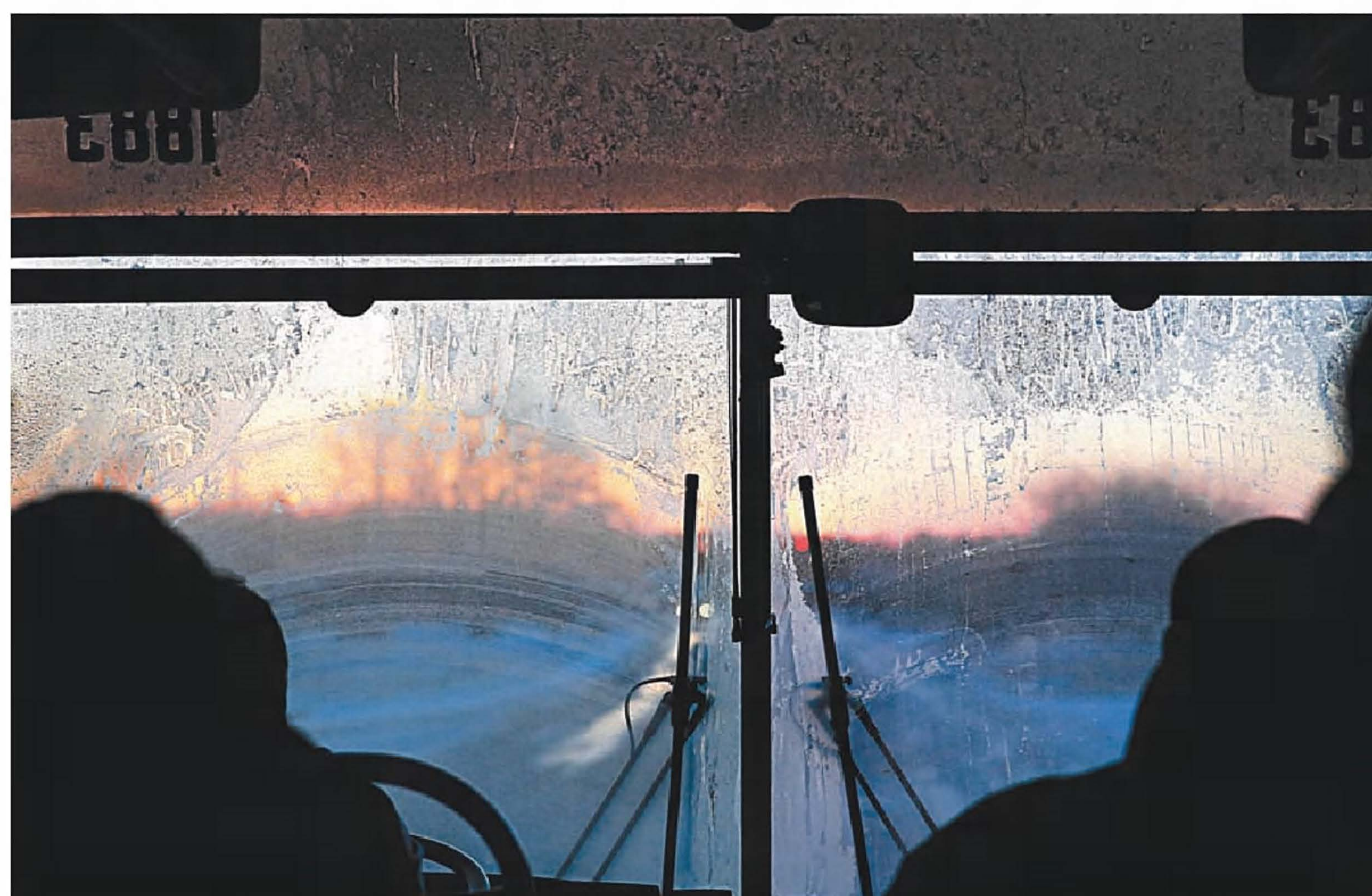
The bus plodded out of Roxbury into the thickness of night, carrying 55 passengers on a 25-hour pilgrimage to Selma, Ala.

They were embarking on a journey similar to one made 50 years ago by an earlier generation of Bostonians fighting Jim Crow laws that aimed to crush the spirit of African-Americans and stifle their progress.

Most of those on the bus Thursday night were not yet born when police used their nightsticks to pound marchers crossing Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965 — a brutal day immortalized as Bloody Sunday, a seminal moment in the quest for voting rights.

The passengers on this bus were determined to retrace the path of the marchers who drove from Boston to

Boston group recalls '60s journey, and the issues today still unresolved



Icy residue forced the bus driver to pull over several times and clear the windshield during the 25-hour trip.

cross the bridge half a century ago. In attending Saturday's anniversary event, they wanted to highlight issues glossed over during the civil rights movement: gay rights, the plight of Muslims in America, misogynistic treatment of black women, immigration reform.

"I needed to be there," said Vonds Dubuisson, a 27-year-old senior at the University of Massachusetts Boston. "A lot of people say that as a young person, what do I know about oppression? But it's not an abstract notion for me. It's not theoretical . . . I know it's all about the fight for something better."

The bus trudged down the highway, swerving through an ice storm in New Jersey. The students stirred as they watched the movie "Selma."

Tony Van Der Meer, a UMass Bos-

SELMA, Page B4

Issues of past, present fuel ride to Selma

►SELMA
Continued from Page B1

ton professor who teaches classes on black activism, stood up from his seat and commanded the front of the bus, using a microphone normally reserved for tour guides. He began a rolling dialogue that continued throughout the trip, touching on the risks and courage it took to fight for what is right.

“What I taught in my class is what’s the relevancy of your learning,” he told the group. “How is it relevant in your life?”

One by one, the students stood up and answered: an undocumented student pushing for immigration reform. A black Muslim struggling for inclusion in the new rights effort. A former Liberian refugee learning to move on. A young man from Dorchester channeling his anger into peaceful resolve. A young mother using her experience as a victim of domestic violence to advocate for others.

Van Der Meer was one of the trip’s organizers, along with Kevin Peterson of the New Democracy Coalition, a minister, the Rev. Ron Bell, and a community advocate, Leonard Lee. All recalled Boston’s stormy past of race relations, invoking busing and the legacy of Charles Stuart, the man who killed his wife, blamed a black person, and set off a storm in Boston before he leapt to his death from the Tobin Bridge.

Many of the students on the bus are already deep in their own activism. Some had been part of the movement that arose after a series of police killings last year exposed a deep racial divide, and underscored what protesters said is a lack of accountability by officers who use their weapons.

“A whole new crew has been active in a new movement,” Van Der Meer said at one rest stop.

“The deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown were catalysts. It’s things they see that gets them sick and tired of be-



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Members of the Boston delegation made their way through Selma, Ala., on Saturday.

ing sick and tired” that nothing gets done, he said.

To 24-year-old Mirlande Thermidor, there is still much unfinished business.

Thermidor, a black student at UMass Boston, had heard about the trip from a friend, and she told her boyfriend, Ross Buttery, a white student at Bunker Hill Community College. The couple had met as high school students at the West Roxbury Education Complex, and had been active in advocacy for social change.

Thermidor, somewhere on the bus ride between Maryland and the Carolinas, recalled participating in small group discussions that tackled thorny issues and joining protests.

Marking the journey that began years before is especially important, she said.

“When you think about the people who got on the bus from Boston and what they did in the 1960s, it’s pretty remarkable,” Thermidor said. “For us to do that now, it’s really incredible.”

As the bus rolled on, it was Adebukola Ajao’s turn at the

microphone. The 20-year-old from Randolph had finished watching “Selma,” and anger punctuated her voice.

“I’m getting mad right now, because what has changed?” said Ajao, who cofounded the advocacy group We Are the Ones. Listing a string of wrongs, she said the discourse over racial empowerment too often neglects black women.

“It’s not about black men,” she said. “It’s about black women. . . . We are in an era of Jim Crow.”

The students snapped their fingers and clapped.

Manny Monterio, a 23-year-old from Dorchester, said he almost didn’t make the trip, wrestling with whether he should instead stay and go to work.

“Being on this bus going to Selma is me fighting,” he said. “Until I understood the term power, I was angry . . . But in order to reclaim my power, I’m chilled. It’s my way of fighting back.”

Not everyone finished the trip. One of the passengers who began in Roxbury had to quickly disembark after receiving a text message that his father was in a hospital emergency room.

Dubuisson nearly missed the trip, too. He did not know about it until he encountered his professor, Van Der Meer, on campus.

When the professor told him about Selma, Dubuisson thought he was referring to the movie. But as soon as Dubuisson learned about the bus trip, he ran to buy toothpaste and soap to wash his face.

Seated on the bus, red dreadlocks framing his face, his

voice brimmed with fresh idealism. He confided that he had experienced a deep sense of loss and helplessness after three of his cousins died, including two who were murdered.

“We just never knew what happened,” Dubuisson said. “The police just wrote it off as gang-related.”

And he recalled being picked on as a third-grader. When he told his teacher, the teacher explained that life was not fair.

“How can you tell that to a child?” he said. “Make it fair.”

The bus drove into daylight and then into night again, as it pulled into the driveway at an Americas Best Value Inn in Opelika, Ala.

Weary but resolute, the group got off the bus. They had made it this far.

The next morning, the bus drove out of Opelika, riding through bumper-to-bumper traffic for a two-hour journey to Selma.

The crowds had come, filling the local inns and crowding the restaurants, to mark the anniversary.

Stuck in traffic for hours, the students got off the bus and decided to walk in the direction of the bridge.

They walked for 5 miles. Some of the older passengers with heart trouble had to turn back. A few got rides.

But the students kept walking. A few found a shorter, but risky path over old railroad tracks. And so they kept walking, praying as they walked into the morning.

Meghan E. Irons can be reached at meghan.irons@globe.com.

LEGAL NOTICES

LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION
Notice of Availability of Competitive
Grant Funds for Calendar Year 2016

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) announces the availability of competitive grant funds to provide civil legal services to eligible clients during calendar year 2016. A Request for Proposals (RFP) and other information pertaining to the LSC grants competition will be available from www.grants.lsc.gov during the week of April 6, 2015. In accordance with LSC’s multiyear funding policy, grants are available for only specified service areas. To review the service areas for which competitive grants are available, by state, go to www.grants.lsc.gov/about-grants/where-we-fund and click on the name of the state. A full list of all service areas in competition will also be posted on that page. Applicants must file a Notice of Intent to Compete (NIC) through the online application system in order to participate in the competitive grants process. Information about LSC Grants funding, the application process, eligibility to apply for a grant, and how to file a NIC is available at www.grants.lsc.gov/about-grants. Complete instructions will be available in the Request for Proposals Narrative Instruction. Please refer to www.grants.lsc.gov for filing dates and submission requirements. Please email inquiries pertaining to the LSC competitive grants process to Competition@lsc.gov.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE WILL HOLD A BUDGET HEARING FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016 ON THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2015, 6:00 PM AT THE ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, 144 MCBRIDE STREET, JAMAICA PLAIN. FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL 617 635-9014.

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