

Name: _____ Class: _____

Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

By UShistory.org
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The Civil Rights Movement was a social movement that began in the mid 1950s and lasted until approximately 1968. This movement fought to end racial segregation and discrimination against African-Americans in the United States. The small moments of resistance by ordinary citizens is what created the foundation for this revolution. As you read, take notes on how civil rights activists were able to create change and how others resisted these positive changes.

- [1] On a cold December evening in 1955, Rosa Parks quietly incited a revolution — by just sitting down.

She was tired after spending the day at work as a department store seamstress. She stepped onto the bus for the ride home and sat in the fifth row — the first row of the “Colored Section.”

In Montgomery, Alabama, when a bus became full, the seats nearer the front were given to white passengers.

Montgomery bus driver James Blake ordered Parks and three other African Americans seated nearby to move (“Move y’all, I want those two seats,”) to the back of the bus.



“Rosa Parks being fingerprinted by Deputy Sheriff D.H. Lockett” by Associated Press is in the public domain.

- [5] Three riders complied; Parks did not.

The following excerpt of what happened next is from Douglas Brinkley’s 2000 Rosa Park’s biography:

“Are you going to stand up?” the driver demanded. Rosa Parks looked straight at him and said: “No.” Flustered, and not quite sure what to do, Blake retorted, “Well, I’m going to have you arrested.” And Parks, still sitting next to the window, replied softly, “You may do that.”

After Parks refused to move, she was arrested and fined \$10. The chain of events triggered by her arrest changed the United States.

King, Abernathy, Boycott, and the SCLC

At that time, a little-known minister named Martin Luther King Jr. had recently become a leader within the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery.

[10] Born and educated in Atlanta, King studied the writings and practices of Henry David Thoreau¹ and Mohandas Gandhi.² Their teaching advocated³ civil disobedience⁴ and nonviolent resistance to social injustice.

A staunch⁵ devotee of nonviolence, King and his colleague Ralph Abernathy organized a boycott⁶ of Montgomery's buses.

The demands they made were simple: Black passengers should be treated with courtesy. Seating should be allotted on a first-come-first-serve basis, with white passengers sitting from front to back and black passengers sitting from back to front. And African American drivers should drive routes that primarily serviced African Americans. On Monday, December 5, 1955 the boycott went into effect.

Montgomery officials stopped at nothing in attempting to sabotage the boycott. King and Abernathy were arrested. Violence began during the action and continued after its conclusion. Four churches — as well as the homes of King and Abernathy — were bombed. But the boycott continued.

King and Abernathy's organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), had hoped for a 50 percent support rate among African Americans. To their surprise and delight, over 90 percent of the city's African Americans refused to ride the buses. People walked to work or rode their bikes, and carpools were established to help the elderly. The bus company suffered thousands of dollars in lost revenue.

[15] Finally, on November 23, 1956, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the MIA. Segregated⁷ busing was declared unconstitutional. City officials reluctantly agreed to comply with the Court Ruling. The black community of Montgomery had held firm in their resolve.⁸ In the aftermath of the boycott, King said, "We came to see that, in the long run, it is more honorable to walk in dignity⁹ than ride in humiliation. So... we decided to substitute tired feet for tired souls, and walk the streets of Montgomery."

The Montgomery bus boycott triggered a firestorm¹⁰ in the South. Across the region, blacks resisted "moving to the back of the bus." Similar actions flared up in other cities. The boycott put Martin Luther King Jr. in the national spotlight. He became the acknowledged leader of the nascent¹¹ Civil Rights Movement.

With Ralph Abernathy, King formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

This organization was dedicated to fighting Jim Crow¹² segregation. African Americans boldly declared to the rest of the country that their movement would be peaceful, organized, and determined.

1. Henry David Thoreau (1817- 1862) was an American essayist, poet and supporter of ending slavery during the American Civil War.

2. Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) was a leader in the Indian Independence Movement in British-ruled India and responsible for inspiring civil rights movements across the world.

3. **Advocate (verb):** to publicly recommend or support

4. "Civil disobedience" is the refusal to follow certain laws as a peaceful form of protest.

5. **Staunch (adjective):** loyal and committed in attitude

6. **Boycott (noun):** an act of refusing to use, buy, or deal with a person, organization, or country as a form of protest

7. **Segregate (verb):** to separate groups of people based on race, religion, etc.

8. **Resolve (noun):** firm determination to do something

9. **Dignity (noun):** the quality of being worthy of honor or respect

10. "Firestorm" refers to a large amount of anger and criticism

11. **Nascent (adjective):** beginning to develop and showing signs of future potential

To modern eyes, getting a seat on a bus may not seem like a great feat. But in 1955, sitting down marked the first step in a revolution.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Rosa Park's decision to remain seated was the beginning of a movement of peaceful protests in the South.
 - B. The boycotts inspired by Rosa Parks remained contained in Montgomery.
 - C. Martin Luther King Jr. is ultimately responsible for the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.
 - D. Rosa Parks did not intend to make a political or social statement when she refused to give up her seat on the bus.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best support the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "She was tired after spending the day at work as a department store seamstress." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "King and his colleague Ralph Abernathy organized a boycott of Montgomery's buses." (Paragraph 11)
 - C. "The boycott put Martin Luther King Jr. in the national spotlight." (Paragraph 16)
 - D. "sitting down marked the first step in a revolution." (Paragraph 19)

3. PART A: What is the meaning of "incite" in paragraph 1? [RI.4]
 - A. To delay
 - B. To cause
 - C. To accelerate
 - D. To support

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "the seats nearer the front were given to white passengers." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "bus driver James Blake ordered Parks and three other African Americans seated nearby to move" (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Three riders complied; Parks did not." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "The chain of events triggered by her arrest changed the United States." (Paragraph 8)