

# Rosa's Story

Shortly after 5:00 P.M. on Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks finished her work as a seamstress at a local department store in Montgomery, Alabama, and boarded a bus. What began as an ordinary bus ride home became the event that sparked the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

According to Montgomery law, African Americans were required to sit in the back of the bus and give up their seats to white passengers as the bus filled. When Parks was asked to give up her seat to a white passenger on the particular evening, however, she refused. Immediately, the driver stopped the bus and called two policemen. Parks was arrested and taken to jail for violating the city ordinance.

Edgar Daniel Nixon, head of the NAACP in Montgomery, posted a \$100 bond to get Parks released. He then called a meeting of African American leaders to determine what action they should take. The meeting was held in the basement of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where a young man named Martin Luther King, Jr. had just been appointed minister. By the end of the long evening, the leaders agreed to call a one-day boycott of all city buses for Monday, December 5. Although Parks was not the first person to be arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus, Nixon decided that she would be the last.

Over the weekend, thousands of leaflets announcing the boycott were printed and distributed. On Monday morning, the first buses began their run through the African American neighborhoods. They finished the same way they began—empty. There were no black passengers. The boycott was a success. Immediately, organizers voted to continue it. They set up the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and named Martin Luther King, Jr. its leader.

Meanwhile, Parks went to court. She was charged with violating a 1947 segregation statute. The judge found her guilty and fined her \$10 plus \$4 in court costs. The NAACP appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

While the boycott continued, the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Council took action. They threatened the MIA organizers and harassed African Americans on the street. Hundreds of leaders and supporters, including Parks, were arrested. Many lost their jobs, and King's house was dynamited. Still the boycott continued.

People walked. They rode bicycles, caught cabs and joined car pools. They drove wagons, hitchhiked, rode mules and then walked some more. One elderly woman declared, "My feet is tired, but my soul is rested."



After 381 days of boycotting, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Parks and declared the Alabama laws on bus segregation unconstitutional. In April 1956, the bus company, which had lost more than \$750,000 during the long boycott, agreed to integrate seating on its buses and hire African American drivers. This was the first major step in a decades-long fight for civil rights in America.

Taken from *Extraordinary African Americans* by Susan Altman

