

The Origins of the Montgomery Bus Boycott

By David J. Garrow

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson moved to Montgomery, Alabama, in the late summer of 1949 to join the English Department at all-black Alabama State College. A thirty-three year old native of Culloden, Georgia, twenty-five miles from Macon, she was the twelfth and youngest child of Owen Boston Gibson and Dollie Webb Gibson, landowning black farmers who prospered until Owen Gibson died when Jo Ann was six years old. As the older children moved away, operating the farm grew more difficult for Mrs. Gibson, who eventually sold the property and moved into Macon with her younger offspring. Jo Ann graduated from high school there as the class valedictorian, and went on to earn her undergraduate degree at Fort Valley State College, the first member of her family to complete college. She took a public school teaching job in Macon and married Wilbur Robinson, but the marriage, heavily burdened by the death in infancy of their first and only child, lasted only a short time. Twelve months later, after five years of teaching in Macon, Jo Ann Robinson moved to Atlanta to take an M.A. in English at Atlanta University and then accepted a teaching position at Mary Allen College in Crockett, Texas. After one year there, Mrs. Robinson received a better offer from Alabama State, and moved to Montgomery.

Mrs. Robinson was an enthusiastic teacher and responded energetically to her new position at Alabama State. She also became an active member of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, which many Alabama State professors attended, and she joined the Women's Political Council, a black professional women's civic group that one of her English Department colleagues, Mrs. Mary Fair Burks, had founded three years earlier when the local League of Women Voters had refused to integrate.

It was a blissful fall, Mrs. Robinson later remembered. "I loved every minute of it. " Just prior to Christmas she made preparations to visit some relatives in Cleveland for the holidays. Storing her car in a garage, she boarded a Montgomery City Lines public bus for the ride to Dannelly Field, the municipal airport. Only two other passengers were aboard, and Mrs. Robinson, immersed in holiday thoughts, took a seat towards the front of the bus. Suddenly, however, she was roused from her thoughts about her family by angry words from the driver, who was ordering her to get up.

"He was standing over me, saying 'Get up from there! Get up from there,' with his hand drawn back," she later recalled.

Shaken and frightened, Mrs. Robinson fled from the bus. "I felt like a dog. And I got mad, after this was over, and I realized that I was a human being, and just as intelligent and far more trained than that bus driver was. But I think he wanted to hurt me, and he did . . . I cried all the way to Cleveland."

That experience convinced Mrs. Robinson that the 'Women's Political Council ought to target Montgomery's segregated bus seating for immediate attention. "It was then that I made up . . . my mind that whatever I could add to that organization that would help to bring that practice down, I would do it," Mrs. Robinson recalled. "When I came back, the first thing I did was to call a meeting . . . and tell

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them what had happened."

Only then did Mrs. Robinson learn that her experience was far from unique, that dozens of other black citizens, primarily women, had suffered similar abuse from Montgomery bus drivers. Over the previous few years several black women, Mrs. Geneva Johnson, Mrs. Viola White, and Miss Katie Wingfield, had been arrested and convicted for refusing to give up their seats. Earlier in 1949, two young children, visiting from the north and unfamiliar with Montgomery's practice of reserving the first ten seats on each bus for white riders only, even if black passengers were forced to stand over vacant seats, also were hauled in for refusing a driver's command to surrender their seats. Some oldtimers in Montgomery remembered how the black community had mounted a boycott in the summer of 1900, when the city had first imposed segregated seating on Montgomery's street cars, a boycott that had won a refinement of the city ordinance so as to specify that no rider had to surrender a seat unless another was available. Nonetheless, drivers often made black riders who were seated just behind the whites-only section get up and stand so that all white passengers could sit.

Mrs. Burks thought black toleration of those seating practices and other driver abuse, such as forcing black passengers to pay their dime at the front, and then get off and board the bus through the rear, side door, was scandalous. "Everyone would look the other way. Nobody would acknowledge what was going on," Mrs. Burks remembered. "It outraged me that this kind of conduct was going on," and that so far no black community organizations had done anything about it.

Black activism did exist in Montgomery, even though it had not yet focused upon bus conditions, despite the widespread complaints. Several years earlier Arthur Madison, a New York lawyer who came from one of black Montgomery's most prominent families, had returned home and tried to stimulate black voter registration, but white legal harassment had forced him to return to New York. The outspoken pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Rev. Vernon Johns, who had come to Montgomery in 1948, regularly denounced the bus situation, but many blacks viewed Johns as too unpredictable and idiosyncratic to assume a leadership role in the community. The brutal rape of a black teenager, Gertrude Perkins, by two white policemen earlier in 1949 had led Rev. Solomon S. Seay to repeated efforts to obtain justice in the case, but white officials had brushed off his complaints.

Another visible black activist was Pullman porter Edgar Daniel Nixon, a member of A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and a local leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Nixon served as Alabama state president of

the NMCP in 1948-1949, and also devoted much time to his Alabama Progressive Democratic Association, a black alternative to a state Democratic Party that continued to discourage black participation despite the 1940s' demise of the "white primary." Nixon regularly mounted one initiative after another; in 1954 he succeeded in winning 42 percent of the vote in a losing race for a seat on the party's Montgomery County Democratic Executive Committee, a tribute not only to the more than 1,500 black voters that Nixon and other activists like businessman Rufus A. Lewis had helped register, but also to the grudging respect that many whites felt for Nixon's tireless efforts.

Lewis, a well-known former football coach at Alabama State College, had been especially active not only in encouraging black registration but also in trying to unify black Montgomery's civic activism. Although some colleagues viewed Lewis and Nixon as low-key rivals for top leadership, Lewis' Citizens Club served as a regular hang-out for politically-minded blacks; his Citizens Steering Committee, formed in the fall of 1952, looked to find ways to exert some black political influence over Montgomery's city policies.

Equally if not more important to the political life of black Montgomery than Nixon's Progressive Democrats, the NMCP branch, or Lewis' Citizens Committee, however, was Mrs. Burks and Mrs. Robinson's Women's Political Council. By the early 1950s Robinson had succeeded Burks as president, and the core membership of regularly active participants numbered at least thirty women such as Thelma Glass, Mary Cross, Irene West, Eurette Adair, Elizabeth Arrington, and Zoeline Pierce, who were either faculty members at Alabama State, teachers in the local, segregated public schools, or wives of relatively well-to-do black professional men. More than either Nixon's circle or Lewis', these middle-class women were the most numerous, most reform-minded group of black civic activists in Montgomery.

The first notable opportunity for black political influence to make itself felt came in November, 1953, in a special election to fill one vacant seat on the three-member Montgomery City Commission. The black-supported victor, Dave Birmingham, a genuine racial liberal, won fifty-three percent of the vote in a contest that involved little discussion of race and allowed Birmingham to construct an electoral coalition of blacks and lower-class whites.

Impressed by their success in representing the balance of power, black civic activists, led by the WPC, met in late 1953 with Birmingham and his two racially moderate colleagues, Mayor W. A. "Tacky" Gayle and George Cleere, to voice three complaints about the racial practices of the municipally regulated and chartered bus company, Montgomery City Lines. Blacks having to stand over empty, white only seats on crowded buses was a constant insult and problem. So

was most drivers' practice of forcing blacks to board through the rear door. Additionally, while buses stopped at every block in white sections of town, it was only every other block in black neighborhoods.

The three commissioners, Birmingham in particular, listened politely, but nothing came of the session.

Undaunted, Mrs. Robinson, who served as the WPC and black community's principal spokesperson, obtained another audience with the commission in March, 1954, and reiterated the three complaints. The WPC, which historian of Montgomery J. Mills Thornton III has accurately termed "the most militant and uncompromising organ of the black community" in pre-1956 Montgomery, also presented the commission with specific details of driver abuse of black passengers. This time the city officials agreed to alter the bus company's practice of stopping only at alternate blocks in black areas, but they and the city's lawyers insisted there was no way, under Alabama's state segregation statutes, that any changes or improvements could be made in bus seating practices. Robinson and other black representatives contended that elimination of the reserved, whites only seats, and a halt to the practice of making blacks surrender seats to whites on overcrowded buses would eliminate the most serious problems, but the white officials rejected the WPC's proposal that the front-to-back seating of whites, and back-to-front seating of blacks, with no one having to stand over an empty seat or give one up after being seated, would in no way offend the state segregation law.

Mrs. Robinson and her colleagues were unhappy over the city's refusal to show any flexibility. In early May, the Commission did approve the hiring of Montgomery's first four black police officers, but many black Montgomeries attached greater importance to the ongoing prosecution of a black teenager, Jeremiah Reeves, who faced the death penalty for the supposed rape of a white woman in 1951.

Mrs. Robinson was already thinking of how to put more pressure on the Commission to improve bus conditions when, on May 17, came a news announcement that strengthened her determination. The United States Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and five companion cases challenging racially segregated public schools, ruled that governmentally-mandated school segregation was unconstitutional and that the sixty-year-old doctrine of "separate but equal" was no longer valid.

Four days after the landmark *Brown* decision, Mrs. Robinson typed a letter to Montgomery's Mayor Gayle, with a copy to Montgomery City Lines manager J. H. Bagley. She, thanked Gayle for the March meeting and for the change in the buses' alternate block stopping practice, but reiterated the WPC's great unhappiness at the ongoing seating policies. Then she politely voiced the threat she had quietly been recommending to her black leadership colleagues.

Mayor Gayle, three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyances are Negroes. y Negroes did not patronize them, they could not possibly operate.

More and more of ourr people are already arrangin with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humiliated, by bus drivers. There has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses. We, sir, do not feel that forceful measures are necessary in bargaining for a convenience which is right for all bus passengers. We, the Council, believe that when this matter has been put before you and the Commissioners,

that agreeable terms can be met in a quiet and unostensible manner to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Mrs. Robinson pointedly noted that many Southern cities, including Mobile, already were using the front-to-back, back-to-front segregated seating plan that Montgomery refused to implement. "Please consider this plea, and if possible, act favorably upon it," she concluded, "for even now plans are being made to ride less, or not at all, on our buses. We do not want this."

Despite the extremely gentle and tactful language she employed in her letter to Gayle, Mrs. Robinson was hoping that black community sentiment would support a bus boycott to force the Commission's hand. Another meeting with the white officials on June 1 registered no progress, but Mrs. Robinson found only modest interest in her boycott idea throughout much of the black community, and placed the idea on a back burner for the time being.

Next to bus conditions, the second civic concern troubling the WPC and other black activists was the decidedly inferior quality of the segregated parks and recreation facilities; available to black Montgomerians. One step the WPG had identified as a partial remedy was the appointment of a black member, such as WPC member Mrs. Irene West, to the

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city's Parks and Recreation Board. Mrs. Robinson voiced this request at a January, 1955, meeting of the City Commission, but despite supportive comments from Birmingham and Mayor Gayle, nothing happened. Instead, attention turned to the upcoming mid-March city elections, and a public candidates' forum that E. D. Nixon's Progressive Democratic Association held on February 23 at the black Ben Moore Hotel.

All three incumbents, plus their major challengers, Harold McGlynn for Gayle, Frank Parks for Cleere, and Sam Sterns and Clyde Sellers for Birmingham, attended the first-of-its-kind event and faced questions about bus conditions as well as the Parks and Recreation appointment. A majority of the contenders endorsed a black appointment to the Parks Board, while others avoided any specifics on either topic. Although the open soliciting of black votes by so many white candidates seemed impressive, one of Birmingham's challengers, former Auburn University football star and state highway patrol officer Clyde Sellers, saw the convocation, and Birmingham's sympathy for black concerns, as just the opening that was needed to cut into Birmingham's previously solid white working class electoral support.

Sellers' strategic desire to make race an election issue got a coincidental boost on March 2 when a fifteen-year-old black girl, Claudette Colvin, refused to give up her bus seat, well toward the rear of the vehicle, so as to accommodate an overflow of newly-boarding white passengers.

Police officers were able to drag Colvin from the bus only with considerable force. The incident immediately sent the black leadership into action. Mrs. Rosa Parks, a seamstress and long time NAACP member who was adult advisor to the NAACP Youth Council, to which Claudette Colvin belonged, immediately began soliciting financial assistance for the her legal defense, as

did Mrs. Parkst good friend Virginia Foster Durr, one of Montgomery's few racially liberal whites.

Rufus Lewis' newly formed Citizen's Coordinating Committee, yet another leadership unity organization which included E. D. Nixon and the WPC's Thelma Glass among its top officers, quickly sent out a mimeographed letter, "To Friends of Justice and Human Rights," seeking Colvin's acquittal, a reprimand of the bus driver involved, and clarification of the oft-ignored city provision that no rider had to give up a seat unless another was available.

Nixon and Mrs. Robinson, thinking that Colvin's case might supply an opportunity for a court challenge to the constitutionality of Montgomery's bus seating practices, interviewed the young woman, but concluded that her personal situation and the particulars of the arrest precluded using the incident as a test case. Robinson and others met, unsuccessfully, with city and bus company officials to seek dismissal of the charges.

Claudette Colvin was quickly convicted for both assault and battery and violating the segregation statute at a March 18 trial, only three days before the city election. When Colvin's attorney, young Montgomery native Fred Gray--who had been one of Mrs. Robinson's Alabama State students before attending law school in Ohio--filed notice of appeal, the prosecutor indicated that he would pursue only the assault and battery charge, not the segregation issue.

On the 21st, Sellers narrowly bested Dave Birmingham, who declined a possible runoff because of bad health, while Frank Parks, who had received black support, defeated Cleere. Disappointed both by the Colvin outcome and Birmingham's loss, the black leadership hoped for other opportunities.

In June, Mrs. Robinson, Gray and other black representatives met once again with city and bus company officials. Despite Gray's observations about Mobile's practices, the white officials, particularly bus company lawyer Jack Crenshaw, adhered firmly to their contention that no changes could be made legally in bus seating practices. Popular complaints about the seating situation and driver abuse remained at high levels, but no further organized initiatives were undertaken.

One relative newcomer to the city, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had succeeded Vernon Johns as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in mid-1954 and accompanied Robinson's delegation to the early March meeting with the city, attributed a good part of the inaction to what he later termed "an appalling lack of unity among the leaders" and a "crippling factionalism." More of a problem than competition among the active leaders, King thought, was the pervasive indifference of many middleclass black Montgomerians to any political or civic concern. Economic vulnerability and fear of white retribution understandably inhibited some, but "too much of the inaction was due to sheer apathy," King later wrote.

Although Mrs. Robinson still harbored her hope that the WPC could at some point launch a boycott of the buses, the late summer and fall of 1955 passed with relative quiet; the October 21 arrest of one black woman, Mrs. Mary Louise Smith, for refusing to surrender her seat became known to most of the black leadership only several months later.

On Thursday evening December 1, Mrs. Rosa Parks, the NAACP activist who had assisted Claudette Colvin's defense, felt tired and weary from her seamstress work at the Montgomery Fair department store when she boarded one of the Cleveland Avenue route buses at Montgomery's Court Square for her regular ride home. One stop later, after taking a seat in the first row behind the ten whites-only seats, Mrs. Parks and the three other black passengers in that row were ordered by the driver, J. F. Blake, to get up so that one newly-boarding white man--who could not be accommodated in the front section--could sit. Although the other three people complied, Mrs. Parks silently refused, and two police officers were summoned to place her under arrest and transport her to the city jail.

Word of the incident spread quickly. E. D. Nixon called the jail to learn about the charges, only to be refused an answer by the officer on duty. Knowing that attorney Gray was out of town for the day, Nixon called white lawyer Clifford Durr, who like his wife Virginia, already knew Mrs. Parks. The Durrs and Nixon drove to the jail to sign the bond for Mrs. Parks' release. A Monday trial date was set for the charge of violating the city's segregated seating ordinance.

While attorney Durr explained to Nixon and Mrs. Parks that they could win her acquittal since there had been no other seat available for her to take when driver Blake demanded hers, Nixon argued that the arrest of Mrs. Parks,

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a widely-known and well-respected person in black Montgomery, was precisely the opportunity the black leadership had long-awaited for challenging the entire bus seating situation. With some hesitance Mrs. Parks agreed, and Nixon went home to plan his next steps.

Later that evening Fred Gray returned to town, learned of Mrs. Parks' arrest and immediately called Mrs. Robinson, who he knew to be the "real moving force" among the black leadership. Mrs. Robinson in turn called Nixon. They quickly agreed that the moment for launching the long-pondered boycott of the buses was at hand.

Nixon would make the calls to set up a black leadership meeting Friday evening; Mrs. Robinson and her WPC colleagues would immediately start producing and distributing handbills calling upon black Montgomerians to stay off the buses on Monday, December 5. "We had planned the protest long before Mrs. Parks was arrested," Mrs. Robinson later emphasized. "There had been so many things that happened that the black women had been embarrassed over, and they were ready to explode." They knew immediately that "Mrs. Parks had the caliber of character we needed to get the city to rally behind us."

Wasting not a moment⁷ Mrs. Robinson sat down at her typewriter with a mimeograph stencil and typed the same message on the sheet several times:

This is for Monday, December 5, 1955

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down.

It is the second time since the Claudette Colbert (sic) case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing This has to be stopped.

Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother.

This woman 's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don 't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday.

You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus.

You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off of all buses Monday.

The stencil complete. Mrs. Robinson called one of her Alabama State colleagues, business department chairman John Cannon, who had access to the school's mimeograph room and readily agreed to join her for a long night of work. By daybreak they had run off thousands of sheets, cut them into single copies, and organized the brief flyers into batches for distribution to dozens of WPC members and their friends. After teaching her first morning class, Mrs. Robinson and two students set out in her car, dropping off the bundles to helpers all across Montgomery. Thousands upon thousands of the leaflets went from hand-to-hand throughout black Montgomery.

While the WPC's network put the boycott into effect, E. D. Nixon made dozens of phone calls to assemble the black leadership. Like Robinson and her WPC colleagues, Nixon knew that for their protest to win mass support, the city's ministers, not always in the forefront to black civic initiatives, would have to be convinced to give the effort their full and active support. The WPC's post-haste distribution of the announcements, Robinson and Nixon knew, ought to short-circuit any arguments that now was not a good time for a boycott, even before they could be voiced. As Fred Gray later emphasized, "the ministers didn't know anything about those leaflets until they appeared."

Although the Friday evening leadership caucus had some difficulties in overcoming the autocratic style of one black pastor, agreement was reached on further publicizing the Monday boycott and on holding a Monday evening mass rally to assess the first day's success. The leadership would meet again Monday afternoon to plan the rally, and amidst scores of weekend phone conversations between the various black activists, a consensus gradually emerged that perhaps a new, all-encompassing community organization ought to be created to oversee this unique effort.

Mrs. Robinson and the WPC membership knew that with the protest going public, their state-payroll positions at Alabama State, and the budgetary vulnerability of the college to white political retaliation, required that they

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remain in the background. As Mrs. Burks later noted in explaining why the origin of the boycott leaflets was treated as a closely-guarded secret well into the 1960s, "the full extent of our activities was never revealed because of the fact that we worked at State."

Monday morning the amazing success of the protest was readily apparent as onlooker after onlooker observed no more than a handful of black bus riders on Montgomery's largely empty vehicles.

Also on Monday, Mrs. Parks, in a very brief trial, was convicted of failing to obey-the driver's command to surrender- her seat. Hundreds of black Montgomerians, in a remarkable scene, gathered at the courthouse to show their support. That afternoon, when the black leadership assembled, Rufus Lewis--to be certain that leadership did not fall into unskilled hands--quickly nominated his pastor, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., to be president of their new community group, the Montgomery Improvement Association. A surprised King hesitantly accepted, and the leadership agreed to make continuation of the boycott beyond their one day success, contingent upon mass sentiment at the evening rally.

A huge and enthusiastic turnout for the evening event quickly and convincingly answered that question. Now the community leaders turned their efforts to organizing substitute means of transportation for the thousands of black Montgomerians eager to forsake a transportation system that most had assumed was an unpleasant but unavoidable fact of daily life.

Thursday morning, with the boycott four days old, more than half a dozen MIA representatives, including King, Robinson and Gray, met with city and bus company officials under the auspices of the bi-racial Alabama Council for Human Relations. Even though King emphasized to the whites that "we are not out to change the segregation laws," but only to win the driver courtesy and first come, first seated front-to-back and back-to-front seating policy that the WPC had been requesting for well over a year, the white officials would not budge from their insistent refusal that no changes in seating practices could be implemented.

The whites' complete intransigence, in the face of a black community effort of such impressive proportions, surprised the black leadership, who had entered into those: first negotiations believing that their modest demands ought to make for a quick settlement. Since "our demands were moderate," King later recalled, "I had assumed that they would be granted with little question." Only in the wake of that unproductive meeting did the MIA leaders begin to realize that it was the very fact of their challenge, and not the particulars of their demands, that had meaning for white Montgomery.

To the city and bus company officials such as Commissioner Clyde Sellers and attorney Jack Crenshaw, the real issue was not which precise seating plan was legally permissible, but the defense of segregation's policies as an exemplar of the underlying doctrine of white racial supremacy. On that question no compromise could be possible; there either was superiority or there wasn't. "They feared that anything they gave would be viewed by us as just a start," Mrs. Robinson later reflected. "And you know, they were probably right."

An often shy and resolutely self-effacing person. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson is now almost seventy and lives quietly by herself in retirement in Los Angeles. Only with some gentle encouragement will she acknowledge herself as "the instigator of the movement to start that boycott." Even then, however, she seeks to avoid any special credit for herself or any other single individual. Very simply, she says, "the black women did it." And she's right.

Sources and Suggested Further Reading

First and foremost, my understanding of Montgomery is based upon my personal interviews with many of the principals--Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Burks, Mr. Nixon, Mr. Lewis, attorney Gray, Rev. Seay, Mrs. Durr and the late Jack Crenshaw, as well as Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, Juanita J. Abernathy, Robert D. Nesbitt, Robert Williams, Rev. Robert S. Graetz, Maude Ballou, Lillie Armstrong Thomas (now Brown), Elliot Finley, Rev. Robert E. Hughes, and Jack Shows. I have also benefitted greatly from the interviews with some of the principals that are on deposit in the oral history collections of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC; the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta; and the Highlander Center, New Market, TN, as well as from the interviews that have been shared with me by David Levering Lewis, Milton Viorst, and Worth Long and Randall Williams. I also strongly recommend the Statewide Oral History Program collection of interviews, compiled in 1973, by the Alabama Center for Higher Education, copies of which are on deposit at all of Alabama's traditionally black colleges.

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There are a number of invaluable, unpublished manuscripts which shed crucial light on the boycott, particularly Mrs. Robinson's "The Montgomery Story," which the University of Tennessee Press will publish later this year, and Ralph D. Abernathy's "The Natural History of a Social Movement: The Montgomery Improvement Association," a 1958 M.A. thesis in Sociology at Atlanta University. Also extremely valuable are Sheldon Hackney and Ray Arsenault's "The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A Case Book"; Peter C. Mohr, "Journal Out of Egypt: The Development of Negro Leadership in Alabama from Booker T. Washington to Martin Luther King," B.A. thesis, Princeton University, 1958; Thomas J. Gilliam, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956," M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1968; Gordon L. Hartstein, "The Montgomery Bus Protest 1955-1956: What Precipitated, Sustained, and Prolonged the Boycott," B.A. thesis, Princeton University, 1973; Lamont H. Yeakey, "The Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott, 1955-1956," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1979; Steven M. Milner, "The Montgomery Bus Boycott: A Case Study in the Emergence and Career of a Social Movement," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1981; and

Donald H. Smith, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Rhetorician of Revolt," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1964.

Among published works, the serious student will benefit from not only chapter two of Dr. King's *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), but also Preston Valien, "The Montgomery Bus Protest as a Social Movement," in Jitsuichi Masuoka & Valien, eds., *Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), pp. 112-27; Aleine Austin, "Behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott," *Monthly Review* 8 (September 1956): 163-67; and Ralph H. Hines and James E. Pierce, "Negro Leadership After the Social Crisis: An Analysis of Leadership Changes in Montgomery, Alabama," *Phylon* 26 (Summer 1965): 162-72. Far and away the most valuable and insightful published analysis of the protest, and the place where anyone with further interest should begin, is J. Mills Thornton, III's "Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56," *Alabama Review* 33 (July 1980): 163-235.

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Learn about Rosa Parks's courageous decision to fight discrimination and the boycott that ended segregation on public buses. If you're seeing this message, it means we're having trouble loading external resources on our website. If you're behind a web filter, please make sure that the domains *.kastatic.org and *.kasandbox.org are unblocked. A brief overview of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956), its roots in Brown V Board of Education and its influence on the Civil Rights Movement. Years before the boycott, Dexter Avenue minister Vernon Johns sat down in the "whites-only" section of a city bus. When the driver ordered him off the bus, Johns urged other passengers to join him. On March 2, 1955, a black teenager named Claudette Colvin dared to defy bus segregation laws and was forcibly removed from another Montgomery bus. Nine months later, Rosa Parks - a 42-year-old seamstress and NAACP member - wanted a guaranteed seat on the bus for her ride home after working as a seamstress in a Montgomery department store. After work, she saw a crowded bus stop. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a political and a social protest campaign against the policy of racial segregation on the public transit system of Montgomery, Alabama. It was a seminal event in the civil rights movement in the United States. The campaign lasted from December 5, 1955 - the Monday after Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, was arrested for her refusal to surrender her seat to a white person - to December 20, 1956, when the federal ruling Browder v. Gayle took effect, and led to a United The Montgomery Bus Boycott started in December 1955. What happened in Montgomery is seen as a pivotal point in the whole civil rights story and brought to promi. In protest, a boycott of the buses by black Americans in Montgomery began. It was probably the first example of the economic clout that the community had because eventually, the bus company had to desegregate their buses or face serious financial difficulties as very many black Americans used the buses. Without their economic input via fares, the bus company of Montgomery faced probable bankruptcy. However, there is more to the story. Many believe that the act by Rosa Parks was a reaction after a hard day's work and that it was not pre-planned.