

Name _____ **Nonfiction Reading Comprehension**

The Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott

The bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 and 1956 brought the power to non-violent protest to the attention of the entire United States. It was set into motion by Rosa Parks, an African American woman, who refused to comply with a bus driver's request that she give up her bus seat to a white man.



Rosa Parks was the first woman to join the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where her husband was an active member. She was raised by grandparents who were both former slaves, in Pine Level, Alabama, where she attended a segregated ("separate but equal") school. As one would expect, her early years were characterized by the ubiquitous racism of the era, with its often attendant violence. "Back then, we didn't have any civil rights," Parks said. "It was just a matter of survival, of existing from one day to the next. I remember going to sleep as a girl hearing the Klan ride at night and hearing a lynching and being afraid the house would burn down."

After Parks' refusal to turn over her bus seat, she was arrested and fined a total of \$14, which included court costs, for violating a city ordinance giving the bus driver the right to assign seats. Parks' experience roused to action the Montgomery Women's Political Council, who printed the following flyer which it distributed throughout Montgomery's black community:

"Another woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person . . . 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 Negro . . . We are . . . asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial."

The community got behind the effort and the Monday boycott/protest was successful, so successful in fact that Dr. Martin Luther King, leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association, asked people to continue the boycott. Its initial demands were consistent with the "separate but equal" policy. Its leaders asked that African Americans be treated courteously while riding the bus, that seats be made available on a first come, first serve basis, and that African Americans also be employed as bus drivers.

The boycott lasted for 381 days, during which it is estimated that about 42,000 protestors went on refusing to ride the bus, opting instead for any other available means of transportation. The economic message was received by the bus company loud and clear. And following the United States Supreme Court decision that the Montgomery segregation law was unconstitutional, the buses were ordered to be desegregated. The boycott brought national attention to Dr. Martin Luther King and was one of the defining events

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that culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – making both segregation at any public facility or the refusal of employment to any individual on the basis of race both against the law.

_____ 1. What was Rosa Parks' role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

- A. She organized the one-day boycott.
- B. She organized the longer boycott.
- C. She refused to surrender her seat on the bus to a white man, thus bringing the issue to public notice.
- D. She was the first woman to join the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP.

_____ 2. Who initially organized the boycott?

- A. The NAACP
- B. The Montgomery Women's Political Council
- C. The Montgomery Improvement Association
- D. The U.S. Supreme Court

3. What point did the boycott make to the bus companies?

4. What two profound effects did the Montgomery Bus Boycott have on American history?
