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By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

In the segregated South, African Americans were denied equality in the workplace, a chance for a decent education and the right to visit restaurants and use restrooms that white people also used.

In much of the South, African Americans were required to sit in the back of city buses and to give up their seats to white riders when buses were full.

That began to change on Dec. 1, 1955 — 70 years ago Monday — when one woman on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus decided she had had enough of segregation and Jim Crow laws.

‘I DID NOT GET ON THE BUS TO GET ARRESTED; I GOT ON THE BUS TO GO HOME’

Rosa Parks, age 42, was commuting home from her job as a seamstress at the Montgomery Fair department store on Dec. 1, 1955, when she boarded a Montgomery city bus. She paid her fare and made her way to an empty seat near the middle of the bus, in the first row of seats reserved for “colored” riders.

As the bus continued on its route, the white-only seats began to fill up. At some point, all the white-only seats became occupied. The driver noticed there were some white riders forced to stand. He walked back to four Black riders and asked them to give up their seats.

The law in Montgomery — and in most Southern cities that had buses — was for Black riders to ride in the back and for white riders to ride near the front. But when white-only seats were filled, the driver had the authority to ask an African American rider to give up their seat.

Parks was more than just a store employee; she was also the secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP and an adviser to the organization’s youth council, where she helped young Black people to register to vote.

Three Black riders gave up their seats and moved to the rear. Parks, however, refused. “Why don’t you stand up?” the driver asked her. “I don’t think I should *have* to stand up,” she replied. The driver



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National City Lines bus No. 2857 on which Rosa Parks rode that day is now on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich.

The photo below is usually labeled as Parks being fingerprinted after her arrest on Dec. 1, 1955. In fact, this was after her arrest on Feb. 22, 1956, for organizing the boycott.

The photo at the top of this page was arranged to show Parks on a Montgomery bus on Dec. 21, 1956, the day the city legally integrated its buses. The man behind Parks is a reporter for UPI who was covering the event.

summoned two police officers who arrested Parks and took her to jail.

On Dec. 5, Parks was found guilty of disorderly conduct and violating the city’s segregation laws, given a suspended sentence and fined \$10, plus \$4 in court costs.

But the day before, Parks’ activist friends had gotten busy organizing a boycott of Montgomery’s bus system. The day after Parks’ conviction, the city’s Black community carpooled, hired Black taxi drivers and walked. The one-day protest went so well that organizers decided to expand their efforts.

A group of ministers and activists met and formed what they called the Montgomery Improvement Association. They elected a 26-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. — a newcomer to the area and the pastor of a small Black church — as their leader.

The city’s transit system suffered serious economic losses with the absence of Black riders. That, in turn, caused tempers across the city to rise. Parks, King and scores of other leaders were arrested for conspiring to interfere with a business. King spent two weeks in jail before he was released. His home and four area Black churches were firebombed.

On Nov. 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unconstitutional. Montgomery desegregated its city buses the next day. The boycott lasted 382 days.

KEY MOMENTS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS



Sources: “Dream a World Anew: The African-American Experience and the Shaping of America” by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, “The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks” by Jeanne Theoharis, Library of Congress, National Archives, National Park Service, Bill of Rights Institute, the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute of Stanford University, NAACP, National Women’s History Museum, the New York Times, Biography.com, History.com