



## Montgomery Bus Boycott

### Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Discuss the purpose of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- Understand the role of the Montgomery Bus Boycott during the Civil Rights Movement.

### Success Criteria:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by complete the reflection.
- Order the historical facts about the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

### Lesson Content Overview:

On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a seamstress at a Montgomery department store, was arrested for violating Montgomery's segregation laws when she refused to give up her seat to a male passenger on a Montgomery City Lines bus driven by James F. Blake. Parks was jailed for violating Chapter 5, Section II of the City Code of Montgomery, a section giving bus drivers "police powers" in assigning seats according to "race." She was later released under a \$100 bond.<sup>1</sup> On Saturday, December 3, leaflets were dispersed announcing a boycott of Montgomery's public transit line set to begin on Monday, December 5. Jo Ann Robinson, President of the Women's Political Council (WPC), and two other women produced the leaflets that spread word of the boycott among the Black citizens of Montgomery. The mimeographed leaflets read as follows:

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5. Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk, come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 pm, at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instruction.

The boycott of Montgomery buses began on the day of Parks' hearing, December 5. Montgomery Recorder's Court Judge John B. Scott fined Parks \$10 and the \$4 cost of the police court. The bus driver, James Blake, served as one of three witnesses for the state. While Parks remained silent throughout the trial, her attorney, Fred D. Gray, informed Judge Scott they would appeal the case. That same day, Montgomery City Lines Manager J. H. Bagley reported that 90 percent of Montgomery's Black population refused to ride its buses. At the start of the boycott, Fred Daniel, 19, was arrested and jailed on a disorderly conduct charge for using force to prevent a Black woman from boarding a bus. Black cab drivers in the city only charged 10 cents a passenger from 4 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 3 p.m. until 11 p.m.<sup>2</sup>

Before the evening meeting on December 5, King was elected to head the MIA. With only 20 minutes to prepare for the 7:00 p.m. meeting that evening, King gave a landmark speech detailing why Black people in

---

<sup>1</sup> *Alabama Journal*. "City Charge Faced by Negro Bus Rider." December 2, 1955. 6C; Joe Azbell. "Negro Groups Ready Boycott of City Lines." *The Montgomery Advertiser*. December 4, 1955. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Bunny Honicker. "Negress Draws Fine in Segregation Case Involving Bus Ride." *Alabama Journal*. December 5, 1955 1-2.



Montgomery should boycott the bus line. King appealed to the edicts of God, a sense of dignity and self-respect, and love to inspire and motivate those in attendance at the meeting. He said:

And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer that never came down to earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie. Love has no meaning. And we are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.<sup>3</sup>

The speech received rousing applause and propelled Dr. King to the forefront of the Black freedom struggle in the United States. It was during this historic time that King refined the nonviolent conflict resolution strategies and tactics of Mahatma Gandhi and encouraged everyone to embrace nonviolence and love as a means of overcoming evil. Utilizing conflict resolution tactics during the bus boycott was essential in that many of the leaders, including King and his young family, were the victims of unscrupulous criticism, death threats, and bombings. Many church officers and even King's father, Rev. Martin Luther "Daddy" King, Sr., encouraged him to consider hiring an armed guard to protect him. Reflection on that situation, King commented:

*How could I serve as one of the leaders of a nonviolent movement and at the same time use weapons of violence for my personal protection? Coretta and I talked the matter over for several days and finally agreed that arms were no solution ... When I decided that I couldn't keep a gun, I came face to face with the question of death and dealt with it. From that point on, I no longer needed a gun nor have I been afraid. Had we become distracted by the question of my safety we would have lost the moral offensive and sunk to the level of our oppressors.<sup>4</sup>*

The initial demands of the boycott leaders did not include changing the segregation law itself, but sought to accomplish the following things:

- (1) Blacks would be treated politely by the bus drivers.
- (2) A first-come, first-seated policy with whites filling the buses from the front and Blacks from the rear; Black people would not have to give up their seats to white people.
- (3) Blacks would be hired as bus drivers.

King and others were even indicted for violating the state of Alabama's boycott laws. In early June 1956, the U.S. District Court ruled that racial segregation of Alabama City bus lines was unconstitutional. After more than a year of organized protest, on December 20, 1956, the MIA voted to end the boycott and to return to the buses on December 21 (382 days) on a non-segregated basis. Although Blacks in Montgomery could now ride the buses freely, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling did not protect Blacks from the wave of terror via home and church bombings, launched by the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups.

---

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, December 5, 1955.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church>

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. quotes in Clayborne Carson, ed. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* retrieved at The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/publications/autobiography-martin-luther-king-jr-contents/chapter-8-violence-desperate>



### SEL Opener:

- **OPTION 1:** Show an image of a modern local city bus and a city bus from 1950s (side by side).
  - **Discussion Questions:** Have you ever been on a city bus? Does anyone have a parent/guardian who takes a bus to work? How would the ride feel if you had to stand the whole time?
- **OPTION 2:** Set up the seats/desks to simulate a bus. Choose a "feature" (i.e. blue jeans) and have the students sit in the front vs. the back and standing vs. sitting based on what they are wearing. Switch the "reason" for the front vs. the back and standing vs. sitting.
  - **Discussion Questions:** How did it feel to sit in the front? How did it feel to sit in the back? How did it feel to stand while others were sitting? How did it feel to sit while others were standing? When would someone feel like it is unfair?

### Instructional Activities:

- Activity 1: Watch the Video: [Civil Rights and the Montgomery Bus Boycott for Kids](#)
  - Complete the [Montgomery Bus Boycott Picture Prompt](#)
- Activity 2: Complete the [Recreate the Bus Boycott](#)
  - **Large Group Discussion:** Have the students share their buses and boycott scenes.
- Activity 3: Watch the [Montgomery Bus Boycott Video](#)
  - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#) / [Answer Key](#)
  - **Large Group Discussion:** Review the guided notes.
    - Discussion Questions: *What is a boycott? What was hard about this boycott? How do you know that the boycott was successful?*
    - Acknowledge the themes among students' answers.
- Activity 4: Read *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* by Connie Colwell Miller
  - Discuss the characters, plot, feelings, vocabulary, summary, and themes.
- Activity 5: Read *Who Sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott?: Rosa Parks (WhoHQ)* by Insha Fitzpatrick
  - Discuss the characters, plot, feelings, vocabulary, summary, and themes.
- Activity 6: Read the Epic Book, [The Montgomery Bus Boycott](#) by Martin Gitlin



### Assessments:

- **OPTION 1:** Cut out the buses on the [Order the Buses Worksheet](#) and put them in order based on the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- **OPTION 2:** Complete the [Montgomery Bus Boycott Reflection Worksheet](#).

### Adaptations for Student Needs

#### IEP/504:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

#### ELD/ELL/ESL:

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences