



Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Rosa Parks was Well Prepared

People like to say that Rosa Parks was “tired” the day she rode that bus, and that her action was unplanned. “I was not tired physically,” wrote Rosa. “No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” It’s true that Parks didn’t set out to be arrested that day in 1955, but she had been preparing for it for many years.

Twelve years earlier, in 1943, she ran into the same bus driver who had her arrested in 1955. His name was James Blake. Parks paid for her ticket at the front of the bus. Blake demanded she get off and re-enter through the back door. She refused, and Blake threw her off the bus. Parks didn’t want any more “run-ins with that mean one.” It was pure chance that she got on his bus again years later.

That same year, in 1943, Parks joined the NAACP, a group fighting for equal rights for African Americans. She traveled across Alabama, helping to investigate crimes against Black people. She signed up to vote and fought for voting rights for all Black people. Parks also formed a youth council so young people could get involved. When she rode that bus in 1955, Parks had been working for civil rights for many years.

The summer before her arrest, Parks attended a special school in Tennessee called Highlander Folk School. The school taught African Americans about their rights and trained them to make change. In the summer of 1955, Parks studied how to fight segregation. One of her teachers was Septima Clark. Clark was born in 1898, and was the daughter of a laundrywoman and a former enslaved man. She grew up to become a teacher and a leader in the struggle for equality. Many called her the “Mother of the Movement” for civil rights.



Rosa Parks (right) attended the Highlander Folk School with Septima Clark, "Mother of the Movement." She studied how to fight segregation in the summer of 1955, a few months before her arrest.

On December 1, 1955, Parks was well-prepared when James Blake told her to give up her seat. Today, we remember her as a hero, but many people didn’t feel this way at the time. Weeks after her arrest, Parks was fired from her job at a department store. Her husband quit his job after being told he could not talk about his wife at work. They received hostile phone calls and even death threats. In 1957, Parks, her husband and her mother left Montgomery and moved north to Detroit to find work and safety.