



Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott

History Kept Claudette Colvin Stuck to Her Seat

Rosa Parks was not the first to be arrested for demanding her rights on a bus. Here are some of the many others in Montgomery, Alabama, who also fought back:

- In 1944, Viola White was beaten and arrested for refusing to give up her seat. A police officer got even by kidnapping and attacking her 16-year-old daughter.
- In 1946, Geneva Johnson was arrested for “talking back” to a driver and not having the correct change.
- In 1951, Epsie Worthy got off a bus after the driver demanded an extra fare. He followed her and began hitting her. When she fought back, she was arrested and fined \$52.

And then there was Claudette Colvin. Colvin was a 15-year-old high school student in 1955. Her class had been studying about Black leaders like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. Colvin was interested in history and politics. She dreamed of becoming president of the United States. Colvin was also a member of the NAACP Youth Council, a group of young people who fought for equal rights. She was close to Rosa Parks, one of the group’s leaders.



On March 2, 1955, Colvin was riding the bus home from school. This was nine months before Rosa Parks’ famous bus ride. The driver told her to stand to make room for a white woman. Colvin and her neighbor, a pregnant woman, refused. Colvin said she’d paid her fare and it was her right to sit. “History kept me stuck to my seat,” she remembers. “I felt the hand of Harriet Tubman pushing down on one shoulder and Sojourner Truth pushing down on the other.”

Two police officers handcuffed Colvin and dragged her off the bus. Her schoolbooks went flying. She was frightened and cried in her jail cell. Later, she joined other women who had been treated unfairly on buses. They fought in court for their rights. On November 13, 1956, the decision came down—the Supreme Court

agreed that segregation on public buses went against the Constitution. The women had won their case!

Colvin made history, but the newspapers didn’t celebrate her accomplishment. Many in her community called her a troublemaker. After high school, it was hard for her to find and keep a job. So in 1958 she moved to New York City. She had two sons and became a nurse’s aide. Colvin was left out of many history books, but she is proud of her actions to end segregation: “I do feel like what I did was a spark and it caught on.”