

# Women's History

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## **Rosie the Radical:**

Left high school to care for her mother, but returned as a woman to graduate in 1934. A 1940's social activist, she joined the NAACP, was secretary of her branch from 1943-56, trained youths to protest the segregated public library, and worked for the release of the nine young Scottsboro Boys accused of rape, quickly tried by an all-white jury and sentenced to death by a lower court in Alabama. The Supreme Court ordered a new trial.

She worked in Montgomery Voters League voter-registration drives when registering was difficult, elusive, often dangerous for black citizens. Failed twice by the registrar, her own voting right was not recognized until her third brave attempt. She achieved this right few blacks were able to secure. She attended multiple classes and seminars concerned with civil rights reform, most notably, a workshop at a training ground for labor organizers and social activists in the summer of 1955. There she began to appreciate and understand leadership skills necessary to be effective when organizing for social causes. That winter, she boarded a bus.

As a thirty-year social activist, she did not plan to personally stand up for justice that day. However, when asked to move that a white could have her seat in the first row of the black section, she defied the local segregation ordinance and remained seated. It has been written that she was tired, she said, she was "tired of giving in." She recalled in a speech how history has recorded "that my feet were hurting...but the real reason was... I felt that I had a right to be treated as any other passenger. We [blacks] had endured that kind of treatment for too long." Seems she was more than a seamstress.

Racial abuse on buses was common. Refusal to move was dangerous. Blacks had been arrested, beaten, even killed for disobeying bus drivers. Back in 1949, professor at Alabama State University, Jo Ann Robinson, sat in the fifth row on a nearly empty bus. After disobeying the bus driver's order to move, she fled the bus in terror as he came at her. In 1954, Robinson, wrote to the mayor of a proposed bus boycott, if abuse continued.

On December 1, 1955, Montgomery police also boarded a bus and arrested Rosa Parks. That night the Women's Political Caucus led by Robinson printed flyers urging a bus boycott. Doctors, lawyers, professors, white-collar workers joined domestic workers and blue-collar laborers and shut down the public transit system. People walked from everywhere to everywhere. Six months later an Alabama federal court declared segregated bus service, unconstitutional. The ruling was appealed but upheld in the Supreme Court. On December 20, 1956, the boycott ended. One year and 16 days previous, the night of Parks' arrest, black women in the Montgomery Improvement Association, looked on as it named as its president Martin Luther King, Jr., who

ultimately gained torch-bearing fame through ardent speeches as he spoke the voice given to the civil rights movement by trailblazer, Rosa Louise McCauley Parks.

**Source**

*Black Women in America*, by Darlene Clark