

I'm Not Moving

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks got on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. It was 6 P.M., and she was going home from work. She took a seat in the back of the bus, behind a sign that said "colored."¹ Mrs. Parks sat in that section because it was the law: In the southern part of the United States, white people sat in the front of the bus, and black people sat in the back. Mrs. Parks was African American, so she had to sit in the back of the bus. That evening, she sat in the first row of the "colored" section.

At each bus stop, more people got on the bus, and the "white" section filled up. There were no more seats there, so a white man was standing. The bus driver got up and moved the "colored" sign back one row. He was making the "white" section bigger.

"You have to move so this man can sit down," he told Mrs. Parks.

"I'm not moving," Mrs. Parks said.

"If you don't move, I'll call the police," the bus driver said.

"I'm not moving," Mrs. Parks said again.

The police came and arrested Mrs. Parks. When African Americans heard about Mrs. Parks' arrest, they were angry. They decided not to ride the buses in Montgomery. There were 40,000 African American commuters in the city, and for more than a year, they did not ride the buses. Some people had to walk miles to go to work. During that year, the buses ran, but they had very few passengers. The city lost a lot of money.

Sometimes African Americans "marched" peacefully in the streets--they walked together in big groups. They marched in Montgomery and in other cities in the South.

In 1956, the United States Supreme Court said that separate sections for blacks and whites on buses were illegal. African Americans began to ride the buses again, but they didn't stop marching. They continued to march because they wanted more changes. They didn't want separate restaurants, hotels, hospitals, and schools. They didn't want separate restrooms and drinking fountains. When they marched (and whites often marched with them), they sang. "We shall overcome," they sang: We will succeed. And they did succeed.

During the next ten years, blacks and whites began using the same buildings, restrooms, and drinking fountains. All of these changes began when Rosa Parks said, "I'm not moving."

¹ Today we do not use the word "colored." We use the word "black" or "African American."