



# THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## STUDY GUIDE



### **DEC. 1, 1955: ROSA PARKS IGNITES BUS BOYCOTT**

*Biographies, discussion questions, suggested activities and more*



# CIVIL RIGHTS

## Setting the Stage

Following the Civil War, constitutional amendments were made to abolish slavery, grant citizenship to former slaves and give all men the right to vote regardless of race. Nonetheless, many states--particularly in the South--used poll taxes, literacy tests and other similar measures to relegate African Americans to second-class status both politically and economically, and prevent them from participating fully in the democratic process.

In the 1896 court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld segregation laws when it ruled that a Louisiana law providing for "equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races" on its railroad cars was indeed constitutional. The high court held that as long as equal accommodations were provided, segregation was not discrimination and thus did not deprive African Americans of equal protection under the law as guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. The ruling resulted in the ongoing segregation of public facilities including railroad cars, restaurants, hospitals and schools. However, "colored" facilities were rarely equal to their white counterparts in actuality, and African Americans suffered through decades of debilitating discrimination and oppression institutionalized through "Jim Crow" segregation laws that restricted their civil rights in the South and elsewhere. It would take decades for the U.S. government to rethink the treatment of its minority citizens.

Cover photo: The bus on which Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott. By Rmhermen from Wikimedia Commons.



# DEC. 1, 1955: ROSA PARKS IGNITES BUS BOYCOTT



Rosa Parks  
and Dr. Martin  
Luther King, Jr.

In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks is jailed for refusing to give up her seat on a public bus to a white man, a violation of the city's racial segregation laws. The successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, organized by a young Baptist minister named Martin Luther King Jr., followed Park's historic act of civil disobedience.

"The mother of the civil rights movement," as Rosa Parks is known, was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1913. She worked as a seamstress and in 1943 joined the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

According to a Montgomery city ordinance in 1955, African Americans were required to sit at the back of public buses and were also obligated to give up those seats to white riders if the front of the bus filled up. Parks was in the first row of the black section when the white driver demanded that she give up her seat to a white man. Parks' refusal was spontaneous but was not merely brought on by her tired feet, as is the popular legend. In fact, local civil rights leaders had been planning a challenge to Montgomery's racist bus laws for several months, and Parks had been privy to this discussion.

Learning of Parks' arrest, the NAACP and other African American activists immediately called for a bus boycott to be held by black citizens on Monday, December 5. Word was spread by fliers, and activists formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to organize the protest. The first day of the bus boycott was a great success, and that night the 26-year-old Rev. Martin Luther King

Jr., told a large crowd gathered at a church, "The great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right." King emerged as the leader of the bus boycott and received numerous death threats from opponents of integration. At one point, his home was bombed, but he and his family escaped bodily harm.

The boycott stretched on for more than a year, and participants carpooled or walked miles to work and school when no other means were possible. As African Americans previously constituted 70 percent of the Montgomery bus ridership, the municipal transit system suffered gravely during the boycott. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Alabama state and Montgomery city bus segregation laws as being in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. On December 20, King issued the following statement: "The year old protest against city buses is officially called off, and the Negro citizens of Montgomery are urged to return to the buses tomorrow morning on a non-segregated basis." The boycott ended the next day. Rosa Parks was among the first to ride the newly desegregated buses.

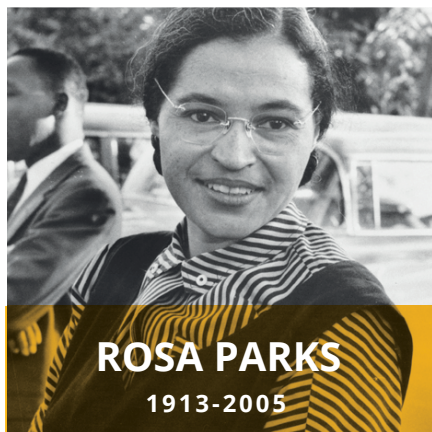
Martin Luther King Jr., and his nonviolent civil rights movement had won its first great victory. There would be many more to come.

Rosa Parks died on October 24, 2005. Three days later the U.S. Senate passed a resolution to honor Parks by allowing her body to lie in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

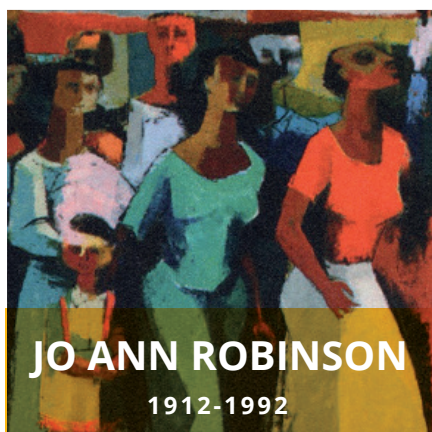
## **DID YOU KNOW?**

**When Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat in 1955, it wasn't the first time she'd clashed with driver James Blake. Parks stepped onto his very crowded bus on a chilly day 12 years earlier, paid her fare at the front, then resisted the rule that African Americans disembark and re-enter through the back door. She stood her ground until Blake, enraged, pulled her coat sleeve to demand her cooperation. Parks left the bus rather than give in.**

# PEOPLE TO KNOW



By refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus in 1955, black seamstress Rosa Parks helped initiate the civil rights movement in the United States. The leaders of the local black community organized a bus boycott that began the day Parks was convicted of violating the segregation laws. Led by a young Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the boycott lasted more than a year--during which Parks not coincidentally lost her job--and ended only when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unconstitutional. Over the next half-century, Parks became a nationally recognized symbol of dignity and strength in the struggle to end entrenched racial segregation.



Alabama State College English professor, activist and president of the Women's Political Council, Jo Ann Robinson was a key figure in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the civil rights movement. Robinson, along with Rosa Parks and Claudette Colvin, was the target of harassment on the Montgomery, Alabama, buses. In 1949, Robinson was verbally attacked by her bus driver for sitting in the "white" section of the bus. After Rosa Parks was arrested in 1955, it was Robinson who mobilized the community to act, creating fliers and reaching out to leaders--one of them a young Martin Luther King Jr.--to help organize a boycott. Nearly 50,000 African Americans boycotted the Montgomery buses for 382 days. In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's racial segregation laws were unconstitutional, overturning a 60-year-old law and cementing the power of nonviolent tactics and civil disobedience in fighting civil rights injustices.



Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister and social activist who played a key role in the American civil rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968. Inspired by advocates of nonviolence such as Mahatma Gandhi, King sought equality for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and victims of injustice through peaceful protest. He was the driving force behind watershed events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, which helped bring about the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and is remembered each year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a U.S. federal holiday since 1986.



# SEE IT

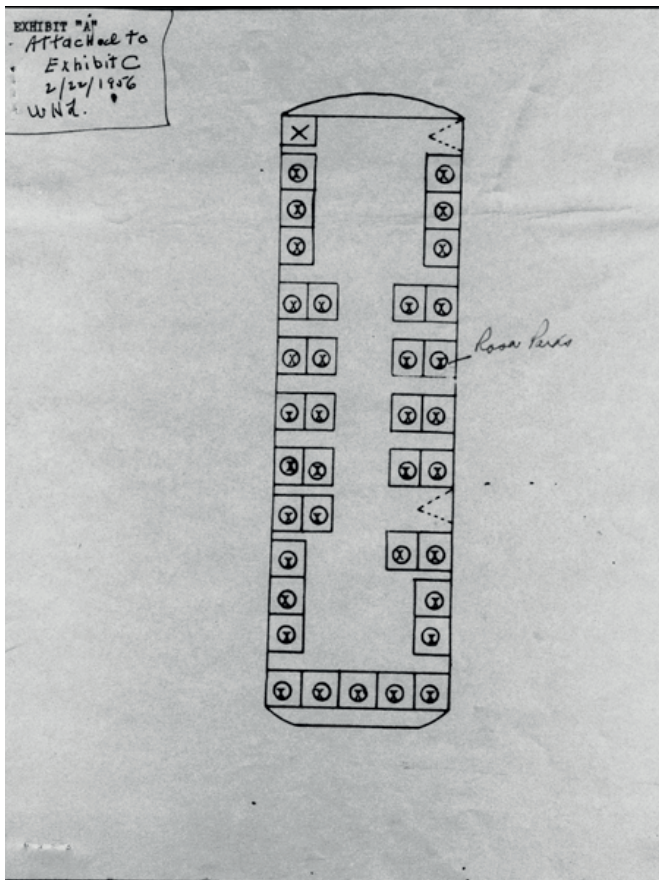


Diagram of where Rosa Parks sat on board the Cleveland Avenue bus (1955)

*Misc.*

POLICE DEPARTMENT  
CITY OF MONTGOMERY

Date 12-1-55 19\_\_

Complainant J.F. Blake (W)

Address 27 No. Lewis St. Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Offense Misc. Reported By Same as above

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone No. \_\_\_\_\_

Date and Time Offense Committed 12-1-55 6:06 pm

Place of Occurrence In Front of Empire Theatre (On Montgomery Street)

Person or Property Attacked \_\_\_\_\_

How Attacked \_\_\_\_\_

Person Wanted \_\_\_\_\_

Value of Property Stolen \_\_\_\_\_ Value Recovered \_\_\_\_\_

Details of Complaint (list, describe and give value of property stolen)

We received a call upon arrival the bus operator said he had a colored female sitting in the white section of the bus, and would not move back.

We (Day & Mixon) also saw her.

The bus operator signed a warrant for her. Rosa Parks, (cf) 634 Cleveland Court.

Rosa Parks (cf) was charged with chapter 6 section 11 of the Montgomery City Code.

Warrant #14254

THIS OFFENSE IS DECLARED:  
UNFOUNDED ☐  
CLEARED BY ARREST ☐  
EXCEPTIONALLY CLEARED ☐  
INACTIVE (NOT CLEARED) ☐

Officers F.D. Day  
D.W. Mixon

Division Patrol Time 7:00 pm  
12-1-55

City of Montgomery, Alabama police report



Heads side of the Rosa Parks Congressional Gold Medal presented to Rosa Parks on 28 November 1999. Designed by Artis Lane.

# CONCURRENT EVENTS



## CHURCHILL RESIGNS

Sir Winston Churchill, the British leader who guided Great Britain and the Allies through the crisis of World War II, retired as prime minister of Great Britain on April 5, 1955. Churchill enjoyed an illustrious military career and distinguished himself several times in battle. In 1899, he resigned his commission to concentrate on his literary and political career and was elected to Parliament. In the second year of World War I, Churchill was held responsible for the disastrous Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns and was subsequently excluded from the war coalition government. However, he returned to politics as a cabinet member in 1917 and acted as secretary of state for war from 1919 to 1921. Out of office from 1929 to 1939, Churchill issued unheeded warnings of the threat of Nazi and Japanese aggression. After the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Churchill replaced Neville Chamberlain as prime minister of a new coalition government. Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany, but Churchill promised his country and the world that Britain would “never surrender.” He rallied the British people to a resolute resistance and expertly orchestrated Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin into an alliance that eventually crushed the Axis. In 1953, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. After his retirement as prime minister, he remained in Parliament until 1964, the year before his death.



## VIETNAM WAR BEGINS

The Vietnam War was a long, costly armed conflict that pitted the communist regime of North Vietnam and its southern allies, known as the Viet Cong, against South Vietnam and its principal ally, the United States. The war began in 1954 (though conflict in the region stretched back to the mid-1940s), after the rise to power of Ho Chi Minh and his communist Viet Minh party in North Vietnam, and continued against the backdrop of an intense Cold War between two global superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union. More than 3 million people (including 58,000 Americans) were killed in the Vietnam War; more than half were Vietnamese civilians. By 1969, at the peak of U.S. involvement in the war, more than 500,000 U.S. military personnel were involved in the Vietnam conflict. Growing opposition to the war in the United States led to bitter divisions among Americans, both before and after President Richard Nixon ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. In 1975, communist forces seized control of Saigon, ending the Vietnam War, and the country was unified as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam the following year.



## DISNEYLAND OPENS

Disneyland, Walt Disney's metropolis of nostalgia, fantasy and futurism, opened on July 17, 1955. The \$17 million theme park was built on 160 acres of former orange groves in Anaheim, California, and soon brought in staggering profits. Today, Disneyland hosts more than 14 million annual visitors, who spend close to \$3 billion. Walt Disney, born in Chicago in 1901, worked as a commercial artist before setting up a small studio in Los Angeles to produce animated cartoons. In 1928, his short film Steamboat Willy, starring the character “Mickey Mouse,” was a national sensation. It was the first animated film to use sound; Disney provided the voice for Mickey. In the early 1950s, Walt Disney began designing a huge amusement park to be built near Los Angeles. He intended Disneyland to have educational as well as amusement value and to entertain adults and their children. Land was bought in the farming community of Anaheim, about 25 miles southeast of Los Angeles, and construction began in 1954. The original attractions drew countless children and their parents and special events and the continual building of new state-of-the-art attractions encouraged them to visit again. In 1965, work began on an even bigger Disney theme park and resort near Orlando, Florida. Walt Disney died in 1966, and Walt Disney World was opened in his honor on October 1, 1971. Epcot Center, Disney-MGM Studios and Animal Kingdom were later added to Walt Disney World, and it remains Florida's premier tourist attraction.

# CONCURRENT EVENTS



## STEVE JOBS BORN

Born on February 24, 1955, in San Francisco, California, to Joanne Schieble and Abdulfattah Jandali, a Syrian immigrant, Jobs was adopted as a baby by Paul Jobs, a Silicon Valley machinist, and his wife Clara. After graduating from high school, Jobs attended college for a single semester before dropping out. In 1976, Jobs and his computer engineer friend Stephen Wozniak founded Apple Computer in Jobs' parents' garage in Los Altos, California. In 1977, Jobs and Wozniak launched the Apple II, which became the first popular personal computer. Four years later, Apple debuted the Macintosh, one of the first personal computers to feature a graphical user interface, which allowed people to navigate by pointing and clicking a mouse rather than typing commands. In 1985, Jobs left the company following a power struggle with Apple's board of directors. That same year, he established NeXT, a business that developed high-performance computers, but proved too pricey to gain a wide consumer audience. In 1986, Jobs acquired a small computer-graphics studio founded by filmmaker George Lucas and rechristened it Pixar Animation Studios. In 1995, Pixar released its first film, "Toy Story," the first-ever feature-length, computer-animated movie. It became a huge box-office success and was followed by such award-winning hits as "Finding Nemo" (2003) and "The Incredibles" (2004). In late 1996, Apple bought NeXT and hired Jobs as an advisor. The following year, he became Apple's interim CEO (the "interim" was dropped in 2000), and under his leadership a nearly bankrupt Apple was transformed into one of the planet's most valuable corporations, introducing a series of innovative digital devices, including the iPod portable music player in 2001, the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad tablet computer in 2010. Jobs passed away in 2011 due to complications from pancreatic cancer. According to biographer Walter Isaacson, Jobs "was the greatest business executive of our era, the one most certain to be remembered a century from now. History will place him in the pantheon right next to Thomas Edison and Henry Ford."



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



President Barack Obama sits in the famous Rosa Parks bus at the Henry Ford Museum after an event in Dearborn, Michigan, April 18, 2012.

1

What words would you use to describe Rosa Parks and her actions on December 1, 1955? How do you think the other African American passengers on that bus felt as they watched what happened? How about the white passengers?

2

Why do you think the Montgomery bus boycott proved to be a successful way to instigate change?

3

Do you think that all people in America today have equal rights?

# SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



Rosa Parks. Photo by Judith Sedwick. Schlesinger Library, RIAS, Harvard University.

## SIGNS OF PROTEST

Ask students to imagine that they were citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 taking part in the bus boycott. Then, have them create a poster or flyer explaining why the boycott is important and encouraging others to take part. It may be helpful to research posters and flyers of the time before or after this activity.

## DEAR HISTORY

As a class, discuss ways that taking part in the Montgomery Bus Boycott had an impact on people's lives. Ask students to imagine how giving up their normal means of transportation would affect them. Then, ask students to imagine they were a participant in the boycott, and write a letter to a friend explaining why they are taking part and how it is affecting their life and family.

## WOMEN OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Ask students to research women who played significant roles in the civil rights movement. After choosing a woman to study further, have students print out or draw a picture of the woman and place it at the center of a poster. Around the image of the woman, ask them to explain in writing who the woman was; when and where she lived; what she contributed to the civil rights movement; why she got involved in civil rights and how, or by what methods, she protested injustice.

# RESOURCES

**Video: Bet You Didn't Know: Rosa Parks**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/rosa-parks/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-rosa-parks>

**Video: Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/rosa-parks/videos/montgomery-bus-boycott>

**Library of Congress: Rosa Parks Papers**

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/rosa-parks-papers/>

**Video: Separate But Not Equal**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement/videos/separate-but-not-equal>

**Article: Martin Luther King Jr.**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr>

**Video: Bet You Didn't Know: March on Washington**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/march-on-washington/videos>

**Article: Civil Rights Movement**

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>