

381 DAYS

THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT STORY



An exhibition developed and organized for travel by the
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE in collaboration with the
TROY UNIVERSITY ROSA PARKS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM



Smithsonian Institution

On December 1, 1955,

one voice in Montgomery, Alabama, quietly and resolutely said “No.” That single “no” kindled a fire that had burned from a decades-long tradition of activism and lit the way to the most influential boycott in this nation’s history.

The events that led to the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott culminated in the determined voice of an unyielding individual who stood up to the power of segregation. The story of Rosa Parks, an educated woman underemployed because of her skin color, has been recounted as a lone act of heroism against seemingly impossible odds.

“People need to know why 50,000 black citizens walked off city transit lines and refused to patronize them again for 13 long months, until they were integrated.”

—Jo Ann Robinson, early organizer of the Montgomery bus boycott

But the truth is more powerful. Fifty thousand people of color forced, through a storm of hardship and courage, a segregated bus system to open its doors to equality. A young preacher took center stage and emerged as a symbol of national and international significance. And the city of Montgomery gave birth to America’s civil rights era.

The Smithsonian Institution, in collaboration with the Troy University Rosa Parks Library and Museum, offers an American story of bravery, honor, and idealism. The Montgomery bus boycott was the genesis of the modern civil rights movement and the first step in the long march toward realizing the goals of the Supreme Court’s landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954.

The boycott was initially a one-day protest to mark Parks’ December 5 court appearance and to register the weariness of those who endured daily assaults to their humanity. African Americans who rode Montgomery’s buses were considered second class, defenseless against humiliation and underserving of basic respect from drivers and white passengers.

On that wintry first morning, organizers worried

that people would be too afraid of white retaliation to honor the boycott. The threat of rain added to their anxiety.

The young preacher Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remembers that on that day, “I was in the kitchen . . . when I heard Coretta cry, ‘Martin, Martin, come quickly . . .’ As I approached the front window, Coretta pointed joyfully to a slowly moving bus: ‘Darling, it’s empty!’ I could hardly believe what I saw.”

Another bus passed, empty. Professors, doctors, lawyers, and preachers stood alongside housewives, domestic workers, and blue-collar laborers and refused to board.

That evening, at the Holt Street Baptist Church, King told the more than 5,000 blacks assembled to discuss continuing the boycott: “. . . one of the great glories of democracy is the right to protest for right . . . if you will protest courageously and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written . . . historians will pause and say, ‘There lived a great people . . . who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.’ That is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility.”

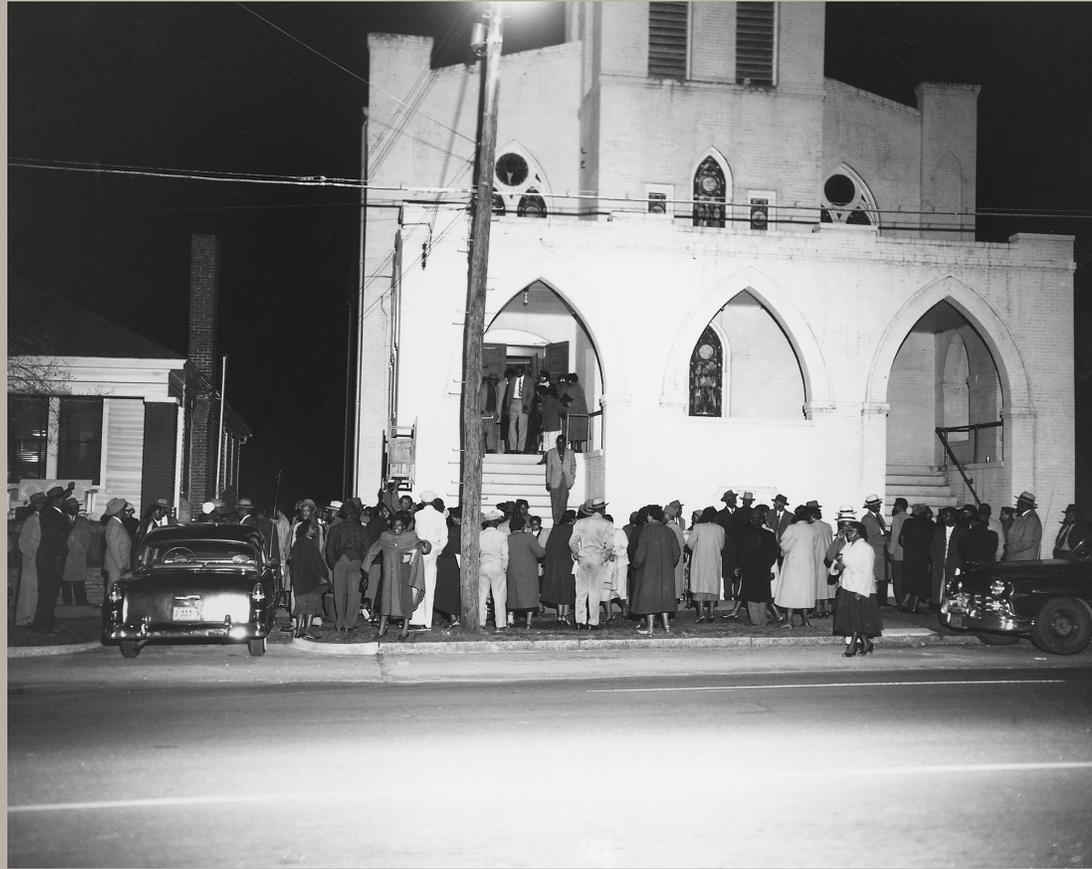
The boycott, which lasted 381 days, evolved into a strategic act of faith and determination that galvanized a people who refused to give up hope.

Through a modernist collage of photographs, political cartoons, contemporary writings, and other text and images, *381 Days: The Montgomery Bus Boycott Story* bears witness to a challenge met. Of a people—black and forward-thinking whites, young and old—joined in boycott by hope, by courage, by self-respect. And, in its wake, the tenets of a non-violent approach to political and social change matured into a weapon of equality for all Americans, no matter race, color, or gender.

On the night of December 5, 1955, at the Holt Street Baptist Church, African Americans resoundingly accepted the call for civil action. Montgomery's black churches became the platform from which the boycott was launched and sustained.

Right: Holt Street Baptist Church, December 5, 1955
Photo by Arthur Freeman, Collection of Diane Wood

Below: Drawing by Harvey Dinnerstein, 1956
Courtesy Library of Congress



The act of defiance turned into an act of community solidarity. Strangers offered rides to strangers, churches purchased cars to transport boycotters, taxicabs often lowered or refused fares, and people walked in groups or alone, buoyed by the boycott's purpose.



Above and left: Photos by Don Cravens
Courtesy Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

Below: Courtesy AP/Wide World Photos

“Negroes were on almost every street corner in the downtown area, silent, waiting for rides or moving about to keep warm, but few got on buses . . . scores of Negroes were walking, their lunches in brown paper sacks under their arms . . . They exchanged little talk among themselves. It was an almost solemn event.”

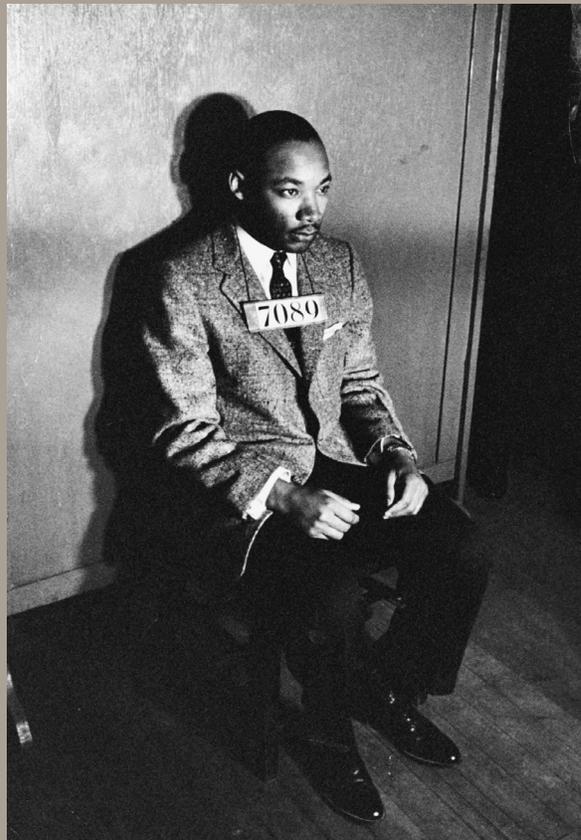
—Alabama Journal reporter describing December 5, 1955





“The first thing that happened to whites like us who were sympathetic to the boycott was that we lost our businesses. People didn’t come to us. We got a reputation.”

—Virginia Durr, boycott activist



Above, left: Photo by Don Cravens
Courtesy Time Life/Getty Images

Left: Martin Luther King Jr. sits for his arrest photograph, February 1956
Courtesy Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

Below, left: Two months after her initial arrest, Rosa Parks was arrested on new charges, February 1956
Courtesy AP/Wide World Photos

Below: Church members celebrate the release of the arrested boycott leaders, February 1956
Photo by Grey Villet
Courtesy Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

Many boycott supporters were threatened with loss of their jobs and harassed by the local government. Conspiracy charges, based on state anti-boycott law, were brought against 98 boycott leaders, including Parks and King. Throughout the boycott, the church was an oasis that offered renewed strength and commitment.



Exhibition Collaborators

TROY UNIVERSITY ROSA PARKS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Situated on the historic site of Rosa Parks' arrest, the Rosa Parks Library and Museum was built in tribute to both Parks and the civil rights movement in Montgomery. This state-of-the-art museum is committed to educating audiences about the boycott's momentous turning point in our country's history and its continued effect on society.

www.montgomery.troy.edu/museum

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, DC, for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science, and history, which are shown wherever people live, work, and play.

www.sites.si.edu

Specifications

Contents: Photographs, political cartoons, illustrations, text, audiovisual components

Participation fee: \$5,000 for a 10-week booking period, plus prorated shipping

Shipping: Prorated, SITES-designated carrier

Size: 2,500 square feet (230 square meters)

Weight: TBD

Crates: TBD

Security: Moderate

Tour begins: December 2005

Exhibition Support

As a host of *381 Days: The Montgomery Bus Boycott Story*, you will receive the following:

- Complete curatorial and registrarial information.
- Complete shipping, handling, and installation instructions.
- Wall-to-wall insurance coverage under the Smithsonian's policy.
- Public relations support in the form of digital press releases, images, and logos; digital graphic templates of promotional materials; and advice on promoting the exhibition and hosting special events.
- Guidelines for local fundraising.
- Educational and programming resources.
- Ability to link to and from the SITES website.

Registrarial Requirements

This exhibition has been designated Moderate Security and will be offered only to institutions that are able to meet the Smithsonian's requirements. It will contain exhibit structure that may be freestanding or contain wall-hung elements as well as lighting and audiovisual components. Institutions hosting *381 Days: The Montgomery Bus Boycott Story* will be required to adhere to the requirements listed below. (This exhibition has not yet been designed or fabricated. Additional requirements may be added to reflect the final exhibition.)

SPACE

- Venues must have a limited-access gallery of sufficient area to accommodate the exhibition. An open mall, hallway, or lounge area is not acceptable.

- Smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited in the exhibition area, exhibitor storage, and receiving and staging spaces.
- Empty crates for exhibit structure and audiovisual components must be stored in a secured, pest-free, and temperature-controlled storage.

SECURITY

- Trained professional guards and/or personnel must be available in sufficient numbers to protect the exhibition adequately throughout the time it is on site (during unpacking, installation, deinstallation, and repacking) and on view.
- Venues must use the security hardware provided in the exhibition.
- The exhibition area must be locked and secured during closed hours. Alarms and/or guards during closed hours are preferred but not required.
- Functioning fire-prevention systems and other fire-protection devices that meet local ordinances must be available in the exhibition, staging, and storage spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

- The exhibition, staging, and storage areas must have temperature and humidity controls to guarantee an environment of 68–72 degrees Fahrenheit and 40–60% relative humidity.
- The venue must have recording hygrothermographs in the exhibition, staging, and storage areas. A member of the professional collections management staff must make daily checks of the exhibition.

This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of AARP.

- There must be no direct sunlight in the exhibition, staging, and storage areas. It should be diffused or eliminated. Light levels must be limited to 20 foot-candles.

EXHIBITION CARE

- Handling of the exhibit structure and audiovisual components during unpacking, installation, deinstallation, and repacking must be done by curatorial, registrarial, or by other trained and experienced museum professionals.
- The exhibition is anticipated to have freestanding components containing audiovisual and possibly specialty lighting that will need to be assembled on site. Venues will need to have additional tools and personnel with the appropriate skills for installation of exhibit structure and audiovisual equipment.
- The exhibition is anticipated to be shipped to each venue in a 53-foot tractor trailer and may contain exhibit crates weighing up to 500 pounds. Venues will need to have the facility and staff or the ability to hire skilled personnel for crate delivery and movement.

SITES Contacts

To host this exhibition, please contact Michelle Torres-Carmona. 202.633.3143 ■ torrescm@si.edu

For information about exhibition content and design, please contact Marquette Folley. 202.633.3111 ■ folleym@si.edu



The boycott lasted 381 days, galvanizing the civil disobedience movement and attracting national attention. Although the battle was won, the war against inequality continued.



Top: Martin Luther King Jr., E.D. Nixon (in light hat), and other boycott leaders await the first desegregated bus, December 1956

Middle and bottom: For the first time, black passengers board through the front of the bus and, like Rosa Parks (center), sit where they please.

All photos by Don Cravens
Courtesy Time Life Pictures/Getty Images



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<p>A TRANSCRIPT</p> <p>Of The</p> <p>RECORD AND PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>Before The</p> <p>RECORDER'S COURT</p> <p>In the Case of</p> <p>The City of Montgomery</p> <p>vs.</p> <p><i>Rosa Parks</i></p> <p>Charge</p> <p><i>Viol. Chapter 6</i></p> <p><i>Section 11-CC</i></p> <p>Appealed to the Circuit Court of Montgomery</p> <p>Case on Docket <i>Dec 1</i> 19<i>55</i></p> <p>Tried <i>5</i> day of <i>Dec</i> 19<i>55</i></p> <p>Appealed <i>5</i> day of <i>Dec</i> 19<i>55</i></p> <p><small>BAVIS PRINTING-LITHO</small></p>	<p>Witnesses for the City</p> <p><i>F. B. May P.D.</i></p> <p><i>N.W. Miron P.D.</i></p>
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Court transcript
Courtesy Library of
Congress

Cover photo by Don
Cravens
Courtesy Time Life
Pictures/Getty Images