

## Excerpt from Rosa Parks's Report on Montgomery Bus Boycott

*Rosa Parks reports on the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott at workshop at the Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tennessee. March 1956. Included are comments by Myles Horton, director of the school and Beulah Johnson, a public school teacher in Tuskegee, Alabama. Reprinted from a mimeographed report by permission of Myles Horton.*

ROSA PARKS: Montgomery today is nothing at all like it was as you knew it last year. It's just a different place altogether since we demonstrated, which marked the time of my arrest on the city line bus for not moving out of the seat I had already occupied. For a white person to take the seat I would have had to stand. It was not at all pre-arranged. It just happened that the driver made a demand and I just didn't feel like obeying his demand. He called a policeman and I was arrested and placed in jail, later released on a \$100 bond and brought to trial on December 5th. This was the first date that the Negroes of Montgomery set to not ride the bus and from December to this date they are still staying off the bus in large numbers, almost 100%. Once in a while you may see one or two but very seldom do you see any riding the city line buses. It attracted much attention all over the nation and worldwide, you may say. There was attention even as far away as London. We had a correspondent at one of our meetings. There was a correspondent from even as far away as Tokyo, Japan. People all over the country have called in to see what's going on, what's being done and what is the reaction to it.

MYLES HORTON: What you did was a very little thing just to sit there, you know, to touch off such a fire. Why did you do it; what moved you not to move? I'm interested in motivations—what makes people do things. What went on in your mind, Rosa?

ROSA PARKS: Well, in the first place. I had been working all day on the job. I was quite tired after spending a full day working. I handle and work on clothing that white people wear. That didn't come in my mind but this is what I wanted to know; when and how would we ever determine our rights as human beings? The section of the bus where I was sitting was what we called the colored section, especially in this neighborhood because the bus was filled more than two-thirds with Negro passengers and a number of them were standing. And just as soon as enough white passengers got on the bus to take what we consider their seats and then a few over, that meant that we would have to move back for them even though there was no room to move back. It was an imposition as far as I was concerned.

MYLES HORTON: Well, had you ever moved before?

ROSA PARKS: I hadn't for quite a long while. It has happened in the past and I did obey somewhat reluctantly. The times that I had to move back I think a colored man gave me his seat. Just having paid for a seat and riding for only a couple of blocks and then having to stand, was too much. These other persons had got on the bus after I did—it meant that I didn't have a right to do anything but get on the bus, give them my fate and then be pushed wherever they wanted me.

MYLES HORTON: You just decided that you wouldn't be moved again, is that it?

ROSA PARKS: That is what I felt like....

MYLES HORTON: They have tried their patience for a long time. Why, suddenly, does somebody—who happens to be somebody we know and admire and are proud of—say, “Now—this is it.” It seems to me what has happened in Montgomery is a new high in American protest, in the sense of people using passive resistance instead of the more conventional methods. Now why, in the first place, did Rosa do this instead of its just being another time when she'd move—and then, equally important, why did the fact touch off the tremendous response that it did in Montgomery? These are significant questions. I don't know whether we can get the answers to them. You couldn't have the highest paid public relations people or the highest paid organizers in the country do this, you know, George. It's just the kind of job that you couldn't set up, plan and carry out. We had heard last summer when Rosa was here that the Negroes in Montgomery were timid and would not act. In fact some of the leaders in Montgomery wrote us to that effect. They said they couldn't get any interest stirred up there, that the Negroes wouldn't stand together. Then Rosa refused to move and as a result of her arrest something big happened. Was it an accident—how do you feel about it Rosa?

ROSA PARKS: None of us seem to know exactly ourselves unless it was because this incident had been experienced by so many others—many Negroes had been subjected to this type of humiliation. I think they responded because each person had experienced something of the same thing.

MYLES HORTON: And your protest made the rest of them realize that the time had come.

ROSA PARKS: We at least could give it a try!

MYLES HORTON: I am sure that Rosa heard all the discussions up here last summer and other people from Montgomery who weren't here heard the radio and read the papers. This certainly was background preparation but there was the same background preparation for a lot of other places where this didn't happen.

BEULAH JOHNSON: You ask what has happened to Rosa. I think I can tell you what happened to her. It is the same thing that happened to me and that man on the L&N railroad. I was tired of insults. You know that the law is on your side and you get tired of being run over. You say, "Well, let's fight it out—if it means going to jail then go to jail." That's just the whole attitude—when you get tired then you get tired of people asking you to get up and move. I'm just pretty certain that that's just one of those days that happened to Rosa. There comes a time in your life when you just decide that you don't give a rap. Many of us have reached that point. I don't live in Montgomery but I'm in Montgomery every week and I know the situation. Now that's what happened to Rosa here. You ask the question why people fell in line. We have had NAACP meetings and we've had the things we discussed when we were here last summer. We have been very much concerned with getting people registered in the state of Alabama. We've been talking about those things and we've been reviewing what has happened all around as far as the court decisions go.

MYLES HORTON: Well, that answers a lot of questions in my mind—but it still doesn't explain why it took the passive resistance form that it did.

ROSA PARKS: I think I can account for that because in the organization the ministers came together and took the lead and made the announcements from their pulpits and we also had these spiritual mass meetings twice weekly.

BEULAH JOHNSON: Well, I tell you I think you are going to have to keep in mind that for the last five years we have been calling on ministers throughout the United States and we have been letting them know that it is strictly a job that ministers should undertake. There has been beautiful support from the ministers—they are really coming out and working. I think they are simply doing what should have been done a long time ago.