

The Montgomery Bus Boycott,

1955 - 1956

In 1954, the US Supreme Court ruled that segregation (a law separating black and white people in public places) was unconstitutional in schools; however segregation was still heavily in place across much of the south.

In Montgomery, Alabama, on the 1st December 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger, and this act of civil disobedience triggered a city-wide response.

Around 70% of the bus users in Montgomery were black, meaning the bus company's profits were greatly reduced.

The NAACP and WPC decided to organise a city-wide bus boycott on the day of Parks' trial. Most black people observed the boycott.

NAACP: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

WPC: Women's Political Council

After Parks was found guilty and fined \$10, a longer bus boycott was planned. It was organised by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), led by Dr Martin Luther King Jnr. As well as organising the boycott, the MIA initially demanded that:

Both white and black passengers should be permitted to sit anywhere on a bus, on a 'first come, first served' basis

White bus drivers should be polite to black passengers

The bus company should employ black drivers on routes mostly used by black passengers

Effects of the boycott

Black people, who were most often on low incomes, commonly depended on buses to get to work. To help encourage them to keep up the boycott the MIA set up car pools and encouraged black taxi drivers to charge the same rate as the bus.

Despite these measures, the boycott was tough for black Americans:

Some people, such as Rosa Parks, lost their job for supporting the boycott.

Leaders were violently attacked by white supremacists and mistreated by the police. King and other church leaders had their homes bombed.

People involved in the car pools were stopped by the police and charged with minor or made-up offences, such as driving too slowly.

Laws that prevented people from gathering in large numbers were used to arrest black people as they waited to be picked up by pool cars.

Results of the boycott

In 1956, members of the MIA were arrested for disrupting lawful business and were found guilty, resulting in fines and imprisonment.

However, the trial also allowed the MIA to publicise their grievances nationally and gain support from people across the USA. Funds poured into the MIA as black and white people from all over the USA supported their cause.

When it became clear that negotiations with the city authorities were not working, the NAACP took the matter to the Supreme Court. This court case became known as Browder v Gayle...

Browder v Gayle referenced the Brown v Topeka decision, concluding that segregation was unconstitutional in transportation as well as education. The MIA had achieved the significant victory of desegregating Montgomery's buses.

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