



# Video Story Transcript

## Rosa Parks

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD53YsXijE8>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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“If you miss me at the back of the bus and you can't find me no where, Come on up to the front of the bus 'cause I'll be riding up there.” Those words come from a song written by James Neblett. And he said, in that song, that he was celebrating all the accomplishments that African-Americans had made during the 1950's and the 1960's in the civil rights movement. And one of the very basic accomplishments, which is unbelievable that it was not possible to do, was for African-Americans to be able to sit anywhere on a public bus. You know, for 68 years in this country, there were laws called Jim Crow laws. And those laws, well, they were mandated to separate the races. Now, they did a good job of keeping the races separate but they sure didn't do a good job of keeping things equal. Separate but equal, they called it. No way. Not at all.

Well, all that changed in 1955, especially on the buses. The buses, you know, they used to have the front rows for the white people and African-Americans had to sit in the back and if the white section filled up and a white person was standing, well, don't you know, an entire row of African-Americans would have to get up and move to the back. It was totally unfair.

But in 1955 that's when Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old woman, from Montgomery, Alabama, she was ordered to stand up on the bus and give up her seat. And Rosa Parks refused. Now I will tell you, her dignity stood up. Her commitment to ending bus segregation stood up. Her inner spirit and, I'm sure, her soul stood up. So, Rosa Parks could make the difficult decision to remain sitting down. Now, there have been many books written about that day and the ensuing year. But I think Rosa Parks said it best herself. So, from excerpts from her autobiography and the many interviews that she had, I'm going to tell you Rosa Parks' story in mostly her words.

When that bus driver came back at me, waving his arms, yelling at me saying, "Make it light on yourself. Give up your seat." I was ready. I was not going to give up my seat. I had prepared for that moment for a long time.

You see, it was December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955. Ha! The newspaper reporter said that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired. Ha. I'll tell you what I was tired of! I was tired of seeing men, women, and children disrespected because of the color of their skin. I was tired of Jim Crow segregation laws. I was tired of being oppressed. You see, my feet were not tired, my soul was. The United States of America was supposed to be the land of the free; the land of equality. But it seems to me, the only people who are equal, well, are people with white skin. And I too am an American and I too deserve respect.

Hmm. Those newspaper reporters... well, they said that I was just a seamstress. No, I am a tailor. I work downtown for the Montgomery Ward Department store. I tailor men's clothes so they fit nice. I do a great job! But that's not all I do. You see, I'm also a volunteer secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. We call it the NAACP. I'm also the head of their youth group. I will tell you, many times I've sat in those meetings taking the minutes and I hear about all the horrible crimes against Negro people. White hate crimes we call them. Where Negroes are cheated, and abused, and harassed, and murdered, and lynched, and much, much more.

You know that young girl, Claudette Colvin? She was 15 years old when she didn't give up her seat on the bus. Oh, I was very proud of her. What she did was hard and brave. She could have gotten killed for that small act of defiance. I invited her to talk to my youth group and we talked about her case many times at the NAACP meetings. And you know, after hearing what she did and after thinking of all that I've been through, well, I've made up my mind I was never again going to give up my seat on any bus.

Now I will tell you, I rode that bus to work, five mornings a week, five evenings a week, four weeks out of every month. And each time I try to sit as high up as I could in the Negro section and each time I said to myself, "If I'm asked to give up my seat, I will NOT."

Hmm. When that day came, and that bus driver came running after me waving his arms, I rapped my determination around me like a quilt on a cold winter's night. And when the police came on that bus, I looked up at one of them and I said, "Why do you push us around?" And I'll never forget what he said to me.

He said, "I don't know, but the law is the law and you are under arrest."

Now I will tell you, they didn't push me around like they did with Claudette. They were very polite. One took my purse, one took my shopping bag, and they escorted me off the bus. And once off the bus, we got to the squad car, and they opened the door, and I got inside. And actually, once inside, they gave me back my purse and my personal belongings.

On the way to City Hall, one of those policemen turned around and he looked at me and he said, "Why didn't you give up your seat when the bus driver asked you to?" I didn't tell him a thing. I was silent all the way to City Hall.

Now let me tell you, after my arrest, the NAACP called for a boycott of the buses. And all the Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama who had been silent or who had been afraid or who had been fearful or who had been angry, we all came together. And we said, "We're going to boycott the buses until the laws change. We're just not going to ride."

Hmm. You know, there were 17,000 Negroes that rode those buses every day and they made up more than three-quarters of the ridership. And when we stopped riding those buses, the bus company lost money. It was hard on them. But let me tell you that, was nothing compared to how hard it was on us.

We walked. We walked everywhere. We walked to church. We walked to school. We walked to work. We walked to visit friends. We walked to buy food. Now, the NAACP did set up carpools - 300 of them. And they did run on a regular basis and that was helpful, especially for those who were older or infirmed. Most of us, we just walked. No matter what the weather. No matter how we felt. No matter how many bundles we had to carry. No matter how many children we had in tow. We walked and not for a day, and not for a week, and not for a month. **We walked for 381 days. Three hundred and eighty-one days.**

Well, finally after all that walking, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that segregation on public transportation was unconstitutional. Look, I have to tell you, what took them so long. Well, in any case, the Negroes of Montgomery, Alabama walked for 381 days so that Negroes throughout the United States of America could sit anywhere they wanted on any trolley, any train, and any bus. It wasn't easy.