Women and the Civil Rights Movement

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Women and the Civil Rights Movement

Goals

• To learn about women’s involvement in the U.S. black civil rights movement
• To use our learning about women’s involvement to better understand a broad range of issues of social movement organizing
Focus: Montgomery Bus Boycott

• How can we use the very familiar event of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to explore a wide range (chronologically and topically) of women’s civil rights work?
Boycotting Segregated Transportation

Focus: The Montgomery Bus Boycott
   – Activist Traditions
   – The Movement behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott
   – Understanding the Boycott
   – Contemporary Cultural Representations of Civil Rights Organizing
Activist Traditions

Goals

• To understand the long tradition of protest, including protest of transportation segregation

• To develop an understanding of the issues involved in transportation boycotts and in civil rights organizing in general

• To use these understandings to ask questions about the Montgomery Bus Boycott
The Institution of Legal Segregation

- **Legal Segregation** (webpage)
Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation

• A History of Resistance
  Willi Coleman, “Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation: Ninety Years of Resistance” (photocopy)

  Robin D. G. Kelley, “Theatres of Resistance” (photocopy)
3. Resolutions of the National Association of Colored Women, 1904

The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs in the fourth convention assembled...

We pledge renewed efforts and loyalty along all lines in this, our national organization, continuing to stand for adherence to our motto “Lifting as We Climb,” for we believe that in it lies the future hope of the race.

In view of the fact of the numerous lynchings and the many victims burned at the stake, extending even to women, which have occurred in nearly every section of our country;

Be it Resolved, That we, the representatives of Negro womanhood, do heartily deplore and condemn this barbarous taking of human life, and that we appeal to the sentiment of the Christian world to check and eradicate this growing evil; and be it further

Resolved, That we do all in our power to bring criminals to justice, and that we appeal to all legislative bodies and courts of justice to see that all persons are protected in their rights as citizens.

Whereas, Our people throughout the South are discriminated against by railroads, being compelled to ride in offensive and inadequate cars, after paying first-class fares; and,

Whereas, Some of the Southern cities have introduced separate street cars,

Be it Resolved, That this body condemn such action, and that in all such states and towns the club women unite in trying to induce our people to refrain from patronizing street cars. . .

Be it Resolved, That we commend the action of the National Republican Convention in the adoption of that part of its platform which asserts that any state disfranchising its voters shall be limited in its Congressional representation.

Be it Resolved, That the women of our Association prepare themselves by the study of civil government and kindred subjects for the problems of city, state and national life, that they may be able to perform intelligently the duties that have come to some and will come to others in the natural progress of the woman’s suffrage question.

Be it Resolved, That the Colored Women’s Clubs endorse the W.C.T.U. [Women’s Christian Temperance Union], and urge that we emphasize more fully the work among the young people, and do all in their power to create a sentiment against the practice of taking them to places of amusement where intoxicants are sold, and further that we do all in our power to prevent the diffusion of improper and pernicious literature that saps the vitality of the moral life of our young people.

Believing that the mother is the rock upon which the home is built, therefore, be it

Resolved, That we pledge ourselves to hold and encourage mothers’ meetings whenever practicable, in order to instruct mothers in all that pertains to home building and child-life.

Protesting Transportation Segregation before Montgomery

- Half a century before the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott African Americans in the city had conducted a two-year boycott when the city council enacted a trolley-car segregation bill. “Like the bus boycott of 1955-1956, the Montgomery streetcar boycott of 1900-1902 was part of a larger regional black protest against Jim Crow urban transit.”

Known Streetcar Boycotts

- Atlanta, 1892-1893
- Augusta, 1898
- Savannah, 1899
- Atlanta and Rome, 1900
- Augusta, 1900-1903
- Jacksonville, 1901
- Montgomery, 1900-1902
- Mobile, 1902
- New Orleans and Shreveport, 1902-1903
- Little Rock, 1903
- Columbia, 1903
- Houston, 1903-1905
- Vicksburg and Natchez, 1904
- San Antonio, 1904-1905
- Richmond, 1904-1905
- Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, 1905
- Jacksonville and Pensacola, 1905
- Nashville, 1905-1906
- Danville, Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Norfolk, 1906
- Newport News, 1906-1907
- Savannah, 1906-1907
Richmond, Virginia, Streetcar Boycott, 1904-05
Richmond Planet Reports a Streetcar Boycott

• *Richmond Planet*, 1904-1905 (photocopy)

• [John Mitchell and the Richmond Planet](website)
• Virginia Mandates Streetcar Segregation, 1906 (website)
Maggie Lena Walker


• Maggie Lena Walker, excerpts from “Benaiah’s Valour,” 1906 (photocopy)
Women Builders

• http://nmaaryder.si.edu/johnson/women.html
Nashville, Tennessee, Streetcar Boycott

• Nashville’s Streetcar Boycott, 1905-1907
  http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/nashv.htm

Union Transportation Company
  http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/union.htm

Richard Boyd
  http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/RHBoyd.htm

StreetcarBoycotts\Nashville\RHBoydLetter.doc
Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56
Montgomery City Code

- http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/rights/lesson1/doc1.html
The Movement behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott

• Women and the Montgomery bus system
• Joanne Gibson Robinson and the Women’s Political Council
• Why not Claudette Colvin?
• Who was Rosa Parks?
Joanne Gibson Robinson and the Women’s Political Council

- Brief history of the Women’s Political Council
- Joanne Gibson Robinson’s May 1954 letter to Mayor of Montgomery
- 1955 Montgomery Mass Meeting
Complaint

Copy of the letter sent to Mayor Gayle

Honorable Mayor V. A. Gayle
City Hall
Montgomery, Alabama

May 21, 1954

Dear Sirs,

The Women’s Political Council is very grateful to you and the City Commissioners for the hearing you allowed our representatives during the month of March, 1954, when the “city-bus-fare-increase” case was being reviewed.

There were several things the Council asked for:

1. A city law that would make it possible for Negroes to sit from back toward front, and whites from front toward back until all the seats are taken:

2. That Negroes not be asked or forced to pay fare at front end and go to the rear of the bus to enter:

3. That buses stop at every corner in residential sections occupied by Negroes as they do in communities where whites reside.

We are happy to report that buses have been stopping at more corners now in some sections where Negroes live than previously. However, the same practice in seating and boarding the bus continues.

Mayor Gayle, three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyances are Negroes. If Negroes did not patronize them, they could not possibly operate.

More and more of our people are already arranging with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humiliated by bus drivers.

There has been talk from twenty or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses. To stop the assault that forceful measures are necessary in carrying for a compliance which is right for all bus passengers. To the Council, believes that when this matter has been put before you and the Commissioners, that agreeable terms can be met in a quiet and amicable manner to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Many of our Southern cities in neighboring states have practiced the policies we ask without incident whatsoever. Atlanta, Decatur and Savannah in Georgia have done this for years. Even Mobile, in our own state, does this and all the passengers are satisfied.

Please consider this plea, and if possible, favorably upon it, for even new plans are being made to ride less, or not at all, on our buses. We do not want this.

Respectfully yours,

The Women’s Political Council

July 26, 1954

Elsa Barkley Brown
April 25, 2002
• Montgomery's Black Citizens Cite Their Most Urgent Needs, 1955
Why not Claudette Colvin?
Flyer announcing boycott

This is for Monday, December 5, 1955

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down.

It is the second time since the Claudette Colbert case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped.

Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother.

This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, anywhere on Monday.

You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go, except by bus.

You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off of all buses Monday.
Mass Meeting

Elsa Barkley Brown
April 25, 2002
Returning to Riding the Bus

- Integrated Bus Suggestions (website)
Who was Rosa Parks?

• Biographical background
• NAACP Work
• Highlander Folk School
Highlander Folk School

• Rosa Parks at Highlander
• Highlander
• Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson
• Beauticians and the Civil Rights Movement
Understanding the Boycott

December 1955

- Walking, Meeting, Carpooling, Negotiating, Publicizing
- In Friendship
- The Trials
- The Outcome
Link to “Ella’s Song”
• Tallahassee Bus Boycott Timeline
Contemporary Cultural Representations of Civil Rights Organizing

- *The Long Walk Home*
- *Ruby Bridges*
- *The Rosa Parks Story*
- *Boycott*
- *Eyes on the Prize*
Visit Elsa Barkley Brown’s website to download powerpoint file which can be edited.

http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Colleges/ARHU/Depts/History/Faculty/EBarkleyBrown/BusBoycott/