



December 1 Rosa Parks Human Rights Day

11 am - Blue Hill Ave. & Dudley St.

No to Poverty, Racism & War!

Boston Rosa Parks Human Rights Day Committee

617-524-3507 • www.brphrd.com

Mumia Abu-Jamal from death row:

Other mothers, other movements

From an Oct. 26 audio commentary:

The death of civil rights icon Mrs. Rosa Parks, at the age of 92, has become a national event with media outlets running retrospectives from the Montgomery bus boycott, which sparked the rise of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the birth of the modern civil rights movement.

This, in this moment of familial and social loss, is yet a good thing for it teaches and reminds the young of how things were in an America that they did not live in. Mrs. Parks rightly deserved the accolades and honors heaped upon her for the great and noble role she played in a mass movement that touched the lives of millions.

Yet, unless one reads the work of Black and radical historians, we would not know that Mrs. Parks wasn't the first Black woman who refused to give her seat to a white man or was arrested for refusing to do so.

In December 1955, an organizer of the Women's Political Council, Jo Ann Robinson, acted within hours of Mrs. Parks arrest by working the phone tree and then writing a leaflet that went out throughout the city which read, "Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown in 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 Colvin 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 bus to work, to town, to school, or 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 all buses Monday." ("The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It, The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson," 1987)

Without Jo Ann Robinson's activism, who would know of Rosa Parks? What if she, or her Women's Political Council, did nothing? What if she hadn't activated the phone tree, or written and then distributed this leaflet, and what if Black folks in Montgomery, by the hundreds, thousands and more, didn't respond to those leaflets?

People build movements, one by one, in tens, hundreds, thousands and eventually millions, and what if Claudette Colvin, this poor woman, lost not only her seat and her dignity but was later tossed in a mental institution. Few remember this woman's name, but her contribution that would set the stage for Parks was immense, yet none of us can deny the power of Montgomery and how it electrified the nation.

On Thursday, Dec. 1, 2005, a number of organizations, unions and activists are calling for a Rosa Park's 50th anniversary Nationwide Strike, to shut the war down. On that day, they're calling for no school, no shopping, no work, to not only mark Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat, but a nationwide strike against poverty, racism and war. Organizers include the Million Worker March Movement, the Troops Out Now Coalition, Black Workers For Justice and a wide, diverse group of organizations and leaders.

When asked about the bus boycott, Parks said, "The only thing that bothered me was that we waited so long to make this protest." It's been 50 years since her heroic stand in Montgomery, against the racist system of segregation. Today, in the brutal aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it is past time for protests against poverty, racism and scourge of war. People joining together make movements. From Death Row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.