

ROSA PARKS
SOUND ROLL 1525
CAMERA ROLL 557

INTERVIEWER: TO BEGIN WITH, I WONDER IF YOU COULD GIVE ME A BRIEF WORD PICTURE OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE MID 50'S IN THE SOUTH, PARTICULARLY MONTGOMERY. AND IF THERE'S ONE INCIDENT OR ANECDOTE AS IT RELATES TO RACE RELATIONS THAT YOU CAN REMEMBER, SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU PERSONALLY THAT MIGHT EXPLAIN OR ILLUSTRATE WHAT THE SOUTH WAS LIKE IN TERMS OF RACE RELATIONS DURING THAT TIME.

Parks: Everything was segregated and by law. Transportation, occupation and just it was just one of those Southern traditions that was uh, enforced in schools.

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE ANY ONE INCIDENT OR ANYTHING THAT STICKS OUT IN YOUR MIND THAT ILLUSTRATES JUST HOW SEGREGATED IT WAS?

Parks: There are many incidents. It's very difficult to pick out any one in particular. In 1954, after the Supreme Court decision had been handed down to do away with uh, segregation in the public schools. We did have a few parents of school age children in public schools to sign a petition and place it before the Board of Education and this was done, the Board of Education published and names and address of these people open to any type of harassment that might be inflicted. I don't know how many lost jobs, maybe they didn't but it was just one of those things that was done to be more, make segregation more oppressive and to intimidate us as a people.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE EMMETT TILL CASE, MRS PARKS?

Parks: It was on the news...

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU START ONCE AGAIN AND TELL ME WHAT WAS ON THE NEWS, REMEMBER PEOPLE WON'T HEAR MY VOICE.

Parks: The murder of Emmett Till, I believe he was about 14 years old, who was visiting his relatives his home was in Chicago and the news came that he had been brutally murdered and put into the river. His body was removed from the river after it had been weighted down-and he was so badly mutilated that he was unrecognizable. The first mass meeting that we had in Montgomery following his death was when Dr. T.R.M. Howard came to speak to the NAACP meeting, well, just a community meeting and he was telling us about it in detail. *Jet* magazine published it and we read about it.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT KIND OF IMPACT DID HIS DEATH HAVE ON YOU PERSONALLY?

Parks: it was just like any person murdered. I couldn't be any way than very upset, very devastated by the in, the United States of America that a child could be just taken out and killed. However, it parallels an incident that had happened in Montgomery not too long before this, except this was a young minister who had a singing group and my husband knew him and his mother. And he was supposed to have done something, I don't know what it was, but I think, uh, some white woman had made a request that, he had a radio program, a group of singers and seemed that she had made a request, I don't know whether it was by writing or how for him, for his group to sing a song and this is supposed to have led to him being in church with this person. And uh, some men took him out to the Alabama River on a bridge and he supposedly jumped over into the river and they told his mother she had better keep quiet about it which she did. Her

husband knew it and I guess the family and that was all. But the difference in, um, his case and um, the Emmett Till case was because Emmett Till came from the North and the media picked it up. In this case, of course, was kept very much hidden so that is why in, around Montgomery it was supposed to have been a, good, race relations, quote unquote, because uh, much of what was done to some families and I happened to be at that time the Secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP as well as the uh, Youth Council advisor in many, uh, cases did come to my attention that nothing came out of because the person that were abused would be too intimidated to sign an affidavit, or to make a statement to let it be known what had happened.

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ALITTLE BIT...

I WANT TO GET A SENSE OF HOW, YOU JUST MENTIONED A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW ACTIVE YOU WERE BEFORE DECEMBER 1, 1955, POLITICALLY, UH, AS FAR AS RACE RELATIONS WERE CONCERNED.

Parks: Well, NAACP was non-partisan, non-political organization. It...

INTERVIEWER: ALRIGHT WHY DON'T YOU START AGAIN?

Parks: I had been active much before the 1954, I had been working with NAACP since 1943. And I worked with uh, the uh, we set up registrations, _____ meetings for people to start becoming registered voters. Very few of us were registered in the early 1940's. And, it was practically impossible to for a black person regardless of the intelligence to become registered except for a very few selected by the white community.

INTERVIEWER: UM, YOU WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN, COULD YOU DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR ACTITIVITES IN GETTING ON THOSE BUSES AND RE-BOARDING BEFORE IT CAME TO THE TIME OF THE FINAL TIME OF CONFRONTATION THAT WE NOW KNOW ABOUT?

Parks: Well, I was, when I would not give my money to the driver or if I put the fare in and get on the bus, the driver who had me arrested did evict me from the bus in 1943. It was those who wanted to enforce this type of uh, oppression, humiliation would rather that I not ride the bus. In fact some did tell me not to ride their buses. If uh, I felt that I was too important to go to the back door to get on. And going to the back door after paying your fare in the front would mean sometime that people wouldn't even get on the bus at all because if you couldn't get around fast enough to suit the driver, he would just drive off and leave you standing after you paid your fare.

INTERVIEWER: NOW THIS WAS A COMPANY POLICY?

Parks: It was, I think it was the individual drivers because some drivers didn't do that. They regarded us, even with segregation, it was uh, they didn't bother you, you just got on the bus, paid your fare and find your place where you could sit or stand.

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INTERVIEWER: MRS. PARKS IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE HOW THE BUSES WERE SEGREGATED AND WHAT THE SYSTEM WAS.

Parks: Well, the system of legal racial segregation on the buses. The white passengers occupied the front seats and blacks in the back. But there was a guess you can say custom or practice that if the back of the bus was filled up

and people was standing in the aisle, they still would leave a certain number of vacant seats in the front even if no white people boarded the bus, buses. The time that if white would get on the bus and occupy what was supposed to be the designated seats for them, they were all filled, some drivers not all, would have their first row of black people to stand though they were back of the white to accommodate those whites who were standing. So that was very humiliating, very oppressive and even with having to take a certain section because c) of your race was also humiliating, but having to stand up on, out of a particular driver to keep a white person from having to stand was um, to my mind, most inhumane. We were paying the same fare, in fact, some black people had to pay double fare because, I mentioned earlier, if they were trying to get on the bus in the rear door, they would have to either walk where they were going after having paid the fare in the front, or pay another fare when another fare. More than 75, between 85 and I think 90 % of the patronage of the buses were black people because while there were some white people who used the buses, they were very much in the minority and we were very much in the majority because more white people could own and drive their own cars than blacks.

INTERVIEWER: NOW ON DECEMBER 1ST, WHAT, WHAT WAS DIFFERENT THAT DAY, WHY DID YOU DECIDE, REFUSE TO GIVE UP...

Parks: Well, there was nothing different about that day because as I said before, I had from time to time had some confrontation with bus drivers. But the difference that made it, this driver decided to have me arrested and have the policeman to take me to jail. And that did attract more attention than it had if I had just gotten off the bus-on his orders.

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU GO BACK TO THAT DAY AND TELL ME WHY AGAIN, YOU JUST DECIDED TO DO IT AND WHAT THE DRIVER SAID TO YOU?

Parks: well, as I said before to you, it was not a matter of me deciding that day, because for a long, over a period of time, over the years, I had, uh had problems with the bus drivers and this one who had me arrested on that day was the same one who had evicted me from the bus on 1943 which did not cause anything more than just a passing glance, I did have to leave the bus and find another way of transportation home or wait for another bus or walk, I don't remember which I did. I had finished my days work as a tailor's assistant in the Montgomery Fair Department store and when I was on my way home, I noticed the first bus was very crowded, even people standing up in the front and the back and I didn't get that one because I wanted to go to the store and pick up an item or two at the drug store. The next Cleveland Avenue bus that I saw I noticed there were I didn't see anyone standing up at that point, but by the time I walked to the bus, and was getting on, there were some people in the back, standing in the back there was one vacant seat which I took along side a man and the two women across the aisle. We went, there were still a few vacant seats in the front, of course, I was just getting on the bus, I was not _____ any seats, or trying to see who was what seats were vacant and what not, I was only concerned with the one I was sitting in. We went to the next stop without being disturbed on the third, the front of the bus seats, the front seats were occupied and this one man, a white man standing at this point the driver asked us to stand up and let him have those seats and when uh, neither, none of us moved at his first uh, words, he said, you all make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats. And the man who was sitting next to the window stood up and I made room for him to pass by me and I sit where I was. The two women across the aisle stood up and moved out. Now, where they went, or whether they left the bus and whether they stayed on I don't know because while he was stopping to have trying to get us to stand up, some people several people left

the bus. I didn't see any white people leave. I don't know what happened to this passenger that he wanted to occupy the seat. I don't know whether he, he never said anything, all I know that it was a man. And when he saw me still sitting, and that had left the three seats vacant, except where I was, he asked if I was going to stand up and I said, no I'm not. And he said, well, if you, if you don't stand up, I'm going to have you, call the police and have you arrested. I said you may do that. And he did get off the bus and stayed for a few minutes and I still stayed where I was and when two policemen came on the bus, the uh, driver pointed me out and he said, he needed the seats and other three stood, that one, he just said that one would not. And when the policeman approached me one of them spoke and asked me if the bus driver had asked me to stand and I said yes. He said, why don't you stand up? I said, I don't think I have to stand up. And I asked him, why do you push us around? He said, I do not know, but the law is the law and you're under arrest. But to my mind and I had never read it in the City ordinance where a bus driver's supposed to have one passenger stand up and not have a seat or another one to take the seat and if I can remember correctly, it said in keeping with racial segregation the bus driver had the, I believe it said the police power which meant they could even carry arms if they wanted to, to rearrange seating in keeping with racial segregation. But they were not rearranging seating, they were just depriving four passengers of a seat for one person to sit down and leave three vacant seats while the back of the bus was packed because there was black standing and there was only one white person who was, uh, standing. And he was a man.

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH DO WE HAVE LEFT JOHN?

CAMERA ROLL.. NO, WE'RE GOING TO ROLL.

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE AT THE FIRST MEETING AT THE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, CAN YOU TELL US WHAT STICKS OUT IN YOUR MIND ABOUT THAT MEETING THAT NIGHT?

Parks: Well, the first meeting was not at the Baptist Church, the first meeting we had was uh, at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King's church where he was pastoring. That was

Parks: on Friday evening...

INTERVIEWER: I'M TALKING ABOUT THE BIG MEETING AT THE --

Parks: Oh, the big meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church there were so many people there that, uh, very difficult to get inside the church. People were standing on the outside and there were number of speakers - Dr. Martin Luther King was one. I didn't have to speak, but I did stand up. The uh, atmosphere was uh, was very? I would say it practically jubilant because people were singing, clapping their hands, and shouting, uh...

INTERVIEWER: STOMPING UPSTAIRS.

ALL RIGHT, WE'RE GOING TO START THAT AGAIN.

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CAMERA ROLL 559

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, I WANT YOU TO BEGIN AGAIN AND TELL ME ABOUT THAT MEETING AT THE HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE.

Parks: When I did get to the church there were so many people in the street around that church it was very difficult to get in. Someone was trying to help

me get in and then someone was. It was just packed. Every inch was taken up with people there and the street was full of people. People were laughing and talking and it seemed like they were quite happy. And when I did get to the meeting, I was escorted to the uh, pulpit, they had a seat for me there. And there were oh so many people that you can imagine that many getting into this church, I think they said there were several thousand I don't know exactly how many in and outside. Loudspeakers had been set up on the outside so those who could not get in could hear what was going on and then there were a number of speeches many ministers and others spoke and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the speakers. And when there was a vote taken to decide whether the protest would continue as it had early that morning it was on Monday, December 5th, the date of my trial and the evening was when this meeting was at the Holt Street Church. And the decision was unanimous. People were just yelling out that they would remain off the buses until changes were made for the better for us.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT SPARKING THE BOYCOTT AND SUCH A BIG MEETING AND THAT KIND OF REACTION?

Parks: Well, I was quite relieved and, uh, clear that people did decide that they themselves could take this action that would attract enough attention to know that the masses of the people were not happy and very much dissatisfied of the way we were treated. However, I felt like it was bit like long coming because there had been so many incidents when the same action could have taken place. But it seemed that they had not made up their minds until this particular incident.

INTERVIEWER: RALPH ABERNATHY TELLS A STORY THAT THERE WAS A SONG SUNG AT THAT FIRST MEETING AT HOLT STREET BAPTIST CHURCH AND EVERYBODY WAS SINGING IT, DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT THAT WAS?

Parks: I know they did quite a bit of singing. I guess what they actually sang is hard for me to um, remember, I guess maybe it was Walk Together Children, Don't get Weary or something like that and but I don't recall that actually, too many details of it.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU GET TO WORK DURING THE BOYCOTT?

Parks: well, the day after I was arrested. I used a cab and other times I would walk or maybe someone would give me a ride. I didn't, it was reasonable walking distance of uh, the downtown store where I worked, it would take anywhere from 25 to 30 minutes to get there walking in less than an hour. And then there were some friends who had cars, I don't recall because I didn't work too long after the incident, I worked five weeks went through the month of December and was uh, discharged from my job after the first week, in um, January.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO THE SUPREME COURT DECISION OF UM, AGAINST SEGREGATION

INTERVIEWER: ON THE BUSES, AND HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT IT?

Parks: Heard about it during one of our mass meeting and uh, Dr. King was presiding and someone brought the message to him and he gave it to us in the meeting.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID, WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION?

Parks: Naturally I would be very relieved to know that at last it had been handed down by the Supreme Court that the buses would not be segregated. But we had been off the buses now at that time for more than a year. And we were used to not riding the buses then.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, UM, HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT GETTING BACK ON THE BUSES FOR THE FIRST TIME, WERE YOU RIDING WITH KING AND THE CLERGYMEN WHEN THAT...

Parks: No, I was not riding with them. In fact, I was not, actually was not planning to ride the buses at all the day my mother was quite ill and I was at home with her. But some reporters from one of the publications, I think it was Look magazine came to my home and asked if I would uh, take a little time out and go downtown with them to have my picture taken riding the bus. Which I did.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID THAT FEEL LIKE GETTING ON THAT BUS AGAIN?

Parks: Didn't feel any special way. Just a matter of getting on for the, so my picture could be taken. The driver who had me arrested was one of the drivers, I think, I must've, was on and off about 3 buses before they got all the pictures that they wanted. And he was one of the drivers, on whose bus I was getting on for the pictures to be taken.

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU EVER DISCOURAGED ABOUT THE BOYCOTT? UM, YOU KNOW, WITH THE _____ WITH BOMBINGS, WITH THE LAWSUITS, THE WHOLE BIT. WAS IT EVER, WERE THERE ANY POINTS THAT YOU WERE JUST DISCOURAGED DURING THIS TIME?

Parks: well, during that time because uh, there were so many, um people involved, I did not feel any discouragement, I just felt that with the number of masses of people being involved and taking a part that it was not discouraging as it had been before the incidents and before others joined in. When you feel like others are with you, I don't think you have, feel the discouragement that you may feel apprehensive about the safety of some other people, or you may get weary because of meetings and taking, well my mother was ill quite a bit, and there were times when I could not participate as much as I wanted too but when she recovered, then, well, she always went with me and also my husband was _____ some of the meetings. He was very shaken and very upset because of the well, over a number of years we had lived under this tension for so long until it really didn't make it worse for others to be working with us, it made it even better. And then as it was then, but only difference was that the public knew about it and the media and newspapers, magazines, TV, gave the protest a great deal of publicity.

INTERVIEWER: I WAS JUST WONDERING IF
HERE YOU ARE TOGETHER AND THEN TO HAVE THIS _____ LUCY CATES COME DOWN AND
HAVE THE BOMBINGS AND THEN THE NAACP OUTLAWED IT, JUST SEEMED LIKE YOU'D JUST
SAG FROM THE WEIGHT OF ALL THIS.

Parks: Well, we didn't sag at all. We just kept moving on. Because there wasn't any need then, because, if I could stand the 20's, the 30's, 40's, and then, 50's all those years, without uh, any mass cooperation, or any support from either black or whites too much. Mr. E.D. Nixon ...

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, GO RIGHT AHEAD.

Parks: And locally we were organized into what we called the Voters League to get our instructions on how to answer the 21 questions _____ registered voters and after becoming registered voters if you did, _____ certificates we would

have to pay poll tax, a dollar 50 cents retroactive to our 21st birthday. I worked with this locally and with NAACP as a national organization. And uh, Mr. Nixon was active in both.

INTERVIEWER: THAT PART YOU WERE TELLING ME ABOUT MR. NIXON BEFORE, WE WEREN'T ROLLING THEN, SO DO YOU WANT TO BACK UP AND TELL ME ABOUT THAT AGAIN?

CAMERA ROLL 560
FALSE START.

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, IF YOU COULD JUST PICK UP AND TELL ME HOW YOU HAD WORKED WITH MR. NIXON BEFORE ALL THIS, HOW YOU TWO HAD WORKED TOGETHER.

Parks: I met Mr. E.D. Nixon in the early 1940's when he was either President or Chairman of the Legal Redress Committee of the NAACP.

INTERVIEWER: WAIT, HOLD ON. OKAY, NOW YOU GET A CHANCE TO TELL ME HOW MR. NIXON, HOW YOU WORKED WITH MR. NIXON BEFORE THE BOYCOTT CAME ABOUT.

Parks: Mr. E.D. Nixon was the very first person who told me the importance of registering and uh, becoming a voter. We uh, he and quite a few of the community people, my husband included, organized a Voters League we called it, we met in each other's homes and uh, a _____ Madison, Mayor of Montgomery had come down from New York City to help us with our registration. His aim was to get people, get us registered without having to be approved by some white registered voter. We worked with that as well as with the NAACP. And Mr. Nixon at that time was the President, and when he wasn't President, he was the Chairman of the Legal Redress Committee and whenever any incident or anything happened in the community, we always called on him. So, he was the very first person who was notified by a friend of mine that I was in jail. The call that I was permitted to make was to my home and I spoke with my mother and my husband and told them I was in jail. And my husband did find someone to give him a ride to jail to release me. But in the meantime, Mr. Nixon, attorney and Mrs. uh, Clifford Durr, were there and they made bonds for me before my husband arrived. And so, he was uh, the first person beside my husband and my immediate family and my mother to really impress upon me the freedom that was our and we had to take a stand to at least let it be known that we want to be free regardless of the conditions under which we were living. And, and, the time I was on the bus and refused to stand up, it was principally because I felt my rights as a human being were being violated and that getting in and obeying the officers was not helping to make conditions better for me or any of the rest of us. And, it was only way I knew to let him and the, all world know that I wanted to be a respectable and respected citizen in the community.

CAMERA ROLL 560
SOUND ROLL 1256
ROOM TONE AT THE BEGINNING.

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