

## Cynthia Scott

Despite the pattern of racial inequality in the city, many white Detroiters cast themselves as 'colorblind,' asserted their rights as 'property owners,' blamed black culture as the impediment to black success in the city and cast black people as being prone towards crime. In response to continuing segregation and inequality in the city, local organizers called for a "Great March" to serve as a "warning" according to Reverend C.L. Franklin "that what has transpired in the past is no longer acceptable to the Negro community." Held two months before the March on Washington, nearly 200,000 people, nearly all black, marched to Cobo Hall. Martin Luther King came to Detroit to join the March. He and Parks marched at the front.

A broad cross section of activists and groups had long highlighted the problem of police brutality and harassment in the city. Thirteen days after the Great March, police killed Cynthia Scott, a black sex worker, shooting her once in the stomach and twice in the back. Young activists rose up in protest. Scott's death and the lack of indictment for the officer who shot her set off a wave of anger, protests, and picketing of police treatment of Detroit's black community.

Parks joined these efforts and volunteered on the long-shot campaign of a young radical civil rights lawyer for a newly-created Michigan Congressional seat. John Conyers, like Parks, was very pro-labor and an early opponent of the US involvement in Vietnam. Parks persuaded Martin Luther King to come to Detroit on Conyers' behalf, which may have helped Conyers win the crowded Democratic primary by about forty votes. Upon taking office in 1965, Conyers hired Parks to work in his Detroit office. In her first years in Conyers' office she worked on constituent needs and often served as his representative in the community. Thus, she was well aware, from her own experiences as well as constituents', of the long history of police abuse and harassment that had pushed people to the breaking point.

**Related primary source:** [Anti-Police Brutality Demonstration – 1963](#)