

Parks' Stance

“Whites would accuse you of causing trouble when all you were doing was acting like a normal human being instead of cringing,” Rosa Parks explained. Parks boarded the bus that December evening and took a seat in the middle section. She was not sitting in the white section, as many later claimed, but in the middle section where black people were allowed to sit but could be asked to move on the whim of the bus driver. At the third stop on Parks' journey home, the bus filled up and one white man was left standing. The bus driver, James Blake, noticed and asked Parks and other black passengers in the middle section to move. By the terms of Alabama segregation, all four Black people in the row Parks was seated in would have to get up so one man could sit down. Montgomery bus drivers carried guns. No one moved. Blake asked again: "You all better make it light on yourselves and give me those seats" and "reluctantly" the other three people, according to Parks, got up. Parks reflected that giving up that seat "wasn't making it light on ourselves as a people." She thought about her grandfather. She thought about Emmett Till. "Pushed as far as she could be pushed," she decided to refuse. "I felt that if I did stand up, it meant that I approved of the way I was being treated, and I did not approve."

She let the man seated next to her get up and then, feeling determined to remain seated, she slid over to the window to await what would happen. Blake said he would have her arrested. "You may do that," she replied. He left the bus to call the police. People grumbled. Some got off the bus. Others feared what would happen. Parks "didn't even know if I would get off the bus alive."

Two officers, Day and Mixon, boarded the bus. One asked Parks why she did not stand up when instructed. Believing in the power of speaking back, Parks coolly asked, "Why do you push us around." He replied, "I don't know but the law is the law and you're under arrest." Parks re-framed the idea of criminality, thinking to herself "Let us look at Jim Crow for the criminal he is and what had done to one lift multiplied millions of times over the United States."

Related primary source: [1956 Interview with Parks During the Montgomery Bus Boycott](#)