

The "Northern Promised Land that Wasn't"

Even after the boycott's successful end, Rosa and Raymond still couldn't find work and the family continued to get death threats. Eight months later, in August 1957, Rosa, Raymond, and Rosa's mother Leona left Montgomery for Detroit, where Rosa's brother and cousins lived. Describing Detroit as the "Northern promised land that wasn't", Rosa Parks was grateful that many of the outward signs of segregation were gone. But she didn't find "too much difference" in the systems of housing and school segregation, job discrimination, and law enforcement between Montgomery and Detroit. And so she would spend the second half of her life challenging the racism of the Jim Crow North.

Almost immediately, she left Michigan for Virginia where she had been hired to work in the inn at Hampton University. Her long-standing involvement in prisoner issues is evident in correspondence with Audley (Queen Mother) Moore while she was there. In December 1957, Parks received a reply from Moore, who describes Rosa's "most welcome letter" and wrote about working on the case of Edgar Labat and Clifton Poret, two black men wrongfully accused of raping a white woman. Moore, who was heading the Universal Association for Ethiopian Women, wanted Parks to lead an organization she was hoping to incorporate with a young woman lawyer, seemingly around prisoner defense. There was no indication of what Parks wrote back. In 1958, Parks wrote home from Hampton deeply saddened by the execution of Jeremiah Reeves, a black teenager wrongfully accused of rape, whose death penalty she had spent years fighting to overturn. Unhappy and missing her family, she left Hampton at the end of 1958 and returned to Detroit.

The next years were hard for the Parks family; she and Raymond struggled to find steady work and she ended up in the hospital in December 1959 with ulcers that had plagued her since the boycott. Given Detroit's segregation, decent housing was hard to find. After struggling to find housing and living for a time squashed in a meager 2-room apartment as the caretakers for the Progressive Civic League, in 1961, the Parkses (including Rosa's mother) finally moved into a downstairs flat in the Virginia Park neighborhood of Detroit.

Related primary source: [Rosa Parks to Leona McCauley \(Mother\) concerning the execution of Jeremiah Reeves, a black Alabama teenager falsely convicted of raping a white woman, April 7, 1958](#). Autograph letter. Rosa Parks Papers. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.