

Give Up My Seat-For What?

ROSA PARKS-OPENING STATEMENT IN RIGHTS CAUSE

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

"Honey, I want that mink coat in the window." "That's good, because that's just where it is."

Thanksgiving, 1955, had just ended and school children had returned to school following the four days off. The Christmas season had started and people were already busy making plans for the holidays. There was that feeling in the air and radio stations had already begun to play Christmas songs. Decorations were going up and, people living in the country were out picking up pecans and walnuts. Some parents were wondering what they would give the children that year and others were realizing that they would not be able to give much of anything to anybody but, at least the kids would be able to go window shopping.

In another part of the country it was slaughtering time and the cracklings had been cooked, the lard made, the hams and bacon

cured and fresh hog brains had already been scrambled with eggs and served up with hot biscuits and smoking coffee cooked in pots without insides--the grounds were just there and they floated around in each cup as it was poured and the professional drinkers swallowed while the amateurs sought to fish them out with their



Rosa Parks

spoons. I suppose they too closely resembled the leavings of certain rodents to suit the fancy of some people.

Las Vegas experienced very warm weather that fall and so did Montgomery. Those of us who have been

here for a while realize that the weather is always nice in December.

December 1, 1955, was quite like most other days that fall. Warm, golden and with blue skies. There were not enough cars around to pollute the air. As a matter of fact, around the country, most people travelled by public transportation. One of the patrons of the system, in Montgomery, had arrived at work, as usual, that morning. She kept her place and at work she did her job. It was tedious work and she was not well paid. But, it was the best job she could find. She spent half of her time on her knees putting straight pins in hems. Most times she could be seen with several pins between her lips, at the left corner of her mouth and her needles and threads dangling from a rust colored sweater. She was a seamstress in a downtown store and she worked almost constantly. That's how she spelled relief. She walked out of the building to the corner and awaited her bus. Her hands, knees, feet and back ached from the work. She pursed her lips and thought "the Lord will make a way, somehow". Dick Clark might have been having a ball but, for Black

people, the 1950s do not generate memories of "HappyDays." There was no bandstand for Black people. Most Americans did not even think of them as Americans. Chubby Checker, The Platters, the Imperials, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino and a few others could come and sing on "Bandstand" but they had better not try to dance with anyone. Maybe Dick looks so young today because he never had to worry about those kinds of things -- he could go anywhere he wanted to and first class at that.

The bus finally came. She got on. She took a seat in the "negro section". Off the bus went and made its appointed stops. More people. And more. Where were they all coming from? Standing room only and more came. She was told to give up her seat. Numerous times in her lifetime she had been given similar orders and on each previous occasion, she had complied. She knew the law and she had obeyed it even though she knew it was not just. That warm December evening, just after dark, she knew that her legs would not bear her weight for the distance she had yet to go. She remained seated. The bus remained still. White passengers

glared. Black passengers covered. Irresistible forces once again. Something gotta give. Who? How? Why? We already know where.

"You are under arrest for violating a city ordinance." With sirens blaring, cherries glaring and onlookers staring

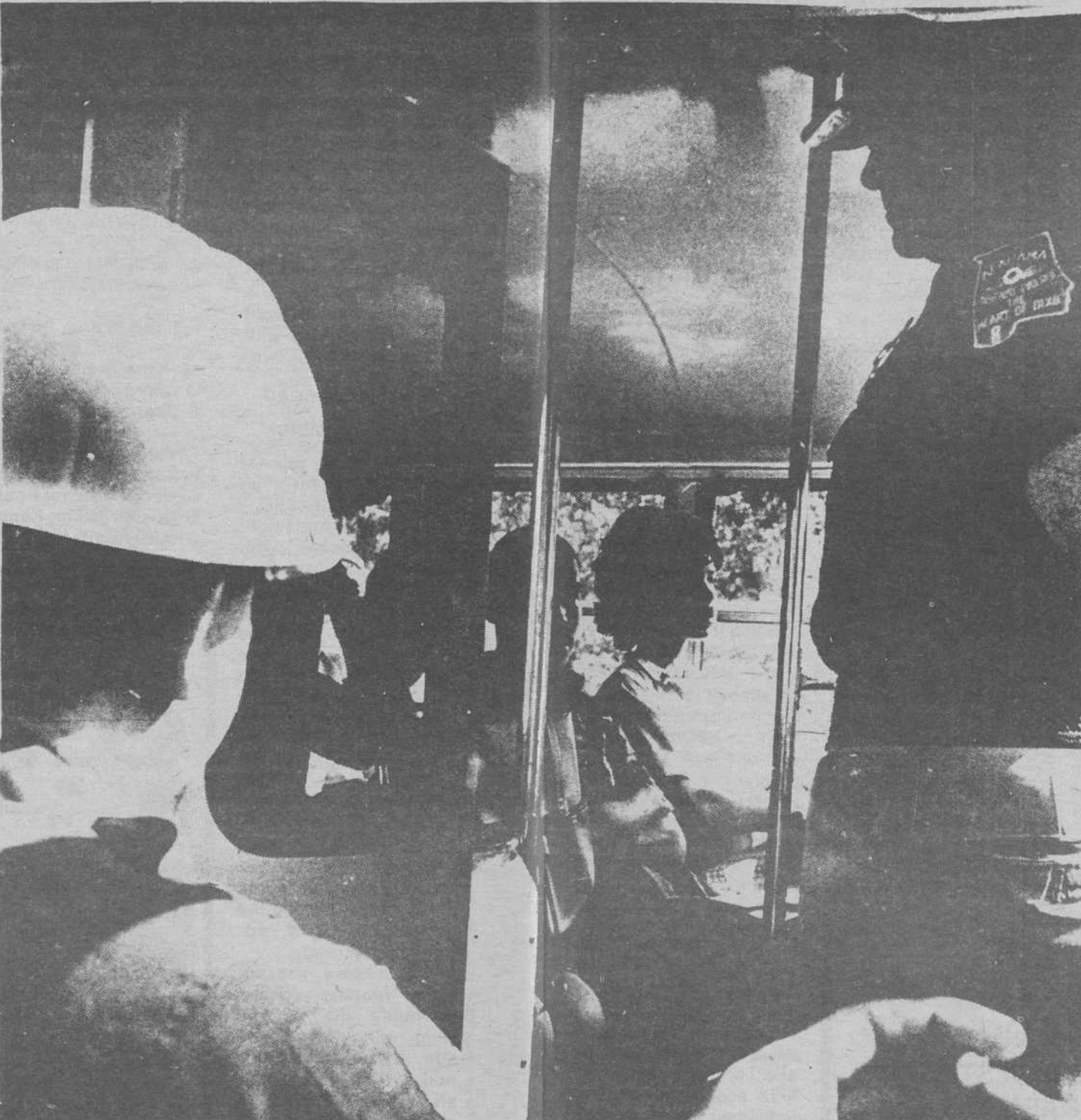
the night. Quiet, serene and still -- as though something big was about to happen.

Throughout Montgomery's Black community, people stayed home and stayed awake all night--or at least took turns sleeping and keeping watch. They

would not get worse.

Perhaps, if the arrest had happened. However, people of the Black community of Montgomery knew her to be a very "religious person who never did anything wrong or anyone any harm." She was quiet and retiring, involved in

who came here, from all over, talked about what was taking place in their hometowns. Some of them were from Montgomery and other points east and south. The main item of discussion might have been the recently passed equal accommodation measures



and bigots snarling, Rosa Parks was whisked off to become the opening statement of "the Civil Rights Movement."

Have you ever been in the eye of a hurricane? Its amazing. Quiet, serene and the sky is so deep and blue. Fringes of clouds are golden yellow and the air is sweet. It is almost like a fairyland -- a place where time stands still. It was that kind of feeling in Montgomery that evening and on through

knew that there would be hell to pay and they wanted to be ready when the devil came to collect.

The evening news, nationwide, barely mentioned the events at Montgomery. Black people had been arrested, or worse, numerous times before and there had been no consequences -- at least on the part of Black people. Because of their realization of a lack of judicial protection, they generally kept quiet and hoped that matters

church work and, by no stretch of the imagination, aggressive.

Those few Las Vegas who were aware of those events did not seriously think that they would have any repercussions on Las Vegas. They erred in judgment. Las Vegas, because of its geography and offering was, even then, more of a national city than the nation's capitol. More Americans were visiting Las Vegas annually, than any other city in the country. Those tourists

pertaining to recreation, public transportation and the public schools.

In hushed tones those items had been discussed by both Black and White Las Vegas. The "old order" was ending and most wondered what effects its ending would have on all citizens. People who had been raised to believe that to be found, socially, in the same room as Black people to be degrading, were now being forced to re-adjust those age-old beliefs.

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"Twenty on the shooter." "Say buddy, what do you think about that woman in Montgomery?" "It's a seven." "What do you mean?" "You know, the colored woman who wouldn't give up her seat on the bus." "Let it ride." "Why should she have given up her seat?" "She didn't have any business sitting up there where white people sit." "The point is eight." "Why not?" "Colored people are supposed to stand up so that white people can sit down." "Twenty on the hard way eight." "I thought that Black people were supposed to be the lazy ones." "They are." "It's a five." "Then why don't they sit down while we stand up?" "Why should we stand up so that they can sit down?" "Its another five." "Because they're lazy and we're not." "What are you, some kind of communist?" "Its a

four." "No I'm no communist. I was born and raised right here in this country and I have fought in two wars and been awarded the 'purple heart'." "I guess you think that it would be right for them to come in here and gamble with us too, don't you?" "Twenty on the pass line." "Why not? Their money is just as good as our's." "You know, you don't make any sense." "Why not? Because I believe in democracy?" "Its a six." "Play it as it lay." "Oh, shut up." "Craps." It was not a planned decision. It was quite unanticipated. The shaking of shackles, which had kept her down by many, had long been awaited. She sat in an empty seat Not too far from the back. It was the area designated For people who were Black. The rush hour traffic

filled the bus. Until there was a white overflow Black people sitting to the front of the back. Were told they would have to go. Her feet were aching and her legs were tired. She could not stand to stand

The driver, insensitive to her plight Would deal the fatal hand. The cards had all been shuffled. Gathered, were the players one and all. And, when the ante was called for Rosa Parks took the fall

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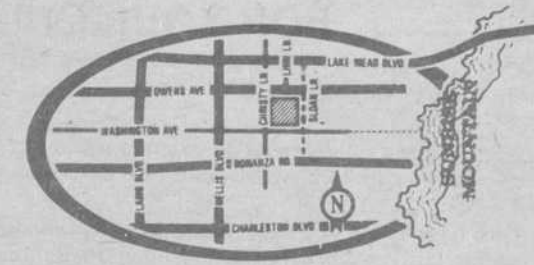
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