#### Women and the Civil Rights Movement

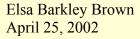
# Professor Elsa Barkley Brown Department of History University of Maryland College Park April 25, 2002

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## Women and the Civil Rights Movement

#### Goals

- To learn about women's involvement in the U.S. black civil rights movement
- To use our learning about women's involvement to better understand a broad range of issues of social movement organizing





#### **Focus: Montgomery Bus Boycott**

• How can we use the very familiar event of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to explore a wide range (chronologically and topically) of women's civil rights work?



## **Boycotting Segregated Transportation**

#### Focus: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

- Activist Traditions
- The Movement behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- Understanding the Boycott
- Contemporary Cultural Representations of Civil Rights Organizing



## **Activist Traditions**

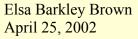
#### Goals

- To understand the long tradition of protest, including protest of transportation segregation
- To develop an understanding of the issues involved in transportation boycotts and in civil rights organizing in general
- To use these understandings to ask questions about the Montgomery Bus Boycott



## The Institution of Legal Segregation

• <u>Legal Segregation</u> (webpage)





# Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation

 A History of Resistance Willi Coleman, "Black Women and Segregated Public Transportation: Ninety Years of Resistance" (photocopy) Robin D. G. Kelley, "Theatres of Resistance" (photocopy)



#### 3. Resolutions of the National Association of Colored Women, 1904

The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in the fourth convention assembled . . .

We pledge renewed efforts and loyalty along all lines in this, our national organization, continuing to stand for adherence to our motto "Lifting as We Climb," for we believe that in it lies the future hope of the race.

In view of the fact of the numerous lynchings and the many victims burned at the stake, extending even to women, which have occurred in nearly every section of our country;

Be it Resolved, That we, the representatives of Negro womanhood, do heartily deplore and condemn this barbarous taking of human life, and that we appeal to the sentiment of the Christian world to check and eradicate this growing evil; and be it further

Resolved, That we do all in our power to bring criminals to justice, and that we appeal to all legislative bodies and courts of justice to see that all persons are protected in their rights as citizens.

Whereas, Our people throughout the South are discriminated against by railroads, being compelled to ride in offensive and inadequate cars, after paying firstclass fares; and,

Whereas, Some of the Southern cities have introduced separate street cars,

Be it Resolved, That this body condemn such action, and that in all such states and towns the club women unite in trying to induce our people to refrain from patronizing street cars....

Be it Resolved, That we commend the action of the National Republican Convention in the adoption of that part of its platform which asserts that any state disfranchising its voters shall be limited in its Congressional representation.

Be it Resolved, That the women of our Association prepare themselves by the study of civil government and kindred subjects for the problems of city, state and national life, that they may be able to perform intelligently the duties that have come to some and will come to others in the natural progress of the woman's suffrage question.

Be it Resolved, That the Colored Women's Clubs endorse the W.C.T.U. [Women's Christian Temperance Union], and urge that we emphasize more fully the work among the young people, and do all in their power to create a sentiment

against the practice of taking them to places of amusement where intoxicants are sold, and further that we do all in our power to prevent the diffusion of improper and pernicious literature that saps the vitality of the moral life of our young people.

Believing that the mother is the rock upon which the home is built, therefore, be it

Resolved, That we pledge ourselves to hold and encourage mothers' meetings whenever practicable, in order to instruct mothers in all that pertains to home building and child-life.

Minutes of the Fourth Convention of the National Association of Colored Women, Held at St. Paul's Church, St. Louis, Missouri, July 11 to 16, 1904 (Jefferson City, Mo., n.d.), pp. 23–26. Reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, ed., A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, vol. 2, From the Reconstruction to the Founding of the NAACP (New York: Citadel Press, 1979), 889–890.



# **Protesting Transportation Segregation before Montgomery**

Half a century before the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott African Americans in the city had conducted a two-year boycott when the city council enacted a trolley-car segregation bill.
"Like the bus boycott of 1955-1956, the Montgomery streetcar boycott of 1900-1902 was part of a larger regional black protest against Jim Crow urban transit."

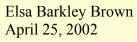
<u>(August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906," Journal of American History, 55, 4 (March 1969), 756. (pdf)</u>



#### **Known Streetcar Boycotts**

- Atlanta, 1892-1893
- Augusta, 1898
- Savannah, 1899
- Atlanta and Rome, 1900
- Augusta, 1900-1903
- Jacksonville, 1901
- Montgomery, 1900-1902
- Mobile, 1902
- New Orleans and Shreveport, 1902-1903
- Little Rock, 1903
- Columbia, 1903

- Houston, 1903-1905
- Vicksburg and Natchez, 1904
- San Antonio, 1904-1905
- Richmond, 1904-1905
- Memphis, Chattanooga, and Knoxville, 1905
- Jacksonville and Pensacola, 1905
- Nashville, 1905-1906
- Danville, Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Norfolk, 1906
- Newport News, 1906-1907
- Savannah, 1906-1907





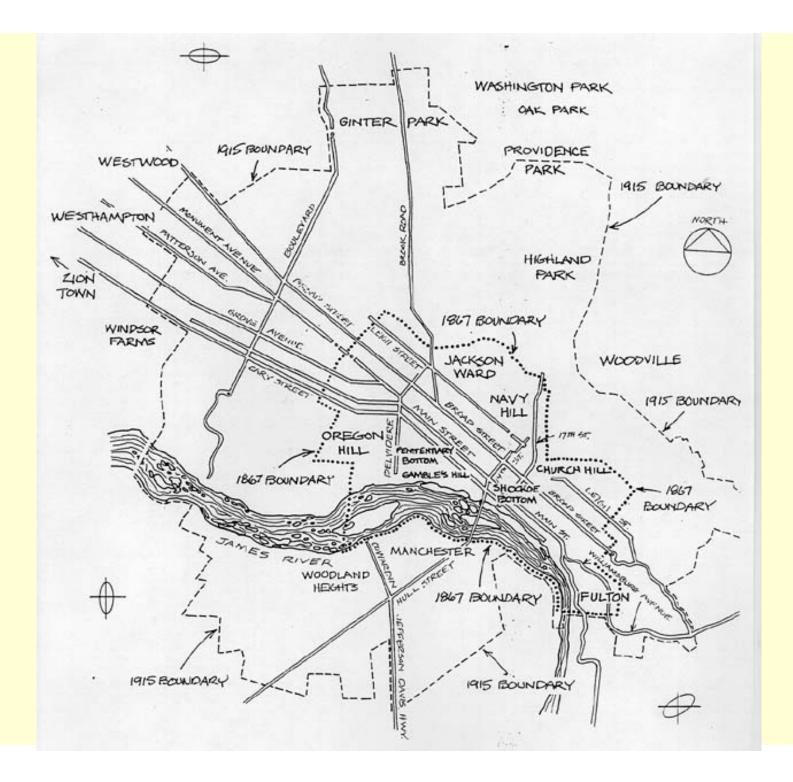
## Richmond, Virginia, Streetcar Boycott, 1904-05



#### **Richmond Planet Reports a Streetcar Boycott**

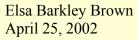
- *Richmond Planet*, 1904-1905 (photocopy)
- John Mitchell and the *Richmond Planet* (website)







 <u>Virginia Mandates Streetcar Segregation</u>, <u>1906</u> (website)





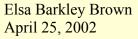
## Maggie Lena Walker

- Gertrude Marlowe, "Maggie Lena Walker" entry in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn
- Maggie Lena Walker, excerpts from "Benaiah's Valour," 1906 (photocopy)



## **Women Builders**

• http://nmaaryder.si.edu/johnson/women.html





#### Nashville, Tennessee, Streetcar Boycott

Nashville's Streetcar Boycott, 1905-1907
 <u>http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/nashv.htm</u>

Union Transportation Company <u>http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/union.htm</u>

Richard Boyd http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/RHBoyd.htm

StreetcarBoycotts\Nashville\RHBoydLetter.doc



#### Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56



# **Montgomery City Code**

• <u>http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/rights/lesson1/doc1.html</u>



# The Movement behind the Montgomery Bus Boycott

- Women and the Montgomery bus system
- Joanne Gibson Robinson and the Women's Political Council
- Why not Claudette Colvin?
- Who was Rosa Parks?



# Joanne Gibson Robinson and the Women's Political Council

- Brief history of the Women's Political Council
- Joanne Gibson Robinson's May 1954 letter to Mayor of Montgomery
- 1955 Montgomery Mass Meeting



Comy of the letter sent to Mayor Gayle Homorable Mayor T. A. Gayle City Hell

Berriat Ste Montgomery, Ala. Hey 21, 1944

Font monery. Al chema

Deny Sir:

The Toman's Folitical Council is very gr-teful to you and the City Commissioners for the hearing you allowed our representatives during the month of March, 1954, when the "city-bus-f-re-increase case" was being reviewed. There were several things the Council raked for:

- 1. A city low that would make it possible for Hegroes to sit from beak toward front, and whites from front toward b ak until all the sonts are trken:
- 2. Thet Hegroes not be asked or forced to pay fore at front and go to the rear of the bus to enter:
- 3. That busses stop at every corner in residential sections occupied by Megroes as they do in communities where whites realde.

To the heapy to report that busses have begun stopping at more corners nowin some sections they Negroes live then previously. However, the size prectices is sesting and horrding the hus continue.

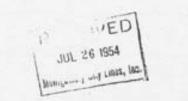
Eryor G-yls, three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyrnces are Hegrees. If Negross did not petrani a them, they could not pessibly operate.

More and more of our people are already arranging with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humilisted by bus drivers.

There has been telk from twenty-five or more log-1 organizations of plantant a city-wide beyond of acusou. The sir, o and full that forceful measures are nemessary in bargaining for a convenience which is right for all bus passengers. We, the Council, believe that when this matter has been put before you and the Cormissioners, that agree ble terms own be met in a quiet and mex undetensible menner to the astisfaction of all concerned.

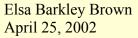
Many of our Southern cities in neighboring states have practiced the policies we s ak without incident whetsoover. Atlente, Froon and Saw much in Georgia have done this for years. Even Mobile, in our own state, does this and all the peasengers ere sctisfied.

Please consider this ples, and if possible, act favor ably upon it, for even now plans are being made to ride less , or not at all, on our busses. We do not went thin.



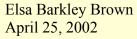
Respectfully yours.

The Nomen's Political Council inn / Allen 24 Jo Jnn Bobinson, President





 <u>Montgomery's Black Citizens Cite Their</u> <u>Most Urgent Needs, 1955</u>





## Why not Claudette Colvin?



#### **Flyer announcing boycott**

This is for Honday, Docombor 5, 1955

It is the second time since the Claudotte Colbert case that a Negro woman

has been arrested for the same thing This has to be stopped.

Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty sents. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your drughter, or mether.

This women's case will come up on Honday. We are, therefore, asking every N'gro to step off the buses Honday in protest of the errest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, oranyther, on Honday.

You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go amount by bus.

You can also afford to stay out of term for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on a Monday. Flease stay off of all buses Monday.

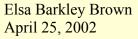


## **Mass Meeting**



## **Returning to Riding the Bus**

• Integrated Bus Suggestions (website)





#### Who was Rosa Parks?

- Biographical background
- NAACP Work
- Highlander Folk School



## **Highlander Folk School**

- Rosa Parks at Highlander
- Highlander
- Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson
- Beauticians and the Civil Rights Movement



## **Understanding the Boycott**

#### December 1955

- Walking, Meeting, Carpooling, Negotiating, Publicizing
- In Friendship
- The Trials
- The Outcome



#### Link to "Ella's Song"



#### • <u>Tallahassee Bus Boycott Timeline</u>



# **Contemporary Cultural Representations** of Civil Rights Organizing

- The Long Walk Home
- Ruby Bridges
- The Rosa Parks Story
- Boycott
- Eyes on the Prize



# Visit Elsa Barkley Brown's website to download powerpoint file which can be edited.

http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Colleges/ARHU/Depts/ History/Faculty/EBarkleyBrown/BusBoycott/

