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**Rosa Parks as a Symbol of Women's Issues and Roles in the Civil Rights**

**Movement**

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Práce se zaměří na proměny rasové segregace ve Spojených státech amerických. Stěžejní pozornost bude věnována postavě Rosy Parkové, respektive tomu, jaké bylo postavení afro-americké ženy, jak v dějinách americké společnosti, tak i v rámci samotného hnutí za občanská práva. Práce může vyústit i v úvahu, jaká je úloha ženské aktivistky v soudobé americké společnosti.

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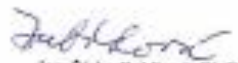
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## **ANNOTATION**

The work focuses on the role of Rosa Parks in the civil rights struggle, mainly on her participation in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The first chapter provides information on the historical development of racial segregation in the United States. The description and further analysis of the boycott itself are included in the following part of the thesis. The last chapter is dedicated to Afro-American women, presenting their activism as well as their position in American society.

## **KEYWORDS**

segregation, Afro-Americans, Rosa Parks, the Afro-American Civil Rights Movement, activism, women

## **ANOTACE**

Tato práce se zabývá rolí Rosy Parks v Afro-Americkém boji za občanská práva, zejména na jejím podílení se na bojkotu městské dopravy v Montgomery. První kapitola poskytuje informace o historickém vývoji rasové segregace ve Spojených Státech Amerických. Popis a následná analýza samotného bojkotu jsou obsaženy v další části této práce. Poslední kapitola je věnovaná afro-americkým ženám. Tato kapitola pojednává o jejich aktivismu a stejně tak i o jejich postavení v americké společnosti.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

segregace, Afro-Američané, Rosa Parks, Afro-Americké hnutí za občanská práva, aktivismus, ženy

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AKA	Alpha Kappa Alpha
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACW	National Association of Colored Women
NCNW	National Council of Negro Women
NJSFCWC	New Jersey State Federation of Colored Women Clubs
WPC	Women's Council Group
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association



## INTRODUCTION

“I would like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free... so other people would be also free.”

-Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks, “the mother of the movement”, as she is often called, was a woman of character, member of the NAACP and a great activist. She has been described as a kind and sweet woman who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus which unintentionally sparked a long-term social and political protest campaign against racial segregation on buses, the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Although the Montgomery Bus Boycott is publicly well known, the action and events leading up to it, and the meticulous planning of the boycott is not.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Historical development regarding the issues of racial segregation of the Afro-Americans in the United States is covered in the first chapter. It includes not only information on segregationist laws and how their passing influenced the life of Afro-Americans in the USA, but it also gives possible explanations for the strong white supremacy upheld mainly in the South. In the second chapter, Rosa Parks’ life is introduced, detailing her experiences as a long-term secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP and later on as an activist who became, thanks to her refusal, a public figure of the movement. The third chapter explores the events leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott as well as the boycott itself, including an analysis of its goals, strategies, victories, and defeats.

In the last part of this thesis, the focus is given to Afro-American women. Beginning during slavery times and the vicious treatment from white masters towards black female slaves, the consequences for further perception of black women in American society, and the creation of black womanhood are briefly described. Next, as black women have a long history of political activism and they heartily participated in the struggle with the aim to seek racial equality, the analysis of the activism of black women is explored. The final part of the chapter is dedicated to the alternations of roles and social positions of black women in American society today.

# 1 RACIAL SEGREGATION IN THE UNITED STATES

In the Declaration of Independence, written by the America's Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (1776). From the extract, it can be understood that equality was meant for all people living in the United States. However, it was definitely not true for Afro-American citizens. The United States was established by people who looked for a world free of persecution and oppression, a place where they could make better lives for themselves and their families. The European people who believed in a better world, took and settled the land of the Indigenous Native Americans. As the demand for plantation labour in those lands grew rapidly, Africans were brought to America and forced to spend a lifetime in bondage (Hasday 2).

The link between the development of the USA and African slavery can be traced back to the beginnings of exploration of the American continent. It is claimed that the first black Africans were brought to Virginia as far back as 1619 (Hasday 4).

The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery, was passed in December 1865 as a result of the American Civil War. Then, the Fourteenth Amendment was approved in 1868 and guaranteed African Americans equal rights as citizens. The Fifteenth Amendment was then added to the Constitution in 1870, promising the right to vote for black men (Fradin 9).

These federal efforts in support of blacks are part of an era in American history called the Reconstruction, dated 1865-1877 (McNeese, "Plessy V. Ferguson" 16). At that point of time, the future for Africans living in America had never looked brighter. Nevertheless, they had many rough years in front of them as white people found different way to oppress black folks. They implemented a practice in order to keep the races apart. Practice was called segregation (Fradin 11).

Even though African-Americans were constitutionally accepted and declared rightful citizens, white Southerners were not prepared to give up on the single principle that guided their political and social attitudes toward blacks. According to their philosophy, blacks were inferior in every aspect. They believed that blacks were only savages or slaves, not capable of

achieving at the level of whites; they were created inferior in their form, colour and mind. Many whites claimed that for these reasons, black citizens should be treated as unequal (McNeese, “Plessy V. Fergusson” 21).

The white folks’ longing for a segregated society was obvious and black people were treated as inferior in everyday business and social events. Legislation against such treatment did not exist until *the Civil Rights Act* of 1875, but the Supreme Court declared parts of the act unconstitutional in 1883. *The Civil Rights Act* provided full and equal enjoyment of accommodations, inns, land, waters, etc. for all people, regardless of race. After its annulment, black were no longer protected against discrimination and Southern white legislatures finally started to write segregation laws (Hasday 11). Such segregationist laws, mandating the exclusion of African-Americans, became known as “Jim Crow laws” after songs and dances which made fun of black people. Jim Crow laws and customs were planned to keep blacks from South out of American society (Fradin 11).

Jim Crow laws seriously interfered in almost all aspects of Afro-Americans’ lives. Black people had to attend their “Negro” schools and visit hospitals with a lack of equipment. Restrictions were also involved in hotels, restaurants, parks, swimming pools, and theatres. Black Southerners even had to use separate drinking fountains and bathrooms and they were kept from voting and serving on juries (Fradin, 2010). To understand segregation even more, author Ronald L. F. Davis explains in his essay, *In the History of Jim Crow: Creating Jim Crow*:

In general the Jim Crow era in American history dates from the late 1890s, when southern states began systematically to codify (or strengthen) in law and state constitutional provisions the subordinate position of African Americans in society. Most of these legal steps were aimed at separating the races in public spaces (public schools, parks, accommodations, and transportation) and preventing adult black males from exercising the right to vote. In every state of the former Confederacy, the system of legalized segregation and disfranchisement was fully in place by 1910. This system of white supremacy cut across class boundaries and reinforced a cult of "whiteness" that predated the Civil War. (1)

Jim Crow laws were interpreted not only in the South but also in other parts of the United States, though they were often stricter and more widely accepted in southern states that had been on the losing side of the Civil War (Marsico 17). To make things worse, Jim Crow laws

were not the only challenge African American faced. Soon after the end of the Civil War, hateful groups of white people, such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), were formed to terrorize black people who defied Jim Crow laws and customs. Burning, beating, shooting, or hanging black folks were frequent hateful acts of these groups as a warning to any African Americans who dared to question or challenge racial inequality (Marsico 20).

Another important change in separated American society that significantly affected lives of blacks was the landmark constitutional law case of the U.S. Supreme Court, *Plessy V. Ferguson*. This decision was handed down by the Supreme Court in 1896 giving validation to the separate but equal system (Hasday 12). Homer Plessy, an Afro-American, refused to give up his seat in a car designated for the exclusive use of white passengers on the East Louisiana Railroad and was subsequently imprisoned. He was arguing his case before John Ferguson, a local district court judge (Marsico 20). As a result of a majority of Supreme Court justices' decision in favor of John Ferguson, doctrine called "separate but equal" was proclaimed, justifying that "segregation was legal so long as blacks were provided with public services and facilities that were essentially equal to those offered to whites" (Marsico 21). As many legal scholars claimed, this doctrine was an essence of institutionalized racism in the United States (Marsico 21).

Donnie Williams and Wayne Greenhaw claim in their book, "Each minute of every day, Jim Crow's hateful presence was felt in the black community" (15). All members of black families were affected by the doctrine. After the Supreme Court approved the doctrine, the segregationist signs "Whites only" and "Colored" spread all over the South around places such as water fountains, restrooms, waiting rooms, the entrances and exits at courthouses, libraries, theaters, and public buildings (Davis 2). Elizabeth Abel in her essay reports:

Whether jotted in faltering penmanship on scraps of paper tacked to private walls, carved in block capitals on the granite thresholds of public buildings, blazoned in neon lights above the entries to movie theaters, crafted in tiffany glass on art deco hotel windows, or commercially printed on framed paper, segregation signs gave race a graphic body that shaped the meaning of the written words. (18)

In other words, white citizens were always preferred. Newer and cleaner facilities were always only for the usage of whites. Schools for Afro-American children were poorly furnished and the books available were outdated. "Colored" public rest rooms lacked privacy and were cramped and filthy (Marsico 18). Curfews for blacks were established and some

state laws even restricted blacks from working in the same rooms in factories and other places of employment (Davis 2).

These laws had crippling social, political, and economic effects on black citizens who were locked into second-class citizenship without access to the rights that were guaranteed to all people under the U.S. Constitution (Williams a Greenhaw 15). Moreover, it is important to mention that educational inequity is the main reason for the huge economic differences between the white and black population as the lack of education trapped black people in the worst work positions. As Jeanne Theoharis indicates in her book, “These were rough times to be black in Alabama. Daily interactions required a constant process of negotiation” (7).

Here, the question of why white supremacy was so strong and rooted in the culture of the South can be raised. The ideology that white skin is superior to black, as the author James W. Vander Zander says, stands on three pillars:

1. Segregation is part of the natural order and as such is eternally fixed.
2. The Negro is inferior to the white or, at the very least, is “different” from the white.
3. The break-down of segregation in any of its aspects will inevitably lead to racial amalgamation, resulting in a host of disastrous consequences. (3)

These white Southerners’ ideological premises give the movement its cohesion. The firm conviction that segregation is inextricably rooted in nature deeply inserted the Southerners’ thinking (Zander 3). Correct or incorrect the belief may be, they were truly convinced that they treated the Afro-Americans as they deserved.

At that point, the Eurocentric perspective to the reasons for the strong conviction that the white race is superior by the “natural order” can be added. The term can be explained as follows:

Eurocentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing emphasis on European (and, generally, Western) concerns, culture and values at the expense of those of other cultures. Eurocentrism often involved claiming cultures that were not white or European as being such, or denying their existence at all. (Pop 1)

The practice has significant connection to segregation for two main reasons. First, a long process of evolution can be traced back through European history to antecedents in Rome and

Greece. Second, in the nineteenth century European power, prestige, and initiative were dominant around the globe (Farmer 346). Racist Southerners were convinced that their unequal treatment was what the black society deserved.

As a consequence of the “separate but equal” doctrine, resistance from the side of Afro-Americans expanded. Many Americans, not only black ones, knew that racial discrimination was wrong and they decided to fight for equality. In 1909, a group of black activists and white liberals, led by figures such as Ida Wells-Barnett, W. E. B. Du Bois, Henry Moscowitz, Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villard, and William English Walling founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP (Hasday 9).

The NAACP, a still existing grassroots-based civil rights organization, was one of the earliest and most influential civil rights institutions in the United States. The group was formed in response to violence and continuous lynchings committed against Afro-Americans with the intention to realize the rights guaranteed to black people in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The NAACP national office was established in New York in 1910 where a president and a board of directors were named (NAACP.com). The first fights for equality meant to overturn “Jim Crow” laws. In other words, to tear down the walls of racial discrimination. The group understood that having black legal representation in the court would be crucial. By confronting the statutes through litigation and lobbying pressure, the NAACP was bringing down discrimination barriers. Victories against racist traditions in various areas, such as hiring practices, breaking through the color barrier in sports, and full integration of the armed services, made the dream of equality appear, little by little, more achievable. Soon after its establishment, the NAACP was the most influential organization in winning rights for blacks and equal protection under the law (Hasday 10).

One of the Afro-American activists, who stood at the foundation of the NAACP and to who would be given high priority, was William Edward Burghardt “W. E. B.” Du Bois. American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and most importantly civil rights activist, was made director of publications and research of the NAACP in 1910. Furthermore, Du Bois established the official journal of the group called *The Crisis*. The magazine has been the crusading voice for civil rights since its beginning. It is one of the oldest black periodicals still continuing in its mission (NAACP.com).

The magazine not only expressed the thoughts, opinions and analysis of people who believed in equal society but also provided space for young African American literary voices. It had a significant impact on the Harlem Renaissance literary and arts movement during the 1920s. It helped many black writers to be heard (NAACP.com).

Another reason for reporting the activism of W.E.B. Du Bois is his works as an author. His main targets were the practices of racism, the “separate but equal” doctrine, the vicious lynchings, and discrimination in education. “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardship” (Du Bois 5). Thanks to his words, people of all colours could better understand what it meant to be a black man living in racist America.

From the lines above, describing the first signs of black resistance, it can be assumed that the confidence of African Americans in seeking equality started to enhance. The battlefield for the Civil Rights Movement itself was almost prepared.

Before the end of this chapter, two important events initiated by the NAACP have to be mentioned, *Brown V. Board Education of Topeka* of 1954 and *Browder V. Gayle* of 1956. Both these attempts at destroying segregation by law were successful in their respective areas. First, *Brown V. Board of Education*, a landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, forever changed the landscape of racial segregation across the nation. Its victory brought an end to the practice of segregation in public schools. In other words, it overturned the *Plessy V. Ferguson* decision of 1896 as the court declared separate public school for black and white students to be unconstitutional (Hasday 22). The second one, *Browder V. Gayle*, a civil suit brought by the instigation of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, ended in a ruling that declared bus segregation unlawful (Marsico 68).

## 2 ROSA LOUISE MCCAULEY PARKS

Rosa Parks has been described as a kind and sweet woman who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus in Cleveland Avenue after a long working day on December 1, 1955 (Fradin 21). Nevertheless, this action was not as spontaneous and unintentional as it has been presented. According to Joyce Hanson, “Parks became a civil rights icon, and many misconceptions about her background and motivations were born. These were, in part, perpetuated by Parks herself”(xi).

Rosa Parks was prepared for action. She was an experienced civil rights activist who had been the secretary of the local NAACP since 1943 (Hanson xi). She had suffered from the white supremacy since she was a kid.

Rosa Parks was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama to James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona Edwards McCauley, a teacher. Although she lived in a home full of love with lots of family members, she was raised only by a single mother as her father left the family when was Rosa a small girl (Theoharis 2). As her mother had to support the family financially, Rosa spent her childhood mainly with her grandparents who were enslaved. They were so-called “freedman”, therefore, they had their specific attitude toward white citizens of Tuskegee (Theoharis 3). At that time, Rosa’s perception of segregationist society she lived in started to explore. Not only because of the everyday struggle her black family had to put up with but also thanks to her own inquisitiveness. As she was an enthusiastic reader, she soon came across the racist literature. After reading William Gallo Schell’s *Is the Negro a Beast?*, she realized that black people were not considered complete human beings. The impact of the book upon the Rosa’s understanding of the “black” and “white” word was immense and devastating (Theoharis 4). Furthermore, due to the segregation laws concerning education, Rosa had to walk to school. She later suggested that seeing white children on their publicly financed buses was another moment of rude awakening (Fradin 25).

Despite her professional ambitions, Rosa had to leave school in the eleventh grade because of her grandmother, who was sick. Rosa worked on the family farm and as a domestic in white people’s homes. Later on, Rose worked as a seamstress at a shirt factory, making denim for men clothes (Hull 26).



In the spring of 1931, Rosa was introduced to Raymond Parks, a 28 year old barber who worked at a black barbershop in downtown Montgomery. Although Rosa had not been interested in seeing Ray again, she fell in love with him after another meeting which was full of discussion. Raymond, as a long-time member of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP, was not afraid of whites. He was the first civil rights activist that Rosa had ever met (Hull 30). It can be assumed that thanks to their relationship, Rosa was slowly becoming involved in the long-term search for racial equality.

Even though Raymond was initially against Rosa's membership in NAACP, Rosa decided to attend the annual Montgomery NAACP meeting for the election of officers in 1943. Since the post of secretary was considered a woman's position, Parks was elected to the office. She worked as a secretary for 12 years. Her job required arranging meetings, notifying members about current events, sending letters and membership payments to the national office, answering phones and issuing press releases. She also kept minutes at every meeting and recorded them (Hull 34). Rosa's enthusiasm for her position in the NAACP was passionate, she was finally fulfilling her desires to be a black activist.

The 1940s were difficult and dangerous times for civil rights activists. Particularly for a growing black belligerence coming from the experience of World War II met aggressive white resistance and violence in order to continue thwarting a mass movement to be able to thrive. Popular narratives often skip this period of time, as all the drama of the mass movement emerged in late 1950s and early 1960s. Nevertheless, it is equally important to examine these years as without the spadework done during that time, the following actions would not have been possible (Theoharis 18).

To further analyse Rosa's activism, a crucial moment has to be mention, the meeting between Rosa Parks and Edgar Daniel Nixon. As Jeanne Theoharis notes in her book, it was "a partnership that would change the course of American history" (18). E.D. Nixon, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, was a long-time activist and organizer and together with Rosa Parks created a strong couple attempting to reach racial equality. Rosa documented every case of racial discrimination and violence against Afro-Americans in Alabama on which E. D. Nixon worked. Among their main interests were cases involving the punishment of black men for crimes they had nothing to do with and sexual assaults on black women by white men (Hull 35).

One of many reported cases was that of Recy Taylor. In 1944, a twenty-four year old black woman who was raped by a gang of six white men near Abbeville, Alabama. The mother of a three-year-old girl was forced to get into car where all six men took turns raping her. Although sheriffs arrested all of the men and the driver of the car confessed and named the other five men, the county grand jury refused to indict them and declared that the men were innocent. Not only black but also white citizens were shocked by the cruel injustice and formed the Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs Recy Taylor, led by Caroline Bellin, a white woman, who asked the NAACP for help (Hanson 42). The Montgomery NAACP sent Parks one hundred miles south to assist. Rosa spent time with Taylor and copiously took down her testimony (Theoharis 23). Even though the NAACP, together with the committee, was successful in getting the governor to convene a special grand jury to review the case, this jury also refused to indict the men (Hull 35). As Joyce Hanson indicates, “this was not how things worked out when a white woman accused a black man of rape” (43).

This case was crucial for the upcoming events for various reasons. First of all, the injustice was so terrible that it grabbed the attention of many civil rights activists. Hundreds of letters written by key black activist women as well as prominent writers and political leaders, e.g. the aforementioned W. E. B. Du Bois, were sent to the governor (Theoharis 24). To put it differently, more and more people, black and white, saw the inevitability of change. Furthermore, Park’s confidence gradually enhanced and she was becoming a more independent civil rights activist with her own actions, not only those connected with E. D. Nixon. She organized her own personal forms of protest, avoiding segregated drinking fountains and elevators (Theoharis 29). She also worked as the secretary to the senior citizens’ brigade of the NAACP, as adviser to the NAACP Youth Council and also recruited young people for the United Negro College Fund, an organization that provided scholarships and financial support for black college students (Hull 38).

The last event which will be mentioned in this chapter and which greatly influenced Rosa was participating in a workshop at the Highlander Folk School in the summer of 1955. The founder of this racially integrated educational institution was a white man, Myles Horton, who believed that the best way to educate economically or politically oppressing individuals was educating them in groups. As Mr Horton reports:

Not as individuals, but the group as a whole has much of the knowledge that they need to know to solve their problems. If they only knew how to analyse what their experiences were, what they know, and generalize them . . . they would begin to draw on their own resources. (qtd. in Hull 47)

The students were taught about civil disobedience, the philosophy of the Golden Rule, and the importance of feeling equal in the human world (Theoharis 45). Rosa Parks attended a ten day long workshop called “Racial Desegregation: Implementing the Supreme Court Decision”. Her experience there, according to her, was one of the most important in her life and virtually transformed her. The time spent there encouraged her enthusiasm for social causes (Hull 48).

In the years before the boycott, Rosa Parks worked on many cases and fought heartily for freedom. After the U.S. Supreme Court declared “separate but equal” doctrine involving education unconstitutional, Parks and thousands of others activists peacefully and patiently working for equality finally earned some reward. With a vision of success, the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP started to develop a plan to test the ruling’s implications for the desegregation of other aspects of public life and the choice fell on the laws regulating segregated seating on the city’s buses (Hull 42).

### 3 THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

Although the Montgomery Bus Boycott is publicly well-known, as it is a seminal part of history for the whole U.S. Civil Rights Movement, the actions and events leading up to it are not. In this chapter, those events will be analyzed. Some of them, like the vicious rape of Recy Taylor and other actions involving the activism of Rosa Parks, have been already mentioned in the previous chapter. Some of the other ones will be examined here.

Another event which not only encouraged Parks to become a public figure, but also increased the desire of Afro-Americans to fight for their rights, was the brutal murder of a young boy named Emmett Till. On August 13, 1955, a 14-year-old boy, Emmett Till, who came from Chicago to visit family members in Mississippi, where he was viciously murdered after he was falsely accused of flirting with Carolyn Bryant by saying “Bye baby”. Carolyn was a white woman who owned a store in Money, Mississippi. After a few days, Roy Bryant, Carolyn’s husband, and his brother-in-law, J. W. Milam, kidnapped Till in the middle of the night and murdered him (Theoharis 43). Three days later, the body of Emmett was pulled from the Tallahatchie River. He had been lynched and beaten so badly that his uncle was only able to identify him by an original ring on his finger (Hasday 31). Emmett’s mother fought to get his body sent back to Chicago and then insisted on an open-casket funeral. She wanted the whole world to see what racial hatred had done to her only child (Hanson 90).

Emmett Till’s murder horrified the nation and the entire world. National and international reporters brought worldwide criticism of Mississippi’s segregationist principles and society. “Jet magazine published the grisly photo of Till’s recovered body, his face so disfigured and distorted that readers, including Rosa Parks, became physically ill” (Hanson 90).

The two young men were arrested and charged with abducting Emmett Till. Nevertheless, in September 23, 1955, an all-white jury in Sumner, Mississippi, found Bryant and Milam not guilty. The decision of the jury was shocking and incomprehensible. Moreover, after a few months, Look magazine published a story about the white murders written by William Bradford Huie in which Bryant and Milam, the suspected murderers, had confessed to the crime (Hanson 91). However evident their guilt was, they were never punished.

The connection between the Emmett's murder and the murderers' acquittal with the Rosa's decision to become a public activist was also described in a poem written by Nikki Giovanni (Theoharis 43):

This is about the moment Rosa Parks shouldered her cross, put her worldly goods aside, was willing to sacrifice her life, so that the young man in Money, Mississippi... would not have died in vain... Mrs. Rosa Parks... could not stand that death. And in not being able to stand it. She sat back down. (Giovanni a Fowler 329)

Before examining the Montgomery Bus Boycott itself, it is important to mention the other attempts made to break the Jim Crow laws involving transportation. Montgomery Bus Boycott was not the only one boycott and Rosa Parks was not the only woman who refused to yield her seat in a means of transport.

The first black bus boycott occurred in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Black leaders of Baton Rouge were successful in instigating the passing of the law called Ordinance 222, which authorize first-come-first-served seating in March of 1953. However, three months after passing the law, bus drivers were still not paying attention and the front seats were considered to be only for whites. As a result of the all-white drivers' resistance of the law, the Ordinance was ruled illegal. On June 20, the boycott began and while the Afro-Americans stayed off the busses, several meetings were held. The boycott lasted fourteen days and in the end, the leaders of both groups came to compromise. They agreed that the two side front seats of buses were for the usage of whites and the long rear seat was for Afro-Americans. For the remaining seats, first-come-first-served basis was provided (Hanson 58). The boycott in Baton Rouge inspired E. D. Nixon and Rosa Parks and it can be considered as a model for the Montgomery one.

Back to the women's refusals to yield their seats in transport, the very first lady who is remembered for this kind of resistance is Ida B. Wells. In 1884, a twenty-one year old teacher was riding a train to her school in Woodstock, Tennessee, where blacks were not allowed to occupy the same train car as whites since 1881. Wells ignored the law as she thought it was immoral. When the conductor ordered her to the "Negro car", she refused to move. She tried to fight for her justice in court but lost (Fradin 15). It is interesting to think about the consequences of winning that trial. Would it have changed the history of the South?

Other women who refused to give up their seats did so in Alabama in the capital Montgomery, a city with a population of 200,000, about a quarter of whom were Afro-Americans. By 1955, Montgomery was one of the most segregated cities in the country (Fradin 20). Moreover, transit was a core component of Jim Crow laws in the South. As Dennis Fradin explains:

Montgomery's law regarding bus seating was called Separation of Races Required. It stated, "Every person operating a bus line in the city shall . . . separate the white people from the negroes." A related law gave bus drivers the "powers of a police officer" when telling passengers where to sit. Furthermore, it was "unlawful for any passenger to refuse or fail to take a seat among those assigned to the race to which he belongs." (21)

Blacks challenged the law many times but for the concept of the paper, as it has been mentioned above, the seminal actors described will be women. Speaking about these women, the planning of the boycott also has to be considered. At that time, the Montgomery branch of the NAACP, together with Jo Ann Robinson as a head of the Women's Council Group (WPC) of Montgomery, were looking for somebody who would be able to play a crucial role in the upcoming boycott and therefore become a public person (McNeese, "The Civil Rights Movement" 54).

Before Rosa's famous ride, three other females were arrested and convicted for not giving up their seats. On March 2, 1955, a fifteen-year-old student named Claudette Colvin was jailed. Claudette was arrested and convicted under the Alabama state law for refusing to yield her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white passenger. She sat with friends in the coloured section of a bus. The vehicle was crowded, and a number of people, no matter whether black or white, were standing. Suddenly, the driver stopped the bus. He ordered black passengers to give up their seats to the whites who were standing. At first no one responded but after a second command the seated black passengers slowly stood up, all except for Claudette (Hanson 83). In her own words, "We had been studying the Constitution in Miss Nesbitt's class. I knew I had rights" (qtd. in Theoharis 53). The driver called for two policemen. Colvin was dragged off the bus. She was handcuffed and jailed (Hanson 83).

Seven months before Rosa Parks' arrest, in April 1955, Aurelia Shines Browder, a graduate of Alabama State College, a member of the Alpha Kappa Mu Honor Society and the NAACP, did not give up her seat on the city bus to a white rider. She was also jailed (Hanson 89). A few months later, on October 21, a young girl Mary Louise Smith refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. As a result, she was arrested too (Fradin 20).

E. D. Nixon was at first confident that he could use the teenagers' cases to oppose the bus segregation policies. Nonetheless, he later discovered that it would be a problem, not only because of their age but also for their personal reasons. For instance, as it was later discovered, fifteen-years-old Claudette was pregnant and Mary's father strongly disagreed with his child becoming a public figure (Marsico 51). "He could not know in the spring of 1955 that someone he had worked with at the NAACP would become his test case" (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 55).

On December 1, 1955, Rosa boarded a bus 2857. After a long day in the sewing company and little Christmas shopping after, she felt tired and sat down just at the beginning of the "colored" section of the bus. At the third stop, in front of the Empire Theatre, more white passengers got in the bus and as a consequence, one white man remained standing. After he ordered her to move, Rosa Parks realized that she already met the bus driver, James F. Blake, earlier. Blake was abusive to her when riding a bus in 1943. Although two other black women rose up and yield their seats, Rosa did not move. For that resistance, she was arrested and jailed (Williams a Greenhaw 47).

As Rosa Parks recollect, at first, she was not thinking about sparking a revolution that day, but:

. . .when that white driver stepped back toward us, when he waved his hand and ordered us up and out of our seats, I felt a determination cover my body like a quilt on a winter night. I felt all the meanness of every white driver I'd seen who'd been ugly to me and other black people through the years I'd known on the buses in Montgomery. I felt a light suddenly shine through the darkness. . . . (qtd. in Williams a Greenhaw 48)

E. D. Nixon was among the first who knew about Rosa's arrest. He came to jail and paid her bail so she could go home until the trial was held. Moreover, he had an important question for her as he was sure that her case would be the one for breaking the Jim Crow law in transportation. Even though Rosa Parks hesitated at first and her husband and mother tried to convince her not to do it as they were afraid of her getting lynched, she decided to allow her case to be used for the bus issue (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 58).

After having the right case, the planning of the boycott could start. Only twenty-four hours after Rosa Parks' refusal to yield her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus, a large-scale boycott of the city's bus system was being organized (Marsico 29). The first thing to do was to catch attention of people. Even though E. D. Nixon was a great activist, he was still only a former head of the local NAACP. For this size of boycott, he needed support, and he got it. Nixon, along with Jo Ann Robinson, the WPC, and Reverend Ralph Abernathy, formed a strong team and on their meeting with ministers, December 2, they agreed on plans regarding the start of the boycott (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 59).

Robinson and other women from the WPC produced over 35,000 handbills to inform as many people as possible and left them in every black neighbourhood, church, school, tavern and bar. The handbill read as follows:

This is for Monday, December 5, 1955. Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down. . . . 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 behind empty seats. If you do not do something to stop those arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter or your mother. This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. . . . If you work, take a cab or walk. But please, children and grownups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off of all buses, Monday. (Marsico 31)



Furthermore, Nixon's friend and reporter of Advertiser magazine, Joe Azbell, published an article about the plans for an all-out boycott of the city buses. The article was the page-one story (Williams a Greenhaw 75). Although many individuals and groups really liked and supported the idea of a citywide boycott within a few days, organizers could not remove their doubts about the support of Montgomery's citizens (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 60). However, on dark Monday morning, ninety percent of black citizens of Montgomery found different ways to travel and, as they were asked, they did not ride the buses. They either walked or used other means such as a bicycle or horse-drawn buggies (Marsico 33). They did it and they believed in the change:

The driver shouted: "You gonna get on?" The man said nothing. He stood still in the crisp December morning, his breath visible, like smoke. "You gonna get on?" the driver asked again. With a defiant twist of his head, the man declared, "I ain't gettin' on until Jim Crow gets off." (Williams a Greenhaw 77)

At the same time, Rosa's trial was held in the courthouse. She was found guilty for violating Montgomery's segregation ordinances and she was ordered to pay a \$10 fine and \$4 in court costs (Marsico 35). After the trial, the black leaders and organizers of the boycott met once again. They established the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) with an elected president, Martin Luther King Junior, who became a new public person and a very important speaker for the whole movement. They agreed to meet with the people of Montgomery at the Holt Street Baptist Church (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 61).

This meeting is a crucial event for the upcoming boycott. Not only because so many excited people showed up but also for the speeches that were held on that evening. The spirit of the citizens was strongly felt in the church. The Afro-Americans of Montgomery, thanks to all the previous events, stopped being afraid to fight for their freedom. They agreed on the following process for the boycott, detailed below.

All black citizens would avoid riding buses operated by the Montgomery City Lines buses, Inc, and they would help transport citizens in need to and from work by providing free rides as long as it would be necessary (Williams a Greenhaw 62). Furthermore, the 18 city taxi cab companies offered their rides for the same fare that the passengers paid to ride the city buses, 10 cents (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 62). They agreed that they had no intentions to persuade others from riding buses in Montgomery, however, they would call

upon the moral and spiritual conscience to give support to the movement (Williams a Greenhaw 83).

All protests and defiance would be done without the use of violence which was the key aspect in the fight for freedom. King in his speech, given on the meeting of December 5, emphasized the importance of nonviolence:

My friends, I want it to be known that we're going to work with grim and firm determination to gain justice on the buses in this city. And we are not wrong, we are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, then the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer and never came down to earth. If we are wrong, justice is a lie. (qtd. in Hanson 99)

To have the constant support of black citizens, every three or four days, ministers called their people to come on meetings. They wanted them to hear the voices of leadership and to keep the spirits up (Williams a Greenhaw 85). Important work was also done by media. As has already been mentioned, Azbell's article informed the public about the first day of the boycott but the most important reporting on the boycott was done on television. The television camera showed what the boycott in Montgomery was all about and the story was taken to the world (Williams a Greenhaw 88).

It is important to realize that black citizens of Montgomery not only refused to ride buses and that was it. They were also hurting as they had to walk for miles every day. Speaking about women, the hardship was mainly carried by them as they had to walk to their jobs. Some of them even 12 miles a day (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 72). Furthermore, the Afro-Americans were showing their resistance despite the constant threat of radical white groups of Southerners. So encouraging them to continue in the boycott and to believe in its success was necessary. For this reason, the roles of several local clergy-men were crucial as they endorsed the protest in their Sunday sermons. The two most known ones were, already mentioned, Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr (Marsico 31).

The other work, involving the organization of the boycott, was done by the MIA. As the boycott went on, every-day transportation presented the biggest problem for the black people. The already mentioned taxi cabs were no longer available as a white city commissioner indicated that all taxi drivers had to charge the expected minimum fare of 45 cents, not only 10, or face a heavy fine. So the MIA organized a transportation committee whose work was to develop a system to move people around with the help of black postmen's knowledge. In this system, both white and black people took part. People throughout the city volunteered the use of their own cars. Moreover, the MIA bought several roomy station wagons and transformed them into taxis called "rolling churches". They also established approximately 50 dispatch stations and 42 pickup sites (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 70).

With such a carpooling system, the question about financing the boycott had to be raised as each week of this system cost around \$2,000. Some financial support for the MIA and boycotters came from wealthier black citizens but also from blacks who could afford to give a dollar or two. Other contributions came from a number of white citizens who supported the boycott, the Montgomery's Jewish community and Northern followers. Furthermore, E. D. Nixon got financial support from Detroit's United Automobile Workers (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 71).

As the boycott went on, the MIA tried to find a way to come to agreement with the city leaders and bus company officials. Although King expected some kind of opposition, he was surprised with the serious resistance to the group's three demands (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 68). The demands were as follows: "Courteous treatment on the buses; first-come, first-served seating, with whites in the front and blacks in the back; and the hiring of black drivers for primarily black bus routes" (Marsico 42).

The attorney of the bus company would not agree to the demands and other city commissioners were even opposed to the requirements, as well as many white Southerners. They thought that if whites submit to blacks on transportation, they would only want more in the future (McNeece, "The Civil Rights Movement" 69). The philosophy of white racial superiority has been discussed in the previous chapter and here the fact about its existence can be seen. The demand of Afro-Americans for equal seating on buses was seen as something impossible from many whites' point of view.

After the meeting, Reverend King and other members of the MIA realized that the struggle would be about much more than segregation laws involving riding buses in Montgomery. The struggle in front of them would be against the larger affair of segregation (McNeece, “The Civil Rights Movement” 69). Nevertheless, the black community remained enthusiastic and the bus boycott went on for days, weeks, and months.

To end the Jim Crow laws, a legal battle in the courts was needed. Two months after Rosa’s arrest, attorneys Fred Gray and Clifford Durr started to search for an ideal case to challenge the city and state bus segregation laws constitutionally. The case of Rosa Parks was not the right one; they did not believe that it would move beyond the state level. For that reason, Fred Gray asked five women, Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, Jeanetta Reeves and Mary Luise Smitt, to become plaintiffs in a civil action case (Hanson 89). All these women were victims of the segregated bus policy. Some of them were already mentioned earlier as women who also refused to give up their seats. The class-action suit alleged that segregated bus laws in Montgomery, Alabama, violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (Hull 76). Fred Gray chose Browder as a lead plaintiff and filed *Browder V. Gayle* in U.S. District Court. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision to end the policy of segregated buses (Hanson 89).

Before the end of this chapter, the goals, strategies, defeats, and victories of the Montgomery Bus Boycott will be analyzed. To start with its goals, Martin Luther King’s words can be used, “the struggle was not between the white and the Negro but between justice and injustice” (qtd. in McNeece, “The Civil Rights Movement” 72).

At the beginning of the boycott, the goal was to end the segregation laws involving transportation. However, with the continued boycott, the struggle was about much more than only buses. The goal expanded to winning equality for the Afro-Americans in the United States and for that reason, although the goal of ending the Jim Crow law in buses was accomplished, the movement continued in its action.

As for the strategies, some of them have been already mentioned previously. Firstly, the main pillar of the boycott’s strategy was nonviolence. The main protagonist of such protests was Martin Luther King, who saw inspiration not only in the example of Jesus Christ but also in more contemporary one, Indian leader Mohandas Karamchand “Mahatma” Gandhi. King was highly interested and inspired by Gandhi’s approach (McNeece, “The Civil Rights Movement” 66). Secondly, as about 40,000 black passengers relied on the city’s public buses

for transportation (Marsico 31), the MIA believed that the city bus corporations would not be able to survive such a dramatic loss and the resistance of their passengers would cause them serious financial problems. This strategy partly met with success:

The Montgomery City Lines experienced a sharp decline in business, with some company officials estimating about \$400 in daily losses. By early January 1956, representatives of the bus service asked the city commission for permission to hike rates so as not to have to lay off drivers or cut routes. (Marsico 46)

On the other hand, some people say that the financial crises made the company officials even more resistant to cooperate and negotiate the situation. The well-built carpooling system can be also seen as a successful strategy to reach the goal of the boycott in a less harmful way for all participants. Finally, the strategy of choosing other plaintiffs for the Supreme Court besides Rosa Parks transformed the idea of a successful ending to the boycott into reality.

When analyzing the boycott, its defeats have to be also taken into account. The first meeting among the MIA and the officials of bus companies can be assumed as a defeat, as the leaders of the boycott did not expect the amount of disagreement from the side of the officials. Furthermore, everyone who participated in the boycott was under the threat to their physical safety as every act of activism drew the attention of the KKK and other hateful radical groups (Marsico 41). Unfortunately, some of the threats became reality and can be considered as a kind of defeat. The defiance of the boycott was shown not only by white citizens but also by police officers. Police ticketed black drivers for speeding, failing to stop at red lights, failing to slow down at a yield sign, staying too long at stop signs, or not staying long enough. White teenagers drove through neighborhoods and had fun shouting or throwing water, or often urine, rotten eggs or bricks at black pedestrians (Hull 102). Then, on the night of January 30, King's house was bombed. Mrs King, their daughter and a visitor were in the house but they managed to escape injury. After this event, Martin Luther King was questioning his continuation in the leadership of the struggle but decided to keep going (Hull 73). Nixon's house was also bombed but no one was present at the time and the case did not receive as much attention as King's house bombing (Hull 102). Nonetheless, considering the boycotters' response to the injustice of policemen, harassment, or bombing, their enthusiasm to stay strong and fight for justice became even stronger. For that reason, all defeats presented can be also seen as incentives to continue the fight for justice, freedom, and equality.

As it was indicated previously, the last aspect to analyze is the victories of the boycott. When speaking about victories, more than only the success at the U.S. Supreme Court has to be taken into account, as there are more achievements to celebrate. To start with the previously mentioned result of the boycott, the ending of segregation in the buses is definitely considered to be the most remarkable victory of the one-year-long resistance. After the court's decision, black people of Montgomery started to board the buses again, choosing to sit anywhere they wanted. The bus companies also agreed to hire black bus drivers. From the great movement's point of view, the victory of Montgomery Bus Boycott can be also seen somewhere else. Thanks to Rosa's refusal to stand up and the further work of the MIA and all boycotters, the struggle of black people became real and noticeable around the world. The popularity of the movement increased. Furthermore, Martin Luther King became a leader of the boycott but most importantly, a leader of the whole struggle. The speeches he had delivered during his activism are still seen as some of the most excellent ones. To conclude, the Montgomery Bus Boycott and its victories played significant and unforgettable role for the upcoming events.

The last paragraph of this chapter is dedicated to the most important name of the paper, Rosa Parks. She sparked the 381-days-long boycott and became a public activist. What are the consequences of her actions for her private life? Even though she was hugely admired for her refusal by many people, she also faced hatred by white Southerners who blamed her for all that was happening. Callers phoned her home to threaten her. She was not so easily frightened, but her husband Ray eventually suffered a nervous breakdown due to nervousness (Hull 77). Rosa and her husband also lost their jobs as their employers did not sympathize with the boycott. To earn money, she took to sewing at home. Then she volunteered as a member of the MIA executive board (Hull 66). It is also important to mention, that her long-term activism was not as widely known and appreciated as her act of defiance on the Montgomery bus on December 5, 1955. Later on, she was a symbol of the entire civil rights movement going on in Montgomery. As a result of her publicity, she began to travel around the country giving fund-raising speeches at various NAACP branches, schools, unions, and churches (Hull 79). After the U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld *Browder V. Gayle*, the Parks were still labeled as troublemakers in Montgomery and the phone calls continued. For these reasons, they decided to leave Alabama and moved to Detroit, Michigan (Hull 79).

## **4 BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICAN SOCIETY**

In this chapter, the position of black women in American society in general will be presented. In the first place, life of black females during the times of slavery will be addressed and later analyzed as these years highly influenced the further perception of African American women in the United States.

Speaking of black female slaves, it is important to make clear that sexism played a significant role in their lives as racism. Sexism was a social order which was brought to the United States by white Europeans from their homelands. In the earlier stages of slavery, the black female slave was not as valued as black male slave as the slave owners focused on the need of labourers and they did not see the importance of owning female slaves. Later on, the idea of breeding slaves came up and the value of black female slave increased (Hooks 15).

As the slave trade gathered momentum, African women made up one-third of the human cargo aboard most ships. The experiences from the ships were only the beginning of a process that would transform an African human being into a slave. From the very moment when the slave was kept, to their last breath, the white man directly influenced his or her life (Child 17). White male slavers were threatened by male black slaves; they placed them in chains and kept as much distance between themselves and black men as it was possible on board. This was not the same for black women. The relationship between white man and black women was the best way to freely exercise the absolute power. Women were stripped of their clothes to show their sexual vulnerability. They were physically abused on a regular basis. As rape was a typical method of torture, many black women were pregnant prior to their capture or purchase (Hooks 19).

There are two main reasons for such treatment towards black female slaves on slave ships. Firstly, white slave owners were not scared of black women and there were no barriers to torture them, as was already mentioned above. Secondly, slavers claimed that these methods were crucial for preparation of African American for the slave market, so called dehumanization. African women received more brutal terrorization as their dedication to serve white family had to be even greater as it was expected that the work of black female slaves would be more intimate. Intimate in a way that they would be able to cause harm to

their master's family as many female slaves worked as maids, cooks, seamstresses, and washerwomen (Hooks 20).

After the slave ships arrival on the shores of America, the horrible experience of black slaves continued. While the black male slave was mainly used as a labourer in the fields, the black female slave was exploited as a labourer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault (Hooks 22). Given these points, the work area clearly reveals the differentiation between the male and female slave.

Another differentiating factor of black male and female slaves was the slave owner's exploitation of the black woman's sexuality. In the nineteenth century, the ideal white woman was perceived as a pure and modest lady; on the other hand, black women were seen as innately lustful beings. Therefore, the perception of black women made them the object of white man's abhorrence and sexual fantasy. Throughout the period of slavery in America, white slave owners believed that to engage in sexual activity with black women was their right. All parts of the black female body belonged to her white master. She could not refuse, if she did so, the knife, the whip and the gun were always there to be used against her (Brownmiller 153). Most commonly, slave owners took slaves by force. Nevertheless, there were black women who did not resist sexual harassment in the hope that from such relationships they or their children would benefit and that their masters would liberate them (Hallam). To further indicate the white slavers' perception of black female slaves, Susan Brownmiller explains in her book, "Female slaves were expected to 'breed'; some were retained expressly for that purpose. In the lexicon of slavery, 'breeder woman,' 'childbearing woman,' 'too old to breed' and 'not a breeding woman' were common descriptive terms" (154).

Back to Africa, the main aspect of black womanhood was being a mother. In slavery, these women's primary social role was disgraced. Within the American plantation system, childbirth of slaves was taken as an economic advantage for the master. His labor force was multiplied through slave pregnancy. The average black woman's age of giving birth was nineteen years old. Later on, she typically bore a child every two and a half years. Even though there were some benefits for mothers during their pregnancy, such as more food and fewer working hours, the physical and psychological burdens were enormous. However, African women still took their motherhood seriously. The responsibility for their children was



much more important than their own freedom and safety. They truly loved even those babies who were born from violence (Hallam).

To conclude the description of black female slaves' experience, the words of Lydia Child, an abolitionist of the nineteenth century, are presented here. In her work, she talks about black women in slavery as follows:

The negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame, no regard for the feelings of husband, or parent; they must entirely subservient to the will of their owner, on pain of being whipped as near unto death as will comport with his interest, or quite to death, if it suits his pleasure. (Child 27)

For the content of the thesis, it is important to focus on the consequences of slavery on the further perception of black womanhood. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, slaves were made free but the humiliation of Afro-American women continued. It was inevitable that such treatment toward female slaves had major impact on the political and social status of black women. Most Americans, not only whites but also blacks, accepted the social hierarchy based on race and sex, which was established back in the times of slavery. The hierarchy ranked white man first, white woman second, black man third, and black woman last. In other words, the black woman had the lowest possible position in the American society (Hooks 53).

The negative perception of black womanhood was hard to change. The fact that during the years of black Reconstruction, 1867-1877, some black women exercised their sexual freedom and freely engaged in sexual relationship with black men, did not support the struggle for change because white Southerners were offended by such behaviour. Whites, both men and women, perpetuated negative images of black womanhood. They accosted and even physically abused black women on public streets, in shops, or at their places of work. Black women were reminded daily that they did not deserve the consideration and respect of white people (Hooks 55). Sexual assault of white men toward black women went on long after slavery ended. The frequency of white male rape of black woman was high. Child or woman, married or single, all African American women were easy targets for white rapists (Hooks 56). Moreover, white journalist entertained their readers by ridiculing the efforts of black people to improve their image to maintain the separation of the races. They made fun from the negative stereotypes of black people (Hooks 55).

The reasons for the devaluation of black womanhood can be explained in two ways. First of all, the hatred towards black females was a direct consequence of the perception of black women during slavery and the deeply rooted racism in American society. However, it could also be seen as a method used for social control. White people did not accept the idea of blacks assimilating and amalgamating into the mainstream of American culture. They wanted to return to the old social order and they knew that without changing the image of black women, the whole Afro-American community would not be able to lift up their race. To maintain the white supremacy, Jim Crow laws were created (Hooks 56). This period of time was already dealt with in the first chapter of this theses.

#### **4.1 Black women activism**

The following part of this chapter describes and further analyses the activism of black women during the civil rights struggles in the South. Even though black women were oppressed by racism and sexism, they courageously engaged in the civil rights movement. Many women were not only followers of the movement but they can also be considered leaders. These women often initiated protests, formulated strategies and tactics, and mobilized other resources which were necessary for the success of the actions. However, most of these female activists remained anonymous, neglected or forgotten (Barnett 163).

The following presents a brief glimpse into black female activism before the modern civil rights movement. Beginning in the nineteenth century, middle-class black women joined groups organized to provide welfare services and education to their members and families. They worked as auxiliaries to the men, who were organizers (Sartain 39). Yet they also established social clubs entirely on their own and organized community groups with common social and structural themes. The focus was primarily on the general moral improvement of society. It was the moral imperative for black women in the middle class to help poorer and disadvantaged people. However, as Lee Sartain indicates, the aim of such groups also had deeper thoughts, “women pursued the elusive goal of respectability within the United States, as determined by white cultural norms, while at the same time aiming for some restructuring of that society, such as in mitigating racism and ending lynching” (41). One of the goals was to show that black society was equal to the white social standards, therefore, black women’s

associations tried to improve the status of black women as a whole with the idea of advancing their entire community (Sartain 42).

For the same reasons, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was created in 1896. As one of the most important first associations lead entirely by black women, it will stand as an example of such organizations here. The founder and the first president of the association was Mary Church Terrell, an activist for civil rights and one of the first Afro-American women who earned a college degree. She saw the NACW as a vehicle for the betterment of the race and for black women specifically. However, it is important to mention that initially the association was not of a feminist nature. Women's social and domestic nature was accepted by the NACW. They tried to improve employment opportunities and social condition for those who had no other option than to work but the essential aim was to make better wives and mothers (Sartain 44). In other words, the concern of the association was in changing the position of black woman in the American society while also uplifting the race as a whole. Other crucial activists directly connected with the association were Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Ida Wells-Barnett, well-known educator and writer Anna Cooper, and Black Baptist women's movement leader Nannie Burroughs. These women, along with many others who launched club movements in their cities and states, were instrumental in the development of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Robnett 45).

Before examining the roles of black women in the modern civil rights struggle, other female association and clubs need to be mentioned. These included New Jersey Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (NJSFCWC), the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Afro-American women of different economic and regional background joined and sometimes led these organizations. They fully participated in actions aimed at ending racial discrimination and the destruction of dominating structures that oppressed African Americans in general and African American women in particular (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 23).

From the paragraphs above, it could be understood that black women did not cooperate with black men to seek racial equality. That was not so. The cooperation between black men and women was crucial to the success of the struggle. The importance is further described by addressing the roles of black women within the NAACP and throughout the entire movement.

Black women stood at the formation of the NAACP and later on, they were its members. Women in the NAACP directed their energy and resources into a battle against segregation on the same level as men. They worked as generators of ideas for fundraising and attracting other members to the organization and also acted as social network operatives who mobilized existing social groupings around civil rights objectives and campaigns. Even though it can be assumed that these were not the highest or publicly visible roles, work of Afro-American women allowed the organization to acquire grassroots stability and generate NAACP publicity. Thanks to the women's work within the organization, the potential of the organization was growing (Sartain 57). In other words, black man led and black women organized. Rosa Parks' work for the NAACP presented in the previous chapters, stands here as an example of the common role of a woman within the organization.

Another part of the chapter is dedicated to the analysis of black female activism during the modern civil right movement. As mentioned above, Afro-American women have a long history of political activism. Although they faced the double oppression of race and gender, they actively participated. They not only took part in social movements, political parties, campaigns, elections, and run for public office, but also provided help, support and assistance to the whole community. It is obvious that their roles in the movement were significant but their importance is conspicuously absent from the publicly well-known history.

The strategic organizational role of black women in the civil rights movement will be addressed first. In her study, Teresa A. Nance presents three main categories of black women's roles during the movement. The first role is called *the mama*. These women took civil rights workers into their homes, gave them food and introduced them around their communities. These actions could be seen as simple and safe but they were frequently viewed as an act of defiance by some white Southerners (Nance 545). The second role is recognized as *the activists*, which is also the crucial role of this thesis. Rosa Parks can be considered as *an activist*, even though her true activism is not so widely known. These women were actively involved in a number of different ways besides just serving as a support network. The activists were major leaders, organizers, and strategists creating the movement to address their personal and communal needs (Nance 547). The last role described by T. A. Nance is often overlooked but its importance during the movement must not be forgotten. *A friend* was the role for women who supported and nurtured others. They were willing to take care of one another's children, exchange responsibilities and offer financial support when it was needed. To sum up, all three roles described above emerged from the same way of making sense of

the world. The Afro-American system of community and family was produced as a result of the racial conditions black citizens of America lived in. They implicitly provided help and assumed responsibility for others with mutually understood values and shared goals (Nance 549).

Secondly, the possible reasons for the rejection of female leadership in the context of the whole movement will be explored. As mentioned above, the important role for the context of the thesis is *the activist*. These women performed roles which could be considered leading ones, yet their leadership lacked recognition. Patriarchy within the black society could be seen as the first reason for neglecting women's roles. As one of the women participating in the movement indicates:

When you're dealing with Black men and women and the fragile position of Black males, you can expect that Black women, even though they might do all the work, will not be recognized as doing the work or leading anything. . . . In the South, women still look to men as leaders when women are actually doing the work. . . .A lot of this comes from traditions of the church and the male minister as the leader, the person whom you're supposed to obey. The movement was no different than anything else. Women obeyed and supported their husbands, looked up to them as leaders, and didn't take any credit even if it was offered. . . . (qtd. in Barnett 175)

Gender stratification can be one possible explanation. Furthermore, the aspect of sexism within American society in the twentieth century has to be considered, as patriarchy constrained all women living in America. For instance, black female activists encountered sexism when they tried to get funding for businesses through banks and local governments. Their attempts to get funds for their projects were not successful mainly because they were women (Barnett 175). The second reason is also connected with the position of women in American society, but from a different point of view. Some black female leaders could not become public figures due to their family responsibilities and economic concerns (Barnett 176). Black women in the South were frequently employed by white people and they would risk their jobs and consequently endanger the other family members if their superintendents found out that they were somehow involved in the struggle.

To connect the last paragraphs of Afro-American women with Rosa's experiences described in the previous chapters, the connection is made here. Even though Rosa can be considered as *an activist*, she is mostly described as a kind and sweet lady who was tired and therefore did not move when the rider of the bus ordered her so. Why Rosa together with the other organizers of the Montgomery Bus Boycott did not reveal the whole truth and black women did not fight for their recognition? The reasons have been actually depicted above. The American society in the first half of the twentieth century was not ready for black women activism. Furthermore, patriarchy was strongly felt also in the black community. The black womanhood was not considered to be an important aspect for fighting the racial equality and therefore it was not appreciated. The interesting fact is that the idea of appreciation of black womanhood in order to uplift the race as a whole was an idea of black women's activism during the nineteenth century, as it was already mentioned. Later on, black male upheld patriarchal values and black women assume a subservient position. Rosa Parks worked, risked, and fought for equality, however; she did it silently and by the male activists' sides as the other black female activists of that time.

## **4.2 The consequences of black women activism for the present**

The last part of the thesis touches the topic covering the changed perception of black women's activism, moreover, the American society perception of black womanhood after the civil rights struggles. As it has been already written above many times, black women participating in the fight for racial equality were often forgotten, sometimes purposely absented from the outline of black history. This fact is not so true anymore. The crucial role of black women during the civil rights movement is the topic of many researches, studies, journals, books, etc. These recent recollections point out that those black women were not apolitical and inconsequential but the right opposite of that description. There was also a conference called "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1964" in Atlanta in 1988. As Deborah Atwater explains, the aim of the conference was to identify and honour women working as individuals or groups who actively participated. Papers from that conference were published in 1990 (540).

Attempts were being made to transform the curriculum on black leadership and civil rights in schools as well. For instance, Evelyn Simien, a professor at the University of Connecticut, arranged a course on black leadership with the goal to include African American women as leaders as well as helpmates. Simien presents her view that African American women of the civil rights movement should not be presented as victims or celebrated as mainstream heroines (747). Students' knowledge was broadened through discussion, group work, and critical examination of the major philosophical and theoretical arguments offering interlocking systems of oppression. Students successfully arrived at some understanding of how Afro-Americans, both men and women, had an impact on the political process via public persuasion, litigation, grassroots mobilization, and direct action. The uniqueness of the course can be seen in the focus on black women experiences which are essential to understanding multiple perspectives within the civil rights movement (Atwater 748).

Already suggested previously, the last paragraph depicts the alteration in perception of black womanhood in the United States that paved the way for Michelle Obama, an Afro-American woman, to become the First Lady of the United States in 2009. Thinking of the thesis's content, the presence of a black woman, a direct descendant of slaves, in the White House is something that black activists presented here would not even dare to dream about. Yet it became a reality.

Speaking about American society today, the term *post-racial* society is applicable, though not entirely accurate. The American society can be viewed as post-racial for all legal barriers that separated races apart were abrogated. However, some scholars like Farah J. Griffin, claim that it is still inappropriate to believe in racial equality as white supremacy and racism have not disappeared yet. Racism just operates differently than in the past (132). Griffin supports this statement saying:

. . .we continue to live in a culture that devalues blackness, as is evident in a variety of contexts, from children's preference for white dolls, to the value placed on white and mix adoptees versus that placed on black children, to the profound racial disparities that continue to plaque black communities nationwide. (Griffin 141)

On the other hand, the fact that so many white Americans voted for a black candidate and consequently, the public acceptance of Michelle Obama as the First Lady of the United States indicate a new American racial era, significantly the least racist era there has ever been. Michelle Obama has achieved the goal that black women always strived for, to be recognized and respected as ladies. Furthermore, Michelle put herself in a role *mother-in-chief* and reminded American society that the role of a wife and a mother should be the most celebrated one (Cooper 55). She gave speeches which focused on the importance of motherhood, as she has rather conservative views on being a good wife and mother. Michelle definitely helped to uphold the general unfavorable perception of black womanhood being a part of the American social order since slavery. Michele's strategy can be compared to the strategy of black female activists as Mary Church Terrel, already mentioned as the first president of the NAWC (Cooper 52). They used their position as a mother as the main aspect of their philosophy. The importance of black motherhood can be traced back to the times of slavery and can be assumed as its consequence. Black female slaves had no right to fully participate as mothers in their children's lives; therefore, their desire to be respected as mothers is deeply rooted. For these reasons, many feminists disagreed with the message Michelle tried to advance. The crucial question is whether being recognized only as a lady, a mother, and a wife is a major goal of black womanhood.



## CONCLUSION

The defiance of Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955 was not only an unintentional refusal of a tired black woman to give up her seat on a bus. Rosa Parks' decision to remain seated preceded many actions which were crucial in furthering the sequence of events that ended the policy of segregated buses, the Montgomery Bus Boycott. These actions were not only seminal for the boycott itself, but for the entire U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The social position of blacks after the abolition of slavery and the persisting vicious treatment by white people were incentives for Afro-American citizen of the United States, both men and women, to seek equality. Moreover, there were numerous great acts carried out by black female activists which were seminal for the Civil Rights Movement. Although the names of black women are not as popular as the names of black men in the struggle, they are no less important. They worked for and established various organizations demonstrating that black women played significant roles in the Afro-American Civil Rights Movement.

This thesis explored a side of the civil rights struggle which is not so publicly well-known. At first, Rosa Parks' experiences as well as her enthusiastic activism was examined, focusing on events which highly influenced her. The planning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott was described and later analysed. As the main protagonists of the boycott were women, the other chapter concentrated on black women in American society, not only their social positions in history but also the roles they performed in the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, the question of the perception of black women in the United States was briefly explored.

The last chapter also covered the topic connected with the role of Michelle Obama and her impact on American society. This topic raises highly intriguing questions which could be a theme of another analysis. Black women have been double oppressed by racism and sexism since they arrived as slaves in shackles on the American shores. Therefore, black women, their fight for seeking equality, or the changes of their position in American society which occurred over time are interesting subjects to be further explored. Moreover, how are black women perceived in the American society of the twenty-first century?

The information given in this thesis are important to be presented for various reasons. Firstly, it is necessary to be aware of all aspects of history for a full understanding of past events. Secondly, with historical understanding comes greater awareness of what is happening in the present. As racial, ethnic, and religious hatred still exists in the world today, historical events must not be forgotten, they need to be remembered and reflected on as often as possible.

„Memories of our lives, of our works and our deeds will continue in others.“

-Rosa Parks

## RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rolí Rosy Parks v Afro-Americkém hnutí za rovnoprávnost, posléze rolí afro-amerických žen v již zmíněném hnutí. Dále je nastíněna sociální pozice afro-amerických žen v americké společnosti spojená též s problematikou vnímání barevných žen ostatními obyvateli Spojených Států Amerických. Stěžejní jméno této práce, Rosa Parks, patří ženě, která byla oddanou aktivistkou a dlouholetou členkou organizace NAACP, kde pracovala jako sekretářka. Její jméno je výhradně spojováno s jejím zatčením, 1. prosince 1955, za neuvolnění místa bělochovi v autobuse v Montgomery. Tímto zatčením započal bojkot městské dopravy, který trval déle než rok a jeho výsledek, tedy ukončení segregančních zákonů v městské dopravě, může být považován za jedno z významných vítězství pro celé Afro-Americké hnutí za občanská práva, které se odehrávalo v 50. a 60. letech 20. století. Pro pochopení všech aspektů tohoto historického období je potřeba široké teoretické obeznámení s událostmi z předcházejících let.

S objevením a následným kolonizováním Ameriky se otevřel nový svět. Tento svět měl být novým a hlavně svobodným místem pro život lidí různých národností. Tato představa bohužel neplatila pro africké obyvatele, kteří byli na americký kontinent převáženi v okovech a prodáváni do otroctví po dlouhé dvě staletí. Otroctví bylo zrušeno po ukončení občanské války a přidáním třináctého dodatku do Americké Ústavy v roce 1865. Čtrnáctý a patnáctý dodatek, slibující rovnoprávnost a volební právo Afro-Američanům, byl přijat během následujících dvou let. V tomto období budoucnost pro afro-americké obyvatele vypadala nadějně. Nicméně, jižní americké obyvatelstvo si přisvojilo jiný způsob utlačování, rasovou segregaci, neoficiálním názvem pojmenovanou jako zákony Jima Crowa. Tyto zákony měly za úkol udržovat afro-americké obyvatele oddělené od ostatních, jak i napovídá název celého principu, „oddělený ale rovnocenný“.

Život afro-amerických obyvatel byl zcela ovlivněn výše zmíněnými zákony. Černošské obyvatelstvo muselo navštěvovat pro ně určené školy, nemocnice, hotely, restaurace, parky, divadla, kina či plovárny. Afro-Američané neměli možnost používat stejná pitka a veřejné toalety jako ostatní obyvatelé Spojených Států. I když vše mělo fungovat na principu „oddělený ale rovnocenný“, veřejné budovy a vybavení pro bílé obyvatelstvo byly vždy v lepším stavu. Vlivem segregace se černošské obyvatelstvo dostalo na nejnižší pozici

v americké společnosti, čímž byli každým dnem utvrzováni. V této době též vznikají násilnické rasistické skupiny, jako například organizace Ku Klux Klan.

Výsledkem nespravedlivého principu segregčních zákonů byly první známky odporu nejen afro-amerických obyvatel. V roce 1909, skupina jak bílých, tak černých aktivistů za rovnocenná práva zakládají lidsko-právní organizaci NAACP, tedy Národní asociaci pro zvýhodňování barevných lidí. Mezi významné lidi, kteří stáli u zrodu této organizace, patří například W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells, Henry Moscowitz, Mary White Ovington nebo Oswald Garrison Villard. Cílem této organizace bylo zrušení zákonů Jima Crowa, společně se záměrem znovu zrealizovat zákony, které byly garantovány přijetím 14. a 15. dodatku do Americké Ústavy. Tento cíl byl daleko, avšak dosažitelný, což bylo jasné díky malým, ale důležitým výhrám, o které se zasloužili odvážní aktivisté pod záštitou NAACP. Dvě největší výhry by měly být zmíněny. První, *Brown v. školní rada Topeky*, byl případ nejvyššího soudu USA, který prohlásil segregaci vztahující se na vzdělávání jako protiústavní. Druhým a pro tuto bakalářskou práci významnějším případem byl *Browder v. Gayle*, jehož výhrou byla zrušena segregční pravidla v městské dopravě. Tento soudní proces následoval po ročním bojkotu městské dopravy v Montgomery.

Ačkoliv bojkot v Montgomery je věhlasně známou historickou událostí, skutečnosti, které k němu vedly a posléze jeho plánování, známé nejsou. Již výše zmíněná Rosa Parks a její vzdor v městském autobuse je považován za podnět pro bojkot, což je často popisováno jako vzdor z důvodu unavenosti po celodenní práci, kde míra Rosy aktivismu není brána v potaz. Tato práce dává do kontextu další činnosti afro-amerických aktivistů, které mohou být brány jako skutečnosti, které jsou pro další slet událostí stěžejní. Rosa Parks společně s Edgarem D. Nixonem, dlouhodobým aktivistou a prezidentem NAACP pobočky v Montgomery, tvořila silnou dvojici, která se zabývala rasistickou diskriminací a násilím aplikovaném na černošské obyvatelstvo. A to hlavně vůči nespravedlivému souzení černých mužů a sexuálnímu zneužívání černých žen. Jeden z nejznámějších případů, na kterém Parks s Nixem spolupracovali, je znásilnění mladé matky, jménem Recy Taylor, šesti bílými muži v městě Abbeville. Jak bylo zvykem, ani jeden z těchto mužů nebyl potrestán.

Spolupráce s E. D. Nixonem a neustálý kontakt s bezprávím, ve kterém byli Afro-Američané nuceni žít, Rosu Parks postupně přesvědčovaly o nevyhnutelnosti změny a nedovolily jí přenechat ono sedadlo v prosincový den roku 1955. Před jejím slavným neuvolněním sedadla bělochovi zde byly další ženy, které byly zatčeny za stejný čin, avšak ve

zveřejnění jejich případu byla vždy nějaká překážka. Jména těchto žen jsou například Ida B. Wells, Claudette Colvin, Aurelia S. Browder nebo Mary L. Smith.

Jak Rosa Parks sama vypovídá, jejím záměrem nebylo započít bojkot, byla jen unavená. A to unavená vzdávat se. Po zatčení Rosy Parks a jejím následném soudu, 5. prosince 1955, Edgar Nixon společně s Jo Ann Robinson, reverendem Ralphem Abernathym a nejznámější osobou celého hnutí, kazatelem Martinem Lutherem Kingem, založil organizaci MIA (Montgomery Improvement Association), která se chopila organizace celého bojkotu. Tato organizace se nejen starala o finanční podporu celé věci, jiné možnosti náhradní dopravy, ale též o mediální stránku. Dále pracovala na podmínkách potřebných k zrušení segregáčních zákonů týkajících se městské dopravy.

Bojkot v Montgomery trval 381 dní, hlavně díky konstantní spolupráci jeho leaderů a stejně tak civilních obyvatel. Afro-Američané nepoužívali městskou hromadnou dopravu po celou dobu bojkotu. Během těchto dní, společná víra ve změnu sílila a odhodlání podílet se na boji za jejich rovnoprávnost, která jim ústavně náležela, se zvětšovalo. K ukončení bojkotu byl potřeba legální soudní případ. Advokáti Fred Gray a Clifford Durr se rozhodli nepoužít proslavený případ Rosy Parks, avšak ostatních pěti žen, již výše zmíněných, k zahájení soudu. Tento případ, s názvem *Browder v. Gayle*, dopadl pozitivně pro afro-americké obyvatelstvo. 13. Listopadu 1956, Ústavní soud Spojených Států Amerických potvrdil segregáční zákony v městské dopravě za protizákonné.

Za strategie bojkotu se dá považovat nejen nenásilí, které bylo významně propagováno hlavním vůdcem celého hnutí, Martinem L. Kingem, ale též donucení společnosti řídící městskou dopravu k přistoupení na požadavky z důvodu ekonomického úpadku, který byl nevyhnutelný, jelikož většina zákazníků autobusové dopravy byli právě Afro-Američané. K vítěznému konci vedla cesta, která nebyla lehká a všichni podílející se mohli setkat nejen s každodenními problémy spojené s dopravou, ale též s odporem ze strany bílých obyvatel Montgomery spolu s násilnickými hrozbami od rasistických organizací. Avšak vydařilo se. Mezi výhry patří nejen ukončení segregáčních zákonů v městské dopravě, ale též medializování celého hnutí v čele s kazatelem Kingem. A konečně, celý bojkot byl významnou událostí pro Afro-Americké hnutí za občanská práva.

Poslední kapitola této bakalářské práce se dále zabývá afro-americkými ženami, jak už bylo zmíněno. Černé ženy byly utlačovány už od dob, kdy byly dovezeny jako otroci na americký kontinent. Jejich utlačování bylo dvojité, jelikož jejich život významně ovlivňovaly dva aspekty. Nejen že měly rasový původ, který byl v oné společnosti nesnášen, ale zároveň byly ženami v silně patriarchálně uspořádané společnosti.

Otrokáři se podíleli na mučení otroků již během jejich cesty na americký kontinent. Už při těchto výpravách byl rozdíl mezi zacházením s africkým mužem a ženou evidentní. Zatímco muž představoval pro otrokáře hrozbu a byl spoután, žena pro ně byla předmětem k volnému projevu jejich moci. Ženy byly fyzicky napadány a znásilňovány. Mnoho afrických žen dorazilo do Ameriky gravidní. Hlavním důvodem takového mučení byla transformace svobodného člověka v otroka plně podrobeného vůle jeho pána. Co se týče žen, jejich oddanost a lojalita musela být ještě větší, jelikož práce, která pro ně byla určená, byla povětšinou v těsné blízkosti jejího pána a posléze jeho rodiny, tudíž zde byla šance rodinným příslušníkům přímo ublížit.

Největším rozdílem mezi životem afrického muže a ženy v otrokářském systému bylo velmi časté sexuální zneužívání černých žen. V těchto dobách otrokáři věřili, že nárokování si těla ženských otroků je jejich výhradním právem. Touto myšlenkou byla ovlivněná celá americká společnost. Černé ženy, i po ukončení otroctví, čelily velmi častému sexuálnímu zneužívání. V povědomí americké společnosti vítězilo přesvědčení, že černé ženy si o takové chování říkají a také si ho zaslouží. S tímto nespravedlivým a nesprávným vnímáním afro-amerických žen ostatní obyvatelé Spojených Států někdy dodnes bojují. A proti němu bojují oné ženy. Aktivismus černých žen je ojedinělý z několika důvodů. Za prvé, nebojují pouze proti nerovnoprávnosti ras, ale též nerovnoprávnosti pohlaví. Během Afro-Amerického hnutí za občanská práva, a i léta před ním, vykonávaly důležité a nezastupitelné role, jak je tomu například v případě Rosy Parks, bez kterých by historie tohoto období nebyla stejná. Jejich jména nejsou dosud stejně známá jako jejich mužských kolegů. Avšak tato skutečnost se postupem času stále mění, jelikož je toto téma, hlavně v poslední době, v zájmu mnoha odborníků.

Jedním z důkazů o pokroku amerického obyvatelstva k existenci společnosti bez rasistických myšlenek je přítomnost afro-americké ženy, Michelle Obamy, v Bílém domě, jakožto první dámy Spojených Států Amerických. Michelle Obama se zasloužila o zlepšení vnímání afro-amerických žen americkou společností skrze její lojalitu manželovi, srdečnosti

a oddanosti při vykonávání její role jako manželky a matky. Michelle se stala ženskou ikonou a jednou z nejoblíbenějších prvních dam vůbec. Skutečnost, že přímý potomek afro-amerických otroků vykonává jednu z nejmávanějších pozic v USA, je, vzhledem k historii afro-amerického obyvatelstva, zvrát, o kterém by si většina odvážných bojovníků za občanská práva nedovolila ani přemýšlet.

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