

Montgomery--Home of the Civil Rights Movement

by

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English 102

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May 9, 2000

Montgomery was the heart of the civil rights movement. With all that was going on with racial tension, injustices, and the lack of work, there was one thing that held those who were willing to fight together. The mass meetings, which were held on Mondays and Thursdays, were the strength of the movement. Dr. King along with Rev. Abernathy and many other preachers would deliver some of the most moving speeches during these meetings. People would come together and think as one during these meetings.

In the first mass meeting, at Holt St. Church, after Ms. Rosa Parks had been arrested for not giving up her seat to a white man, “the crowd was one that no man could count” (Interview--Redden). Rev Abernathy along with Dr. King decided that at this point there should be something done. After hours of speeches and sermons and thoughts of what could be done Dr. King came up with the boycott of the buses. He knew that there would have to be some organization to this move, thus the Montgomery Improvement Association (M.I.A) was evolved. This organization gave a name to those who wanted to make Montgomery a better place to live. Dr. King said that the decision to boycott the buses would be a “sacrifice for justice”(Montgomery Bus...,pg.60). During this mass meeting Rev. Abernathy made it clear on what the boycott was about when he said “ the boycott is not a one-man show, nor a preachers show, but the show of 45,000 black Montgomerians” (Montgomery Bus..., pg.62).

In 1956, At First CME church, where there was another mass meeting being held, there was an announcement that the church was on fire. The announcement was made by the fire chief. Due to all the abuse blacks had taken from whites there was no reason to believe this announcement. It was believed that this was another trick to hurt blacks, or should I say coloreds because this is what blacks were called back then. Rev. Abernathy said to all that was there “Don’t Move!”(He figured the fire chief was making this statement so that the people in the church would trample over another) and no one moved. The church was as still and as quiet as a mouse. This is the amount of trust and belief that was shown during those mass meetings.

After the march from Selma to Montgomery the first meeting was at St. Jude. This was a mass meeting as well as a rally or show. There were several preachers there. There were entertainers, such as: Bill Cosby, Lena Horne, and Sammy Davis Jr. and Harry Bellefonte. There was support from all kinds of people from everywhere around the world. This meeting was one to be remembered. This is why we can move forward in this city and everywhere. Always keep in mind that “struggles of the past inspire struggles for today” (Interview-Williams).

The civil rights movement pulled together some of the strongest black women today. Zecozy Williams was one who was extremely active in the civil

rights movement for Montgomery. Keep in mind this was only a citizen of the city of Montgomery just like you and I. She didn't get paid to march, or to fight the struggle, or to be abused by those who wanted Montgomery to continue to be the racist, unequal city that it was before. Mrs. Zecozy Williams, sent by Martin Luther King Jr., along with Mrs. Rosa Parks went to school in Tennessee to learn how to get blacks registered to vote. She then set up voter registration clinics in the 1950's. Without women with her strength and courage, blacks in Montgomery would still be cleaning houses, shining shoes, or taking care of white women's babies.

Another black woman, who helped Montgomery leave what was once a natural way of life behind, is Mrs. Idessa Redden. Mrs. Redden was also a member of the M.I.A.. She attended the mass meetings that were held. She underwent abuse from those who wanted blacks to stop fighting. Mrs. Redden can recall friends of hers that were stripped of their husbands in the middle of the night and made to watch while a white man covered in white sheets (or known as the KKK) would kill them in their presence. These brutal and thoughtless acts of violence were done only to try to scare the blacks into stopping the protest for their own rights. However, even when things hit close to home Mrs. Redden did not give up in the fight for justice. Although she had no children, Mrs. Idessa Redden along with Mrs. Zecozy Williams escorted the first black children into an

all white school. The three black children were accepted into Linear. This brought about the desegregation of schools in Montgomery. Mrs. Redden appointed herself to the job of escorting the children to and from school because she knew that the children would be harassed and maybe hurt. When asked why did she fight so hard during the movement in Montgomery she replied, “determination and knowing some of the things I could have and all of the things I didn’t have” (Interview-Redden).

...The chief function of the negro movement has been to awaken a nation’s conscience.... (Eyes on the Prize, 213) This was the goal behind the movement in Montgomery. It wasn’t to bring the spotlight on any one person but to open the eyes of those who were determined to keep them shut. So many things for Montgomery were won during the civil rights movement. Jobs for black people were made available. Yes, it was a struggle a, a struggle well worth the fight. To think of all the pain our people before us suffered; we have to strive to make our victory one not easily forgotten. Montgomery didn’t have a lot to offer but the black community wanted their share of what the city did have to offer. “We want freedom. We want the power to determine the destiny of our black community.... (Eyes, 346) “ We want full employment for our people.”(Eyes, 347)

Was this too much to ask? Blacks were allowed to help the city prosper by spending money in stores or even riding the buses, but could not have a say in the

building up of their own community. The civil rights movement was inevitable.

Although Montgomery may still be somewhat behind when you compare it to another state such as New York City or Los Angeles, it has come a very long ways. Montgomery, along with the heart of all those who fought in the struggle and those who continue to fight, is a city that knows change.