

ROSA PARKS

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courage and determination, taking on the entire system," he said.

UNC history Professor Joel Williamson said economic concerns became the backbone of civil rights as the protests of the 1960s began to fizzle out as political goals were achieved.

"Up until 1965, the struggle was very much in the political sphere, dealing with segregation and disenfranchisement," Williamson said. "Once those goals are achieved through legislative victories, there is a question as to what to do next."

According to an online article in The Black World Today by Manning Marable, director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, the median household income for blacks is \$25,351, only 60 percent of the average white income of \$42,439.

Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Research and Cultural Center in New York City, said the economic problems that faced the community divided blacks into several groups.

"There are the problems that face those at the bottom, primarily the relocation of the economic safety net represented by welfare and public assistance," Dodson said. "As more and more people are denied access to support, an increasing number of people are forced into the homeless population."

Dodson also discussed economic

issues which upper-class blacks had to confront. "There has been a concern for some years to increase black access to capital people who want to do business and create business have been redlined out of banking and investment, lacking capital to expand existing businesses."

Black said that once blacks had secured basic liberties, they looked to raise their quality of life in new ways.

"With new challenges come new responsibilities, and blacks want things that were never possible before. Now that they can get jobs, they want to move up the corporate ladder," she said.

A population which had historically been silenced is now attempting to be heard in a new arena as the economic issues which Martin Luther King Jr. began to address have become central.

Now that blacks have secured a unified political voice, economic concerns reflect the more individual struggle.

"Assimilation into the labor force leads to a fracturing of culture — as overt racism decreases, blacks tend to think less like blacks, more like middle-class Americans, more in class terms, less in race terms," Flynt said.

Williamson said the black middle class was growing at a rate far faster than that of the white middle class, creating a gap that made economic unity within the black community nearly impossible.

"We still have poor blacks, but blacks who have gotten education are moving up more rapidly than white folks," he said. "Along with prosperity comes anxiety: Are we going to go one by one?"

The shift in focus to an individual

economic movement has stirred up controversy among observers, many of whom claim the movement lost power once it moved to its current status.

"The civil rights movement has been successful in some ways, which leads to a hemorrhage in enthusiasm because people become satisfied," Flynt said. "Polls indicate African-Americans are the group most satisfied with their lives because of the shift from the way things were to the way they are now."

UNC African-American studies Professor Kenneth Jenken also said the civil rights movement was a mere shadow of what it was when Parks was most prominent.

"Do I think that there is a civil rights movement now? No," he said. "I think there are organizations working, but certainly not in the sense there once was."

But the struggle for opportunity still continues in the eyes of many who seek to better their positions in society.

Black said that although the movement was not as flashy or unified as the memorable protests of the 1950s and 1960s, civil rights was still a rallying cry throughout the black community.

"Rosa Parks can be understood as a seamstress who was obstinate, a veteran of the civil rights movement who offered her own inconvenient view, or a catalyst to a huge, significant movement in American history," Flynt said.

"Now the unfinished revolution in America is the economic revolution."

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Parks' Arrest Spurs Movement

By JAMILA VERNON
Staff Writer

On a fated December day, one middle-aged black woman sparked the onset of a major civil rights movement by simply refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Ala., city bus.

Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old seamstress, was returning home from work on Dec. 1, 1955, when the bus driver, James Blake, ordered her to move to the back of the bus to make room for a white passenger.

When Parks adamantly refused, Blake called the police, and Parks was arrested that day and taken into custody.

But Blake was not breaking any laws that day. Alabama municipal law stated that blacks were to surrender their seats to white passengers if needed.

She was not the first to stand up for injustice on a city bus. Others had been arrested for refusing to give up their seats.

But because Parks was the former secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, her arrest was immediately made more public.

Her simple action sparked leaders of the black community to begin rallying in opposition of the blatant discrimina-

tion against Parks and the entire black community.

The Revs. Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy, Jo Ann Robinson, head of the Women's Political Council, and E.D. Nixon, an official of the NAACP, all decided that it was time to protest the city's segregation laws.

King, pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, called meetings on Dec. 3 and Dec. 4 to discuss the matter.

As a result, they distributed 40,000 handbills throughout the black community, arranging to stage their first boycott against the bus company on Dec. 5. The bills read, "Please stay off all buses Monday."

Nixon even contacted a reporter of The Montgomery Advertiser and alerted him of their plans.

Only a few blacks were seen riding the buses that day. Ninety percent of the city's population carpooled or even walked to their destinations.

The protest continued for an exhausting 381 days, financially crippling the bus company.

The local white communities did not respond in kind. Police harassed blacks riding in carpools and even arrested a few for loitering while waiting for a ride.

The same day of the boycott's start, black leaders formed the Montgomery Improvement Association, and King was made president.

The hiring of black drivers on predominantly black routes, seating of blacks toward the front and whites to the back were the goals of the organization.

While it remained somewhat of a peaceful protest, the houses of both King and Abernathy were bombed dur-

ing the course of the protest on January 30, 1956, striking fear into the black community.

King and Nixon refuse to give up the fight. Instead, Nixon felt it was time for the NAACP to lead the protest because they were a much larger and established organization.

However, Nixon could not wait for the appeal on the Parks case. In February 1956, a civil case was filed, Browder v. Gayle, in which the legality of Alabama's segregation ordinance was questioned by attorney Fred Gray.

It was also filed on behalf of the five women who experienced discrimination similar to that Parks faced while riding the bus.

It was decided that Alabama's laws were in violation of the 14th Amendment, however the next stop was the Supreme Court.

Nixon planned to take the case to the federal court in response to the "intransigence" of the Montgomery City Commission and the bombing of his home.

Nine justices determined, once and for all, that Alabama's law was truly unconstitutional, bringing legal closure to the boycott.

While the battle was won, the war had just begun.

The Rosa Parks incident went on to incite a stronger Civil Rights Movement, one that fought for blacks to have equality in all areas of life, not just in those pertaining to public transportation.

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carolina women's Basketball



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