

# Chapter Twenty-Two: Claudette Colvin\_Alabama, 1950s

In the chapter titled "Claudette Colvin," the narrative reveals a deeper truth about the civil rights movement and the pivotal role played by Claudette Colvin, whose story predates that of Rosa Parks. Claudette, a fifteen-year-old girl living in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her bus seat to a white woman nine months before Parks' famous act of defiance in December 1955. During an outing with school friends, Claudette sat in the rear section of the bus designated for Black passengers, when a white woman demanded her to move. Despite peer pressure and threats from the bus driver, Claudette resolved to remain seated, feeling the weight of her ancestors' struggles—Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth—pushing her to resist.

Claudette's childhood was marked by acute awareness of racial injustice. She faced the harsh realities of segregation, from not being allowed to try on shoes in stores to having her medical appointments canceled due to the color of her skin. The death of her sister from polio plunged Claudette into grief, yet school became a refuge. Her English teacher used relevant texts that connected their lives to broader principles of freedom and justice, fortifying Claudette's resolve.

The societal turmoil reached a boiling point when she learned of the wrongful arrest and subsequent execution of Jeremiah Reeves, a classmate accused—a chilling reminder of rampant injustice. This incident ignited a deep sense of anger and a desire for change within Claudette. She declared her intention to become a lawyer, wanting to fight for justice and not just bemoan the current state of affairs.

On that fateful day on the bus, Claudette stood her ground against authority, even as police officers attempted to force her out of her seat. Tearfully asserting her constitutional rights, she embodied the refusal to accept subjugation. The ordeal culminated in her arrest, but it also made her a catalyst for change in her community. Afterward, she became a central figure in the burgeoning civil rights movement, demanding justice not just for herself, but for Jeremiah and all those wronged by an unjust system.

Claudette's actions were emblematic of a larger struggle, ultimately contributing to the Montgomery bus boycott and transforming her into a symbol of resistance within the civil rights narrative .