

5.7 The Untold Story of Rosa Parks Replay

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis Podcast, Season Six, Episode Seven: "The Untold Story of Rosa Parks."

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:14

Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:50

Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. And I hope that you are staying healthy, because my goodness, you can probably hear it in my voice. I have a cold. Well, I had a cold and then it turned into a sinus infection. So I'm like so over it. But I hope you're healthy out there. And I'm really excited to share this untold story episode with you. If you've been here for a really, really, really, really long time, you might remember this episode. This is actually a replay episode from Season Two. It's "The Untold Story of Rosa Parks." And I remembered this episode and wanted to share it with you because last week was actually Rosa Parks's birthday. So Rosa Parks was born on February 4 of 1913. And last week, I was laughing to myself because we were supposed to have a birthday party for my sister's girlfriend, and everybody was sick. Like I said, I have a cold, everybody's had this nasty cold. And my mom had already ordered the birthday cake, and so she couldn't cancel it. So she asked me to go pick it up from the store, and we decided to split the cake and just take some home and eat it. And we'll reschedule the party and reorder the cake and eat some more cake later. But as I was sitting eating this cake with my girls, my two daughters, I thought, "Well, we should be celebrating someone. Who can we celebrate?" It was February 3, and I thought, "I'm pretty sure that Rosa

Parks's birthday is in the first week of February." I just thought, "I feel like I read that. I feel like I remember that." So I looked it up. And lo and behold, her birthday is February 4. So I was able to sit with my daughters and tell them the story of Rosa Parks and help them understand why she was so important to the civil rights movement and why we look up to her as someone who knew how to make a plan and put it into action and get things done.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:43

So as I was sharing that story with them, I thought we need to dig up this untold story episode and listen to it again, because she is an inspiration and we can be learning so much from her example. So if this is your first time hearing this untold story episode, I'm super excited for you, because these are always quite the wild ride. And if it's not, I encourage you to listen again, because there's always something new that I learn when I dig into the stories of civil rights leaders and other Black figures from history.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 03:14

Now during this episode, you are going to hear the story of Claudette Colvin. Claudette Colvin was a teenager who actually kept her seat on the bus before Rosa Parks did, but they did not choose her to be the face of the civil rights movement in the same way that they chose Rosa Parks to be the face. And I explained all of that in that episode, and I tell her story, but I wanted to tell you that Claudette Colvin is actually one of the people that we feature in Season One of Bite-Sized Black History. So if you're unsure, or you're new here, Bite-Sized Black History is our Black History Month program for you and your family, or for you and your classroom. And it's 12 bite-sized podcast episodes that are all eight minutes or less. And they're specifically for kiddos. So we have 12 different Black Americans from history, who really have been overlooked by our history books. These aren't going to be people that you've even heard of before, or if you have heard of them, maybe you're like, "Oh wait, who was that again?" Or what did they do? So I chose 12 different Black Americans. I did a ton of research to figure out their story and to find some really cool interesting things about them. I made mini podcast episodes and turned it into what we call Bite-Sized Black History. And the cool thing is that it comes along with a booklet. So each featured Black American has a custom illustration that we turned into a coloring page so your kiddos can be coloring while you're listening to the podcast episodes. And then after it's done, it's meant for you to be able to snuggle up together and talk about what you've learned. So I provide a few reflection questions about what you've learned and why it's so important to hear these stories and understand what we can take from their experiences. So I hope that you will consider investing in Bite-Sized Black History for your family or for your classroom. You can go to firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory or visit the link in the show notes. And the exciting thing is, I've actually created a Season Two. So Season One was released last year, Season Two was released this year, and they are both available for you. So go to firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory, and you can be listening to Bite-Sized Black History basically the rest of February, because we have 24 different bite-sized podcast episodes for you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 05:32

All right, my friends, I hope you enjoy this untold story episode. I hope you've learned so much about Rosa Parks, and I hope you will consider doing something to honor her birthday, whether it be talking to your kiddos about her story, or maybe making a donation to a black-led

organization in her name, just something to show your gratitude for the work that she did for the civil rights movement. Because, you know, I always say this, racism affects everyone, every single person of every race. So I'm so grateful to Rosa Parks because she's not just a hero in the Black community, she's a hero for all of us.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:07

There are two things that I hope that you get out of listening today. The first is that I really, really want you to know that Rosa Parks was not a tired seamstress. Her actions in the Montgomery Bus Boycott were planned to a T. And the second thing I want you to take away from this episode is someone who is a true hero but is often left out of the story. She is this missing puzzle piece that completes the picture so beautifully and helps us understand what really happened what really went on, and her name is Claudette Colvin. Okay, so more on Claudette in a little while. But I just want to paint the picture of how we usually hear the story.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 06:47

So what we usually have learned, we're in second or third grade, we're in school and our teacher's explaining the story of Rosa Parks to us. So Rosa Parks is exhausted, she's a seamstress. She's had a long day of work. She gets on the bus, she sits down and a white person gets on the bus. And then the bus driver asks her to get up. And she says "No, I'm not going to get up. I'm not going to give up my seat." And the story that we're told is it's because she's so worn out from this long day of work. And of course, she gets arrested, and this sparks the Montgomery bus boycott. So the story that we usually think is that well, "Rosa was exhausted and the Black community is just so exasperated, that they're like, 'You know what, we're not gonna ride the buses anymore.'" But that is not where the story begins.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:31

So I want you to remember the day of Rosa's arrest. She was arrested on December 1 of 1955, but the story actually begins way back in March of 1954. So in 1946, there was this Women's Political Council they called the WPC that was formed by this group of Black women who were professionals in the community. And so they decided that they would take on a lot of different issues. And by the time 1954 comes around, they are focusing on Jim Crow laws. So if you're not familiar, Jim Crow laws were the laws in the United States that were used to segregate Black Americans from white Americans. And something that's really important to point out when we're talking about Jim Crow laws is where the name Jim Crow came from. So in the last episode of the podcast in the Dr. Seuss episode, I talked about Blackface and the minstrel shows and how white people would put themselves in Blackface and then put on these shows in order to entertain each other. And within the shows, they did a lot of making fun of the Black community. The whole point of Blackface was to show how dumb and buffoonish Black people were. And one of the most famous characters that people would play when they were in blackface is a man named Jim Crow. So that's where the name for Jim Crow laws came from was this Blackface character, Jim Crow.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:56

Jasmine Bradshaw 09:30

So the WPC, the Women's Political Council, they decide it is time for us to tackle segregation. Our communities are being oppressed, and this is not okay. So they schedule a meeting with the mayor of Montgomery, Alabama. His name is W A Gayle. And in this meeting, they decide to talk about the busing system and the segregation that exists within busing. When they go to the meeting, they have a list of three things that they would like to see changed about the busing system. The first is that they don't want anyone to be standing over empty seats. So as you know, the buses were split into two sections. The front section was for white riders, and the back section was for Black riders. And oftentimes, if the Black section of the bus was full, they couldn't sit in the empty seats that were in the white section. And so they would be standing even though they're empty seats on the bus. So that was their first request is that no one should be standing up if there are seats available. Sounds pretty reasonable, right?

Jasmine Bradshaw 09:53

The second request is that Black riders shouldn't have to pay at the front of the bus and then get off the bus and enter through the rear of the bus. So the policy was that if you were Black, you had to get on the bus and pay at the front, because that's where the little station was where you would put in your coins, and you have to get back off of the bus and get on the bus at the very back where the Black section was. And oftentimes when they would pay and then get off the bus, the bus drivers would pull off and just leave them. So they would take their money, and then they would leave them on the side of the road. So after they've already paid their bus fare, they still didn't get to ride the bus.

Jasmine Bradshaw 10:30

And their third request was that the buses would stop at every corner in the Black neighborhoods as they did in the white neighborhoods. So oftentimes, white neighborhoods would have bus stops all over the place. So it was really easy for white passengers to have access to the bus stop. But Black neighborhoods would only have one or two throughout the whole neighborhood. So people had to walk really long distances in order to ride the bus. So these are the three things that they're asking the mayor in the meeting.

Jasmine Bradshaw 10:55

Well, you're probably not surprised that nothing came of that meeting. And a couple months later, in May, they sent a letter to the mayor saying, "Hey, we just want to remind you of our requests that we asked for, and we think it's really important that you know that we are thinking about doing a boycott. If you don't answer our requests, we're probably going to do this boycott." And in the letter, there's a quote that I wanted to read it says, quote, "There has been talk from 25 or more local organizations of planning a citywide bus boycott." So remember, this is in May of 1954, a year-and-a-half before Rosa Parks decides to take her seat and not get up. So this is that first piece of the puzzle that shows us that Rosa Parks was not a tired seamstress. This was a very methodical event, planned out by many organizations that were well known in the community. And so the WPC, the Women's Political Council and the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, they team up and

they decide, "Okay, how are we going to get this boycott together? What is it going to look like?" So they're kind of starting to explore the idea of what's going to start the boycott? Are they just going to start it themselves? Or are they going to wait for something to happen?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 12:08

So fast forward a little bit to March 2, 1955. And this is when Claudette Colvin enters the picture. Claudette Colvin is a 15-year-old girl from Montgomery, Alabama. And she goes to school in the northeast part of the city, and she lives in the southeast part of the city. So every day, she has to take the bus all the way across Montgomery. And she has to actually take two buses. So she gets on the bus, and then she changes buses downtown in the city square, which is actually the same place where Rosa Parks changes buses, and the same place where Rosa Parks gets arrested for not giving up her seat. So Claudette Colvin and her three friends are coming home from school, and they get on a bus that's relatively empty, they move back to the section of the bus where they're supposed to be sitting, and they sit down. And as the bus continues to go throughout the city, it picks up more people and the bus fills up. Well as the bus fills up, there's a white woman who gets on, and there are no more seats. So she's standing in between the two rows that Claudia and her friends are sitting in. And the bus driver decides that this woman should not be standing up. So he calls over the speaker to Claudia and her friends and tells them that they need to give get up and give this white woman their seats. In an interview that I read with Claudette, she explained that even though they were sitting in their assigned section "I really hate using the word "colored" you guys, that's why I'm not saying it. I'm just gonna stick with you know, white section, Black section, assigned section" so even though they're sitting in the assigned Black section in the back of the bus, when this white woman comes on the bus, the bus driver tells them you need to get up because she needs to sit down, which as I said before, when I was talking about the meeting with the mayor and the WPC, they were saying that nobody should be standing up with their empty seats. So the Black people were not allowed to sit in the white section, but the white people were allowed to sit in the Black section.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 13:59

So Claudette explained that even though they were sitting in the correct section, the bus driver is the one who gets to assign the seats. So when he asked them to get up, her three friends get up, but she does not get up. And the bus driver is telling her you need to get up and she's saying "No, I'm not going to get up. It's my constitutional right to sit here." So what she did was actually not against the law. Under Jim Crow laws, bus drivers were not supposed to tell Black people that they had to get out of the Black section. If they were sitting in the Black section of the bus, they should have been able to stay in that section of the bus and not have to give up their seat. But as was customary in Montgomery at the time, the bus driver felt that this is my bus and I get to decide who sits where, so you need to get up. Claudette responds and says "No, I'm not getting up. It is my constitutional right to sit here," which, when she was talking in the interview, she talks about how she knew that because at school that day, and that whole week leading up to it, they had been learning about Black history, learning about their rights, and she says she learned about Harriet Tubman, and she learned about Sojourner Truth. And she said in that moment when she was telling the bus driver, "No, I will not get up," she felt like

Harriet Tubman was sitting on one side of her and Sojourner Truth was sitting on the other side of her. And these two women, her ancestors, were pushing her down and not letting her get up, helping her to be strong in that moment, which I thought was the coolest thing I've ever heard.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 15:25

And if you didn't think that segregation laws were completely ridiculous already, this is just gonna put that nail in the coffin for you, because it definitely did for me, I was like, Really, you guys? Really? The white woman could not sit in the empty seat? So Claudette is with her three friends, right? There's four of them. And there's two bus seats. Three of her friends get up, and she stays sitting down, which means there's a completely empty seat on the bus. But the white woman cannot sit down in that empty seat, because white people and Black people cannot even be sitting in the same row as each other. So it's not like she would even need to sit next to Claudette, she would be sitting across the aisle in a different seat. But according to segregation laws, they should not be sitting in the same row. Because I have no idea why. It's too close. I don't know. It's so, so ridiculous. So that's why the bus driver was so insistent that all four of them get up.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 16:21

So the bus driver calls the police, and the police come and they tell Claudette that you need to get up. Why are you not getting up? Of course, they're being very belligerent and yelling at her. And she's saying, "No, it's my constitutional right to sit in the seat. I'm not getting up. So they grab her and they drag her off the bus. So they arrest her. And they can't charge her with breaking a segregation law, because she didn't break any segregation laws. She knew that it was her constitutional right to be sitting in that seat. So they charged her with resisting arrest, which is mind blowing, because how could she be resisting arrest if she didn't do anything wrong? It's just absolutely bonkers. But that's what they charged her with. They take her to jail, and they end up taking her to an adult jail instead of a juvenile correctional facility. They take her to adult jail. They put her in her cell by herself, and she talks about hearing the key turn the lock, and she just loses it. She's totally terrified. She's 15-years-old. It's just It's unbelievable. So she's in jail for about three hours. And her mom and her pastor come to pick her up.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:25

Now I want you to think about the fact that she's 15. So that means that right now she's 79. She's still alive. She lives in Brooklyn, New York. She just retired from working in a nursing home for 30 years. And she's like somebody's grandma. That hit me so hard when I was thinking about it, like Claudette could totally so easily be my grandma. She's still around, like, we can still talk to her, this amazing civil rights icon. So she's in jail, her mom comes and picks her up.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:56

And this is when another key player in the story comes into the picture. His name is Fred Gray, and he is her attorney. And he's actually Rosa Parks's attorney as well. So Fred Gray is still alive too. And I watched an interview with him where he explains why he became an attorney, and

too. And I watched an interview with him where he explains why he became an attorney, and why he specifically became a civil rights attorney. So he talked about how the Black community did not have very many options when it came to getting an attorney. There were some white attorneys who would represent them kind of half heartedly, but they needed somebody from their community who understood their plight and understood the law and could really stand up for them. So he goes to college, and this is kind of when he makes this decision of the fact that he wants to be a lawyer specifically in Montgomery, but in Montgomery, he can't go to law school because he's Black. So he gets into law school in Cleveland, and he goes to Ohio for school. And he says that every single assignment that he gets in school, every single time he has an opportunity to choose what he wants to research, he researches Alabama law, because it was always his goal to go back to Alabama and fight segregation. By the time he gets out of school, he is an Alabama law expert and he goes back to Montgomery to do what he set out to do. And he said that that is to quote, "Destroy everything segregated I could find." So Fred Gray hears about Claudette, and he gets to work on her case. And in this interview that I was watching with him, he says that he never tells the story of Rosa Parks without also including Claudette Colvin, because he believes that she is the key to this engine getting started. He said quote, "Had there not been a Claudette Colvin, there may never have developed a miss Rosa Parks as we know of. There may never have developed a Dr. King as we know of." So he is saying that if Claudette didn't do what she did, we might not have had Rosa Parks rise up, or we might not have even seen Dr. King in the same way that we do today. So it's so important that we recognize Claudette as a true hero in this story.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 20:00

So from here the organizations who are putting together the bus boycott see what happens with Claudette and decides maybe she should be our representative. Maybe her case is the one that we should take on to spark this boycott. So Claudette and the NAACP are working together to get this boycott started, but they actually decided that they're not going to go with Claudette as the representative. And there were three main reasons for that. Claudette talks about it, and I read about it in a couple of different articles as well. One of the reasons is because Claudette got pregnant shortly after all of this was happening, so Claudette says that it was actually statutory rape, which is heartbreaking, but she got pregnant. And the NAACP and the other organizations knew that they needed the Black churches to be the center of this boycott. That if the boycott was going to work, they had to have the Black churches on board, because Black church is the center of the Black community. So they thought that these conservative churchgoers were not going to go for a representative who's a 15-year-old girl who is pregnant. So that was the first reason. The second reason is that she's 15. They were afraid that she wouldn't be reliable because she was a teenager, which is kind of sad, because she's proven herself reliable. She sat on on a bus, didn't give up her seat, and she was arrested for it. But that was the second reason. And the third reason that Claudette cites is her looks. Claudette is much darker-skinned compared to Rosa Parks. And Claudette says that they liked the look of her better. They thought that she would be more palatable to the country because she had this light-skinned privilege, which I understand, because it's something that I have as well. And we'll talk about that in another episode when we talk about privilege in a couple of weeks.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:49

So because of those three reasons, they decide it's not the right time, Claudette is not the right person. And they wait, which is really hard for Claudette because she was ready. She wanted to stand up for what she believed in and she was ready to go. But they said, "No, it's not the right

stand up for what she believed in, and she was ready to go. But they said, "No, it's not the right time. You're not the right person." In between Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, there's actually another woman who chooses not to give up her seat on the bus and gets arrested for it. And her name is Mary Louise Smith. So in October of 1955, before Rosa Parks, she is 18-years-old, she doesn't give up her seat, and they choose not to go with her because as I said before, they don't feel like a teenager is the right choice for the spokesperson, or kind of the face of the bus boycott or the movement.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 22:36

So finally, we get to miss Rosa Parks. On December 1, 1955, she chooses not to give up her seat on the bus and gets arrested. But what you need to know about Rosa beyond the fact that she's a seamstress, the thing that we all seem to know about her, is that she was very involved in the civil rights movement before any of this happened. So she was the secretary for the NAACP, both at the city level of Montgomery, but also at the state level. So she is one of those people who is kind of at the top of the food chain when it comes to these organizations. She also is very connected with Fred Gray, the attorney who ends up representing her, the attorney who represented Claudette. And he will also represent her. She and Fred Gray have lunch every day. His office is right down the street from where she works. And so they meet up and they have lunch and they talk about everything under the sun. And he said that he had lunch with her on the day that she was arrested for not giving up her seat. She says that she didn't know that that was going to be the day that she was going to do it. But she knew that something was coming, that she was going to do something. And December 1, 1955 just turned out to be that right time. So Rosa Parks is arrested, she's taken to jail, and she is charged with disorderly conduct. Fred Gray points out that this is a really important detail to the story. They did not arrest her on a charge of breaking segregation laws, and that was very strategic. The city officials in Montgomery did not want this to go to court. They didn't want the segregation laws of Alabama to be in the court system, because that means that they might be shut down. They might be changed. So instead of charging her with something that had to do with segregation, they charged her with disorderly conduct, thinking they're not going to be able to get the segregation laws in the courts, which means that they're not going to be able to change them.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 24:33

I think that is so important to stop and think about the fact that the Black community and the organizations within the Black community are being very strategic in these moments, but so are the people in power in the white community of trying to keep this oppression going. So the leaders of the NAACP decided this is it. This is our opportunity. Rosa is our gal and we are going for it. They partner up with the women in the WPC, and those women work on getting the word out. So they create these flyers that say, "We are going to have a bus boycott. If you want more information, come to the Holt Street Baptist Church." And this Baptist Church is a key piece of the puzzle, because it is the center of the community of Black churches.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:18

Now, I want to pause and talk a little bit about the flyer for a second. I know that seems really silly. But when I was looking it up, I saw a copy of the original flyer that said, you know, "We're having the boycott come to the church." And I remember looking at it, and I feel so dumb

saying this, but I was like, "It doesn't even have a picture on it." Like, oh, my goodness, Jasmine, You're ridiculous. So I looked into the process of what it would take to create a flyer in 1955. And it was insane. She had to use some crazy machine, I think something that came before the typewriter, I have no idea. And then she had to take it to a college and beg somebody to make copies on this other insane machine that I had also never heard of. Just the idea of how much effort it took to make one little flyer that had two sentences on it about the boycott, and how they were able to distribute it is totally amazing.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 26:12

So this is when Martin Luther King, Jr. comes into the picture. And he's actually not very well known at all at this time. He's a preacher at a church called Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. And they chose not to do it at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church for a very specific reason. Like I said, everything about this was very strategic. They switched from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to Holt Baptist Church, because Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a lot of the people in the congregation were more elite members of the Black community. So these are people who, a lot of them had cars. They didn't ride the buses. So this boycott would not be as impactful. Because obviously, if you're not even riding the bus, you can't boycott the bus. The other thing is that a lot of the people at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church were working for the state. So their jobs were within the government. And if they were to show a large amount of outward support for the boycott, they probably would have lost their jobs. So they were supportive and saying like, "You go! I'm really happy that you're doing this, this is really important." But they were afraid of putting their jobs in jeopardy, which is, of course completely understandable. So Dr. King moves from the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to the Holt Street Baptist Church. because it is the epicenter of Black church in Montgomery, Alabama.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 27:31

The night before the boycott is scheduled to begin, they create what is called the MIA, the Montgomery Improvement Association. And that is a coalition of all these leaders from different organizations that represent people of color. And they elect Dr. King as their president. They choose him very specifically because he's not very well known. Because he's not well known, he's not a polarizing figure in the Black community, like, everyone can get behind him, because they don't know a whole lot about him. They just know that he is calling them to rise up and stand up for their rights, and they are on board with that. Originally, the Montgomery bus boycott was scheduled to only take place for one day, December 5, 1955, just five days after Rosa Parks is arrested. And they say, "Everybody stay off the buses for one day. We really want them to make it more fair for us." So at the beginning, their requests are the same as the requests that they had in the meeting with the mayor from a year and a half ago. They don't want people standing over empty seats. They don't want Black people to have to enter from the back of the bus, and they want the buses to stop more frequently in Black communities. So this is what they're standing up for. This is what the bus boycott is trying to accomplish.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 28:55

The boycott is incredibly successful. 40,000 people stopped riding the buses. 40,000 people in the Black community. That's 90% of the Black community in Montgomery, Alabama stopped, completely stopped, riding the buses. And the women in the WPC worked really hard to set up

carpools. And they work with the NAACP, and together they set up carpools with over 300 cars in it to get people to work. So helping people pick people up and drop people off. And lots of people decide that they're going to walk these incredibly long distances, because it means that much to them. And they also talked to the Black taxi drivers, and the Black taxi drivers decide that they're only going to charge 10 cents a ride for other people in the Black community because they said that that's how much it would cost for them to ride the bus. So somebody who couldn't afford earlier to take a taxi can now afford to do so because they're lowering their fares in order to help out the cause.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:53

As you can imagine, this did not go over well with city officials. 75% of the people who rode the buses in Montgomery were Black. So they are losing a huge chunk of their clientele. But even so they decided not to give in to the requests of the boycott. And so that's when the leaders in the Black community decided, "No, we need to keep going. We need to ride out this boycott until they give in to what we are asking for." And this is when things get a little bit crazy. I mean, people are so committed to the cause that they are getting up in the middle of the night to walk to work, and they are ready to really finally have some fairness in their community. And the white community is not happy about it, especially the white segregationists. So in February of 1956, white segregationists bomb both E.D. Nixon's so E.D. Nixon is the president of the NAACP they bombed his house, and they bombed Dr. King's House.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 30:59

This really terrifies the Black community, which is totally understandable, right? But Dr. King encourages them, "Please do not respond with violence." He shows that the reason why this happened is because their movement of non-violence is working. They were able to target the city in a way that they are now losing 65% of their income. The bus companies are losing 65%. He's telling them "We are going to make progress. Please don't get violent," and the community presses on. Two days later, Fred Gray, the attorney for Rosa Parks and Claudette Colvin, decides we have to go forward with a lawsuit. And this is when he files "Browder v. Gayle." Gayle, remember that name from the beginning? That is the mayor. W.A. Gayle is the mayor that the women from the WPC met with at the very beginning to ask for their demands to be met. So because the city officials were really strategic, and they charged Rosa Parks with disorderly conduct and Claudette Colvin with resisting arrest, they were not able to use those cases in the courts to fight segregation. So instead, he decides we're going to go about this in a civil suit, and we're going to sue the mayor. So February is kind of a crazy month in 1956, because first Dr. King's house is bombed. Two days later, they decide to go forward with Browder v. Gayle and sue the mayor. And then the city comes back and indicts over 80 of the leaders of the bus boycott.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 32:37

So there's this really old law from 1921. And in 1921, there was like an uprising of coal miners. And because that happened, they decided in Montgomery that they needed a law against boycotting, basically. The quote says, "This law is prohibiting conspiracies that interfered with lawful business," which is absolutely insane to me. I'm like, you can't make somebody shop at

your store. That's kind of how capitalism works, right? It's ridiculous. But it says, "You can't boycott and disrupt lawful business." So under this law, they are able to indict 80 of the leaders of the boycott. And Martin Luther King is one of them, and he asked to go to court. And of course, the court finds him guilty and they fine him \$500 or 386 days in jail, which is over a year. I just think that's totally bonkers. But he either has to pay this fine, or he has to go to jail. In addition, they charge him to pay \$500 in court fees. So he either pays \$1,000, or he goes to jail. He tries to appeal and he loses, and he decides, "My community needs me," even though it's against his principles to pay the fine, because this law is completely insane. He's like, "My community needs me. I can't be in jail for a year." So he pays the \$1,000.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 33:59

And this is where we need to have a two-second conversation about systemic racism. So I have explained before that racism has so much to do with the systems that are put in place in our society, the systems of power that we are living under. And this is an exact example of that. So the Black community is fighting back in the only way that they can by using their dollar and not patronizing the bus companies. So the Montgomery government comes back and says, "Nope, we have this the law in which we have decided that you're not allowed to do that." Well, obviously this law more negatively impacts communities of color, because the communities who aren't boycotting are the ones in which the system is set up for them. They enjoy what's going on on the buses, because it's comfortable for them. So why would they ever need a boycott? So when we talk about systemic racism, this is that example, that there are laws in our society in which communities of color are more negatively impacted than others simply because of the way that the law is constructed. The law never even has to say Black or white, but because of the way our society is set up, it affects the Black community way more than it ever would affect the white community.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 35:18

Okay, so back to Browder v. Gail. So Fred Gray brings this lawsuit against the mayor of Montgomery, and there are four plaintiffs in the case, and Claudette Colvin is one of those plaintiffs. They go to her and they say, "We really need your help with this case." And her mom, Claudette's mom, is really encouraging to her. She's like, "I think you should go forward with this, even though they kind of snubbed you before and pushed you aside. They clearly need you now. So you should go and do what you need to do." She agrees, and they go, and they testify in front of these three district court judges. And what they're saying is that the segregation on the buses is really unfair, the treatment is awful. There are so many terrible things that happen, but one of them, of course, is the way that they get on to pay their fare and then they get off and have to get on through the rear of the bus, and oftentimes the bus drivers will pull off. So there's this one bus driver who is notorious for being terrible and for pulling off after people have paid. And 12 years before Rosa Parks decided to sit down and not give up her seat, this notorious bus driver pulled off on her. So she got on, she paid her fare, got back off to get on through the rear of the bus, and he pulled off. And he's the same bus driver who she was sitting on his bus that day in December of 1955. When she decided not to give up her seat, it was the exact same bus driver. Now Rosa Parks isn't included in the Browder v. Gale case, because her case is still going on in the courts. And Fred Gray says he doesn't want the courts to have anything to decide about. He doesn't want them to be thinking about disorderly

conduct. He only wants them to be thinking about segregation. So he's like, I don't want to distract them. I don't want them to have anything to say that's different from segregation. They have to decide about segregation once and for all.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 37:16

So two of the three district court judges decide that, yep, these segregation laws are unconstitutional under Brown v. the Board of Education. So as many of you know, Brown v. Board is the Supreme Court case that decided that segregation was no longer legal in the schools. Well Brown v. Board happens in May of 1954. We're all the way in February of 1956, like almost two years later after Brown v. Board, and we are still fighting against segregation. So the two judges say, "No, segregation isn't okay anymore. We already decided that with Brown v. Board. We can't have segregated buses." And of course, the defendants, the mayor, and the bus driver and all the other city officials appeal this decision to the Supreme Court. Well, the Supreme Court is like "We are not dealing with this. We already did that with Brown v. Board. We gave you our decision." So what they do is summarily affirm the decision that the district court judges made. So that means that they, basically they didn't want to hear the case at all. They just said "Yep, we agree with the other judges. You guys need to move forward with what they're saying." So this is on December 17 of 1956, and three days later, on December 20 of 1956, the orders for the buses to be desegregated finally comes from the city officials in Montgomery, and that is when the boycott is finally ended. Over a year after it started.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 38:48

Wasn't that a wild ride? I mean, there is no way you can still sit there and think that she was a tired seamstress, am I right? I'm so glad that you listened to this untold story episode. I hope you learned something new, something interesting. And I hope that you will invest in Bite-Sized Black History for your family or for your classroom. I would love to see a picture of you and your students, or you and your kiddos, coloring the illustration of Claudette Colvin and sharing what you've learned about her amazing story and how much she contributed, even though she is kind of a hidden figure when it comes to the movement. She is such an inspiration. All right, go to firstnamebasis.org/blackhistory if you would like to invest in Season One and Season Two or both of Bite-Sized Black History. And remember, you can always visit the link in the show notes as well. And I promise to be back with a new episode next week. I am so excited to share with you what I've been working on. And hopefully this cold will be gone. Hopefully this sinus infection will be a thing of the past, and my voice will sound back to normal again. All right my friends, I love you. I hope you continue to honor these Black Americans throughout Black History Month, to take some time to really reflect on how they have enriched so many of our lives. And just take care of yourselves. Stay healthy, stay safe. I love you so much.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 40:16

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site. I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is

linked there. So you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](#). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.