

Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice Study Guide

**Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice by Phillip M
Hoose**

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Plot Summary

Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice is the story of the early life of Claudette Colvin, a fifteen-year-old resident of Montgomery in 1955 who spontaneously refused to yield her seat to a white woman, which violated local law at the time. The importance of Claudette Colvin is that her actions preceded that of Rosa Parks's by nine months. Parks became a symbol of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and Claudette's story was hidden away, despite her importance in inspiring the Montgomery bus boycott and her participation in the Browder v. Gayle trial which declared Montgomery bus segregation laws unconstitutional.

The main point of the book is to tell Claudette's story and to subtly hold the '50s and '60s Civil Rights' leaders accountable for ignoring Claudette. At the time, she was considered an inappropriate face for the Civil Rights movement as she was a young, "emotional" unwed, pregnant mother. Given the stigma on unwed motherhood in the black community and behind, she was deemed unfit. The problem was that Claudette was then almost completely forgotten by the movement even long after its major successes. When she was young, no one helped her survive poverty or take care of her child. She was given almost no acknowledgment whatsoever. While some people spontaneously looked into her case in the '70s, '80s and '90s, Claudette was not officially recognized until the mid-2000s. In 2005, she spoke for the first time to Booker T. Washington high school students.

Colvin was born in 1939 to young parents but was left to be raised by her great-aunt and great-uncle. She lived in a small town outside of Montgomery. She was regarded as a smart and inquisitive young girl and started to resent segregation from an early age. In high school, Claudette started to learn about black history and became resentful that her constitutional right to equal protection under the law was being violated. This anger precipitated her resisting giving up her seat to a white woman. Her actions earned her many friends and enemies and inspired the black community. Had it not been for her, the energy that sparked the Montgomery bus boycott may not have existed and with it much of the energy that set off the Civil Rights movement.

The book has two major climax points, Claudette's resistance on the Montgomery bus and Claudette's testimony in Browder v. Gale. The birth of the Civil Rights movement is also a major feature of the story, but its rise and trials did not directly correlate with Claudette's. Eventually, the movement left her in the dust and she served quietly as a nurse for decades until she was rediscovered. The book covers her life in less than two hundred pages and is clearly intended for younger high school students interested in learning about the true origins of the Civil Rights movement.



Chapters 1-3, Jim Crow and the Detested Number Ten, Coot,

Chapters 1-3, Jim Crow and the Detested Number Ten, Coot, Summary

Chapter one opens the story in Claudette Colvin's words. She was four years old when she found out what happened when blacks acted up against whites. Some white boys came up to her and wanted to see her hands. They touched each other's hands and the boys laughed. When Claudette's mother saw them, she came up to Claudette and slapped her across the face and told her that she's not supposed to touch white people. The white boy's mother agreed. She learned to never touch white people again.

The author's voice takes over. Claudette Colvin grew up black in central Alabama during the 1940s and 1950s. Jim Crow controlled her life and all other blacks with her. Races were heavily segregated in all aspects of life. Jim Crow laws also kept blacks poor. In 1950, sixty percent of black women in Montgomery were maids for white families and seventy-five percent of black men did unskilled labor. Blacks made half as much as whites. The only professional jobs were being a pastor or teaching school. Blacks and whites could not marry, play on the same sports teams or even swim together.

Segregation laws made a lot of difference on the bus because blacks have to sit in the back. Blacks depended on buses to reach their white employers. In Montgomery, if seats were full and a white person came in, a black person had to get up. It did not matter how old, sick or young the black person was or how many blacks sat in a seat. This practice was actually against city bus law. Tough men commanded the buses. Some carried guns. There were no black drivers, and blacks were often referred to as "cows" and "apes". Sometimes blacks stood up to drivers, but they often had to pay fines. This happened even to Northern blacks who visited the South. Incidents happened from time to time. In 1952, a man named Brooks just went through the front rather than the rear door, and after refusing to go out and come back in the other way, was shot by a police officer who had been quickly called after the incident began.

Change was coming, however. On May 17th, 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court, outlawed racial segregation in public schools. Black students were emboldened and one of these students was fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin. Around 3:30 pm on March 2nd of 1955, this skinny girl with glasses got on the Highland Gardens bus with friends behind the white section. She would resist.

Chapter two begins in Claudette's voice. Her birth name was Claudette Austin and she was born in Birmingham on September 5th, 1939. Her father's name was C.P. Austin and her mother's was Mary Jane Gadson. Her father was often away. When she was a baby she went to live with her great-aunt, Mary Ann Colvin, and great-uncle, Q.P.



Colvin, in a country town called Pine Level, close to Montgomery. They were the two people she called Mom and Dad. She was happy with them. Her young sister, Delphine, came to live with them as well. People thought she was smart and she asked about everything. She was most curious about how whites came to rule them. She was taught that whites thought they were a special race, but she did not believe it. Pine Level was a small town, but Claudette felt at home. She would sleep over at friends' houses often and was educated in a little, red school house. She loved school. She knew lots of white people. Some of them nicknamed her "Coot" to demean her. Claudette was very religious and played church with her friends.

When Claudette turned eight, her great-aunt inherited a house in Montgomery and they moved into a suburb of the city. Claudette became used to city life. Claudette shared a bedroom with Delphine. Claudette spent a lot of time saying her prayers and enjoyed listening to the radio. She also enjoyed going downtown, but it also made her angry because while they could shop in white stores, blacks couldn't try on clothes. She was barred from doing lots of other things as well. The author notes that Claudette did well in junior high. The summer of 1952, Delphine came down with polio, and it also hit a number of other black boys and girls. Her parents didn't allow her to see Delphine in her condition. Claudette did not see her until she was dead. Claudette then started to question everything about God because she didn't understand why God would take Delphine away.

In chapter three, two weeks after Delphine died, Claudette tried to focus on her studies at Booker T. Washington High. The city provided few funds for the schools. Claudette found her intelligence an asset, but she had light skin and straight hair, which made it hard for her to be popular because she was "almost white". She felt lonely, particularly after Delphine's death. Claudette notes that after Delphine died she started to become very sensitive, particularly when blacks put themselves down. She felt like blacks hated themselves.

Another disaster happened in November when Claudette's neighbor, Jeremiah Reeves, was arrested for raping a white housewife. Reeves confessed and then the police expanded the charges. Blacks were furious. An all-white jury sentenced Reeves to die. Even if Reeves was guilty, he had not killed anyone. The verdict made many of the students radical, as Reeves had been admired. He had even turned himself in. Claudette started to pay attention to social causes. Claudette notes that Reeves's arrest changed her life and she started thinking about racism. The NAACP was asked to take the case; Claudette heard of them for the first time then. She became angry for Jeremiah and stayed angry a long time. In 1954, the Supreme Court threw out his conviction. At that time, Reeves said his confession was forced and said he was innocent for the rest of his life. But following a two-day trial, a new all-white jury sent Reeves to death again. The fury among blacks rose again.

Claudette was radicalized by a schoolteacher named Miss Geraldine Nesbitt. She had an M.A. in education from Columbia. She was a hard teacher of English and used literature to teach about light. She taught the Constitution and they would read the Bible from a literary point of view. Nesbitt brought her own books from home. Many blacks



were worried about the coming integration with whites and didn't want it to happen. Claudette wanted an integrated world and thought that with whites at schools, the school would get more money. Nesbitt taught Claudette about black history, that blacks had a culture before then. Claudette grew in confidence and changed her views. She started to believe that race had no moral significance. She wanted to liberate her people after reading about Harriet Tubman. In 1955, Nesbitt taught Negro History Week and Claudette learned about massive injustice.

Chapters 1-3, Jim Crow and the Detested Number Ten, Coot, Analysis

Chapters one through three prepare the reader for Claudette Colvin's struggle against racial oppression in the 1950s American South. The importance of this book is that it informs the reader about the first woman to stridently resist bus segregation in Montgomery. Most people believe that this woman was Rosa Parks, but in fact, Claudette Colvin was the first, though the Civil Rights movement would decide to play up Rosa Parks and downplay Claudette as she was a less sympathetic figure. The author of the book, Phillip Hoose, sets out to correct this misconception.

Chapter one reviews the social situation of blacks in Alabama in the 1940s and 1950s. It explains the structure of the Jim Crow laws and where they originated. The point is to explain how blacks were degraded, humiliated and oppressed by Jim Crow, which segregated their lives from whites in nearly every respect. Blacks were largely employed by whites, however. As a result, they had to take white buses into white areas of town. They were forced to sit in the back of buses and, what's worse, if the bus was full and a white person boarded, blacks in Montgomery were forced to get up and move. Claudette grew up in this environment and would be part of the movement to change it.

Chapters two and three explain Claudette's early life, how she grew up with her great-uncle and great-aunt and was very religious as a child. Her faith was shaken when her sister, Delphine, died of polio. At school, she performed well but often found herself lonely and sensitive as a result of her sister's death. Claudette began to find meaning in her life when she learned of how oppressed blacks were and particularly after the imprisonment and death sentence of Jeremiah Reeves, a black teenager accused of raping six white women. Even though the Supreme Court overturned the verdict of the first trial, an all-white jury sentenced him to death again. As a result of this trial, Claudette became radicalized and started to learn and read about black oppression in school. This education sets the stage for the plot of the book—Claudette's challenge to the bus segregation system and the role of her challenge in the evolution and success of the Civil Rights movement. Claudette, at the end of chapter three, is ready to revolt against her oppressors.



Chapters 4-6,

Chapters 4-6, Summary

In chapter four, on March 2nd, 1955, Claudette got out of school early. She sat in the front of the bus since there were no whites there. As the bus moved forward, whites began to fill up the seats until a white woman was standing up in the white section and she was sitting down. Claudette notes that the driver said he needed those seats. The woman was not elderly, so Claudette stayed put. But the other three girls moved. Claudette wanted to rebel after studying the Constitution. She decided she would not take it. The white woman would not sit down in the aisle across from her. Blacks had to be behind whites. The driver then yelled again, but Claudette kept quiet. At the next stop, the driver had a policeman come arrest her but a pregnant black woman, Mrs. Hamilton, had sat down next to her and also refused to move. When some men got off the bus, Mrs. Hamilton moved but Claudette was alone and still refused. The transit policeman had no authority to make an arrest, but once they reached the next stop, two Montgomery policemen came aboard. Claudette notes that she started crying but maintained that sitting in that spot was her right. The two policemen then dragged her off the bus, and Claudette went limp, refusing to fight back.

On the police ride, the cops ridiculed her and called her a "nigger bitch". They said they were taking her to a woman's prison in Atmore, despite the fact that she was fifteen. Claudette was placed in the city jail without the chance to make a phone call. She prayed the while time. Her schoolmates on the bus told her mother about Claudette and Claudette's mother got the local pastor and they went to the station. Claudette notes that the pastor, Reverend Johnson, bailed her out. On the way home, Claudette felt happy and proud. But she was still scared of being hurt. Her family stayed up for fear of lynching. The Reverend was proud of her for standing up for freedom and said she brought the revolution to Montgomery.

In chapter five, the news of Claudette's resistance spread quickly. Black people were very proud of her. Jo Ann Robinson, an English professor at Alabama State College was impressed. She had confronted segregation herself and was an active member of the Women's Political Council, a large group of professional black women in Montgomery. Some were professors, though Claudette's teacher, Geraldine Nesbitt, was also a member. Robinson remembered being bullied by a bus driver and started to collect stories of abuse. She and her organize started to push for fairer bus rules and threatened boycotts otherwise. The idea of a bus boycott was growing in popularity among local blacks because seventy-five percent of bus riders were black. But no one had the gall to do it yet.

Claudette was now the center of attention wherever she traveled. Many loved her, but others were angry that she made things harder on others. Claudette faced criminal charges, however, and it was not clear what would happen to her. Her family started to work their connections and they found a good civil rights lawyer, Mr. E. D. Nixon. Black



leaders were quickly organized, and among them was the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a young Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They met with the police commissioner, but he refused to drop the charges. But black leaders felt hopeful anyway. In the days before the trial, Nixon called Rosa Parks, a quiet, forty-two-year-old seamstress who was secretary of the Montgomery NAACP. She led the NAACP's youth group and had tried to organize young blacks to struggle for civil rights. Her meetings were poorly attended until Claudette got involved. Claudette met Rosa Parks and it turned out they were well connected.

Claudette's lawyer was a young man. Fred Gray was only twenty-four and just out of law school. He was committed to destroying segregation. He had lunch with Rosa Parks almost every day. Gray met with Claudette's family after the event and took notes and urged the family to consider the hazard of contesting the charges. She would be challenging Jim Crow and could suffer violence. Claudette did not hesitate and the Colvins would not back down. Gray organized the other kids on the bus to testify and black leaders rallied behind her. Her hearing was on March 18th, 1955 and Claudette was confident. She faced three charges: breaking the segregation law, disturbing the peace and assaulting a police officer. Despite an excellent defense, the judge convicted Claudette of all charges and put her on probation. Claudette was furious and sobbed. Claudette felt like a criminal and would have a police record for the rest of her life. She was also on probation. She had not broken the law or assaulted a police officer. At school, more children turned against her and she did not expect it.

In chapter six, the word of Claudette's conviction spread and blacks were ready to rebel. The bus boycott continued to gain steam but many were worried about making Claudette the face of the movement as she was so young. People thought she was too emotional and feisty. People disagreed. Claudette never knew about the conflict. The community, however, did raise money to pay for her lawyers. On May 6th, 1955, Gray went to the Montgomery Circuit Court to appeal Claudette's conviction and Judge Eugene Carter dropped all the charges, save the one for assaulting a police officer. This was depressing as there was nothing left to appeal constitutionally. Everyone but Gray lost interest in an appeal and Claudette still had a criminal record. As Claudette finished high school, attitudes became increasingly negative. Claudette stopped having her hair straightened out of rebellion to stop looking white. She had a boyfriend at the time who was upset but she told him that he looked "African". This phrase was not used at the time.

Claudette became youth secretary of the NAACP. She went to church when she could and stayed overnight at Rosa's. Rosa was withdrawn, but her mother and Claudette connected. Many of the kids in her group became bored with Claudette, however. At a summer visit to Rosa's, she met a black man around ten years older than she was, separated from his wife. He was kind to her and admired her. By the time she was sixteen, at the end of the summer, Claudette returned to school for her senior year. Many of the black leaders kept looking for the "right" person to represent the boycott. On October 21st, Mary Louise Smith, another young black teenager, defied the same law and was arrested and jailed but there was no newspaper publicity. People kept talking, though. Rumors destroyed Claudette's reputation, though. She was also



branded "unfit" to be the face of a movement. Rosa Parks and Fred Gray kept meeting and tried to learn from Claudette's case. People were impatient with segregation, and now a year and a half after *Brown v. Board of Education*, a handful of young people had stood up against the law. Claudette and Mary Louise Smith had let the cat out of the bag.

Chapters 4-6, Analysis

Chapters four, five and six present a story arc bent in an unusual way. Chapter four is a point of climax in the book, but it only signals a change in Claudette's life that will in turn start the build-up to another climax in the book. Thus, chapter four is a sort of climax for Claudette, whereas future chapters will show how her actions led to the outbreak of the Civil Rights Movement, which will be a climax in the story for the black community as a whole. It starts to emerge in these chapters that Claudette had great courage but was not properly recognized for it. It was Claudette who first fought the segregation laws, and it was Claudette who suffered having a blemish on her criminal record that would keep her from getting many ordinary jobs after high school. Claudette endures the taunting and hatred of her classmates who did not want to suffer for their rights as she did. But Claudette remained strong despite it all.

One of the most fascinating features of these three chapters are the presentation of Rosa Parks. Most presentations of Parks are glowing, treating her almost like a saint. But in this story, Parks is a nice woman but a long-time activist with the NAACP. Her activism was planned out in advance and in response to Claudette's activity. She is seen as emotionally withdrawn, and that while she cared about the Civil Rights Movement, she did not form a warm connection with Claudette. It becomes clear that the author believes that Claudette was wrongly treated and that Parks in some sense "stole" the credit that was due Claudette as a result of her activism. Most of the blame falls on the leaders of the black community in Montgomery. They were so focused on picking a sympathetic "face" of their movement that they forgot Claudette's accomplishments after only a few months' time. The thought was that Claudette was too "young" and too "emotional" and uncontrolled to inspire the proper degree of sympathy with the Southern and American public.

While Claudette endured ridicule and was unaware of the plans of the leaders of the black community, she still continued to develop as a character. She responded to her mistreatment by developing a harder and stronger personality that refused to conform to norms of acting white in the black community. She was determined to continue her education. At the same time, the author shows how the Civil Rights Movement derived much of its energy from her courage and is growing despite forgetting her.



Chapters 7-8,

Chapters 7-8, Summary

In chapter seven, on December 2nd, 1955, tens of thousands of black citizens of Montgomery signed on to the bus boycott. Jo Ann Robinson wrote up the boycott pledge. This happened just after Rosa Parks was arrested the day before. When Parks was arrested, she left peacefully and she was permitted to call family. She was only charged with disorderly conduct. She had only to pay a ten-dollar fine, but the black community was angrier than they had been before due to what had happened to Claudette.

Parks was in her early forties and was married. She was known as an activist in the NAACP and worked as a respected seamstress. She was light-skinned, and her popularity cut across classes. She was also calm and "safe". Claudette had been none of these things and she had also recently become pregnant outside of marriage, which made her political radioactive at that time. Claudette reports that she knew almost nothing about sex. She only had sex once and did not have an abortion because it was illegal. Claudette just kept quiet but she started showing too early and was kicked out of school. She then noticed that her name was misspelled on the bus boycott note. No one paid attention to her and she felt left out. She had the energy. It hurt her.

On the morning of Monday, December 5th, Martin Luther King, Jr. watched as the buses were empty. Only eight black passengers rode any bus at all. That night a celebratory rally was held. Thousands of people were there, and King gave the main speech. He gave his famous words that "We are determined here in Montgomery to work and fight until justice runs down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream". The church was rocked and the Montgomery bus boycott was born. Claudette, though, had stayed away from the meeting. She was depressed and lonely. Her family took her to Birmingham so she could start school under her legal name, Claudette Austin. Her biological parents would now be her parents and they were very strict. Claudette was happy that the movement had started and she wanted to be part of it. When she left Montgomery, people said, though, that she was crazy. But when she was alone she had time to contemplate her life. However, she was only in Birmingham two weeks. She went home despite being pregnant because she wanted to be involved.

In chapter eight, 1956 arrived and Montgomery was full of excitement. Reporters were covering the protests and the boycott entered its second months. Black leaders pushed for modest changes, but the city officials refused to give in. Mass meetings were still held and Dr. King encouraged the people to be peaceful and loving. In the meanwhile, the leaders of the movement, as part of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), created an alternative transport system of pickup stations and cars. It was perfectly voluntary and ran on solidarity. However, the cars did not have enough seats. Many people walked miles to work, even some of the elderly. People made many sacrifices.



When Claudette got back to Montgomery, she participated. She read the papers and watched the news. The whites who employed her mother were sympathetic. Claudette had more family duties since her mother was gone so often. Claudette often went to mass meetings on the other side of town where people would not recognize her. She was impressed by Dr. King, but she was still ostracized for her pregnancy. By late January, the City Lines bus company was losing a massive amount of money. They had to shut down bus routes and lay off drivers. Desperate, Mayor Gayle had the police crackdown on black activism, such as arresting Dr. King. Attacks increased on black leaders and protesters were scared that whites would never give in.

At the same time, Gray and other NAACP lawyers decided to raise the issue of the constitutionality of Jim Crow in federal court, as state courts would be unsympathetic. This would be a "second front" for the movement. Gray started searching for a plaintiff and Rosa Parks was ruled out. Claudette Colvin was on Gray's short list. Claudette remembers being surprised that he called. Gray came to visit them. Claudette's parents gave permission for her to participate in the suit, as she was still a minor. Gray told her that she would be in danger, but Claudette was not scared. Her family and Reverend Johnson supported her.

Claudette's baby was born in Montgomery on March 29th, 1956 and his name was Raymond. She had only six weeks after Raymond's birth to prepare for the lawsuit. She kept in shape, rehearsed and prayed. She was excited to give her speech and was even more excited to fight for justice.

Chapters 7-8, Analysis

Chapters seven and eight in one sense start the plot build-up all over again. Claudette has been ignored and the Civil Rights movement was being born as the Montgomery bus boycott was being planned. At the beginning of chapter seven, Rosa Parks' arrest is explained, as is the bus boycott that followed soon thereafter. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is introduced. But Claudette had been hidden away and forgotten, if for no other reason than that she had become pregnant out of wedlock and was therefore not only a disgrace to the black community but no longer even close to a suitable face for the movement. Claudette felt alone and hurt by Rosa Parks's accomplishments and the way the black community rallied around her. But she had to worry about other things, like being ostracized and kicked out of school and about how she would take care of her baby. After going to Birmingham and returning home after two weeks, she was determined to stand with the movement anyway. As the Montgomery boycott continued and increased social tensions, Claudette was alone.

An important element of this chapter is that the author clearly represents Rosa Parks as upstaging Claudette and the author seems to blame the black community for ignoring Claudette for bad reasons. This is an important element of the entire book, the idea that Claudette was unfairly ignored, that she never got credit for her courage.



Chapter eight, however, gives Claudette another chance. Her old lawyer gave her the chance to be a plaintiff in a suit against the city of Montgomery in federal court. Claudette was happy and excited to get to be a part of the movement again. So now the plot builds, as Claudette's story and the Montgomery movement's story increase in intensity and importance.



Chapter 9-10/Epilogue, Browder v. Gale, Rage in Montgomery, History's Door

Chapter 9-10/Epilogue, Browder v. Gale, Rage in Montgomery, History's Door Summary

Chapter nine opens on May 11th, 1956. It is Claudette's court date. Her family takes her to the courthouse and she and Fred Gray are greeted by a large crowd of supporters. It was the 159th day since the Montgomery bus boycott began; the lawsuit gave the crowd hope. In the meanwhile, the segregationists continued to resist changing anything for the boycott. Many singled out Martin Luther King to blame for "stirring up trouble" and the like. He had been attacked several times. Segregationists had also used an obscure anti-boycott law to have many black leaders arrested, including King and Parks. The youngest of the three federal judges was Frank M. Johnson, a young man from Alabama who people assumed was on the side of segregation. The other two were justices Richard Rives and Seybourn Lynne. Claudette was one of four plaintiffs.

Gray began his argument that segregation violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. He would present each of his plaintiffs, one by one. Mrs. Browder was first, then Susie McDonald and Mary Louise Smith. They all testified to their poor treatment and would not admit the prosecution's accusation that they were all King's puppets. When Claudette went up to the stand, she was nervous. She was last, as her story was the most powerful. Gray questioned her on her story quickly and then the prosecutor, Walter Knabe, started to question her. He pursued the same strategy with her, but she stood strong. She had become the star witness. At lunch, she was able to meet Mary Louise, and they liked each other a lot. After lunch, the Mayor and city commissioners testified that segregation laws were required for city order. But Judge Rives replied that one cannot command one person to give up their Constitutional rights so that others won't commit a crime. When Claudette left the courthouse, everyone told her that she did great. Her parents were proud of her and she was proud of herself.

In chapter ten, the judges then withdrew to deliberate. Johnson was convinced the law was unconstitutional. Justice Rives agreed, but Justice Lynne did not. He said the Supreme Court had spoken to this issue in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. But Lynne was outnumbered and the federal court abolished segregated seating. The decision took ten minutes and was announced on June 19th, 1956. Mayor Gayle said the city would appeal the case. But protesters rejoiced. The boycott could end and the case would not be considered by the Supreme Court until fall. The court quickly began to receive hate mail. Claudette heard about the court decision and was happy, but she was still a teenager with a baby and all alone. She needed support, but no one helped her. She was shunned due to her pregnancy and the fact that her baby was light-skinned, but Colvin was not ashamed of herself. She just had made a mistake.



Through the summer of 1956, the city officials tried to crush the boycott and singled out Dr. King. The NAACP sent reinforcements, but King was found guilty of trumped up charges and was sentenced to spend a year in hard labor. Churches started to be bombed and violence erupted. But on November 13th, the Supreme Court upheld *Browder v. Gayle*. They won. Gayle vowed to hold out until the end, but on December 20th, 381 after the boycott began, there was an order to integrate the buses. Gayle relented and the boycott ended. Montgomery blacks rejoiced. But on the first symbolic bus ride, Claudette was nowhere to be found.

Racial prejudice did not end and many whites revolted. Montgomery nearly became a battle zone. Claudette was afraid, but she needed work and the money. No one would help her or hire her. She was afraid, but one day Reverend Ralph Abernathy invited her to a private reception. There were a few people there, including the Kings and the Abernathys. She got to meet King for the first time and he complimented her. But no one paid her bills or protected her. She felt good anyway.

Epilogue: It is now 2005, and Claudette Colvin is speaking to students at Booker T. Washington Magnet High School in Montgomery, Alabama. Two hundred people listened to Colvin speak. In 1957, Claudette passed her G.E.D. and went to college but dropped out after a year. She followed her sister to New York City, leaving Raymond with her mother. In 1960, she had a second son named Randy and started going back and forth between New York and Alabama until 1960. She was a maid but did not have enough money. She became a nurse at a Catholic hospital in New York, finally, and worked there for many years. During the 1960s, Claudette supported the civil rights movement but stayed on the sidelines. She told no one of her past. She watched Rosa Parks's fame grow and wondered if anyone remembered her. But in 1975, a Birmingham newspaper reporter, Frank Sikora, contacted her after doing library research. He wrote a story about her, and then several more stories were written after that. Colvin was still presented as an immature teenager and people had said she was pregnant when she was arrested (she was not). But in 2005, she accepted a ticket home to speak to high school students. The recognition made her feel wonderful and that young people wanted to know about her. She knows that segregation isn't dead, even though the signs were destroyed. They forced whites to take another view and they changed their attitudes. Colvin thinks Parks was the right person to represent the movement at the time, but she made a statement that Parks probably could not have made. She made the first cry for justice.

Chapter 9-10/Epilogue, *Browder v. Gale*, Rage in Montgomery, History's Door Analysis

Chapters nine and ten and the epilogue reach the second climax and then play out the denouement. Chapter nine is the story of *Browder v. Gale*, the federal court case that led to the end of bus segregation in Montgomery. Fred Gray was the defense attorney and he had four plaintiffs, one of which was Claudette Colvin. At the time, Colvin was still sixteen, but she gave her testimony with course. The prosecution tried to get Claudette and the other plaintiffs to admit that King was manipulating them, but



Claudette would not budge. Chapter ten begins with the deliberations of the justices. In large part due to Claudette's testimony, two of the federal court justices ruled in favor of the defense which made the bus boycott illegal and unconstitutional. The bus boycott continued as the mayor and other city leaders fought the black community's pressure to enforce the boycott. Many people were targeted with violence, but over a year after the boycott began and King was in jail, the Supreme Court affirmed the ruling in *Browder v. Gale*. The boycott could end and the buses would be integrated.

It is here that the author starts to focus on a major theme of the book, Claudette Colvin's mistreatment. The author points out that Claudette was basically ignored save for one private meeting with King and other civil rights' leaders. She was alone and pregnant and had no help finding a job. The author notes in the epilogue that as Claudette's life went on she kept quiet about her role in the Civil Rights movement. She was rediscovered in 1975 and her importance increased, but only very, very slowly. It was not until the late 2000s that Colvin started to be recognized explicitly. It becomes clear that the author's point in writing the book was to buttress this rediscovery and have Claudette properly remembered for her courage and bravery. While Colvin admits that Rosa Parks was a better representative of the movement at the time, she still wishes she had gotten her due.



Characters

Claudette Colvin

Claudette Colvin is the main character of *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. The entire point of the book is to publicize her life and her important achievements on behalf of the Civil Rights movement. She was born on September 5th, 1939 near Montgomery, Alabama. Claudette grew up a very inquisitive and head-strong young woman. When she started to learn about black history at Booker T. Washington High School in Montgomery, she began to resent racial segregation laws, especially the bus segregation laws that were especially demeaning to blacks in Montgomery.

On March 2nd, 1955, she refused to give up her seat to a white woman and she was arrested and taken to jail. She was charged with crimes as a result, including the crime of police brutality. A young lawyer named Fred Gray helped to get the charges removed insofar as he could, though this was not entirely successful. After her trial, the black community became somewhat split over her importance. Some were angry with her for rocking the boat, but most were happy with her courage. However, eventually Claudette became pregnant with her son Raymond, and since she was not married, she was deemed an unfit representative of the Civil Rights movement. The author clearly regards this as an injustice. Claudette was largely forgotten until *Browder v. Gale*, when she testified about her experience with the police. This led to the overturning of the city's segregation laws, but she was quickly ignored again, this time for some thirty years, until she was rediscovered.

The Black Community in Montgomery

While there are many minor characters in the book, none of them add up to the full force of the black community in Montgomery. They are often treated as an actor in themselves, as having attitudes, reactions, emotional states, perseverance and judgments. For instances, the black community is described as being energized by Claudette's resistance of bus segregation. But it is also described as becoming enraged with Montgomery city officials who enforced segregation. The black community was organized around the bus boycott, for instance. Together, "they" managed to continue the boycott for over a year. Similarly, "they" organized a system of alternative transportation through carpooling that would not be available otherwise.

The most significant feature of the black community in Montgomery is its complex relationship with Claudette. At first, many blacks were proud and excited by Claudette's courage and willingness to fight oppression. While some blacks, particularly her fellow high school students, ostracized Claudette, she was widely seen as a hero. Complications arose when Claudette became pregnant outside of marriage. Many in the black community shunned her, not merely because this was seen as immoral behavior, but because Claudette no longer seemed like an appropriate symbol of the Civil Rights



movement. She would not be sympathetic to whites, the people that the movement was trying to influence. While Claudette was brought back into the spotlight for *Browder v. Gale*, she was quickly forgotten again until the early twenty-first century.

Claudette's Parents

Claudette was raised by her great-aunt and great-uncle, who were always kind and supportive of her.

Fred Gray

A young black lawyer who represented Claudette in both of her court cases.

Rosa Parks

A reserved seamstress and secretary of the local NAACP, Parks was a friendly acquaintance of Claudette's but became the face of the Civil Rights movement in her place for resisting bus segregation nine months after Claudette.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Then a young black preacher rising in prominence who led the Montgomery bus boycott and only partially recognized Claudette's achievements.

Mayor Gayle

The segregationist mayor of Montgomery who was an unrelenting opponent of the black community and the bus boycott.

Mary Louise Smith

Another young black teenager who, like Claudette, resisted segregation on Montgomery buses and was also arrested.

The Bus Drivers

Many Montgomery cruelly and arbitrarily imposed segregation laws. Some, however, were opposed to Jim Crow laws.

The NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which was responsible for organizing support for the bus boycott and for the Civil Rights movement generally.

Raymond

Claudette's son.



Objects/Places

Pine Level

The small Alabama town where Claudette was born.

Montgomery

The central Alabama city, which is the main setting of the book.

Montgomery Buses

Claudette and many other blacks rode the bus to work and school in Montgomery. The segregation in the buses was so egregious that many blacks rebelled, though Claudette was first among them.

Jim Crow Laws

The laws which imposed racial segregation in the American south.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Montgomery blacks refused to ride the buses in Montgomery for over 380 days in order to protest bus segregation.

Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s church where many civil rights meetings were held.

The Montgomery City Jail

Claudette spent time in the Montgomery city jail, just as many major Civil Rights leaders did.

The Civil Rights movement

The movement for racial equality in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.



Browder v. Gale

The court case that ended bus segregation in Montgomery.

Brown v. Board of Education

The famous 1954 court case that ended racial segregation in public schools.

Illegitimacy

Having a child out of wedlock, which was morally condemned in Claudette's youth. She was therefore relegated to the sidelines during the Civil Rights era.



Themes

The Fight for Justice

Claudette Colvin: *Twice Toward Justice* seems to be first and foremost a story about the beginnings and successes of the Civil Rights movement. It is particularly interesting for its presentation of the pre-Rosa Parks and pre-Montgomery boycott nature of the Civil Rights movement. Apparently, members of the Montgomery NAACP had opposed bus segregation for some time and felt that it was a particularly egregious form of segregation. The NAACP had been against it for the entire twentieth century, up to the 1950s, when they helped to end it. Further, many members of the Montgomery NAACP were interested in provoking a reaction from the city in order to make blacks look like the victims of oppression. Indeed they were, but many will be surprised that, say, Rosa Parks's resistance was not spontaneous but planned out in advanced after Claudette's spontaneous resistance.

The book also proceeds through the Montgomery bus boycott, which is a very inspiring story. So is the story of the court case, *Browder v. Gale*, that eventually led to the ending of the bus boycott when the bus segregation laws were ruled unconstitutional. Author Philip Hoose goes out of his way to play up Claudette's role in the movement and the way in which she was conveniently used when Civil Rights leaders needed her but conveniently ignored when they did not. Nonetheless, the story of Claudette's role in the Civil Rights movement is the main theme of the book.

Unjust Neglect

Claudette Colvin: *Twice Toward Justice* has two main almost opposing themes. While the theme concerning the fight for justice is powerful, uplifting and hopeful, there is a counter narrative where Claudette is only given a role in the Civil Rights movement when it was convenient for Civil Rights leaders, but that she was neglected at other times due to various stigmas that were placed upon her by, say, her conviction and her pregnancy. The author, Philip Hoose, is expressly of the mind that Claudette was unjustly neglected by the black community and that Rosa Parks was somewhat of a usurper and a fraud.

One of the most surprising features of the book is the author's presentation of Rosa Parks as a somewhat cold, upper-middle class, light-skinned woman who he paints as a bit more "white" than Claudette, implying that Civil Rights leaders at the time were looking for leaders that seemed less threatening to whites. The author also focuses in drawing out Claudette's impressions of Parks. She was somewhat resentful, but at the time of the interviews, she understood that Parks was perhaps a better face for the movement.



The author also seems to condemn the Civil Rights movement's leaders for not protecting Claudette when she couldn't get a job and when she was pregnant. It is clear from the text that the author believes the stigma placed upon Claudette for having a child out of wedlock was too high, and that even if Claudette could not be a face of the Civil Rights movement, that the leaders could have still provided for her.

Loneliness

When one opens the pages of *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*, the reader may expect to find a simple story about an important forgotten figure in the Civil Rights movement. In many ways, this is a perfectly appropriate expectation. But while this is indeed a major theme of the book, as one can see above, it also leaves out a surprisingly forceful and prominent theme in the book. Not only is the book focused on the fight for social justice and pointing out and rectifying the unjust neglect of Claudette, it also communicates an almost constant sense of loneliness within Claudette.

Claudette felt somewhat lonely from an early age. She was largely abandoned by her parents to her great-uncle and great-aunt. She was pretty nerdy in school and so was never very well connected socially. She could be stubborn and resistant to authority as well, which sometimes alienated her from others. But her first major point of loneliness was the result of her rebellion on the Montgomery city bus. Claudette often felt alone due to the schoolchildren who were angry at her for stirring up trouble. She felt alone when she was not protected by the Civil Rights leaders against the charges leveled against her by the city and she felt alone when she couldn't get a job as a result of her conviction.

Claudette felt even more alone, however, as the Civil Rights leaders ignored her once she became pregnant. The stigma placed upon out of wedlock births was very high in the black community in those days, and many were afraid that Claudette had made herself an inappropriate face of the Civil Rights movement. Even after her crucial testimony in *Browder v. Gale*, she felt alone as she had been forgotten.



Style

Point of View

Claudette: *Twice Toward Justice* is a combination of two points of view, the first and the third person. The majority perspective is that of author Philip Hoose. He tells Claudette's story from a largely impartial perspective, structuring the real-world events into a narrative that engages the reader. He also presents bits of historical background and explanations of key ideas in text boxes and captions underneath pictures throughout the story. His point of view is also that of someone who is taking a retrospective look on the past. In other words, the point of view is largely looking towards the past. The most important aspect of Hoose's point of view is that it is not impartial or neutral. Hoose is clearly siding with Claudette against those who ignored her, and he is critical of the Civil Rights leaders for not taking better care of Claudette when she was alone, pregnant and poor.

The second point of view is that of Claudette herself. Hoose interviewed Claudette many, many times and constructs bits of monologue from those interviews to give Claudette's answers to his questions a narrative structure that Hoose can interweave throughout the book. Claudette's judgment of the Civil Rights leaders is less harsh than that of Hoose. She does hold it against the Civil Rights movement that it largely abandoned and forgot her. However, she understands that Rosa Parks was a better face for the movement at that time and in that culture.

Setting

Claudette Colvin: *Twice Toward Justice* is set in the mid-1950s largely in Montgomery, Alabama. The beginning of the book focuses largely on Claudette Colvin's home near Montgomery, Pine Level, and her eventual move into the city. As a child, she inhabited a small number of places, including her home, a local church, her school and a few recreational places. When she moved to Montgomery, there was a bit more to do, but one of the most important settings within Montgomery became a transitional place she often found herself in—the buses of the Montgomery transportation system. These buses were highly segregated, and in some ways they constitute the most important setting of the book, since it is here where Claudette helped to create the Civil Rights movement in her act of rebellion. Further, it is here where segregation was first broken down after it was ended in public schools.

Other important settings within Montgomery include Claudette's home, where she was often alone and lonely, Booker T. Washington High School, where Claudette went to school and where she was ridiculed and ostracized both for her rebellion and her pregnancy, and Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the church pastored by Martin Luther King, Jr. and where many of the protests for Civil Rights were organized. Perhaps the second and third most important settings are the federal courthouse and the city jail,



respectively. Claudette and many Civil Rights leaders were placed in the city jail, and it is in the federal courthouse where Claudette gave her testimony in *Browder v. Gale*.

Language and Meaning

Claudette Colvin: *Twice Toward Justice* is clearly written for a young adult audience. The issues discussed in the text seem a bit too complex for children under ten but perfectly appropriate for children in their late teenage years. Accordingly, the prose is simple and straightforward. There is no real subtlety. Instead, the language largely reports the events of the story but also covers Claudette's inner emotional reactions to various events in her life during her childhood and participation in the Civil Rights movement. However, there are two issues concerning the language and meaning of the text that should be noted.

First, the text is structured in three distinct ways. The first and most dominant form of language is that of the author, who explains the story in impartial terms, proceeding chronologically through events. The second form of language is the relatively simpler prose of Claudette's speech excerpted from a long series of interviews. Finally, there is language in the text boxes and captions littered throughout the book intended to explain key concepts or important aspects of historical background to the reader.

Second, the text has an important tonal feature that must be noted. While the text is mostly positive and excited, albeit peppered with a recognition of the tragedy of racial prejudice, it only becomes truly negative when it speaks of Claudette's treatment by the black community. It is quite clear from the language itself that the author believes that Claudette was mistreated.

Structure

Claudette Colvin: *Twice Toward Justice* has a very simple structure, appropriate for the young teenage audience it appears to have been written for. While the book is not for a young child, it is for people young enough such that complex sentences should be largely avoided and that need pictures and captions to stay interested in reading the book. Each chapter is full of pictures, asides in large text boxes, transcribed comments from Colvin spoken in simple prose. This is not to say that the book shies away from controversy or serious social and political matters. Rather, it is only to say that it is clear that the attention span of the intended reader social group is low.

The book is structured into two broad parts. Part One is the story of the first stride towards justice. Called "First Cry", it is the story of Claudette's youth and the way in which her youth prepared her for that climactic moment when she refused to yield her seat to a white woman. It also explains what happened to her afterward and how she felt abandoned by the black community once they discovered that she was pregnant. Towards the end of Part One, Claudette is being accepted again as she prepared to testify in the landmark court case, *Browder v. Gale*. Part Two, "Playing for Keeps", discusses Claudette's second stride toward justice and its aftermath. It shows her

testifying in *Browder v. Gale*, the results of the trial and the future successes of the Civil Rights movement.



Quotes

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
Chap. 1, p. 1

"I swear to the Lord I still can't see Why Democracy means Everybody but me."
Chap. 1, p. 2

"To me, God loved everyone. Why would He curse just us?"
Chap. 2, p. 11

"'Radical' simply means 'grasping things at the root'."
Chap. 3, p. 21

"For some reason we seemed to hate ourselves."
Chap. 3, p. 22

"Early in life, I had learned that if you want something, you had better make some noise."
Chap. 4, p. 29

"She ain't got to do nothin' but stay black and die."
Chap. 4, p. 30

"And I think you just brought the revolution to Montgomery."
Chap. 4, p. 35

"Now I was a criminal."
Chap. 5, p. 45

"Claudette and now Mary Louise Smith had shown through their courage that at least some young people were ready to act."
Chap. 6, p. 55

"I don't mean to take anything away from Mrs. Parks, but Claudette gave all of us the moral courage to do what we did."
Chap. 7, p. 59

"Claudette, you're a Christian, and you're about to get thrown to the lions and you have one speech to give to the Senate. That was more like it. In my imagination that courtroom seemed like the Coliseum, and it felt like I had one last speech. I was going to make the most of it."
Chap. 8, p. 75

"No, sir. We haven't changed our ideas. It has been in me ever since I was born."
Chap. 9, p. 86



"It was one of the great human rights victories in U.S. history."
Chap. 10, p. 96

"No one with any pull would help me or hire me. Those were hard, fearsome days: In those days, it seemed like I couldn't go anywhere and no one wanted to be near me. I wanted to escape from there."
Chap. 10, p. 98

"Claudette Colvin had more courage, in my opinion, than any of the [other] persons involved in the movement."
Epilogue, p. 101

"Mine was the first cry for justice, and a loud one."
Epilogue, p. 104

Topics for Discussion

Why is Claudette Colvin significant for the Civil Rights movement?

What was Claudette's action that made her so important and well-known? Why was it important?

What is Claudette's connection to the Montgomery bus boycott?

Do you think Claudette was mistreated by the black community? Why was she mistreated? How? What do you think the Civil Rights movement should have done differently with respect to Claudette?

What was Claudette's role in *Browder v. Gale*?

How was Claudette rediscovered?

How is Claudette's attitude about her treatment during the 1950s Civil Rights movement in Montgomery?