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STATEMENT OF U.S. REP. JOHN LEWIS AT THE DEDICATION OF GARE ROSE PARKS
February 6, 2016

The Honorable Jane Hartley
United States Ambassador to France
United States Embassy
Paris, France

Dear Madam Ambassador and Dear Friends of Buttes-Chaumont:

I was delighted and very pleased to learn that the people of the 19th arrondissement voted to dedicate this subway station to the legacy of Rosa Parks. Your decision is so fitting and so appropriate because transportation played a major role in the U.S. struggle for civil rights and social justice. The 1961 Freedom Rides desegregated not only train and bus seating, but they opened up all public accommodations in the United States.

Most do not realize that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was not the only one of its kind. There were many bus boycotts in the 1950s, including one in Tallahassee, Florida in 1956 that began only a few months after the Montgomery boycott ended. The first bus boycott actually occurred in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1953, but the boycott sparked by Rosa Parks receives the most attention. For many historians, it marks the beginning of the modern-day Civil Rights Movement in America and the emergence of its foremost leader, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Beyond the need to remember and honor this history, your vote is also a poignant reminder that the struggles of all oppressed peoples everywhere, throughout human history, are truly one struggle: the effort to build a society and a world community that respects the dignity and the worth of every human being. We used to say two things in the American movement that I want to leave with you today. We would say, "Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week or one year. Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, and each generation must do its part, must make its contribution" to this unified human endeavor.

We also used to say that "the ends and the means are inseparable". We believed that if our goal was peace, then we had to use peaceful, yet confrontational, tactics to make our voices heard. Because in the final analysis, we are one people, one family, the human family, and "we must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will all perish as fools," to quote Dr. King. Thank you for remembering the great integrity of Rosa Parks' legacy and her role as a liberator of humanity. I hope to see you one day in Paris coming and going in the Gare Rosa Parks.

Best wishes and
With deepest gratitude,

John Lewis
Member of Congress