

Mrs. Rosa Parks



"To this day I believe we are here on the planet Earth to live, grow up and do what we can to make this world a better place for all people to enjoy freedom." --Mrs. Rosa Parks—

Parks, known as "the mother of the civil rights movement," walked into history on December 1, 1955 when she refused to give up her seat for a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus. She was arrested for her defiance, and she agreed to challenge the segregation order in court. After this tactic failed, Parks and others organized the Montgomery bus boycott: "For a little more than a year, we stayed off those busses. We did not return to using public transportation until the Supreme Court said there shouldn't be racial segregation."



Mrs. Rosa Parks, born on February 4, 1913, has been called the "mother of the civil rights movement" and one of the most important citizens of the 20th century.

Her mother was a school teacher and taught her at home until the age of eleven. She then attended Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, and later Booker T. Washington High School. Both of these schools were for African-American students only.

Her father left the family when Rosa was very young. Her mother often advised her to "take advantage of the opportunities, no matter how few they are."

He died of cancer in 1977, the same year her brother, Sylvester, died. She had no children born to her, but she has said, "I consider all children as mine."

When she was twenty, Rosa married Raymond Parks, a barber, active in black voter registration and other civil rights causes.. She attended Alabama State College, worked as a seamstress and housekeeper, and was active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Montgomery Voters League. The Voters League was a group that helped black citizens pass the many tests that had been set up to make it hard for them to register as voters. In 1943 she was elected Secretary of the NAACP Montgomery Chapter.

"I worked on numerous cases with the NAACP," Parks has said, "but we did not get the publicity. ... We didn't seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens." (Ebony, 1988)

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks and three other black passengers were asked to vacate an entire row of seats just behind the whites-only section of the bus so that one white man could sit down.

At first, the black passengers all remained seated. The driver then said, "You all make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats." All stood except Parks. When Blake threatened to call the police, she said gently, "you may go on and do so." Two police officers boarded the bus to arrest her and take her to jail.



Mrs. Parks was booked, fingerprinted, jailed and fined \$14.



Workers, waiting for rides, organized by the leaders of the boycott.

The following night, fifty leaders of the Negro community (among them was the 26 year old minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) met to discuss the issue. They had been looking for an opportunity to test the bus segregation laws in court, and needed a person with a spotless reputation to volunteer to lead that effort. Mrs. Parks agreed.

Mrs. Parks was forty-two years old, and was very well respected in the black community. But long before that day, she fought segregation in her own way. She walked up the stairs of a building rather than riding in an elevator marked "blacks only." She

went home thirsty instead of drinking from the "colored only" water fountain. And, Mrs. Parks preferred to walk home from work whenever possible to avoid sitting in the "blacks only" section in the back of the city bus.

That night they organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott that would continue until the bus segregation laws were changed, and flyers went out to thousands that very evening.

The very next morning the buses were virtually empty, city-wide, and they stayed that way for 382 days. It caused the bus company to lose a huge amount of money -- and changed America forever.



During Dr. King's meetings, the crowd overflowed out of the church with over 4,000 excited supporters of the boycott. Dr. King stated, "I could hear voices saying: 'We are with you all the way Reverend.' "

During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Mrs. Parks and her family received threats and were continually harassed. She was fired from her job as a seamstress, but didn't budge in her efforts. "I didn't have any special fear," she said. "It was more of a relief to know that I wasn't alone."



After the Supreme Court decision, on the bus, with a white man seated behind her.

In December of 1956, the Supreme Court decided that bus segregation violated the constitution. The Civil Rights Movement was put into motion, which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Today all Americans, whatever their race, nationality, or religion, must be given equal treatment under the law.

In 1957 Rosa and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan, where she again took in sewing and also worked as a fundraiser for the NAACP. In 1965 she was hired by Congressman John Conyers, Jr., also a civil rights leader, to manage his Detroit office. She and her husband remained active in the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

"I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom, equality, justice and prosperity for all people," said Rosa Parks on the occasion of her 77th birthday. And so she is.

