

elle crée
she creates



Rosa
Parks

Rosa Parks (1913-2005)

Civil Rights Activist

“Stand for something or you will fall for anything. Today’s mighty oak is yesterday’s nut that held its ground.”

In 1955, a quiet act of defiance by a seamstress on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, helped change the course of history. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the “colored” section for a white passenger. She was arrested for disorderly conduct and violation of Alabama’s segregation laws. With the support of the NAACP, her civil disobedience case eventually led to a federal decision that bus segregation was unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment.

Parks grew up under the system of segregation in the south; however, a job as a housekeeper on an air force base helped open her eyes to possibility. Because it was federal property, the base didn’t allow segregation. She became friends with the white couple whose house she cleaned and they helped sponsor her education in activism and racial equity.

She had been active in the Civil Rights Movement – serving as the secretary for the NAACP in Montgomery and as a youth leader – for over a decade before her act of civil disobedience on that bus. Her resistance was bolstered by recent events. Just months before, a Black teenager – Emmett Till - had been murdered for supposedly flirting with a white girl in Mississippi, and his killers had been acquitted despite the NAACP’s work on the case.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott that resulted from her arrest became a nationwide movement. She collaborated with other Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Edgar Nixon and became a prominent figure in the racial justice movement.

In 1957, unable to find work, Rosa and her husband moved to Michigan. They found that it didn’t feel that different from living in the segregated south. Discrimination toward African Americans was just as strong, especially in housing. Rosa became active in working for open and fair housing in Detroit.

She campaigned for John Conyers, an African American man who was elected to the House of Representatives, and went on to serve as his secretary for more than 20 years. In that role she was able to continue her activism and work around socio-economic issues, despite increasingly bad health.

In 1987, Rosa co-founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development in honor of her late husband. Its aim was to educate youth about the civil rights movement and to help them reach their highest potential.

By her death in 2005, she had received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Congressional Gold Medal, and had become an international icon in the fight for equality. She was the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda.