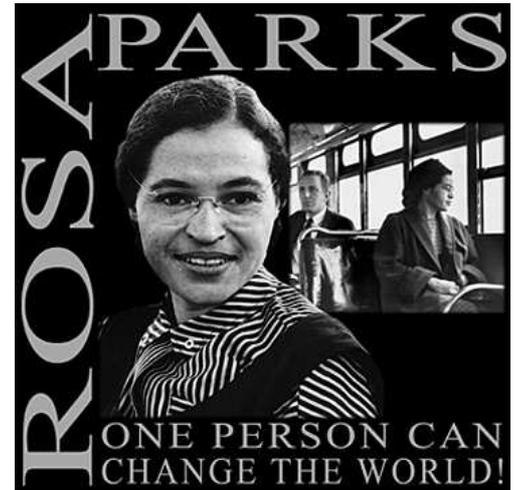


### QUICK FACTS

- **NAME:** Rosa Parks
- **OCCUPATION:** Civil Rights Activist
- **BIRTH DATE:** February 04, 1913
- **DEATH DATE:** October 24, 2005
- **EDUCATION:** Industrial School for Girls, Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes
- **PLACE OF BIRTH:** Tuskegee, Alabama
- **PLACE OF DEATH:** Detroit, Michigan
- **ORIGINALLY:** Rosa Louise McCauley

### BEST KNOWN FOR

Civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger, spurring the Montgomery boycott and other efforts to end segregation.



## Rosa Parks biography

### SYNOPSIS

Civil rights activist Rosa Parks was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Her refusal to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus spurred a city-wide boycott. The city of Montgomery had no choice but to lift the law requiring segregation on public buses. Rosa Parks received many accolades during her lifetime, including the NAACP's highest award.

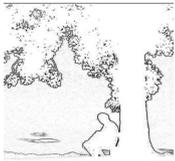
### CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER

Civil-rights activist. Born Rosa Louise McCauley on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Her refusal to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus spurred on a city-wide boycott and helped launch nation-wide efforts to end segregation of public facilities.

### EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Rosa Parks' childhood brought her early experiences with racial discrimination and activism for racial equality. After her parents separated, Rosa's mother moved the family to Pine Level, Alabama to live with her parents, Rose and Sylvester Edwards, on their farm. Both her grandparents were former slaves and strong advocates for racial equality. In one experience, Rosa's grandfather stood in front of their house with a shotgun while Ku Klux Klan members marched down the street. The city of Pine Level, Alabama had a new school building and bus transportation for white students while African-American students walked to the one-room schoolhouse, often lacking desks and adequate school supplies.

Through the rest of Rosa's education, she attended segregated schools in Montgomery. In 1929, while a junior in the eleventh grade, she left school to attend to her sick grandmother in Pine Level. She never returned, but instead got a job at a shirt factory in Montgomery. In 1932, Rosa married a barber named Raymond Parks who was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). With Raymond's support, Rosa Parks finished her high school degree in 1933. She soon became actively involved in civil rights issues by joining the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP in 1943, serving as the secretary to the president, E.D. Nixon until 1957.



### **ORDERED TO THE BACK OF THE BUS**

The Montgomery, Alabama city code required that all public transportation be segregated and that bus drivers had the "powers of a police officer of the city while in actual charge of any bus for the purposes of carrying out the provisions" of the code. While operating a bus, drivers were required to provide separate but equal accommodations for white and black passengers by assigning seats. This was accomplished with a line roughly in the middle of the bus separating white passengers in the front of the bus and African-American passengers in the back. When an African-American passenger boarded the bus, they had to get on at the front to pay their fare and then get off and re-board the bus at the back door. When the seats in the front of the bus filled up and more white passengers got on, the bus driver would move back the sign separating black and white passengers and, if necessary, ask black passengers give up their seat.

On December 1, 1955, after a long day at work at the Montgomery Fair department store, Rosa Parks boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus for home. She took a seat in the first of several rows designated for "colored" passengers. Though the city's bus ordinance did give drivers the authority to assign seats, it didn't specifically give them the authority to demand a passenger to give up a seat to anyone (regardless of color). However, Montgomery bus drivers had adopted the custom of requiring black passengers to give up their seats to white passengers, when no other seats were available. If the black passenger protested, the bus driver had the authority to refuse service and could call the police to have them removed.

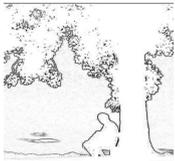
As the bus Rosa was riding continued on its route, it began to fill with white passengers. Eventually, the bus was full and the driver noticed that several white passengers were standing in the aisle. He stopped the bus and moved the sign separating the two sections back one row and asked four black passengers to give up their seats. Three complied, but Rosa refused and remained seated. The driver demanded, "Why don't you stand up?" to which Rosa replied, "I don't think I should have to stand up." The driver called the police and had her arrested. Later, she recalled that her refusal wasn't because she was physically tired, but that she was tired of giving in.

The police arrested Rosa at the scene and charged her with violation of Chapter 6, section 11 of the Montgomery City code. She was taken to police headquarters where later that night she was released on bail. On December 8, Rosa faced trial and in a 30 minute hearing was found guilty of violating a local ordinance. She was fined \$10, plus a \$4 court fee.

### **MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT**

On the evening Rosa Parks was arrested, E.D. Nixon, head of the local chapter of the NAACP, began plans to organize a boycott of Montgomery's city buses. Ads were placed in local papers and handbills were printed and distributed in black neighborhoods. Members of the African-American community were asked to stay off the buses Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup> in protest of Rosa's arrest. People were encouraged to stay home from work or school, take a cab or walk to work. With most of the African-American community not riding the bus, organizers believed a longer boycott might be successful.

On Monday, December 5, 1955, a group of African-American community leaders gathered at Mt. Zion Church to discuss strategies. They determined that the effort required a new organization and strong leadership. They formed the "Montgomery Improvement Association" (MIA) and elected Montgomery newcomer Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. The MIA



believed that Rosa Parks' case provided an excellent opportunity to take further action to create real change.

With the success of Monday's refusal to ride the buses, the boycott continued. Some people carpooled. Others rode in African-American-operated cabs. Most of the estimated 40,000 African-American commuters walked, some as far as 20 miles to get to work. Dozens of the Montgomery public buses sat idle for months, severely crippling the transit company's finances. But the boycott faced strong resistance, with some segregationists retaliating with violence. Black churches were burned and both Martin Luther King, Jr. and E.D. Nixon's homes were attacked. Other attempts were made to end the boycott as well. The taxi system used by the African-American community to help people get around had its insurance canceled. Other blacks were arrested for violating an old law prohibiting boycotts.

But the African-American community also took legal action. Armed with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that said separate but equal policies had no place in public education, a black legal team took the issue of segregation on public transit systems to federal court. In June of 1956, the court declared Alabama's racial segregation laws for public transit unconstitutional. The city appealed and on November 13, 1956, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling. With the transit company and downtown businesses suffering financial loss and the legal system ruling against them, the city of Montgomery had no choice but to lift the law requiring segregation on public buses. The combination of legal action, backed by the unrelenting determination of the African-American community made the 382-day Montgomery Bus Boycott one of the largest and most successful mass movements against racial segregation in history.

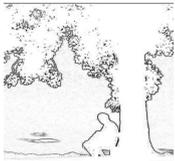
## **DISCRIMINATION**

Although she had become a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks suffered hardship as a result. She lost her job at the department store and her husband lost his after his boss forbade him to discuss his wife or their legal case. They were unable to find work and eventually left Montgomery. Rosa Parks moved her family—husband and mother—to Detroit, Michigan. There she made a new life for herself, working as a secretary and receptionists in U.S. Representative John Conyer's congressional office in Detroit. She also served on the board of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. In 1987, along with Elaine Eason Steele, a long-time friend, she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. The institute runs the "Pathways to Freedom" bus tours, introducing young people to important civil rights and Underground Railroad sites throughout the country. In 1992, she published *Rosa Parks: My Story*, an autobiography recounting her life in the segregated South. In 1995, she published her memoirs entitled *Quiet Strength* which focuses on the role religious faith played in her life.

## **LEGACY**

Rosa Parks received many accolades during her lifetime including the Spingarn Medal, the NAACP's highest award. She also received the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award. On September 9, 1996 President Bill Clinton awarded Rosa Parks the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given by the U.S. executive branch. The next year, she was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award given by the U.S. legislative branch. In 1999, *Time* magazine named Rosa Parks one of the 20 most influential people of the 20th century.

On October 24, 2005, at the age of 92, Rosa Parks quietly died in her apartment. She had been diagnosed the previous year with progressive dementia. Her death was marked by several memorial services, among them lying in state at the Capitol Rotunda in Washington D.C. where an estimated 50,000 people viewed



her casket. Rosa was interred between her husband and mother at Detroit's Woodlawn Cemetery in the chapel's mausoleum. Shortly after her death the chapel was renamed the Rosa L. Parks Freedom Chapel.

<http://www.biography.com/people/rosa-parks-9433715?page=3>