



Remembering Rosa Parks

Her bravery sparked a fight for civil rights

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DON CRAVENS—TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

Rosa Parks sits near the front of a newly integrated bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

Civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, on February 4, 1913—100 years ago today. As an adult, she worked as a secretary on an army base and a seamstress at a department store. She also volunteered with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to fight for equal rights for blacks. At age 42, she stepped onto a bus—and quietly opened a new chapter in our nation's history.

On December 1, 1955, Parks broke the law. Her crime was to take an empty seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. It's an act that doesn't seem special at all today. But in 1955, segregation laws in some states required separate seating for blacks and whites in restaurants, on buses and in other public spaces. Parks stood for racial equality by refusing to move when the driver asked her to give her seat to a white man. Parks sat quietly while the driver called the police. "People always say that I didn't

give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true," Parks said. "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Sparking a Movement

Parks was arrested, but her act of bravery set off a chain of events that changed the United States. African Americans responded to the injustice by refusing to ride buses in Montgomery, where about three-quarters of bus riders were black. Martin Luther King Jr. led the peaceful boycott, which lasted 381 days. In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that African Americans could not be forced to sit only in certain areas on buses. And in 1964, the Civil Rights Act outlawed racial discrimination in all public places.

After the boycott ended, Parks continued living in Montgomery with her husband, Raymond, and volunteering with the NAACP. But the couple both lost their jobs and received many threats from people who were angry about her civil rights work. They eventually decided to move north to Detroit, Michigan. Rosa Parks found work as a seamstress and continued to fight for civil rights.

In 1965, Parks took part in a 50-mile march in Alabama with Dr. King to demand equal voting rights, a cause that was especially important to her. A few months later, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which made it easier for blacks to vote. That year, Parks also got a new job as an assistant to John Conyers, a black U.S. Congressman from Michigan. She later created an organization called the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development, which helped teens learn about African American History and find jobs. In 1999, President Bill Clinton presented her with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor the U.S. government can give.

The Mother of Civil Rights

Many admirers call Parks the mother of the civil rights movement. She led by example, showing that peaceful protest could create dramatic change. But Parks shared the credit. "The only thing that made it significant was that the masses of the people joined in," she said.

On October 24, 2005, Parks died at her home in Detroit. She was 92 years old. On February 4, 2013, in honor of what would have been her 100th birthday, the U.S. Postal Service issued the Rosa Parks Forever Stamp. The world will continue to remember and honor a leader who took a stand by taking a seat.



USPS/AP

The U.S. Postal Service issued a special Rosa Parks stamp on February 4, 2013, which would have been the 100th birthday of the civil rights pioneer.

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