

Rosa Parks (Civil Rights)

Written by Delores A. Hampton
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Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley on February 4, 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama. Rosa married Raymond Parks, a barber, in 1932, and they remained married until his death in 1977. They had no children.

In 1955, Rosa Parks was an African American living in Montgomery, Alabama -- a city with laws that strictly segregated blacks and whites. On December 1, 1955, after her day of work as a seamstress at a local department store, Rosa Parks boarded a city bus. When she refused to give up her seat to a white man, the bus driver called police, and Rosa Parks was arrested and fined. The resulting bus boycott by African-Americans, led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., (pictured in background) caused a national sensation. The boycott was a success and led to desegregation in Montgomery and elsewhere in the United States. Over time, Rosa Parks became a national icon of civil rights and African-American pride. Parks worked as an aide to Michigan Congressman John Conyers, Jr. from 1966 until her retirement in 1988, and she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development in 1987. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Bill Clinton in 1996.

Parks' bus ride was reminiscent of Homer Plessy's refusal to leave an all-white rail car in Louisiana in 1892... Her refusal to relinquish her seat came nine months after teenager Claudette Colvin was arrested for the very same thing. Rosa Parks died October 24, 2005 at the age of 92.

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