

Name: _____ Class: _____

Rosa Parks: Beyond the Bus

By Barrett Smith
2017

Rosa Parks (1913-2005) was an activist in the Civil Rights Movement and is best known for her refusal to give up her seat on the bus for a white passenger on December 1, 1955. However, this moment wasn't Parks' sole contribution to the Civil Rights Movement. As you read, take notes on how the author describes Rosa Parks and the role she played in the Civil Rights Movement.

[1] Rosa Parks is one of the most well-known women in the Civil Rights Movement. She is most famous for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus. Her arrest led to the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott. However, little is known about the fact that Rosa Parks was also involved in civil rights activism for years before that day, and after her release from prison she continued to fight and inspire youth to do the same.

Early Life

Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley in 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama. She was raised in the rural town of Pine Level, Alabama. The effects of deep racism in the rural south were some of her earliest memories: walking to her segregated¹ school while white children took buses, and watching the Ku Klux Klan² march on the street in front of her home.

Rosa Parks attended a secondary school led by the Alabama State Teacher's College for Negroes. However, she had to drop out in 11th grade to take care of her sick mother and grandmother. It was not until after she married Raymond Parks that she had the time and financial support to finish her degree. This was no small

accomplishment — at the time, less than 10% of African Americans earned high school diplomas.



"Rosa Parks . Youth Rally celebrating 43 years of Parks fight for justice . A. R. Chapel . Howard University . WDC . 5 December 1998" by Elvert Barnes is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

1. **Segregate (verb):** to separate people based on race
2. a white supremacy group that promotes the idea that white people are superior to other races

Civil Rights Movement

Rosa Parks' most famous moment in the fight for civil rights was her refusal to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. But she spent much of her life as an activist. She became involved in the civil rights movement while working with her husband to free the Scottsboro Boys, two young black men accused of raping white women.

- [5] She joined the Montgomery, Alabama NAACP³ chapter in 1943, and she was elected secretary the same day. She worked alongside the President, ED Nixon, fighting for criminal justice. They fought to protect black people from false accusations and lynchings⁴ and wanted the law to respond to crimes committed against black people. Parks started a youth branch of the NAACP in Montgomery and inspired them to fight against segregation. Many parents didn't want their kids associated with the NAACP because they were scared of trouble. But Parks encouraged youth to stand up for themselves and their rights.

Parks was a firm believer in self-respect and self-defense. Even as a child, her grandmother worried about her "talking biggety⁵ to white folks." Parks' life was defined by a deep personal belief in individual rebellion and self-preservation. Even as a young woman, Parks told her grandmother that "[she] would rather be lynched than live to be mistreated and not be allowed to say 'I don't like it.'" It was this same value that gave her the strength to resist that famous day on the bus.

Montgomery Bus Boycott

Parks' activist career is often overlooked. Instead, she is often perceived as a quiet old lady on the bus - an image she would later refute,⁶ saying: "People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in." Some misunderstanding of Rosa Parks' story can be traced to the Civil Rights Movement itself: the movement needed to portray itself sympathetically to gain support. They found that the image of a quiet, tired old lady better fit the sensibilities of the country — which was a white majority. Civil Rights leaders — including Parks herself — used her public image as a way to better advance the cause.

After her arrest, Parks and ED Nixon decided to organize a protest of segregation by boycotting the bus system on the day of Parks trial. Black participation in the boycott was higher than anybody anticipated. They decided to continue the protest for over a year. The Montgomery Bus Boycott that started with Parks' protest gained international attention and resulted in the Supreme Court ruling that bus segregation was unconstitutional. The national and worldwide popularity of Rosa Parks' arrest and the Boycott propelled⁷ the Civil Rights Movement to the international fame that allowed it to realize its goals.

3. the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

4. to put to death, especially by hanging, without legal authority

5. a term meaning "rudely self-important"

6. **Refute (verb):** to deny or contradict

7. to move something forward

Later years

After the boycott ended, Rosa Parks moved to Detroit to avoid threats and harassment. There, she worked with Congressman John Conyers for 30 years. During that time, she founded The Institute for Self-Development⁸ — in honor of her late husband Raymond Parks. She spent the remainder of her life using her fame to inspire youth to make change and become advocates for justice and peace.

- [10] Parks also remained active politically into the end of her life. She met with the Pope in 2000 to discuss racial healing, and has also met with President Bill Clinton and other important figures. She has received many awards, the highest of which include NAACP's Spingarn Medal for outstanding achievement, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal — the two highest civilian honors in the United States. She has also received two NAACP image awards- one for playing herself in the TV Series "Touched by an Angel," and one for her book, "Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth." Rosa Parks devoted her life to transforming the world for peace and justice. She passed away in 2005 at the age of 92. Her foundation's posthumous⁹ biography states, briefly, "Rosa Parks was a symbol to all to remain free."

"Rosa Parks: Beyond the Bus" by Barrett Smith. Copyright © 2017 by CommonLit, Inc. This text is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

8. The Institute of Self-Development provided young people with different programs to help them learn and succeed.
9. occurring or appearing after one's death

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. Parks' other accomplishments and activism did not compare to her decision to refuse to give up her seat to a white passenger.
 - B. Parks' positive influence on civil rights began before her refusal to give up her seat on the bus, and continued up until her death.
 - C. Parks' actions became popular largely because of her lack of interest in activism prior to the day she refused to give up her seat on the bus.
 - D. Parks' decision to not move to the back of the bus was minimized by the media and negatively impacted her influence on the Civil Rights Movement.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "She is most famous for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus. Her arrest led to the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Parks was a firm believer in self-respect and self-defense. Even as a child, her grandmother worried about her "talking biggety to white folks." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "Parks' activist career was often overlooked. Instead, she was often perceived as a quiet old lady on the bus — an image she would later refute," (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "Her foundation's posthumous biography states, briefly, "Rosa Parks was a symbol to all to remain free." (Paragraph 10)

3. PART A: How did the assumptions surrounding Parks' decision not to give up her seat compare to her intentions?
 - A. People portrayed Parks' actions as being the result of fatigue, when in reality, Parks' actions were meant to be a political and social statement.
 - B. People believed that Parks' was attempting to make a political statement, when in reality, she was tired from a long day at work.
 - C. People think that Parks' actions were spontaneous, when in reality, Parks knew that her actions would inspire the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
 - D. People believed that Parks' acted on her own when she refused to give up her seat, when in reality, it was a planned demonstration by the NAACP.

4. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in." (Paragraph 7)
 - B. "They found that the image of a quiet, tired old lady better fit the sensibilities of the country — which was a white majority." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "the president of the Montgomery NAACP decided to organize a protest of segregation by boycotting the bus system on the day of Parks trial." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "Parks also remained active politically into the end of her life." (Paragraph 10)

5. How did Parks influence young people during her life?
