



Rosa Parks

"You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right."

Rosa Parks (1913-2005) is known as the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" for a career of activism surrounding one famous act of defiance. Rosa McCauley was born in Alabama, where she grew up with the constant threats and indignities of living in the South under Jim Crow. In 1932, she married Raymond Parks, a civil rights activist whose influence helped inspire her to join the cause. She became one of the only women members of her NAACP chapter, serving an important role as secretary. On December 1st, 1955, Rosa made her audacious stand by refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white person. Because of the respect she had in the community, she worked with civil rights leaders to use the incident to work for meaningful change. She appealed her conviction to initiate a legal challenge to the segregation of the public transportation system, and her story inspired a 381 day boycott of the buses by African Americans. Within a year, the Supreme Court declared the bus seating laws unconstitutional and issued an order for immediate integration. Rosa continued to be extremely active in the civil rights movement, but at great personal cost. For safety reasons, she and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan, where she worked for 23 years on the staff of Congressman John Conyers. Parks would go on to write several books about the experiences of her life, and she recounted how her faith in God had been a vital source of strength during difficult times. She continued to be a strong voice for racial equality, giving speeches across the country and donating the proceeds to a scholarship fund for promising Black youths. Later in life, she was decorated with the highest honors available to an American citizen, receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999. Almost 50 years after her historic act, she passed away on October 24th, 2005. Her body lay in state in the Capitol rotunda, the first woman and second African American to be so honored. A statue of her now resides on permanent display in the Capitol's Statuary Hall.

Today, Rosa Park's act of bravery is one of the most famous events in American history. However, few Americans appreciate the impact of her career of activism before and after this extraordinary moment. Most importantly, her courage and determination are still an inspiration to people all over the world in the struggle for freedom and justice.