**Rosa Parks**

Rosa Parks will always be associated with the [Montgomery Bus Boycott](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/montgomery_bus_boycott.htm) of 1955-56 which many regard as the start of a major [civil rights](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/civil1.htm) offensive in America. Rosa Parks was a seamstress when the boycott began but she was far from ill-educated.

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| http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fileadmin/historyLearningSite/rosa_p2.jpg |

Rosa Parks was born on February 4th 1913. America was effectively a segregated society, whether it was in the South or in the cities of the north and east. Job prospects for African Americans were poor and many could only look forward to the lowest paid jobs – and be thankful that they had a job. [Education](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/USAeduc.htm), if it existed for African Americans, was done within the community, especially in the south, where schools were segregated. Buses and restaurants were also segregated in the South. Whereas segregation in the South was obvious and open, the writer Zora Hurston has pointed out that it also existed in many other parts of America, though more disguised. This was the America in which Rosa Parks grew up.

Her mother was a teacher. She was also a member of the [NAACP](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/NAACP.htm), as was her step-father. Parks was taught to read and write by her. Her first school only had one teacher in it to teach all the children there, aged between five and their teens. Parks recalled in an interview that there were as many as 60 students at her school - taught by just the one teacher. The law stated that schools could be separate but equal. Rosa Parks had a five month school year – the rest of her time was spent working on farms.

Parks went to an all-black college, the Alabama State College, but could only find work as a seamstress in Montgomery. However, Rosa Parks was involved with the NAACP. She served as a local secretary to it and was later an adviser to the NAACP Youth Council. In 1943, she had experienced discrimination on the buses in the South firsthand. Having paid her fare, she was told to use the back entrance of the bus to get to the ‘black’ seats at the back of the bus. As she walked to this door, the bus drove off leaving her where she was. However, as a member of the NAACP, Parks would have known about the Claudette Colvin story.

On December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man who was standing as all the ‘white’ seats had been taken. She was arrested and on December 5th, a boycott of the buses started that lasted for 381 days. The boycott only ended when shop keepers in Montgomery urged a settlement as their livelihoods were being ruined as so few African-Americans went into Montgomery to do any shopping. In 1956, the Supreme Court deemed that segregation on buses was unconstitutional. Along with the ‘[Brown](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/USAeduc.htm)’ decision of 1954, this legal ruling is seen as being of great significance in [civil rights](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/civil1.htm) history. Parks was given the title “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement” – though it is a title she is modest about.

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| **“Four decades later I am still uncomfortable with the credit given to me for starting the bus boycott. I would like (people) to know I was not the only person involved. I was just one of many who fought for freedom.”** |

When asked why she refused to give up her seat when three other African-Americans did, Parks replied:

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| **“Our mistreatment was just not right, and I was tired of it. I kept thinking about my mother and my grandparents, and how strong they were. I knew there was a possibility of being mistreated, but an opportunity was being given to me to do what I had asked of others.”** |

The success of the boycott and the decision by the Supreme Court did change Montgomery – but it also made Parks enemies. She and her family moved to Detroit to escape racists. In 1987, Rosa Parks, with her husband, established the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute of Self-Development. This organization provides career training for black youths but it is also involved, via its Pathways to Freedom, with educating youths on civil rights history by visiting the scenes of important civil rights cases.

Trueman, Chris. “Rosa Parks.” Civil Rights in America. History Learning Site (2000) 10October2013<<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk>.

Website for video clip introducing Rosa Parks

<http://www.history.com/topics/rosa-parks/videos#bet-you-didnt-know-rosa-parks>