

Parks, Rosa Louise (1913–2005), an African American civil rights activist, became best known for her role in a 1955 boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus system. Parks triggered the boycott when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus. Her action helped bring about the civil rights movement in the United States.

Parks was arrested for violating a city law requiring that whites and blacks sit in separate rows on buses. She refused to give up her seat in the middle of the bus when a white man wished to sit in her row. The front rows were for whites only. The law required blacks to leave their seats in the next rows when all seats in the front rows were taken and other whites still wanted seats.

Even before Parks's arrest, Montgomery's black leaders had been discussing a protest against racial segregation on the city's buses. Parks allowed the leaders to use her arrest to spark a boycott of the bus system. The leaders formed an organization to run the boycott. Martin Luther King, Jr.—then a Baptist minister in Montgomery—was chosen as president.

For 382 days, from Dec. 5, 1955, to Dec. 20, 1956, thousands of blacks refused to ride Montgomery's buses. Their boycott ended when the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated seating on the city's buses unconstitutional. The boycott's success encouraged other mass protests demanding civil rights for blacks.

Rosa Louise McCauley was born on Feb. 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. She attended Alabama State Teachers College. In 1932, she married Raymond Parks, a barber. She held a variety of jobs and, in 1943, became one of the first women to join the Montgomery Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She served as the organization's secretary from 1943 to 1956.

Parks lost her job as a seamstress as a result of the Montgomery boycott. She moved to Detroit in 1957. From 1967 to 1988, she worked on the Detroit staff of John Conyers, Jr., a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives. In 1979, she won the Spingarn Medal for her work in civil rights. She wrote an autobiography, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (1992). In 1996, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1999, she was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal. Parks died on Oct. 24, 2005. Legislation was enacted later that year to add a likeness of Parks to Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol.

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