



#3654

ROSA PARKS: THE PATH TO FREEDOM

Grade Levels: 7-12
20 minutes

FILMAKERS LIBRARY 1996

DESCRIPTION

On December 2, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus. This quiet act of defiance in Montgomery, Alabama, led to the Civil Rights Movement of the '60s. Covers briefly her childhood and marriage, focusing on the events in Alabama, their effects on segregation, and Mrs. Parks' influence and impact as "the mother of the Civil Rights Movement." Interviews with Mrs. Parks and other eyewitnesses strengthen the presentation.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: United States History

- ◆ Standard: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
 - Benchmark: Understands the development of the civil rights movement
- ◆ Standard: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties
 - Benchmark: Understands individual and institutional influences on the civil rights movement
 - Benchmark: Understands how diverse groups united during the civil rights movement

Subject Area: Civics

- ◆ Standard: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society
 - Benchmark: Knows major conflicts in American society that have arisen from diversity
- ◆ Standard: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity
 - Benchmark: Knows sources of political conflict that have arisen in the United States historically as well as in the present

- Benchmark: Knows instances in which political conflict in the United States has been divisive and reasons for this division
- ◆ Standard: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life
 - Benchmark: Knows some of the efforts that have been put forth to reduce discrepancies between ideals and the reality of American public life

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To present the facts of Rosa Parks being the catalyst to the beginning Montgomery bus boycott and the civil rights movement.
2. To provide an introduction to the civil rights movement and segregation laws that prompted it.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Who is the woman many call, “The Mother of the civil rights movement”? Her name is Rosa Parks. She was also awarded the NAACP’s Spingarn Medal and the Martin Luther King, Jr. nonviolent peace prize. In 1984, Rosa Parks was given the Eleanor Roosevelt Woman of Courage award and in 1996 was presented with the Medal of Freedom award.



Where did this legacy begin? February 4, 1913, Rosa Louise McCauley was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. When she was a young girl two years of age, her father moved out on Rosa, her mother, and her little brother Sylvester. At this time the small, split family of three moved into Rosa’s grandparents’ house. Later when her mother and grandparents became ill, Rosa took over the cooking, cleaning, shopping, and sewing. This proved to be only one of the many trials that Rosa Parks would face in her life.

Rosa’s early experiences were not different than those that many African Americans experienced at this time. Noted on more than one occasion was the idea that Rosa would walk past nice, modern white schools on the way to an old building, the school for blacks. It was a one-room building with no windows, desks, or books.

After hard work as a schoolteacher, her mother earned enough money to send her daughter away to school. The result was such that at the tender age of eleven, Rosa moved to Montgomery to live with her aunt. While there, she enrolled in the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls. Due to a lack of funds, Rosa cleaned classrooms after school to pay her tuition. Before her graduation at this institution, Rosa’s mother became ill and begged her to return home. Rosa was unable to complete high school until after her marriage.

At the time that Rosa was arrested on December 1, 1955, she was acting secretary for the NAACP. She had been active in several other cases prior to the Montgomery bus boycott. There had been several previous arrests due to bus seating; however, they had not protested their cases like Rosa did. Rosa knew that the NAACP needed a

plaintiff to use in protest to higher courts about the buses in Montgomery. Rosa states: "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."

On this day Rosa was arrested due to failure to give her seat to a white man. When the NAACP heard of her arrest, they put their plans into motion. They used a minister, somewhat new to the area, to help them. This minister was Martin Luther King, Jr.

After a meeting, the NAACP contacted local leaders to spread the word about a boycott of the busing system. Support was overwhelming. On one occasion during the boycott, over one hundred people were peacefully arrested. At the beginning of the boycott, taxi drivers offered reduced fares, but this was soon ruled against the law. Times became harder for those who normally rode the buses.

After a long year of threats and misfortune, the segregation of buses was ruled unlawful. This ruling came from the Supreme Court on December 20, 1956. Television cameras followed Mrs. Parks on December 21, 1956, as she posed in the front seat of a Montgomery bus.

The threats toward Mrs. Parks didn't end after this ruling was handed down. She moved out of Alabama to Detroit in 1957. By this time, the harassment had died down. However, she still felt that a move would be in her best interest.

After serving as an administrative assistant for more than twenty years, she retired from the office of Detroit Congressman John Conyers in 1988. She has been the recipient of several awards and opened her own Institute for Self-Development. This is a community center environment that offers programs for youth to help them continue their education and have a strong hope for the future.

KEY CONCEPTS

1. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
2. boycott
3. Jim Crow laws
4. segregation
5. Ku Klux Klan (KKK)
6. civil rights movement



BEFORE SHOWING

1. Rosa Parks has been called the "flash point" for the civil rights movement and the "mother" of the movement. Discuss what these terms mean.
2. Discuss the "established rules" in the 1955 American South that dictated that African American riders had to sit in the back of the bus and were expected to surrender their seat to a white bus rider.
3. Explain the significance of the Montgomery bus boycott: how it caught the attention of the entire nation, how it gave Martin Luther King, Jr. a position of leadership

within the national movement, and how it demonstrated that the nonviolent method of protest was effective.

AFTER SHOWING



Applications and Activities

1. Create a time line to show how the civil rights movement came about, and the components of it. Focus on the concept that Rosa Parks was later called "The Mother of the civil rights movement."
2. Read the following boycott address given by Martin Luther King, Jr. and discuss what made the speech persuasive.

"There comes a time that people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired—tired of being segregated and humiliated; tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression...for many years we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we like the way we are being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice. One of the great glories of democracy is the right to protest for right...if you will protest courageously and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in future generations the historians will pause and say, 'There lived a great people--a black people who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.' That is our challenge and our overwhelming duty."
3. Discuss the following remark by Rosa in 1997 concerning courage and change. Have the students ever had to stand up for something they believed in? Why doesn't change occur more quickly?

Question: "Have you ever faced something that you thought you couldn't stand up to?" Rosa's answer: "I can't think of anything. Usually, if I have to face something, I do so no matter what the consequences might be. I never had any desire to give up. I did not feel that giving up would be a way to become a free person. That's the way I still feel. By standing up to something we still don't always affect change right away. Even when we are brave and have courage, change still doesn't come about for a long time."
4. Discuss why African American people as a race were referred to as "Colored," "Negro," or "nigger." Are these names still being used today? Is it important to be labeled as a race of people?
5. Interview relatives or friends who were young adults during the civil rights movement. Find out how they felt about the movement at the time. In what leaders did they put their trust? What were their hopes and fears? Did they take part in any of the political activities?
6. Write a research paper on other famous African American women of the civil rights movement and what significant contributions they made to the movement. (Fannie Lou Hamer, Coretta Scott King, Jeanne Allen [Deaf African American woman].)
7. Write a report on one of the vocabulary terms and present it in class.

8. Contact the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development and ask for information on the institute's "Pathways to Freedom" program and other activities to motivate youth to reach their potential. Contact information:

Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development
c/o Gregory Reed
1201 Bagley
Detroit, Michigan 48226
<http://www.rosaparks.org>