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American Commemorative Panels: Rosa Parks

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“Each person must live their life as a model for others.”

ROSA PARKS

Rosa Parks

COURAGE

ROSA PARKS (1913-2005) was an extraordinary American activist who became an iconic figure in the civil rights movement. On December 1, 1955, Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to surrender her seat on a municipal bus to a white man. Her arrest sparked a successful boycott of the Montgomery bus system.

The boycott in response to her arrest lasted for 381 days and became an international cause célèbre, thrusting a young local pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr., into the spotlight. On November 13, 1956, in a related case, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that segregating Montgomery buses was unconstitutional. The boycott continued until the written order mandating integrated buses arrived on December 20. The next day, black citizens began to ride the Montgomery buses once more.

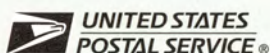
Integration did not go smoothly. There were violent incidents and Parks received threatening phone calls before and after the Supreme Court decision. She and her husband lost their jobs in retaliation for their role in the boycott. In 1957, they moved north to Detroit, Michigan, where her brother had moved years earlier.

Many honors were awarded to Parks in her lifetime, including the Spingarn Medal in 1979 and dozens of honorary degrees. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Clinton in 1996, and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999. In 1987, she co-founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development to inspire young people to socially responsible behavior. Upon her death, Rosa Parks became the first woman and second African American to lie in honor in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in Washington.



background: Don Cravens/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images; left: Courtesy The Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development; Rosa Parks's name and image used under license with the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development

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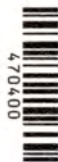
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Rosa Parks (1913-2005) became an inspiring, iconic figure of the civil rights movement with one quiet act of courage. On the evening of Thursday, December 1, 1955, after working all day, she was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat on a municipal bus to a white man. Discriminatory laws in effect at that time required black passengers to sit in the rear section of the bus and to surrender their seats to white passengers on demand.

The response to her arrest was a successful boycott of Montgomery's bus system that lasted for 381 days and became an international cause célèbre. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in a related case that segregating Montgomery buses was unconstitutional.

After the boycott, Parks moved north to Detroit, Michigan, where she continued her activism; she joined the 1963 march on Washington and returned to Alabama for the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

She received many honors in her lifetime, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded by President Clinton in 1996, and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999. In 1987 she founded, with her friend Elaine Steele, the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development to carry on her life's work in civil rights, education, and advocacy. Upon her death, Parks became the first woman and second African American to lie in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in Washington.

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