

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was a Black woman, who played an important part in the American Civil Rights movement. She made changes to try to make life fair for Black and White people in America.

Early Life

Rosa Parks was born on 4th February, 1913, and grew up on a farm with her mother, brother and grandparents in a place called Montgomery in the USA. Rosa Parks grew up at a time when Black people and other people of colour were treated as second-class citizens. They did not have the same rights as White people.

Segregation in America

When Rosa Parks was growing up, Black people were not allowed to use many of the same public places as White people. This was called 'segregation'. The laws in many American states enforced segregation between White people and Black people in public places such as schools, transport, toilets and restaurants. They also made it difficult for Black people to vote. Many White people did not respect Black people and treated them very badly.

The Bus Ride

On 1st December, 1955, Rosa Parks was sitting on the bus on the way home from work. She was sitting in the section segregated for Black people but if the White section was full, Black people had to move so White people could have a seat.

On this day, the White section was full and Rosa was told to move but she did not. The driver said that he would call the police but she stayed sitting down. Eventually, the police came and she was arrested, charged and found guilty for breaking the law and she had to pay a fine.

What Happened Next?

Amazingly, what Rosa did on that day started a big movement. 40 000 Black people in the area (and some White people) refused to use the buses at all until they were treated fairly – this was called The Bus Boycott. The huge amount of people involved could not be ignored. The newspapers reported it and the boycott went on for 381 days before finally the government took action and the segregation on buses was lifted – and all because of Rosa Parks.

Rosa's actions made history as it sparked a movement to make a change. Even though it wasn't the end of segregation and civil rights still had a long way to go, it was a victory.

"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."

Parks, Rosa; James Haskins (1992). Rosa Parks: My Story. Dial Books. p. 116

