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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | Parks, Rosa (1913-2005) | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_patterson_john_malcolm_1921) | |
| On 1 December 1955 local [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_national_association_for_the_advancement_of_colored_people_naacp1/) leader Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. This single act of nonviolent resistance helped spark the [Montgomery bus boycott](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_montgomery_bus_boycott_1955_1956/), a 13-month struggle to desegregate the city’s buses. Under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., the boycott resulted in the enforcement of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that public bus segregation is unconstitutional, and catapulted both King and Parks into the national spotlight.   Born in Tuskegee, Alabama, on 4 February 1913, Rosa Louise McCauley Parks grew up in Montgomery and was educated at the laboratory school of Alabama State College. In 1932 she married Raymond Parks, a barber and member of the NAACP. At that time, Raymond Parks was active in the Scottsboro case. In 1943 Rosa Parks joined the local chapter of the NAACP and was elected secretary. Two years later, she registered to vote, after twice being denied.   By 1949 Parks was advisor to the local NAACP Youth Council. Under her guidance, youth members challenged the Jim Crow system by checking books out of whites-only libraries. The summer before Parks’ arrest, [Virginia Durr](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_durr_virginia_foster_1904_1999/) arranged for Parks to travel to Tennessee’s [Highlander Folk School](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_highlander_folk_school/) to attend a workshop entitled, ‘‘Racial Desegregation: Implementing the Supreme Court Decision.’’ It was there that Parks received encouragement from fellow participant [Septima Clark](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_clark_septima_1898_1987/), who later joined Highlander’s staff in mid-1956.   When Parks was arrested on 1 December 1955, she was not the ï¬rst African American to defy Montgomery’s bus segregation law. Nine months earlier, 15-year-old [Claudette Colvin](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_colvin_claudette_1939/) had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger. In October 1955, 18-year-old Mary Louise Smith had been arrested under similar circumstances, but both cases failed to stir Montgomery’s black leadership to help launch a mass protest. King wrote of Parks’ unique local stature in his memoir, [*Stride Toward Freedom*](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_stride_toward_freedom_the_montgomery_story_1958/), where he talked of how her character and dedication made her widely respected in the African American community (King, 44).   Although many news accounts depicted Parks as a tired seamstress, Parks explained the deep roots of her act of resistance in her autobiography: ‘‘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, 116).   Parks inspired tens of thousands of black citizens to boycott the Montgomery city buses for over a year. During that period she served as a dispatcher to coordinate rides for protesters and was indicted, along with King and over 80 others, for participation in the boycott. Parks also made appearances in churches and other organizations, including some in the North, to raise funds and publicize the [Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA).](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_montgomery_improvement_association/)   Parks continued to face harassment following the boycott’s successful conclusion and decided to move to Detroit to seek better employment opportunities. Shortly before her departure, the MIA declared 5 August 1957 ‘‘Rosa Parks Day.’’ A celebration was held at Mt. Zion AME Zion Church, and $800 was presented to Parks. Despite the fanfare, Parks found it hard to believe that her actions launched an entire movement: ‘‘I had no idea when I refused to give up my seat on that Montgomery bus that my small action would help put an end to the segregation laws in the South’’ (Parks, 2).   In 1964 John Conyers, an African American lawyer, received Parks’ endorsement of his campaign to represent Detroit in the U.S. House of Representatives. After he won, he hired Parks as an ofï¬ce assistant. She remained with him until her retirement in 1988.   In 1987 she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, which provides learning and leadership opportunities for youth and seniors. She was an active supporter of civil rights causes in her elder years. She died in October 2005, at the age of 92.   **SOURCES**  Introduction in *Papers* 3:3, 5. King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 1958. Parks, *Rosa Parks*, 1992. Robinson, *Montgomery Bus Boycott*, 1987. |