

Shut Up and Sit Down? Well, How The Turntables: Rosa Parks

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I would like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free... so other people would be also free.

December 1st, 1955.

Rosa Parks took her seat on the bus home after a long day at work.

These buses were different from the ones we are used to. In 1955's USA, they had two sections, *Whites* and *Colored*. As if that was not dehumanizing enough on its own, if a white person got on the bus and the white seats were full, black people had to get up and give their seat to them. It is hard to imagine how such a discriminatory act could be legal today, let alone as pervasive and widespread as it was back then. But the segregation era was deeply integrated into their society, from schools to bathrooms to the entrances of the same building to where people can drink water and many more bordering-on-petty places. This separation was coupled with condescending remarks and looks from the groups in power, of course.

If we try to put ourselves in black people's shoes, perhaps, to some of us it is not hard to imagine the building pressure of thinning patience. How it gets increasingly more difficult to keep your mouth shut and go along with it when you are stepped down on constantly for no logical reason; when you feel the weariness of a life that seems to keep getting harder, and the weight of the growing pile of freedoms that are stolen from you.

Maybe, that is exactly how Rosa Parks was feeling on that day; the day that was, from an outsider's perspective, not much different than any other day.

As she was seated, a white person got on the bus. Black people were expected to get up. She refused. When she received the much-expected stares, she stayed seated. When the bus driver got up from his seat to get her off hers, she kept sitting down. When she was threatened with a police call, she stayed put still.

While a simple story to tell, the decision itself is far from simple considering what she was doing *was* illegal, and with the *current* police brutality issues in the US taken into account, it is not hard to speculate on the risks she was taking. It was an act of courage, and in its simplicity, it symbolized standing up and shouting.

As expected, her act of courage was not costless. She was arrested just like she was threatened and fined 14 dollars (134 dollars in 2019). However, a single act of hers inspired thousands, and she became the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the first large-scale protest against segregation and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. For over a year, every single black person in Montgomery refused to take the bus. Instead, they walked to work or arranged transportation services for the same cost of the busses, and some white women helped with their personal cars. On December 5th, black bus riders, which were the majority, joined the protest as well. Needless to say, this 381-day boycott cost a lot of money to the Montgomery City Lines. The boycotts only stopped when the US Supreme Court declared the Montgomery segregation unconstitutional in December 1956. As the protests took place, Rosa Parks received death threats and had to move twice due to being unable to find a job, other leaders involved were attacked, and some even bombed.

While this event is what she is deservedly known for, Rosa Parks was a social activist her entire life, save for her childhood. Before the bus boycott, she worked as the secretary of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the head of the Youth Division of the same organization. Her act of defiance was strategic and planned, but brave and inspiring nonetheless. After the bus boycotts, she continued to be highly involved in the Civil Rights Movement and worked with Congressman John Conyers to help the homeless. Later with her husband, she also founded The Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute Of Self-Development to educate the black youth. She has also received many awards for her works, including the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, the highest honor possible in the country. [\(1\)](#) [\(2\)](#) [\(3\)](#) [\(4\)](#) [\(5\)](#) [\(6\)](#) [\(7\)](#) [\(8\)](#)