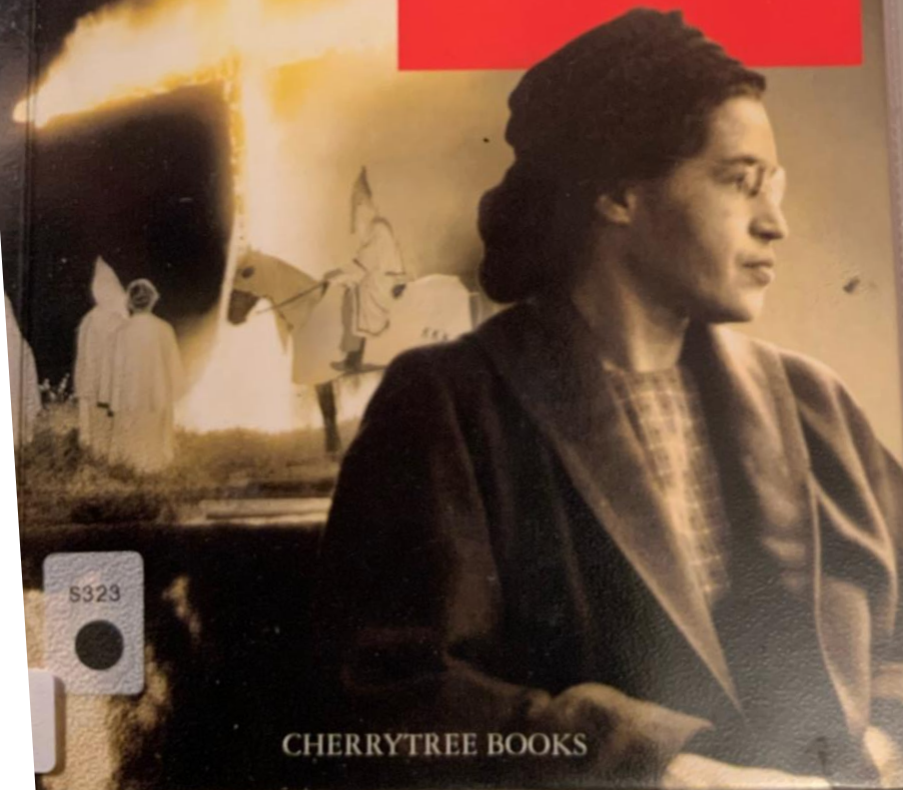


D A T E S   W I T H   H I S T O R Y

Rosa Parks  
and her Protest for  
Civil Rights  
1 December 1955



S323

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## Dreaming of a fairer world

**D**ecember 1955: Christmas is coming, the season of goodwill. Shops are beginning to put up coloured lights and sparkling trees. This is Montgomery, state capital of Alabama, in the heart of the American South. The city made its name as a market for cotton, timber and cattle, but it has grown in recent years.

Montgomery's pavements are busy this evening with workers returning home. Many of them are **African Americans**. Although they make up over a third of the city's population of 130,000, they are treated as second-

class citizens by most of the whites who live there. Among the blacks is Rosa Parks, tired after a hard day's work at her sewing machine. She is a quiet middle-aged woman, who hasn't stood out in the crowd, until now.

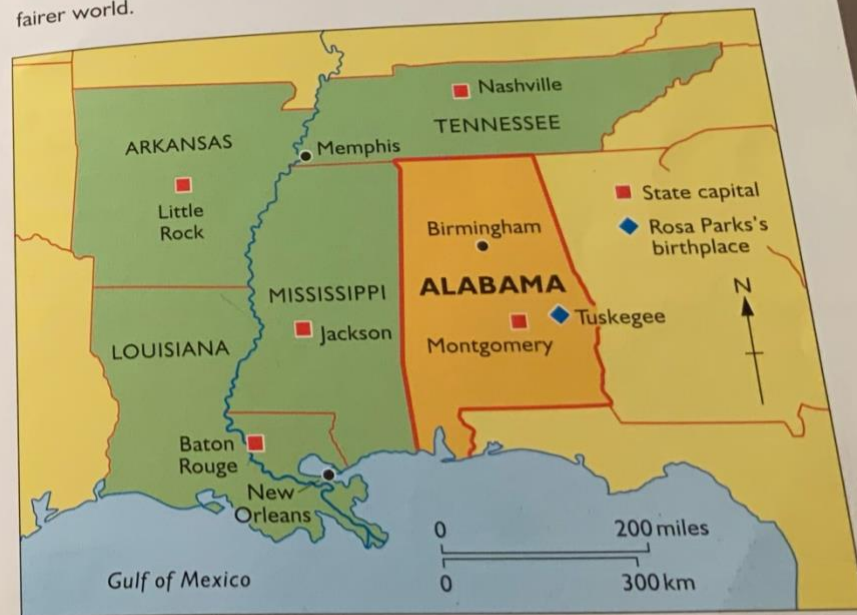
Rosa was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama on 4 February 1913. She knew poverty and hard times at an early



Rosa Parks in the 1950s.

age. Her father was James McCauley, a carpenter and stonemason. Her mother was a teacher called Leona Edwards. Both were African Americans. Rosa was given a strict Christian upbringing in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

At the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, aged 11, Rosa was no rebel. She was serious, quietly spoken and did as she was told. However her parents did tell her about African American history and of their dreams for a fairer world.



A map showing Alabama and neighbouring southern states of the USA.



## Rosa's refusal

In 1932 Rosa married a barber called Raymond Parks. Raymond and Rosa shared a passion for social justice and during this time both campaigned for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Through this organisation, Rosa met both blacks and whites who were determined to bring about a fairer society.



A woman recruits new members for the NAACP in the 1950s.

After finishing work on 1 December 1955, Rosa boards the bus and buys a ticket. The front of the bus is reserved for whites. Blacks must sit at the back. Blacks are allowed to sit in the middle, but only if no whites are left standing. Rosa sits in the middle.

Rosa hates this **discrimination** against her people. Back in 1943 she had an argument with a racist bus driver over this. She now realises that this same man, James F Blake,

is driving the bus this evening. At the third stop a white man climbs aboard and demands a seat in the middle section. Driver Blake orders all the blacks in Rosa's row to stand. The others begin to obey – but Rosa refuses to move. Blake calls the police. When they arrive, they arrest Rosa. The prisoner goes peacefully, is taken to the police station and fingerprinted. Some days later, she is fined \$10.

The NAACP is angry that Rosa has been humiliated in this way and decides to **boycott** the public transport system. Seventy-five per cent of the city's bus passengers are black. Let the bus company see how they survive without these fares. The word spreads like wildfire among African Americans. Walk, organise lifts, ride bicycles – but don't travel by bus!



Rosa Parks photographed sitting at the front of a bus after her protest in 1955.

## Timeline

- 1500s** Start of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- 1807** Britain halts trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- 1833** Britain ends slavery in its empire (including Canada and the Caribbean). American Anti-Slavery Society calls for abolition in the USA.
- 1861-65** US Civil War, abolition of slavery.
- 1866** Founding of the Ku Klux Klan.
- 1884** Start of the 'Jim Crow' laws.
- 1909** Founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP).
- 1913** 4 February: Rosa Louise McCauley (Parks) is born.
- 1932** Rosa McCauley marries Raymond Parks.
- 1934** Founding of the Nation of Islam movement.
- 1941** USA enters the Second World War.
- 1955** 13 August: the murder of Emmett Till.  
1 December: Rosa Parks is arrested for her bus protest.
- 1956** 13 November: US Supreme Court rules against bus segregation laws.  
21 December: bus desegregation enforced in Montgomery, Alabama.
- 1957** July: ~~death~~ threats force Rosa Parks to move to Detroit.  
September: riots at Little Rock, Arkansas, as Black pupils try to enter high school.
- 1960** Lunch-counter sit-ins, Nashville, Tennessee.
- 1961** The 'Freedom Riders' challenge segregation.
- 1963** 12 June: murder of Medgar Evers.  
23 June: Great March to Freedom, Detroit.  
28 August: Martin Luther King addresses 300,000 in Washington, DC.  
22 November: assassination of President John F Kennedy.
- 1965** 21 February: Malcolm X is assassinated in Harlem, New York.  
7 March: start of the Selma to Montgomery freedom march.  
August: violent riots in Watts, Los Angeles.
- 1966** Rise of the Black Panthers and the Black Power movement.
- 1967** July: violent riots in Detroit.
- 1968** 4 April: assassination of Martin Luther King.  
5 June: assassination of Robert Kennedy.
- 1987** Founding of the Parks Institute.
- 1996** Rosa Parks is awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- 1999** Rosa Parks meets Nelson Mandela in Detroit.
- 2005** 24 October: Rosa Parks dies, and lies in state at the US Capitol.



## Glossary

**abolition** Getting rid of a custom or law.

**African Americans** Americans whose ancestors came from Africa.

**Black Power** A movement calling for people of African descent to rise up and seize power for themselves.

**boycott** To make a protest by refusing to deal with someone or to use their services.

**civil war** A war between two armies within a single country, as happened with the USA 1861-65.

**communist** Believing that the working classes should seize power and take control of the economy and government.

**discrimination** Treating one group of people differently than another.

**economic** To do with the economy, the way in which money, employment and trade is organised.

**harass** To bother, or make trouble for someone.

**immoral** Offending against ideas of what is right or just.

**integration** Making sure that all people are included in something – the opposite of segregation.

**intimidate** To scare people off from doing something, to terrorise them.

**jury** A group of people called in to decide guilt or non-guilt in a court case.

**Nobel Peace Prize** An international prize that is awarded to people who have helped to make the world a more peaceful place.

**pastor** A clergyman, minister or priest.

**plantation** A large farming estate which produces a crop such as cotton or sugar cane.

**race** A group of people who are categorised by their physical appearance.

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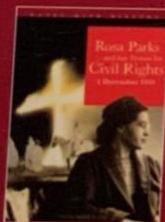
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## ROSA PARKS

On 1 December 1955, on her way home from work, Rosa Parks was asked to give up her seat on the bus for a white man. Rosa had had enough of the racial discrimination in her town and refused. Rosa was arrested but her long, hard protest for civil rights in America had begun...

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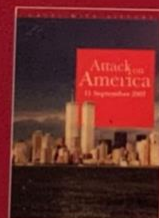
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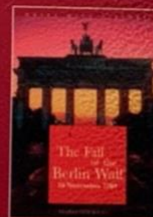
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