

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks was an African-American woman who made history with her comparatively small action of sitting still on a bus, which went on to spark major changes in American society.

Early Life

Rosa Parks was born on 4th February, 1913 and grew up mainly on a farm with her mother, brother and grandparents in Montgomery, Alabama, USA. She grew up at a time when American was segregated for black and white people.

Segregation in America

Segregation meant that many things for black and white people had to be separated by law. They had to use separate toilets, water fountains, entrances to public buildings and black and white children went to separate schools. It was also quite obvious that all the black facilities were not as clean or as modern as white facilities. Not only were black and white people segregated; black people were treated worse than white people within society.

The Bus Ride That Changed History

On 1st December, 1955, Rosa Parks was travelling home from work on a bus and sitting – as she had to – in the section allocated for black people at the back of the bus. The bus companies always moved black people further back or made them stand if the section allocated for white people was full and a white person needed to sit down. This happened to Rosa and she was told to move further back to give her seat to a white person...but she did not move. She was threatened with police action but she stayed put. Eventually, the police arrested, charged and fined her for breaking the law.

What Happened Next?

Amazingly, Rosa's behaviour unleashed a wave of protest and 40 000 black people in the area (and some white people) supported a bus boycott (a refusal to use the bus services in Montgomery). The bus companies lost a lot of money and the amount of people involved could not be ignored. The newspapers reported it and the boycott went on for 381 days, before it came to the attention of the government and just over a year later, in December 1956, the segregation on buses was lifted.

Rosa's actions made history as they 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



Rosa Parks Questions

Try and answer the questions using full sentences.

1. Where did Rosa grow up?

2. What is 'segregation'?

3. How were the facilities provided for black and white people different?

4. How old was Rosa when she did not move on the bus?

5. If you boycott something, what are you doing?

6. In 1955, how were the buses in Montgomery segregated?

7. In 'The Bus Ride That Changed History' section, why has the author used an ellipsis?

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8. Near the end of the text, the author writes that 'it wasn't the end of segregation'. When the bus laws were changed, why wasn't it the end of segregation?

9. In Rosa's quote, what was Rosa tired of and why do you think this was?

10. What sort of characteristics and qualities do you think Rosa Parks had? Give reasons for your answers.
