



Text Version of Audio Story: Rosa

She was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. Growing up in the Deep South in the 1920s, it didn't make sense to her ...

Jim Crow laws. Laws designed to keep black people and white people separate.

Some white actors were made up in what was called blackface — black makeup — and they mockingly portrayed black Americans. One such minstrel performance was called Jim Crow. The laws were dubbed the Jim Crow laws.

Blacks couldn't drink from the same water fountains as whites. They couldn't eat in the same restaurants. Public restrooms were segregated, too.

Blacks were allowed to ride on the same bus, but the front of the bus was reserved for whites. The back was for blacks. However, if the white section was full, it was the law that a black person would have to give up their seat to a white person. Blacks had to get on the front of the bus, pay their fare, exit, and re-enter through the back door.

It had been explained to her that "that's just the way it is." But she knew in her heart of hearts that being treated like a second-class citizen wasn't right. After all, this was America.

She grew up and got married. She was pretty, quiet, neat as a pin, now living in Montgomery, Alabama, and working as a seamstress.

At the age of 42, she uttered one word that would change the world forever. On December 1st 1955, Rosa Parks said "No!"

When a bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama, demanded she give up her seat to a white person, she quietly said "No!" The driver informed her that if she didn't get up, she would be arrested. Rosa was taken to the police station, fingerprinted, photographed and locked in a cell. She went to court and was convicted.

Black citizens rallied around Rosa Parks and a young unknown minister named Martin Luther King Jr.

Under the leadership of King, the black folks of Montgomery, Alabama, united. They adopted the nonviolent protest policies of a lawyer from India, turned humanitarian and civil rights leader in his own country — Mahatma Gandhi.

The nonviolent protesters in Montgomery staged a one-day boycott of the public buses. That one-day boycott stretched into a 381-day boycott. America watched as they walked to work and school. Housewives acted as dispatchers arranging rides for people, so they wouldn't have to take the bus.

The following November, the United States Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to segregate public transportation. It was but a small victory in the scope of the injustices that were yet to be righted.

Parks' courage and King's leadership had put the issue of civil rights on the front pages. Good and decent Americans knew that the time for equality was long past due. Oppositions such as the KKK came out in force. Murder and violence would become commonplace, and yet the cause forged ahead.

In 1964, President Johnson signed into law the landmark Civil Rights Act. That same year, Martin Luther King Jr., at the age of 35, became the youngest man ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Four years later, he fell prey to an assassin's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee.

At the time of this writing, Rosa Parks is 87 years old. She recently visited that very street corner where she was arrested so many years ago. There, Troy State University has built a ten million dollar library and interactive museum — dedicating it to the courage of a department store seamstress, who changed the world with just one word.

I'm the American Storyteller.