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INFLUENCE OF ROSA PARKS

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Rosa Parks is a renowned activist in the history of America, with her greatest highlight being the Montgomery bus incidence. On December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a Montgomery bus which black people refrained from using to avoid demeaning as the front seats were reserved for the whites while the black sat at the back.¹ Segregation in the bus was a law and the drivers had authority to determine how people sat on the bus. On a fateful day, Rosa Parks sat at the white's section and when the driver ordered her to stand so that a white person would sit, Rosa refused.² Rosa Parks's supporters argue that she brought great influence in the fight for civil rights, breaking white supremacy and breaking the chains of segregation. The supporters believe that Rosa's upbringing and the respect she commanded in her life allowed her to drive change in America's democracy. Notably, some people argue that Rosa Parks should not receive all the respect as the mother of civil rights movement. She was just a representation of many people who had stood against segregation on the bus. While it is true that Rosa Parks was not the first in standing against segregation, the influence she commanded when her case spread across America cannot be ignored when we talk about civil rights and equality today,

Before the Montgomery bus incidence, Rosa Park's upbringing indicates that she was under constant forces of segregation and she was clearly against the practice. Born and raised in Alabama, Rosa was segregated by Jim Crow's law that sidelined the blacks in almost every social aspect of their daily lives.³ Specifically, the blacks were segregated in areas such as commutation services, public restrooms and educational facilities. For instance, white children would board buses to school while the black children walked.

¹ Theoharis, Jeanne. *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. Beacon Press, 2015.

² Theoharis, 2015

³ Hanson, Joyce A. *Rosa Parks: A Biography: A Biography*. ABC-CLIO, 2011

Rosa was not an exception to this segregation as she reported being bullied at school and was constantly required to defend herself. Devaluing the black people that existed during Jim Crow era had created a great opportunity for sexual harassment of the blacks. Rosa Parks disclosed that she was forced to fight her way out of the hands of a man who intended to sexually assault her, maintaining that she was ready to die than to give in.⁴ Also, Rosa recalls how her grandfather would stand outside their house with a short gun to defend the family when the Ku Klux Klan was threatening black Americans' security. Thus, living face to face with segregation opened Rosa's eyes to the prejudice against the black Americans at a very age⁵. Childhood adversities helped Rosa establish that she lived in an unfair world and fought her way out to freedom.

Indeed, Rosa Parks was not a civil rights movement mother the day she hesitated give a white man a bus seat, but early days when she defended herself against school bullies and the day she defended herself from the white sexual assaulter. Rosa's past prepared her for the day she set the stage for civil rights movements.

The natural path of Rosa's life indicates that she was destined to be a symbol of dignity in the fight against segregation. Rosa was a dedicated and faithful follower in the community church and this gave her great recognition among the community members. Notably, in 1932, Rosa got married to Raymond Parks, a member of NAACP. Coupling with a member of an activist group gave Rosa a renewed energy and a clear path to fight against segregation.⁶For

⁴ Hanson, *Rosa Parks*

⁵ Kudlinski, Kathleen. *Rosa Parks*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

⁶ Mace, Darryl. *Rosa Parks: A Life in American History*. ABC-CLIO, 2021.

instance, Raymond and Rosa joined hands in raising money needed to defend a number of black men who had been falsely accused of rape by white women. In 1943 Rosa joined NAACP despite warnings about safety by the husband, indicating her determination to make a difference. Rosa became the secretary to NAACP'S president and served with the organization for thirteen years. As a result, holding influential position in the community and NAACP helped Rosa gather a lot of respect and influence in Montgomery, which later gave her support when she got arrested.⁷ Later on, Rosa secured a job at Maxwell Air force Base, a segregation-free entity, thus getting a chance to experience equality. At Maxwell's, Rosa understood how much the black community was losing on and decided to take a great turn towards fighting for civil rights. Hence, the great influence and support that Rosa had gathered made it possible to make history in American democracy.

In America's History, Rosa is greatly remembered for igniting protests and giving powerful civil movements. Many people miss understanding that before the Montgomery bus incidence that led to the arrest of Rosa Parks, there were campaigns for fair treatment of the black people on the local buses. Additionally, NAACP members, Montgomery labor activists and Women's political committee were at the forefront in seeking fair treatment of the American Black people. In 1954 before Rosa's arrest, a court ruling pointed out that there was a chance to end racial segregation when the court ruled that segregated public schools provided unequal protection of the laws.⁸ Arrest of Rosa Parks came in when the campaigners held a chance to challenge the law of segregation and indeed, the campaigners seized the moment.

⁷ Mace, *A Life in American History*

⁸ Richard, Kayla Jene. "Beyond the Bus Boycott: The Impact of Rosa Parks on the Civil Rights Movement." Ph.D. diss., 2020.

Notably, Rosa Parks was already a member of the NAACP, which allowed for immediate intervention to her arrest. After Parker's arrest, a trade unionist named Nixon and a Women's political Committee leader mobilized the community to boycott the Montgomery buses. A Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formulated under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr to spearhead the long boycott. Surprisingly, people from other parts of the USA joined in to the protests and further protested against segregation in restaurants and other social facilities. Following three hundred and eighty-one days of protests, the Montgomery Bus industry was highly affected due to decreased income from the blacks who formed the largest percentage of riders.⁹ MIA sought to advocate for better treatment in buses. Still, the support given by NAACP made it possible to fight for complete dismissal of segregation in buses and order for full integration was given in December 1956.

Based on the argument that Rosa was arrested at a heightened quest for inclusion and held active roles in campaign groups, Rosa was in the best position to trigger boycotts and change the direction of civil rights activism. Despite several indications that Rosa Parks long existed in activism before her arrest, some people still maintain there is no difference between her and other activists that appeared before; hence their importance should be measured equally.

Several people have attacked Rosa Parks's contribution to democracy because she was not the first black American to ²refuse to give up a seat on the bus. Claudette Colvin and Aurelia Browder are among the named persons who refused to take the back seat at the bus and were arrested and convicted in March 1955 and April 1955. Notably, the two were named plaintiffs against Montgomery's mayor in February 1956. The MIA sought to file a legal suit against the city when the boycott failed to offer full integration. Simplifiers of Parker's contribution question

⁹, Richard, Beyond the Bus Boycott

why the plaintiffs were not recognized with the same importance as Parker in ending bus segregation.¹⁰ Evidence indicates that Rosa was better positioned to ignite protests considering her active roles in fighting for rights, for instance, the Scottsboro Boys case.

Notably, arguments have been made insinuating that Rosa refused to stand from the bus seat because she was tired from the day's work and not because she was protesting bus segregation. However, in later reports, Rosa defends herself, saying that she was not tired from work or old age but was rather tired of giving in.¹¹ Rosa disclosed that it was not the first time she was protesting the segregated bus as she recalled being forced out of the bus to board from the back. While some may take Rosa's defenses as mere stories, her childhood and proof of active participation in the NAACP can dismiss arguments against Rosa's contribution.

Events of one's life can shape destiny depending on the path one chooses. Many people are born and raised in disadvantaged situations, but they chose to fight for a better future. For instance, former USA President Barrack Obama was not born in a royal family or a politically driven environment. Still, he believed he could change his life narrative and indeed, it was possible.

Rosa Parks was brought up in a highly segregated community, but she decided to fight for her rights from the very beginning. The exposure to unfair treatment instilled in her an undying determination to engage in civil rights activism in her life. ¹ When Rosa Parks refused to give up a bus seat to a white, she was fed up with the segregation in the city, but her action opened up to a destiny of hope to all black Americans. Rosa did not only open up a way for civil

¹⁰ Schwartz, Barry. "Collective forgetting and the symbolic power of oneness: The strange apotheosis of Rosa Parks." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2009): 123-142.

¹¹ Schwartz, 123-142

movements' formulation, but she also got a chance to educate the youths on importance of civil rights. After living in Alabama, Rosa and her husband founded a training institute where youths were trained on the roots of civil rights movements to ensure her legacy lives.¹² Notably, Rosa did not stop her works after the full integration of transportation, but she was seen advocating for rights and fighting against unfair acts such as sexual assault. In one case of a girl who was sexually assaulted, Rosa disclosed that such cases were close to her heart due to past exposure to a rape threat. It can be concluded that almost every aspect of Rosa's life, even the unaware prepared her for future roles, but when faced with situations to make tough decisions, she was brave enough to drive change.

Conclusively, contributions of Rosa Parks in defining the democracy in America and setting the stage in advocating for civil rights are immense. Reflecting on the great revolutions that civil rights movements have made to bring equality, we can understand the doors that Rosa Parks opened and appreciate the America today. As depicted in Rosa's history, a life of segregation in Jim Crow's era is nothing that any American would wish to go back to. The road to end racism and ensure equality still seems to be long as Americans are still struggling with the two issues, but having the opportunity to voice our views is enough to appreciate the 'mother of civil movements.' We should also note Rosa Parks never came as first to protest unfair treatment; thus, in writing America's history, we should also remember those side-by-side with Rosa in inspiring change.

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¹² Richard, Beyond the Bus Boycott.

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