

Marquand Chapel  
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**Reflections on Rosa Parks**  
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While reflecting on Rosa Parks, I was struck by the ironies in her life and awed that in death she continues to make history.

Revisionist historians attempted to reduce the heroic act of civil disobedience that she took on December 1, 1955 to a concern for exhaustion after a day of hard work as a seamstress. It was suggested that her action was unplanned and that being anointed a prophet was accidental. Mrs. Parks set the record straight by writing in her autobiography, “*the only tired I was, was tired of giving up.*”

Rosa Parks makes history as the first woman to lie in state in the rotunda of the Capitol Building and ironies abound. It is perhaps fitting that she rests in the same place of honor reserved for military leaders and war heroes for she was certainly a 5-star general on the front lines of the war against racism. It is ironic however that this icon of justice, the “mother of the civil rights movement” is accorded the same tribute paid J. Edgar Hoover, the head of the FBI during the civil rights movement. Hoover used the full force of the resources at his disposal in an attempt to destroy those fighting on the battlefields in Montgomery, Selma, Birmingham & Greensboro.

It is ironic that it is on the occasion of the death of Rosa Parks that Condoleeza Rice, a person whose understanding of her own sense of heritage has been questioned, would acknowledge that her rise to the highest seats of power has been on the shoulders of Rosa Parks. The city of Montgomery continues to debate whether or not Rosa Parks should be pardoned while persons of infamy have been pardoned. It is ironic that the Montgomery Improvement Association that was created in 1955 in support of her actions still finds it necessary to meet every Tuesday morning “over grits and eggs”<sup>1</sup> to discuss racial issues.

As the years passed, Rosa Parks continued to use her prophetic voice against the unjustifiable and unfair. In 2003 (just 2 years ago at the age of 90) the NAACP decided to present her its Image Award. Rosa Parks boycotted the program out of her concern for how the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., The Rev. Jesse Jackson and she had been portrayed in the movie, *Barber Shop*, which was also scheduled to receive an Image Award at the same time. So she did not go.

In 1999, Rosa Parks sued the Grammy-award-winning group *Outkast*. She believed they had used her name for commercial purposes without consent. If the fans of *Outkast* were going to hear and sing her name, she wanted them to learn something from it. It was finally agreed that *Outkast* would produce educational programs on the Civil Rights Movement to be distributed to thousands of schools.

Rosa Parks was simply one person with a passion for justice. Her radical activism in a singular act of disobedience on a city bus catapulted a movement that had been seeking a spark.

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<sup>1</sup> *DetroitNews.com*, October 30, 2005, <http://www.detnews.com/2005/specialreport/0510/30/A01-365847.htm>

She was the match that lit a flame to replace the darkness that had enveloped this nation for 400 years. Her earthly flame has been extinguished and the threat of darkness remains. Who among us will have the courage of Rosa Parks to say “no” to injustice? Who among us is simply, “tired of giving in?” Is it you? How about you? Perhaps its you!