

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks

America's most powerful politicians honoured Rosa McCauley Parks last month [February 2013] by unveiling her statue in the US Capitol's Statutory Hall. President Barack Obama who attended the unveiling praised Parks as an enduring reminder of what true leadership requires, "no matter how humble or lofty our positions". Rosa McCauley Parks was a fearless campaigner against unfairness and injustice. Her actions against segregation in the USA turned the wheels of the civil rights movement and her reforming zeal was central to ending the unfairness of segregation. We can all be proud of her campaigning and reforming achievements and for the recognition given to her.

Clan Association Chief Hector MacAulay said "Reform is a characteristic in all MacAulays. So many of our most famous men and women were also campaigners and reformers.



People like Thomas Babington MacAulay a leading political reformer, Zachary MacAulay a central figure in abolishing slavery, Thomas Bassett MacAulay a great land reformer, Francis Sowerby MacAulay a great pioneering mathematician, Mother Catherine MacAulay a leading 19th century reformer in Ireland campaigning against extreme poverty and exploitation of workers and Iain MacMillan MacAulay who helped to reform our Clan Association".

The Woman Who Changed a Nation

By Kira Albin, interview conducted in 1996.

Photos courtesy of Monica Morgan Photography and ZondervanPublishingHouse.



When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on December 1, 1955, she was tired and weary from a long day of work. At least that's how the event has been retold countless times and recorded in our history books. But, there's a misconception here that does not do justice to the woman whose act of courage began turning the wheels of the civil rights movement on that fateful day. Rosa Parks was physically tired, but no more than you or I after a long day's work. In fact, under other circumstances, she would have probably given up her seat willingly to a child or elderly person. But this time Parks was tired of the treatment she and other African Americans received every day of their lives, what with the racism, segregation, and Jim Crow laws of the time. "Our mistreatment was just not right, and I was tired of it," writes Parks in her recent book, *Quiet Strength*, (ZondervanPublishingHouse, 1994). "I kept thinking about my mother and my grandparents, and how strong they were. I knew there was a possibility of being mistreated, but an opportunity was being given to me to do what I had asked of others." The rest of Parks' story is American history... Her arrest and trial, a 381-day Montgomery bus boycott, and, finally, the Supreme Court's ruling in November 1956 that segregation on transportation is unconstitutional. But Parks' personal history has been lost in the retelling. Prior to her arrest, Mrs. Parks had a firm and quiet strength to change things that were unjust. She served as secretary of the NAACP and later Adviser to the NAACP Youth Council, and tried to register to vote on several occasions when it was still nearly impossible to do so. She had run-ins with bus drivers and was evicted from buses. Parks recalls the humiliation: "I didn't want to pay my fare and then go around the back door, because many

times, even if you did that, you might not get on the bus at all. They'd probably shut the door, drive off, and leave you standing there." Forty years later, despite some tremendous gains, Parks feels, "we still have a long way to go in improving the race relations in this country." Rosa Parks spends most of her year in Detroit but winters in Los Angeles. Her day is filled with reading mail,—"from students, politicians, and just regular people"—preparing meals, going to church, and visiting people in hospitals. She is still active in fighting racial injustices, now standing up for what she believes in and sharing her message with others. She and other members of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development have a special program called Pathways to Freedom, for young people age 11-18. Children in the program travel across the country tracing the Underground Railroad, visiting the scenes of critical events in the civil rights movement and learning aspects of America's history. Elaine Steele, Parks' close friend and cofounder of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, says, "Mrs. Parks is a role model that these students look up to, and they feel very honored and privileged to be in her company. And she's very gracious to accompany the students to these activities." February, Black History Month, seemed a relevant time to evaluate youth and their sense of history. But Parks thinks bigger and broader. "We don't have enough young people who are concerned and who are exposed to the civil rights movement, and I would like to see more exposure and get their interest," she says, pausing to reflect, "but I think it should just be history, period, and not thinking in terms of only Black History Month." Parks is quiet, soft-spoken, and diplomatic. But she is firm in her belief that enough people will have the courage and dedication to make this country better than it is. "And this young man that's taking over the NAACP, Kweisi Mfume, I admire him a great deal," she adds. About Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Black Muslims, she says, "Well, I don't know him personally, but I think it was great that he spearheaded the million man march." Parks has met many renowned leaders and has traveled throughout the world receiving honors and awards for her efforts toward racial harmony. She is appreciative and honored by them but exhibits little emotion over whom she has met or what she has done. Her response to being called "the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" is modest. "If people think of me in that way, I just accept the honor and appreciate it," she says. In *Quiet Strength*, however, Parks is careful to explain that she did not change things alone. "Four decades later I am still uncomfortable with the credit given to me for starting the bus boycott. I would like people to know I was not the only person involved. I was just one of many who fought for freedom." In August 1994, Parks was attacked in her home by a young man who wanted money from her. Of the event, she writes, "I pray for this young man and the conditions in our country that have made him this way. Despite the violence and crime in our society, we should not let fear overwhelm us. We must remain strong." Parks' belief in God and her religious convictions are at the core of everything she does. It is the overriding theme in her book and the message she hopes to impart: "I'd like for [readers] to know that I had a very spiritual background and that I believe in church and my faith and that has helped to give me the strength and courage to live as I did." Strength in Numbers Donations to help support and expand Pathways to Freedom, are welcomed. Send a check or money order to: Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, 65 Cadillac Square, Suite 2200, Detroit, MI 48226.