



Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein On the Death of Rosa Parks

November 2, 2005

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) introduced the following floor statement today in memory of Civil Rights Activist Rosa Parks:

“Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the truly legendary and enduring figures of the 20th century – Rosa Parks – who dedicated herself to fighting for equality and justice.

Rosa Parks, the matriarch of our nation’s civil rights movement, died last Monday at the age of 92. An American icon who changed the course of the 20th Century, Rosa Parks believed that men and women –regardless of color – should not be treated as second class citizens. Sixty years after the name Rosa Parks first made headlines, her courageous acts continue to symbolize the cause of freedom in America.

As we mourn the passing of Rosa Parks, we are reminded of the power and integrity of her spirit. Her quiet dignity and fearless strength shaped and inspired the Civil Rights Movement in the United States over the last half-century.

Most historians date the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the United States to December 1, 1955. Tired and weary not only from a long day of work, but from years of discrimination and racial inequality, an unknown seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. On that momentous day in history, Rosa Parks was arrested for violating a city ordinance, but her lonely act of defiance sparked a movement that ended legal segregation in America.

The subsequent bus boycott by African Americans created a national sensation. Led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery bus boycott lasted nearly 13 months and inspired the nation’s civil rights movement.

The boycott led to the Supreme Court questioning the legality of the Jim Crow law that mandated the discrimination of African-Americans on the public bus system. And on November 13, 1956, in the landmark case *Browder v. Gayle*, the Supreme Court banned segregation on buses. A tremendous victory for the cause of freedom and equality.

Throughout her long life, Rosa Parks possessed an innate ability to lead. Her quiet acts of courage illuminated for Americans the disgrace and moral injustice of segregation. She continued to inspire non-violent protests in the name of civil rights throughout the 20th Century and changed the face of America forever.

Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1913 -- a time when black and white America seemed destined to remain perpetually divided. In 1932, she married civil rights activist Raymond Parks. Together, they worked for the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, where she worked as a secretary for the Montgomery branch and as its youth leader.

In the summer of 1955, while working for the NAACP, Rosa Parks attended an interracial leadership conference. She later said that it was at this conference where she "gained strength to persevere in my work for freedom, not just for blacks but for all oppressed people."

Rosa Parks had a distinguished career of public and community service. In 1965, Rosa Parks began to work as a receptionist and office assistant for Congressman John Conyers in his Detroit office, where she continued to work until 1988. Later, she established the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. Its ongoing mission is to motivate and direct youth to achieve their highest potential.

Rosa Parks once remarked that she wanted to be remembered "as a person who wanted to be free and wanted others to be free." She lived each day by this mantra and inspired countless individuals in America and throughout the world to take up the mantle of freedom.

But although our country has come a long way since the days of the Jim Crow laws, it doesn't mean that we still don't have even more to accomplish. We must protect the advances made by America's minorities, and also further those advances in the years ahead.

Today, we honor the life and legacy of Rosa Parks, a great champion of freedom, equality and justice, and prosperity for all people. I believe that it was especially fitting that she was given the distinct tribute of lying in honor in our Nation's Capitol. An icon who changed America, there is no doubt that Rosa Parks will remain etched forever in our memories."

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