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## Campus, nation mourn civil rights icon Effects of Parks' death felt by university community

Jamaal O'Neal

Staff Writer

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Rosa Lee Parks, also known as the "mother of the civil rights movement," died Monday evening in her Detroit home. She was 92. Parks was born in Tuskegee, Ala., on Feb. 4, 1913.

Parks was riding on a Montgomery, Ala., city bus on Dec. 1, 1955, when she refused to give her seat to a white man. Jim Crow laws, which mandated the separation of the races in buses, restaurants and public places, required blacks to give their seats to whites.

She was jailed and fined \$14.

Her arrest triggered a 381-day boycott of the bus system and has been earmarked as the start of the modern civil rights movement. Parks had numerous honors. She received dozens of awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian honor, in 1999.

Todd Moye of the history faculty said Parks was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that helped register black voters in Alabama, and numerous other civil rights organizations.

"Some people had the perception that this was a spare of the moment movement, but it wasn't," he said.

Moye said Parks tended to stay out of the spotlight, but her demeanor played a pivotal roll during the movement.

"She had a tremendous amount of dignity," he said. "That made it easy for people of the United States to understand why they were fighting for change in America."

Moye said Parks is the personification of normal black Americans who were able to come together and accomplish major changes that effect us today.

"She is living proof that normal people can have a huge impact on the American system," he said. "You don't have to be rich ... or have a college education to make a difference."

NT students have not forgotten her legacy and contribution to American society but agree there is still a long road to follow in the struggle for racial equality.

Worried about the future

Parks commented about apathy among black youth.

In a 1988 interview, Parks said she worried that black youth took legal equality for granted.

Cheyron Brown, director of NT's multicultural center, agrees with Parks' statement.

"People, regardless of race, greed or color, have taken for granted the struggles of those that came before us," she said. "I believe that we have gotten so into our comfort zones, riding on the backs of those who have paved the way for us, that we won't do it."

Leslie Obinegbo, Mesquite senior and president of the NT National Association of Black Journalists, said black students should take advantage of the rights many struggled for during the civil rights movement.

She encouraged all students to become proactive on campus, register to vote and participate in all elections.

"I think it's really sad that we take advantage of those rights that are made available to us through people like Rosa Parks," she said. "It wasn't too long ago where black people were not allowed to vote,

and to know she was alive while people were sitting around not voting, I'm sure that broke her heart."

NT remembers a legend

The news of Parks' death saddened some students and faculty, but her legacy will live in the hearts of those touched by her class and stance for justice.

The Coalition of Black Organizations, NABJ and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People have plans in the works to honor Parks. All groups will be discussing these plans at their next meeting.

President Norval Pohl said he was 12 years old when he heard about Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott.

"I can remember the coverage that followed in Life magazine and all the pictures of the boycotts and the riots that were going on," he said. "It was a time of great turmoil."

Pohl said growing up in rural California kept him away from issues that caused racial tensions in the South. But a train ride to Kansas changed his perspective.

"It was like another world," Pohl said. "We couldn't imagine what was going on in Alabama ... it was just wasn't something that occurred to us in our little community."

Brown said Parks' stance aided diversity's causes.

"Mrs. Parks left a legacy, that when you're tired of going with the norm when it's wrong, you have to take a stand," she said. "Her sitting down was a symbolic stand for people everywhere that we have to stand up for injustice."

Obinegbo agreed.

"For black people, we really don't have very many prominently black leaders who are still around today," she said. "To know that she was still living is very inspirational because it's like that dream is still living."

Warren Burggren, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said Parks is a pioneer of the civil rights movement that will never be forgotten in American history.

"I'm sure she didn't set out to change the face of the civil rights movement," he said. "But that single act of bravery by a single individual who said I had enough ... shows that wonderful things can start from small humble beginnings."



Photo courtesy the United States Library of Congress

"Woman Fingerprinted. Mrs. Rosa Parks, Negro Seamstress, Whose Refusal to Move to the Back of a Bus Touched Off the Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama." 1956. New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.