



Rosa Parks: A Life

By Douglas Brinkley

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Fifty years after she made history by refusing to give up her seat on a bus, Rosa Parks at last gets the major biography she deserves. The eminent historian Douglas Brinkley follows this thoughtful and devout woman from her childhood in Jim Crow Alabama through her early involvement in the NAACP to her epochal moment of courage and her afterlife as a beloved (and resented) icon of the civil rights movement. Well researched and written with sympathy and keen insight, the result is a moving, revelatory portrait of an American heroine and her tumultuous times.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Most Americans know her only as the 42-year-old seamstress who refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. Her quiet act of defiance is often considered the beginning of the modern civil rights movement, but historian Douglas Brinkley reminds us that it was neither the beginning nor the end of Rosa Parks's quest for justice. On that fateful day in 1955 she was already a veteran civil rights activist, married to a charter member of the NAACP's Montgomery chapter, and a devout member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the many black churches whose congregants organized and fought to desegregate the South. Brinkley gives a thorough account of Parks's political life in the South and in Detroit (where she moved in 1957 to escape death threats), capturing her majestic personal dignity. Yet he also places her activism within a vivid historical context, anchored by extensive interviews with her peers and Parks herself as well as scholarly research. His subject is now a frail octogenarian, but Brinkley conveys the power of her legacy in a moving final scene when Nelson Mandela, just four months out of a South African jail in 1990, embraces Parks as a comrade and a beloved mentor. --*Wendy Smith*

From Publishers Weekly

In the second volume to date of the popular Penguin Lives series to be devoted to a woman (remarkably, only four of the projected 26 subjects will be female), historian Brinkley shreds several key myths surrounding Rosa Parks, the African-American woman who became "the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" at the age of 42, when she boldly defied Jim Crow laws by refusing to give up her seat to a white rider on a segregated bus in 1955. The act catalyzed the historic 381-day Montgomery bus boycott and stirred the nation's conscience. Yet Parks has a more complex personality than is suggested by her shy, soft-spoken public persona, Brinkley reveals. Despite a humble, fatherless childhood in rural Alabama, she quickly distinguished herself as a tireless worker with the local NAACP, devoting her energies to area youth groups, recording the problems of victims of hate crimes and participating in the organization's major state conferences. Brinkley (The Unfinished Presidency, etc.) pinpoints the origins of Parks's strength and strong social commitment as he details the legalized segregation that tainted every aspect of Southern life. His short, compelling scenes rivet the reader, although some merely expand on previously disclosed events, such as the wave of jealousy and backbiting among Parks's peers, her resurgence in Detroit politics as an aide to Representative John Conyers and the savage beating and robbery that almost took her life in 1994. Like several books in this series, Brinkley's tribute to Parks succeeds not because of an abundance of fresh revelations but because of its wealth of insight and rich portraiture. Agent, Andrew Wylie; 4-city author tour. (June)

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From Library Journal

Effectively evoking time and place from Rosa Louise McCaulery's birth in Tuskegee, AL, on February 4, 1913, to her receiving the U.S. Congress's highest honor—the Congressional Gold Medal—in 1999, historian Brinkley (Univ. of New Orleans) profiles the quiet woman dubbed "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement." On December 1, 1955, the seamstress, who married Raymond Parks and served as secretary to the NAACP chapter in Alabama's capital, refused to give up her city bus seat to a white man and was arrested for violating racial segregation laws. Brinkley's contribution to the "Penguins Lives" series captures the resolve that helped launch and guide the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56 and the crusading protest that followed. An easy-to-read synthesis, this book offers general readers an accessible profile of both Parks and black protest against white supremacy for most of the 20th century. The recently re-issued 1992 autobiography, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (Penguin Putnam Bks. for Young Readers, 1999) provides a more

personal focus on Parks. Recommended for collections on biography, African Americans, women's studies, Civil Rights, the South, or modern U.S. history.

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