

Hon. Louise Williams Bishop Declares Rosa Parks Remembrance Day
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Capitol Rotunda, February 4, 2002
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
By [Wynne Alexander](#)

Thank you Mr. Speaker,
And thank you to all my colleagues who so willingly co-sponsored this resolution.

Our action here today marks one of the most important functions of a cultured society. We are emphasizing the connection with the people whose historic actions paved our way to a better future. In marking this “Rosa Parks Remembrance Day” we are acknowledging not only her singular act of bravery and vision, but we are also standing in humility and thankfulness for an action that will live for all time, lauded and applauded from one generation to the next.

The indelible imprint of Rosa Parks’ footsteps will guide us through the ages, just as she herself was following the tradition and footsteps of the great abolitionist Sojourner Truth.

This statuesque black woman escaped slavery in the early 1800s. But not before she did hard labor in the fields of unjust slave masters, gave birth to five children, and withstood the horrendous agony of having some of them taken from her and sold into slavery. After her escape from that purgatory, she became a highly reputed speaker, championing the abolitionist movement slowly gaining steam across a conflicted United States. She was scheduled to speak before a women’s rights convention in Akron, Ohio. Some of the organizers were afraid to let Sojourner Truth speak. They claimed they did not want to get “mixed up” in the anti-slavery movement.

The leadership decided to let her speak anyway, no doubt, because they knew--white or black--in 1851- without the right to vote, all women were compromised. All women were in some form of chains. That day, Sojourner Truth delivered her now famous “Ain’t I A Woman” speech. Her extraordinary oratory brought down the house. All the righteous people rushed the podium, embracing her, and hailing her a hero. And those who wanted her silenced, were themselves made silent.

Sojourner Truth struck major blows for freedom, eventually counseling President Abraham Lincoln, sensitizing him to the African American reality in Civil War America.

Well, 104 years later, the business of cleaning up the *mess* of inequality needed another stand up woman. Albeit, one willing to keep her seat.

Someone willing to sacrifice, unafraid to go to jail and be handled by some of the wrongest-headed (sic) people in Alabama, someone of supreme courage and integrity. That someone was Rosa Parks.

And so, on December 1st in 1955, in a racially hostile Montgomery, Alabama- she simply refused to get up and move to the back of the bus. And for that, she was arrested.

She was *arrested* for *sitting* where she pleased.

The struggle she sparked brought a young Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to national prominence as he spearheaded what became the Montgomery Alabama Bus Boycott.

Later, Dr. King marked the historic connection, saying the Montgomery Bus Boycott led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

And I'm here to tell you, Rosa Parks taking a stand and saying 'I'll sit anywhere I please' is responsible for me sitting in the Pennsylvania Legislature today. *All* of the great women who stood up before us, have *us* standing on their shoulders. And remember for years, Rosa Parks was the lone female image in a sea of male leadership. And that transcends race. *All* the women who serve in the Pennsylvania state house and senate, and both federal houses of congress, regardless of color, *all* the women serving in cabinets across this country, all the female judges in the land-*all* of us, we are sisters linked to these great freedom fighters. Without them where would any of us be? Rosa Parks, in her quiet defiance and unswerving courage, launched a thousand careers for women in public service. You can't get to the front of the seniority chain without getting to the front of the bus *first*. We've gone from the chains that cripple and bind to the chain of high command. I thank you Rosa Parks, without you, how far would any of us have risen ?

Another towering intellect of our time, Maya Angelou writes about the source of inner strength that epitomizes Rosa Parks' ability to inspire an uprising in the rest of us:

"You may write me down in history
With your bitter twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I rise...

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness

But still, like air, I'll rise...

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise."

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