

Conclusion: The Struggle Continues

***“The Struggle Continues...The Struggle Continues...The Struggle Continues”* an elderly Rosa Parks wrote over and over on a drugstore bag.**

Too often Rosa Parks is celebrated as the ‘quiet’ and “accidental’ heroine of a movement long since run its course when the actual Rosa Parks thought there was much more work to be done. To the end of her life — she stood with those doing it, even as she struggled with the ways people “still only want to talk about that one evening in 1955 when I refused to give up my seat on the bus.” “I understand that I am a symbol,” she wrote in her autobiography *My Story*, but she carried on her organizing nonetheless. “The struggle continues,” she consistently maintained. At the age of 82, Rosa Parks was mugged in her home by a young man, Joseph Skipper. Saddened by the attack, Parks refused the hysteria pundits tried to cultivate around her mugging and rejected the ways that many now saw the biggest problem facing black people as black people themselves. Rather, she prayed for Skipper and “the conditions that have made him this way.” When the word went out that Parks had been mugged, Skipper was caught and beaten severely. After being convicted, he was sent to prison out of state for his own safety. Parks made it known through men in prison that she did not want the young man hurt.

Long committed to cultivating youth leadership and worried that adults had become “too complacent”, she and longtime friend Elaine Steele founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development in 1987 to educate young people about African American history and the struggle for civil and human rights. Parks worried about the backsliding around key civil rights protections. She publicly opposed the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. Dismayed by the ways the Supreme Court was “turning its back on the undeniable fact of discrimination and exclusion,” she felt, given Thomas’ poor record on civil rights and statements on *Brown v Board* and *Roe v Wade*, his appointment “would not represent a step forward in the road to racial progress but a u-turn on that road.” Eight days after the tragedy of 9/11, she joined with civil rights activists Harry Belafonte, Danny Glover and others in a statement against a “military response” to the attacks and calling on the United States to act “cooperatively as part of a community of nations within the framework of international law.”

Similar to the ways the Black Lives Matter movement is challenging mass incarceration and police injustice, Parks had long seen the role of the law as a key site in perpetuating injustice. Long heartened by the spirit and militancy of young people, she foregrounded the responsibility of adults

Book

<http://rosaparksbiography.org/bio>

and movement elders to nurture the political spirit of young people and support their organizing efforts. As she reminded Spelman College students, “don’t give up and don’t say the movement is dead.”

Interview: [Nikki Giovanni NPR interview talking about Parks, history, and her book *Rosa*](#)