

# LAW & JUSTICE

## Rosa Parks Statute Dedicated

Civil rights icon shaped course of U.S. history

(AP) — President Barack Obama and congressional leaders unveiled a full-length statue of civil rights icon Rosa Parks in the Capitol last Wednesday, paying tribute to a figure whose name became synonymous with courage in the face of injustice.

Parks becomes the first black woman to be honored with a full-length statue in the Capitol's Statuary Hall. A bust of another black woman, abolitionist Sojourner Truth, sits in the Capitol Visitors Center.

Obama said that with the installation of the statue, Parks, who died in 2005, has taken her rightful place among those who have shaped the course of U.S. history. He said her presence in Capitol would serve to "remind us no matter how humble or lofty our positions, just what it is that leadership requires."

Obama and House Speaker John

Boehner jointly led the unveiling, standing with the statue between them as they grasped and pulled in opposite directions on the braided cord that held the covering. Congressional leaders in the House and Senate joined Parks' niece in tugging on the cord.

"We do well by placing a statue of her here," Obama said, "but we can do no greater honor to her memory than to carry forward the power of her principle and a courage born of conviction."

The statue portrays Parks seated, wearing a hat and clutching her trademark purse — "a permanent reminder of the cause she embodied," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

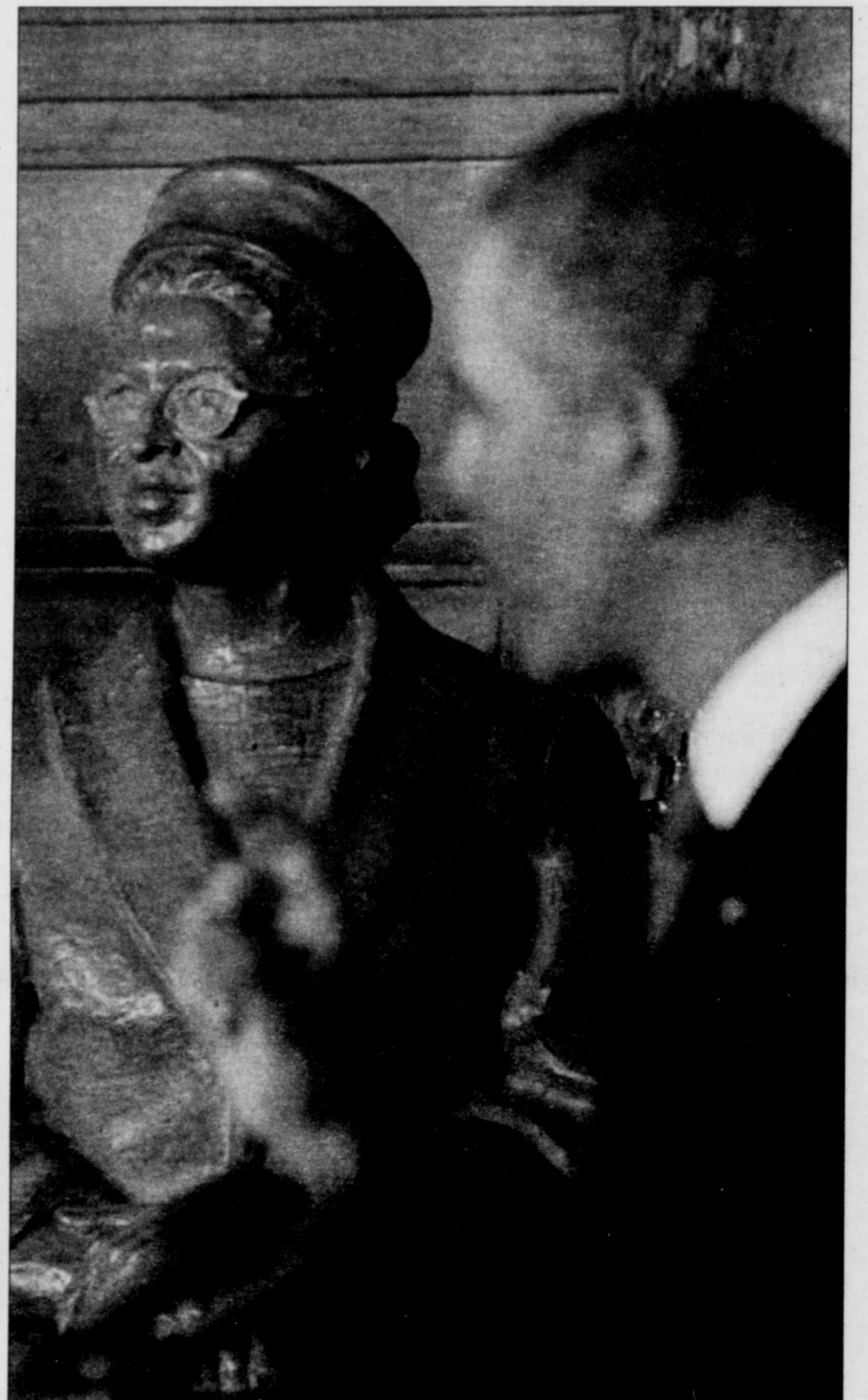
The several hundred lawmakers, family and congressional staff who gathered for the ceremony in the vaulted hall rose to their feet and whooped as Boehner opened the ceremony.

"Here in the hall, she casts an unlikely silhouette — unassuming in a lineup of proud stares, challenging all of us once more to look up and to draw strength from stillness," said Boehner, R-Ohio.

In a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus in segregated Montgomery, Ala. She was arrested, touching off a bus boycott that stretched over a year.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Parks had "moved the world when she refused to move her seat."

Jeanne Theoharis, author of the new biography "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks," said Parks was very much a full-fledged civil rights activist, yet her contributions have not been treated like those of other movement leaders, such as the Rev.



President Barack Obama speaks during the unveiling ceremony for the Rosa Parks statue in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Martin Luther King Jr.

"Rosa Parks is typically honored as a woman of courage, but that honor focuses on the one act she made on the bus on Dec. 5, 1955," said Theoharis, a political science professor at Brooklyn College-City University of New York.

"That courage, that night was the product of decades of political work before that and continued ... decades after" in Detroit, she said.

Parks died Oct. 24, 2005, at age 92. The U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in her honor on Feb. 4, which would have been her 100th birthday.

Parks was raised by her mother and grandparents who taught her that part of being respected was to demand respect, said Theoharis, who spent six years researching and writing the Parks biography.

She was an educated woman who recalled seeing her grandfather sitting on the porch steps

with a gun during the height of white violence against blacks in post-World War I Alabama.

After she married Raymond Parks, she joined him in his work in trying to help nine young black men, ages 12 to 19, who were accused of raping two white women in 1931. The nine were later convicted by an all-white jury in Scottsboro, Ala., part of a long legal odyssey for the so-called Scottsboro Boys.

In the 1940s, Parks joined the NAACP and was elected secretary of its Montgomery, Ala., branch, working with civil rights activist Edgar Nixon to fight barriers to voting for blacks and investigate sexual violence against women, Theoharis said.

Parks has been honored previously in Washington with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996 and the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999, both during the Clinton administration.

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