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# CULTURE

English-speaking World

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# Rosa Parks



## KEY WORDS

**Civil rights:** the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality.

**NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People):** established in 1909, it is America's oldest and largest civil rights organisation.

**Segregation:** the separation by law of different racial groups.

## Early life

Rosa Louise McCauley was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Both her maternal grandparents were ex-slaves and strong **advocates**<sup>1</sup> for racial equality. She attended a segregated, one-room school in Pine Level, Alabama, where one teacher was responsible for about 50 students. Black students had to walk to school, while the city of Pine Level provided bus transportation and a new school building for white students. In 1929, Rosa left school to care for her sick mother. She also began cleaning houses to earn some money.



## Fighting for equal rights

Later she worked as a **seamstress**<sup>2</sup> and became active in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1932, she married Raymond Parks, a barber and an important member of the NAACP, in Montgomery, Alabama. At that time, Rosa also went back to school and finally earned a high school diploma: she was very proud of it!

On December 1, 1955, Rosa sat on the bus after a hard day at work. All the seats were occupied when a white man boarded. The bus driver told Rosa and some other African Americans to stand up. Rosa refused. Soon the police arrived and she was arrested. They accused her of breaking the law and gave her a 10\$ **fine**<sup>3</sup>. She refused to pay. That night a group of African American leaders met and decided to boycott the city buses. It wasn't easy for Black people to stop using buses. Many of them didn't have cars, so they had to walk to work or couldn't go into town to buy things. However, they were united and determined, and the boycott continued for over a year until the US Supreme Court declared that segregation laws in Alabama were unconstitutional.



Rosa Parks arrested



## After the Boycott

In spite of<sup>4</sup> this important change, Rosa received many death threats and some of the civil rights leaders' houses were bombed, including the home of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1957 Rosa and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan. She continued to attend civil rights meetings and to many African Americans became a symbol of their search for dignity and equality. Today she is still a symbol of freedom, resistance and courage.

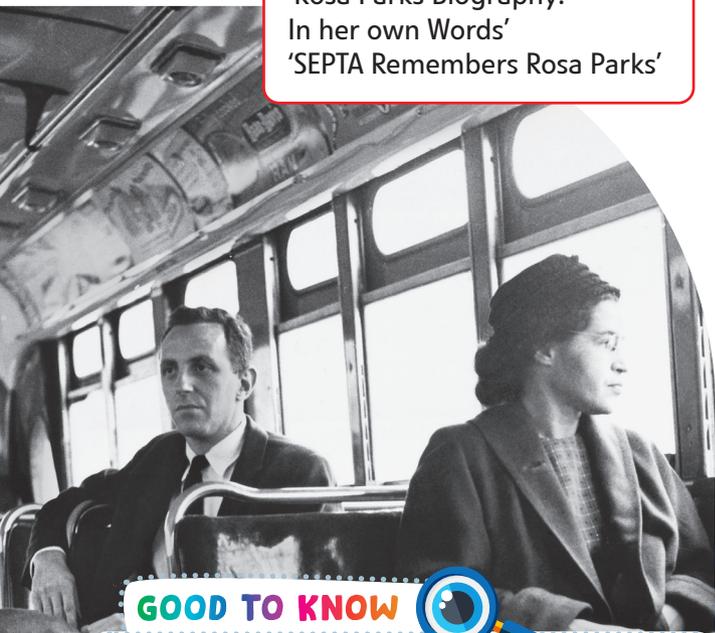


### GLOSSARY

- 1 **advocates** sostenitori
- 2 **seamstress** sarta
- 3 **fine** multa
- 4 **in spite of** nonostante

### YouTube Watch the videos.

'Rosa Parks Biography:  
In her own Words'  
'SEPTA Remembers Rosa Parks'



### GOOD TO KNOW

**Montgomery Bus Boycott:** a civil rights protest during which African Americans refused to ride city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest segregated seating. The boycott took place from December 5, 1955, to December 20, 1956, and is regarded as the first extensive US demonstration against segregation.



Martin Luther King Jr. at the 1963 March on Washington

## ACTIVITIES

### 1 TOWARDS EXAM Read the text and answer the questions.

- 1 Where was Rosa Parks born?
- 2 What was her experience at school like?
- 3 What did she do after leaving school?
- 4 Why did the police arrest Rosa on December 1, 1955?

### 2 Tick T (true) or F (false). Correct the false sentences.

- 1 In the 1950s, most African American people went to work on foot. T F
- 2 After being arrested, Rosa was punished with a 10\$ fine, which she didn't pay. T F
- 3 The main consequence of the boycott was the death of many civil rights leaders. T F
- 4 Because she felt in danger, Rosa left Alabama, but kept fighting for equality. T F

### 3 DEBATE Life skills Discuss and answer the questions. Then, in turns, express your opinions and listen to your classmates' answers.

- ◆ How important is a person's strength of character?
- ◆ How important are money and physical strength?
- ◆ Is education important? Why? Why not?
- ◆ Do you know other examples of people who made change possible? Here are some names: Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela. Go online and search for information about them.

THAT'S  
AMAZING!



# Stand up for your rights!



## WARM UP

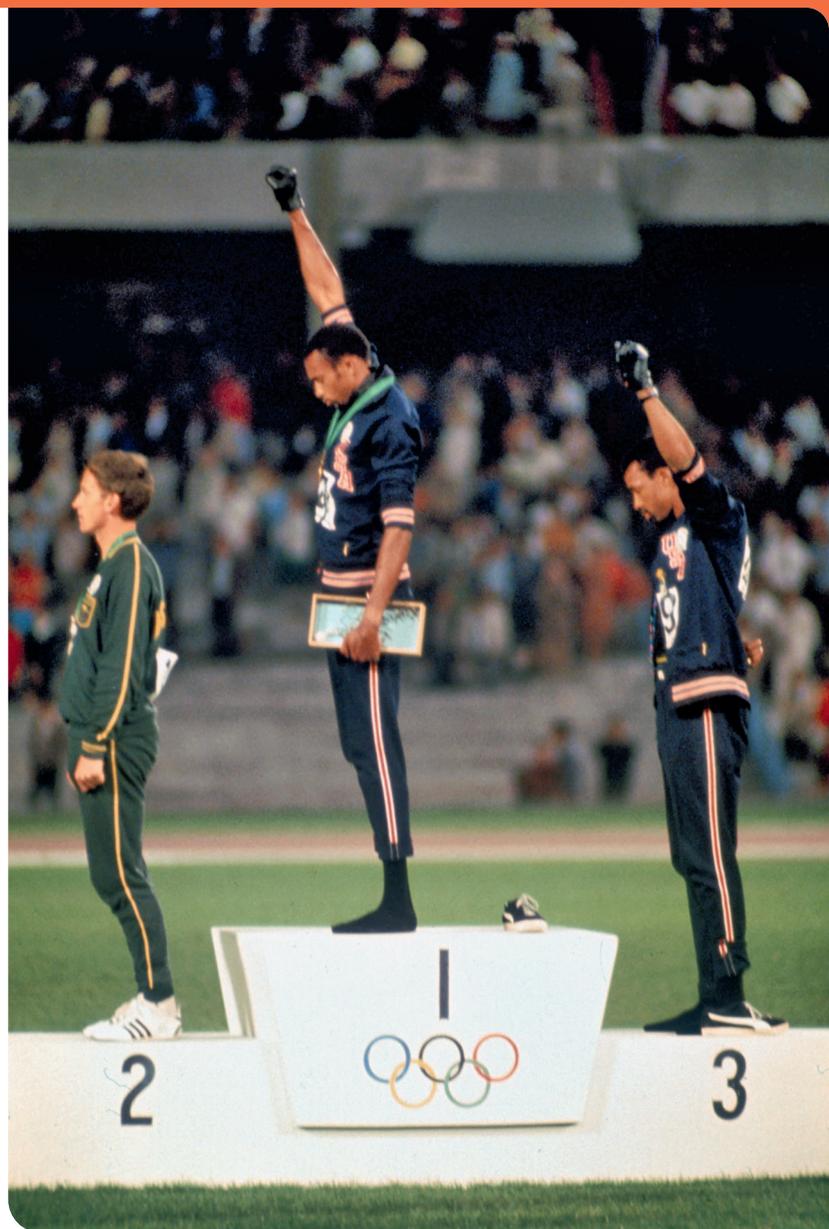
Look at the picture and answer the questions.

- 1 Do you notice anything unusual?  
What is it?
- 2 What do you think is happening?

## Tommie Smith and John Carlos

1968 was an important year for the Civil Rights Movement in America, especially after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. in April. At the Mexico City Olympics, US athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos won gold and bronze medals in the 200. On October 16, they mounted the podium wearing a black scarf and a single black glove. As the national **anthem**<sup>1</sup> began, they lowered their heads and raised their fists to protest against racial inequality. They also didn't wear shoes: their black socks represented poverty in the African American community.

The protest became one of the most famous sporting moments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. 'We are black and we are proud to be black in white America,' said Carlos, but the International Olympic Committee expelled both athletes from the Games.



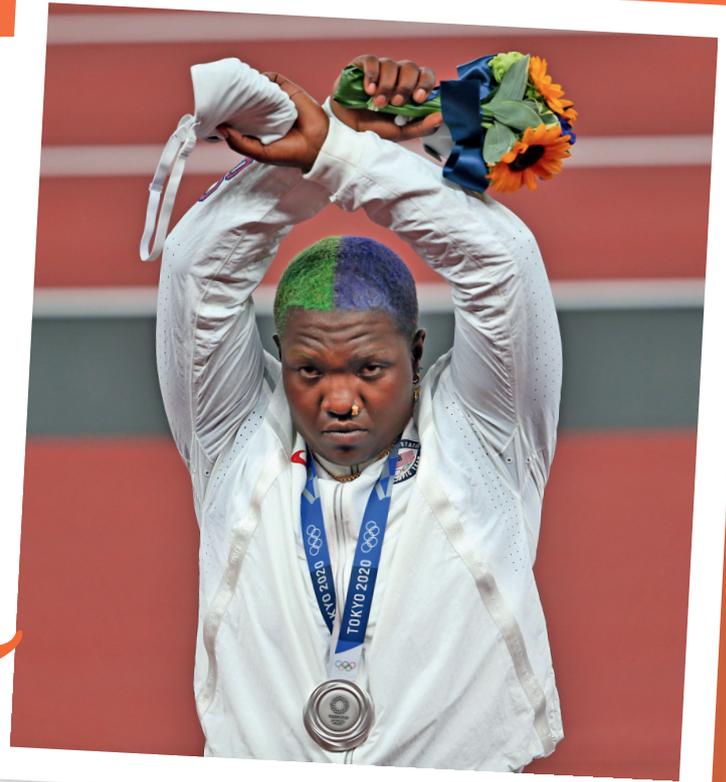
## Showing solidarity

That night on the podium was also Australian sprinter Peter Norman, who won a silver medal. Norman didn't raise his fist, but in solidarity with Smith and Carlos he wore an 'Olympic Project for Human Rights' badge on his **chest**<sup>2</sup>. When he went back to Australia, Norman suffered hard repercussions from his country. It was a period of strong tensions because of discrimination against Aboriginal people, so he was isolated and excluded forever from professional competitions and never obtained a permanent job.

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## Raven Saunders

At the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, US **shot-putter**<sup>3</sup> Raven Saunders won a silver medal. During the competition she wore a Hulk mask and had purple and green hair. Later, on the podium, she raised her arms above her head in an X, as a sign of protest. Saunders said later that the X represents 'the intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet'. After her victory, she said that she really cares for freedom and equality and that her gesture was her personal way of showing it. When a journalist asked what her final mission was, she replied: 'To be me. To not apologise. To show younger people that [...], you can be you and you can accept it.'



### GLOSSARY

- 1 **anthem** inno nazionale
- 2 **chest** petto
- 3 **shot-putter** lancia-trice del peso

## ACTIVITIES

- 1 **TOWARDS EXAM** Read the text on page 66 and answer the questions.
  - 1 Why was 1968 important in America?
  - 2 Who were Tommie Smith and John Carlos?
  - 3 What did they do after winning a medal?
  - 4 Who was Peter Norman?
  - 5 Did he show disagreement with Smith and Carlos? How did he behave on the podium?
  - 6 Were there any consequences for the three winners?
- 2 **TOWARDS EXAM** Read the text about Raven Saunders and answer the questions.
  - 1 Who is Raven Saunders?
  - 2 Where is she from?
  - 3 What does her protest gesture mean?
  - 4 What is her final mission?



- 3 **REAL-LIFE TASK**  **Life skills** Work in pairs. Look for information about one of the athletes listed below and prepare an oral presentation. Report to your class who they are/were and what iconic protest gesture or fact they are famous for. The dates in brackets are there to help you.
  - ◆ Muhammad Ali (1967)
  - ◆ Henry Olonga and Andy Flower (2003)
  - ◆ Feyisa Lilesa (2016)
  - ◆ Colin Kaepernick (2016)
  - ◆ Gwendolyn Berry (2019)