“The only tired I was, was tired of giving in,” Rosa Parks explains when asked why she refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white passenger and move to the back as she was returning home from work as a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama. Her quiet act of defiance on December 1, 1955, and her subsequent arrest triggered a boycott of the city’s bus lines by its black citizens. Martin Luther King Jr., then a young clergyman in Montgomery with little experience in the techniques of mass protest, organized some seventeen thousand black Americans to take action. The success of the boycott so enraged local authorities that they sued immediately to have it declared illegal. A little more than a year later, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Alabama laws requiring segregated seating on public conveyances were unconstitutional.

Mrs. Parks and her family eventually moved to Detroit, where she became active in youth work, job guidance, and recreational planning. She has continued to be involved in civil rights matters, and has received numerous awards for her efforts, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor (1986), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1996), and the highest award bestowed by the United States government, the Congressional Gold Medal (1999).

Taking a Closer Look

Rosa Parks is described as a woman of quiet strength who has always taken a firm stand for what she believes in. In this painted-wood sculpture, Marshall D. Rumbaugh depicts Parks and the historical moment for which she is famous. The sculptor uses the visual language of folk art—forms that are often not realistically carved and anatomical distortion and exaggeration—to convey these character traits in his portrait of Parks in the clutches of two officers of the law. How do the differences in proportion between Parks and her captors, as well as the flatness of the piece, help to communicate this message of determined resistance?

Learn more about the life of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott by reading and listening to her own words at the following Web site:

http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0int-1

Rosa Parks: Pioneer of Civil Rights interview, June 2, 1995, Williamsburg, Virginia