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Rosa Parks 1913-1955: How Family, Education, Religion, and Socio-Political Influences Shaped Her Leadership

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ROSA PARKS 1913-1955: HOW FAMILY, EDUCATION,
RELIGION, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL INFLUENCES
SHAPED HER LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Susan E. Sitter

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
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Title: Rosa Parks 1913-1955: How Family, Education, Religion, and Socio-Political Influences Shaped Her Leadership

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This study identified the family, education, religious, and socio-political influences of Rosa Parks that shaped her leadership prior to her refusal to move from her seat on the bus on December 1, 1955. Women of color living in the Black belt of America faced the risk of sexual violence, health care disparities, and poverty from the time of slavery and throughout the Jim Crow years. Yet, they did not give up, rather they employed these challenges to drive their activism, and empower them to seek justice and equality for all people (Sua, 2012).

A qualitative research design with a narrative approach and interpretive biographical lens was utilized to re-story the personal experiences of Rosa Parks. Archival data relating to Rosa Parks' life and events from 1913 until 1955 were examined and analyzed for emerging themes in the studied areas of influence, and exposing what Creswell (2007) terms epiphanies or turning points. Specifically, the study analyzed the influences in Rosa Parks' life prior to her bus resistance through the leadership frameworks of Greenleaf (1977), Sipe and Frick (2009), Burns (2003), Gardner (1995), and Heifetz (1994).

The research revealed that courageous leadership and activism of Parks, despite the dangerous environment of the Jim Crow South, was fostered by the powerful influences of family, education, religion, and socio-political factors. Politically minded and supportive family, education, faith and prayer, other leaders and activists, and the challenging environment itself may advance leadership for women living and working in similar challenging circumstances.

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