

**Book Review: Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. Beacon Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0807050477 (Hardcover). 304 pages. \$27.95**

**Reviewed by Leslie Dunlap<sup>1</sup>**

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Americans accustomed to the popular characterization of Rosa Parks as the quiet, gentle seamstress who unwittingly sparked the civil rights movement by refusing to give up her seat on a Jim Crow bus might be surprised to see her included in, much less gracing the cover of, an essay collection entitled *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*.<sup>2</sup> The cover photograph of her admiring a poster of Malcolm X might startle those used to picturing Parks in contrast to, not alongside, militants such as Malcolm X. Yet as Jeanne Theoharis, a professor of political science at Brooklyn College, reveals in that volume and in *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, Parks merits reconsideration as a radical for her lifetime of activism, well before and long after the Montgomery bus boycott she inspired. In this political biography, Theoharis unravels what she calls the “fable” of Rosa Parks by taking into full account the depth, complexities, and costs of her political commitments. At the same time, Theoharis analyzes how the image of Parks as an “accidental or angelic heroine” emerged at the time, the consequences of that myth for Parks, and the political needs that

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