There were enough movie stars at Wednesday night’s screening of “The Rosa Parks Story” to draw some very busy lawmakers away from the campaign-finance reform debate on Capitol Hill so that the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement” might be honored.

That would be Rosa Parks, of course, the woman who refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in the segregated Alabama of 1955, setting off the seminal Montgomery bus boycott with Martin Luther King Jr. and, by anyone’s account, changing history. As actress Cicely Tyson put it, “That one act of inaction has moved the entire world.”

Miss Tyson plays Rosa Parks’ mother in the film, which airs on CBS next Sunday night. Angela Bassett stars as Mrs. Parks, and Toney Stewart (“In the Heat of the Night,” “A Time to Kill”) plays her best friend, Johnnie Carr. All three actresses were on hand at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center for the reception and screening, with the petite Miss Bassett most striking in black leather.

Washington’s own civil rights legend Dorothy Height spoke for the approximately 300 persons present when she said, “Rosa Parks sat down so that you and I could stand up with more dignity.”

That’s why, she added, “This is more than a film to us.”

It’s also why the audience included Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe, Reps. Diane Watson (the honorary host), Loretta Sanchez, Julia Carson, and John Conyers, who is Mrs. Parks’ congressman and close friend. (She has lived in Detroit since 1957.)

Mrs. Parks, 89, is ailing and was unable to make the trip to Washington for the tribute, although she read the script and offered suggestions to ensure its authenticity.

The film, which already has been screened in cities across the country, is undeniably a made-for-TV production (cue the stirring music before increasingly frequent commercial breaks). It was finished in 19 days in Montgomery under the direction of Julie Dash, director of the 1992 release “Daughters of the Dust.”

Ms. Dash described her latest work as “a love story told within the context of the civil rights movement.” The focus is on Mrs. Parks’ early years and relationship with her husband, Raymond. According to the story line, the marriage grew strained when she asserted her independence by joining the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, soon becoming more of a righteous activist than a demure wife.

She was both angry and dignified, Miss Bassett explained. “She wasn’t just a seamstress whose feet were tired that day.”

Tha actress - who was kept apart from non-VIP guests and press by a Hollywood-style red rope - called the experience of portraying such an extraordinary woman “pretty awesome ... She gave up a lot so that we could get so much.”

DETROIT — Movie stars jetted in and the Detroit Institute of Arts served as a glamorous backdrop for the world premiere of The Rosa Parks Story.

And if that wasn’t enough, the made-for-television film’s debut coincided with Rosa Parks’ 89th birthday and the kick-off of Black History Month.

Organizers of the benefit, held Feb. 4, hope that when the final tally comes in a hefty hunk of change will end up in the coffers of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. The foundation helps children achieve their potential through educational programs.

Lila Cabbil, a member of the institute’s advisory board, said it was too soon to say how much money was raised from this event and other viewing parties to be held when the film is shown on CBS, Feb. 24.

But for partygoers it was a glamorous evening.

The Hollywood contingent included actresses Cicely Tyson and Angela Bassett, who is married to Detroiter Courtney Vance. The actresses mingled with Detroit’s hoi polloi at an early supper in the DIA’s Great Hall.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Craig Strong didn’t even have his full-length fur coat off before he was whipping out his “favorite picture.” In the photo Strong is giving a broadly grinning Rosa Parks a smooch on the cheek.

“That was three years ago on her birthday,” Strong said.

Politicos such as Ricardo Solomon, chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, rubbed shoulders with Kenneth Burnley, who heads the Detroit Public Schools.

Everyone was smiling, animated and engaged in networking around issues that linked them to Rosa Parks — social and economic justice and human services projects. U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Damon Keith and Attorney General Jennifer Granholm posed for photos. “I swore her in as attorney general, and I’ll swear her in as governor,” the judge declared.

Cutlines:

arrested. cutline
Mrs. Parks is arrested and fingerprinted for violating segregation laws. A bus driver demanded she give up her seat to a white man, and she refused.

bassett/rosa on bus.cutline
From a sitting position, Rosa Parks (Angela Bassett) took a historic stand against segregation. (Tony Esparza/CBS)

cicely & bassett.cutline
Actresses Cicely Tyson and Angela Bassett flew in for the premiere of “The Rosa Parks Story.” Bassett plays Rosa Parks in the movie and Tyson plays her mother.

rosa at premiere.cutline
Civil rights icon Rosa Parks appeared at a premiere and birthday party hosted by the Detroit Institute of Arts for the made-for-TV movie about her life.

rosa/scuffle.cutline
Rosa Parks, played by Angela Bassett in the movie The Rosa Parks Story, is surrounded by black leaders.
Rosa Louise McCauley was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama to James and Leona McCauley. At age two her family moved to Pine Level, Alabama, to live with her maternal grandparents. Her mother, a school teacher, taught Rosa at home until age eleven when she moved to Montgomery to live with her aunt. She enrolled in a private school, the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, where she cleaned classrooms to pay her tuition. Later she attended Booker T. Washington High School but was forced to leave to take care of her sick mother. In 1932 she married Raymond Parks, to whom she would remain married until his death in 1977. Though Raymond had very little formal education, he was self-taught and supported his wife’s desire to return to school to receive her high school diploma, which she did in 1934.

Mrs. Parks worked as a seamstress at a Montgomery department store in 1955. On December 1 of that year she boarded a city bus and sat in a row at the front of the “colored” section. The whites only section in the front of the bus filled up and a white man was left standing. The bus driver demanded that Mrs. Parks and three other patrons in the colored section give up their seats so the white man could sit. The other three people moved but Mrs. Parks had been pushed around enough and refused to yield her seat. She was arrested when the bus driver contacted the police and filed charges against her. Four days later she was found guilty of disorderly conduct and the Montgomery bus boycott began.

Over a year later the city was served with papers declaring segregation of bus service unconstitutional. The next day Mrs. Parks boarded a bus and for the first time was allowed to sit in any unoccupied seat. Her ordeal however was not over. She had lost her seamstress job and was unable to find work. Her family was harassed and threatened. In 1957, she moved along with her mother and husband to Detroit where her younger brother Sylvester lived.

In 1965 she joined the staff of U.S. Representative John Conyers of Michigan and worked there until her retirement in 1988. Mrs. Parks now travels the country extensively, lecturing on civil rights. Through the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, a non-profit organization she co-founded with Elaine Steele in 1987, she works with young people to help them achieve their full potential. She has received honorary degrees from ten colleges and universities and has received countless honors and awards. On April 22, 1998, she attended the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Troy State University Montgomery Rosa Parks Library and Museum to be located on the spot she was arrested over forty years ago.
Born: Rosa Louise McCauley on Feb. 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Ala. Parents: James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona Edwards McCauley, a teacher. Her father left the family when Rosa was very young. Her mother often advised her to “take advantage of the opportunities, no matter how few they are.”

Family: Her husband, Raymond Parks, was a barber active in black voter registration and other civil rights causes. He died in 1977, the same year her brother, Sylvester, died. She had no children born to her, but she has said, “I consider all children as mine.”

Education: Finished high school in 1934. She has received more than two dozen honorary doctorates, including one from Soka University in Tokyo.

Home away from home: At her brother’s urging, she and Raymond moved to Detroit to escape the threats they constantly received in Alabama. She still lives there but spends winters in Los Angeles.

Possible quotes

BY ROSA PARKS

On whether she was afraid on Dec. 1, 1955: “I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear.” (Investor’s Business Daily)

On her life in the spotlight: “I have not had a quiet life, and I really could live without this publicity. I just want to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free and wanted others to be free.” (Chicago Tribune/KRT)

On taking up the cause: “It’s up to the individual how they feel about it — it’s not anything that can be forced on them.” (Women’s Wire)

“To this day I believe we are here on the planet Earth to live, grow up and do what we can to make this world a better place for all people to enjoy freedom.”

ABOUT ROSA PARKS

“The importance of Rosa Parks in American culture is almost singular in that it’s not just what she did, but God’s use of her in the fullness of time. There’s something divine about her.”

— Rev. Jesse Jackson (Cincinnati Enquirer)

tv slot

The Rosa Parks Story: CBS is set to air this made-for-television movie starring Angela Bassett as the legendary Freedom Rider who has long resided in Detroit. It airs at 9 p.m. on Feb. 24.