



Document A: Police Report

The police who arrested Rosa Parks filled out this official report about the arrest.

Date 12-1-1955

Complainant: J.F. Blacke (wm)

Address: 27 No. Lewis St. . . .

Offense: Misc. . . .

Date and Time Offense Committed: 12-1-55 6:06 pm

Place of Occurrence: In Front of Empire Theatre (On Montgomery Street). . . .

We received a call upon arrival the bus operator said he had a colored female sitting in the white section of the bus, and would not move back.

We (Day & Mixon) also saw her.

The bus operator signed a warrant for her. Rosa Parks, (cf) 634 Cleveland Boul.

Rosa Parks (cf) was charged with chapter 6 section 11 of the Montgomery City Code.

Warrant #14254

Officers: F.B. Day, D.W. Mixon

Division: Patrol

Time: 7:00 pm

Source: Police Department, City of Montgomery. December 1, 1955.

Sourcing

1. Who are the "authors" of this document? What biases do you think they had? Why might this be important?

Close Reading

2. What words in this document explain where Rosa Parks sat? Do you think this means the front, middle, or back of the bus?

Contextualizing

3. Based on this document, do you think this is the first time a black person had been arrested for refusing to give up a seat in Montgomery, Alabama? Justify your answer using the document.



Document B: Court Affidavit

This sworn statement was submitted to the state court when Rosa Parks appealed her conviction.

Rosa Parks, Appellant vs. City of Montgomery, Appellee

Appealed to Court of Appeals of Alabama From: Circuit Court of Montgomery County
Feb. 12, 1957 Affirmed—[illegible signature]

Agreed Stipulation of Facts

Attached hereto and marked Exhibit "A" is a plan of the seating arrangement of the bus on which the alleged violation occurred. There were thirty-six seats assigned for passengers. Just prior to the alleged violation by the defendant the ten front seats were assigned for white persons and the back twenty-six seats were assigned for negroes. The defendant was sitting on one of the first dual seats immediately behind those occupied by white passengers and all seats assigned to whites were occupied and all standing room in that section was taken. Negroes were also standing in the negro section. The evidence is in dispute as to whether or not there were vacant seats in the negro section. In order to take on more white passengers who were at that time waiting to board the bus the driver, the agent in charge, requested the passengers who were in the row of seats immediately in the rear of the white section to give up their seats to white passengers. This would have made four more seats available to whites and under such reassignment the white section would have been increased to fourteen seats and the negro section decreased to twenty-two seats. The defendant, a negro, refused to move in accordance with the request of the bus driver, the agent in charge, and was arrested for such refusal.

The defendant was convicted in the Recorders Court of the City of Montgomery, Alabama, and appealed to this Court where the case is at issue.

Respectfully submitted,
D. Eugene Loe
Fred D. Gray
Charles D. Langford
Feb. 22, 1956

Filed in open court and made a part of record of this case.
Carter
Judge

Source: Excerpt from the brief filed on behalf of Rosa Parks in Parks vs. City of Montgomery. Filed in the Court of Appeals, Montgomery, Alabama, March 28, 1956. Signed by D. Eugene Loe, attorney for the city of Montgomery, and Fred D. Gray and Charles D. Langford, attorneys for Rosa Parks.

Sourcing

1. Who signed this document? Why might this be important?

Close Reading

2. How does this document define where Rosa Parks sat? Do you think this means the front, middle, or back of the bus?

Corroborating

3. Compare the police report (Document A) and the court affidavit (Document B). Which document is more trustworthy? Why?



Document C: Letter from Robinson to the Mayor

In this letter, Jo Ann Robinson writes the Mayor of Montgomery asking for fair treatment on the buses.

Honorable Mayor W. A. Gayle
City Hall
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Sir:

The Women's Political Council is very grateful to you and the City Commissioners for the hearing you allowed our representative during the month of March, 1954, when the "city-bus-fare-increase case" was being reviewed. There were several things the Council asked for:

1. A city law that would make it possible for Negroes to sit from back toward front, and whites from front toward back until all the seats are taken.
2. That Negroes not be asked or forced to pay fare at front and go to the rear of the bus to enter.
3. That busses stop at every corner in residential sections occupied by Negroes as they do in communities where whites reside.

We are happy to report that busses have begun stopping at more corners now in some sections where Negroes live than previously. However, the same practices in seating and boarding the bus continue.

Mayor Gayle, three-fourths of the riders of these public conveyances are Negroes. If Negroes did not patronize them, they could not possibly operate.

More and more of our people are already arranging with neighbors and friends to ride to keep from being insulted and humiliated by bus drivers.

There has been talk from twenty-five or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of busses. We, sir, do not feel that forceful measures are necessary in bargaining for a convenience which is right for all bus passengers. . . .

Please consider this plea, and if possible, act favorably upon it, for even now plans are being made to ride less, or not at all, on our busses. We do not want this.

Respectfully yours,
The Women's Political Council
Jo Ann Robinson, President

Source: Excerpt from a letter written by Jo Ann Robinson, May 21, 1954. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sourcing

1. How long before Rosa Parks' arrest was this letter written?
2. Why do you think Robinson reminds the mayor that three-fourths of the bus riders in Montgomery are African American? What is her intention?

Contextualizing

3. Given this document, agree or disagree with the following phrase, "Rosa Parks caused the Montgomery Bus Boycott." Explain your position.



Document D: Letter from Durr to Director of Highlander Folk School

Virginia Foster Durr was a white woman who supported civil rights for African Americans in Montgomery. Here, Durr writes the director of the Highlander Folk School and his wife. Highlander was a center for training civil rights activists and labor organizers.

January 30, 1956

Dear Myles and Zilphia:

I just received a communication from there giving a summary of the past year's activities and I think you should add how much you had to do with the Montgomery Bus Boycott which is really making history and is of the deepest significance. LIFE, TIME, CBS, NBC, and countless other papers have been down here covering it. . . I think it is the first time that a whole Negro community has ever stuck together this way and for so long and I think they are going to win it.

But how your part comes in is through the effect the school had on Mrs. Parks. When she came back she was so happy and felt so liberated and then as time went on she said the discrimination got worse and worse to bear AFTER having, for the first time in her life, been free of it at Highlander. I am sure that had a lot to do with her daring to risk arrest as she is naturally a very quiet and retiring person although she has a fierce sense of pride and is, in my opinion, a really noble woman. But you and Zilphia should certainly take pride in what you did for her and what she is doing. . . .

Lots of love to all, come and see for yourself.
VA

Source: Excerpt from a letter written by Virginia Foster Durr to Myles and Zilphia Horton, January 30, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sourcing

1. What is the author's skin color? Why might that be important?

Contextualizing

2. According to Durr, what did Myles and Zilphia Horton have to do with the Montgomery Bus Boycott?

Close Reading

3. Most textbooks refer to Rosa Parks as a tired seamstress. What image of Rosa Parks does this letter convey?



Document E: Robinson on the boycott leaflet campaign

Here, Jo Ann Robinson explains how she and others produced and distributed the leaflet calling for a boycott in time for thousands of African Americans to stay off the buses on Monday morning, December 5, 1955. Just before she began this work, Robinson and E.D. Nixon had decided over the phone to call for a boycott.

I sat down and quickly drafted a message and then called a good friend and colleague . . . who had access to the college's mimeograph equipment. When I told him that the WPC was staging a boycott and needed to run off the notices, he told me that he too had suffered embarrassment on the city buses. . . . Along with two of my most trusted senior students, we quickly agreed to meet almost immediately, in the middle of the night, at the college's duplicating room. We were able to get three messages to a page . . . in order to produce the tens of thousands of leaflets we knew would be needed. By 4 a.m. Friday, the sheets had been duplicated, cut in thirds, and bundled. . . .

Between 4 and 7 a.m., the two students and I mapped out distribution routes for the notices. Some of the WPC officers previously had discussed how and where to deliver thousands of leaflets announcing a boycott, and those plans now stood me in good stead. . . .

After class my two students and I quickly finalized our plans for distributing the thousands of leaflets so that one would reach every black home in Montgomery. I took out the WPC membership roster and called [them]. . . I alerted all of them to the forthcoming distribution of the leaflets, and enlisted their aid in speeding and organizing the distribution network. . . .

Throughout the late morning and early afternoon hours we dropped off tens of thousands of leaflets. Some of our bundles were dropped off at schools. . . Leaflets were also dropped off at business places, storefronts, beauty parlors, beer halls, factories, barber shops, and every other available place. Workers would pass along notices both to other employees as well as to customers. . . .

By 2 o'clock thousands of the mimeographed handbills had changes hands many times. Practically every black man, woman, and child in Montgomery knew the plan and was passing the word along. . . .

Source: Excerpt from Jo Ann Robinson's memoir, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, 1987. Knoxville, Tennessee.

Sourcing

1. When did Robinson write this? How might this detail influence our judgment of this document?

Contextualizing

2. What resources were in place that helped Robinson with the leaflets?

Close Reading

3. Many accounts of the Montgomery Bus Boycott say that once Parks was arrested, the boycott happened. According to Robinson, what happened in between the arrest and the start of the boycott?



Document F: Abernathy remembers the first meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association

In the following excerpt, Reverend Ralph Abernathy remembers the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) at a local Baptist church on the first day of the boycott. After this, the MIA held regular weekly meetings until the boycott ended.

We, M.L. King and I, went to the meeting together. It was drizzling; I had been working up until the last minute on the resolutions. I was given instructions: one, to call off the protest, or two, if indicated, to continue the protest until the grievances were granted. We had had a successful “one-day protest,” but we feared that if we extended it beyond the first day, we might fail; it might be better after all to call the protest off, and then we could hold this “one-day boycott” as a threat for future negotiations. However, we were to determine whether to continue the protest by the size of the crowds. . . .

When we got about twenty blocks from the church we saw cars parked solid. . . as we got closer to the church we saw a great mass of people. The *Montgomery Advertiser* estimated the crowd at approximately 7,000 persons all trying to get in a church that will accommodate less than 1,000. It took us about fifteen minutes to work our way through the crowd by pleading: “Please let us through—we are Reverend King and Reverend Abernathy. Please permit us to get through.” . . .

Those inside applauded for at least ten minutes.

It was apparent that the people were with us. It was then that all of the ministers who had previously refused to take part in the program came up to Reverend King and me to offer their services. This expression of togetherness on the part of the masses was obviously an inspiration to the leadership and helped to rid it of the cowardly, submissive, over timidity.

We began the meeting by singing *Onward Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War*. . . .

Mrs. Rosa Parks was presented to the mass meeting because we wanted her to become symbolic of our protest movement. Following her we presented Mr. Daniels, who happily for our meeting had been arrested on that day. . . . The appearance of these persons created enthusiasm, thereby giving momentum to the movement.

We then heard the resolutions calling for the continuation of the boycott . . . unanimously and enthusiastically adopted by the 7,000 individuals both inside and outside the church. . . .

Source: Excerpt from Ralph Abernathy’s thesis for his master’s degree, *The Natural History of a Social Movement*, 1958. Atlanta, Georgia.

Close Reading

1. What were Abernathy’s two choices and what was the deciding factor guiding that choice? Why is this factor important in creating a successful boycott?

Contextualizing

2. What does this document suggest about the leaders of the boycott? About their hopes for Rosa Parks?
3. How did Abernathy know that the “people were with [them]”? How do you explain the supporters’ enthusiasm?



Document G: Handbill from Central Alabama Citizens Council rally

This handbill was given out at a rally in Montgomery organized by the Central Alabama Citizens Council. 10,000 white citizens attended. Leaders of Montgomery's local government—including Mayor Gayle—spoke to the crowd about preventing integration.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to abolish the Negro race, proper methods should be used. Among these are guns, bows and arrows, sling shots and knives.

We hold these truths to be self evident that all whites are created equal with certain rights; among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of dead niggers.

In every stage of the bus boycott we have been oppressed and degraded because of black slimy, juicy, unbearably stinking niggers. The conduct should not be dwelt upon because behind them they have an ancestral background of Pigmies, head hunters and snot suckers.

My friends it is time we wised up to these black devils. I tell you they are a group of two legged agitators who persist in walking up and down our streets protruding their black lips. If we don't stop helping these African flesh eaters, we will soon wake up and find Rev. King in the White House.

LET'S GET ON THE BALL WHITE CITIZENS.

The Book "Declaration of Segregation" will appear April, 1956. If this appeals to you be sure to read the book.

Source: Handbill produced by the Central Alabama Citizens Council, February 10, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sourcing

1. When was this written? Given the timing, what might the authors' intentions be in writing and sharing this document?

Close Reading

2. Consider the phrases and images used to describe African Americans. What obstacles to desegregation does this document show?

Contextualizing

3. What historic document is this modeled after? What does this tell us about how the authors viewed themselves?



Document H: Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks to the crowd

At this Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) weekly meeting, King speaks to the crowd.

Democracy gives us this right to protest and that is all we're doing. . . . We can say honestly that we have not advocated violence, have not practiced it and have gone courageously on with a Christian movement. Ours is a spiritual movement depending on moral and spiritual fortitude. The protest is still going on. (Great deal of applause here). . . .

Freedom doesn't come on a silver platter. With every great movement toward freedom there will inevitably be trials. Somebody will have to have the courage to sacrifice. You don't get to the Promised Land without going through the Wilderness. You don't get there without crossing over hills and mountains, but if you keep on keeping on, you can't help but reach it. We won't all see it, but it's coming and it's because God is for it. . . .

We won't back down. We are going on with our movement.

Let us continue with the same spirit, with the same orderliness, with the same discipline, with the same Christian approach. I believe that God is using Montgomery as his proving ground. . . . God be praised for you, for your loyalty, for your determination. God bless you and keep you, and may God be with us as we go on.

Source: Excerpts from a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., as reported by Anna Holden, a teacher at Fisk University. March 22, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sourcing

1. Who was King's audience? What does that imply about King's intentions in this speech?

Close Reading

2. What does this document suggest are key factors in the success of the boycott?

Contextualizing

3. Find and list four references to religion in this speech. How does King use religion in this speech? What does this imply about the role of religion in the boycott?



Document I: Bayard Rustin's diary

Bayard Rustin, an African American civil rights activist, traveled to Montgomery to advise Dr. King and support the bus boycott. Though he was eventually asked to leave Montgomery because leaders feared his reputation as a gay Communist would hurt the movement, he kept a diary of what he found.

February 24

42,000 Negroes have not ridden the busses since December 5. On December 6, the police began to harass, intimidate, and arrest Negro taxi drivers who were helping get these people to work. It thus became necessary for the Negro leaders to find an alternative—the car pool. They set up 23 dispatch centers where people gather to wait for free transportation.

This morning Rufus Lewis, director of the pool, invited me to attend the meeting of the drivers. On the way, he explained that there are three methods in addition to the car pool, for moving the Negro population:

1. Hitch-hiking.
2. The transportation of servants by white housewives.
3. Walking.

Later he introduced me to two men, one of whom has walked 7 miles and the other 14 miles, every day since December 5.

"The success of the car pool is at the heart of the movement," Lewis said at the meeting. "It must not be stopped."

I wondered what the response of the drivers would be, since 28 of them had just been arrested on charges of conspiring to destroy the bus company. One by one, they pledged that, if necessary, they would be arrested again and again.

Source: Excerpt from Bayard Rustin's Montgomery Diary, February 24, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sourcing

1. How long after the bus boycott began was this document written?

Close Reading

2. How was it possible for African Americans to stay off the buses, but still get to work during the boycott?

Contextualizing

3. Who does this document suggest were important to the success of the boycott?



Document J: Interview about the boycott

Researchers from Fisk University visited Montgomery, Alabama, during the boycott to learn more and to document the movement. Here a woman shares her ideas about the boycott during an interview at a car pool dispatch center.

Maid: This stuff has been going on for a long time. To tell you the truth, it's been happening ever since I came here before [World War II]. But here in the last few years they've been getting worse and worse. When you get on the bus they yell: "Get on back there" . . . and half of the time they wouldn't take your transfer, then they make you get up so white men could sit down where there were no seats in the back. And you know about a year ago they put one of the high school girls in jail 'cause she wouldn't move. They should have boycotted the buses then. But we are sure fixing 'em now and I hope we don't ever start back riding. . . . We [are] people, we are not dogs or cats. . . . All we want 'em to do is treat us right. They shouldn't make me get up for some white person when I paid the same fare and I got on first. And they should stop being so nasty. . . We pay just like the white folks. . . .

[The bus companies] are the ones losing the money and our preachers say we will not ride unless they give us what we want. . . . You see the business men are losing money too, because people only go to town when they have to. . . . When you do something to my people you do it to me too. . . .

Source: Excerpt from an interview conducted by Willie Lee, January 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Close Reading

1. What experiences and events motivate this woman to continue boycotting the buses?
2. What does this woman want as a result of the boycott?

Contextualizing

3. Whose direction does this woman follow?