



## Modified 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 (white male)

Address: 27 North Lewis Street

Offense: Miscellaneous

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, (colored female), 634 Cleveland Boulevard.

Rosa Parks (colored female) 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.

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

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## 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.



## Modified 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—[signature cannot be read]

Agreed Upon Facts

Exhibit "A" is a plan of the seating arrangement of the bus on which the alleged violation occurred. There were 36 seats assigned for passengers. Just prior to the alleged violation by the defendant, the 10 front seats were assigned for white persons and the back 26 seats were assigned for negroes.

The defendant was sitting on one of the first dual seats immediately behind those occupied by white passengers. All seats assigned to whites were occupied. 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 waiting to board the bus, the driver told the passengers on the row of seats immediately in the rear of the white section to give up their seats to white passengers. This would have made 4 more seats available to whites and the white section would have been increased to 14 seats and the negro section decreased to 22 seats. The defendant, a negro, refused to move 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.

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## 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?



## Modified 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 when the "bus-fare case" was being reviewed two months ago. 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 forced to pay fare at front and go to the rear of the bus to enter.
3. That buses stop at every corner in Negro communities as they do in communities where whites live.

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

Mayor Gayle, three-fourths of bus riders are Negroes. If Negroes did not ride them, they could not possibly run.

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

There has been talk from 25 or more local organizations of planning a city-wide boycott of buses. We, sir, do not feel that forceful actions are necessary in asking for something which is right for all bus passengers.

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

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

## 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.



## Modified 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 newsletter from Highlander giving a summary of the past year's activities. I think you should add how much you had to do with the Montgomery Bus Boycott which is really making history. 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. Rosa Parks. When she came back she was so happy and felt so liberated. 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 person although she has a strong sense of pride and is, in my opinion, a really noble woman. But you and Zilphia should 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.

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### 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?



## Modified 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 wrote a message and then called a good friend who could use the college's copying equipment. When I told him that the WPC was staging a boycott and needed to run off the leaflets, he told me that he too had suffered embarrassment on the city buses. Along with two of my most trusted students, we agreed to meet right away, in the middle of the night, at the college's copying room. We were able to get three messages to a page in order to produce the thousands of leaflets we needed. By 4 a.m. Friday, the sheets had been copied and cut in thirds.

Between 4 and 7 a.m., the two students and I mapped out delivery routes for the leaflets. We had planned before how and where to deliver thousands of leaflets in case of a boycott, and those plans now came in handy.

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 asked for their help in giving out the leaflets.

Throughout the late morning and early afternoon hours we dropped off tens of thousands of leaflets. Some of the leaflets were dropped off at schools. Leaflets were also dropped off at business places, stores, 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 copied leaflets had changed 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.

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### 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?



## Modified 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.*

M.L. King and I went to the meeting together. I was given instructions: one, to call off the protest, or two, to continue the protest until our requests 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 to call the protest off, and then we could hold this “one-day boycott” as a threat for future talks. However, we were to decide whether to continue the protest by the size of the crowds.

When we got about 20 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 about 7,000 persons all trying to get in a church that will fit less than 1,000. It took us about 15 minutes to work our way through the crowd by pleading: “Please let us through—we are Reverend King and Reverend Abernathy.”

Those inside the church applauded for at least ten minutes.

It was obvious 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.

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

Mrs. Rosa Parks was presented to the 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 motions calling to continue the boycott, unanimously and enthusiastically adopted by the 7,000 people 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.

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### 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?



## Modified 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.

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

### 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?



## Modified 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 are 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.

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

### 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?



## Modified 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.

*Some of the language and phrasing in this document has been modified from the original. The original document can be found on the HTM website, [www.historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://www.historicalthinkingmatters.org).*

### 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?



## Modified 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, the drivers 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.

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### 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?