



Subject Support

History

Case study: *The Montgomery bus boycott, 1956*

Developing the ability to think critically by exploring causation with students

Autumn, 2018

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The Montgomery bus boycott: developing the ability to think critically by exploring causation with students

In exploring the case study, *The Montgomery bus boycott, 1956*, students are following a narrative of events. They are not concerned, however, merely with what happened but also with why it happened and what its historical significance is. In exploring issues of causation and significance with students, we have a great opportunity to develop their ability to think critically, which is one of the stated objectives of the syllabus and an increasingly cherished aim of senior cycle education.

At previous history in-service sessions, it has been argued that some of the best ways in which students' critical thinking can be generated include:

- the use of the enquiry-focused approach
- the use of 'critical skills' exercises that involve group discussion and judgement-forming

Both approaches are drawn on in the following exploration of the case study.

The enquiry-focused approach

The enquiry-focused approach involves organising a set of lessons around an enquiry question on which the teaching and learning activities are focused. It aims to give a clear focus to a series of lessons, to clarify for all concerned what the learning purposes are and to ensure that the sequence of lessons is leading to improved understanding on the part of the students.

In her book, *The Twentieth Century World* (The Historical Association, 1997), Christine Counsell outlines the rationale behind the approach. The following is an edited extract:

Choosing a sequence of interesting historical enquiries gives a clear focus to any scheme of work. This approach has a number of advantages:

- (i) It prevents a superficial run through the content and leads pupils into deeper levels of historical understanding.
 - (ii) It allows students to engage in real historical debate. Historians usually begin with a question.
 - (iii) It motivates students by giving a clear focus to their work. Identifying key questions is a powerful way of 'sharing clarity with learners'. Teachers are thus reinforcing that the whole point of a sequence of lessons or activities is to build towards some attempt at answering the question. Some teachers who use this approach will refer to such a question in every single lesson. Pupils are constantly reminded of what they are trying to do and why.
 - (iv) Key questions can shape and limit an otherwise sprawling content.
 - (v) It encourages pupils to produce more substantial and significant outcomes at the end of a section of work.
- (pp.30-31)

Linking your work on the case study to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The following quote comes from *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.8)

Traditionally we have thought about **literacy** as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. **Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.** Throughout this document, when we refer to “literacy” we mean this broader understanding of the skill, including speaking and listening, as well as communication using not only traditional writing and print but also digital media.

The student activities set down in this resource are designed to improve students’ “capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media.”

As the literacy strategy makes clear, a key element in developing literacy is promoting students’ listening, talking, reading and writing skills, as well as their ability to critically assess visual images and other broadcast material. Some of the ways in which material from this booklet can be used to achieve these objectives are as follows:

- The worksheet on the film clip encourages students to watch and listen carefully, and it includes questions designed to develop their ability to think critically.
- The questions/points for discussion that follow the sources are intended to form the basis for purposeful discussion among students and educative interaction between teacher and students. As well as promoting literacy, the teaching and learning conversation which this type of interaction underlies is a key component of all strategies for promoting assessment for learning in the classroom.
- The enquiry approach exemplified in this resource is designed to keep the learning outcomes constantly in the forefront of students’ minds. This is important in all strategies to improve literacy and is a key component of strategies for assessment for learning.
- The critical skills exercise is a type of card sorting exercise which helps to develop students listening skills and oral skills, as well as their ability to think critically.
- The importance of consolidating learning through carefully-designed written tasks is fundamental to student learning. The enquiry approach exemplified here concludes with an activity for students: “Your conclusions on the enquiry”. Also, some of the “Questions and points for discussion” set down for each step of the enquiry can be used as the basis for written tasks as deemed appropriate by the teacher.

The elements of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* relating to numeracy identify the need to enable young people “to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences, and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.” Teachers may wish to look out for opportunities to develop these abilities in students in the course of work on the case study. (e.g. questions in relation to duration such as Source 13, Question 2.)

The Montgomery bus boycott, 1956: an overview of the case study

On Thursday 1 December 1955, Rosa Parks, a black seamstress returning from work on a city bus in Montgomery, Alabama, refused a request from the driver to give up her seat to a white man. At the time buses were racially segregated, i.e. white people and black people sat in separate sections of the bus. Whites sat at the front of the bus and filled seats towards the rear; blacks had to sit in the back of the bus and could sit no nearer the front of the bus than the fifth row. Parks had taken a seat in the fifth row which was the first row that blacks were allowed to occupy. If the bus was so crowded that a white person had to stand, a black person was required by Montgomery law to give up her or his seat to the white person. When the bus driver asked all four black people in the fifth row to move, Parks was the only one to refuse. The bus driver then called the police and Parks was arrested.

On hearing of her arrest E.D. Nixon, a fellow member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), bailed her out of jail and began to contact local black leaders to arrange a protest. A bus boycott had been under consideration for some time and the Women's Political Council (WPC) under Jo Ann Robinson had informed Mayor Gayle in a letter of 21 May 1955 that pressure was building for a boycott. On Friday 2 December, a meeting was held in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Martin Luther King was minister. Here, the decision was taken to support a boycott on Monday 5 December.

When ninety percent of the black community stayed off the buses on Monday 5 December, black leaders and ministers met that afternoon to discuss continuing the boycott. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed at the meeting to oversee the continuance of the boycott and Martin Luther King was elected its president. Unsuccessful talks with city officials followed and the MIA prepared for the long haul.

When city officials began to penalise black taxi drivers for aiding the boycotters, the MIA organised a car pool of about 300 cars to help people get to and from work. Other attempts to disrupt the boycott followed. In early 1956, the homes of Martin Luther King and E.D. Nixon were bombed. City officials obtained court injunctions in February 1956 and boycott leaders were indicted under a 1921 law prohibiting conspiracies that interfered with lawful business. King was tried and convicted on this charge and ordered to pay a fine or be imprisoned. However, the verdict was appealed and the boycott continued.

Meanwhile, a case had been filed at the federal District Court on 1 February on behalf of four African-American women who had been treated badly on buses in Montgomery. (Rosa Parks was not included to avoid giving the impression that they were trying to circumvent her prosecution on other charges.) Because the *Browder v. Gayle* case (as it became known) challenged the constitutionality of a state statute, it was brought before a three-judge U.S. District Court panel. On 5 June, the court ruled that segregation on buses within the state was unconstitutional. King welcomed the verdict but called for the boycott to continue until the ruling was implemented.

On 13 November, while King was in court being tried on the legality of the boycott's car pools, he was informed that the U.S. Supreme Court had just affirmed the District Court's decision on *Browder v. Gayle*. The boycott continued, however, as city and state officials prepared to appeal the Supreme Court decision. On 17 December, the Supreme Court rejected their appeals to reconsider their decision and three days later the order for integrated buses arrived in Montgomery. On 20 December, King called for an end to the boycott and this was agreed. The following morning, he boarded an integrated bus with Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon and Glenn Smiley, a white minister who had supported the boycott.

Glossary of important terms: develop your historical literacy skills

Boycott

As a form of protest, people involved in a boycott stop using the services of a particular company or companies. Boycotting can also involve a decision not to buy goods from a particular company.

Browder v. Gayle

This was a case heard before the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama regarding Montgomery bus segregation laws in June 1956. The court ruled that segregation on Alabama buses was unconstitutional. (It cited a previous court ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that declared segregation in state schools unconstitutional.)

While the decision was welcomed by the boycott leaders, it was decided to continue the boycott until the ruling was implemented. In November, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the District Court's decision. On 17 December 1956 the Supreme Court rejected the appeal from city and state authorities to reconsider their decision, and three days later the order for integrated buses arrived in Montgomery. On 20 December the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) voted to end the 381-day bus boycott.

Civil Rights movement

In a general sense, the term describes a movement which seeks equal rights for all citizens by virtue of their citizenship. In the context of the United States, the term is primarily used to describe the mass movement that developed in the 1950s and 1960s to end the widespread practice in many Southern states of segregating public facilities and services in ways that discriminated against black citizens.

Federal court

The United States has a federal system of government in which power is shared between the federal government (which oversees the governance of all 50 states) and the state governments. Both the federal government and each of the state governments have their own system of courts. In general, federal courts hear cases such as those involving whether a particular state law is constitutional or where there is a dispute between two or more states. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the federal system and its decisions on all matters are final and binding.

'Jim Crow' laws

In U.S. history, the term is used to describe the laws that enforced segregation in the Southern states from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s.

The term comes from a minstrel routine, 'Jump Jim Crow' developed by Thomas Dartmouth ('Daddy') Rice and imitated by many others. It was used to describe the segregated life that African-Americans were forced to endure.

Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)

The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was founded on 5 December 1955 by a group of black ministers and community leaders in Montgomery, Alabama. Earlier that day, the Montgomery bus boycott had begun following the arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December for refusing to give up her bus seat. Plans for a one-day bus boycott had been drawn up at a meeting on 2 December in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Martin Luther King was minister. The success of the one-day boycott prompted the establishment of the MIA to oversee the continuation of the boycott and, in a wider sense, to improve race relations in Montgomery. Among its officers were Martin Luther King (President) and E.D. Nixon (Treasurer).

As a result of his involvement in the boycott, King emerged as a national figure and the MIA's tactics became a model for many subsequent civil rights protests to follow.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in February 1909 to oppose discrimination against black Americans. Its early members included William Du Bois, the well-known campaigner for civil rights and the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, and John Dewey, the renowned educationalist. The NAACP was involved in many campaigns over the decades: it fought a long campaign against lynching, it supported the struggle for women's suffrage and it used every legal means to secure civil rights for black Americans. During the 1950s its main strategy was to use the courts to end racial discrimination in the United States.

Non-violent resistance

The principle of 'non-violent resistance' is based on the belief that the struggle for civil rights and/or social or political struggle is best pursued by renouncing the use of violence and adopting, instead, such techniques as protest marches, non-cooperation and boycotting. Although not the earliest exponent of the principle, the Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi gave it its fullest articulation and application in practice over a long period of time. Gandhi was a formative influence on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. According to King himself, Gandhi's stress on love and non-violence gave him "the method for social reform that I had been seeking". (King, *Stride towards Freedom*, p.79) See

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_nonviolent_resistance/ and <http://www.un.org/en/events/nonviolenceday/background.shtml>

Racial discrimination

This is where people are treated less fairly than others because of their racial profile. One example would be the Alabama state laws that forced black Americans to sit in the back section of buses. This discrimination led to a form of racial segregation. (See below.)

Segregation

Segregation involves the forced separation - in a range of public and social contexts - of particular groups of people. Where this segregation is enforced on the basis of racial difference, it is known as 'racial segregation'.

(United States) Supreme Court

This is the highest court in the U.S. federal court system. See 'Federal court'.

(Montgomery) Women's Political Council

The Women's Political Council (WPC) of Montgomery, Alabama, was established in 1946, by Mary Fair Burks and others, to encourage civic involvement and oppose racist policies. Many of its members were educators at the all-black Alabama State College, including Jo Ann Robinson, head of the English Department, who became WPC president in 1950. As president, Robinson brought to prominence the issue of segregation on the buses, making many submissions to Mayor W.A. Gayle and the city commission to lobby for bus reforms. Lack of progress on the issue of bus segregation prompted Robinson and other Council members to argue the case for a boycott of the buses and Robinson wrote to Mayor Gayle in May 1954 to inform him that there was growing support for such a move.

The arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955 convinced Robinson and other Council members that the time for action had come and the WPC began immediately circulating leaflets across the city announcing the boycott. The WPC was to play an on-going role throughout the boycott, organising car pools and meetings and communicating with protestors.

Biographical notes

Ralph Abernathy (1926-1990)



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ralph_Abernathy.jpg

Black American clergyman and civil rights campaigner, Abernathy was born in Linden, Alabama and served overseas with the U.S. Army towards the end of World War II. After the war, he was ordained as a Baptist minister and earned a degree in Mathematics from Alabama State College in Montgomery. He subsequently earned an MA in sociology from Atlanta University. In 1951 he became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Montgomery. When Martin Luther King became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954, the two men quickly became friends.

After the arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955, Abernathy played a key role in setting up the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). He and King proved an effective partnership at the weekly mass meetings during the boycott. While King set out the moral and philosophical arguments with his inspiring oratory, Abernathy translated these arguments into an agenda for practical action: “Now let me tell you what that means for tomorrow morning.”

In early 1957, Abernathy joined with King and others to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) of which he became secretary-treasurer. He succeeded King as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) when King moved to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1960. In 1961, with King’s encouragement, he accepted an invitation to become pastor of West Hunter Baptist Church in Atlanta and the two men remained close allies. Following King’s assassination in 1968, he became president of the SCLC but the organisation never enjoyed the success it had under King’s leadership. In 1989, his memoir *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* was published.

Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

Key personality



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King,_Jr..jpg

Black American clergyman and civil rights campaigner, King was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and was the son and grandson of Baptist ministers. His third level education included completion of a B.A. degree in Morehouse College, Atlanta; a Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania; and a doctorate from Boston University. In Boston he met and married Coretta Scott, with whom he had two sons and two daughters.

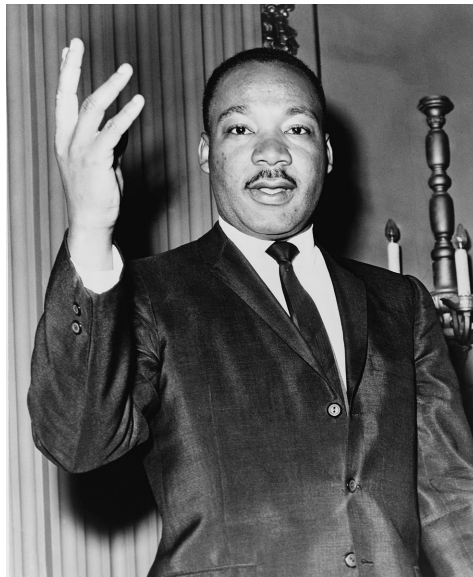
Whilst working on his Ph.D. dissertation, King accepted an offer from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, to give a trial sermon on 24 January 1954. This led to an invitation to become pastor of the church, an offer which he accepted in April 1954. He joined the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and encouraged his congregation to do likewise. Through his church work and involvement in the NAACP he got to know people such as Jo Ann Robinson and E.D. Nixon who were to play prominent roles in the Montgomery bus boycott.

The bus boycott began following the arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955. At a meeting of 5 December 1955, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was established to oversee the continuance of the boycott and King was elected its president. The events that transpired over the year that followed were to make King a nationally-known figure. In January 1956 his home was bombed and he made a plea for non-violence; in February, he was indicted, along with other MIA leaders, for violating an

anti-boycott law and, in March, he was found guilty, though the verdict was appealed. On 5 June 1956, the federal district court ruled in the *Browder v. Gayle* case that bus segregation was unconstitutional - and this decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in November. King's role in the boycott attracted attention both nationally and internationally, and the non-violent methods that characterised the boycott became the model for many subsequent challenges to segregation in the Southern states.

In early 1957, inspired by the success of the Montgomery bus boycott, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed to coordinate the activities of local activist groups throughout the South and King became its leader. His powers of oratory helped make him a nationally-respected figure and, in 1963, he led the March on Washington ('for Jobs and Freedom'), where he made his famous 'I have a dream' speech. In December 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. However, in February 1965, he was jailed along with more than two hundred others after a voting rights march in Selma, Alabama. Following his release, he led the Selma to Montgomery march of March 1965, a march which attracted substantial support from across the United States. (According to King, "forty of the nation's top historians took part in the march to Montgomery." *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, p.287) The march was soon followed by the enactment of President Lyndon Johnson's Voting Rights Act of 1965, described by the president as "one of the most monumental laws in the history of American freedom".

King became increasingly critical, however, of President Johnson's Vietnam policy, calling for a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam in August 1965 and delivering a strong anti-war speech at New York's Riverside on 4 April 1967. Exactly one year later, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, as he chatted with friends on the balcony of a local motel. His widow, Coretta Scott King (1927-2006) carried on his work through the Martin Luther King Jr. Centre for Social Change in Alabama. The third Monday in January is celebrated as Martin Luther King Day in the United States.



Martin Luther King in 1964

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King_Jr_NYWTS.jpg

E.D. Nixon (1899-1987)

Union leader and civil rights advocate, Edgar Daniel Nixon was born in Lowndes County, Alabama, the son of a Baptist minister and a maid-cook. His adolescent years were spent in Montgomery. Receiving very little formal education, he worked his way up from baggage handler in a train station to a job as a Pullman sleeping car porter, a relatively prestigious job for African-Americans which offered good wages and travel opportunities. In 1928, he joined the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters trade union and later helped to form its Montgomery branch, serving as its president for many years.

During the 1940s, Nixon helped to form the Alabama Voters' League which aimed to encourage voter registration among the African-American community in Montgomery. In 1945 he was elected president of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and two years later became the state president of the organisation. During the 1950s, Nixon began to openly question the segregated seating arrangements on city buses. Along with other members of the NAACP, he began to look for a test case to challenge the legality of Montgomery's transport system.

When Claudette Colvin, a fifteen year old who was pregnant and unmarried, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man in March 1955, Nixon considered the possibility of taking a court case. He consulted with attorney and civil rights activist Fred Gray and others but decided, ultimately, that Colvin was too immature to handle the pressures of a major court case and that her personal circumstances might cause public relations problems. When Rosa Parks was arrested on 1 December, Nixon realised that the time for action was opportune.

Together with Clifford Durr, a white attorney and civil rights activist, Nixon bailed Parks out of jail and, with the cooperation of the Women's Political Council, set about mobilising Montgomery's black community. When the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was set up on 5 December, Nixon was elected treasurer. During the boycott, Nixon's contacts in the wider civil rights and labour movements were helpful in generating support for the campaign.

In June 1957, Nixon resigned from the MIA in a dispute over leadership issues. Until his death in 1987, he remained active on civil rights issues, concentrating in his later years on improving conditions in housing projects. In 2001, Montgomery County Public School System named an elementary school in his honour.

For images of E.D. Nixon, see

https://www.google.ie/search?q=e.d.+nixon+images&client=safari&rls=en&dc=0&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj0vtC_2crYAhXBJMAKHbLmBHEQsAQIJg&biw=1039&bih=666#img=5n8lVBPziKBZeM

Rosa Parks (1913-2005)



Rosa Parks, with Martin Luther King in the background, c.1955
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosaparks.jpg>

Seamstress and civil rights activist, Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McAuley in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1913. She grew up in Montgomery and left school at sixteen due to family circumstances. In 1932, she married Raymond Parks, a barber and member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1943, Rosa Parks joined the local chapter of the NAACP and was soon elected secretary. Two years later, after two unsuccessful attempts, she registered to vote.

Through her work as a seamstress, Parks came into contact with white civil rights activists Clifford and Virginia Durr and, in the summer of 1955, they sponsored a week-long stay for her at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee to attend a workshop on opposing segregation. This experience increased her commitment to civil rights issues and determination to oppose segregation.

By the time of her arrest in December 1955, Parks was widely respected in the black community and proved a popular focus for opposition to bus segregation laws. Responding to the stereotype of her as a 'tired seamstress', she wrote in her autobiography, *Rosa Parks* (1992): "I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in." (p.116)

During the period of the boycott, Parks played an active role in coordinating rides for protestors. She was indicted, along with Martin Luther King and others, for her role in the boycott. She also made appearances in churches and other institutions to raise funds and publicise the work of the Montgomery Improvement Association.

Following the ending of the boycott and, due in part to death threats and other harassment, Parks moved to Detroit in 1957. She resumed work as a seamstress but remained active in the civil rights movement. When President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, banning segregation in public accommodation, Parks accepted an invitation to attend the ceremony. In 1965, she returned to Alabama to help lead the final leg of the Selma to Montgomery march in pursuit of voting rights in the South. In the same year, she joined the staff of Representative John Conyers, one of the leading African American members of Congress, and managed his Detroit office until her retirement in 1988.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton presented Parks with the Presidential Medal of Freedom declaring: "When she sat down on the bus, she stood up for the ideals of equality and justice and demanded that the rest of us do the same." Other honours followed and in 2001, despite frail health, she travelled to Montgomery for the opening of the Rosa Parks Library and Museum. When she died in 2005, her remains were flown to Washington DC to lie in honour in the Capitol Rotunda. She was the first woman and only the second African-American to lie in state. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights organisation founded by Martin Luther King and others, presents the Rosa Parks Freedom Award each year in her honour.

Jo Ann Robinson (1912-1992)

Although less well known than Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King, Robinson played a key role in organising and sustaining the Montgomery bus boycott. In his memoir *Stride Towards Freedom*, Martin Luther King wrote that, "... she, perhaps more than any other person, was active on every level of the protest." (p.78)

Born Jo Ann Gibson in Culloden, Georgia, Robinson was the youngest of twelve children and the first member of her family to graduate from college. Whilst teaching in Macon, Georgia, she was married for a short time to Wilbur Robinson and had one child who died in infancy. She subsequently moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where she earned an M.A. in English from the University of Atlanta. Following a year of doctoral study at Columbia University, New York City, she moved to Montgomery in 1949 to teach English at Alabama State College. She soon became active in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and the Women's Political Council (WPC).

At the end of her first semester in Alabama State College in 1949, Robinson suffered a humiliating experience when she was ordered off a nearly empty public bus for sitting in the fifth row. On becoming WPC president in 1950, she decided to make the segregated bus seating arrangements a priority for the organisation. The WPC made repeated complaints about seating practices and driver conduct to the Montgomery City Commission. Meetings with Montgomery mayor, William A. Gayle, and members of his staff yielded no results and, by 1955, Robinson was informing the mayor that a bus boycott might ensue if changes were not made. The arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955 spurred Robinson into action.

Robinson seized the opportunity to put the long-considered boycott into operation. On the evening of 1 December, she, along with two students and the head of the Business Department, copied thousands of leaflets calling for a bus boycott, for distribution over the following days. When the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was founded, Robinson chose not to accept an official MIA position because of fear of losing her job at Alabama State College. However, Martin Luther King asked her to edit the weekly MIA newsletter and she participated in the car pool system that made the boycott possible. Despite her efforts to work behind the scenes, she was the target of several acts of intimidation, including attacks on her property by local police officers.

In the late 1950s, along with colleagues who had supported the bus boycott, she was reportedly investigated by a special state committee and state 'evaluators' regularly attended classes that she gave in the college. She resigned from her college post in 1960, working for a year in Gambling College, Louisiana, before settling in Los Angeles, where she worked in the public school system until her retirement in 1976. She remained involved in her community and in local politics until her death in 1992. Her memoir, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, was published in 1987.

For images of Jo Ann Robinson, see

https://www.google.ie/search?q=jo+ann+robinson+images&client=safari&rls=en&dc=0&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisjdGU1qLZAUhUEDcAKHVzhC_YQsAQIJg&biw=1039&bih=661

The Montgomery bus boycott, 1956: timeline

1955	1 December	Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat and was arrested. Bailed out of jail by E.D. Nixon, secretary of local branch of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).
	2 December	Meeting held in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Martin Luther King Jr. was minister to discuss bus boycott proposed by E.D. Nixon. Jo Ann Robinson and her students distributed fliers asking people not to ride the buses on Monday 5 December.
	5 December	Rosa Parks appeared in court. Bus boycott took place. At meeting of black leaders in Mount Zion AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church, Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) formed, with Martin Luther King as president. At mass meeting in Holt Street Baptist Church, decision taken to continue boycott.
	8 December	MIA held unsuccessful talks with city commissioners and bus company officials. Car pool arrangements set in motion at evening meeting.
1956	30 January	Bomb attack on homes of M.L. King and, the following day, E.D. Nixon.
1956	1 February	Browder v. Gayle case was filed in U.S. District Court by Fred Gray, a black lawyer working in tandem with E.D. Nixon and Clifford Durr (a white lawyer and civil rights activist). Note: Browder was a Montgomery housewife; Gayle was the mayor of Montgomery.
	21 February	King and other boycott leaders indicted for violating Alabama's 1921 anti-boycott law.
	22 March	King found guilty of leading illegal boycott and sentenced to \$500 fine or 386 days in jail. Verdict appealed.
	5 June	Federal District Court ruled in the Browder v. Gayle case that bus segregation was unconstitutional.
	13 November	U.S. Supreme Court upheld decision of federal district court that bus segregation was unconstitutional.
	20 December	Bus integration order arrived in Montgomery. King called for end to boycott and this was agreed.
	21 December	King rode first integrated bus with Ralph Abernathy, E.D. Nixon and Glenn Smiley (a white Methodist minister and civil rights activist).

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Christopher B. Strain (2017), *The Long Sixties: America, 1955-1973*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Robert Weisbrot (1990), *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Norton.

Useful websites

<http://www.montgomeryboycott.com>

A website of the *Montgomery Advertiser* newspaper, it contains articles from the archives of the newspaper, photo galleries, biographies and more.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/rosa-parks-gallery/>

<http://spartacus-educational.com/USAmontgomeryB.htm>

<http://spartacus-educational.com/USAparksR.htm>

<http://www.crmvet.org/docs/mbbdocs.htm>

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/tah-loudoun/blog/psas/rosa-parks-and-the-montgomery-bus-boycott/>

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/bus-boycott-historical-documents-highlight-integration>

<http://www.smithsoniansource.org/display/primarysource/viewdetails.aspx?PrimarySourceId=1203>

<http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/rights/rights1.html>

<https://www.civilrightsteaching.org/desegregation/resource/teaching-montgomery-bus-boycott/>

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/americon-vid-rosa-parks/video/#.WmBvghRsz-Y>

<http://hll.org/BusBoycott.htm>

<http://spot.colorado.edu/~wehr/5025B.TXT>

<https://www.scribd.com/document/54562217/Montgomery-Bus-Boycott-2008>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZtAECC3BOc>

Episode from *The People's Century*, dealing with the wider context of segregation. Minutes 29.50-37.00 Voting issue/Selma march; Minutes 07.50-15.40 School problems/the Sit-in protests/Freedom riders

The Montgomery bus boycott: a possible line of enquiry

If students are to understand the issues and events of the case study, they will need to understand the context in which Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, why that refusal led to a city-wide boycott of the buses in Montgomery, Alabama, and why that boycott became a matter of national controversy and national significance. An enquiry question such as the following may be helpful in this regard.

Why did Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat spark a national controversy?

There is a compelling and historically significant story at the heart of this case study, and it makes sense to steer students through the narrative step-by-step so they can see how the action of one individual led ultimately to developments that had implications for the lives and careers of many. Beginning with the circumstances of Rosa Parks' arrest, the following three stages of enquiry are recommended:

Stage 1: Why did Rosa Parks refuse to give up her bus seat on 1 December 1955?

Stage 2: Why did Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat lead to a bus boycott in Montgomery?

Stage 3: Why did the bus boycott in Montgomery become a matter of national controversy?

What are the potential benefits of using these questions to focus on the subject matter of the case study?

In the pages that follow, for the three stages of the enquiry a list of "factors identified in commentaries" is followed by a selection of linked primary source extracts and some secondary source extracts.

While most sources have undergone some degree of editing, teachers may decide to engage in further editing of some documents to facilitate use with their own classes.

A possible 'hook'

The following clip, lasting 1 minute 55 seconds, features two of the organisers of the boycott, Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy, speaking in the course of the boycott, with footage in between of people walking to work in support of the boycott. It can be used to introduce some of the main personalities and significant themes of the case study.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QZik4CYtgw>

TRANSCRIPT AND WORKSHEET

Transcript

[Speaker: Dr. Martin Luther King]

For a number of years, the Negro passengers on the city bus lines of Montgomery have been humiliated, intimidated and faced threats on this bus line. Just the other day one of the fine citizens of our community, Mrs. Rosa Parks, was arrested because she refused to give up her bus seat for a white passenger. Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested and taken down to jail, taken from the bus – just because she refused to give up her seat.

At present, we are in the midst of a protest, the Negro citizens of Montgomery, representing some 44% of the population. Ninety per cent at least of the regular Negro bus passengers are staying off the buses and we plan to continue until something is done.

[Speaker: Ralph Abernathy]

Although many have been arrested, we continue – listen to me – we continue to have a protest, for none of our actions have been found illegal. The car pool, and all we have done in this struggle, continues.

Questions/points for discussion on video clip

1. According to the first speaker, Dr. Martin Luther King, what had been happening on the “city bus lines of Montgomery” for a number of years prior to the arrest of Rosa Parks?
2. How does King describe Rosa Parks?
3. What circumstances of Rosa Parks’ arrest “just the other day” are mentioned by King?
4. What points does King make about the on-going bus boycott?
5. (a) What are the two elements of the clip in between the footage of the two speakers?
(b) What is the purpose of showing these two elements? (How do they add to our understanding of what the two speakers have to say?)
6. What difficulty faced by those involved in the boycott is mentioned by the second speaker, Ralph Abernathy?
7. Abernathy mentions one of the methods used by the boycott organisers to keep the boycott going. Discuss what you think that method involved and the likely challenges involved in keeping it going.
8. In the box below, write down two questions prompted by watching the video clip that you would like to see explored during the course of the enquiry.

Enquiry, Stage 1

Why did Rosa Parks refuse to give up her bus seat on 1 December 1955?

Among the factors identified in commentaries are:

- Like many others in her community, Rosa Parks was tired of giving in to the demands imposed by unjust regulations and laws.
- Although she worked as a seamstress, Rosa Parks was an active member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and believed that black people needed to be treated more fairly.
- Earlier that year, Rosa Parks had attended a workshop on opposing segregation which may have influenced her thinking.

Relevant sources

Source 1

The following excerpt is taken from an interview given by Rosa Parks in 1997. The interview is currently available at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/sittingdown.htm>. The following is part of her response to the question, “What made you decide on December 1, 1955, not to get up from your seat?”

That particular day that I decided was not the first time I had trouble with that particular driver. He evicted me before, because I would not go around to the back door after I was already onto the bus. The evening that I boarded the bus, and noticed that he was the same driver, I decided to get on anyway. I did not sit at the very front of the bus; I took a seat with a man who was next to the window – the first seat that was allowed for ‘colored’ people to sit in. We were not disturbed until we reached the third stop after I boarded the bus. At this point a few white people boarded the bus, and one white man was left standing. When the driver noticed him standing, he spoke to us (the man and two women across the aisle) and told us to let the man have the seat. The other three all stood up. But the driver saw me still sitting there. He said would I stand up, and I said, “No, I will not.” Then he said, “I’ll have you arrested.” And I told him he could do that. So he didn’t move the bus any further. Several black people left the bus.

Two policemen got on the bus in a couple of minutes. The driver told the police that I would not stand up. The policeman walked down and asked my why I didn’t stand up, and I said I didn’t think I should stand up. “Why do you push us around?” I asked him. And he said, “I don’t know. But the law is the law and you are under arrest.” As soon as he said that I stood up, the three of us left the bus together.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss what the writer means when she says of the bus driver, “He evicted me before”.
2. Whereabouts did the writer sit on the bus on the day in question?
3. Why did the bus driver ask the writer and three others to vacate their seats?
4. What was the driver’s response when the writer refused to vacate her seat?
5. How does the writer describe her dealings with the policemen who placed her under arrest?



The Rosa Parks bus, on display in the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa_parks_bus.jpg

Secondary Source 1 (edited)

By the end of World War II in 1945, Rosa was a leader in the Montgomery Voters' League and the secretary in the local chapter of the NAACP. Parks loved her job at the NAACP: "I recorded and sent membership payments to the national office, answered telephones, wrote letters, sent out press releases, and kept a record of cases of violence against black people." (Parks and Haskins, 1992: p.84) In addition she headed the NAACP Youth Council, which attempted to draw youngsters into the sphere of the NAACP's activities. "One of our projects was getting the young people to try to take out books from the main library instead of going to the little branch across town that was the colored library." (Parks and Haskins, 1992: p.94)

Reference: Rosa Parks and Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story*. New York: Dial Books, 1992.

Sina Dubovoy, *Civil Rights Leaders: American Profiles*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997, p. 92.

Questions and points for discussion

1. In what ways, according to the writer, was Rosa Parks an active citizen in Montgomery?
2. What was the NAACP? What role did it play in American life at the time?
3. List the activities Rosa Parks was involved in as a member of the NAACP in Montgomery.

Secondary Source 2 (edited)

Although shy and unassuming, Rosa Parks held strong and well-developed views about the iniquities [evils] of segregation. Long active in the NAACP, she had served as secretary of the local branch. In the summer of 1953 she spent two weeks at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, an institution which encouraged interracial amity [friendship]. Founded and run by Myles Horton, Highlander flouted the local segregation laws and gave black and white Southerners a virtually unique opportunity to meet and mingle on equal terms. Rosa Parks's protest on the Cleveland Avenue bus was the purposeful act of a politically aware person.

Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens and New York: The University of Georgia Press, 1987, p. 16.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What picture of Rosa Parks does the writer paint in the opening sentence?
2. Rosa Parks attended the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, on a number of occasions. What was unique about the school, according to the writer?
3. Explain the writer's statement that "Rosa Parks's protest on the Cleveland Avenue bus was the purposeful act of a politically aware person."



Rosa Parks has her fingerprints taken.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosa_Parks_being_fingerprinted_by_Deputy_Sheriff_D.H._Lackey_after_being_arrested_for_boycotting_public_transportation_-_Original.jpg

Enquiry, Stage 2: Why did Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat lead to a bus boycott in Montgomery?

Among the factors identified in commentaries are:

- For some time, the Women's Political Council in Montgomery under the leadership of Jo Ann Robinson had been campaigning for better treatment on the buses for black commuters, and the possibility of an organised bus boycott had been brought to the attention of Mayor W.A. Gayle. Disappointed with the Mayor's reactions, once Rosa Parks was arrested, Robinson circulated a flyer calling for a boycott on the following Monday.
- Following Rosa Parks' arrest, E.D. Nixon, one of the most respected members of the black community in Montgomery believed the time for a bus boycott had come.
- Local church ministers such as Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy were prepared to take on the leadership of the boycott.
- The success of the one-day boycott on 5 December convinced black community leaders that the boycott should be continued until acceptable improvements were made.
- The black community of Montgomery were angry with the way they were treated on city buses and were prepared to endure hardship in the hope of bringing about change.

Relevant sources

Source 2 (edited)

The following is an edited excerpt from a letter written by Jo Ann Robinson, President of the Women's Political Council to W.A. Gayle, the Mayor of Montgomery on 21 May, 1954.

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. We, the Council, believe that when this matter has been put before you and the Commissioners, that agreeable terms can be met in a quiet manner to the satisfaction of all concerned.

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.

Originally published in Jo Ann Robinson's *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women who Started It*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987, p.viii) Currently available at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/tah-loudoun/blog/psas/rosa-parks-and-the-montgomery-bus-boycott/>

Questions and points for discussion and research

1. How would you describe the tone of the letter, based on this edited excerpt? (e.g. angry, reasonable) Explain your answer.
2. According to Jo Ann Robinson, the writer of the letter, how real a prospect was a bus boycott in Montgomery in May 1954?

Source 3: Flyer distributed by Jo Ann Robinson following Rosa Parks' arrest

Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down.

It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped.

Negroes have rights too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter or mother.

This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday.

You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus.

You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off all buses Monday.

<http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/551202-001.pdf>

Source 4: Version of flyer edited by Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King and also distributed

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5.

Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat.

Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk.

Come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 PM at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further instruction.

http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol03Scans/67_2-Dec-1955_Leaflet%20Dont%20Ride%20the%20Bus.pdf

Questions and points for discussion

1. What messages do Source 3 and Source 4 have in common?
2. (a) How was the case of Claudette Colvin, mentioned in Source 3, similar to that of Rosa Parks?
(b) Why did the case of Claudette Colvin not lead to a bus boycott?
(See biographical note on E.D. Nixon, p.12.)
3. Suggest reasons for the issuing of a new, edited version of the flyer (Source 4). Include in your considerations the new detail it contains.

Source 5

Here, Mary Fair Burks, founder of the Women's Political Council and a friend and colleague of Jo Ann Robinson, reflects on Jo Ann's role in the boycott.

Whether the boycott was solely Jo Ann's idea, as she claimed, is debatable. What is important is that the boycott occurred. And once it was underway, nobody worked more diligently than she did as a member of the board of the Montgomery Improvement Association and as a representative of the Women's Political Council. Although others had contemplated a boycott, it was due in large part to Jo Ann's unswerving belief that it *could* be accomplished, and her never-failing optimism that it *would* be accomplished, and her selflessness and unbounded energy that it *was* accomplished.

Mary Fair Burks, Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Ann Rouse and Barbara Woods (eds.) *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941-1965*. Indiana University Press, 1993 paperback edition. pp.71-83: p.75.

Questions and points for discussion

1. The writer says that it is debatable "Whether the boycott was solely Jo Ann's idea". Can you identify another activist who played a major role in initiating the boycott? (See Source 6 if necessary.)
2. How important a role did Jo Ann Robinson play in the boycott, according to the writer? (Compare this with the view of Martin Luther King in Source 10.)

Source 6

Early Friday morning, December 2, [E.D.] Nixon called me. He was so caught up in what he was about to say that he forgot to greet me with the usual hello but plunged immediately into the story of what had happened to Mrs. Parks the night before. I listened, deeply shocked, as he described the humiliating incident. "We have taken this type of thing too long already," Nixon concluded, his voice trembling. "I feel that the time has come to boycott the buses. Only through a boycott can we make it clear to the white folks that we will not accept this type of treatment any longer."

Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000, p. 51.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Do you think E.D. Nixon and Dr. Martin Luther King knew each other prior to the telephone call to which King refers? Explain your answer.
2. What impression of Nixon's state of mind does King give? Explain your answer.
3. What was King's reaction to the news about the arrest of Rosa Parks?
4. What suggestion did Nixon make in the course of the phone call according to King?

Source 7 (edited):

Just before calling me Nixon had discussed the idea with Rev. Ralph Abernathy, the young minister of Montgomery's First Baptist Church who was to become one of the central figures in the protest. Abernathy also felt a bus boycott was our best course of action. So for thirty or forty minutes the three of us telephoned back and forth concerning plans and strategy. Nixon suggested that we call a meeting of all the ministers and civic leaders that same evening to get their thinking on the proposal, and I offered my church as the meeting place.

Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000, pp. 51-52

Questions and points for discussion

1. What do we learn about Ralph Abernathy from King's description of him in Source 7?
2. Why were there telephone calls 'back and forth' for thirty or forty minutes between Nixon, Abernathy and himself, according to King?
3. According to King, whose idea was it to have a meeting that evening (2 December, 1955) of 'all the ministers and civic leaders'?
4. Dr. King says that he offered the use of his church for the meeting. What was the name of the church? (See below.)



Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King was minister and where the meeting referred to in Source 7 took place.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dexter_Avenue_Baptist.jpg

Source 8

In the following excerpt from a report in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on 6 December 1955, reporter Joe Azbell describes the meeting the previous evening where the decision to continue the boycott was taken.

See <http://spartacus-educational.com/USAmontgomeryB.htm>

When the resolution on continuing the boycott of the bus was read, there came a wild whoop of delight. Many said they would never ride the bus again. Negroes turned to each other and compared past incidents on the buses.

At several points there was an emotionalism that the ministers on the platform recognized could get out of control and at various intervals they repeated again “what we are seeking is by peaceful means.”

“There will be no violence or intimidation. We are seeking things in a democratic way and we are using the weapon of protest,” the speakers declared.

The meeting was much like an old-fashioned revival [meeting] with loud applause added. It proved beyond any doubt that there was a discipline among Negroes that many whites had doubted. It was almost a military discipline combined with emotion.

The Montgomery Advertiser, 6 December 1955

Questions and points for discussion

1. What was the name of the reporter and in which newspaper did the report appear?
2. The report describes a meeting that took place on the evening of the day when the one-day bus boycott took place. What was the date of that boycott?
3. According to the writer, how did the people at the meeting react when the resolution to continue the boycott was read?
4. According to the writer, why did the speakers keep repeating, “what we are seeking is by peaceful means”?
5. See if you can find out what the writer means when he compares the meeting to “an old-fashioned revival meeting”.
6. According to the writer, what did the meeting prove “beyond all doubt”?

Significant meetings

Meeting	Date	Venue
Meeting of ministers and civic leaders to discuss boycott	2 December 1955	Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
Meeting of leaders to discuss plans for evening meeting. MIA established.	5 December 1955 (afternoon)	Mount Zion A.M.E. Church (A.M.E. = African Methodist Episcopal)
Mass meeting to discuss boycott	5 December 1955 (evening)	Holt Street Baptist Church
Mass meeting where car pool arrangements were agreed	8 December 1955	St. John A.M.E. Church

Source 9 (edited): Martin Luther King describes the mass meeting of 8 December 1955 where arrangements for a car pool were first put in place

... a mass meeting was being held that night. There I asked all those who were willing to offer their cars to give us their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and the hours that they could drive, before leaving the meeting. The response was tremendous. More than a hundred and fifty signed slips volunteering their automobiles. Some who were not working offered to drive in the car pool all day; others volunteered a few hours before and after work. Practically all of the ministers volunteered to drive whenever they were needed. p.65

Despite this success, so profoundly had the spirit of the protest become a part of the people's lives that sometimes they even preferred to walk when a ride was available. The act of walking, for many, had become of symbolic importance. Once a pool driver stopped beside an elderly woman who was trudging along with obvious difficulty.

"Jump in, Grandmother, you don't need to walk."

She waved him on. "I'm not walking for myself," she explained. "I'm walking for my children and my grandchildren." pp.65-66

Claycorne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What proposal did King put to the mass meeting of 8 December, according to this account?
2. What details are given of the response to King's proposal?
3. Discuss the point that King makes that, for some, the act of walking "had become of symbolic importance."
4. What did the elderly woman mean when she said, "I'm walking for my children and my grandchildren"?

Source 10

Another loyal driver was Jo Ann Robinson. Attractive, fair skinned and still youthful, Jo Ann came by her goodness naturally. She did not need to learn her nonviolence from any book. Apparently indefatigable [tireless], she, perhaps more than any other person, was active on every level of the protest. She took part in both the executive board and the strategy committee meetings. When the MIA newsletter was inaugurated a few months after the protest began, she became its editor. She was sure to be present whenever negotiations were in progress. And although she carried a full teaching load at Alabama State, she still found time to drive both morning and afternoon. p.66

Claycorne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss what King says about the moral character of Jo Ann Robinson.
2. What evidence does King provide that she "was active on every level of the protest"?
3. To what extent does King's assessment of Jo Ann Robinson's role in the boycott agree with Mary Fair Burks' assessment in Source 5?

Enquiry, Stage 3: Why did the bus boycott in Montgomery become a matter of national controversy?

Among the factors identified in commentaries are:

- The charismatic leadership of Martin Luther King – and, in particular, his oratory – had an impact that focused attention on events in Montgomery.
- The boycott lasted over a year and was widely supported despite the many obstacles encountered. The longer it went on, the more publicity it attracted.
- Civil rights activists from Northern states such as Bayard Rustin came to Montgomery and helped to bring the issues of the boycott to national prominence.
- Violent attacks on boycott leaders made newspaper headlines nationally and internationally.
- The Browder v. Gayle court case, and other court cases relating to the boycott, made the issues raised by the boycott matters of nationwide debate.

Relevant sources

Secondary Source 3

[Martin Luther King] was a brilliant speaker. He had the ability to make complex ideas simple: by repeating phrases, he could expand an idea, blending the rational with the emotional. That gave him the great ability to move others, blacks at first and soon, remarkably enough, whites as well. He could reach people of all classes and backgrounds; he could inspire men and women with nothing but his words.

David Halberstam (1993) *The Fifties*. New York: Villard Books, pp.547-548.

Questions and points for discussion

1. According to the writer, what ability did Martin Luther King have that made him such a brilliant speaker?
2. What kinds of people did Martin Luther King's speeches have an impact on, according to the writer?

Source 11, Martin Luther King addressing the crowd that gathered at his house when it was firebombed on 30 January 1956

We believe in law and order. Don't get panicky. Don't do anything panicky at all. Don't get your weapons. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. Remember that is what God said. We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them.

I did not start this boycott. I was asked by you to serve as your spokesman. I want it known the length and breadth of this land that if I am stopped this movement will not stop. For what we are doing is right. What we are doing is just. And God is with us.

Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000, p. 80

Questions and points for discussion

1. What characteristics of Martin Luther King as a speaker, identified in Secondary Source 3 above, are evident in this source?
2. How does Martin Luther King present his own role in the bus boycott?

Source 12 (edited): Alastair Cooke, British journalist

In this excerpt written in the 1980s, the writer quotes from a report written at the time the boycott began on 5 December 1955 and then continues as follows:

Well, it was still going five months later when I was down there to cover the story which by now was a national concern. It would not have grown so, I believe, if it hadn't been for the man who kept coming back there to strengthen the resistance of the blacks, all of whom went on, day after day, month after month walking to work. In the evening of that spring day, I went to the service in the Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. The place was jammed to the doors. For an hour or more, there were chants and hymns. Then they all sang 'Old Time Religion; and there was a rustle of leaders at a side door, and out came three parsons who prepared the way for the coming of the leader. The side door opened again, and the roar might have been for Victory in Europe. He was a young man with solemn good looks. The roar eventually died into a breathless silence, and this young Dr. King read out a petition that was to be, he said, 'a constitution for our cause'. Well, it was a rousing, seething evening, not to be forgotten.

Alastair Cooke (2009) *Letter from America: 1946-2004*. London: Folio Society, p.196.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What change had taken place between the writer's first visit to Montgomery and the one discussed here, which was five months later?
2. The writer gives credit for the success of the boycott to "the man who kept coming back there to strengthen the resistance of the blacks." Who was that man? Support your answer with evidence.
3. In what Montgomery church was the service attended by the writer?
4. What happened for the first hour or so of the service, according to the writer?
5. How does the writer describe the entrance of Dr. King and the reaction of the congregation?



The Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mt_Zion_AME_Apr2009_01.jpg

Secondary Source 4 (edited)

He became the MIA's ambassador, representing its cause throughout the nation before white and black audiences, and, in doing so, he acted as the MIA's chief fundraiser. He had the education and self-assurance to cope with the press, and he developed a keen sense of public relations. Calm and articulate, he handled reporters well, presenting the boycotters' case reasonably and persuasively. He also displayed cool intelligence in moments of crisis. When his home was bombed he acted decisively to avert a riot. When the MIA's recording secretary, the Reverend U.J. Fields, charged his colleagues with misuse of funds, King not only disproved the charge but also persuaded Fields to recant in public. Virginia Durr thought he had "a genius for the right act at the right time." By any objective appraisal, King made a massive contribution to the success of the boycott. Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens and New York: The University of Georgia Press, 1987, pp. 28-29.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What does the writer mean when he describes King as "the MIA's ambassador"?
2. According to the writer, what qualities did King have that enabled him to deal well with press reporters?
3. Referring to the bombing of King's home the writer says that he "acted decisively to avert a riot". What do we know about his actions from our study of Source 11?
4. Discuss King's handling of an accusation of misuse of funds as described by the writer.
5. Research: See what you can find out about Virginia Durr.
6. What is the writer's judgement on Dr. King's role in the boycott?

Source 13

Police in Montgomery, Alabama, yesterday began arresting 115 negroes indicted for participation in the 11-week boycott of public buses there by negroes.

Nine ministers were among the first taken into custody. Another negro leader whose home was bombed recently, was also arrested. The 115 were indicted on Tuesday by a grand jury under an old Alabama state law originally aimed at labour unions, making it an offence to participate in an "unlawful" boycott.

The boycott began last December when a negress was fined £5 for refusing a driver's order to move from the white to the coloured section of a public bus, thus violating the local segregation ordinances. In retaliation, Montgomery's negro population – led by their ministers – formed car pools, or walked, rather than ride on buses, thus causing a sharp drop in the revenue of the local transport company.

The Irish Times, 23 February, 1956

© The Irish Times

Questions and points for discussion

1. What was the crime with which the 115 'negroes' were charged?
2. Had the boycott been going on for 20-30 days, 50-60 days or 80-90 days?
3. Who do you think was the "negro leader whose house was bombed recently"?
4. Can you find any inaccuracy in the first sentence of the third paragraph?
5. What consequences of the boycott are mentioned here?

Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

Source 14

Thousands of negroes walked to work in Montgomery, Alabama, yesterday in a “passive resistance pilgrimage” to support an 11-week-old boycott of the city’s race-segregated buses. In the city courthouse, 89 negroes – who had also walked to court – pleaded not guilty to charges under an old Alabama law against “illegal” boycotts, which was originally passed because of labour disturbances. Their trial was fixed to start on March 19th.

The boycott began after a negress was arrested for refusing to move from the white to the negro section of the a bus.

At a church meeting which followed the court hearing, the negro defendants heard a telegram read from Dr. Ralph Bunche, negro Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations which said: “I greatly admire and congratulate you all. I know that you will stand firm in face of threats and resorts to police-State methods of intimidation.”

The Irish Times, 25 February, 1956

© The Irish Times

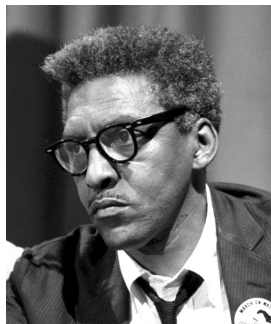
Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss the use of the words ‘negroes’ and ‘negress’ in the newspaper report.
2. What details in the report indicate that the boycott was well-supported?
3. Who was the ‘negress’ referred to in the second paragraph?
4. Discuss the importance of the telegram from Dr. Ralph Bunche which was read out at the church meeting.



A photograph of Dr. Ralph Bunche, c.1951

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ralph_Bunche,_1951.jpg



Bayard Rustin in 1963

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BayardRustinAug1963-LibraryOfCongress_crop.jpg

. Irish Times archive material supplied courtesy of The Irish Times at www.irishtimes.com

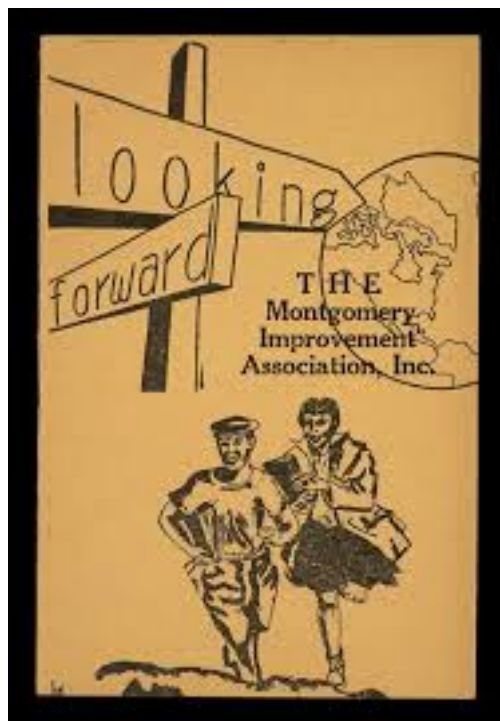
Source 15 (edited)

Bayard Rustin was a Northern civil rights activist who travelled to Montgomery in February 1956 to consult with the leaders of the bus boycott. The following is an excerpt from a report on his visit that he wrote for an organisation called the War Resisters' League. See http://www.crmvet.org/info/mbb_rustin_5603.pdf

Those of us who are interested to see progress towards a peaceful interracial society in the South and who are convinced that to a considerable degree such a society depends on a non-violent response by the Negro community, have something to do in addition to supporting the Montgomery Improvement Association. We must use our resources to strengthen the forces of non-violent resistance in the Montgomery situation. This means, among other things, helping to prepare literature, helping to plan workshops on non-violence and raising funds to carry on other programs related to non-violent education. ... We in the North should bear in mind that the most important thing we can do to help the Montgomery situation is to *press now for total integration in the North*. Montgomery is important if it stimulates us to greater action where we are.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss Rustin's reference to "progress towards a peaceful interracial society".
2. What sort of response from the 'Negro' community did Rustin think was necessary if peaceful progress was to be achieved?
3. What kinds of things did Rustin say he and his fellow civil rights activists must do to help the Montgomery Improvement Association?
4. Discuss what Rustin saw as the most important thing that activists in the North could do to help the Montgomery situation.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/4101516580>

Secondary Source 5 (edited)

As the boycott wore on, courts became a central locus of struggle. Increasing their pressure, authorities prosecuted King for violating a state law that criminalized conspiring “without a just cause or legal excuse” to hinder a business. Eighty-nine MIA dissidents were also indicted.

Intended to suppress the Negro rebellion, the prosecution had precisely the opposite effect. It spurred the black community to further displays of unity, confidence and self-sacrifice. Defendants joyously turned themselves in to the police. As King put it, “those who had previously trembled before the law were now proud to be arrested for the cause of freedom.” Being arrested or jailed pursuant to the protest had become a badge of honour. The day the boycott leaders were arraigned, most of Montgomery’s blacks shunned *all* motor transportation as a gesture of respect and solidarity.

The prosecution also advanced the cause of the boycott by elevating it to a major item of national and international news. For the first time, King and the boycott movement appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* and received notice by network television. The heady feeling of being at the center of the world’s attention further encouraged Montgomery’s rebellious black population. p.1029

Randall Kennedy (1989) Martin Luther King’s Constitution: A Legal History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *The Yale Law Journal*, Volume 98, Number 96, April 1989, pp. 999-1067.

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss what the writer means when he says, “As the boycott wore on, courts became a central locus of struggle.”
2. What impact did the prosecution of King have on the bus boycott, according to the writer?
3. What impact did the prosecution of King have on the media coverage of the boycott, according to the writer?
4. How did the black population of Montgomery react to the increased media focus on their boycott?



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King,_Jr_.sv

Sources 16A and 16B: Two cartoons by Laura Gray from *The Militant*, a socialist newspaper, in February and March 1956

A



https://hll.org/images/BusBoycottSegregation_lg.JPG

Cartoon by Laura Gray in *The Militant*, 13 February 1956

B



https://hll.org/images/BusBoycottCarPool_lg.JPG

Cartoon by Laura Gray in *The Militant*, 9 March 1956

Questions and points for discussion

1. What is the essential message conveyed in Source 16A? In answering, consider the bus signage, the spoken words and the gesture adopted by the human figure.
2. In Source 15B, what was the 'car pool' to which the cartoon refers?
3. Who were the organisers of the car pool, as the cartoon suggests?
4. Discuss what you consider to be the essential message of Source 16B.

Note: The cartoons were located with the assistance of the Holt Labor Library, San Francisco. Thanks to David Walter, Director of the Library, and to Marty Goodman, Director of the Riazonov Library digital archive project, for his role in scanning the images. The images were first made available online by the Marxist Internet Archive.

Secondary Source 6

Gayle v. Browder was the most significant of the suits that arose from the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Fred Gray filed it February 1, 1956, two days after King's home was bombed for the first time. Gray had previously asserted the unconstitutionality of bus segregation as a defense to the prosecution of Mrs. Parks, but had lost the right to appeal that issue because of a procedural mishap. In *Gayle*, Gray reasserted the claim but this time in a federal, as opposed to a state, court and on behalf of a plaintiff instead of a defendant. pp.1047-1048

Gayle was brought as a class action on behalf of four named plaintiffs and "all other Negroes similarly situated." Each of the named plaintiffs had either been asked by a driver or police officer to comply with the targeted segregation laws or had actually been arrested. p.1049

Randall Kennedy (1989) Martin Luther King's Constitution: A Legal History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *The Yale Law Journal*, Volume 98, Number 96, April 1989, pp. 999-1067.

Questions and points for discussion

1. What was the name of the attorney who filed the Browder v. Gayle lawsuit on 1 February, 1956?
2. On what previous occasion had the same attorney argued that the bus segregation laws were unconstitutional?
3. On this occasion, what were the two main ways in which the claim was being asserted?
4. Can you work out from the context what is meant by a 'class action' in legal terms?
5. The four named plaintiffs were Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald and Mary Louise Smith. See if you can find out which ones had previously been arrested for refusing to give up their seats on a Montgomery bus.
6. Discuss what was meant by "all other Negroes similarly situated".



Claudette Colvin, aged 13 in 1953. In March 1955, she was the first person arrested for resisting bus segregation in Montgomery.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Claudette_Colvin.jpg

Source 17: Martin Luther King describes attempts to halt the operations of the car pool that enabled the bus boycott to continue for as long as it did

Insurance agents decided, almost overnight, to refuse to insure our station wagons, contending that the risk was too high. Finally the company that held our liability insurance notified us that all the policies would be canceled as of September 15. A Northern friend who had read of our trouble wrote suggesting that we contact Lloyds of London. A few days later I talked to T. M. Alexander, an insurance broker in Atlanta, who approved of the idea and agreed to make contact for us. In a few days he was able to tell us that Lloyds of London would take the insurance.

But we were in for even greater difficulties. The city decided to take legal action against the car pool itself. We tried to block this maneuver by filing a request in the federal court for an order restraining the city from interfering with the pool. But U.S. District Judge Frank M. Johnson refused to grant the request. Soon several of us received subpoenas; the city had filed the petition. The hearing was set for Tuesday, November 13.

Clayborne Carson (ed.), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* London: Abacus, 2000, p. 92

Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss reasons why insurance agents decided “almost overnight” to cancel insurance policies on vehicles being used in the car pool.
2. What is the term generally used in Ireland for what are described here as ‘station wagons’?
3. How did the leaders of the boycott manage to deal with difficulties in getting insurance, according to Dr. King?
4. What sort of action did the city council take to try to stop the operation of the car pool?
5. (a) How did the boycott leaders try to block this action by the city council?
(b) Why were they unsuccessful?
6. Why was 13 November 1956 expected to be a ‘crunch’ day for the boycott leaders?



Chrysler station wagon, 1960

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chrysler_Station_Wagon.jpg

Secondary Source 7

On November 13, 1956, almost a year after the boycott had begun, King went to court to defend himself and the carpools against the local authorities who had declared it a 'public nuisance'. King was hardly optimistic about the outcome in a Montgomery court, but suddenly, during a recess, an AP reporter handed him a note that included an AP bulletin reporting that the Supreme Court had judged the Montgomery bus-segregation law to be unconstitutional. The blacks had won. King, always aware of the need to include rather than exclude people and the need to be magnanimous in victory, spoke at a mass rally to point out that this should not be viewed as victory of blacks over whites but as a victory for American justice and democracy. On December 21, the city prepared to desegregate its buses. An empty bus pulled up to a corner near Dr. King's home. Martin Luther King, Jr., boarded it. The white driver smiled at him and said, "I believe you are Reverend King." "Yes, I am," Martin Luther King, Jr., said. "We are glad to have you with us this morning," the driver said.

So the battle was won. But the war was hardly over. It was a beginning rather than an end: the boycott became the Movement, with a capital *M*. The blacks might have alienated the local white leadership, but they had gained the sympathy of the white majority outside the South.

David Halberstam, *The Fifties*. New York: Villard Books, 1993, p. 562

Questions and points for discussion

1. Why was Martin Luther King "hardly optimistic" on the morning of 13 November 1956?
2. What were the circumstances in which King heard about the Federal Court decision declaring the Montgomery bus segregation laws to be unconstitutional?
3. In what way, according to the writer, was King "magnanimous in victory"?
4. On what date did bus desegregation in Montgomery come into effect?
5. Research: See if you can find out the names of others who joined King in boarding the bus on that historic morning.
6. Discuss what the writer means when he says, "So the battle was won. But the war was hardly over."
7. What historical significance does the writer attach to the bus boycott?

A handwritten signature of Martin Luther King Jr. in black ink, written in a cursive style. The signature reads "Martin Luther King Jr." with a large, stylized "Jr." at the end.

Signature of Martin Luther King

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King_Jr_Signature.svg

Secondary Source 8

The Montgomery Bus Boycott has attained a secure and honored niche in the Nation's public memory. Indeed, it has become something of a legend. One problem with making legends is that the process engenders [gives rise to] a distortive sentimentality. We must thus be careful to prevent admiration for the boycott from exaggerating its accomplishments. The concerted [coordinated] withdrawal of Negro patronage is not what finally desegregated the buses; successful litigation [the taking of legal action] constituted the decisive action. The economic pressure of the boycott forced Company officials to break ranks with the city commissioners. Its moral pressure impelled a few white Montgomeries to commit the apostasy [going against their previous loyalties] of actually siding with King. But the boycott on its own did not succeed in inducing the political authorities to make any substantial concessions.

p.1054

Randall Kennedy (1989) Martin Luther King's Constitution: A Legal History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *The Yale Law Journal*, Volume 98, Number 96, April 1989, pp. 999-1067.

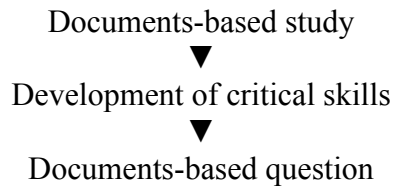
Questions and points for discussion

1. Discuss the meaning of the point made by the writer in the opening sentence.
2. What does the writer mean when he says the Montgomery bus boycott has become "something of a legend"?
3. According to the writer, what is one problem in making legends? Explain your answer.
4. In the case of the Montgomery bus boycott, admiration for the action taken may lead to what distortion, according to the writer?
5. The writer says that the bus boycott is not what finally led to desegregation on the buses: what did, according to the writer?
6. What 'successes' of the boycott does the writer mention?
7. The writer goes on to acknowledge (p.1066): "Later developments would attest to the influence of the boycott as a role model that encouraged other acts of rebellion. Participants in subsequent protests remember Montgomery as a distinct, encouraging presence." How similar or different a view is this to the one expressed by the writer in the second paragraph of Secondary Source 7.



Attorney Fred Gray honoured in Montgomery in 2015 with unveiling of historic marker
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Montgomery_ceremony_in_honor_of_Fred_Gray.JPG

A critical skills exercise



The Leaving Certificate History syllabus states that the documents-based study is “the primary means of developing [students’] skills in working with evidence”. (p.5)
The syllabus also states that, in the examination, the documents-based question “will test candidates’ ability to interrogate, correlate and evaluate a particular body of evidence”. (p.15)

Rationale for card sorts

In a card sort, cards with text (single words, phrases, sentences) are grouped or ranked according to particular criteria. Card sorts are good in helping students to make connections and form judgements. By having the text on cards, students can move them around, group them and, when necessary, change their minds. This approach promotes discussion and collaborative learning.

The intention of the critical skills exercise on the pages that follow is to illustrate in a practical and active manner the type of critical skills that the documents-based study is designed to develop. Essentially, the purpose of the exercise is to encourage students to THINK by discussing snippets of evidence and making judgements on their import by deciding whether they support or oppose the given proposition. The PLAY element is important and the exercise should be an engaging one for students. The intention is not to come up with answers that are either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’: much of the value of the exercise is in the process itself. That said, it should be possible to reach consensus in most cases and to clarify misunderstandings – where these arise – in the process.

In literacy development, such approaches can play a pivotal role as students engage together in purposeful reading and discussion of text and are active participants in the learning process.

What is involved in the critical skills exercise

Each group of 4-5 students is given an A4 sheet with the proposition at the top of the page and two columns headed: **Agrees** and **Disagrees**. Each group is also given an envelope containing 8 short documentary extracts – each on its own small strip of paper or cardboard – and the task is to discuss with each other the appropriate column in which to place each extract. When each group has reached its conclusions, the outcome of the exercise is discussed in a whole group setting.

Note: Since some of the sources are primary and others secondary, it may also be helpful to invite students to distinguish between the two types.

Proposition: The successful outcome of the Montgomery bus boycott was due to Martin Luther King.

Place each of the secondary source extracts in the appropriate column, depending on whether you think it agrees or disagrees with the above proposition. If the group cannot agree on whether a particular extract agrees or disagrees with the proposition, place it along the dividing line in the middle and wait to hear what other groups have to say about the extract.

Agrees	Disagrees

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source A</i></p> <p>“You know there comes a time when time itself is ready for a change. That time has come in Montgomery and I have nothing to do with it.” (MLK)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source E</i></p> <p>The concerted withdrawal of Negro patronage is not what finally desegregated the buses; successful litigation constituted the decisive action.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source B</i></p> <p>By any objective appraisal, King made a massive contribution to the success of the boycott.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source F</i></p> <p>Although others had contemplated a boycott, it was due in large part to Jo Ann’s unswerving belief that it <i>could</i> be accomplished, and her never-failing optimism that it <i>would</i> be accomplished, and her selflessness and unbounded energy that it <i>was</i> accomplished.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source C</i></p> <p>Victory had come about through community solidarity (largely inspired by King’s superb oratory and equally superb courage), despite jeopardised jobs, intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan, and harassment by police ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source G</i></p> <p>... although King inspired blacks in Montgomery ... talented local leaders other than King played decisive roles in initiating and sustaining the boycott movement.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source D</i></p> <p>... Martin Luther King, Jr., is usually cited as the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott ... Yet the boycott was started by a woman, Jo Ann Robinson, and by the women’s group that she headed, the Women’s Political Council.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Source H</i></p> <p>The boycott involved a lot of people.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Source E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Randall Kennedy</p> <p>Martin Luther King's Constitution: A Legal History of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, <i>The Yale Law Journal</i>, Vol. 98, No. 6, (April 1989), pp. 999-1067 p.1054</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Source A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Martin Luther King</p> <p>Cited in David Halberstam, <i>The Fifties</i> (1993) p.561</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Source F</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mary Fair Burks</p> <p>Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods. <i>Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941-1965</i> (1990), p. 75</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Source B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Adam Fairclough</p> <p><i>To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.</i> (1987) p.29</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Source G</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Clayborne Carson</p> <p>Martin Luther King Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle, <i>Journal of American History</i>, 74:2, Sept. 1987, pp.448-54</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Source C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">David Levering Lewis</p> <p>Martin Luther King, Jr., and the promise of nonviolent populism in John Hope Franklin and August Meier, <i>Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century</i> (1982). p.279</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Source H</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Christopher B. Strain</p> <p><i>The Long Sixties: America, 1955-1973.</i> (2017) p.47</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Source D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Anne Standley</p> <p>The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement, in Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods. <i>Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers, 1941-1965</i> (1990), p. 184</p>

Historians' views about the Montgomery bus boycott

Secondary Source A

In solidarity, duration, and quality of leadership, the Montgomery bus boycott was in a league of its own. Its significance lay not merely in the event itself, but also in the way it attracted national attention – and in the widest sense of the term – political support.

It took a month for the news of the boycott to reach page 71 of the *New York Times*, and thereafter it stayed in the headlines for a year.

Adam Fairclough (1987) *To redeem the soul of America: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, p. 23.

Secondary Source B

The formula for nonviolent civil rights campaigns was perfected in Montgomery: unsuccessful presentation of elementary grievances; mounting of increasingly provocative peaceful demonstrations; gross acts of violence by white citizens and outrageous misconduct by local law enforcement and judicial bodies, relentlessly reported by the national media; infusion of money and talent from national liberal organizations and increasing participation of nonresident whites (clergy, labor, students) in nonviolent demonstrations; single or multiple atrocities perpetrated by local whites, leading to direct or indirect federal intervention and negotiated settlement with chastened or cowed white officials. King's pulpit rhetoric, electric presence in the community and at the head of singing columns, his internationally reported sojourns in jail, fund-raising in the North and unyielding enforcement of nonviolent discipline in the South, and his consistent reasonableness at the negotiating table were (more often than not) highly effective.

David Levering Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the promise of nonviolent populism, in John Hope Franklin and August Meier (eds.) *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*. University of Illinois Press, 1982. pp.277-303-71: pp.279-280.

Secondary Source C

In unity and nonviolence the blacks found new strength, particularly as the nation began to take notice. Things that had for so long terrified them became a badge of honor. Their purpose now was greater than terror. More, because the nation was watching, the jails were becoming safer. King was, in effect, taking a crash course in the use of modern media and proving a fast learner. Montgomery was becoming a big story, and the longer it went on, the bigger it became.

David Halberstam (1993) *The Fifties*. New York: Villard Books, p.557

Secondary Source D

The boycott lasted for more than a year, during which boycotters congregated at frequent mass meetings held at churches, where their resolve was strengthened through speeches, sermons songs, and strategy sessions. The boycott came at a high price, as a grand jury indicted nearly one hundred black citizens for conspiracy to boycott; they were tried and found guilty. Four Baptist churches were firebombed; insurance companies dropped coverage on those churches where mass meetings were held. King's house was firebombed too. Counseled by Bayard Rustin, an organizer for the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and an advocate of Gandhian diplomacy, King persuaded the angry crowd that gathered at his demolished home not to retaliate. It was his initiation into the ways of nonviolence. The boycott finally ended when the Supreme Court affirmed a lower court decision outlawing segregation on buses. Black Montgomeries again rode the city's buses, now sitting in any available seat they wished.

Christopher B. Strain (2017) *The Long Sixties: America, 1955-1973*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, pp.46-47

Secondary Source E

... supported by every institution and leader in their community, the black citizens of Montgomery stayed off the buses through the spring, summer, and early fall. Finally, in mid-November, the U.S. Supreme Court came to their aid; segregation on Montgomery buses was ruled unconstitutional. "Praise the Lord," cried a black Alabamian, "God has spoken from Washington, D.C."

Federal assistance to the fledgling black movement enraged a growing number of southern whites, ordinary citizens and politicians alike. Echoing their Confederate forebears, they accused the Supreme Court and liberals in Congress of trying to destroy a cherished way of life.

Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin (2012, Fourth Edition), *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.29.

Interrogating the historians

Our enquiry has focused on the question:

Why did Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat spark a national controversy?

1. (a) Which historians mention the way in which the black supporters of the boycott stood together as a united group?
(b) Which historian highlights the role of mass meetings in keeping the protestors united?
2. Which historians mention the impact the boycott had outside of Montgomery, nationally and/or internationally?
3. Which historians mention the acts of violence carried out against boycotters and/or boycott leaders?
4. (a) Which historians highlight the leadership role played by Martin Luther King in the boycott?
(b) Which historian gives a list of leadership attributes that made King so effective? Make a list in your own words of these attributes.
5. Which historian mentions the court cases and firebombing that were directed against the boycott leaders?
6. Which historians mention the court case taken by boycott leaders that eventually led to the Supreme Court decision that segregation on the buses was unconstitutional?
7. Which historian mentions the growing resentment amongst many Southern whites following the Supreme Court decision?

Your conclusions on the enquiry



Our enquiry has looked at the reasons why Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat on 1 December 1955, why her action led to a bus boycott in Montgomery, and why that boycott became a matter of national controversy.

Based on the evidence you have encountered in the course of the enquiry, identify:

- (a) two reasons why Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat
- (b) three reasons why this action led to a bus boycott
- (c) three reasons why the boycott became a matter of national controversy

Make your case in a written report, devoting one paragraph to each of the factors identified. In a concluding paragraph, give your judgement – based on the evidence you have studied – in relation to the question: *Why did Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat spark a national controversy?*

OR

Now that we have looked at a wide range of evidence on the Montgomery bus boycott:

- Explain what you see as the main reason why Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat on 1 December 1955.
- What do you think are the TWO most important reasons why Rosa's refusal led to a bus boycott?
- What do you think are the TWO most important reasons why the boycott became a matter of national controversy?
- For each of the reasons you give, you must back up your reason with evidence from the primary sources (such as newspaper reports) or secondary sources (such as extracts from the writings of historians) that we have studied.



**History In-Service Team,
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**Exploration, Enquiry and Evidence: Applying the Three Es in
Practice**

Exemplar Material selected from

Later Modern Field of Study

Europe and the Wider World, Topic 6

The United States and the world, 1945 to 1989

History In-Service Team (HIST), Autumn 2006, Phase 7