

Montgomery Bus Boycott Primary Document Set #1

Document 1: Letter from Jo Ann Robinson to the Mayor of Montgomery

Honorable Mayor W. Gayle

City Hall

Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Sir:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully yours,

The Women's Political Council

Jo Ann Robinson, President

Source: Excerpt from a letter written by Jo Ann Robinson, May 21, 1954, Montgomery, Alabama. In this letter Jo Ann Robinson writes the Mayor of Montgomery asking for fair treatment on the buses.

Document 2: Jo Ann Robinson on the Boycott Leaflet Campaign

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

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

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

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

Source: Excerpt from Jo Ann Robinson's memoir [story about her life], *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, pp. 45-47, 1987, Knoxville, TN. Here Jo Ann Robinson explains how she and others produced and distributed the leaflet calling for a boycott in time for thousands of African Americans to stay off the buses on Monday morning, December 5, 1955. Just before she began this work, Robinson and E.D. Nixon had decided over the phone to call for a boycott.

Document 3: Handbill from Central Alabama Citizens Council Rally

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

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

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

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

LET'S GET ON THE BALL WHITE CITIZENS.

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

Source: Handbill produced by the Central Alabama Citizens Council, February 10, 1956, Montgomery, Alabama. This handbill was given out at a rally in Montgomery. Ten thousand white citizens attended. Leaders of Montgomery's local government, including the mayor, spoke to the crowd about stopping integration.

Document 4: Letter from Virginia Durr to Director of Highlander Folk School

January 30, 1956

Dear Myles and Zilphia:

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

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

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

VA

Source: Excerpt from a letter written by Virginia Foster Durr to Myles and Zilphia Horton, January 30, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama. Virginia Foster Durr was a white woman who supported civil rights for African Americans in Montgomery. Here, Durr writes the director of the Highlander Folk School and his wife. Highlander was a center for training civil rights activists and labor organizers.