

Parts of an Edited Historical Document

This handout will help you make sense of edits that have been made to the documents on the HistoricalThinkingMatters.org website.

2 READ: INTERVIEW ABOUT THE BOYCOTT

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

HEAD NOTE

The head note provides important contextual information about the document. It may tell you more about the author or the situation of its origin and can help you understand the document.

BRACKETS

Brackets [] either indicate that we have substituted a new word for a word in the original document or that we have inserted new words. We use brackets to make the document read more smoothly.

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

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

ELLIPSES [ee - lip - seez]

Ellipses are three periods [. . .] that show where we have taken words out of the original document. We use ellipses instead of the original words when we want to shorten the document. Sometimes you will see ellipses with four periods at the beginning or end of a paragraph [. . . .].

SOURCE

The source gives specific information about the creation of the document. It can include the author, date, type of document, and where and how it was published. Paying attention to the source of a document helps you begin to imagine why the document was written and what it might say—even before you've read the actual document. Source is sometimes also called attribution.

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

*This document is from the Rosa Parks inquiry.
HistoricalThinkingMatters.org*