

# USING OPVL TO ANALYZE BAYARD RUSTIN'S CONFIDENTIAL UPDATE FROM MONTGOMERY

## INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

In this lesson, students use a source analysis strategy known as OPVL, which asks them to evaluate a source by considering its Origin, Purpose, Value, and Limitations. OPVL is widely used across the International Baccalaureate curriculum. If you want to learn more about using the strategy with your students, [this short video](#) provides an excellent overview. For a more detailed explanation, or to help you create additional scaffolding or depth for your students, [see this teacher blog entry and/or the materials compiled by this school library site](#).

The OPVL Graphic Organizer provided includes question prompts, as well as examples and cues to help students break down and address OPVL.

The source excerpted in this lesson was shared with FOR by Walter Naegle, Bayard Rustin's partner. He obtained it from the archives of the [Swarthmore Peace Collection](#) at Swarthmore College.

Besides offering a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the early days of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)'s work and organizing in Montgomery, this letter is an important source inasmuch as it addresses some of the fears of redbaiting that dogged Rustin in particular and the civil rights movement overall. This could be an excellent opportunity to connect your teaching of the Black freedom struggle to your teaching of the Cold War.

The excerpts included here also give us glimpses of the kinds of conversations taking place about organizing. They range from details like designing a campaign button to deep thinking about questions of strategy (including debates around using or avoiding the term "boycott"). And they reveal ways that the MIA was engaging with white business owners *besides the bus company* about addressing the far-reaching economic impact of Black people refusing to ride the city buses.

Depending on how in depth you want to go into this with your students, you could certainly have them read and analyze the full document, which is an incredibly rich source. You can find the [full PDF here](#).

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Blurry but legible, the heading on a February 25, 1956 letter from Bayard Rustin in Montgomery reads, "CONFIDENTIAL: ABSOLUTELY NOT FOR PUBLICATION." The letter is addressed to Ralph (DiGia, a War Resister's League colleague) and Arthur (Brown, Rustin's partner at the time).

### DIRECTIONS

Read the excerpts from Rustin's letter. Highlight or annotate as you go. Note any questions you have. Then, use the OPVL graphic organizer to break down and analyze this source.

You and Ralph can clear on what should go out. Bear in mind there must be no talk of my being here and reports should be made confidential in terms of no one here knowing that I am so closely tied in. Already they are watching me closely and I am sure they report telephone conversations. Many perhaps all Negro leaders' phones are tapped. I have been followed by police cars and never go out after dark alone. There are two white girls down from the north as reporters who have been stopping me in public (court house, Governor's office, public meetings) for information. Today I had to ask them not to speak to me except by phone. I have a lot of inside dope and they all want it but I can't take a chance. On two occasions when these girls (all very friendly like) came to me, two police officers came and stood over us with the most menacing expressions. When I called one of the girls to ask her not to contact me publically, she told me to be careful, every move I made was being watched, that I should be prepared to leave town by car at a moment's notice, that the rumour was being spread by a reporter on the ADVERTIZER, the local paper, that I was a communist NAACP organizer and that Rev. Abernathy, trained in Moscow, and I were planning a violent uprising. As you may gather, this as the British would say, is "not altogether true"-- but in this atmosphere who knows what can happen?

So I must be prepared if necessary to leave here. This also is a very real problem. How complicated things become in the heat of a struggle -- searching for nonviolent answers in a society that accepts so many assumptions of violence presents problems indeed. Now to tell you some of the accomplishments of the last day or so.

6. The idea of having a button for all to wear who refuse to ride has been accepted. It will have the words "join our nonviolent protest" along with certain symbols.

8. We have succeeded fairly well in a few days in doing away with the word "boycott", which has been used to describe the action. The term "boycott" was an explosive one here. And besides it is too narrow and implies a desire to hurt economically. We do not avoid recognizing now and admitting publicly that there is economic loss to the Bus Company and to white merchants. (Negroes used to stop in town to buy on their way home but now they walk the shortest routes from work and are too tired to carry packages. Consequently they have increased by about \$400 the business of the small Negro merchants in the ghettos.) We now make it clear that we have no desire to boycott anyone but that in effect the white communities' failure to negotiate has itself created what we never intended-- economic loss. White merchants are impressed with this thinking and have begun to reevaluate.

**ANALYZING SOURCES WITH OPVL CONFIDENTIAL LETTER FROM BAYARD RUSTIN  
IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA TO RALPH DIGIA AND ARTHUR BROWN**

	Ask yourself. . .	Examples & cues to help you answer the questions	Analysis of assigned source
<b>Origin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is this source?</li> <li>• Who produced it?</li> <li>• When?</li> <li>• Where?</li> </ul>	Speech Cartoon Advertisement Newspaper article	
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was it produced?</li> <li>• To do what?</li> <li>• For whom?</li> </ul>	Inform Inspire Document Satirize Convince Disprove Condemn Expose	
<b>Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is this useful as a piece of historical evidence?</li> <li>• How does it help us understand the time period and/or the author?</li> <li>• What unique or special insights does it provide?</li> </ul>	Personal opinion Public opinion First-hand account	
<b>Limitations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the point of view of the author?</li> <li>• What might be the source's bias?</li> <li>• How might it be biased? (Remember: being biased doesn't automatically make a source unreliable, but you need to be clear about what kind of bias it has).</li> <li>• What part of the story does it leave out?</li> </ul>	Occupation Religion Gender Nationality Race Class Ethnicity	