

From: <http://studentactivism.net/2013/04/13/the-letter-that-prompted-letter-from-birmingham-jail/>

Accessed on 6/7/13

The Letter that Prompted “Letter From Birmingham Jail.”

April 13, 2013 in [Students](#)

Fifty years ago yesterday, a group of eight white Birmingham clergy published “A Call For Unity,” an open letter criticizing Martin Luther King and other civil rights organizers. The letter, excerpted below and available in full [here](#), prompted King to write Letter From Birmingham Jail.

The authors of A Call For Unity varied in their background and ideology, but all of them considered themselves opponents of segregation. They were, they believed, allies of the anti-racist cause. Several were, in fact, anti-racist activists. Their letter was a call for caution, not capitulation, for slow progress, not retreat.

In the years that followed, some would take King’s words to heart and expand their commitment to forceful anti-racist organizing. Others would become embittered, believing that King had misrepresented and slandered them.

“We are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely...

“We believe this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our own metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experiences of the local situation. All of us need to face that responsibility and find proper channels for its accomplishment.

“Just as we formerly pointed out that ‘hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions,’ we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham...

“We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in

negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets. We appeal to both our white and Negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense.”

King’s response, [Letter From Birmingham Jail](#), appeared four days later.

From: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-martin-luther-king/>

Accessed on June 7, 2013

A Group of Clergymen

April 12, 1963

We clergymen are among those who, in January, issued “an Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense,” in dealing with racial problems in Alabama. We expressed understanding that honest convictions in racial matters could properly be pursued in the courts, but urged that decisions of those courts should in the meantime be peacefully obeyed.

Since that time there has been some evidence of increased forbearance and a willingness to face facts. Responsible citizens have undertaken to work on various problems which cause racial friction and unrest. In Birmingham, recent public events have given indication that we all have opportunity for a new constructive and realistic approach to racial problems.

However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.

We agree rather with certain local Negro leadership which has called for honest and open negotiation of racial issues in our area. And we believe this kind of facing of issues can best be accomplished by citizens of our own metropolitan area, white and Negro, meeting with their knowledge and experiences of the local situation. All of us need to face that responsibility and find proper channels for its accomplishment.

Just as we formerly pointed out that “hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions,” we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have not contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham.

We commend the community as a whole, and the local news media and law enforcement officials in particular, on the calm manner in which these demonstrations have been

handled. We urge the public to continue to show restraint should the demonstrations continue, and the law enforcement officials to remain calm and continue to protect our city from violence.

We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets. We appeal to both our white and Negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense.

Signed by:

C.C.J. CARPENTER, D.D., LL.D., *Bishop of Alabama.*

JOSEPH A. DURICK, D.D., *Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Mobile-Birmingham*

Rabbi MILTON L. GRAFMAN, *Temple Emanu-El, Birmingham, Alabama*

Bishop PAUL HARDIN, *Bishop of the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the Methodist Church*

Bishop NOLAN B. HARMON, *Bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church*

GEORGE M. MURRAY, D.D., LL.D., *Bishop Coadjutor, Episcopal Diocese of Alabama*

EDWARD V. RAMAGE, *Moderator, Synod of the Alabama Presbyterian Church in the United States*

EARL STALLINGS, *Pastors, First Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama*

From: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated_letter_from_birmingham/
Accessed on June 6, 2013

“Letter From Birmingham Jail”

April 16, 1963

MY DEAR [FELLOW CLERGYMEN](#):

While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine goodwill and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in [Birmingham](#), since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "[outsiders coming in.](#)" I have the honor of serving as president of the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference](#), an organization operating in every Southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the [Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights](#). Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns: and just as the [Apostle Paul](#) left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom far beyond my own hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the [Macedonian](#) call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; [self-purification](#); and direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more [unsolved bombings](#) of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants—for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the [Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth](#) and the leaders of the [Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights](#) agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained.

As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of [self-purification](#). We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" We decided to schedule our direct-action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic-withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change.

Then it occurred to us that Birmingham's mayoralty election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Police Safety, [Eugene "Bull" Connor](#), had piled up enough votes to be in the run-off, we decided again to postpone action until the day after the run-off so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement.

Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct-action program could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask: "[Why direct action?](#) Why [sit-ins](#), marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as [Socrates](#) felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. We are sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of [Albert Boutwell](#) as mayor will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is a much more gentle person than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists, dedicated to maintenance of the status quo. I have hope that Mr. Boutwell will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as [Reinhold Niebuhr](#) has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. [The nations of Asia and Africa](#) are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you go forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the [Supreme Court's decision of 1954](#) outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with [St. Augustine](#) that "an unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of [St. Thomas Aquinas](#): An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the

Jewish philosopher [Martin Buber](#), substitutes an "I-it" relationship for an "[I-thou](#)" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and awful. [Paul Tillich](#) has said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is *difference* made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is *sameness* made legal.

Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the [First Amendment](#) privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of [civil disobedience](#). It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of [Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar](#), on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the [Hungarian freedom fighters](#) did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the [White Citizen's Counciler](#) or the [Ku Klux Klanner](#), but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him [drink hemlock](#)? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely rational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best-known being [Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement](#). Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible "devil."

I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do-nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle.

If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies—a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the [Zeitgeist](#), and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on [freedom rides](#)—and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not [Amos](#) an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not [Martin Luther](#) an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And [John Bunyan](#): "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ..." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need. Perhaps I was too optimistic; perhaps I expected too much. I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some—such as [Ralph McGill](#), [Lillian Smith](#), [Harry Golden](#), [James McBride Dabbs](#), [Ann Braden](#) and [Sarah Patton Boyle](#)—have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach-

infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as "dirty nigger-lovers." Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.

Let me take note of my other major disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, [Reverend Stallings](#), for your Christian stand on this past Sunday, in welcoming Negroes to your worship service on a nonsegregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating [Spring Hill College](#) several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the [bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama](#), a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the

impressive outlines of her massive religious-education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of [Governor Barnett](#) dripped with words of interposition and [nullification](#)? Where were they when [Governor Wallace](#) gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"

Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great-grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as [infanticide and gladiatorial contests](#).

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent—and often even vocal—sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true [ekklesia](#) and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of [Albany, Georgia](#), with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been

dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation—and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the [Birmingham police force](#) for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department.

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handing the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was [Chief Pritchett](#) in Albany, Georgia, but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As [T. S. Eliot](#) has said: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst

of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. There will be the [James Merediths](#), with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. There will be the old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My feets is tired, but my soul is at rest." There will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Explanatory Text (*The annotations added here were not annotated by King Institute staff and the Institute does not guarantee their accuracy. For more information, make sure to check the corresponding links in our Encyclopedia.*)

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

"This response to a published statement by eight fellow clergymen from Alabama (Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter, Bishop Joseph A. Durick, Rabbi Hilton L. Grafman, Bishop Paul Hardin, Bishop Holan B. Harmon, the Reverend George M. Murray, the Reverend Edward V. Ramage and the Reverend Earl Stallings) was composed under somewhat constricting circumstances. Begun on the margins of the newspaper in which the statement appeared while I was in jail, the letter was continued on scraps of writing paper supplied by a friendly Negro trusty, and concluded on a pad my attorneys were eventually permitted to leave me. Although the text remains in substance unaltered, I have indulged in the author's prerogative of polishing it for publication." ([Click here for the clergymen's statement to King](#))

[Birmingham](#) was the largest city in Alabama with a population of approximately 225,000. During the 1950s and 1960s, Birmingham was one of the most segregated cities in the South with strict city ordinances that made it unlawful for different races to mix and mingle in almost all social settings.

Outsiders Coming In

Because the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was a national organization that worked to support local, grassroots campaigns for civil rights, they were often accused of being outside agitators. When King worked with local groups such as the ACHMR, he often became the focus of media attention, resulting in local segregationists viewing him and SCLC as outsiders who were disrupting their community.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established in 1957 to coordinate the action of local protest groups throughout the South. Under the leadership of King, the organization utilized the power and independence of black churches as the strength of its activities. SCLC differed from organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in that it operated as an umbrella organization of affiliates. Rather than seeking individual membership, it coordinated the activities of local organizations like the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. SCLC trained local communities in the philosophy of Christian nonviolence, and through its affiliation with churches and its advocacy of nonviolence, sought to put the struggle for civil rights in moral terms. Headquartered in Atlanta, SCLC is now a nationwide organization with chapters and affiliates located throughout the United States. It continues its commitment to nonviolent action to achieve social, economic, and political justice and is currently focused on issues such as racial

profiling, police brutality, hate crimes, and discrimination. For our online encyclopedia entry, [click here](#).

The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) was founded in Birmingham, Alabama, on 5 June 1956, after Attorney General John Patterson of Alabama outlawed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the state. Immediately after the disbandment of the NAACP, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth called a meeting of local ministers and community leaders at Sardis Baptist Church and the ACMHR was founded. Shuttlesworth was named president of the ACMHR by acclamation. In its Declaration of Principles, ACMHR announced its determination to press forward persistently for Freedom and Democracy, and the removal from our society any forms of Second Class Citizenship. With SCLC backing, in 1963 ACMHR conducted a sustained campaign of marches and nonviolent action to protest segregation in Birmingham. ACMHR and SCLC sought to desegregate public facilities and attain equal employment opportunities for Birmingham's black citizens by targeting the city's department stores. For our online encyclopedia entry, [click here](#).

St. Paul the Apostle (born A.D. 10, died A.D. 67)

Early in his life he was an enemy of the Christian church and worked to eradicate Christianity. On the road to Damascus, Paul had a mystical experience and the Gospel of Jesus Christ was revealed to him. After his conversion, he spent his life as a missionary, traveling, writing, and preaching the Gospel. His conversion from enemy of Christianity to Apostle suggests the importance of absolution of sin through faith and grace in Christianity.

Macedonia

On his second and third missionary journeys, Paul traveled in Macedonia to spread the gospel. Apparently, he expelled a demon from a girl who was clairvoyant. For this he was jailed, but he was freed by an earthquake. He was later jailed, beaten, and taken to Rome, where he was imprisoned and died.

Self-Purification

Self purification is the cleansing of anger, selfishness and violent attitudes from the heart and soul in preparation for a nonviolent struggle. This is a fundamental aspect of Martin Luther King Jr.'s concept of active resistance/civil disobedience. The practice is deeply spiritual and philosophical and it is not simply ideological. This is an important distinction as it differentiates this type of action from other forms of ideological or revolutionary behavior. From the King center in Atlanta, here are the fundamental tenets of Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence described in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*. The six principles include: (1.) Nonviolence is not passive, but requires courage; (2.) Nonviolence seeks reconciliation, not defeat of an adversary; (3.) Nonviolent action is directed at eliminating evil, not destroying an evil-doer; (4.) A willingness to accept suffering for the cause, if necessary, but never to inflict it; (5.) A rejection of hatred,

animosity or violence of the spirit, as well as refusal to commit physical violence; and (6.) Faith that justice will prevail.

Unsolved Bombings

Between 1948 and 1957, there were 48 unsolved racial bombings in Birmingham alone. During the 1960s there were over 40 unsolved bombings. This resulted in Birmingham often being referred to as Bombingham.

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth

One of the founding members of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Fred Shuttlesworth brought a militant voice to the struggle for black equality. He drew King and the SCLC to Birmingham in 1963 for a historic confrontation with the forces of segregation. The scale of protest and police brutality of the Birmingham Campaign created a new level of visibility for the civil rights movement and contributed to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Born in Mt. Meigs, Alabama, Shuttlesworth was licensed and ordained as a preacher in 1948. He earned an A.B. (1951) from Selma University and a B.S. (1953) from Alabama State College. Shuttlesworth served as minister at First Baptist Church in Selma until 1952, and the following year he was called to Bethel Baptist Church in Birmingham. After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation in Montgomery was unconstitutional in November 1956, Shuttlesworth and the ACMHR made plans to challenge segregation on Birmingham's buses. The night before their campaign was to begin, a bomb exploded under Shuttlesworth's parsonage at Bethel Baptist. The house was destroyed but Shuttlesworth escaped unharmed. In 1963, the SCLC joined forces with the ACMHR to protest segregation in Birmingham. SCLC leaders met secretly in January of that year to draw up initial plans for the Birmingham Campaign, known as "Project C" – C for confrontation. Shuttlesworth issued the "Birmingham Manifesto," which explained the black community's decision to act: "We act today in full concert with our Hebraic-Christian tradition, the laws of morality and the Constitution of our nation," Shuttlesworth proclaimed. "We appeal to the citizenry of Birmingham, Negro and white, to join us in this witness for decency, morality, self-respect and human dignity.

Alabama Christian Movement For Human Rights

The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) was founded in Birmingham, Alabama, on 5 June 1956, after the Attorney General John Patterson of Alabama outlawed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the state. Immediately after the disbandment of the NAACP, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth called a meeting of local ministers and community leaders at Sardis Baptist Church and the ACMHR was founded. Shuttlesworth was named president of the ACMHR by acclamation. In its Declaration of Principles, the ACMHR announced its determination to press forward persistently for Freedom and Democracy, and the removal from our society any forms of Second Class Citizenship. With the backing of SCLC, in April and May of 1963, the ACMHR conducted a sustained campaign of marches and nonviolent

action to protest segregation in Birmingham. ACMHR and SCLC sought to desegregate public facilities and attain equal employment opportunities for Birmingham's black citizens by targeting the city's department stores. Their demonstrations were met with arrests, assault by fire hoses and police dogs, and imprisonment.

Mayoralty Election

The Birmingham mayoralty election was to be held on March 5th, 1963. SCLC and ACMHR decided to postpone Project C, also known as Project Confrontation, for two weeks in order to prevent Bull Connor from using the presence of protesters to emotionally charge the election for his political advantage. The three candidates, Bull Connor, Albert Boutwell and Tom King were all segregationists. No candidate won a clear majority and the runoff between Connor and Boutwell further delayed the protests. Boutwell won the election on April 2nd, but he and other city officials refused to leave office. On May 23rd he was forced to vacate the office by the Alabama Supreme Court. King and others began Project C on April 3rd.

Connor, Theophilus Eugene "Bull" (1897-1973)

Bull Connor was an ardent segregationist who served for twenty-two years as commissioner of public safety in Birmingham, Alabama. Using his administrative authority over the police and fire departments, Connor worked to ensure that Birmingham remained, as Martin Luther King, Jr. described it, the most segregated city in America. In 1963, the violent response of Connor and his police force to demonstrations in Birmingham propelled the civil rights movement into the national spotlight.

Connor was born on 11 July 1897 in Selma, Alabama. After the death of his mother when he was eight, Connor traveled around the country with his father, who moved from job to job as a railroad telegrapher. Connor never graduated from high school, but he learned telegraphy from his father and used this skill to gain employment at radio stations and eventually become a radio broadcaster. His political career began in 1934 when he used his popularity as a Birmingham sportscaster to win a seat in the Alabama House of Representatives. After serving a term in the House, he was elected to the Birmingham City Commission and soon became known for his uncompromising opposition to integration. Upon his reelection as commissioner of public safety in 1957, he promised to uphold segregation in Birmingham to the utmost of my ability and by all lawful means. It was on his watch that the city earned the nickname Bombingham, with seventeen bombings of black homes and churches occurring between 1957 and 1963.

Direct Action

Direct action is a form of political activism which seeks to remedy social, political or economic ills. It is often immediate and confrontational. Direct action can include such activities as strikes, workplace occupations, sit-ins, revolutionary/guerrilla warfare, demonstrations, etc. Direct actions are sometimes a form of civil disobedience and can include illegal activities.

Sit-in

The sit-in campaigns of 1960 and the ensuing creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) demonstrated the potential strength of grass-roots militancy and enabled a new generation of young people to gain confidence in their own leadership. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed pride in the new activism for being “initiated, led and sustained by students”; he often found himself the target of criticisms from SNCC activists who believed he was too cautious. The campaigns were initiated on 1 February 1960 when four black students from North Carolina A&T College sat down at Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. The students -- Joseph McNeil, Izell Blair, Franklin McCain, and David Richmond -- purchased several items in the store before sitting at the counter reserved for white customers. When a waitress asked them to leave, they politely refused; and to their surprise, they were not arrested. The four students remained seated for almost an hour until the store closed. The following morning about two dozen students arrived at Woolworth's and sat at the lunch counter. While no confrontations occurred, the second sit-in attracted the local media. By day three of the campaign, the students had formed the Student Executive Committee for Justice to coordinate protests which would culminate in a march of several thousand students. The Greensboro protesters eventually agreed to the mayor's request to halt protest activities while city officials sought “a just and honorable solution,” but black students in other communities launched lunch counter protests of their own. By the end of the month, sit-ins had taken place at more than thirty locations in seven states. By fall of 1960 there were signs that the southern civil rights movement had been profoundly transformed by the fiercely independent student protest movement. Those who had participated in the sit-in campaign were determined to continue the direct-action tactics that were seizing the initiative from older, more cautious organizations such as King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Socrates (470 BC–399 BC)

Socrates was an ancient Greek philosopher who is widely credited for laying the foundation for Western philosophy. Most of what we know of Socrates comes from the writings of Plato. Socrates is often referred to a gadfly because he upset social norms by posing difficult philosophical questions that caused people to examine their lives and beliefs. This created a tension in the mind that had the effect of liberating individuals from the influence of socially accepted half-truths and myths. For these activities, Socrates was tried in an Athenian court on charges of corrupting the youth. Although he had the opportunity to escape and run from his fate, Socrates refused and he was sentenced to death.

Albert Boutwell

Albert Burton Boutwell (1904 - 1978). In the 1963 Birmingham mayoral election, the three candidates, Bull Connor, Albert Boutwell and Tom King were all segregationists. No candidate won a clear majority in the first election but Boutwell defeated Connor in a runoff on April 2nd. However, Connor and other city officials refused to leave office. On May

23rd Connor was forced to vacate the office by the Alabama Supreme Court. Boutwell took office and served for one term.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 –1971). Niebuhr was a very important and influential Protestant theologian known for his attempt to relate the Christian faith to the reality of the modern political world. He wrote many books that examined the role of the church in society and he served as the editor of the magazine Christianity and Crisis. According to Niebuhr, “individuals are morally sensible in their ability to consider the interests of others and to act on their behalf. Individuals can be unselfish. However, in a society or a group of individuals, it is difficult to handle the interest of the group by means of the human rational faculty because groups are only the collection of individuals\` selfish impulses, not of their unselfish consideration for others. This collective egoism of individuals becomes more powerful. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships. Therefore, All social co-operation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group requires a measure of coercion.

The Nations Of Asia And Africa

After WWII, many nations in African and Asia were engaged in de-colonization movements to gain independence. India, Vietnam, Algeria, the Congo and Sudan are just a few examples of countries that gained independence from foreign occupiers. These movements became key battlegrounds during the Cold War, where both the united States and The Soviet Union vied for political allies.

Supreme Court's Decision Of 1954

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Brown is a landmark ruling of the United States Supreme Court which overturned Plessy v. Ferguson(1896). Brown made clear that the establishment of separate public schools for black and white students was inherently unequal. The Warren Court handed down a (9-0) decision that made racial segregation a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This legal victory, spearheaded by the NAACP, paved the way for the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s.

St. Augustine

Aurelius Augustine; St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was a Christian theologian, and a bishop in North Africa. Although born a Catholic, Augustine left the faith to become a Manichaeon. He studied rhetoric and taught in various cities throughout the Roman Empire. Later in life, Augustine converted to Christianity and became a priest. In 396 he was made the bishop of Hippo. His writings have had a tremendous impact on the development of Christianity.

St. Thomas Aquinas

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was perhaps the greatest medieval philosopher and he is considered by many Roman Catholics as their most important theologian. Aquinas tried to show the harmony between faith and reason, and between Christianity and philosophy. Aquinas thought that through natural reason we discern what is good and bad. This reason is an impression of the divine light, or eternal law, upon us. A law is a prescription that we act or not act and laws must be directed to the common good. Laws that aren't for the common good are unjust. An unjust law isn't a law at all because it is out of harmony with eternal law.'

Martin Buber

Martin Buber (1878-1965) was Jewish philosopher, translator, and educator, and his work was very influential on 20th century theology. I-Thou or I-You describes a relationship that stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. These beings interact with one another in their authentic existence, without any objectification of one another. The I-it relationship stands in opposition to I-You. I-It describes a relationship between a subject-I and an object-It. This causes the I to experience others beings as things, and this in turn allows for dehumanization.

I-thou

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Paul Tillich

Paul Tillich (1886 –1965) was a German-American theologian and Christian existentialist. According to Tillich, in his book, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, "To be in the state of sin is to be in the state of separation. And separation is threefold: there is separation among individual lives, separation of a man from himself, and separation of all men from the Ground of Being. This three-fold separation constitutes the state of everything that exists; it is a universal fact; it is the fate of every life. And it is our human fate in a very special sense. For we as men know that we are separated. We not only suffer with all other creatures because of the self-destructive consequences of our separation, but also know why we suffer. For sin and grace are bound to each other. We do not even have a knowledge of sin unless we have already experienced the unity of life, which is grace. And conversely, we could not grasp the meaning of grace without having experienced the separation of life, which is sin. In grace something is overcome; grace occurs in spite of something; grace occurs in spite of separation and estrangement. Grace is the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself."- Tillich's theology was the subject of King's dissertation.

First Amendment

US Constitution
Bill of Rights
Amendment I
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government or of an occupying power without resorting to physical violence. It is one of the primary tactics of nonviolent resistance. Henry David Thoreau developed the modern theory behind this practice in his 1849 essay Resistance to Civil Government. Thoreau's essay has been influential on many practitioners of civil disobedience, including Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Shadrach and others

The book of Daniel(3:1-30). King Nebuchadnezzar constructed a golden statue and requested that all bow down and worship it or suffer death by being thrown into a furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and worship because of the Old Testament prohibition against worshipping idols. For this they were thrown into the furnace. They emerged from the furnace completely unharmed. Amazed that these men were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own God, King Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed that the God of these men is the one true God, for no other God can save in this way.

Hungarian Freedom Fighters

In 1945, near the end of WWII, the Soviet Union liberated Hungary from the Nazis. Soon, Hungary was dominated by the sphere of Soviet influence. On October 23rd, 1956, Hungarian students began demonstrating against Soviet domination. There was widespread revolt and many joined the freedom fighters, yet the Soviets crushed the uprising on November 10th. However, many see the uprising as the first crack in the iron curtain.

White Citizens Council

The White Citizens Council was founded in 1944. The WCC is sometimes referred to as a civilized version of the KKK, or a white collar Klan. They met openly and worked to thwart desegregation movements. They were white supremacists and were involved in many racist activities, however, they did not openly advocate violence or terrorism.

Ku Klux Klanner

Ku Klux Klan (KKK) is the name of several past and present organizations in the United States that have advocated white supremacy, anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, anti-Communism and nativism. These organizations have often used terrorism, violence, and acts of intimidation, such as cross burning, to oppress African Americans and other social or ethnic groups.

Drink Hemlock

After being found guilty by an Athenian jury, Socrates was sentenced to death. He drank a cup of poison hemlock.

Elijah Muhammad's Muslim Movement

Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975) was the leader of the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) in the mid-20th century. He was a major advocate of independent, black-operated businesses, institutions, and religion. Elijah Muhammad was born Elijah (or Robert) Poole on October 7, 1897. He was an early disciple of W.D. Fard, the founder of the Nation of Islam. Muhammad established Chicago as the center of the movement and built a Temple, schools, created a newspaper, and founded black owned businesses. The movement is very disciplined. Members have strict rules to follow regarding eating, drinking, and behavior. Members are forbidden from eating pork, smoking and drinking. The use of drugs, profanity, and dancing are also not permitted. All members are to be well dressed and groomed. Muhammad taught that blacks constituted the original human beings, but that a mad black scientist named Yakub had created a white beast through genetic manipulation and that whites had been given a temporary dispensation to govern the world. That period, however, was due to end soon; now the time was at hand for blacks to resume their former dominant role. It was understood that violent war would be likely before the transition could be completed. In the meantime, Muhammad advocated an independent nation for African Americans.

Zeitgeist

Zeitgeist is originally a German expression that means the spirit of the age. It is literally translated as Zeit=time and Geist=spirit. It describes the intellectual and cultural climate of a particular age or era.

Freedom Rides

During the spring of 1961, student activists launched the Freedom Rides to challenge segregation on interstate buses and bus terminals. Traveling on buses from Washington, D.C., to Montgomery, Alabama, the riders met violent opposition in the Deep South, garnering extensive media attention and eventually forcing federal intervention from the Kennedy administration. Although eventually successful in securing an Interstate Commerce Commission ban on segregation in all facilities under their jurisdiction. On the 4th of May 1961, the Freedom Riders left Washington, D.C., in two buses and headed to Virginia. While they met

resistance and arrests in Virginia, it was not until the riders arrived in Rockhill, South Carolina, that they encountered violence. There, Lewis and another rider were beaten, and another rider was arrested for using a white restroom. The ride continued to Anniston, Alabama, where on the 14th of May, riders were met by a violent mob of over 100 people. Before the arrival, Anniston local authorities had given permission to the Ku Klux Klan to strike against the Freedom Riders without fear of arrest. After a series of standoffs, one of the buses was firebombed, and its fleeing passengers were forced into the angry white mob. The violence continued at the Birmingham terminal where Eugene -Bull- Connor's police force offered no protection. Although the violence garnered national media attention, the series of attacks prompted James Farmer of CORE to end the ride. The riders flew to New Orleans, the original destination, bringing to an end the first Freedom Ride of the 1960s.

Amos

Amos was a prophet who gave his message to the Israelites in 750 BCE or 749 BCE. The reference is to Amos 5:24. Amos warns the people of Israel that the Lord is displeased with their behavior. People are overly concerned with earthly possessions, bodily desires and there is a shallow adherence to their religious values. Amos tells the people that God will soon judge them for their sins.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the leader of the great religious revolt of the sixteenth century in German. His theology challenged the authority of the papacy by emphasizing the Bible as the sole source of religious authority. According to Luther, salvation was attainable only by faith in Jesus as the messiah, and this faith was not mediated by the church. These ideas helped to inspire the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization. Martin Luther began his assault on the papacy when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. That document contained an attack on papal abuses and the sale of indulgences by church officials.

John Bunyan

John Bunyan (1628-1688), was a Christian writer and preacher, and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the most famous published Christian allegory. Bunyan was imprisoned in 1660 for preaching without a license. He was confined for 12 years because he refused to desist from preaching. While in confinement, he wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* which tells the story of Christian, who makes his way from the City of Destruction, to the Celestial City of Zion, the former symbolizing earth and the latter heaven.

Ralph and others

The writers that King refers to are Southern whites who have written extensively on racism, desegregation, and civil rights. They were all supporters of the civil rights movement.

Reverend Stallings

Stallings was one of the eight clergymen to whom the Letter From a Birmingham Jail was addressed. He was the pastor of Birmingham's First Baptist Church. Stallings was praised by King for desegregating his church in early 1963. Because of his moderate stance on civil rights and desegregation, Stallings was often the target of criticism from both conservative segregationists and liberal integrationists.

Spring Hills College

Spring Hill College is the oldest Jesuit college in the South and the third oldest Jesuit school in the United States. In 1954, Spring Hill College became the first college in Alabama to integrate its student body. They did so prior to the Brown decision.

Bus protests in Montgomery, Alabama

Sparked by the arrest of Rosa Parks on 1 December 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott was an eleven-month mass protest that ended with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that public bus segregation is unconstitutional. The Montgomery Improvement Association coordinated the boycott, and its president, Martin Luther King, Jr., became a prominent civil rights leader as international attention focused on Montgomery. The bus boycott demonstrated the potential for nonviolent mass protest to successfully challenge racial segregation and served as an example for other southern campaigns that followed. The MIA issued a formal list of demands: courteous treatment by the bus operator; first-come, first-serve seating for all, with blacks seating from the rear and whites from the front; and black bus operators on predominately black routes. Montgomery's black residents stayed off of the buses through 1956, as city officials and white citizens sought to defeat the boycott. The homes of both King and Ralph Abernathy were bombed, and the membership of the local White Citizen's Council doubled. City officials obtained injunctions against the boycott in February 1956 and arrested 156 protesters under a 1921 law prohibiting the hindrance of a bus. Despite this resistance, the boycott continued. Under increasing pressure to address the conflict in Montgomery, the federal district court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional on 4 June 1956 (*Browder v. Gayle*). The Supreme Court upheld the lower court's ruling, and on 21 December 1956, the boycott officially ended. King's role in the bus boycott garnered international attention, and the MIA's tactics of combining mass nonviolent protest with a Christian tone became the model for challenging segregation in the South, a strategy highlighted by King in *Stride Toward Freedom*, his 1958 memoir of the boycott.

Governor Barnett

Governor Barnett Ross Robert Barnett (1898 –1987) was the Democratic governor of the U.S. state of Mississippi from 1960 to 1964. He was a staunch segregationist who opposed James Meredith's attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi. Barnett's open defiance of federal law and his unapologetically racist views often caused him to clash with federal authorities.

Nullification

Nullification refers to the idea that sovereign States formed the Union and that these States reserve final authority over their affairs, especially regarding the authority of the Federal Government's power over State affairs. Essentially, they felt they could nullify or make void a Federal law that they disagreed with. The issue of State's rights was a central concern of the Civil War in the 1860s and the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Many Southern Governors refused to follow Federal law and claimed State's rights as their defense.

Governor Wallace

After pledging “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” in his 1963 inaugural address, Alabama Governor George Wallace gained national notoriety by symbolically standing at the entrance of the University of Alabama to denounce the enrollment of two African American students. His stature as an ardent segregationist was further heightened when he mobilized the Alabama National Guard to block school desegregation in Birmingham in 1963 and when he condoned the use of violence during the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. Martin Luther King, Jr. described Wallace as one of the most dangerous racists in America. George Corley Wallace was born on 25 August 1919 in Clio, Alabama. The son of a farmer, he worked his way through the University of Alabama Law School and graduated in 1942. After a brief stint in the United States Air Force, Wallace returned to Alabama to work as the state's assistant attorney general. He was elected to the state legislature in 1947 and served as a district judge from 1953 to 1959. In his early political career, he maintained a moderate stance on integration; but after losing his first gubernatorial campaign to a candidate who was endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan, Wallace became an outspoken defender of segregation. He soon established a reputation as the fighting judge for his defiance of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; and four years later, he won the governorship on a segregationist platform. Between 1963 and 1987, Wallace served four terms as governor.

Infanticide and gladiatorial protests

The first recorded gladiatorial combat in Rome occurred when three pairs of gladiators fought to the death during the funeral of Junius Brutus in 264 BCE. These types of contests were common until Christianity became the most popular religion in Rome in 4th century AD. Infanticide was often practiced in the Roman Empire. A father would be presented with a child and he would decide whether the child should be raised, or left out in the elements to die. Visibly deformed children were almost always killed. Christians rejected this practice, and as their influence grew, the practice died out.

Ecclesia

Ecclesia or Ekklesia in Christian theology denotes both a particular body of faithful people, and the whole body of the faithful. In this reference he means the inner church as the true body of religion.

Albany, Georgia

Formed on 17 November 1961 by Albany, Georgia's Colored Ministerial Alliance, the NAACP, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and other civil rights organizations, the Albany Movement conducted a broad campaign that challenged all forms of segregation and discrimination. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) joined the coalition in December 1961, attracting national publicity to Albany. Although the Albany Movement was successful in mobilizing massive protests during December 1961 and the following summer, it secured few concrete gains due to the jailing of hundreds of protesters. It was the first campaign in the South to involve large numbers of black adults of varied class backgrounds in protests. Protests continued in Albany through July, when the Albany Movement invited SCLC and SNCC to share leadership in the campaign. Following his second arrest, King agreed on 10 August 1962 to leave Albany and halt the demonstrations, effectively ending the Albany Movement. While close to ninety-five percent of the black population boycotted buses and shops, the ultimate goals of the Movement were not met. King blamed much of the failure on the campaign's wide scope. The experiences in Albany, however, helped inform the strategy for the Birmingham Campaign that followed less than a year later.

Birmingham Police Force

The Birmingham police, led by Eugene Bull Connor, were notoriously harsh. They were often witnessed perpetrating civil right abuses or allowing others like the Klan to perpetrate crimes. During the civil rights struggles of 1963, police Commissioner Connor ordered the use of fire hoses and dogs to drive back the youthful demonstrators. Across the country, television stations fanned images of firefighters attacking citizens with powerful hoses and police carting children away in paddy wagons. This police riot in Birmingham drew national attention to the harsh realities of racial segregation in the South, and sparked more than a hundred black protests in cities and communities throughout the nation.

Chief Pritchett

Laurie Pritchett, police chief of Albany, Georgia, from 1959 to 1966, was primarily known for his role in containing the efforts of the Albany Movement, a group of civil rights organizations that in 1961 conducted a broad campaign against the city's institutionalized segregation. Pritchett's nonviolent approach to demonstrations, including arrests of Martin Luther King, Jr., were seen as effective strategies in bringing the campaign to an end before the Movement could secure any concrete gains. In late 1961, two years after Pritchett was appointed chief of police, the Albany Movement brought civil rights activists to Albany to contest racial segregation in bus and train stations, libraries, parks, and hospitals, as well as discrimination in jury representation and in employment. In anticipation of the arrests of a large number of protestors, Pritchett arranged to have access to jails in nearby cities. He also ordered his officers to enforce the law without using violence and to make arrests under laws protecting the public order, rather than under the more legally unstable segregation laws. Pritchett was also careful to avoid the negative nationwide attention that police brutality could bring to his city and police department. Following an incident on July 24 in which officials assaulted peaceful demonstrators, including a pregnant woman, he quickly took control of the situation by declaring that he was an advocate of nonviolence

and ordered his officers to refrain from using clubs or guns unless attacked. Pritchett, who had a close relationship with white newsmen covering the protests, was featured in several important magazines and newspapers for his belief in nonviolent law enforcement. The lack of violence in Albany resulted in very little media coverage of the actual protests. Although he and King were on opposite sides of the Albany struggle, Pritchett later maintained that King was a close personal friend. He died in High Point in 2000 at the age of 73.

T.S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot/ T.S. Eliot,(1888-1965), was a poet, dramatist and literary critic. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948. This quote is taken from the Eliot play, *Murder in The Cathedral*, which deals with the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket. In this scene, Becket is tempted by a figure who offers him martyrdom, which he rejects and he accepts his death as inevitable. The passage reads: Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain: Temptation shall not come in this kind again. The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

James Meredith

In January 1961, the night following John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration, James Meredith decided to submit an application to the University of Mississippi (also known as Ole Miss), which was closed to African-American students. His application was rejected twice, but with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Meredith legally challenged the university's segregation policy. After enduring extended court battles, the defiance of Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett, and violent campus riots, Meredith was finally admitted on 1 October 1962. Meredith graduated from Ole Miss in August 1963 with a bachelor's degree in political science.

In 1966 Meredith began a solitary march from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, to encourage African-American voter registration. When a sniper wounded him on the second day of the march, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee rallied behind his cause. King, Stokely Carmichael, and Floyd McKissick were joined by hundreds of other marchers as they completed the march. By the late 1960s Meredith had moved to New York and received a law degree from Columbia University. Over the next several years, Meredith became more politically involved, making several unsuccessful bids for public office, including a run for the Republican Senate nomination in Mississippi.

From: <http://www.mlkonline.net/jail.html> accessed on June 6, 2013

Letter From Birmingham Jail

Martin Luther King's Letter From The Birmingham City Jail (aka "The Negro Is Your Brother.")

Summary

Written in April 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" delivered an important statement on civil rights and civil disobedience. The 1963 racial crisis in Birmingham, Alabama, was a critical turning point in the struggle for African American civil rights. Although King's letter was not published until after the Birmingham crisis was resolved, it is widely regarded as the most important written document of the modern civil rights movement and a classic text on civil disobedience.

Important Themes and Quotes

In this letter he outlines twelve of his most important concepts, and he summarizes each of them in a few well-chosen words.

1. THE INTER-CONNECTION OF ALL PEOPLE

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

2. A GENERAL METHOD OF ACTION FOR NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE

"In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: (1) Collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive; (2) Negotiation; (3) Self-purification; and (4) Direct action."

3. THE CREATIVE TENSION OF DIRECT ACTION

"...there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth."

"Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with."

". . . the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation."

4. THE RIGHT TIME TO DO GOOD

"We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right."
"Frankly I have never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was "well timed . . ."

5. THE GRANTING OF FREEDOM

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

6. THE PURPOSE OF LAW AND ORDER

". . . law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress."

7. JUST AND UNJUST LAWS

". . . there are two types of laws: There are just laws and there are unjust laws. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that 'An unjust law is no law at all.' "

8. SOMETIMES WAITING MAKES THINGS WORSE

"It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills."

"We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation."

9. MODERATION AND LUKEWARM ACCEPTANCE

"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."

10. EXTREMISM FOR LOVE

"Was not Jesus an extremist in love? 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that spitefully use you.' Was not Amos an extremist for justice -- 'Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.' Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ -- 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' Was not Martin Luther an extremist -- 'Here I stand; I can do none other so help me God.' Was not John Bunyan an extremist -- 'I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a

butchery of my conscience.' Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist -- 'This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.' Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist -- 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'

So the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice -- or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?"

11. ACTS WHICH MAY PRECIPITATE VIOLENCE

"We must come to see, as federal courts have consistently affirmed, that it is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber."

12. THE HEROISM OF NONVIOLENCE

"One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, and thus carrying our whole nation back to great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence."

Commentary

Letter From the Birmingham City Jail is one of Dr. King's most inspired and powerful works. While less famous than his I Have a Dream Speech, it is a masterful work on the U.S. civil rights movement and a seminal reference in the struggle of oppressed peoples against tyrants everywhere.

Stephen Fought, professor emeritus and former Dean of Academics at the Air War College writes:

It is therefore appropriate to ask whether anyone who enjoys freedom in America today can take comfort in considering themselves "an outsider" to peoples fighting for their freedoms elsewhere in the world — and to wrestle with the consequences of that conclusion.

Here is a wonderful introduction introduction (below) to Rev. Martin Luther King's "Letter From The Birmingham City Jail" was written by Colin W. Bell, Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee in May, 1963, and was published along with the the complete original text of the King letter, without copyright notice, with the approval of its author.

"The letter speaks powerfully of one of the great freedoms --freedom from racial discrimination -- which is rooted in our religiousfaith and which our nation has stood for

in principle but has not yet established in practice. It is an eloquent expression of the nonviolent approach to the restructuring of our social order."- Colin W. Bell