

# Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from the Birmingham Jail: Engage in Active Nonviolence



Is it ever morally right to break the law?

Image: Photo of Dr. King and former Notre Dame President Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, taken by unidentified artist and held in the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of the University of Notre Dame



## Warm-Up: The March That Led to King's Arrest

In the Spring of 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968) was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for leading [nonviolent demonstrations against segregation](#). While in jail, he wrote the letter discussed in this digital essay. This brief video explains the lead up to MLK's arrest.

Watch this: "The March That Led to MLK's Arrest and Famous Letter" (Smithsonian Channel)  
[The March That Led to MLK's Arrest and Famous Letter - YouTube](#)



## Introduction

Dr. King wrote this letter in response to a [public statement](#) of concern issued by eight white religious leaders of the South. As such, much of the letter takes the form of responding to objections to the actions of the Civil Rights activists.

King first scrawled the letter in newspaper margins, as that was the only paper available, before his lawyer was eventually able to secure paper for him. Lacking any texts or resources, King relied solely on memory for the many allusions to theology and philosophy in the letter. The letter has become one of the most influential texts on the subjects



Recreation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s cell in Birmingham Jail at the National Civil Rights Museum, photo by Adam Jones, Ph.D.

of civil disobedience and active nonviolence.

You can access the full letter [here](#), and the selected passages for this digital essay [here](#).



## Key Concepts

- Cosmopolitanism
- Nonviolent Campaigns
- Constructive Nonviolent Tension
- Just vs. Unjust Laws



## Why I Am in Birmingham

Dr. King first addresses the charge from the white leaders that Dr. King and the protestors are all “outside agitators” coming in and stirring up trouble in Birmingham.

*I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham since you have been influenced by the argument of "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 affiliate organizations all across the South, one being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary and possible, we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago, our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited 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 promises. So, I am here, along with several members of my staff, because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational ties here.*

*Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometown, and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular home town. 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 in this country.*



### The “Injustice Anywhere” Argument Broken Down

Dr. King makes the appeal to his audience that all people of the world are pieces of a single community of moral concern. This philosophical idea is similar to **cosmopolitanism**. Derived from the Greek word kosmopolitês (‘citizen of the world’), cosmopolitanism is the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community. Different versions of cosmopolitanism focus on political institutions, moral norms, relationships, or shared markets of cultural expression.

Here is Dr. King’s argument broken down:



**1. All people are connected to all others in a web of causation and dependence.**

All of us exist in the same space-time continuum bound by the same laws of physics. More than that, we have created a global economic system that ties factory workers in Bangladesh to people buying clothing in Chicago. More than THAT, we all exist within social and political communities whose impacts inevitably reach beyond our artificially drawn borders. Whether we acknowledge it or not, every human is connected to every other human. King’s argument here is similar to the ideas of the [butterfly effect](#), the Zulu and Xhosa concept of [ubuntu](#), and Pope Francis’ argument repeated frequently in [Laudato Si](#) that “everything is connected.”

**2. Because everyone is connected, anything that affects one directly affects all of us indirectly.**

If a drop of water falls in a still lake, it will cause a ripple that reverberates through the entire lake, no matter how large. Likewise, if one person is impacted by something, then all of us are impacted indirectly by the ripples of cause and effect that that action produces.



3. Therefore, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

If anyone experiences injustice, it affects all of us since we are all connected. If left unaddressed, that injustice could spread and the negative effects will surely spread outward to other communities through our many channels of connection.



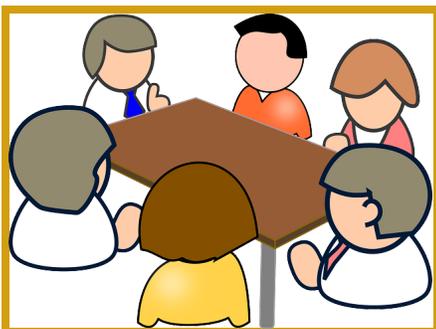
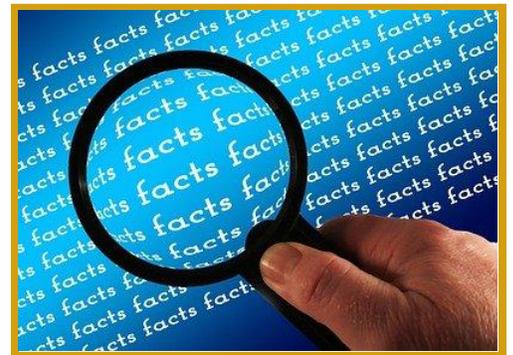
## Four Steps for Nonviolent Campaigns

In this section, Dr. King explains the process of their nonviolent campaigns, from gathering information to direct action. He hopes to demonstrate that these protests are not the impulsive, uninformed actions of a passionate mob, but rather a carefully planned and well-informed strategy for creating change without violence. In doing so, he also created a blueprint for future movements to follow when campaigning for 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. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham.*

### 1. Collection of Facts

*There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of [police brutality](#) is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved [bombings of Negro homes and churches](#) in Birmingham than in any other city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts.*



### 2. Negotiations

*On the basis of these conditions Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.*

*Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants — such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of*

*these promises [Rev. Shuttlesworth](#) and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human*

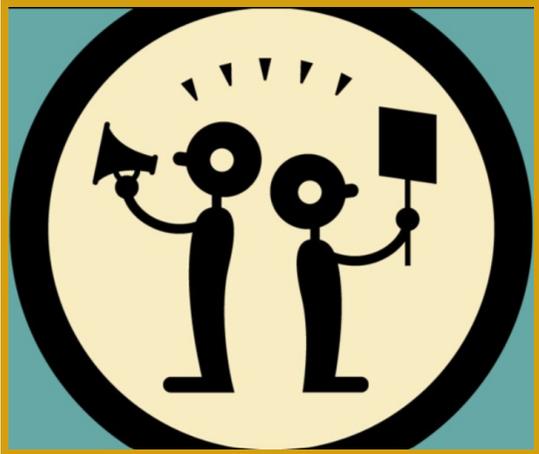
Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstrations. As the weeks and months unfolded we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained.

### 3. Self-Purification

As in so many experiences of the past we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through a process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?"



### 4. Direct Action



We decided to set our direct-action program around the Easter season, realizing that with the exception of Christmas, this was the largest shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. Then it occurred to us that the March election was ahead, and so we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that [Mr. Connor](#) was in the run-off, we decided again to postpone action so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. At this time we agreed to begin our nonviolent witness the day after the run-off.

This reveals that we did not move irresponsibly into direct action. We too wanted to see Mr. Connor defeated; so we went through postponement after postponement to aid in this community need. After this we felt that direct action could be delayed no longer.



### Objection: Why Direct Action?

You may well ask, Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that

"And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who am his gift to you. For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God; and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore I would advise you to spare me." --Socrates



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, we must see the need of having 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. So the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We, therefore, concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.



## Objection: Why Not Be Patient?

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, "Why didn't you give the new administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that the new administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one before it acts... My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. **History is the long and tragic story of the 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 are 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 never yet engaged in a direct action movement that was "well timed," according to the timetable 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 a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that

**"Justice too long delayed is justice denied."**

We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.

I guess 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, brutalize, and even kill your



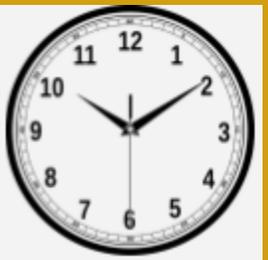
Photo by Ted Eyton for Ms. Magazine

black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an air-tight 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 little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer

for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos: "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" men and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when 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 tip-toe stance never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are 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 an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience...

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time. I received a letter this morning from a white brother in Texas which said, "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but is it possible that you are in too great of a religious hurry? It has taken Christianity almost 2000 years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." All that is said here grows out of a tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, **time is neutral**. It can be used either destructively or constructively. I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. 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 coworkers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

When you're hurt, it's not time that heals your body but your cells working to repair themselves. In the same way, social progress doesn't just happen with time - people taking action over time brings progress.



*We must use time creatively, and forever realize 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.*



## Objection: You Break the Law!

*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, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?"*

*The answer is found in the fact that 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."*

### Formulation 1: Unjust Laws Violate Natural Law



"God, the Father watches us all everywhere." by angelofsweetbitter2009 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

*Now what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when 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 Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in [eternal 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...*

*So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful... So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.*

### Formulation 2: Unjust Laws Manufacture Difference

*Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand a just law is a code that a majority*



*compels a minority to follow that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.*

### Formulation 3: Unjust Laws are Undemocratic



*Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama [all types of conniving methods](#) are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote despite the fact that the Negro constitutes a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?*

### Examples from History

*I hope you can see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law as the rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly (not hatefully as the white mothers did in New Orleans when they were seen on television screaming "nigger, nigger, nigger") and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law.*

*Of course there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego](#) to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks, before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.*

*We can never forget that everything 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. But I am sure that, if I had lived in Germany during that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws.*



*"Frankreich, Einsatz gegen die Resistance" by Kriegsbericht Koll, July 1944*



## Objection: Your Actions Led to Violence

*You deplore the demonstrations that are presently taking place in Birmingham. But I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being. I am sure that each of you would want to go beyond the superficial social analyst who looks merely at effects, and does not grapple with underlying causes. I would not hesitate to say that it is unfortunate that so-called demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham at this time, but I would say in more emphatic terms that it is even more unfortunate that the white power structure of this city left the Negro community with no other alternative...*

*In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn't this like condemning the 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 delvings precipitated the misguided popular mind to make him drink the hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because His unique God consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? 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.*

Here, King argues that one cannot honestly judge nonviolent action as a disruption of the peace when the peace was already disrupted by the violence of segregation, police brutality, and hate crimes. It is superficial to criticize the effects (protests) without analyzing the causes (systemic racism).

Furthermore, to say that the peaceful protestors are responsible for causing the violence during the Civil Rights Movement is to blame the victim for what the violent party is doing. It would be like blaming Jesus for his own crucifixion. The party committing the immoral action is wholly responsible for it, not the party they are inflicting the abuse upon.



## Objection: This is Extremism

*You spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of the extremist... **Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come.** This is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom; something without has reminded him that he can gain it... and with his black brothers of Africa, and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. Recognizing this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand public demonstrations. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let*

him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So I have not said to my people, "Get rid of your discontent." But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. Now this approach is being dismissed as extremist. I must admit that I was initially disappointed in being so categorized.

**Repression and Internalization**

What King is describing here is similar to what Friedrich Nietzsche describes as the "internalization of man," and what Sigmund Freud describes as "repression." When we feel strong passions but are prevented from exercising them, they don't just go away - they fester inside us and cause us to react in negative, even violent ways. That is why all three thinkers, King, Nietzsche, and Freud, advocate channeling your passions into creative and healthy outlets, such as art and nonviolent action.

But as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love? "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully 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? 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. So, after all, maybe the South, the nation, and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.



Credit: "Love Each Other" by Tyler Merbler, Flickr.com

## The True Keepers of Justice

I must close now. But before closing, I am impelled to mention one other point in your statement that troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." ... I don't believe you would so quickly commend the policemen if you would observe their ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you would watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you would see them slap and kick

old Negro men and young boys, if you would observe them, as they did on two occasions, refusing to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I'm sorry that I can't join you in your praise for the police department. It is true that they have been rather disciplined in their public handling of the demonstrators. In this sense, they have been publicly "nonviolent." But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the last few years, I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. So I have tried to make it 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 even more, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.



I wish you had commended the Negro demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of the most inhuman provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, courageously and with a majestic sense of purpose facing jeering and hostile mobs and the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman of Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity, "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested." They will be young high school and college students, 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's 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 the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

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## Conclusion

Dr. King ends his letter with a humble apology and a call for forgiveness.

*Never before have I written a letter this long -- or should I say a book? I'm afraid that 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 is there to do when you are alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell other than write long letters, think strange thoughts, and pray long prayers?*

*If I have said anything in this letter that is an understatement of the truth and is indicative of an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything in this letter that is an overstatement of the truth and is indicative of my having a patience that makes me patient with anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.*

*Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,*

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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## Try it Yourself! Challenge

We're not going to ask you to become the next Martin Luther King, but try this:

1. Think about a law or school policy that you think is unjust according to one of King's three formulations.
2. Identify some friends or allies who feel the same
3. Together, go through the steps for nonviolent campaigns that King outlines: collect the facts, attempt to negotiate, self-reflect, then engage in direct action!
4. If anyone criticizes your actions, keep King's rebuttals in your back pocket.

You'd be surprised at what you and a group of passionate activists can achieve following King's lead.

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## Acknowledgements

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