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Subjects: American Literature and Composition
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Towards a Better Society: Utilizing the Rhetoric of Persuasion to
Create Positive Change in One's Own Place

Short Abstract of the Unit:

This unit of my American Literature course seeks to empower students to advocate for a better society through their written words -- in this case through the form of a formally written persuasive letter to be sent to a legitimate audience. This culminating project emerges from the study of works of two prominent American figures, Henry David Thoreau and Martin Luther King, Jr. whose legacies exemplify the power and responsibility of an individual to discern truth and act in accordance with his or her own conscience. Studying "On Resistance to Civil Government" and "Letter from Birmingham Jail" together offers an opportunity to see how a writer from one historical context can influence the thinking, writing, and actions of an individual at a later point in time. I want them to realize that they too are a part of this tradition.

This unit asks students to produce an authentic piece of writing that emerges from a personal investment in and a love of place. It is my hope that the desire to envision a better place upon recognizing the imperfections/shortcomings inherent in human constructed societies develops from this love of place. Students will be given freedom to choose an aspect of their lives that is important to them and this will serve to be their inroads to conduct authentic research. The act of publishing the letter to an authentic audience grounds their work for achieving change. The letter will be sent via snail mail (which I argue holds a heightened value in contrast to the daily patterns of high speed communication in our contemporary society.) In order to write persuasively, the students must contemplate the context of the situation, the viewpoints of the audience (including viewpoints different than their own), and the most effective style, tone, and diction to utilize in getting one's own ideas across effectively to other individuals.

Context of the Unit:

This year I am hoping that the students begin to develop a sense of place long before we reach this unit. I will be employing the methodology of Janet Burne's string journals (<http://www.walden.org/documents/file/Burne,%20Janet.pdf>) to help students become better observers of place and grow in connection to place from the beginning of the year. I will focus their attention on their sense of belonging to the place of home, the place of school, the place of hometown, the place of Cleveland, the place of Ohio, the place of America, our planet Earth, and ultimately the universe and beyond. One of the later journal entries specifically asks students to identify an element of place that is less than perfect/ideal.

This unit will follow a unit on Transcendentalism in which student will be exposed to works of Emerson and Thoreau and the underlying characteristics and ideas of this movement.

As a teacher in a Jesuit high school, I will utilize this unit to foster particular values and methodologies that have roots in a Jesuit education. This includes the incorporation of the Ignatian paradigm of experience, reflection, action, which is a cyclical mode of progress for personal growth in knowledge that leads to action. The study of rhetoric will be grounded in the tradition and art of "eloquentia perfecta" which is Latin for "Right reason expressed effectively, responsibly and gracefully." The content will reflect the hopes that Ignatian education has for its graduates (see Profile of a Graduate at Graduation in the addendum to this unit) and the tradition of social justice that is a part of the Catholic Church's social teachings.

On each classroom wall in the English department, we have placed framed posters serve as constant reminders to ourselves and students. The posters highlight the reading process, the writing process, and Aristotle's appeals. Each year in English courses the students will deepen their understanding of these central concepts. This unit challenges students to utilize each of these concepts.

Finally, while not a team taught unit, each sophomore at Ignatius takes a semester theology course focusing on morality. This unit seeks to reinforce and offer a concrete opportunity for students to explore an issue of conscience that matters to their sense of place.

Duration and objectives:

This unit will take approximately 2-3 weeks to complete depending on the time needed/allotted for students to complete the writing process.

Objectives:

- Analyzing and understanding the relationship between literature and history
- Understanding the influence of ideas from one time and place on the ideas of another time and place
- Developing clear claims and arranging effective supporting evidence in formal essays
- Developing familiarity with embedding sources and listing them in a works cited page using MLA format
- Utilizing the writing process to formulate a finished product.
- Recognize the relationship between purpose and audience
- Support claims using the three classical appeals: ethos, pathos, logos
- Abide by proper manuscript conventions for formal letter writing
- Distinguish validity of external sources
- Incorporate external source material into paragraphs using MLA parenthetical documentation (e.g., direct quote, paraphrase, and summary)

Outline

Day 1: Introduce/Read “On Resistance to Civil Government”

Day 2: Discuss “On Resistance to Civil Government”

Day 3: Introduce “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; begin reading

Day 4: Discuss “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Day 5: Introduce/review “Ethos, Pathos, Logos” (handout); Reread “Letter from Birmingham Jail” highlighting passages Ethos, Pathos, Logos
(<http://faculty.millikin.edu/~moconner/writing/king1a.html>)

Day 6: Small group/Large group exploration of persuasive and rhetorical techniques

Day 7 and beyond: Introduce writing prompt; begin writing process -- prewriting (handout, topic selection checksheet), drafting, revision, proofreading, publishing)

Other mini-lessons may be included in writing process depending upon prior skills:

- Conducting research, finding credible sources, utilizing research databases
- Block format for business letters
- MLA format for citations, works cited
- Integration of quotations into text

Last Day : Collect and send letters; reflection on process as a whole

Lesson details

Day 1:

Pre-reading:

Define Civil Disobedience

Quickwrite (from *Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston*)- Under what circumstances would you be willing to go to jail for a moral or political principle? Write a brief description of the principle and of your feelings about it. Alternatively, explain why you wouldn't be willing to commit civil disobedience under any circumstances.

Homework: Read "On Resistance to Civil Government" and complete study questions

Day 2:

Post-reading -- Discussion using Seminar questions as a guide, highlight current examples of civil disobedience (notably most recent concerning the Keystone Pipeline (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/08/proposed-tar-sands-pipeline-sparks-civil-disobedience/244086/>))

Day 3:

Pre-reading:

Students are asked to produce prior knowledge of Martin Luther King, his writings, and the Civil Rights Movement

Present a brief historical context of King's writing of the letter (include letter that King is responding to <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/clergy.pdf>, and details of his imprisonment [http://mlk-](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_letter_from_birmingham_jail_1963/)

[kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_letter_from_birmingham_jail_1963/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_letter_from_birmingham_jail_1963/)). Call students attention to those who have signed the letter.

Reading: Students are given a printed copy of the letter (without coloring). After a brief explanation of the background, students are directed to begin reading the letter and to interact with the text utilizing marginalia. (Reading and quality of marginalia will be utilized to assess homework grade (10pts). Students should finish reading the letter for homework.

Day 4:

Post-reading: Discuss "Letter from Birmingham Jail"; walk students through King's ideas: discernment of truth/conscience, steps in a nonviolent direct action campaign, just/unjust laws, human personality/dignity, extremists v. moderates)

Day 5:

Introduce/review "Ethos, Pathos, Logos" (handout); Ask students to think about Letter from Birmingham Jail and as a group identify examples for each appeal. Continue until students are comfortable with the ideas.

Assignment: Reread "Letter from Birmingham Jail" highlighting passages Ethos, Pathos, Logos (<http://faculty.millikin.edu/~moconner/writing/king1a.html>)

Day 6: Small group/Large group identification and exploration of persuasive and rhetorical techniques.

What techniques/passages did you find most persuasive? Why?

Who is King's audience? Primary? Secondary?

Day 7 and beyond: Introduce writing prompt; begin writing process -- prewriting (handout, topic selection checksheet), drafting, revision, proofreading, publishing) Distribute writing prompt and prewriting. After discussion of prompt, students conduct 5-8 minutes brainstorming on the prewriting handout. On the board ask students to share ideas. Prewriting session two: Ask students to choose one area of interest and utilize another method of prewriting to explore the issue on the backside of the prewriting 1 handout (freewrite, clustering/webbing, listing, etc.)

Day 8:

Conduct library research on topics

Other mini-lessons may be included in writing process depending upon prior skills:

- Conducting research, finding credible sources, utilizing research databases
- Block format for business letters
- MLA format for citations, works cited
- Integration of quotations into text

Last Day : Collect and send letters; reflection on process as a whole

Student Materials needed:

- Highlighters or colored pencils (green, blue, red, purple)
- Library access, internet access (for research purposes)
- Computer access, (typed final document)
- envelope
- stamp

List of Handouts:

Study Questions for “On Resistance to Civil Government”

Seminar Questions for “On Resistance to Civil Government”

Document: Letter from Birmingham Jail

Color-coded Reference Sheet for Analyzing Aristotle’s Appeals in Letter

Study questions for Letter from Birmingham Jail

Document: Letter from Birmingham Jail with color-coded appeals

Persuasive Letter Assignment sheet

Persuasive Letter Prewriting sheet

Persuasive Letter Writing Plan

Persuasive Letter Peer Review

Persuasive Letter Rubric

Handouts from College Writing Centers on Ethos, Pathos, Logos

Study questions for “On Resistance to Civil Government”

Name: _____

Who does Thoreau hold responsible for the accomplishments of America?

Why was Thoreau jailed?

Why did he believe he was jailed?

How did Thoreau view his punishment?

List examples of injustices that have existed or exist today.

Explain the truth in these paradoxical statements:

“I saw that if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through, before they could get to be as free as I was.”

“I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax.”

Seminar questions for “Civil Disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau

(questions constructed by Francis Bryant, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3356>)

OPENING (choose one of the following to begin the discussion of the document)

Do you like Thoreau and his ideas? Why or why not?

What word, phrase or line do we need to understand to realize the importance of Thoreau’s work?

What does Thoreau want us to believe?

CORE: (use these as a guide for your discussion)

Who is ultimately more important the individual, the citizens as a whole, or the government?

What role should we (as a citizen) play in society? What are the limits of government should follow in intruding in our daily lives?

Can the government restrict your beliefs? Are there beliefs or actions that the government should try to alter?

Is the government that Thoreau desires achievable?

Are we a democracy in Thoreau’s eyes? In your eyes? In the textbook definition of democracy?

What areas of our government today would Thoreau attack? Defend

Are there leaders today that Thoreau would admire? Detest?

In discussing the role of the individual, which quote best outlines your philosophy?

Thoreau:

“if the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go... perchance it will wear smooth - certainly the machine will wear out.... If it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.

Socrates:

“an individual must do what his city or country demands of him or he must change their view of what is just.”

Kennedy:

“ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.”

What problems or limitations do you see with the other views?

What should be the role between the individual and the government?

Under what circumstances should conscience outweigh the law?

What should the consequences be for someone who breaks the law?

Is there ever a valid reason to break a law?

Can you see yourself breaking a law for a greater cause? Explain

CLOSING: (choose one)

What are some situations today where we have examples of people who are working for changes in the name of justice and fairness?

To what extent should they go to accomplish their goal?

Do you applaud or criticize citizens who work for change?

What advice would Thoreau give them?

What are the circumstances that would force you to be like Thoreau?

If Thoreau were alive today how would he judge America?

The following pages include the text of Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail. The layout of the text is the same as the color-coded rhetorical analysis that appears later in this unit. Both texts were included for comparison's sake. The color-coded rhetorical analysis while not intended to be distributed as a whole, is very helpful for instructional purposes.

While reading the following letter, using a pen or pencil only to mark the text, underline significant passages, write questions/comments in the margins, note places of confusion (?), circle or box important word choices.

Document: Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail

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 circumstance. 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.

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 good will 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 the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own 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 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 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 Public 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 so to 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, we must 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 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 dart

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-county 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 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 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 last to advocate disobeying 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 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 make 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 non-segregated 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 Rio 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, 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 other worldly religion which makes a strange, **on** 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, here 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. They 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. They will be 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 feet is tired, but my soul is at rest." They 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.

The text of this letter originally appeared at: [The Nobel Prize Internet Archive](#)

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The following handout was compiled from three 8 1/2 x 11 framed signs that hang in each of the English classrooms to help students recall the three appeals.

The handout provides a compact, color-coded reference sheet that students can utilize at their desks while identifying the appeals in the letter.

Good Writing is Persuasive Writing.

ETHOS

Greek for "character"

“Who’s he to talk?”/
“Where’s he from?”

(Ethos, “the silent proof” of character, convinces indirectly.)

Whose reputation is “working” for him? / Whose reputation is he upholding?
What are his credentials?
Does the writing show that the author appears...
--to know what he is doing?
--to know what he is talking about?



Green: use of appeal to authority or reputation or ethos

Good Writing is Persuasive Writing.

PATHOS

Greek for “suffering” or “experience”

What alluring feelings emerge
from the piece?

Does the reader feel joy in response to a good, clear argument?
Is the reader “all fired up” by the total argument?
(If so, the piece utilizes *shrewdly-chosen* elements: words, support, and structure.)

Does the reader feel delight in response to an overall well-crafted piece?
Has humor been a part of the reading experience?
(The writing won’t “pathetic”!)



Red: use of an emotional appeal or pathos

Good Writing is Persuasive Writing.

LOGOS

Greek for “word”

“Where’s the beef?”

The logical “proof” provides concrete supports.

Reasons? Examples? Facts?
Quotations--of Authority? --to *Show Authority*?
Statistical Evidence?



Blue: use of an appeal to logic or logos

Aristotle’s Appeals

Three forms of rhetoric: ethos,
pathos, logos

Rhetoric: the ability, in each
particular case, to see the available
means of persuasion



Purple: the opposition’s arguments

Study Questions for King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

1. In King's first sentence, he mentions that, "while confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities 'unwise and untimely'" Who is King primarily directing his letter—who is meant by "your?" Who is he addressing his letter to and why?
2. King mentions that for years he has heard the word, "wait!" What reasons does he give indicating that there is a time when the "cup of endurance runs over."
3. Who does King begin to "almost conclude" is the "Negro's great stumbling block" in their journey towards freedom?
4. What, for King, is the "myth of time?" What does he think is the true nature of time? Why does he believe this myth to be so pernicious (injurious, destructive)?
5. How does King believe that human progress comes about, and how must those who struggle for justice use time?
6. King embraces the label of "extremist." Who are the "extremists" in history that he cites for inspiration? Why do you think he chose to mention these people?
7. King believes that the important question is not whether he is or will be an extremist. Rather, the question is what kind of extremist he will be. Explain the options King has to choose from regarding what kind of extremism he will advocate and embody. What is the absolutely powerful example King puts forth characterizing this choice?
8. How has the "white moderate" dampened the hope King possessed for them?
9. How does the Church in King's time differ from the Early Church, according to King?

10. Through his activism, King not only wants to claim the dignity and justice that the African-American community deserves, but also wants something for the American community of which they are a part. What is his hope for the American community, our nation?

11. King claims justice for African-Americans not because they are African-American. On what basis does he claim justice for the African-American community? What is the difference between the two claims, and why does King believe the latter claim better than the former?

12. Does King believe that only if we recover our Judeo-Christian heritage will democracy have a chance in our nation? If so, why? If not, why not?

13. In King's view, was the Declaration of Independence written for African-American people, or was it limited only to white male property-holders? Explain.

Looking back over the letter, list the most convincing argument that King makes using Aristotle's appeals.

ETHOS

PATHOS

LOGOS

Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail--a rhetorical analysis

In the following text, here is the color key:

Purple: the opposition's arguments

Red: use of an emotional appeal or pathos

Green: use of appeal to authority or reputation or ethos

Blue: use of an appeal to logic or logos

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 circumstance. 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.

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 good will 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 the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own 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 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 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 Public 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 so to 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, we must 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 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 dart 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-county 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 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 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 last to advocate disobeying 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 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 make 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 Council 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 non-segregated 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 Rio 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, 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 other worldly religion which makes a strange, **on** 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, here 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. They 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. They will be 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 feet is tired, but my soul is at rest." They 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.

The text of this letter originally appeared at: [The Nobel Prize Internet Archive](#)

Text revised and corrected by

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English II
Persuasive Letter

Towards a Better Society: Utilizing the Rhetoric of Persuasion to
Create Positive Change in One's Own Place

Assignment:

You are to choose an issue of conscience/importance and write a letter in which you attempt to provoke a change in your audience's action/behavior through your creative use of language – specifically the rhetorical conventions of ethos, pathos, and logos.

I will be assessing your work based upon the following:

Your letter/writing should:

Demonstrate clear purpose.

Address a specific audience.

Utilize the steps of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, publishing).

Demonstrate proficiency with topic sentences, controlling ideas, paragraph coherence and unity.

Be edited for grammar, punctuation, and capitalization rules.

Demonstrate consistent use of formal or informal voice.

Effectively embed quotes from external sources (2 minimum) using MLA parenthetical documentation.

Correctly list external sources on a Works Cited page in MLA format (Hacker Manual).

The letter should be written in block style (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/1/>)

12pt Times New Roman

Include the Works Cited page as an enclosure.

____ 10pts prewriting

____ 10pts writing plan (due _____)

____ 10pts first draft (due _____)

____ 10pts second draft (due _____)

____ 10pts writing lab visit (must be utilized for some part of the writing process)

Signature from writing lab proctor required for credit.

____ 100pts final copy (_____)

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Persuasive Letter: Prewriting

For each of the following (if applicable), brainstorm a list of changes that you believe should be made to create a situation that is better (more just, upholding personality, reflecting God's will). Spend 5-10 minutes and jot down anything that comes to mind without judgment. Your list should include no less than 5 changes.

Home:

SIHS:

Cleveland:

Local Community:

Ohio:

U.S.:

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Persuasive letter writing plan:

Narrowed topic:

Audience:

Opposing viewpoints:

Points of persuasion utilizing ethos:

Points of persuasion utilizing pathos:

Points of persuasion utilizing logos:

Where might you begin your research? Who are the experts in the field that you are exploring?
(Consider library sources, local organizations, etc.):

Persuasive letter: Peer Review

Remember: as you review the essay, do not focus on spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors as much as content. Look at the overall effectiveness of the essay.

1. Imagine that you are the intended audience for this letter. Are you convinced to make the change/decision that the letter asks you to make?
2. Restate in your own words the writer's purpose:
3. Does the letter seem to present a clear understanding of the complexity of the issue? (For example, does it offer an understanding of the opposing viewpoints?)
4. Does the logic of this paper's argument ever fall flat? Where? What might be done to correct this? (Consider the letter's ETHOS, PATHOS, LOGOS.)
5. Do you feel this paper relies on evidence, or on opinion or intuition? If the latter, cite examples of where this paper relies on opinion and intuition and give suggestions as to how the writer can write more objectively.
6. Could the writer of this paper have omitted certain passages to make this paper more concise? If yes, which ones?
7. At which point did you feel most interested by this piece? When least? Explain.
8. Does the letter integrate quotations effectively? YES NO
9. Are each of the sources used credible? If not, which sources are not credible?
10. Does the letter follow the proper formatting for a block letter?
YES NO

Name: _____

Persuasive Letter Assessment

ACT Persuasive Writing Rubric

1	2	3	4	5	6
0-41	42 43 44 45	46 47 48	49 50 51	52 53 54	56 57 58 59 60

Student includes two or more credible sources using correct MLA format (for both in text citations and works cited).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Student utilizes the proper format/conventions of a block letter.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Student effectively incorporates the rhetorical appeals of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20

ACT Persuasive Writing Essay Rubric

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Task	Essay doesn't show that the student understands the task.	Shows a weak understanding of the task.	Shows some understanding of the task.	Shows an understanding of the task.	Shows a clear understanding of the task.	Shows a clear understanding of the task.
Position Taken	Doesn't take a position on this issue The essay fails to convey reasons to support its position.	No position taken on the issue, or Takes a position but fails to give reasons, or Takes a position but [switches sides].	Takes a position on the issue but doesn't offer a context for discussion.	Takes a position on the issue and may offer some context for discussion.	Takes a position on the issue and may offer a broad context for discussion.	Takes a position on the issue and may offer a critical context for discussion.
Complexity	The essay shows no recognition that there is another side to this issue.	There is little recognition of a counterargument to the writer's position	Acknowledges a counterargument to the writer's position, but discussion of it is brief or unclear.	Shows some recognition of complexity by providing some response to counterarguments to the writer's position	Partially evaluates the implications and/or complications of the issue, or responds to counterarguments to the writer's position.	Examines different perspectives on the issue, or evaluates the implications and/or complications of the issue, or fully responds to counterarguments
Development & Focus of Ideas	Minimally developed. May include excessive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is usually maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be maintained.	Thinly developed. Examples are absent, general or not clearly relevant. May include extensive repetition of the writer's ideas or of ideas in the prompt. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be.	Development of ideas is limited and may be repetitious, with little, if any, movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the general topic is maintained, but focus on the specific issue in the prompt may not be.	Development of ideas is adequate, with some movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained throughout most of the essay.	Development of ideas is specific and logical. Most ideas are elaborated, with clear movement between general statements and specific reasons, examples, and details. Focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained.	Development of ideas is ample, specific, and logical. Most ideas are fully elaborated. A clear focus on the specific issue in the prompt is maintained.
Organization	Little or no evidence of an organizational structure or of the logical grouping of ideas. Transitions are rarely used. Introduction and conclusion are absent or minimal.	Some indication of an organizational structure and some logical grouping of ideas within parts of the essay are apparent. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious, and they may be inappropriate or misleading. An introduction and conclusion are clear but minimal.	Organization is simple. Ideas are logically grouped within parts of the essay, but there is little or no evidence of logical sequencing of ideas. Transitions, if used, are simple and obvious. An introduction and conclusion are clearly present but underdeveloped.	Organization is apparent but predictable. Some evidence of logical sequencing of ideas is apparent. Most transitions are simple and obvious. The introduction and conclusion are clear and somewhat developed	Organization is clear, although it may be predictable. Ideas are logically sequenced, although simple and obvious. Transitions may be used. The introduction and conclusion are clear and generally well developed.	Organization is clear: the organization may be somewhat predictable or it may grow from the writer's purpose. Ideas are logically sequenced. Most transitions reflect the writer's logic and are usually integrated into the essay. The introduction and conclusion are effective, clear, and well developed.
Language Skills	Sentence structure and word choice are simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may significantly impede understanding.	Sentence structure and word choice are usually simple. Errors may be frequently distracting and may sometimes impede understanding.	Language shows a basic control. Sentences show a little variety and word choice is appropriate. Errors may be distracting and may occasionally impede understanding.	Language use is adequate. There is some sentence variety and appropriate word choice. There may be some distracting errors, but they do not impede understanding.	Language is competent. Sentences are somewhat varied and word choice is sometimes varied and precise. There may be a few errors, but they are rarely distracting	Shows a good command of language. Sentences are varied and word choice is varied and precise. There are few, if any, errors to distract the reader.

The following pages contain two helpful online handouts I discovered from college writing centers:

Mt. San Antonio College

www.mtsac.edu/instruction/humanities/writingcenter/LogosEthosPathos.doc

Indiana University

www.iupui.edu/~uwc/pdf/Rhetorical%20Triangle.pdf

Either would be appropriate to utilize as instructional handouts in class.



The Writing Center RealWriting™ Handouts



Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Whenever you read an argument, you must ask yourself, “Is this persuasive? And if so, to whom?” There are several ways to appeal to an audience. Among them are appealing to logos, ethos, and pathos. These appeals are prevalent in almost all argument.

Definitions

Logos: The Greek word “logos” is the basis for the English word “logic.” Logos is a broader idea than formal logic—the highly symbolic and mathematical logic that you might study in a philosophy course. Logos refers to any attempt to appeal to the intellect, the general meaning of “logical argument.” Everyday arguments rely heavily on ethos and pathos, but academic arguments rely more on logos. Yes, these arguments will call upon the writers’ credibility and try to touch the audiences’ emotions, but there will more often than not be logical chains of reasoning supporting all claims.

Ethos: Ethos is related to the English word “ethics” and refers to the trustworthiness of the speaker/writer. Ethos is an effective, persuasive strategy because when we believe that the speaker does not intend to do us harm, we are more willing to listen to what he/she has to say. For example, when a trusted doctor gives you advice, you may not understand all of the medical reasoning behind the advice, but you nonetheless follow the directions because you believe that the doctor knows what he/she is talking about. Likewise, when a judge comments on legal precedent, audiences tend to listen because it is the job of a judge to know the nature of past legal cases.

Pathos: Pathos is related to words “pathetic,” “sympathy,” and “empathy.” Whenever you accept a claim based on how it makes you feel without fully analyzing the rationale behind the claim, you are acting on pathos. They may be any emotions: love, fear, patriotism, guilt, hate or joy. A majority of arguments in the popular press are heavily dependent on pathetic appeals. The more people react without full consideration for the WHY, the more effective a argument can be. Although the pathetic appeal can be manipulative, it is the cornerstone of moving people to action. Many arguments are able to persuade people logically, but the apathetic audience may not follow through on the call to action. Appeals to pathos touch a nerve and compel people to not only listen, but to also take the next step and act in the world.

Effective writing and argumentation thus depends on the inclusion of appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos. Balancing these three appeals in your writing contributes to a stronger, more persuasive argument.

The Writing Center
Building 26B, Room 1561
(909) 594-5611 x5325

<http://www.mtsac.edu/instruction/humanities/writingcenter/>

To Appeal to Logic (Logos)	To Develop Ethos	To Appeal to Emotion (Pathos)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical, abstract language • Denotative meanings/reasons • Literal and historical analogies • Definitions • Factual data and statistics • Quotations • Citations from experts and authorities • Informed opinions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language appropriate to audience and subject • Restrained, sincere, fair-minded presentation • Appropriate level of vocabulary • Correct grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vivid, concrete language • Emotionally loaded language • Connotative meanings • Emotional examples • Vivid descriptions • Narratives of emotional events • Emotional tone • Figurative language
Effect		
Evokes a cognitive, rationale response	Demonstrates author's reliability, competence, and respect for the audience's ideas and values through reliable and appropriate use of support and general accuracy	Evokes and emotional response

For additional help with Logos, Ethos, and Pathos, please see the software program in the lab, I-claim.

Also, for help with logical fallacies, please see our handout.

Examples of Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Logos

Let us begin with a simple proposition: What democracy requires is public debate, not information. Of course it needs to be generated only by vigorous popular debate. We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our ideas about the world to the test of public controversy. Information, usually seen as the precondition of debate, is better understood as its by-product. When we get into arguments that focus and fully engage our attention, we become avid seekers of relevant information. Otherwise, we take in information passively—if we take it in at all.

Christopher Lasch, “The Lost Art of Political Argument”

Ethos

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely”. . . Since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable in 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, 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 the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Pathos

For me, commentary on war zones at home and abroad begins and ends with personal reflections. A few years ago, while watching the news in Chicago, a local news story made a personal connection with me. The report concerned a teenager who had been shot because he had angered a group of his male peers. This act of violence caused me to recapture a memory from my own adolescence because of an instructive parallel in my own life with this boy who had been shot. When I was a teenager some thirty-five years ago in the New York metropolitan area, I wrote a regular column for my high school newspaper. One week, I wrote a column in which I made fun of the fraternities in my high school. As a result, I elicited the anger of some of the most aggressive teenagers in my high school. A couple of nights later, a car pulled up in front of my house, and the angry teenagers in the car dumped garbage on the lawn of my house as an act of revenge and intimidation.

James Garbarino, “Children in a Violent World: A Metaphysical Perspective”

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<http://www.mesa.edu/instruction/summit/writingcenter/>



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The Rhetorical Triangle: Understanding and Using Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

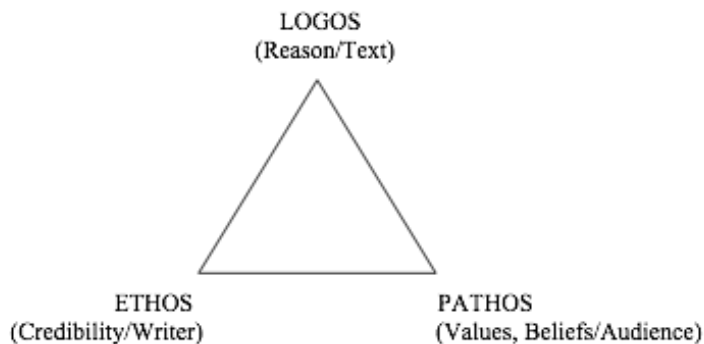
Logos, ethos, and pathos are important components of all writing, whether we are aware of them or not. By learning to recognize logos, ethos, and pathos in the writing of others and in our own, we can create texts that appeal to readers on many different levels. This handout provides a brief overview of what logos, ethos, and pathos are and offers guiding questions for recognizing and incorporating these appeals.

Aristotle taught that a speaker's ability to persuade an audience is based on how well the speaker appeals to that audience in three different areas: logos, ethos, and pathos. Considered together, these appeals form what later rhetoricians have called the rhetorical triangle.

Logos appeals to reason. Logos can also be thought of as the text of the argument, as well as how well a writer has argued his/her point.

Ethos appeals to the writer's character. Ethos can also be thought of as the role of the writer in the argument, and how credible his/her argument is.

Pathos appeals to the emotions and the sympathetic imagination, as well as to beliefs and values. Pathos can also be thought of as the role of the audience in the argument.



The rhetorical triangle is typically represented by an equilateral triangle, suggesting that logos, ethos, and pathos should be balanced within a text. However, which aspect(s) of the rhetorical triangle you favor in your writing depends on both the audience and the purpose of that writing. Yet, if you are in doubt, seek a balance among all three elements.

Questions to help you recognize and utilize logos, ethos, and pathos

The following questions can be used in two ways, both to think about how *you* are using logos, ethos, and pathos in your writing, and also to assess how *other writers* use them in their writing.

Logos:

- Is the thesis clear and specific? (*for help with thesis statements, see the Revising Thesis Statements handout*)
- Is the thesis supported by strong reasons and credible evidence?
- Is the argument logical and arranged in a well-reasoned order?

Ethos:

- What are the writer's qualifications? How has the writer connected him/herself to the topic being discussed?
- Does the writer demonstrate respect for multiple viewpoints by using sources in the text?
- Are sources credible? Are sources documented appropriately?
- Does the writer use a tone that is suitable for the audience/purpose? Is the diction (word choice) used appropriate for the audience/purpose?
- Is the document presented in a polished and professional manner?

Pathos:

- Are vivid examples, details and images used to engage the reader's emotions and imagination?
- Does the writer appeal to the values and beliefs of the reader by using examples readers can relate to or care about?

One Final Thought

While the above questions can help you identify or utilize logos, ethos, and pathos in writing, it is important to remember that sometimes a particular aspect of a text will represent more than one of these appeals. For example, using credible sources could be considered both logos and ethos, as the sources help support the logic or reasoning of the text, and they also help portray the writer as thoughtful and engaged with the topic. This overlap reminds us how these appeals work together to create effective writing.

For Further Learning

A Sequence for Academic Writing. Behrens, Rosen, and Beedles. 179-184.

The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing, 4th ed. Ramage, Bean, and Johnson. 78-79; 408-410.

University of Iowa Rhetoric Department. http://www.uiowa.edu/~rhetoric/morphing_textbook/general/triangle.html

United States Naval Academy. <http://www.usna.edu/Users/english/mace/index.html>

Colorado State University. <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/teaching/commenting/refresher.cfm>

University of British Columbia. <http://www.writingcentre.ubc.ca/workshop/tools/rhet1.htm>

Iowa State University. http://www.public.iastate.edu/~drussel/rhet_analy_105/analy/homepage.htm

University of Texas at Austin. <http://www.drw.utexas.edu/roberts-miller/handouts/rhetorical-analysis>

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The profile of the Graduate at Graduation is viewed as the legitimate and necessary goal for a Jesuit education. The following characteristics have been selected from a larger body of characteristics formulated by the Jesuit Secondary Education Association. This unit has been designed to help students progress towards these characteristics.

Open to Growth: The Jesuit high school student at graduation is

- beginning to take responsibility for growth as a person; desires integrity, commitment, and excellence in multiple facets of one's life.
- is developing a habit of reflection on experience.
- is becoming more open to broader, adult issues.

Intellectually Competent: The Jesuit high school student at graduation already

- has mastered the fundamental skills of language.
- can read and summarize material at a level of a beginning college freshman.
- is developing a mastery of logical skills and critical thinking.
- is developing a curiosity to explore ideas and issues.
- is developing the ability to apply knowledge and skills to new situations.
- can present a convincing argument in written form.
- is taking pride and ownership in his or her school accomplishments.

Religious: The Jesuit high school student at graduation is beginning to form a Christian conscience and evaluate moral choices, and can reason through moral choices with increasing clarity.

Loving: The Jesuit high school student at graduation

- is more capable of putting self in another person's place and understanding what that person is feeling.
- is more sensitive to the beauty of the created universe and is more caring about life and the natural environment.

Committed to Doing Justice: By graduation the Jesuit high school student:

- is more aware of selfish attitudes and tendencies which lead one to treat others unjustly; consciously seeks to be more understanding, accepting, and generous with others.
- is beginning to see that Christian faith implies a commitment to a just society.
- is beginning to understand the structural roots of injustice in social institutions, attitudes, and customs.
- through reflection and study is becoming aware of alternatives in public policy which govern the services provided for various segments of the community.
- is beginning to understand the complexity of many social issues and the need for critical reading of diverse sources of information about them.

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Bryant, Francis. "Civil Disobedience excerpt seminar." LEARN North Carolina, 2008. Available on the web at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3356> (accessed 8 August 2012).

Elements in Literature, Fifth Course. Eds. Kathleen Daniels, et al. Austin: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 2003. (Selections from "Resistance to Civil Government")

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 4th ed. (or 5th ed.) Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2004.