

## Letter from Birmingham Jail Rhetorical Précis

### Précis

Martin Luther King Jr., a minister, and civil rights activist, in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963) states the reasons why the church, white moderates, police, and even people of color have perpetuated the injustice in Birmingham, and why nonviolent direct action is the best choice for people of color to take if they want to obtain freedom. He asserts that the church is fearful of becoming nonconformists, that the police being “nonviolent” still preserves the system of segregation, and that he stands between two opposing forces: people of color that have accepted the system, and the ones who are on the verge of violence. The purpose of this letter was to explain to his fellow clergymen the actualities of the situation regarding segregation in order for them to know how to improve their understanding of it. King Jr. establishes a formal relationship with his fellow clergymen as a minister that is concerned with the integrity of the church.

### Outline

- Sent by an affiliate of his organization, but also because of injustice

- Four basic steps of any nonviolent campaign: collection of facts, negotiations, self purification, and direct action - Birmingham has a record of brutality, probably the most segregated city in the U.S.. Self purification undertaken, direct action causes the other party to negotiate because tension is created, results in a crisis
- “Why didn’t you give the new city administration time to act?” Newly elected mayor also a segregationist
- Brutality = fear and resentment, and segregation affects children of color negatively by making them feel inferior - unconscious bitterness toward white people
- Breaks law because they are unjust - degrades human personality, is followed by the minority, disobeys the law of God. Just - followed by the majority, uplifts the human personality, and follows the law of God. First amendment rights violated - arrested for right to peaceful assembly and protest
- Breaking the law and willing to accept punishment arouses the conscience of the community over its injustice, throughout history people have disobeyed the law
- White moderates have a superficial understanding of the situation, disappointment in the church. Opposition and silence, problem is dismissed as a social issue. Recounts a time when Christians were not afraid to take a stand.
- Clergymen should have seen P.D. brutality, nonviolence from them still preserves the system. Apology for length, not much to do in jail, asks for forgiveness if wrong, hopes to meet other clergy as equals if possible

#### Works Cited

King, Martin Luther. "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Letter From Birmingham Jail (2009): 1-12.

Academic Search Complete. Web. 28 Aug. 2016.

## Rhetorical Precis 1

Martin Luther King, in "Letter from Birmingham" (1963), addresses the concerns of white ministers who criticized MLK's nonviolent protest in Birmingham, and suggests that his presence was necessary in order for there to be change in the current segregated community at the time. Throughout his letter, King addresses each of the concerns to make it clear that segregation was a major issue that had to be acted upon soon, by claiming that he was invited there to attend an injustice that has not diminished and will not have an end if one waits and believes negotiations will not be broken. His purpose is to clarify the reasons for his participation with others in nonviolent protests in Birmingham, in order to have merchants end segregation in their communities and stop with the racist signs. He establishes a formal relationship with the clergymen who disagree with King's 'untimely' protest in Birmingham.

## 1. Introduction:

MLK states that he is writing to explain his presence and his behavior in Birmingham, which he is aware is of concern by the clergymen and referred to as "untimely and unwise."

## 2. Body:

## A. Reasoning why MLK is protesting in Birmingham

1. He received an invitation by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to attend a nonviolent protest.
2. He is responding to injustice just as Apostle Paul.
3. He claims that "injustice [that is present] anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" being why it is his duty to take action and diminish such threat.

## B. Opens up to how he is not content that the clergymen's disagreement towards the protesting is not towards the segregation occurring, and do not believe that his actions are not in good time and are not smart.

1. He claims that it is in good time because it is obvious that there is an injustice which has not been contained as it is continuing, for negotiations have not been followed through by the white people in the community as there are still racist signs.
2. It is wise because it is best to put pressure on the government so the change is done sooner.
  - a. The protesters have gone through the 4 basic steps being: the gathering of facts of injustice, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action, which were necessary for a well thought out process of civil disobedience, which should be effective as negotiations were broken which left protesters with the choice to act directly.
  - b. Argues that colored people had waited too long to stand up for themselves by people telling them to wait for the right time, when it sounds like a never.
  - c. Gave examples of the hardships that colored people have faced regarding the slavery faced, and the sad moments in which they and their families were excluded, to show that it must end for colored people have suffered enough.

- C. Expresses his disappointment with how there seems to be lack of distinction between a just law and unjust law, also his disappointment in the white moderates.
  - 1. MLK claims that his actions were not breaking the law, but was forgoing with the Supreme Court's decision in the desegregation of public schools which should apply to different aspects in a community.
    - a. Segregation is an unjust law which doesn't mean it has to be "followed," being why he is protesting it and would do so if living under Nazi-rule. Simply being "legal" does not make it morally right.
  - 2. Explains his discontent with white moderates as being a result of their seemingly praise towards "order" rather than "justice'
    - a. Claims that there's more disappointment in white moderates rather than hate groups towards colored people since white moderates are more conscious, yet are against taking action that is necessary to diminish segregation.
    - b. Suggests that taking nonviolent action is not being "extreme" since the wait has been far too long for colored people to be free from racism, and seems unjust to criticize protesters rather than those against desegregation.
      - 1. Expresses disappointment in how clergymen are not seeing the wrong in how protesters are being handled by others and instead of expressing anger towards the violent ones, are expressing unfortunate thoughts about nonviolent protesters fighting for justice.
      - 2. Claims to be content for being perceived as an extremist for he is standing up for what he believes in and compares himself to Jesus and Apostle Paul for going ahead with his moral conscience (which should be what moderates should be doing as some are.)
- D. MLK further expresses his disappointment, this time being with the "white church and its leadership," excluding the ones who actually supported him.
  - 1. He asserts that he had hoped that the church would support the colored peoples' movement and understand the immorality in the injustice that colored people are facing.
    - a. He implies that the white church has instead stood aside and not acted as he had hoped.
    - b. In the light of the fact that the church has not been help, he claims that it has lost social power but that no matter what, his cause shall not be lost without the help of the church.

### 3 Conclusion:

- A. He is not okay with the church's ignorance as they were praising the police's violent actions to stop the nonviolent protesters from carrying on for a just cause.
- B. He expresses his praise for the civil rights protesters for their nonviolent protesting and willingness to physically suffer for a better tomorrow, and suggests that the white church should praise them to.
- C. He formally begs for forgiveness from the church if he has offended them in any way.