

Letter from a Birmingham Jail Questions

1. Who is the letter addressed to?
2. What criticism of King's actions caused him to write the letter?
3. How does King counter the argument that he is an "outsider coming in" to bring about change in Birmingham?
4. What drew King to carry the gospel to Birmingham? (What was there needing to be addressed)
5. Explain the significance of the idea "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
6. What does King say the clergymen have ignored in their criticism of the demonstrations led by King?
7. What are the four basic steps of a non-violent campaign?
8. Why is self-purification a critical step if one hopes to reach moderate whites? (Come back to this)
9. How did the failure of the Birmingham business community help to usher in the direct action campaign?
10. What is the goal of direct action?
11. How does King address the issue of "waiting" for the new administration to act?
12. Why is it necessary for the oppressed to push the oppressor to act immediately?
13. How is "wait" basically a four-lettered word?
14. Explain the foundation for idea of denigrating "nobodiness" that compels King to act on his direct action campaign.
15. How does King show the hypocrisy of the clergymen's anxiety over the breaking of law by King?
16. Compare and contrast *just* and *unjust* laws.
17. Why are segregation laws *unjust*?
18. How does King say the voting process has created unjust segregation laws in Alabama?
19. How can just laws be applied in unjust ways?
20. Who has King been disappointed in over the last few years?
21. How is the white moderate to blame for the application of segregation laws?
22. How is the absence of tension merely the absence of justice?
23. How does King say it is not those engaged in direct action who are causing the tension?
24. How has time been the enemy of justice?
25. How does King say time should be used in this quest for justice?
26. How does King say his community is being dragged in opposite directions with him in the middle?
27. What fear does King have if the white community dismisses non-violent protesters and doesn't support their non-violent methods?
28. What activities does King favor for Blacks seeking the end of oppression to engage in?
29. How is it dangerous to label these activities as "extremist"?
30. How do all that challenge the status quo gain the title "extremist" no matter what actions they engage in?
31. How does King connect the extremism of direct action for civil rights to the plight of Jesus Christ?
32. How many white allies does King see his movement as having?
33. What keeps more from joining the cause?
34. Why is King disappointed in the white churches?
35. How does the suggestion of church leaders to follow desegregation orders because they are the law, a failure to recognize justice?
36. How are the words during early Christianity "...the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded ideas and principles of popular opinion..." a criticism of southern churches' inaction in leading the cause of justice?
37. How does the churches' support of the status quo make them complicit in denying Black rights?
38. How does King describe using the police to enforce segregation laws as an immoral act?