

# MLK why we couldn't wait book reviews examples

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



1. What were conditions like for black people in the U. S. in the early 1960's?

From the textbook: What legal and societal mechanisms created and kept black people in these conditions?

Conditions for black people in the United States during the early 1960's where bleak, they faced social, economic and educational discrimination. These forms of discrimination, created by an informal but controlling white male elite political governing consortium reached back into the anti-bellum tradition. These mechanisms kept black people in these conditions by allowing entrenched areas or the country to remain severely segregated. Even when Brown vs. the Board of Education struck down the concept of separate but equal, regional demographics literally kept black people in their place. Although schools were no longer segregated, the long established black and white neighborhoods ensured that most students received unequal educational opportunities; as a result, it was difficult for even the brightest students to obtain an education. Those people who managed to overcome the odds had difficulty finding employment after graduation. Even when they were able to secure a job in their profession, they generally received a salary that was only a fraction of what a white male would receive for performing the same duties. Part of the difficulty was that black people had accepted their inferior treatment. In Martin Luther King's own words:

The Negro in Birmingham, like the Negro elsewhere in this nation, had been skillfully brainwashed to the point where he had accepted the white man's theory that he, as a Negro, was inferior. He wanted to believe that he was the equal of any man; but he didn't know where to begin or how to resist the influences that had conditioned him to take the line of least resistance and

go along with the white man's views. He knew that there were exceptions to the white man's evaluation: a Ralph Bunche, a Jackie Robinson, a Marian Anderson. But to the Negro, in Birmingham and in the nation, the exception did not prove the rule. .

2. What was MLK's philosophy of how to bring about change and where did it come from? Why was it so widely accepted among black people?

King's philosophy of how to bring about change involved nonviolent direct action. This was rooted in the belief that in order to change the oppressed themselves must refuse their chains. He sets this forth clearly when he writes " The old order ends, no matter what Bastilles remain, when the enslaved, within themselves, bury the psychology of servitude," .

Although the Supreme Court struck a landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education decision, implementation was slow and both political parties neglected civil rights issues. There was the sense that the liberation of African peoples was outpacing that of African Americans in the United States (King, 2). King wrote about that time in these words "" In the summer of 1963 a need and a time and a circumstance and the mood of a people came together." . In particular, 1963 marked the centennial of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. King pointed to this when he stated that the " milestone of the centennial of emancipation gave the Negro a reason to act—a reason so simple and obvious that he almost had to step back to see it" . This gave a sound reason for the movement to become widely accepted among black people. The part of this acceptance was the success of the nonviolent protests in Birmingham that demonstrated how the nonviolent action behind the victory in Birmingham could be expanded. This

became what King describes as the “ nonviolent crusade of 1963: .

3. Divide the civil rights movement in Birmingham into stages of preparation, demonstrations, and ending? What happened in each stage?

The events leading up to the launching of the Civil Rights movement found their first broadly expressed public understanding with Rosa Parks. This kept building as more people became cognizant of the inequities suffered by black people in the United States. World War II had an influence on this when soldiers who had fought together overseas did not get equal treatment back home in America. Of particular relevance in this regard was that the American soldiers were exposed to other social alternatives.

As awareness of social inequities came to the forefront, black Americans became increasingly dissatisfied with their conditions. The white soldiers who served with them overseas had learned to see them as people as human as themselves. The new generation was actively breaking a number of social norms Gandhi had already set the path for non-violent protest. This is reflected as a motivating force when King writes “ This Revolution is genuine because it was born from the same womb that always gives birth to massive social upheavals - the womb of intolerable conditions and unendurable situations.” . In preparation for the active phase King addressed diverse groups “ representing a cross section of our people in Birmingham. I spoke to 125 business and professional people at a call meeting in the Gaston Building. I talked to a gathering of two hundred ministers. I met with many smaller groups, during a hectic one week schedule.” .

This established the pattern for the second stage of the American Civil Rights that saw its active phase in the mid-1960s. This was the time of the pacifist

army. “ We did not hesitate to call our movement an army. But it was a special army, with no supplies but its sincerity, no uniform but its determination, no arsenal except its faith, no currency but its conscience.” .

“ The amazing aftermath of Birmingham, the sweeping Negro Revolution, revealed to people all over the land that there are no outsiders in all these fifty states of America. When a police dog buried his fangs in the ankle of a small child in Birmingham, he buried his fangs in the ankle of every American. The bell of man’s inhumanity to man does not toll for any one man. It tolls for you, for me, for all of us.” .

After the politicians and the public worked together to maintain awareness on these issues and pass appropriate legislation America entered into the third phase of the process. Although the active demonstrations ended in the 1970s we, as a nation are in actually engaged in this process over 50 years later in 2014. The wide scale demonstrations are over but discrimination has not ended. In Martin Luther King’s own words “

#### 4. Why were the protests in Birmingham important?

The protests in Birmingham were important because nonviolent action was behind the victory in Birmingham that he describes as the “ nonviolent crusade of 1963: (King, Jr. and Cotton 30). This nonviolent action set the stage for the following remainder of the crusade, and proved that nonviolent action was an effective method to bring about change in the United States that would help dissolve some of the barriers to racial equality faced by the American people. It also helped set a pattern for protests regarding other social and political issues.

#### 5. Find five short passages in the book that you think illustrate a character

trait of MLK. List the character trait, type the passage, and then write a short paragraph explaining how you think that passage demonstrates the character trait you have chosen. Do this for each of the five passages you choose.

One of Martin Luther King's outstanding character traits is his moral devotion to past and future generations. He makes this clear early on when he writes: We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. .

This clearly shows that King is confronting this as a far reaching moral issue that goes back thousands of years to biblical history, hundreds of years to the time the United State's Constitution was written and still is carried forward to the time when he wrote that passage. In doing this he is faced with an issue that he cannot dismiss as moral and resolves to confront and address so as not to permit it to continue into the future.

**This is clear when he links the suffering of the current generation with his own daughter situation when he writes** 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,

This expresses his concern not just with how the adults in his community and

country are suffering it also shows how he is concerned with its effect upon his daughter and her generation as well.

His daughter's questions are obviously a motivating force when he continues to try to explain to his daughter and she asks "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" . This brief sentence has great impact because King is looking at the issue through his daughter's eyes and can find no fair and valid moral explanation for the unequal treatment she will face in her life because of prejudice.

He ties this devotion to history as well when he addresses the past by writing "If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail." . This shows his attention to history when he compares the suffering the black people faced under slavery. He that, although bringing about change in his time will be difficult, it not as hard as the problems faced under the yoke of slavery and since those problems were overcome, the current and future opposition can be overcome as well.

Dr. Martin Luther King reaches far back into historic Biblical times and brings the problems forward through milestone events. He examines the issue of oppression and prejudice through a variety of different contexts and perspective; including how it appears through the eyes of his little daughter. Still he remains positive that the non-violent campaign will overcome the injustice as is clear when he writes that it took "Christianity almost 2000 years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." .

## **Works Cited**

King, Jr., Martin Luther and Dorothy Cotton. *Why We Can't Wait*. Harper & Row, 1964. Book.