

# Analysis of letter from birmingham jail essay sample

Law



On April 12, 1963, eight white clergymen from Alabama wrote to the citizens of this state to urge them to stop the demonstrations and protests that were occurring during the civil rights movement. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. who many consider the leader of the Civil Rights Movement wrote his own letter in response. On April 16, 1963 he wrote the letter that is now known to all as the " Letter From Birmingham Jail." This letter was directed towards the clergyman and basically all Christian people, I believe it is safe to say that this letter would be considered hostile to many in the Christian community during the time it was written. In his letter he indicates that he is purposely in Birmingham, AL because of the injustice that is occurring with the Negro people living there; " But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." (Martin Luther King Jr. 1963) He is not only concerned about what is happening currently in Birmingham but also what is happening around the nation; " Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." (King, 1963) Mr. King, Jr. is convinced that if the Christian, white, middle class Americans along with their Christian leaders would get more involved in the Civil Rights Movement and stop taking the " wait and see" approach there would be no need for the protests that were currently going on; " I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom." (King, 1963)

He reinforces this statement by saying: " More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will." (King, 1963) Many churches were also struggling with following the laws of the nation in regards to segregation and staying true to the Christian doctrine of the teachings of Jesus Christ; "...love your neighbor as

yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 30-31, New International Version 1984). Mr. King Jr. reminds his readers “... everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “ legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “ illegal.” (King, 1963) Mr. King Jr. does an amazing job of using all possible methods of appeals. He quotes St. Thomas Aquinas to appeal to ethos; “ An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.” (King, 1963) He follows up with a quote with an appeal to reason; “ Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality.” (King, 1963)

When Dr. King Jr. responds to the accusation of being extremists he references many people in history who also may have been labeled the same: “ Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: “ I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.” (King, 1963) and “ Was not Martin Luther an extremist: “ Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.” (King, 1963) I think the most emotional and possibly most convincing quote he makes is as follows: 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. (King, 1963)

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The clergymen make the accusation that the demonstrations that are going on are “untimely”. Mr. King Jr. responds to this by pointing out now they have in fact have delayed many demonstrations: “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”, and “When we discovered that the Commissioner of Police 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...” (King, 1963)

Mr. King also basically scolds the clergymen for praising the police in Birmingham for keeping the peace without violence, he explains to them what is actually going on; “I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes...if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls...see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys...refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together.” (King, 1963) Mr. King’s letter is perfectly written, he lets you know right away why he is writing the letter and what the issues are. He gives a timeline of events and the factors that influenced these events. His writing is intelligent and heartfelt, he is writing as a freedom fighter, a Negro man, a citizen and a God fearing Christian. I love how he ends his letter with humbleness and hope for a nation to become united

## References

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