

**Analysis of Argument: “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

1. Read the letter addressed to King. What is the rationale for asking “outsiders” to refrain from demonstrating in Birmingham? List the main points presented in the letter.
2. Dr. King begins his response by justifying his reasons for being in Birmingham. He presents an argument through analogy by comparing his situation to that of the Apostle Paul. How does that analogy help justify his presence in Birmingham? Is it an appropriate analogy?
3. A further argument in support of his presence in Birmingham is the “interrelatedness of all communities and states.” Explain.
4. King then describes the four basic steps to a nonviolent campaign. Why does he state that “we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action” in Birmingham? Provide examples.
5. How does he address the counter-argument that negotiation alone is “a better path”?
6. Why is nonviolent civil disobedience needed? Why shouldn’t they “wait”? How does King justify their impatience? Discuss the anecdotal evidence presented. Is it effective?
7. How does King justify breaking the law? What laws should be broken?
8. How does he differentiate between a just and an unjust law? Compare King’s reasoning with Thoreau’s (“Resistance to Civil Government”).
9. How does King address the counter-argument that disobedience of the law leads to anarchy?
10. King presents another Biblical analogy to further justify civil disobedience. Explain
11. How does King address the concerns of the Birmingham clergymen that describe his measures as “extreme”?
12. King discusses his disappointments with “white moderates” and the white churches. How does his frustration with these groups contribute to the justification of his actions in Birmingham?
13. Toward the end of the letter, King presents another Biblical analogy to support his argument. Explain.
14. Review the letter from the clergy to King. Does he successfully address their concerns and refute or qualify their arguments? Compose an outline of King’s letter.

OVER PLEASE

Constructing an Argument: “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

Directions: Under each point presented by the Alabama clergymen, list King’s arguments.

1. Racial injustice in Birmingham is a local matter; outside interference is inappropriate.

2. The demonstrations are “unwise and untimely.”

3. Nonviolent civil action is unlawful and unjustified.

4. Nonviolent civil disobedience involves “extreme measures” that could exacerbate racial unrest.

5. Racial injustice is best addressed through negotiation with local leaders and in the courts.