

Artifact:

**“Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King,
Various Publications, 1963.**



You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. . .

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue. . .

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. . . For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. . .

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dark of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; 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, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you no forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness" then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

APUSH Framework Classifications

Period 8: 1945-1980

Key Concept 8.2.I

APUSH Theme/s:

Politics and Power, American and National Identity

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SALLAN

A primary source practice

One important note: Don't think you have to address all of the elements below. That'd be annoying.

Instead, see SALLAN as a sort of menu:
Depending on the artifact, some elements will be more relevant than others.

Source

- +**Context:** What's going on at the time??
 - +**Point of View:** What's relevant re the creator's worldview?
 - +**Purpose:** Why was this source produced?
 - +**Audience:** To whom is the message directed?
- How do these elements impact the artifact's Argument?**

Argument

- +**Main Message:** Argument the creator makes?
- +**Supporting Details:** Specific parts especially relevant to the Main Message?
- +**Underground:** What's going on below the surface? POV, assumptions, tone?

Links (to Content Knowledge)

- +**Broad CK:** Broad CK you can link to this artifact?
- +**Specific CK:** Specific CK you can link to this artifact?

Links (to other Artifacts)

- +**Source Corroboration:** Does another artifact corroborate the Main Message of this artifact?
- +**Source Conflict:** Does another artifact conflict with the Main Message of this artifact?

Analysis?

Explain the historical significance of this artifact by using:

- +1 element from Sourcing.
- +2 other elements of your choice.

New Question?