

King *Letter From a Birmingham Jail* STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why doesn't King consider himself an "outside agitator"? What reasons does he give? Why does King say he has every right to be in Birmingham?
2. From King's perspective, with what were the people who complained about his presence and activities more concerned? Briefly, what do you suppose were the fundamental causes of the protests?
3. What are the four basic steps of any non-violent campaign?
4. Why did King originally postpone the boycotts and marches? Why did he feel that they now couldn't delay any longer?
5. What, in King's view, is good about creating social tension? Who does King mention that did this same thing in his society? How do you suppose the person mentioned accomplished this?
6. What is King's goal for his "direct-action program"?
7. Why didn't King want to wait and see what the new government might be like?
8. What is King's view about the relationship between progress and struggle? Do you think he's right? Explain the dynamic he sees between the ruling class and those who lack privilege? Give some examples from several continents.
9. What does King think is so wrong about telling the oppressed to "wait"? What are some of the examples he gives? Have you ever faced discrimination or had similar feelings?
10. What is King's rationale for breaking laws? How does he distinguish between two different kinds of laws? Be sure to say what constitutes each.
11. In your own opinion, if King is correct about how difficult is to change the status of the oppressed, why shouldn't violent means be used to accomplish this instead of non-violent ways? Isn't the use of non-violent means the same as "waiting"?
12. What makes segregation unjust and therefore "morally wrong and sinful"? Does this same guideline apply to other problems (or perceived problems) in our society? Abortion rights? Affirmative action?
13. Begin reconstructing King's argument. First, find all the conclusions he reaches. Next, find all the relevant premises he adduces. Try your best to formulate King's argument in Standard Argument Form (numbered premises, etc). We'll go over his argument (and other civil and human rights arguments) in class.