

# Odyssey Oracle

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## Channeling Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Summarizing "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

In his letter from Birmingham jail, Dr. King seeks to respond to concerns that came to him in the form of a letter from eight Alabama clergymen. They felt that he was an outside agitator coming into their area and stirring up trouble without first giving the region time to allow the community to make the needed changes. They also felt that Dr. King was not allowing the local and federal courts to do their job of mandating the end of segregation. He was accused of being "unwise and untimely." Dr. King wrote this famous missive after he had participated in a civil rights demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama, and was arrested. He responded to this letter from his liberal peers while in a jail cell.

In his letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. King responds to the criticisms. First, he clarified that he did not consider himself an



outsider because what happens in one part of the U.S. has an effect on all parts. He also let them know that he was there by the request of the local affiliate of the Alabama Christian Movement for human rights to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program. Dr. King also reiterated his personal motive, which was that he was going to be wherever injustice could be found. He compared himself with the Apostle Paul, who carried the gospel of Jesus far and wide, saying, "I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my hometown." He goes on further to talk to the truth of the police brutality, lack of justice in the courts, bombings of black properties, and the inability of Negro leaders to have effective negotiations with their white counterparts. With promises made and broken once again, the decision was made to use bodies in the place of words. King's feelings were that people who are segregationists at heart do not want change and must be faced with conditions that will force them to realize that change is going to happen.

It is interesting to note that people did not just run out in the streets to protest. There were steps and methods to determine if direct action was needed. This included a determination of injustices, as well as workshops and trainings on how to resist nonviolently even when being attacked.

When responding to the accusation of being untimely, Dr. King queried as to how long people were to be brutalized and lynched, walking around scared. At what point is too much too much? Dr. King says in his letter that "we must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right." Some white moderates disappointed Dr. King in part because of their willingness to wait for the right time and their

inability to empathize with those who had been oppressed for so long. They seemed not to see that time was not going to heal or change those who were content with the status quo. White moderates wanted to wait or take things slowly, but black people were just done with waiting.

In the end of his letter Dr. King speaks directly to religious institutions and their leaders. He despairs of their silence in the face of unspeakable horrors and injustices. He lays blame at their doorsteps for their silent sanction of things as they are and holds them complicit with those committing sins against the Negro people. He accuses the church of being weak, yet he also acknowledges those who have broken ranks with those who would do nothing or murmur platitudes, often with the consequence of being ejected from their congregations. The presence of these white religious people witnessing side by side provides hope and sustenance to the movement.

Interestingly enough, Dr. King seems to know in his heart that this movement that coalesces around him will be successful, even without the assistance of the church. He writes that "we will reach the goal of freedom . . . because the goal of America is freedom." (**Billie Kelsey**)

In "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Dr. King uses various techniques to relate to his accusers that say he has no business in Birmingham and is only agitating a non-issue with his "outside presence."



First off, Dr. King addresses his accusers as "Fellow Clergymen." This is important because he has already established that he and his accusers are equal men of good faith, even the same faith... Knowing that many of his accusers are Christian followers, Dr. King uses the stories of the Old and New Testament to persuade his accusers that he was there for all the right reasons. For the non-believers, believers of other faiths and historians, Dr. King uses multiple sources to relate to the people that will read this letter: Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, Socrates, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obeying the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, Hitler and World War II, etc.



Possibly his best quotes in the reading are “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” and “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” I truly believe these two sentences sum up the entire article.

Now Dr. King sets the foundation for why the protest came to action. He took the four steps to prevent these measures: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action. When Dr. King and his supporters felt that negotiation had run its course with miniscule results, they non-violently sprang into action with some good old fashioned civil disobedience: marches, sit-ins, and boycotts. Dr. King goes on to talk about the timing of the direct actions...

I would agree with St. Augustine: “An unjust law is no law at all.” Dr. King used this quote to advocate breaking the law. He uses the example that Hitler’s laws were legal during World War II but following those laws would have been a moral sin; he would not have followed them...

**(Run Barlow)**

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. along with others marched into Birmingham to protest the segregation laws. All were arrested. From this, fellow clergymen composed a letter criticizing the protests, stating they were “unwise and untimely.” The letter appeared in the Birmingham newspaper. Martin Luther King, Jr. responded with “A Letter from Birmingham Jail” not only to the clergy but sending his message across the nation and gaining the support of the majority group, also known as middle class America... He wanted to prove his intent was not to encourage violence but to fight through negotiation for the freedom of all.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote on several issues within his letter, including the claims made against him by these religious figures. He stated that what was happening here was affecting the whole country. In his letter he used many examples showing that anyone who believed in the Bible could understand and relate. He explained everything needed to hold a peaceful

protest. He laid out the basis for anyone who wanted to be involved. He stated the issues that he was protesting. His letter overall was an attack, but a nonviolent one... Birmingham officials and businessmen didn’t do as they said, and the store owners had not removed the racial signs from their stores. This all led to the demonstration. The Easter holiday was the second largest shopping season and was chosen by the protesters as the best time to bring pressure to those store owners. He continued with how this plan was postponed many times due to the upcoming elections, but protesters felt it couldn’t wait any longer. . . . Martin Luther King, Jr. attacked the accusation of him as a law-breaker... Laws are made to protect, not punish and degrade. He expressed concern that if changes are not made, violence will erupt...

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote this letter in such a heartfelt and non-offensive voice. He ended his letter stating that he still holds faith and hopes that all prejudice will soon be a thing of the past.

**(Michele Withers)**



...Martin Luther King goes into the facts about the hard and brutal events that are happening in Birmingham, such as having more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches than in any city in the nation. Birmingham also was the most segregated city in the U.S.... As Martin Luther King once had discussed, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issues. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored." The purpose of direct action is to create a situation that is so crisis-packed that it can open the door to negotiation... (**Shaquida Johnson**)



Since my time spent here in the Birmingham jail, certain accusations have been made about our demonstrations and activities. The reason behind the peaceful demonstrations and rallies is because every man deserves a right to the American dream



of peace, freedom, and justice. My heart is bleeding for the African American people who have for years faced ugly racism. The nonviolent protesting is a must. We have to take a stand to injustice. Change has to take place today; Birmingham needs to change its community through calls for unity and brotherly love. The Holy Bible talks about letting brotherly love abide. . . .

The peaceful marches are done so our white brothers can see the strength we could all have being united in our country called the United States of America. There is a known truth that united we stand and divided we fall. Working together hand and hand can be more than just a thought but reality. Life is too short to be spent cheating your brother or slaying your brother; we learned that from Cain and Abel. Has God favored you over me, or have we been called together to build this country in unity?

As I write this epistle, we cry aloud the wrongs and injustice of this country. It is time to reach for a new horn, a horn of righteousness, and blow it aloud to let freedom ring from rooftop to rooftop. We deserve the right to attend topnotch universities as well as private schools. We the Negro people are productive and a thinking people. We are not dumb, untrained creatures.

I leave the plea of freedom with you today as well as the King of Glory. The Bible says, "My heart is indicting a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalms 45:1). With this letter, change is coming. (**Kenya Moses**)

. . . When he was put in jail in Birmingham, the whites' statement was that their "present activities were unwise and untimely" (p. 84). Instead of getting angry, Dr. King called the white men of "genuine goodwill." Dr. King didn't want to use any violence whatsoever. He even had an organization where they would gather around and communicate, called the "Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights" (p. 84). The reason why Dr. King was in





Birmingham is because he was afraid of what might occur, such as violence. He was trying to tell not just the whites but the blacks that they are destined to be together and must come together and join forces. Dr. King's four basic steps are collection of the facts to determine whether injustice is alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action (p. 85). Following these steps can prevent their community from falling apart. **(Linda Thao)**

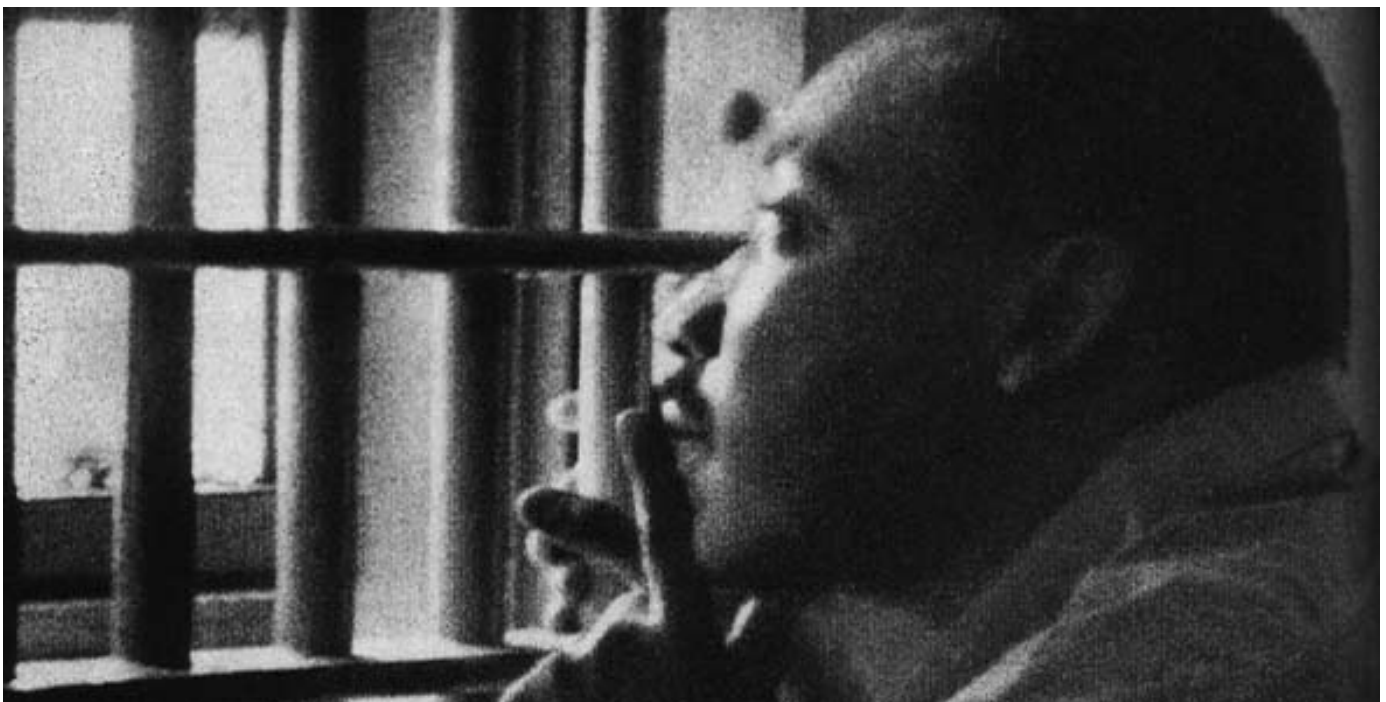
### Analyzing the Language of "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Martin Luther King, Jr. used a variety of literary techniques when writing "Letter from Birmingham Jail." He used allusions quite a lot in this letter. An allusion is a casual reference; an incidental mention. On p. 84 of "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King referenced Apostle Paul of Tarsus. Paul left his village of Tarsus to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. King left his hometown of Atlanta, GA to carry the gospel of freedom of Negroes. On p. 89, King references the words of the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber when he talks about how segregation is morally, politically, economically and sociologically wrong. On p. 90, when he talks



about civil disobedience, King references Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and how they did not obey the laws of King Nebuchadnezzar. On p. 93, King mentioned Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement when talking about the bitterness and hatred felt by black nationalist groups. On p. 94, King referenced Jesus, Amos, John Bunyan, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson when speaking on the subject of extremists. On p. 98, King referenced the Pilgrims at Plymouth and Thomas Jefferson signing the Declaration of Independence when he talked about how our Negro foreparents were in this country before the aforementioned events took place. On p. 99, King referenced T.S. Eliot when he talked about the way the Birmingham policemen used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of flagrant racial injustice. Martin Luther King, Jr. used allusions in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to get his message across to all people. He wanted people from all nationalities and religious backgrounds to see that his fight for freedom of Negroes was similar to all of the people or groups that he mentioned in "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

Parallelism is the act of comparing one thing to another. On p. 88, King used parallelism when he stated, "The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet like speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy



pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.” On p. 89, King compared just and unjust laws: “Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.” Martin Luther King, Jr. used parallelism in “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to clarify the difference between one act or event from another.

Alliteration is the repetition of the same initial letter or sound in two or more nearby words. On p. 87, King used alliteration when he stated we needed to rise from the “dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.” On p. 97, King wrote of the “dark dungeons of complacency.” Martin Luther King, Jr. used alliteration to emphasize his statements.

Metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a direct comparison without using like or as. On p. 97, King used metaphors when he stated, “In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.” King used metaphors so people could see what he was talking about. In this instance, you can actually picture a thermometer and a thermostat and know that they both have something to do with temperature.

Of all of the literary techniques that King used to write “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” I think that the allusions were most persuasive. King was smart to reference and mention other famous acts and persons to get his message across to people of all races and religions. (Marcia Brown)

### **Demanding that “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” Become Required Reading in Madison Schools**

Dear Madison Metropolitan School Board,

As an African American citizen with the honored privileges I have been blessed to attain, I am grateful for the nonviolent fight to which Martin Luther King, Jr. dedicated himself. As a result of Martin Luther King’s unwavering hope of equality for Negroes, I was able to obtain my A.A.S degree from the Martin Luther King, Jr. College



in Chicago, Illinois. Before the Odyssey Project, I hadn’t read or heard of “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” It is most unfortunate that this letter was not brought into my history class in the Chicago Public School System. My history teachers briefly spoke of Martin Luther King and the “I Have a Dream” speech but did not convey the significance of the Negro struggle. I am a 50-year-old African American adult that has been deprived of the right and honor that surely would have come from having the knowledge and understanding of the pain and suffering that Negroes encountered before my time.

I believe the Madison Metropolitan School Board should make the emotionally powerful, eloquent, yet truthful letter a requirement for all students to read. Students should be given the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and compassion given to its readers, enabling them to get a clear understanding of the struggle of the African American people in a time of cruelty and injustice.

This letter will give students the opportunity to read a great piece of literature. It will surely give them a better understanding of Martin Luther King’s desire for all men to be treated with respect as well as his hope for equal rights. This letter has the power to spark a flame of passion in the hearts and minds of the students who read it, giving them the encouragement to stand up for their rights and beliefs without the fear of negative responses forged with ignorance and brutality that Martin Luther King faced. It will give them the push in making an informed decision as to how they choose to live.

This letter explains with great detail the injustice, brutality, and bitterness that Negroes faced from the “white moderates,” as King calls them in this letter. King also explains the importance of “just” and “unjust” laws, making this a significant form of teaching with the light of sinful and immoral acts against any of God’s children. This letter should be used as a tool to enhance the importance of the many sacrifices and dedication that Martin Luther King endured and the confrontational criticisms he received while fighting the nonviolent fight for equal rights...

Dr. King’s powerful letter will teach students in Madison schools the importance of not doing an evil for an evil; it will further enhance the

understanding of evil as an injury to man. King was totally committed to truth and justice for all with the hopes of making a better life for all of God's children, not just the African American people of this nation.

This letter is a vital part of American History and should be discussed in schools around the world. The fact that we have an African American President in the White House is a direct result of the unselfishness and sacrifices made by Dr. King, an unwavering man, a kind and gentle man with pure determination, a man considered to be a gadfly, a man willing to accept the consequences of his actions in his efforts to obtain justice and equality for all. The students will certainly come to the realization that the truth cannot be pushed away or hidden. They will come to know of Martin Luther King's integrity, morals, and uprightness and to see him as one who did prevail, giving proof that any goal set forth in life is attainable with the greatest of sacrifice and the giving of his life.

My son is a sixth grade student in the Middleton Cross Plains School District. Before middle school, his teachers did not speak in detail of Martin Luther King, Jr.; in fact, the school did not accept or

acknowledge Martin Luther King's birthday as a holiday, saying that the students did not get that day off. I kept my son home from school that day. As a result, I was given a phone call upon his return to school. I was verbally reprimanded for keeping him home and told that he would have to make up the missed day at some point. Not only was I insulted, but I was very disturbed by the school's inability to accept my decision as an African American. I was so disturbed that I questioned if my son should remain in the school as a student. I made it clear that I did not feel confident in the school's ability to teach my son African American History; I went as far as exploring the option of home schooling my son.

The power in the message given by Martin Luther King, Jr. in this letter is vital to the significance of the struggle, pain, suffering, and injustice in which African Americans were treated. Madison students should be educated and given the opportunity to understand the importance of African American History. This letter will enlighten the students and maybe some will become gadflies on their way to living their lives with great morals and integrity. (**Phyllis Anderson**)



In the hopes of broadening our youths' horizon of understanding and helping them gain vital lifelong conflict resolution skills, I humbly submit the full text of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" for your consideration and approval as required reading for all students of the Madison Metropolitan School District prior to graduation.



Dr. King's innovative and successful campaign of non-violent civil resistance to the unlawful practice of segregation demonstrates how the positive tools of compassion, determination, and peaceful persistence may be utilized to overcome surmounting opposition to just and righteous causes. The letter effectively defends his position, ideas, and goals both eloquently and passionately. The letter explains the decision to employ direct action tactics in order to acquire the rights given to all men and women and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, and it demonstrates that such action was taken responsibly.

I believe that there is much to learn about the human condition and the will of those suffering from injustice to rise above intolerance and truly be free. As American citizens we have been guaranteed by the Constitution certain unalienable rights; Dr. King's movement has brought to light the underlying tension that festered within our beloved America. Through his work and that of others, they were able to show the injustice for what it is and effectively deal with it as a society.

I hope you find the letter as inspirational and invigorating as I have and will allow the future generation to learn from such a gifted and selfless teacher as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (**Keith Johnson**)

Growing up and receiving my primary education through the Madison Metropolitan School District, I have fond memories of various teachers tackling the complex subjects of the Civil Rights movements and various other aspects of black history.



Being an African American, I was proud to learn of the past struggles and contributions my ancestors made to the United States. As I grew older, I began to appreciate the fact that black history is also American history. . . .

As noble as the efforts of the Board of Education are in regard to these matters, the course material requisitioned on African American studies seems to pale in comparison to the broader, more detailed scope of the African American experience. As a child of Dane County, I recall academic discussions entailing a very plain and systematic course consisting of what many in society would consider a basic overview of black history. This usually consisted of samples (not in its entirety) of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, discussion of the Underground Railroad and of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycotts, and a handful of documentaries on civil rights and civil disobedience. Although these events and subjects are important in history and played invaluable roles





in the fight for civil equality, many high school graduates the nation over leave their respective school systems with a basic watered down version of black history, with fragmented knowledge of who, what, when, where, and how. This epidemic of lackluster copy and paste academia has left generations of African American students deprived of other crucial, pivotal writings, speeches, events, and people whose influence and rebellious audacity proved just as groundbreaking and revolutionary as the more famous poster children of black history. According to the 2008 report “Given half a chance: The Schott 50 state report on Public Education and black males executive summary,” Wisconsin graduated fewer black males, with “a 40 point gap in how effectively black males are educated” (blackboysreport.org). Obviously there are major, fundamental gaps in the educational rearing of black students and our children as a whole.

Recently I was introduced to a piece of writing called “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This letter, to the best of my recollection, was never introduced into K-12 studies.

This letter is a challenging literary read composed at the apex of the civil rights struggle in the South. Dr. King’s eloquent references to past social struggles through the timeless work of Socrates and Mohandas Gandhi present a man who was more complex and studious than just his famous four-word slogan of “I have a dream.” This letter invokes various literary devices and demonstrates a powerful command of the English language with the sensitivity of a poet; we see a glimpse of black history rarely presented in American classrooms today. His dealing with local and federal governments, along with the inner workings of little known civil rights agencies, sometimes has been all but lost to history’s pages.

I believe closing our achievement gap between black and white students in America first begins with a concrete and uninhibited version of history, not just quick trivial facts printed on McDonald’s cups during the month of February. In his letter, Dr. King states that “History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom gave up their privileges voluntarily.” How little have we progressed since then? In America today,

the privileged, whether earned or not, walk away with diplomas and degrees while the poor and disadvantaged make do with a mediocre education. 13% of the American population is African American, and within that number 40% of us are behind bars, according to the Bureau of Justice and Statistics. Ironically, a letter from a formerly incarcerated black man is the catalyst to keeping many more black men from behind bars and back behind books. (**Brandon McCarey**)

I suggest that all high school students prior to graduation read the full “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr. The reason why these students should read this letter is because Martin Luther King states the main problem of what was going on in Birmingham from his point of view. He experienced injustice in a raw and brutal way. I believe what happened in the 1950s and 1960s was true, and so will each student after reading this extraordinary letter.

The part that catches me in the letter is when he said, “I hope that white moderates would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice, and that when they fail to do this they become dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.” This means that the laws are here for justice, not for injustice. The system needed a change, and Martin Luther King, Jr. had to let the world see and believe that our laws needed to be correct and fair for all people—not only whites, but blacks and every other race that exists. (**Jesse Hamilton**)

As I am reflecting on the progress that our nation has made concerning our society dealing with racial prejudice, tears and emotions begin to flood my spirit. Today, as an African American woman who is allowed to work in the same place as a Caucasian female without being belittled, I feel overwhelmed. The fact that all races are allowed to go to school together without fear of being beaten or spat upon



is mind blowing. I believe that our children these days are spoiled and do not know the true meaning of affliction, sacrifice, or determination when faced with a little issue called the color of your skin or difference in how you look. I think our children need to fully know what it really means to fight for what you believe in. Black History today is still not fully recognized for its full potential or importance to our society for its impact on diversity and nationality...

For this reason, all high school students should be made to read completely Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" before graduating. I believe they would have more appreciation for the diploma they will receive once they have knowledge of the struggle it took to get to where we are today. I wonder how the students would feel about walking up on stage to get their diploma if they were stopped by a sign reading "For whites only." How many students would be eliminated from the ceremony? This is one of the obstacles African Americans had to deal with just to go into a store or even just to get some water or use the bathroom. Think about how you would react. Would you fight back with words or with your hands, or would you just remain silent? Every student should be made to read this letter from the Birmingham jail—yes sir, every one—before graduating. **(Lorraine Garrett)**

...This letter should be read at every high school graduation because it will strongly influence us with its message of nonviolence and with our need to eliminate so much injustice that our families struggle with in the world. We do not spend enough time to review all the messages of our "philosophers," and we don't have the courage to do what they did. We should think more about them in order to be better citizens and to open our hearts. **(Elvira Rodriguez)**

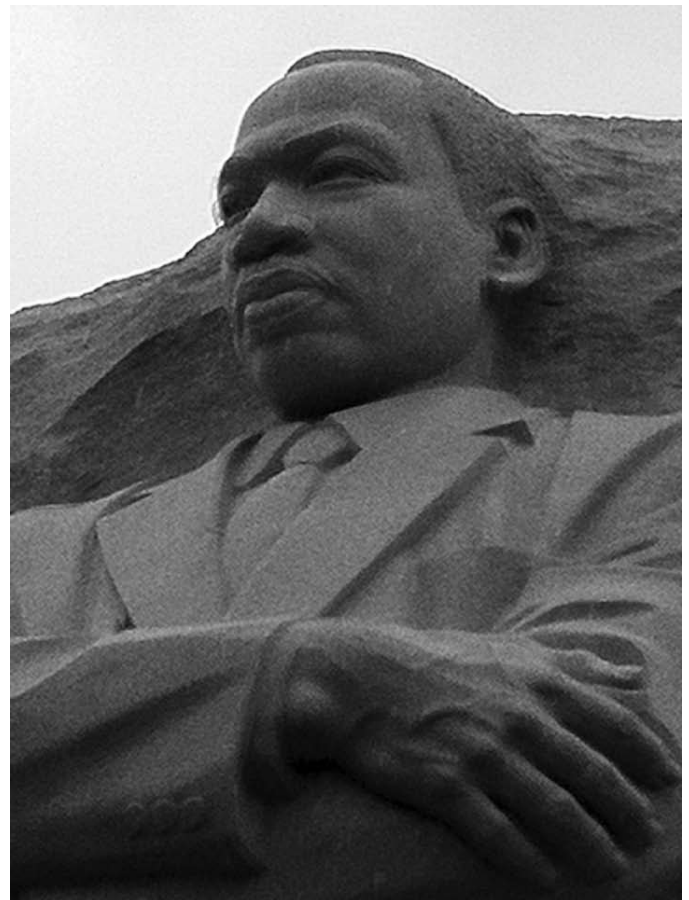


**Dear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,**

It is a privilege and an honor to write this letter to you. After reading your eloquent "Letter from a

Birmingham Jail," I had to write a letter directly to you to thank you for writing to the clergymen, proving to them who you are and what you stand for. . . . I see your anger, I see your laughter, I see that you can even make war with the white clergymen, but like Socrates you responded in peace. Socrates knew no matter what he said, it would not stop the Athenians from taking action to kill him. Like Socrates, you stood for what you stood for and didn't move. You didn't back down. **(Marilyn Johnson)**

...I understand how true your letter's message still is today, 49 years later. There are times in my own life when I realize the chasm between now and then isn't as great, and I both continue to wait for a better time and a less superior villain. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is much of what you imagined, wouldn't you agree? I speak of our President. He attended the best schools and took every advantage of what is made available, in spite of the odds of those who would oppose his birth by



laws or opinion. Some days I would love to write to some of the senators and congressmen and advise them that their white spots are showing and their George Wallace accents are loud. The President is a much maligned victim of a white superiority mentality, but a victor and recipient of the sacrifices of you and others.

I thank you for your willingness to go beyond state borders, which might as well have been foreign borders in the South, to make known what was happening in Birmingham as an abomination not only to God's word but to our great Constitution. I'm sure you're keeping up with what's happening in Wisconsin and how outsiders are being accused of causing Scott Walker's recall, as if once again state borders blind one to injustice.

Your statement about a "five year old asking why do white people treat colored people so mean" has given way in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to my nephew asking me at five years old, "Why do they treat the brown kids differently?" My heart just broke at having to give an answer, just like the heart of the father in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a five year old. I'm sure you had assumed we'd be much further along now. . . . You challenged men's allegiance to this country and God with your words of true justice.

I can no longer sit back and just watch as my brothers and sisters fall. Because of your encouragement and example, I will speak up when I see wrong is there and when I see a way to help. I will never fall again into the "ominous cloud of inferiority." (**Yetta Harris**)

You spoke about the nonviolent campaign with four ways of going forth in a respectful and law abiding way to resolve the issues in Birmingham. . . . Bombing Negro homes and our churches is an act of horrific violence. I'm not sure why there is so much hatred toward the Negro race. They arrest us for speaking our minds, refusing to obey their laws, and needing to be free! How do we get past this? But here they are getting away with terrible acts! Yes, we do need a formula for freedom.

We ask for the freedom to sit in the same classrooms as the Whites. We ask for the right to

be able to go to the same stores as the Whites, as well as the freedom for our children to be a part of the simple things that children want growing up as kids. Why should we have to explain racism to young, innocent children when the only difference we all have is color? We are all human! Having to explain this to your own children must have been a challenge. I commend you on this!

We can't overlook such extreme instances. Being treated unfairly will forever be imbedded into our minds, hearts, and souls! I feel that we should follow in Jesus's footsteps and become extremists of Love, Truth, and Goodness; maybe others will follow. From then on, all segregation will cease, and peace will come to us all. The need for power will be no more. All will be forgiven. Respect will flow naturally. I know this is your goal, Dr. King. The fight has just begun for us all... (**Arnella Royal**)

Before reading your work, I was somewhat familiar with the term "civil disobedience"; however, I never understood how to apply it as an effective action to get a suitable result for a particular issue.

I am thrilled to have learned from your essay the four basic steps to determine if racial injustice is present in a community.

I am so excited to have learned the example of what is a just law and an unjust law. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, "an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust." After reading your "Letter from Birmingham Jail," I want to thank you for having compassion for the struggle of African American people.

Your letter is a special document that demonstrates your skill of organizing people to use non-violence to promote a positive change. Thank you. Your contribution to the struggle of human rights, in my opinion, offers the blueprint for future struggles on issues of inequality in America today. Again, thank you. (**Abraham Thomas**)

. . . You and I have a lot in common, such as I am a minister as well and have spent much time in jail,



though my sentence was not for helping others but helping myself. This is all in the past, and I am a new man. I also hate injustice...

You said something so powerful: "I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities" while people are suffering. It reminds me of how the Catholic Church stood by and watched all the Jews get slaughtered but said nothing.

The world, the church, and all who are seeking righteousness must stamp out evil and injustice such as racism. My brother, I truly feel your heart. Peace in Jesus's name.

**(Minister Eugene Smalls)**

...I understand why you seldom respond to people's criticism of your work and ideas, but I am very happy you did respond to the clergymen's criticism because your brothers and sisters needed to know your feelings and what has been brought to your attention. Because you responded with this powerfully worded letter, the hateful people were shown the struggles and the brutality we were painfully fighting against for our future generations.

What about now in 2012 where there is still racism, hatred, poverty, drugs, gang violence, and my biggest concern: the fact our children are still not able to have a good education or have to wait until they get to college to learn more of your work and ideas? Yes, a lot of things have been terminated, but there still is a lot that needs to be done with our own people. Families have lost the meaning of morals and values. The highest age of a grandmother now is 35. Where are the Big Mamas, Nanans, and Grandmas? I have seen so much disrespect with teenagers that I am scared for my African American sisters and brothers. If we don't get it together, our heritage, history, and your work and ideas will have been wasted. Where are all the strong leaders like you were? Barack Obama cannot change this world by himself.

Thank you, Dr. King, for your inspirational



words, but someone needs to step up and do the right thing.

**(Nkechi Johnson)**

I would first like to thank you for your determination and dedication to equality and justice for all. Your national leadership is valiantly grasped by all who see and hear you. The trials and tribulations you've endured have opened everyone's eyes on your important quest for justice. I find your understanding and handling of the social injustices and prejudices of the South to be simply amazing. You've been solid in thought and action. Dr. King, I've come full circle with your way of thinking. . . . Thank you also for opening my eyes to key factors that sustain some of these injustices. For example, you mention that you stand in the "middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community." . . . It is time we all act in a nonviolent way to get your way of thinking into law. . . .

Your words motivate and give a great deal of hope. Your willingness to be jailed for something you believe in makes me believe in you. . . . It's time to rise up and let our voices be heard.

Lastly, sir, this word "wait" has really motivated me nonviolently. For this type of word to be used in such a situation as segregation really upsets me. The fact that you had to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park shown on TV has me packing my bags. Also the fact that your young daughter is developing a serious sense of inferiority in her little world saddens me deeply. But mainly the fact that policemen down there are "brutally kicking, cursing, and killing our brothers and sisters with impunity" has got to stop.

So I am writing to you to let you know we are on our way. I am bringing a small force of positive brothers down to Birmingham, Alabama. I can no longer sit back; I've got to help. Dr. King, we are on our way to aid and assist. Once down there, I want to personally take full advantage of this moment. I will take "freedom rides," I will march, I will stand, cheer, scream, sing, or whatever else I have to do to change this segregated way of thinking, to open the



eyes of the blind and to awaken the ears of the deaf. You only live once. So I'm putting myself fully into this fight for justice. I appreciate all you do for the world, Dr. Martin Luther King. Lastly in your words, "Justice too long delayed is justice denied." Dr. King, . . . we are on our way! (**Terry Hart**)

My dearest brother, Martin Luther King, Jr... I want to talk to you about me, myself, and my family. After all, my praising you and your work... would be small to a giant of a man full of character deemed Christ-like. It would be small to a giant of a man with worldwide recognition. It would be small to a man who today could easily repeat and/or three-peat as winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Therefore, as small as I am to a giant of a man as you, I simply would like to tell you a little about myself and pray for your spiritual take and advice on things.



After reading your "Letter from Birmingham Jail," I was forced to look in the mirror, I was forced to reevaluate, and ultimately I was forced to repent, not because I am a worker of iniquity but because I am not fully exercising the faith by way of full action.

What I mean by this is although we as a people have come a long way from you and your forefathers' initial struggles with slavery and segregation, we still have yet to commit to unity and truly overcome. In 2012 we still have clergymen like those who criticized you. We still have those that are complacent and full of narcissism, not willing to stand arm in arm with their fellow man to defeat or even acknowledge the trickery and deceit of the enemy. We still have those that give glory to God on Sunday and blaspheme His name in every way possible Monday through—wait a minute, I shall say Sunday evening through the next Sunday morning. . . .

Finally there is "me," one of those who stand by and do nothing. Yes Doctor, I, Juba Moten, stand by and do nothing. I have no legitimate excuse; therefore, I will not attempt to spawn one.

I cried when I read your letter, and I cry as I write this letter, because I can't help but wonder if I would have stood by your side and witnessed

the elderly and young being pushed and flogged. I cry because I wonder if I would have remained by your side after being a spectator of the countenance of those basically being eaten alive by dogs. I cry because most of my life I stood for mischief, fruitless affairs against my brothers and fellow man, to the point of brutal measures, for what?

But today, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I cry because I am cleansing myself in preparation of taking on the task of doing something to fully accomplish your dream of freedom, for nothing has touched me more than your letter from Birmingham Jail with the exception of the passion of Christ.

Dr. King, you are golden, a glow of infinity that will light the lives, minds, souls, spirits, and hearts of many forever. Frederick Douglass, Socrates, Martin Luther, W.E.B. Dubois, and I, Juba O. Moten, and many, many more stand hand in hand, arm in arm with you on that glorious Judgment Day as we all will be praised and allowed into heaven because we're "extremists"—extremists of love, that is! As you emphasized, why wait? Now is the time! (**Juba Moten**)

. . . What amazed me most was how you marched and protested using a nonviolent direct-action movement while the police and other white men beat you and let their dogs bite you and then locked you up, didn't feed you, and got even angrier when you were singing or praying together.

You have a lot of heart because, Dr. King, I think I would have lashed back out at them. Knowing I was not going to win, I would have lost twice...

It was smooth how you flipped those knuckleheads calling you an extremist by asking them "was so and so an extremist?" Here are some, like when you wrote, "Was not Jesus an extremist of love?" And you wrote about John Bunyan and Abraham Lincoln. . . . You marching in the southern streets helped make freedom possible.

Some of us at times do not take advantage of what your generation has blessed us with by fighting for our rights. Now I hope you can help out my fellow gangbangers and thugs because it seems they act like they don't know it was an even harder





struggle before whatever they are calling a struggle now. Then it was like we almost had no rights as black people. Now they're willing to throw their rights out the window quicker than a blink of an eye and are proud to have an arrest record, not knowing their great-great-grandparents didn't even have the rights to their birth records.

Now, Dr. King, this is the saddest thing I can end with. We used to fear the white man; now we fear each other. I just wish one day now we can stop killing each other. Thanks, Dr. King, for the eye opener. I hope to pass along what I have learned from your letter.

**(Donta Starr)**

...I envy your courageous and fearless stance towards the nonviolent direct action. I was raised in an environment where racial injustice didn't quite exist but I had to deal with physical injustice. A chilly feeling ran through my body and I could see goose bumps on my skin when I first read your letter. It normally takes a lot of effort on my part to be so calm when I want to fight back. I cannot hide the fact that it does not come naturally to be so nice to someone who torments and dehumanizes me; therefore, I considered a nonviolent direct action possibly would not be the best option for me. However, after finishing reading your letter, I was compelled to re-visit the methods I use in dealing with issues and challenges that I face on a daily basis to see whether they will cause more harm than good. Your nonviolent direct action proved to be the best method to use because it triggers a relaxed mind, therefore creating and opening doors for negotiations.

In your letter, you mentioned Socrates a couple of times. Socrates "felt the necessity to create tension in the mind of individuals so they could rise from the bondage of myths...." Though society did not like him, Socrates was firm in his beliefs and kept stirring up their minds. You also wrote that "nonviolent tension will lead to growth.... the growth to understanding and brotherhood." I found this statement very powerful and believe this very message should be passed on throughout



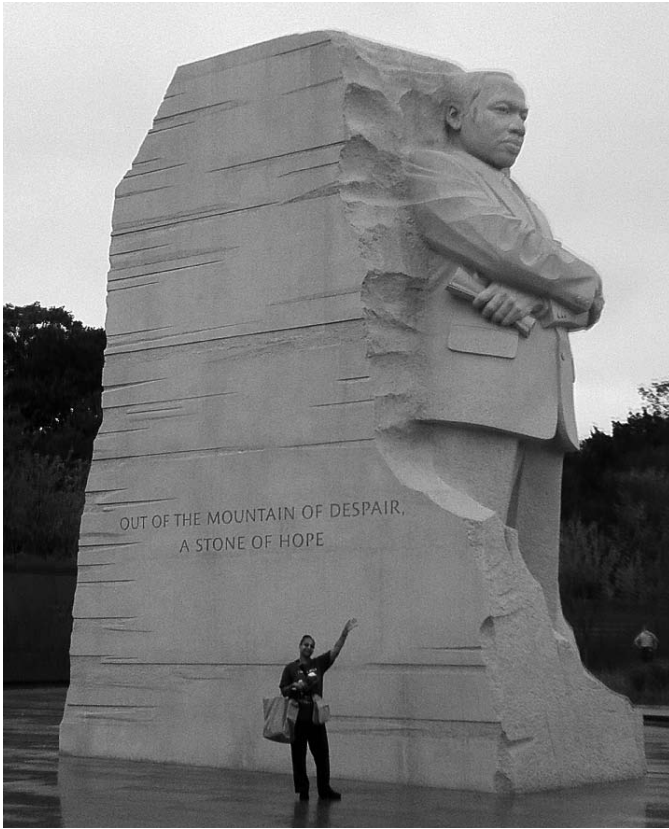
generations, to create a healthier and friendlier community.

Reading the Birmingham Jail letter, I could feel your boldness, fearlessness, and earnestness. Dr. King, you wrote this letter with sincere gravity to awaken a society which was drowning in injustice and racial segregation. An example you gave of early Christians who stood for what they believed gave a very powerful argument of nonviolent direct action: "They were too God-intoxicated to be 'astronomically intimidated'." They did not fight back when they were harassed, tormented or killed, no matter how much punishment they were to receive. This kind of civil disobedience that was practiced proves how unjust the laws were.

You write that the "church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound." I am rather ashamed with the Christian ministers who condemned you as an extremist, for they were the very people who were supposed to give you the support you needed; they had learned the love of God and how to treat their fellow brethren. Injustice was even among the Christians, the white moderates. I am struck greatly with the reverence you showed in this letter while pointing out the very cause of the disease of racial injustice. While your approach was nonviolent, the white men who professed to know and behave better were the very cause of violence. The Birmingham policemen used their brutality and hateful treatment during the demonstrations, attacking unarmed nonviolent Negroes. What an injustice for the white clergymen to praise them for such behavior!

I salute you for having the courage to reveal such injustice in the land that says it is for freedom for all. I like how you exposed injustice with brilliance and passion, bringing immediate attention to cure its cause. You write that, "Just like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light," so "oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever." Dr. King, you have stood so firm in changing this nation because you refused to give up and you did not let frustration and disappointment hinder your success in exposing the injustice and racial segregation in this country.

**(Tatenda Bvindi)**



*Mary Wells '07 visits new King memorial*

I would just like to thank you for writing your letter from Birmingham jail and showing to the world how deep your love and concern for humanity truly goes. It is rare that there is such an individual so caring to others after seeing the worst in them. I agree entirely with your ideas that direct action has to happen now, that the white churches should step in and help end segregation, and that no one should be “condemned” for doing what is morally just and correct.

How can people say that they want desegregation to happen but on its own time? If we leave it up to time, we may just run out. You are correct in saying that “it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say wait.” They don’t have to live every day afraid, wondering if it’s their last. . . . How can we continue to be patient when every day there are people being lynched, beaten, and stripped of their dignity? . . . We both know that the time for justice and fairness is now.



Direct action CANNOT wait.

The white churches indeed are a huge “disappointment” to us both. They allow their pastors and reverends to teach the word of God but do not encourage their congregations to live up to the word of God outside of the church walls. The white churches want “their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law” but not because “integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother.” . . . Jesus said to “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that spitefully use you,” yet the white churches apparently only refer this scripture to their white peers. . . . The white churches need to practice what they preach and help take nonviolent measures to end segregation and create a loving brotherhood of all men. . . .

Why can we not have people’s conscience decide what is morally right and wrong? People who do things because they are the law even though they may be wrong morally are cowards. Anyone who follows your teachings for their own selfish reasons is a disgrace to the purpose you are working towards. . . .

Your nonviolent measures and goal to seek freedom and justice are from the heart. . . . People always condemn those that seek to change the status quo... I agree with you that “one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.” Our society has put into people’s minds that no matter the law, one must obey them all. But how can we as a race, as humanity, obey such laws that discriminate against us not because we are a threat but because of the color of our skin? . . .

Your letter has truly given me hope that the state we are living in can actually change for the better... We will have freedom soon enough, and our brothers and sisters of every race will soon be able to live in a world where equality and justice come before all. (**Tai’Kiah Phillips**)

...Your letter stated that while timing is key, time itself “is neutral” and “can be used either destructively or constructively.” You made me realize that it’s what you do with the time you are given that makes a difference.



You explained why your demonstration was well planned to follow an important election before allowing people to forget the issue or to trust the law to work itself out. You stated multiple times, in many different ways, that “privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily.” I agree with you. I believe that no matter how a person feels about an issue, they sometimes need to be stirred into action. One way of doing this is to create tension. Doing so nonviolently, through marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides, allowed you to keep your morals intact and confirmed your belief that only just laws that “square with the moral law or law of God” should be followed. The kind of laws that resulted in your incarceration are unjust because they “degrade human personality” and were broken “open, lovingly . . . and with a willingness to accept the penalty.”

You also made the point that the demonstrations were not done simply to defy the law but to point out the fact that a major part of the population was frustrated and had lost their faith. It’s quite true that if those “repressed emotions do not come out in . . . nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence.” Nonviolent demonstrations offer a more positive way to deal with the despair that was felt while also working towards negotiation. Negotiation means an end to living in “monologue rather than dialogue” and working towards unity. Unity means a better life and more happiness for all involved.

...The visual images you created made it feel more like reading a poem than a letter. Whether you were discussing “depressing clouds of inferiority” or saying we are all “tied in a single garment of destiny,” I was able to feel the emotions attached to your words. Your letter was extremely long but not redundant. I especially like the paragraph towards the end where you apologized for the length of the letter. I took that as a little sarcastic, almost as if you were saying, “Sorry for inconveniencing you with this long letter that I wrote while sitting in a jail cell for breaking a foolish law.” Your idea of dialogue versus monologue goes along perfectly with the way I try to raise my children. It means that a person doesn’t have to agree fully with what another is saying, but as long as the two are discussing it together, there is the option to work

out an agreement that both parties can live with. The most important idea that I got from your letter is that we all live in this world together, and it would be best to view others as our brothers and sisters.

**(Katie Pruitt)**

**Dear lazy friend,**

It shames me that you’re too lazy to read “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. This is the man who did his part for the movement for desegregation. This man, with others, walked roads and rode buses to fight for your freedom. If it weren’t for him, you wouldn’t have been able to lie on your sofa watching cable and playing video games. His leadership for non-violence was cutting edge for his time. It’s his and others’ self-sacrifice that made it possible for us to be free. Do you like being called a nigger? Would you like not to be able to sit and eat at a lunch counter or to go to the Dells if it only admitted whites? Would you like having to sit at the back of the bus when clearly there are other seats open? This man was put in jail for a peaceful march. He wanted to bring light to unjust laws for Negroes in this nation. Dr. King, like Socrates, stood up for what he believed in and didn’t back down. If you don’t like something that is being told to you, question it. Be a gadfly in the mind of the lawmakers until they question it themselves.

Dr. King didn’t run when times looked bleak. Now if this man could work through hate and racial injustice, you can read his letter. He opened the eyes of a nation to show them how wrong it is to keep a race chained down by injustice, hate, and segregation. He got the Negro people out of their cave to show them that they are not an inferior race. Shame on you, shame on you, if you don’t want to read about the struggle for equality.

**(Samantha East)**



# The Bunny's Dangerous Journey

By Beatriz Mairena- Kellman



In a poor country, a little boy bunny lived with his mom and grandmother. The poverty was so extreme that they had no money even to eat. One day the mother decided to go to a distant and rich country, to work and send money to her son who stayed behind with his grandmother. The mother sent to her son money to buy food, toys and to pay for school so the boy could have a better life. The boy bunny and his mother both missed each other very much. They were both sad to be far apart.

Many years later, when the boy bunny was almost an adult rabbit, he still missed his mother. He was not happy in his poor country without her. He began to doubt that she loved him. He decided to go and see her. He knew that the river trip his mother had taken to go north was very long and very dangerous. There were hungry animals all along the way. Some of them preyed on many, many traveling bunnies.

He hid on a boat that he hoped would take him down the river to where his mother lived. Being on the boat was dangerous. He had to avoid being caught. There were crocodiles in the river that wanted to eat him. There were piranhas in the river that wanted to eat him too. Finding food and water was always difficult. Sometimes it was very hot. At night it was very cold. He got sick and was very hungry, scared and sad over and over again. His clothes were stolen and he had trouble getting new ones. He felt very scared and very lonely, but his strong love for his mother kept him going. Some animals along the way were kind and helped him. Once, after he had been almost eaten by some crocodiles, a good samaritan found him, helped him get to a doctor and fed him until he was strong again. The good samaritan advised him to go back because the trip was just too dangerous. He didn't want to go back.



He had many bad experiences but managed to survive. His love for his mother and his desire to see her were so strong, that he just kept trying and trying. As he was getting close to his mother, he had another terrible encounter with sharks. They left him almost dead again. Once again he was lucky to find friendly animals that helped him.

After many sad and scary experiences, the boy bunny, now an adult rabbit, finally got to the rich country where his mother lived. They were overjoyed to see each other and made a great big hug.

Sadly, it soon became apparent that neither the mother nor the young man rabbit were the same people they had been when the mother left. They had trouble understanding each other, got mad at each other and finally decided to live apart. The now grown boy bunny could not overcome his sadness of feeling that his mother had abandoned him. The mother who had worked very hard under difficult circumstances couldn't understand why the boy felt unloved and didn't appreciate the support she had provided.

The end of the story is happy and sad. Both the mother and the now grown boy rabbit have jobs, places to live and enough to eat. They still have trouble understanding each other. The boy bunny has a baby bunny of his own back in the poor country. The baby's mother is facing the same hard decision that the boy's mother faced years ago.

*Beatriz submitted this children's story to a contest asking for creative responses to Sonia Nazario's Enrique's Journey.*

## Is It Wrong? By Terry Hart

Is it wrong of me  
to want to be free?  
I am a proud Black  
American  
striving to be the best I can  
be.

Is it wrong of me  
to want to read and write?  
What masta don't know . . .  
is we read all night!  
Soon as his bedroom light goes out,  
we start to jump and dance!  
sing and shout!  
Just as soon as night turns morn,  
most will pick cotton, some will pick corn.  
Is it wrong of me, America,  
for wanting to be respected?  
Or are our laws of the land  
at me unjustly directed?  
I have run the race  
and the race has run me.  
I will not tire or quit!  
Nor will he!  
And so today  
I hope and pray  
that when I lie in my grave  
I am finally free  
and not a slave.  
So I ask of you:  
Is it wrong of me  
to want to be free?



## Breaking the Cycle

By Hedi Rudd  
(reprinted from The Madison  
Times)

I open up my mind to my own  
thoughts

Closing out the constant chatter of others  
I see where I have been  
Where I want to be  
The distance is vast

As a child my dreams were also vast  
Nothing seemed off limits  
Time beat on  
I grew and found myself at that age  
Where doubts begin to creep

Am I too old to see my dreams come true?  
Am I too set in my ways to change and grow?  
Have I become sedentary from my desire  
to not repeat the mistakes of the past?

I shake myself  
Open my eyes and realize  
That dreams are for the living  
Limits are for the self-imprisoned  
and I am free to change and grow.

I give that knowledge gift to my own offspring  
so to remove any doubts from their minds  
that they are truly free  
to be whatever and whoever they want to be.  
That is their inheritance  
Free from chains and binding  
They have no excuses  
Only potential



# TV Review: Misfits

## (Super Powers Aren't Just for Heroes!)

By Brandon McCarey

Over the summer of 2011, I was introduced to a British science fiction series entitled “Misfits” which is currently airing on E4, a popular digital station in Britain. The plot revolves around five young offenders in their early twenties who are forced to work in a community service program, where they accidentally obtain super powers after a strange and sudden electric storm. Kelly gains the ability to hear the thoughts of others, Curtis rewinds time after experiencing an immense sense of regret, Alisha possesses the ability to send two people into a sexual frenzy when they touch her skin, Simon can become invisible, and Nathan is granted immortality.

... Their new powers seemed to be a direct physical manifestation of the characters' unique psychological profiles. Alisha's sexually based power stems from her haughty attitude and overtly promiscuous lifestyle. Her abilities now make her virtually untouchable in social settings. After nearly being raped on several occasions, she quickly comes to despise her powers, which in turn causes her to reflect on her vain and shallow lifestyle. She begins searching for a more emotional connection with men rather than sexual. Simon, who is very anti-social and often picked on by the others, turns invisible when he feels ignored or finds himself in stressful social situations. Kelly's power of telepathy stems from her being overly self-conscious and constantly worried about what others think of her. Curtis, the moral character of the group, is plagued by regrets which grant him the ability to time travel to alter the past. Nathan,

the rude, wise cracking, foul mouthed, sex-crazed pervert who was kicked out by his mother and is now living illegally in the community center, becomes immortal due to his boundary issues.

The series in my opinion is very well written, with clever dialogue and unique characters, situations and unforeseen plot twists. The campy, whiz-bang special effects add an element of realism of their super powers, while the character development is thought provoking, creating both memorable lines and deeper looks into what makes these characters tick. . . . Being very much the anti-heroes, the Misfits are not swooping down to save civilians from burning buildings, and they have no colored tights or capes or secret names. The super-powered young adult offenders only want to finish their community service and get back to their normal everyday lives. . . .

This series is currently airing in its third season and can be viewed on Hulu.com by non-British viewers. The ever unfolding drama of “The Misfits” has grown a cult following. The popularity of “Misfits” is purely grass roots and driven by fandom in England and America.

British science fiction is nothing new to me, as I grew up watching series such as “Doctor Who,” “Red Dwarf,” and “The Tomorrow People” and became a fan of television programming from across the pond. In semester one of Odyssey we covered literary works by Charles Dickens, William



Blake, and William Shakespeare. By examining these British classics, you can see how their styles have reincarnated themselves in today's popular British television. The actors in "Misfits" are all well trained thespians of various respected acting academies and colleges throughout England, with training in classical theatrical works such as *Macbeth* and *A Christmas Carol*.

... If you are looking for a show that's very different yet engaging, I would highly recommend "Misfits" for a unique and different television experience. I would like to remind everyone that "Misfits" is rated TV-MA for mature content, for language, sexual situations and violent scenes, so it may not be appropriate for younger viewers.

## Movie Review: The New Heroes

### By Tatenda Bvindi

After watching "The New Heroes," a dramatic series about 14 entrepreneurs, I have often questioned myself: what can stop me from helping the needy? Is it because I am not brave enough or am too scared to face the struggles and challenges that come along? Is it because I lack essential training that is needed to pursue this kind of work? I found the answer is yes, but wait! Odyssey has already started the preparation I need to pursue qualifications that will enable me to become skilled and knowledgeable to be more effective in this kind of work.

A vital lesson I learnt from watching this video is to educate people to use whatever resources they have to preserve their environment and live better lives. An example has been set by Albina Ruiz, who has changed many lives in Pucallpa, Peru. A program she is running called "Health Cities" has turned garbage into money in Pucallpa, creating a cleaner environment and jobs (small compost businesses) that encourage people to grow healthy crops using organic waste and not fertilizers, thereby providing healthier food for their families.

I also found the story of Maria Teresa Leal inspiring. Living in Rocinha, Brazil, she saw people in this compound were encircled in poverty and drug trafficking. Maria noted the gift of sewing and hand crafting in the women of Rocinha. She then started the Sewing and Crafting Project incorporating these women; they now make pieces for fashion shows. This project is helping women in Rocinha to provide food and clothes, and they now can manage to send their kids to school.

Moses Zulu is another passionate individual working tirelessly to provide education to the AIDS orphans of Zambia. He sees a future in these kids and has devoted his life to giving them the most valuable equipment, education, to be better people in the community.

When we talk of poverty, children are most affected in these circumstances. In Thailand, Sompop Jantraka is fighting to stop child prostitution and sex trade by introducing the Daughter Education Program, a program that is helping poor parents send their kids to school instead of selling them into sex industries.

In India, Inderjit Khurana believes in taking school to the poor because they cannot afford to be in school. She has turned train platforms into schools because she knows that education is the strongest tool that can break the cycle of poverty. She sacrifices in most cases, using her own finances to give these kids a purpose in life.

These passionate individuals have ventured into the world with vehement desires to change people's lives. They take it as their duty to educate and provide for the needy. To them, duty has become a delight; sacrifice has become a pleasure. No amount of discouragement, struggles, and challenges will set their minds off attaining their goals of touching people's lives. I am inspired with this kind of

commitment and would love, by God's grace, to be a blessing to many lives in despair.



# My MSO Experience

By Phyllis Anderson

On Sunday, January 22, 2012, my daughter and I attended the Madison Symphony Orchestra at the Overture Center, and what a wonderful performance we saw! We had seating up high, enabling us to see the entire orchestra with each and every instrument used to produce the most beautiful music I've ever heard.

I was completely amazed to see how music director and conductor John DeMain had total command of the artists. Mr. DeMain swayed and rocked along with the beat of the music, causing many in the audience to rock as well. The first half of the concert was about musical memories of travel, composed by Claude Debussy. Mr. Debussy was inspired by his surroundings: the beauty of the land as well as the music he encountered while on a long tour.

I remember the time I went to an orchestra in grade school. It was very boring. I couldn't wait for the concert to be over so we could get back to school. I now have a true appreciation for the orchestra and the twenty-four plus instruments it takes to make the kind of music I was blessed to enjoy.

The notes from the violins seemed to bounce off the walls of the hall. An artist named Jennifer Morgan played a solo on the English horn that was so beautiful, I got chills and teared up. Mr. Paul Haugan played the tuba with such power I could feel the rumble in my seat. The music was upbeat with rhythm and fun. I later read that the music was Spanish.

Then came the special guest: a famous violinist

named Augustin Hadelich. He was absolutely incredible. He played a selection with the orchestra, and his fingers moved so fast that the audience couldn't help but to say "Wow!" after his first selection was

done. He went on to play a solo and proved why he is known to be the violinist with "gorgeous tone" or the one who plays with "fast fingered brilliance." Mr. Hadelich hit a few notes that were high, but there was one note that many in the audience didn't realize a violin could make.

After his performance was done, we took a break and the buzz was all about the brilliance of Mr. Augustin Hadelich and the honor that most felt just seeing his performance.

The concert resumed ten minutes later and we were treated to an exciting performance I'll not soon forget. Every instrument was used and each artist played with vigor, power, and strength from beyond. The room was filled with very loud yet rhythmic music. The violinists' heads and arms were moving to the beat. Anthony DiSanza played percussion (drums) with such force he actually looked tired afterwards.

This was an opportunity I'm truly grateful my daughter and I were allowed to experience. Once again, thank you Emily and donor Carroll Heideman.



# Odyssey Milestones and Moments

## Woody in Wal-Mart

My most exciting moment was getting engaged and how my fiancé, Brian Carroll, went about it. We were in Wal-Mart looking for God knows what, and all of a sudden he went down on his knees and asked



if I'd marry him. I went completely deaf and asked him, "What did you say?"

I said "Yes," and told him to get up quickly. I giggled like a schoolgirl. He told me, "Hurry up. We have to go to the mall so I can get you a ring." I must admit I have the most beautiful white gold 1/3 carat diamond ring ever. I must admit I have been engaged several times, but I have a real keeper this time.

(Yetta Harris)



## Welcome to Honor-Amelia!

Thursday, January 5, 2012: if Amelia "Nana" Gossett were alive today, she would be 109 years old. This day is also the due date for Honor-Amelia Marie Moten, the great granddaughter of the grandmother of mine whom we all called "Nana."



January 5<sup>th</sup> has always been and will always be a day to relish as a token of our love, reverence, and of course "honor" for Amelia "Nana" Gossett's life, long-lived until the age of 96. She was mostly noticed for her love, sweetness, peacefulness, and devoted walk with Christ, her lord and savior, not to mention that Upside-Down Seven-up Cake the whole family enjoyed. If you lived far away from Nana, no need to worry: she would freeze that delicious, mouth-watering, melt in your mouth cake and mail it to you on your birthday. This is just a small thing, a narrow example of the root of January 5<sup>th</sup> and its significance in our family's calendars across the land.



Here it was January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012. At 11:30 AM we entered Meriter Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, luggage in tow. I, a three-time biological father, was aghast and exhilarated at the same time. My youngest daughter, Zuriah, at two years old was energized, jolly, and amazing as always, meaning she was obviously clueless. Then there was Delerria, who was also in an aghast and exhilarated state, giving hugs and kisses and final words of instruction to her 16-year-old and 7-year-old daughters. This heightened my concerns as we headed out to bring our baby girl, Honor-Amelia, into the warm, loving family where she's destined to be fully embraced.

Dilation was sorely slow, so at 1:15 PM Delerria was induced to hopefully speed up the process. But it was to no avail. Contractions were keen, stabbing and piercing her inner body as if she were under the surgical knife without anesthesia, contributing to high pitched screams that filled the room with the feel of the Pale Horse. Although I was encamped with fear, I remained cool, calm, and collected as I held on to faith and encouraged Delerria to do the same.

Dilation continued to be slow, but sometime between the fifteenth and sixteenth hour after being induced, it picked up rapidly. By this time we were almost five hours into the morning of January 6<sup>th</sup>, passing but not leaving behind the significance of the expected and highly anticipated day of January 5<sup>th</sup> for that beautiful day will forever be a part of our family's birthing experience.

At 5:22 AM on January 6, 2012, born at nine pounds, three ounces, 21 inches long, and lighting the morning darkness is our family's sixth generation "Amelia." Her name stands in full reverence and "Honor" of the very first two, our memorable, loving "Nana" and her own grandmother before her. Now there are a total of four. My first cousin, whose grandkids now call her "Nana," is also named Amelia. It is a wholesome family tradition, and we all thank God wholeheartedly for it.

Therefore, let it be written that January 5<sup>th</sup> and January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 were indeed my, Juba Moten's, most memorable and thankful days of the holiday season. I love you, Honor-Amelia Marie Moten!  
(Juba Moten)

### Missing Wednesdays

Oh, how I missed Wednesday nights. I didn't even realize how much I liked class. It has changed me. I am smiling more and thinking about things in a whole different light about my life and my ways. Even though I may not graduate as a good poet or even a writer, I will still have risen because I am finally learning who Nkechi (loyal "gift to God") Jevona-Louise Johnson likes and is. . . . I called my grandmommie and told her that I put her real name in my story in the Oracle. She said "Well, that's my name. Don't wear it out." I was nervous and thought she would be upset, but she said, "It's fine" and told me that she and others are proud of me. They see me smiling more in these last couple months.  
(Nkechi Johnson)



### My Trip to Mexico

Traveling to Mexico was one of the biggest dreams I had, not only because Mexico is my birth country, but also because God blessed me with





two kids, Andres and Heidi. We used to sit down and talk about how it would be to meet Mexico together. I wanted them to know how Mom's childhood was, who her family is, and how people survive with just a few pesos every day. We decided to travel on December 17, 2011.



. . . Mom just couldn't believe that she was there with her two kids. She showed them how, in her childhood, she lived with her parents in only one room, which was her whole house. She showed them the corner where she and her brothers slept, played, and even fought, but they didn't care because they had a huge yard. They didn't know that they could have more, so they probably didn't really care. They had what they needed: mom, dad, food, and home.

. . . We went to visit almost our whole family, which was really emotional. We went to 14 different houses. In every one, we were received with a great smile. It took us around a week, but at the end we were really happy.

**(Elvira Rodriguez)**

### **Instant Love**

The most interesting thing I did over winter break was see my baby cousin, Lynae Contrice Cowan, be born. It was amazing. I had never seen anyone give birth before, and I must say that I enjoyed it.

Lynae was born on Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The date in itself (Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>) had me a little worried. While her mother was in labor, Lynae gave us a scare. The monitor showed that her heartbeat had fallen drastically. The nurse said that the drop could be due to the baby playing with the umbilical cord, either in her hand, with her feet, or around her neck. My cousin Cowana, Lynae's mother, was so afraid that she began to cry. This is her first child, and she didn't want anything to go wrong. The doctor had to come in and stick another monitor on Lynae's head . . . and in doing so had



to break her water. That monitor recorded her heartbeat more accurately, and Lynae's heart began to beat much better.

Once Cowana had dilated, it was time to start pushing. This was by far the most exciting part. . . . I began to literally scream with so much excitement. . . . Cowana began to cry, but tears of joy this time. Her delivery was safe, and her newborn was alive and well. After grabbing her tools, the doctor let me cut the umbilical cord, made Cowana push out her placenta, and the process was over.

I can't even begin to express my feelings toward Lynae. I love that little girl to death. It's funny to me how you can know someone for a short amount of time, yet love them indefinitely in an instant. I spent the whole weekend at the hospital with my cousin and younger sister, and I most definitely enjoyed spending time with Lynae. She got to

come home on Tuesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, and everyone was ecstatic. I'm glad I got to experience such a wonderful thing. The gift of giving life is truly one thing that I wish every woman could experience at least once over the course of her own life.

**(Tai'Kiah Phillips)**

### **My Holiday Oracle Moments**

My holiday Odyssey moments began that final Wednesday evening, December 14, 2011... [Our last class of Semester 1] triggered many thoughts about the true meaning of Christmas inside of me. That last evening in class turned out to be an Odyssey moment for me.

My Odyssey journey that began in August 2011 had given me an academically capacious view of myself. For instance, feelings of enmity that were keeping my thoughts in a cave about my future have been replaced with a new sense of purpose and motivation.

I have one special holiday event that I am compelled to share that directly involves the



Odyssey program's "Profiles in Courage" Special Edition Oracle of Winter 2012. In this Oracle, I wrote my profile about my grandmother, Mrs. Annie May Hillman. This homework assignment became the center of my family's conversation. My mother was the proudest of all, and she requested that I get several copies to send to other family members. These proud moments also allowed me to full express my opinion on some family issues that were truly troublesome for all of us.

In my honest opinion, I believe that the article about my grandmother had some spiritual power in it. For instance, my older brother was in awe of many of the things that I, his younger brother, had remembered. This provoked deep, long conversations about many topics. I believe I will remember this Christmas and how a homework assignment from the Odyssey Project started a unique way to celebrate the holidays.

**(Abraham Thomas)**

### **A Grand Thing**

... On December 30<sup>th</sup>, my 16-year-old son lil John looked me in my eyes and said, "Mama, I want to be baptized." I asked him, "Why?" He replied, "I believe in GOD, and it's time." At this point I turned into a leap frog. I couldn't stop myself from leaping up and down. In my lifetime I have experienced many good things, along with many bad things. This was a GRAND thing.

New Year's Eve we went to church and brought the house down in praises. We began the New Year with unspeakable joy with added peace which surpasses ALL understanding. This blessing caused me to do a self-examination of my heart. I looked at every area in my life. In this evaluation I asked myself is there anything in my heart that could separate me from GOD and inheriting eternal life. Everything was given over to GOD. I made a solemn promise to GOD that I will live only for Him. . . .

**(Yolanda Cunningham)**



### Heart Melting Love

The whole week prior to Christmas I was on pins and needs waiting on Friday, December 23. The reason why I was so excited is because I got to visit with my son Junior (he's the oldest of four), who just turned 28, and two granddaughters.



Kiarah is four going on 40. She is my heart, and she loves her Paw Paw. She is so intelligent she will hold a conversation with you that will make you do a double take to see if this is a child you are talking to. Kiarah loves to sing to me. One time she called me and sang "Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so." For Christmas she sang a Christmas song to me. She is so adorable that she causes my heart to melt.

Then there's my one year old granddaughter, Kalista, who is very feisty and will only allow me to hold her for one minute. But when she gets older she will love me as much as Kiarah does.

I went to Green Bay on Friday with a trunk full of toys. I didn't think I would ever make it. The traffic was very slow and it began to snow, but I finally made it.

By morning all the snow was melted, and I began to wrap the presents I brought with me. I had a great time watching the kids tear open their presents. After all the hugs, I had to leave. . . .  
(Eugene Smalls)

### The Beauty of Goodness

On January 15, 2012, I attended the 28<sup>th</sup> annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Recognition breakfast to watch the recipients receive their Outstanding Young Person Awards, Mann Scholarships, and MLK Scholarships. This event is held by the Urban League and various sponsors at Edgewood High School, where children ranging from elementary to graduating seniors in high school are nominated by their teachers for their outstanding academic accomplishment, service to their schools and



community, and presence as role models throughout the previous year.

Hundreds of students from over 30 schools in the area are honored. Some receive Mann Scholarships, named after Bernard and Kathlyn Mann, a native Madison family with five children. Big on education, the Mann family made sure all five children would graduate from high school and continue their higher education. All five have at least an undergraduate degree in their professional career path. After Bernard and Kathlyn Mann passed, the Mann scholarship was founded in their honor to give the opportunity to a young person who may academically have the tools for success but may lack the resources to fulfill their maximum potential. Recipients receive financial aid, mentoring, guidance, and various necessities throughout their high school career. Our very own Tai'Kiah Phillips was a former Mann Scholar award winner.

The event was wonderful. I chose to write about this because the sight of people doing good things never gets old. It's always a beautiful thing.

(Run Barlow)

### A Day with Mommy and Me

On the first day off from school, my boy Darin made me breakfast in bed: I had pancakes with apple jelly, crisp bacon, cheesy eggs, steamed rice, orange juice, and coffee with French vanilla cream.



After we ate we decided to work out to get rid of the overstuffed feelings we had after breakfast. . . . After our workout, I thought about taking a shower and going back to bed, but my boy Darin, the 11-year-old Energizer bunny, wasn't having that. We went out and finished Christmas shopping and made a day of staying away from home. . . .

When it was time to head home, we went to see the Festival of Lights at Olin Park. I noticed all the cars turning off their headlights after driving along the path, making the beautiful holiday lights shine even more. . . . We both enjoyed the lights display. There were shapes of barking dogs, Santa and the reindeer, gift boxes of different shapes and



sizes and colors, and a lighted arch of blue lights that lit the way in sequence as people drove under it. The Festival site had posted signs that told of the sponsors and the years of service in the Dane County area. Visitors were also given the option of tuning in on the radio to listen to holiday music. . . . Driving through the park was the best part of our day. It only took 15 minutes to complete the drive, and at the end of the drive we were greeted by a very cheery lady who gave us candy canes. We gave a \$5 donation that made my boy proud.

We made it home by 8 PM that evening and started wrapping the gifts we purchased earlier in the day. I can honestly say I had a fun-filled day with my son. He called it a “Mommy and Me Day.” He hasn’t called our time spent together a “Mommy and Me Day” since he was maybe six or seven years old. His exact words were, “Ma, I’m getting too old to be calling it that. Let’s just say we hung out and kicked it.” That is a day I will remember forever.  
(Phyllis Anderson)



*Run Barlow served as Santa at the Children’s Museum.*



# Culture of Poverty Tour Visits Odyssey Students

Noted PBS broadcaster Tavis Smiley and Princeton University scholar Cornel West, co-hosts of the Smiley & West radio show, visited Madison in August 2011 as part of their 15-state poverty tour and expressed great appreciation for the mission of the Odyssey Project. The motto for the poverty tour was based on an excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon entitled "The Good Samaritan":

"I choose to identify with the underprivileged. I choose to identify with the poor, I choose to give my life for the hungry, I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity. This is the way I'm going. If it means suffering a little bit, I'm going that way. If it means sacrificing, I'm going that way. If it means dying for them, I'm going that way, because I heard a voice saying 'DO SOMETHING FOR OTHERS.'" (August 28, 1966)

**Tavis Smiley:** We ended the first day talking to students. We ended the day on a note of hope because you get up everyday with hope and keep fighting your way out of poverty. We ended tonight with some students in a program called Odyssey in Madison with students who found a way through education to get themselves on the path toward learning, to get themselves into a college or university and on their way to degrees. You learn to never never never give up hope. . . . The poor in this country should not be invisible. . . . Odyssey Project graduates were so impressive. We broke bread with these graduates of the Odyssey Project at a wonderful Ethiopian restaurant called Buraka in downtown Madison . . . and had a dialogue about the path some students have taken from homelessness to a college education.



**Cornel West:** We looked into the eyes of the Odyssey students, a project led by Emily Auerbach, and realized now is the time more than ever to tell the truth about poverty in America. It's a spiritual, social, political, and economic matter.

I am full of joy because I know that I should not be in any other place than I am right now than on this Poverty Tour, keeping alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, keeping alive the fight for love and justice, fighting back. The common thread is humanity, rich humanity. We have been inspired. . . . That sister Emily Auerbach, she's special. Professor Emily Auerbach, in the tradition of Berea College where her parents attended college, is just an exemplary citizen

when it comes to being a masterful teacher and exemplifying a love for students... To cut funding for the Odyssey Project would be a moral obscenity.

