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ODYSSEY



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ODYSSEY LOVE



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I LOVE . . .

In search of a broader definition of love for Valentine's Day, Odyssey students completed paragraphs or verses starting with the two words "I love."

I love to be a mother. My kids are my greatest asset. It's a feeling I can't explain. They have been with me through it all, every high and every low. They love me just as much as I love them. My kids make my heart happy.

I remember seeing them for the first time and feeling like literal butterflies were flapping in my belly. I always knew I wanted to be a mother because I wanted to love my kids how I wanted to be loved growing up. I want my kids to know that I'm there to support them. I will be their biggest cheerleader, the one they can come to when they are feeling lost and scared. They can talk to me about anything. There is no greater love than being a mother. **(Amanda Von Behren)**



I love oatmeal raisin cookies—fresh out of the oven with a tall glass of milk. Brings out the joy of childhood memories.

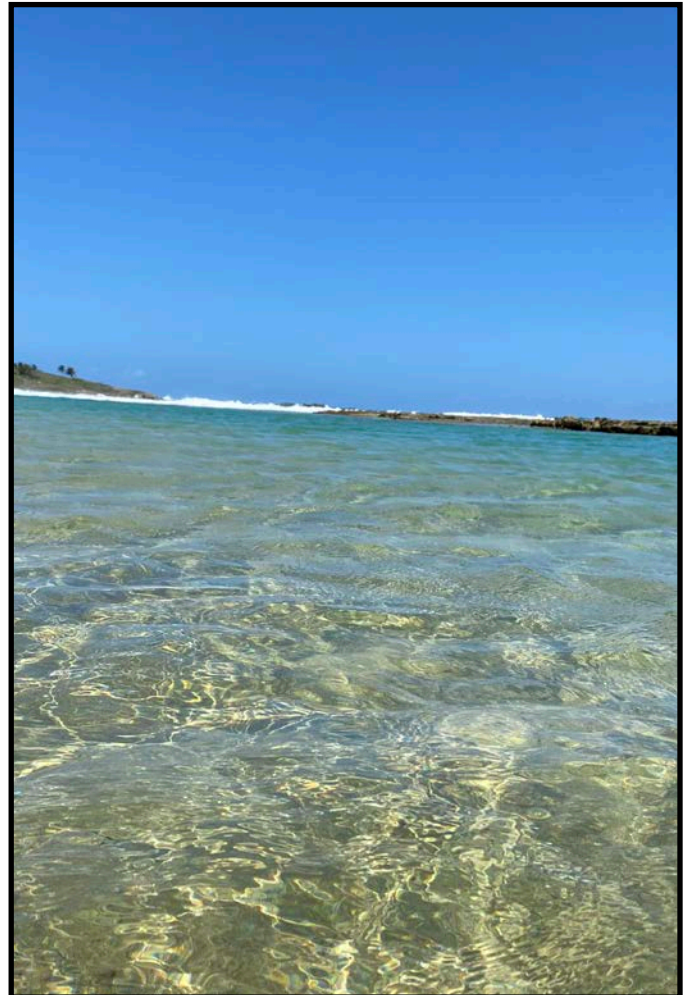
And I love the warmth of peace like a silent room, or a rainstorm that interrupts my sunny day and leaves my clothes drenched. To me, this is what defines love—the gift with many packages. You can't have one without the other. **(Vernell Cauley)**



I love my children! My children are the missing pieces to the peace I need. They encourage me to be better and want more out of life. They teach me every day how to be a better mother, friend, and family member. My children are everything to me in this world. My reason for change, my reason to want to be here living when all odds are against me. I love my children. **(Fataeshia Clark)**



I love being a mother. Being a mother is a lot of trial and error. No matter how much you try to prepare, there is always a curve ball. Like how I'm trying to write this paper with my son crying and pulling at the paper. Sometimes being a mom is extremely hard, but I wouldn't trade it for the world. Watching something you birthed grow into one of your greatest achievements is the best part. Being a mother is one of the best kinds of love you will ever receive from anyone in this world. But being a mother motivates you and gives you the strength you never thought you had. I love being Malachi's mother. **(Mikaylah Harris)**



I love my life, the ups and downs, the turn arounds! By the glory of God, I am alive. I love my life, the calmness, the waves, the way life can be so peaceful. I love my life because if I don't value my own life... then who will? **(Dontaeve Acklin)**

I love my family. We are close, family oriented the way our mother raised us to be. Our mother on her death bed said that one of the things that she wanted her children to do was to stay close. My siblings and I continue to fulfill our mother's will. We try so hard to pass this will on to our children.

(Kimberly Rodgers)

I love the way this man makes me feel. This feeling is like no other. This man stepped into my life at the right moment in time. When I felt like I couldn't be loved or was never going to be loved the way I needed and wanted. He loves me for me and even loves my kids as his own. Shout out to the love of my life. Mr. Secret. **(Tanisha Milligan)**



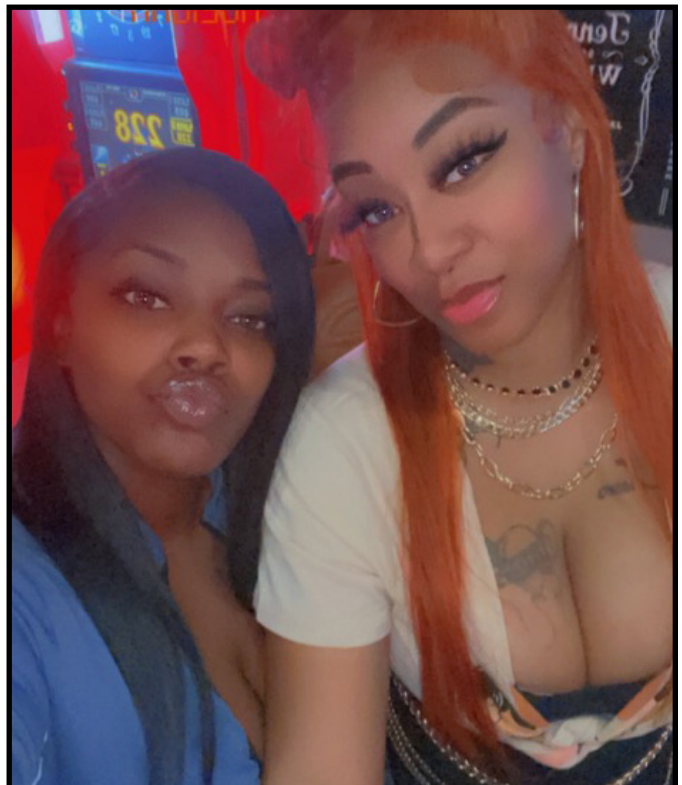
I love when you can feel the sand fall between the crease of your fingers, as it falls back into the ocean. As you gaze into the sun fall, the mist of the ocean grazes you with just a brush of sea salted water. As the fish swarm around you, it is like they are dancing to the ripple just beneath your heart. I love the knowledge they seem to bring as my mind starts to wonder and sing. I love the time that has passed just to bring me up to current speed. I love the ocean which plays in my soul only for people to hear, find a sea shell and listen to everything I love to feel. **(Marcy Tibbs)**



I love being a mom. It's the greatest blessing I could ever ask for. I love seeing my children getting along and loving and caring for one another. It is priceless. I love cooking for my children, and they love my cooking so much that they want me to open a restaurant. They are my pride and joy. I want them to know no matter what they go through in life, they can always come home because there's no place like home. **(Sally Phelps)**



I love my best friend. I love her so much and I'm so happy she came into my life. It's about to be almost our one-year anniversary as best friends, and the way we vibe and have each other's backs is truly heartfelt and genuine. I become so excited about the things we do together and how we encourage one another, and I'm looking forward to the memories and adventures we are yet to endure. I really love my best friend and I know she loves me. We complement each other so well. I love you, bae! **(Endia Walls)**



I love Sky. Sky as in Skylar, my daughter. She is my own little piece of representation that the sky is the limit. God hand crafted her for me. The light that shines through my Sky is my light at the end of every tunnel. Her everlasting joy reminds me of rainbows in the sky. Her existence brings me peace like the visual of clouds in a bright blue sky. My love for her reaches beyond the sky. She is everything to me; I love being her mother. It is a blessing I cannot describe.
(Mia Cannon)



I love my life. As hard as it may seem at times, I wouldn't change it for the world. I love that I get to see my children when I wake up in the morning. Life for me revolves around my children. The sticky fingers after eating pancakes for breakfast, or the runny noses from a cold. Watching them laugh and play with each other gives me the strength to continue moving forward. It's not always glitz and glamor, but I'm forever grateful that I am living it.
(Danika Bethel-Johnson)



I love being a mom. I'm so thankful for my fab 5! I love how they keep me going even on days I don't feel like doing anything. I also love being a phlebotomist—I love how much I have grown.
(Andrea Evans)



I love my son beyond measure. Karter has made me change my whole life; from top to bottom, left to right. The constant joy even on bad days compares to nothing else in this world. He's my blanket on a cold night, and I am his blanket from a harsh world. "Everything I'm not made me everything I am." (Kanye West) Becoming a mother helped me find my purpose in life and find myself, who Carissa really is. The love I have for Karter and the love I give to him is unexplainable. His smile lets me know I am doing something right. **(Carissa Andrews)**



I love thunderstorms. When the pressure in your ears feels like you're taking off on a flight or creeping up the rails of a roller coaster. When a certain fresh and electric smell drifts into your person, sending a soft shudder across your skin. When gathering clouds seem like a herd of elephants and daylight is suddenly closed up in curtains of gray, blue-black, and ink. Then, you are party to an event that is as suddenly cataclysmic as it is sweet and refreshing. I walk out, in rubber soles, to greet the hundred million tears - warm and salty - cold and bitter. Eruptions of sound: the cannons of heaven startle me as they explode through the crackling rhythm of the rain. Every drop a baptism as I am stained with gently furious tears. **(Lucas Benford)**

I love being me. I love being a black man in a world that wasn't designed for him to win. I love breaking the shackles that bound me back as I try to prevail. I love being able to change the outcome of the ones who might trail behind me. I love creating the ins and outs of my life. I love looking and listening back to my choices and being able to create the future I want to live. I love holding the power! **(Synquar Harston)**



I love LOVE, real love. The way it makes you feel when it's real. Not toxic or dishonest, not harmful or hurtful. Real love. Supportive, seductive, inspiring, accepting, teaching, and growing love. Love is welcoming and it never fades if it's true. You might not always like someone, but if you TRULY love someone you always will. Just make sure you love you and God first. **(Jasmine Benson)**

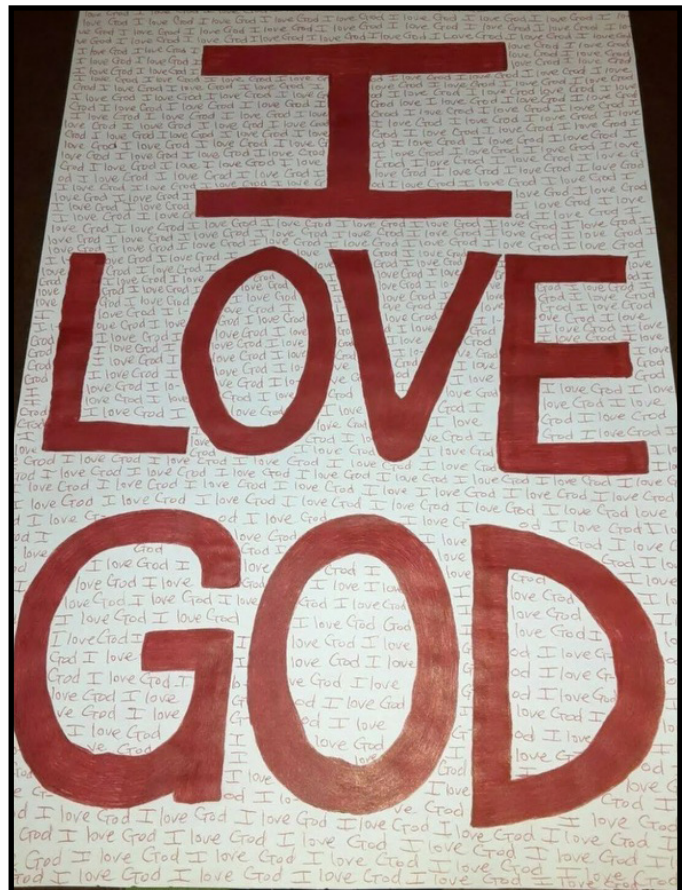


I love life. For the first time. For the way I wake up lately. For this light in my eyes that never seems depleted. I love life. I understand more profoundly why my God has me breathing. It all used to ache, and to think I didn't want a part in this; now I flourish. I dance when I walk and I don't recognize myself, for I am in a new chapter beyond all the hurt. **(Giana Mason)**

I love my babies and the way they smile in their sleep. I love the way they look for my comfort when they weep. How they cry when they think I've gone and the way my comfort feels like home. I love them deeper than words can explain. I loved them even when they had no name. I hold them close to my heart and when my world seems like it's going to end, I look in their eyes and find my start. **(Mekicia Davis)**



I love my relationship with God. He has brought me out of sorrow, worry, and anxiety. I love to worship by listening to the word, hearing the word, and singing and praising with rejoicing in my heart. I love God because he loves me unconditionally. **(Andrey Gavins)**





I love to cook. Cooking is my passion. I love the joy of knowing that I have made others' taste buds dance, the different spices such as Cajun when making a big Sass burger. 100% pure beef cooked to your temp, topped with pancetta, which is a bacon, pulled pork, and chicken with BBQ sauce, fried golden crisp onions, and freshly made coleslaw to complete the big Sass. Please enjoy. **(Ron Watson)**

I love my beautiful daughter's smile when she screams "Mommy!" when I come home. Especially when she hugs me. **(Rosanna Lopez)**



I love being/feeling complete. Usually in life I feel so overwhelmed or overworked or simply just not feeling like I've done enough. But in all reality, I need to give myself credit because the fight is hard and not just for me. No matter how hard life gets, I have to give myself credit. When I am complete, I feel accomplished. I feel honored because no matter what, there will be rainy days but the rainbow and sun will always come out to shine. When I feel complete, I just don't need anyone to shine because I feel brighter than the sun, like nothing can block my blessing or my happiness when I feel complete, and that's why I love it the most. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



I love learning new things and expanding my knowledge. Odyssey makes my brain feel like a dry sponge that's being thrown into a sink full of water. New knowledge reminds me of a flower blooming. Opening up and displaying itself... good, bad, or ugly... whole time every stage is viewed as GROWTH! I love expanding my vocabulary and learning new things, and I also enjoy listening to my classmates and the stories they have to tell. **(Cierra Jackson)**

I love a well-cooked meal. Every time I get a perfect meal I fall in love. I love that a perfect recipe can be anything. When I take the time to put something random together that comes together, it's the best feeling in the world. **(Terance Nix)**



I love seeing when people are happy. I always smile deep down from the bottom of my heart when I see the expression of happiness on people's faces—whether it is a family member, a close friend, or a perfect stranger. I truly believe that we all deserve and have the right to true happiness. A big part of me is always working to bring a little joy—a little kindness or help to anyone I have a chance to interact with. The world will probably be a better place if we all work to help each other reach true happiness. **(Souleymane Nikiema)**



I love my kids. There's nothing like being a father, especially when you don't grow up with yours. I have three boys and a beautiful princess. They're my world. I love every single minute I get to spend with them. I love cooking breakfast and dinner for them. I love to hear if they like what I made for them or if I need to do better next time. I love hearing about their days and finding out what their small minds are learning and how it's shaping them as people and help guide them with the new knowledge they learned. I just love being a dad. **(Isiah Pickett)**



I love my name. My name's spelling is unique. I don't know too many Aleesha's spelled like mine. I



love the spelling of my name, but do not like how it sounds when I say my own name. Flowers, my last name, goes back many generations and I never plan on changing it even if I ever marry. It will be hyphenated! **(Aleesha Flowers)**



I love the way that I am, I am not perfect, but in Odyssey I started loving my imperfections because "there is a kind of beauty in my imperfections." **(Blanca Laine)**



I love the sound of my children's laughter. Their laugh makes me laugh and puts the biggest smile on my face. Hearing them laugh lets me know that they're happy. When they are happy, I feel like I am doing what I got to do as a father and letting them know they can always be comfortable with me. I want this to be a lifetime thing so that as they get older, they still feel comfortable joking, crying, laughing, and talking to Daddy. **(Rodney Poe Jr)**

MOVED BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

After reading "A Letter from Birmingham Jail," King's magnificent appeal for justice and change, Odyssey students wrote him their reactions. These are just brief excerpts from their much longer letters to Dr. King.

Dear Dr. King,

Your "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" was very educated and inspiring. When you wrote "We have waited more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights," I found this line to be very interesting as this was written in 1963, yet it's 2024 and we are in many ways still fighting for our constitutional and God given rights. Granted "times have changed," yet we are still fighting to keep your dream alive. . . .

Until laws are declared just, we will continue to fight for our freedom and basic human rights. I sense that you are having feelings of doubt, and trust me I have those feelings every day. I worry neither I nor my future kids will see the day where the color of our skin doesn't matter, the way we wear our hair won't matter, our beautiful blackness won't be intimidating to others, but we will be equals. . . . Why do we endure so much pain and no reward? How are we able to forgive and move forward, but the opposition still won't accept us? . . .

Imagine being a child in a classroom and all you hear is that your people were not strong enough, not good enough, constantly hearing how we were enslaved, beat on, owned, we owned nothing (at least that's the lie told in our history books), called n****s, considered three-fifths a person, and much more. Unconsciously that little black boy in school grows to hate himself because he has only heard negative things about his people. . . . In conclusion, Dr. King, I loved reading your lengthy letter from Birmingham jail. It was filled with so much education and was inspiring to the people. **(Dontaeva Acklin)**



To simply state it, I am appalled by your letter. To know what you fought for (freedoms for education, speech, and basic human rights) was so unjustly discriminated against hurts. Even more so to still be experiencing this in 2024 is truly heartbreaking. Men are paid more than women, whites are more likely to get a job when up against blacks, etc. Systematic racism has gone on for far too long. "Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy." The Constitution says, "united we stand, divided we fall." How are we united when a person of great morals such as yourself isn't allowed to speak what we all know without ridicule?

. . . I believe the only reason you have your own holiday today is because you obeyed. You were met with pressure and maybe withheld to a certain extent, yet folded eventually. "If you can't beat them, join them." That phrase reminds me of you. Essentially, they tricked you to think you actually could sit with them, just as they still do people in positions of power today. I understand you needed

support, but from your own people. Malcolm X didn't conform, and look what that got him. I feel like being peaceful got us nowhere. Undoubtedly you are a pioneer of the movement, and I will never take that from you; I just can't agree or conform to societal views that you did. Thank you for trying and moving us an inch forward; we're still a mile behind. **(Carissa Andrews)**

I'm writing to you in the same way that a child would write to Santa Claus as I'm timid to share any ideas with a man who would seem to already know the contents of my heart as you are idolized as the champion of justice. You have become a mythical figure in the American consciousness - a man who so firmly, so proudly, so longingly believed in his ideas that he became synonymous with his virtues. I would hazard that you would not want me to waste my energy in the service of your veneration, but in the service of working towards a better tomorrow. This letter is written with deepest gratitude and utmost awe, but you would remind me that you are just a man; a just man.

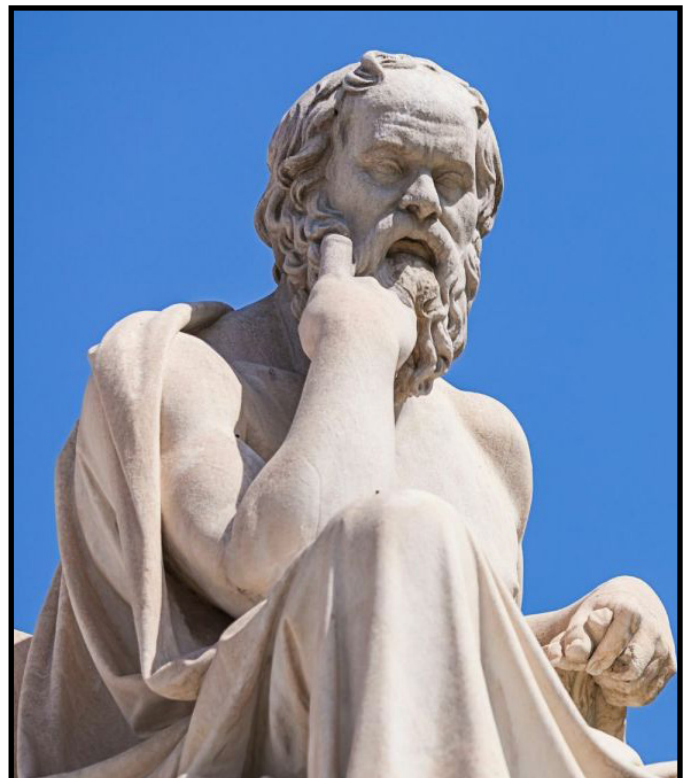
Note that this letter is marked one day before the beginning of the month of February and the start of Black History Month. You might appreciate the irony of it also being the shortest month of the year. Your writer is the child of interracial love and so contains the slave and master; the self and the other; the meek and the powerful. He is a wanderer in the desert, searching for community and hungry for justice. We are fireflies in the bleak and expansive emptiness before alighting on a cause and igniting ourselves with a passion for positive change. We are extremists for love - for justice - for healing and bonding that will create a community for everyone.

The adage, "Time heals all wounds," is not one that you would subscribe to, Rev. King. Time is simply the container that holds all our actions, good, bad, and indifferent. The moderates still ply time as a snake oil cure and you astutely relate that, "without hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation." . . .

Nobodiness: This feeling of not mattering is an

epidemic in the black community. Why try for something better when everything seems to reinforce that your voice and your actions are valued less? You longed for a day when no parent would ever have to explain to their child why the world seemed to be against them based solely on their appearance. You challenge us to make a critical distinction between just law and unjust tyranny. You invite us to imagine a world where freedom and love are the values that guide our society. And, you offer us a tool for resistance in the form of nonviolent direct action because despite the violence of our oppressors you offered a way to break from the cycle of an eye for an eye to see eye to eye.

You allude to Socrates's Allegory of the Cave: those that see the light of truth are charged with leading others to the light. Our democracy saw its infancy in ancient Athens and was imperfect then as it only accounted for the privileged minority. Reverend King, the potency of your dream was not only in your desire to uplift your community but to see all people as members of a greater human community built upon a foundation of justice and love. Yours in Extreme Love and Radical Justice **(Lucas Benford)**



I hope this letter finds you well considering the climate of our world, our nation, our state. I would like to apologize to you for my role or lack thereof for civil and human rights. The oppressors continue to oppress, but their allies seem to be those who receive the most oppression from the powers that be and their systems.

Hate looks like abolishing social programs that afforded opportunities to black, brown, and other people of color. The oppressors have figured out ways legally to stop the vote or eliminate the disenfranchised citizens' vote all together.

We as Black people have forgotten ourselves. . . . I care about my future as well as my allies, but like you I can no longer ignore the inequalities that my people face. I do not care about integration because we're integrated.

I am going to misquote one of the best MCs to ever do it, Killa Mike. "We must as people mobilize, strategize, politicize." The revolution should be seen, heard, and felt. If likeminded individuals moved as one and stopped asking to be let into a society that never wanted them to be a part of it, you wouldn't have to demonstrate, and clergymen, so-called men of the cloth, wouldn't be ok with calling a nonviolent protest problematic or the catalyst for your incarceration. . . . Again, you leave me and my people without a choice but to protect ourselves by creating our world of peace, of acceptance and inclusion.

My people are the disenfranchised, Afro-American men and women, impoverished, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and every have-not or voice that's not heard. If we're not included in society, it's time to start our own. We will no longer wait for the oppressor to acknowledge our human and civil rights from this day forward. Thank you for everything, Dr. King. **(Jasmine Benson)**

The letter was strong, compelling, and beautifully written to show all your key points. In your letter, you stated, "The purpose of our direct action is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door for negotiation." I totally



agree with this. Legislators are not always open to negotiation when it comes to things that make them uncomfortable. So, I agree with the idea of making things so unbearable that they must hear what we all have to say. Within your letter you also talk about how painful it is for Negroes to hear the word "Wait!" I cannot agree with this more. "This 'Wait!' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'" You could not have said that any better. In everyday life, we hear the word wait and have this hope that the answer is going to be yes. But it is just a way for someone to prolong telling us no, or never.

The intensified examples that you utilized to prove your point that we as a race have waited too long for our rights touched me the most. "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..." You have opened so many people's eyes to how many God given rights are being taken from us. I will end this letter to you, Dr. King, by thanking you again for showing the world how to achieve success without reverting to violence. Thank you for your bravery, your leadership, and your effervescing abundance of knowledge. My sincerest regards. **(Danika Bethel-Johnson)**

I first want to say what an honor it is to get an opportunity to write to you. I'm truly inspired by your strength and courage to stand up against what I consider to be evil forces. You were willing to travel and fight in the most segregated city in the United States. The thought of a grown man whose first name was "N****r," middle name was "Boy," and last name being "John" and a mother never given the respected title of "Mrs." saddens me. . . .

The tragedies in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 remind me of the challenges I faced while growing up in 21st-century Chicago, Illinois. Birmingham received the nickname "Bombingham" due to numerous bombings, while Chicago, troubled by many unsolved killings and shootings, fostered the name "CHI-RAQ" mimicking the war in Iraq. I strongly believe your willingness to walk in the line of fire in such a dangerous time is truly inspiring to all leaders. May we never forget the courage you sustained in your walk to freedom. . . .

Your struggle was faced with the aggression of racist police officers, racist politicians in office, racist bus drivers, restaurant owners, county sheriff's staff, and the list can go on. Very few mention the struggle we face within ourselves, us, who are called to be Christian men of faith. You stated, "The judgment of God is on the church as

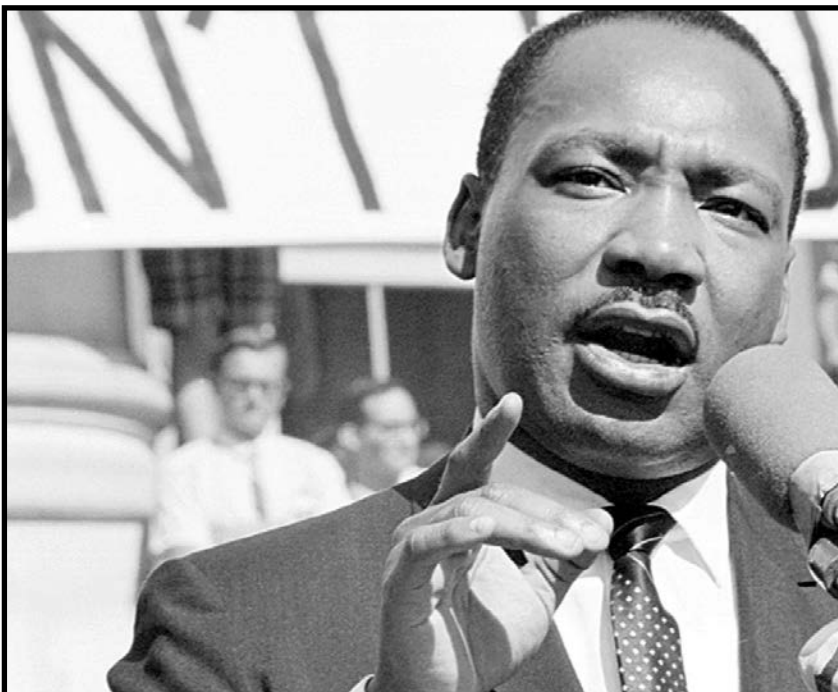
never before." This statement touched the core of my heart because while you are surrounded by enemies, this is the first time I heard someone address the enemy within the church. Jesus told us (John 15:12), "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." There were beatings that were witnessed, killings and lynchings. Yet the white ministers, priests, and rabbis, all who were believers in our Savior, chose to be silent. Is it safe to say we surely are not praying and believing in the same God? Thank you for bringing the light to the dark. I'm sure if they weren't aware of their sins, they are now.

It's because of you I choose to stand. I learn the answer is never to fight this war of peace with fire. Love has always been a strong weapon and should always be used against evil. Your sacrifice will not be in vain. You have changed the lives of many and many more to come. For this you will be respected and loved. **(Vernell Cauley)**

I would like to say that your letter touched me beyond repair as we still in today's society face Injustice. This letter has opened me up like a book and has shown me that society is not on board with the movement you have planned. This society has failed us as a people, and the injustices we face make it problematic for those of the African

American race. I'm not settled on what I want to do, but this has moved me in the direction of following your movement. How dare they not hear us as a unit? It frustrates my soul to even think they may have an upper hand or believe we are not equal.

I'm inspired by your unwavering beliefs in the power of love and nonviolent protest that you demonstrate among your community and others as well. . . . Until they see us, we are invisible when we should stand out. Can we not seek justice without injustice? Dr. King, we need you here with us to fight this battle. Without you, this movement has a setback that the world is not ready to see. **(Fataeshia Clark)**



I believe that not much has changed since you passed. If anything, time has just gone on and a new way of using these same tactics has been formed. There have been few movements for what the black community and others deem wrong, and due to some of the police brutality and lack of freedom of speech, many movements have been reduced to none. With everyone being awarded a platform, there is more hate spewing across the United States than ever before. Even when coming in peace, some feel we should have no voice. Broken promises continue to be sold like the American dream during every election and forgotten just as quickly. Equality should be a necessity and not a commodity to those who are human.

Many oppressed people can't become successful and knowledgeable due to the limitations being placed on people of color. . . . Many don't understand the trauma of seeing someone beaten to death, medical malpractice, and becoming victims who are paraded as the problem, when in reality they are victims of misunderstanding, lack of care, lack of judgement, and lack of importance. **(Mekicia Davis)**

I am writing in response to your letter from the Birmingham Jail. First, I would like to say thank you for everything you did standing up for blacks. Never backing down, not allowing what people say to stop you or slow you down, you believed that blacks should be treated the same. I am also thankful that I didn't have to deal with the things you had to. When I watch movies about race or how black people were treated, I always say that could never be me, that they would have to kill me. People treated blacks like they were nothing, with the police pushing old Negro women and young Negro girls and slapping and kicking young boys. Some people could be your mother, granny, children, and there's nothing you could do. Not being



able to get food or having to tell your children we can't go to the amusement park or Funtown because of the color of our skin—I couldn't even imagine going through that, seeing my children break down crying. That would break my heart. I am happy and beyond thankful that you did the things you did. I really believe the things you did made a huge difference. **(Andrea Evans)**

Your words of wisdom in your letter from a Birmingham jail state truth and sincerity for those who have been oppressed by broken promises for centuries. You have had the voice for so many victims of racial torture and segregation across the country and in many communities. You were raised in a church with many relatives. God's work has made you a prophet of love and equality.

You carry the gospel of freedom and speech as Jesus and Apostle Paul did. I admire your strength and determination to bring awareness and understanding to the oppressed and segregated blacks to fight for freedom nonviolently through marches and protests. . . .

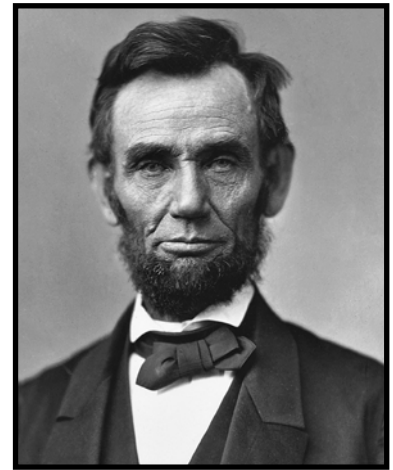
The moderates refuse to understand freedom. Your long letter brought a sense of faith and truth held by a bitten tongue. I pray every day that we all can live equally and peacefully. It is 2024 in the United States, and we still have a lot of these same problems of injustice, racism, and oppression by higher authority. Our black people are wrongfully accused or convicted daily for something they did not do. Certain people cannot vote, or it is hard to be able to vote because those in the House decide those laws to make it hard for a black human. Women are still fighting for the right to protect their own bodies. Our black families still suffer from homelessness, unemployment, mental illness, and abuse of drugs and other substances. God, please bring comfort into all our hearts as equals with love, and we will uplift and support each other no matter what. **(Aleesha Flowers)**

I'm writing you this letter in hope and faith that we as a people are heard, finally! In agreement, I too am tired of waiting. When will it ever be a good time to stand up and take what is ours? Being a Christian, and firmly believing in equality, the only way to see change is to put forth movement. In Deuteronomy 28:13 it says, "the Lord will make you the head, and not the tail; ye will move upward and never downward." We as a people have to move forward with faith in knowing we will rise up and see a change.

In your letter, I read that a white brother from Texas wrote, "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry." To that, I too feel we have come a long way and still we have a lot more work to do. We are tired. Our brothers and sisters are dying. No more am I willing to stand back and accept the injustice. Justice for all is the only way. You are not alone, my brother. We shall rise and justice will prevail. **(Andreya Gavins)**

I would like to commend you first of all for keeping calm and staying respectful throughout your entire letter from beginning to end. I love how when you were president of the Southern Christian Leadership conference, all 85 affiliated organizations came together and shared all of your staff, educational, and financial resources with each other. It really shows how much more you can get done when we just come together opposed to working against one another. I also liked how you implemented a four-step plan (injustice exists, negotiation, self-purification, and lastly direct action). . . . Also you brought up about Socrates and it being necessary to create tension in the mind so individuals could rise from bondage. I love how you said, "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed" as well as "justice too long delayed is justice denied." . . . I'm sorry you had to tell your daughter she couldn't go somewhere to have fun because of her race. I couldn't imagine telling my son no for such a reason. So again, I think you for fighting for me then so I could have a better today. I also agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

"Oppressed people can not be oppressed forever": nothing but the truth. Was Jesus not an extremist for love? As well as you quoting Abraham Lincoln, "this nation cannot survive half slave and half free" and "what kind of extremist will we be, extremist for hate or love?" . . . My favorite thing you said was there can be no deep disappointment where there is no deep love. . . . In the end you still fought with a nonviolent approach and teaching others to follow in good spirit. Thank you again for fighting for a better future. **(Shanigel Goodwan)**



After reading your Letter from Birmingham Jail from 1963, I feel truly inspired by you and other activists' bravery, determination, and planned resilience towards injustices faced by the Negro, or what we now call black or African Americans. You were right, the injustices of the Negro have been ignored for far too long. And the people have waited far too long for their injustices to go noticed. Speaking as a Black woman in 2024, I feel like open segregation has changed dramatically as schools, transportation methods, restaurants, city parks, and businesses are racially integrated due to the efforts before me; however, some things still have some progress to make. For example, racism continues to infest the world like a pandemic disease. Police brutality and prison rates among black and brown people have continued to increase while we remain the minority in the general population.

"Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained." This quote stuck with me and many other activists across the world as we non-violently planted ourselves outside the streets of Downtown

Madison demanding the stop of police brutality among black and brown people after being a witness to the heinous murders of our black and brown brothers and sisters. As we chanted, screamed, and cried for several days and nights, our pain grew and some felt like they weren't being heard, seen, and felt by their political representatives, fellow peers, coworkers, and white counterparts. So peaceful protests turned into people expressing their pain through the form of riots. Historically, this is what happens when people are ignored for too long. . . .



What I found to be most important during those days was how we all reminded ourselves that we too were human, and our lives mattered as well. We do not deserve to die because of our skin color. We do not deserve to be incarcerated at a higher rate than our white counterparts because of our skin color when the same crimes are being committed. Our lives matter too. Black lives matter. **(Mikaylah Harris)**

. . . It saddens my soul that the history of my ancestors started with being seized on land God provided for them, to then be brought to a foreign land and be involuntary subjected to the upmost cruel injustice known to man. I think it's extremely dazzling how you were able to highlight the roles the government, church, and community play in the oppression of our negro brothers and sisters. . .

"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." This quote simply explains how we have processed the injustice over the centuries. How much longer are we to be denied the same rights our whiter counterparts have? How much longer is the negro voice going to be silenced?

I've never looked at the perception of the white moderate until now, and never realized the muzzle

they put on the issues negroes faced. They helped feed the idea that order was more important than having justice: "Prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice." . . .

"Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?" I loved how you called bulls**t upon the church and the hypocrisy it displayed. You bring forward wonderful examples of how they forgot to practice what they preach. **(Synquar Harston)**

As a native woman who has experienced discrimination toward my people, a group of indigenous people in Ecuador, South America, I truly empathize with your frustration when injustice is everywhere and justice conspicuous by its absence, but I deeply understand that "not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

My people in South America and your people in North America have been targets of brutal repression, marginalization, discrimination, genocide, etc. from those who call themselves superiors because of their social status or skin color, for those who practice Christianity just in their face and unjust in its application. My people have been forcibly removed en masse from the

lands on which our ancestors have lived for years so that the others could claim these lands and its resources.

As a native woman of South America, I applaud your courage to continue raising your voice in defense of equality to your people, or equality of some rights to each human being in this universe. I applaud your courage to not cease your resistance until one day seeing your people reach their freedom against the “disease of segregation.”

Your protest makes me strong. Your courage is my courage to keep resistant and resilient in this battle. . . . Dr. King, I stand with you, I believe in you . . . Your incarceration in Birmingham is not in vain. People are more conscious now: they follow you and they will stand with you. One day your dreams will come true to build one America, an America of freedom, equality, and justice. **(Blanca Laine)**

Some say your letter was long, but all the horrible stuff that happened is so sad. Still, we did have a little gain, like we did get a black president! But they questioned him being an American.

Years later when the whole world watched George Floyd being murdered on the video, the whole world lost it. The injustices and getting pulled over

for being Black or brown or a foot on the neck is modern day lynching. In your own words, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to injustice everywhere.” Dr. King, the whole world felt that is still injustice. Can you, Dr. King, make another impactful speech? The world does need you more than ever! Your letter moved all of us. The whole world made it loud and clear that “Black Lives Matter,” especially America. So many now can see because the technology really showed that there was no way of lying about that and getting away with that. We are still fighting a good fight. **(Rosanna Lopez)**

I remember visiting the Lorraine Motel when I was nine years old. My family and I were the only white people in sight as we were taken through a museum of your life. I felt flushed and embarrassed but you know what that emotion really was, Dr. King? It was fear—from a little white girl pretty far from home. We fear what we don’t know, and at nine years old, all I knew was there weren’t any white people in this museum. It was the first time I felt uncomfortable in public. Looking back, that was a gift. That feeling was the best encapsulation of role reversal I was going to get for a while. We were only in Memphis on summer vacation, and I knew Wisconsin would be waiting for me for the rest of my life. Being in the South and sorely sticking out was a valuable experience, even if only for a week when I was a fifth grader.



You remind me of the character in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave who ascends into the sunlight, only to be scorned. I enjoyed the superlative you chose in regards to rising from “the dark depths of prejudice and racism” to “the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.” Socrates elaborates, “Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if anyone tried to lose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.” . . .

In your letter, you point out, “I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes.” This statement reminds me of how we address homelessness in this nation. It seems to me that homelessness is like a set of Russian nesting dolls. Homelessness is what you see, but twist the next doll off and underneath you might find addiction. Many times, with those suffering from the disease of addiction, drug use happens as an attempt to self-medicate mental illness. Underneath all of this are adverse childhood experiences. In broader terms, trauma. This is why I admire how you, Dr. King, lead with love. You preach non-violence. So much of that pain people are running away from could be eased with ears and simple validation. Empathy is a powerful tool that should be normalized. . . .

Eli Wiesel once proclaimed, “The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it’s indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it’s indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.” You allude to such dangers of indifference when you preach, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.” . . .



One of the most powerful memories I have remains my visit to the Lorraine Motel. I will always remember how this museum walked me gently through your life story. I will always remember the display of a jail cell with little fragments of toilet paper and paper towel, and I will never forget the tears in my grandma’s eyes when the tour ended at the balcony where you were robbed of your life.
(Giana Mason)

I commend your efforts to desegregate the county, but those efforts did not work. African Americans are still being treated unfairly. You wrote, “when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters.” We are still being murdered by police, for instance. George Floyd was killed on May 20, 2020 by the hands of a white policeman while unarmed because they thought he used counterfeit money at a convenience store. Breonna Taylor was killed because a no-knock warrant was served to the wrong house. To think that we are still dealing with discrimination today just in a different form.

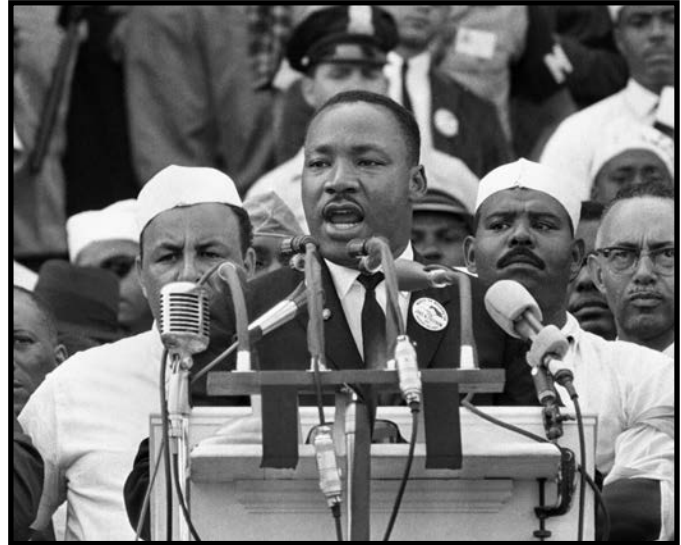
Another way we are still struggling in 2024 is mass incarceration. You wrote in your letter, “They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen.” Prisons and jails are still uninhabitable; they are still filthy and roach infested. We are living in a time where African American males receive sentences 13.4 percent longer than any other race. For example, as stated by Jessica Larche at WTKR, “Stephens was 18-years-old when he robbed two people inside their York County home at gunpoint at the direction of 29-year-old Paul Michael Melendres, his white co-worker from a fast food restaurant on the Peninsula. Nolen, who was 17-years-old at the time, helped Stephens and Melendres carry out the crime. Judge Prentis Smiley, Jr. sentenced Stephens to 1,823 years in prison while sentencing Nolen to 33 years in prison. However, the judge sentenced Melendres to 10 years on the same charges.” (<https://www.wtkr.com/investigations/data-shows-black-men-receive-harsher-punishments-thanwhites-for->

same-crimes) So you see mass incarceration is still a thing today. . . .

I am grateful for the attempt to make African American lives better, but what can we do now to continue what you have already started? Where do we start? How do we let the world see that African Americans deserve the same opportunities as everybody else? We deserve to be free and have the same education and to not be killed like the next person of a different race.
(Tanisha Milligan)

. . . You have showed respect and wisdom by expressing your belief in your fellow clergymen to be “men of genuine good will” despite their attacks— and that your faith in them is the reason you decided to write them an open letter. Your presence in Birmingham was amply justified by an invitation from an affiliate group in your role as President of the Southern Christian leadership conference. But more importantly you traveled to Birmingham because injustice was found there— and as you said so well, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” — That the idea of “outside agitator” is irrelevant because “what affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” You also justified your direct action by explaining that when negotiations have broken down and the promises have been broken, the last resort when there is no alternative is direct action—such as sit-ins and marches—to create “tension” that will force a community which previously refused to negotiate to come to the negotiating table—You did not omit to mention the great Socrates, who used “the tension” technique in his teaching. . . .

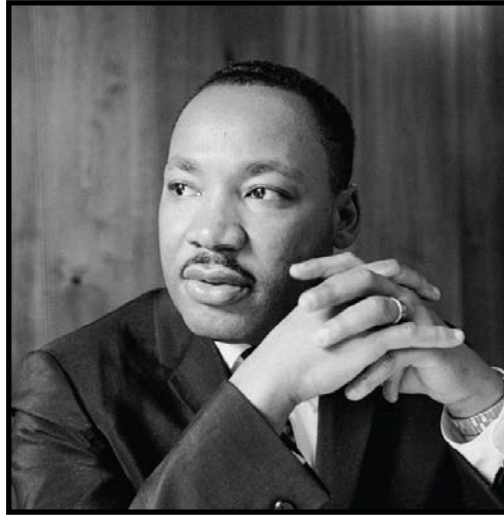
As wise as you are, you decided to see the good side of being labelled an “extremist” by owning it. You showed that extremist does not always mean violence—you demonstrated that one could be extremist for having different opinions such as Jefferson who argued in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal” or Jesus who extremely loved his enemies— instead of getting upset and looking for retaliation. Despite your effort to contrast your nonviolent approach with others such as “The Black Nationalist



Movement” that considered the white man as the “Devil” — and believed that violence is the only language that white people understand— you are still labeled an “extremist.” You praised the courage of some white men called “dirty ni***r-lovers” such as Ralph McGill, Reverend Stallings...who bravely took part in direct actions and courageously endure all the consequences of their acts. At the same you condemned the lack of actions from some white moderates who believed in “order” and were willing to leave things the way they are because the time is not appropriate. But I can see that your big disappointment comes from the white Church. As a church man, you hoped that your big support would have come from them— because of the foundations of the Church are based on God’s laws which are just, moral— and advocate for justice, equity, peace, and love for all human kind.

You are incontestably the father of “Civil Rights” in the United States. . . . However, I am so saddened to inform you that the segregation you bravely fought still exists today— under other forms in some places—we, Black African American, sometimes face “white privilege and racial inequality.” Many of us are still struggling to get access to good education, decent housing, and good employment. I want to reassure you that we will continue to follow the path you created — we are grateful for all your effort and sacrifices— and for that we will never give up the fight. May God bless you and your family! **(Souleymane Nikiema)**

The first thing I want to do is thank you for being the person to stand in between two forces of the same struggle. I'm pretty sure it was one of the hardest and most challenging things to do at the time. Not only that, I also commend you for not resorting to violence while having a lot of reason to, and to turn around and fight a fight nonviolently had to take a lot of courage.



commitments that were promised back then have changed for the worse. I feel as though you have more people pulling away from church homes because as you said they are becoming more like social clubs rather than a sanctuary to worship the lord. The church has become "laxer" and doesn't hold the same positive meaning like it did back then. When you said "there was a time when the church was very powerful," that statement held so much truth in how weak our faith is now. I also want to

I am sorry to hear your fellow white ministers and priests flipped on you like a pancake, or a half-done burger. Please understand at the time they didn't have the sight to see your fight. You should know as a child I also had the same feelings and questions your children had after hearing tons of stories from my grandmother. She also gave me words of wisdom that freed my heart of any hate that I would've had just as you did about your children. Sorry that my words fall so short, but just know yours flowed as long as the Mississippi River and were just as needed. **(Terance Nix)**

Thank you for your powerful and impactful letter. I totally agree with a lot of points you made. Still today a lot of these systems are implementing the segregation laws/views with today's society. Along with myself, there are many black men who feel bogged down with how we are viewed and treated by others, mainly people of power. When you speak about the citizens praising the Birmingham Police Department for keeping "order" and "preventing violence," they aren't seeing how they are treating innocent black men in the process. I compare that to the police departments in today's society. They are praised and viewed as "protecting," but they are the ones we need protection from.

The systems that are in place are totally immoral and unjust, which is the main cause of chaos in the world today. When you spoke about the church and how it's used as a place of worship, the

touch on when you said "oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever." One day we will realize what is really going on and who's calling the shots. When that day comes, our oppressors will already be long dead. Who will pay the repercussions of our "just" or "unjust" actions? **(Isiah Pickett)**

One of the main things that caught my attention is when you talk about negative peace. I believe that is such a sad truth especially when it comes to white privilege and the justice system or really this country as a whole. You yourself saw it firsthand: the hypocritical actions of this country and the unjust laws. It's almost as if they feel they can break their own laws and it's okay, but if a minority does it, then they have to be punished. Choosing peace or violence, there will always be a loophole for them. They have a different way of forcing segregation on us these days and it's through the jail system. Knowing the difference between just and unjust is essential because then maybe more people will start to open their eyes to the injustice that our people have been / still go through to this day.

I also loved when you said "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it is demanded by the oppressed." That is something that caught my eye because still to this day in the year 2024, we are still fighting for the same freedom and equal rights. We have made a big difference due to your letter, speeches, and perseverance, but there is still a lot of work to be done. **(Rodney Poe Jr)**

It's an honor to write this letter of appreciation to you started back in elementary school. It's history that I learned and loved when going to school. Education became a passion for me. I thank God for all of the peaceful protesters that participated in the civil rights movement with no violence. . . . I agree injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. . . . I am an African American woman who was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1964. I attend college at UW Madison, where we are still able to learn about Black history. As you know they have been taking black history out of our schools all around the United States. It's sad when you can't learn about your own ancestors. Your roots help generations identify where their family tree comes from.

I reside in Madison, Wisconsin. Growing up learning history helped me to learn about politics, how to have a voice, how to stand up for my human and civil rights, how to be a reader, how to be the best person I could be in a prejudice situation, to love and not hate. It's your voice and the other leaders that I continue to hear that keep this country moving in the right direction. As you know, the prejudice, the hate, the unjust laws, the killings, the bombing, the terrorist attacks, and threats have worsened all over the world since Birmingham and the South. What I do love and respect is the people who have been blinded to racism and prejudices finally seeing the truth, the facts with their own eyes. The violence and hatred in this world has come out from the darkness; the hate is so strong that it's not hidden behind close doors.

The murder of Mr. George Perry Floyd, the African American man who was murdered by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota during an arrest, shocked the world. Even white people who don't believe in racism and prejudice have seen now with their own eyes and are fighting for nonviolence and the civil rights movement; they hate the fact of how Brown and Black people were treated back then and now. They helped start the Black Lives Matter movement and it's truly been a help. . . . **(Kimberly Rodgers)**



. . . I must confess that this letter touched me deeply; your words resonated with truth and urgency of the civil rights movement. Your willingness to endure imprisonment for the sake of justice is a testament of your unwavering dedication to the cause. I'm so overwhelmed with excitement about your commitment to justice, equality, and nonviolent protest, which I know has inspired millions including myself. . . .

Dr. King, you talked about the injustices we have faced all around the world and how yet today we are still enduring injustice, whether it's in the schools, court systems, jails, or any other corrupt systems around the world, but that's only the beginning when we need to find an end.

I liked how you talked about your children needing answers, or should I say a confirmation, on how we are different from whites and not accepted by many of them, but yet we bleed the same color blood as they do. This really caused some complex feelings when you had to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she couldn't attend Funtown. Today as I write back to you, I wanted to tell you I have too experienced the same humiliation within restaurants and other establishments in today's world. For example, I have sat at five-star restaurants only to get one-star service and treatment and to be stared upon as if I couldn't cover my bill, but I even left a healthy tip which wasn't deserved, I just wanted the respect. . . .

I feel learning starts at home and usually we want to believe what we are taught, but somewhere within the fine lines some people were taught wrong. Have our people not suffered enough? Have

we not endured the hatred and beatings they have forced upon us? Why can't they hear you and believe what you say is true?

Your letter has opened my eyes to the injustices that persist in our society. Your powerful words have compelled me to reflect on my own actions and the role I can play in effecting positive changes. The call for unity and understanding has reminded me of the importance of empathy and compassion in our interactions with others. I am inspired by your powerful beliefs and the love that you have to deliver this message.

I believe this message has the ability to transcend boundaries and bring people together. I believe in your vision of a society where individuals are judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character and that's a belief I wholeheartedly share.

This letter will not go in vain, especially behind your tireless work. I want you to know that you have brought about a significant change and it has inspired many to come forth with action. You have ignited a fire without flame, and to us a race that's enough to keep the smoke going. I want to thank you, Dr. King, for your dedication to justice, equality, and peace. Your courage as one man with leadership abilities has left a path for me and others to walk in; with that I am honored to stand alongside you and our community in the fight for a more just and equitable world. **(Marcy Tibbs)**

There are many parts of your letter that I can appreciate. Sadly, a lot of the points you made are still relevant today. The way you started the letter was smart. If I was the person writing it, I don't think I would have been so calm with reading these people their rights. I can appreciate that not only are you worried about having justice around you but bringing justice to everyone in the world. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." If one place allows slavery and injustice, then the next city or state will allow it. If every place has the same



systems and laws in place, then the rest of the world will follow suit. "Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

It's sad that back then and even now people can't be treated equal. It's sad that people don't think about people's feelings. It's sick that someone can

actually lose their life because of someone's belief or their skin color. There have been so many killings from the police, mostly of black and brown people, which has caused so many riots, rallies, protests, and lootings, things I honestly never thought I would see. "Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice." It seems like we will never fully get justice. "Like a boil that can never be cured, as long as it is covered up, but must be open with all its ugliness to the natural medicines." This sadly won't stop any time soon. Excuse after excuse—this is the world we live in. **(Amanda von Behren)**

Martin, my dear friend, we have a greater task at hand. Here we are in jail. The injustice that is going on here in Birmingham is the work of the devil. We march, protest, and boycott a peaceful demonstration. The Negro has not respect and is treated as though slavery is still in existence! The ones who proclaim to be moderates suggested that we hold fast on the work God has sent you to do. It's clear as day the blacks are being oppressed in a city full of hatred and contempt for our people. You stated that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany.

Martin, the northern states are so much different from the south. You used allusion by quoting first Abraham Lincoln—"this nation cannot survive half free and half slave"—and also Thomas Jefferson—"that all men are created equal." God didn't make one color superior to another race. . . . Martin, this is a bad situation. . . . There are more challenges ahead. God give us strength. **(Ron Watson)**

VOCABULARY FROM KING'S LETTER

desegregation laxity

paternalistically cognizant

gadfly gainsaying elegy

paradoxical unduly

scintillating futility

pathos concoct

nonconformist abyss

zeitgeist relegating

plight affluent extremist

lamentably monologue

sanctimonious moratorium unfettered

provincial excruciating forbearance

interrelatedness trivialities

oppressor anesthetizing incorrigible

repudiate catapulted antidotes

deplorable ideologies ekklesia

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ON LOVE

“Love is the most durable power in the world.”

“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

“Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it.”