**Letter from Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King Jr.** Copyright © 2014 by The Atlantic Monthly Group. All Rights Reserved.

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| I am in Birmingham because injustice is here ...  We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike 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. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say "wait."  …There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience ...  You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask, "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "An unjust law is no law at all."  Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. 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. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality ...  There are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.  I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson scratched across the pages of history the majestic word of the Declaration of Independence, we were here ...If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands ...  Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. | List examples of God-given and constitutional rights African Americans were waiting for? (Brain / Notes)  What is it called when people break a law on purpose in order to highlight the injustice of that law? (Brain)  Highlight or underline the answers to the following questions in the text:  What does King consider a just law? (Text)  What does King consider an unjust law? (Text)  Why was King arrested? (Text)  Why was King willing to break this law? (Text)  Why does King feel that African Americans will share in the American ideals Jefferson stated in the Declaration of Independence? (Own words) |

Answer the following prompts in **complete sentences**.

1. Give an example of a just law today? Explain why just.

2. Give an example of an unjust law today? Explain why unjust.

3. How were African American voting rights restricted in the late 1800s and 1900s?

a.

b.

c.

4. Referring to the states that denied African American voting rights, King asked, “Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?”

a. Rewrite his question in your own words.

b. Answer the question with an explanation.

5. King says “I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.