

## MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S LETTER FROM THE BIRMINGHAM CITY JAIL

You may well ask, “Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of **constructive** (*def. serving a useful purpose*) nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the **bondage** (*def. slavery*) of myths and half-truths to the **unfettered** (*def. not limited or restrained by anyone or anything*) realm of creative analysis and objective **appraisal** (*def. a careful assessment and consideration of something*), we must see the need of having nonviolent **gadflies** (*def. an annoying person, especially someone who provokes others into action by criticism*) to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We, therefore, **concur** (*def. agree*) with your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live monologue rather than dialogue...

We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy, and transform our **pending** (*def. waiting to be decided or dealt with*) national **elegy** (*def. a sad funeral song or poem for the dead*) into a creative **psalm** (*def. a sacred song or hymn*) of brotherhood. Now is the time to life out national policy from quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

1. As explained by Martin Luther King Jr., what is the purpose of nonviolent direct action?
  - a. It creates an environment of tension in which no one is willing to negotiate.
  - b. It prevents negotiations from taking place
  - c. It dramatizes an issue so that it can no longer be ignored
  - d. It delays negotiation until people are ready to confront an issue
2. Which statement correctly describes the structure of this excerpt from the letter?
  - a. Martin Luther King Jr. rejects the argument that negotiations are better than direct action
  - b. Martin Luther King Jr. uses the example of Socrates to justify the creation of tension and then demands that people create this tension by any means necessary
  - c. Martin Luther King Jr. explain why he prefers the use of negotiations over direct action
  - d. Martin Luther King Jr. defends the use of nonviolent direct action and urges the readers to seize the chance to make meaningful change
3. How can the tone of this excerpt from the letter best be characterized?
  - a. Critical yet optimistic
  - b. Angry and regretful
  - c. Defiant and arrogant
  - d. Thoughtful and urgent

4. Read the following sentence: "So the purpose of the direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." The word **inevitably** means
- a. Acting as an obstacle
  - b. Unable to be avoided
  - c. Unable to be changed
  - d. Occurring very soon
5. Which audience did Martin Luther King Jr. most likely target when writing this letter?
- a. People who supported his work
  - b. People who fought for civil rights
  - c. People who questioned his methods
  - d. People who lived in the North

6. Explain why Martin Luther King Jr. mentioned the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates in his letter. Use the text of the letter to support your answer.

*According to Socrates, why was it "necessary to create a tension in the mind"?* \_\_\_\_\_

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*According to MLK, why was it necessary to create "tension in society"?* \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How did Martin Luther King Jr. view the state or condition of the nation when he was writing this letter? Refer to the second paragraph to support your answer.

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