The Rev. Martin Luther King's Reply to the Eight Clergymen who complained About Outsiders in The Birmingham Affair
Written from Birmingham’s Jail and Here Excerpted. A Significant Document of Our Times.

M Y DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN—While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling upon Negro leaders to come to the good old Magna of the Old South, or to the New South, as the case may be. Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. . . . But since I feel that you are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the argument of "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliates organized throughout that body, but I am the only one of the Negro leaders in the South who is being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary and possible we shall come together with our affiliates. Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to try to use this city in this direct action program, if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. I am here, along with several members of my staff, because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational responsibilities.

Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is still here. Moreover, . . . I am cognizant of the fact that no amount of statement of meaninglessness of our condition can ever blot out the very varied,amply documented multi­

nitude, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial, "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives in a society must be concerned with what happens there.

You may well ask, "Why direct action? Why sit-ins? Why marches? Why should it come to this? Why can't we be satisfied with legal avenues?" It is easy to see why.

JUST AS SOCRATES felt it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent struggle to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic圣洁上地 of man's soul. And the only way to bring this about is to create a situation so packed with meaning and force that it can no longer be ignored. It is impossible to direct action and say, "The time for negotiation is at hand." There can be no negotiation on equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition.

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are intemperate. Some of you inquire as to what we have been doing at the jail. Did we not give you the new administration time to act? The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that while Dr. King and I were in jail, we were urged to come in and join with Mr. C. B. King, the new mayor, and try to pass a nonviolence ordinance so that we could move into the community and seek to create constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth.

I must say to you that we have not made a gain in civil rights without determined nonviolent pressure. History is the long and mazy search by the people, at every stage, of the meaning of their ultimate end. We must indeed employ a means that is in keeping with the end. We must use nonviolent means, nonviolent action, if we are to create a nonviolent society.

I am sure that each of you realizes that with the exception of Christmas, Negroes are caught in an inescapable network of mutual dependence. In the midst of深切的 dive when you have seen necessary sympathy and concern, you may have owed a debt to Negro presence. When you have been harried and disturbed, some Luckily you have been a part of a community where Negroes have been able to create a community that is greater than the sum of its parts.

I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ears of every Negro with piercing familiarity. It is the word that the Negro hears from the lips of white people when he is forced by the weight of oppression to the求救于 the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent struggle to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic圣洁上地 of man's soul. And the only way to bring this about is to create a situation so packed with meaning and force that it can no longer be ignored. It is impossible to direct action and say, "The time for negotiation is at hand." There can be no negotiation on equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition. There can be no equality while the Negro community is in its present desperate condition.

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of the complacent or the hatred of racial discrimination. It is made to appeal to the conscience of a white man, who is reputed to represent Christianity, and who is told that the white man is an incorruptible, willing to lay down life for those who need it, and one of our great problems is the need not the well-organized and co-ordinated machinery, but the will of the people to act. There is no less of an easy way of life and nonviolent resistance. I am grateful to God that, throughout our history, we have been involved in a violent struggle. If this philosophy had not been convincing to many men, then the issue of violence vs. nonviolence might have been a more difficult task. But if the ministry of nonviolence is not convincing to many men, then we are back to the same old situation. We must either accept the philosophy of nonviolence or we must reconsider the philosophy of violence.

People cannot remain oppressed if we agree to their demand. They must be given the opportunity to raise their voices. If they are not given the opportunity to do so, then they will remain silent. The church must not only pray for peace, but it must also be a living witness to peace. The church must not only preach about justice, but it must also practice justice. The church must not only speak about love, but it must also live in love. The church must not only praise the police, but it must also condemn the police when they fail to uphold the law. The church must not only criticize the government, but it must also support the government when it acts justly. The church must not only protest, but it must also support the nonviolent protesters. The church must not only demand, but it must also provide the means to fulfill that demand. The church must not only pray, but it must also act. The church must not only speak, but it must also listen. The church must not only believe, but it must also act.

I have been greatly encouraged by the response to the letter I wrote to the editor of the New York Times. The response has been overwhelming. I am grateful to those who have written to me and to those who have expressed their support. I am grateful to those who have expressed their concern and their desire to work together for a better world. I am grateful to those who have expressed their willingness to be a part of this struggle. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to nonviolence. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to justice. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to love. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to peace. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the church. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the world. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the future. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the present. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the past. I am grateful to those who have expressed their commitment to the present and the future.

I hope that this letter will encourage others to join in this struggle. I hope that this letter will inspire others to act. I hope that this letter will challenge others to think. I hope that this letter will encourage others to pray. I hope that this letter will inspire others to act. I hope that this letter will challenge others to think. I hope that this letter will encourage others to pray.

THE REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.