

## A Journalist's Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The Civil Rights Movement: '60s: <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/exhibits/sixties/civil.html>

THE CIVIL RIGHTS Movement and the escalating war in Vietnam were the two great catalysts for social protest in the sixties. Since the end of the Civil War many organizations had been created to promote the goals of racial justice and equality in America, but progress was painfully slow. It was not until the sixties that a hundred years of effort would begin to garner the attention necessary to force a modicum of change. There was little consensus on how to promote equality on a national level: groups such as the NAACP, CORE, and Dr. Martin Luther King's SCLC, endorsed peaceful methods and believed change could be affected by working around the established system; other groups such as the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Nationalist Movement advocated retaliatory violence and a separation of the races. There were numerous marches, rallies, strikes, riots, and violent confrontations with the police. National leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X would be assassinated, violence would claim the lives of young and old, and rigged all-white juries mocked justice in cases involving crimes perpetrated by whites against African Americans. Restaurants, hotels, night clubs, public facilities, and the school systems were still segregated during the early sixties, and educational and job opportunities for minorities were far below those available to the white majority. The African-American community, being in the minority, depended on the support of the white population, and at least in terms of sentiment, those caught up in the spirit of the hippie movement took the cause of racial justice and equality to heart, and often to the streets.

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL and well known of the Black leaders that emerged in the sixties, Dr. Martin Luther King was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Council. He and his followers organized numerous marches, rallies, and strikes to call attention to the systematic discrimination against minorities that was endemic in American society. His belief was in nonviolent confrontation with the authorities and a prodding of the conscience of the white majority to effect social change. He convinced President Kennedy and later President Johnson to push for legislation to end discrimination and was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1964. On April 4, 1968, King was assassinated in Memphis while there to organize a garbage workers strike.

BORN MALCOLM LITTLE, Malcolm X began his real education in a prison library where he was serving time for robbery. Upon his release, he joined the Nation of Islam whose leader Elijah Muhammad preached that the black race was superior to the white, that the white race was inherently evil, and that total separation was the only way to achieve racial equality. Malcolm X rose quickly through the ranks, attracting numerous converts with his fiery oratory skills, organizational abilities, and tireless work. In 1964, disturbed by Elijah Muhammad's accumulation of wealth, Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam and started his own organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which vowed to promote greater harmony among all nationalities and races. He was warned repeatedly that some of his former associates were plotting to kill him, and on February 22, 1965 three men shot him to death as he gave a speech in the Harlem Ballroom.

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From "[We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/intro1.htm)"—"The Need for Change":  
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/intro1.htm>

*The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country... But in the view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant ruling class of citizens... Our Constitution is color-blind... In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law... It is, therefore, to be regretted that this high tribunal... has reached the conclusion that it is competent for a State to regulate the enjoyment by citizens of their civil rights solely upon the basis of race... We boast of the freedom enjoyed by our people above all other peoples. But it is difficult to reconcile that boast with a state of the law which, practically, puts the brand of servitude and degradation upon a large class of our fellow-citizens, our equals before the law. The thin disguise of "equal" accommodations ... will not mislead anyone, nor atone for the wrong this day done.*

Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan, dissenting opinion in Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896

The "wrong this day done" to which Justice Harlan referred was the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson. Homer Adolph Plessy, an African American, had boarded a train in New Orleans and seated himself in a "whites-only" car. When he refused to move, he was arrested for violating the "Jim Crow Car Act of 1890." The incident led to the Supreme Court case in which all but Justice Harlan voted against Plessy, affirming the right of states to enact segregation laws. The "separate but equal" ruling set the stage for the rampant racial discrimination that followed in the Deep South. In many cities and towns, African Americans were not allowed to share a taxi with whites or enter a building through the same entrance. They had to drink from separate water fountains, use separate restrooms, attend separate schools, and even swear on separate Bibles and be buried in separate cemeteries. They were excluded from restaurants and public libraries. Many parks barred them with signs that read "Negroes and dogs not allowed." One municipal zoo went so far as to list separate visiting hours.

African Americans were expected to step aside to let a white person pass, and black men dared not look any white woman in the eye. Black men and women were addressed as "Tom" or "Jane" but rarely as "Mr." or "Miss" or "Mrs." A black man was referred to as "boy" and a black woman as "girl;" both often endured insulting labels of "nigger" or "colored."

Voting rights discrimination was widespread. In Tennessee, as the Justice Department's John Doar discovered on a self-appointed tour of rural Haywood County, black sharecroppers were being evicted by white farmers for trying to vote. In Mississippi, names of new voter applicants had to be published in local newspapers for two weeks before acceptance, and voters had the right to object to an applicant's "moral character." Black applicants, many of whom were illiterate or poorly educated, were also required to pass literacy tests and to interpret sections of the state constitution to the satisfaction of the registrars. These tests were not applied to illiterate whites. In Alabama, many registration centers were only open two days a month; voting registrars often arrived late and took long lunch hours. In 1957 the town of Tuskegee gerrymandered black residents outside the city limits to make them ineligible to vote. In nearby Macon County, voter registration boards used discriminatory practices such as these to limit the number of eligible black voters:

·holding black applicants to a higher standard of accuracy than whites;

- allowing white applicants to register in their cars and in their homes;
- processing black applicants last, even when they were first in line;
- establishing separate registration offices in different parts of the courthouse;
- offering assistance only to white applicants in completing the registration form;
- refusing to notify black applicants about the status of their applications.

Some counties in the Deep South resorted to harsher means of preventing local blacks from voting. They jailed black applicants and firebombed places where voter education classes had been conducted, such as Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Terrell County, Georgia. They threatened, beat, and in some cases, murdered black applicants.

Southern blacks who resisted segregation, particularly those in rural areas, lived in constant fear--fear of their employers, who vowed to fire them; fear of white "citizens' councils," who adopted policies of economic reprisal against demonstrators; and fear of white vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan, who exerted an often-unchecked reign of terror across the South, where lynching of African Americans was a common occurrence and rarely prosecuted. Nearly 4,500 African Americans were lynched in the United States between 1882 and the early 1950s.

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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

"A Summing Up: Louis Lomax Interviews Malcolm X," November 1963:  
<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=539>

LOMAX: Minister Malcolm, we are all by now familiar with your basic philosophy; we have heard you speak, seen you on television, and read your remarks in magazines and newspapers. By now, I think, everybody knows your position that the white man is a devil, a man incapable of doing right; you hold that the black man is of God's divine nature, that he fell from power because of weakness; you hold further that the white man's rule over the earth was scheduled to end in 1914, but that his end has been delayed because of the need to get the American Negro into the fold of the black brotherhood.

MALCOLM X: Yes, sir, that is what The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us. The white devil's time is up; it has been up for almost fifty years now. It has taken us that long to get the deaf, dumb, and blind black men in the wilderness of North America to wake up and understand who they are. You see, sir, when a man understands who he is, who God is, who the devil is . . . then he can pick himself up out of the gutter; he can clean himself up and stand up like a man should before his God. This is why we teach that in order for a man to really understand himself he must be part of a nation; he must have some land of his own, a God of his own, a language of his own. Most of all he must have love and devotion for his own kind.

LOMAX: Wouldn't you say the Negro has a nation—America?

MALCOLM X: Sir, how can a Negro say America is *his* nation? He was brought here in chains; he was put in slavery and worked like a mule for three hundred years; he was separated from his land, his culture, his God, his language!

The Negro was taught to speak the white man's tongue, worship the white God, and accept the white man as his superior.

This is a white man's country. And the Negro is nothing but an ex-slave who is now trying to get himself integrated into the slave master's house.

And the slave master doesn't want you! You fought and bled and died in every war the white man waged, and he still won't give you justice. You nursed his baby and cleaned behind his wife, and he still won't give you freedom; you turned the other cheek while he lynched you and raped your women, but he still won't give you equality. Now, you integration-minded Negroes are trying to force yourselves on your former slave master, trying to make him accept you in his drawing room; you want to hang out with his women rather than the women of your own kind. . . .

LOMAX: I have heard you say that a thousand times, but it always jolts me. Why do you call the white man a devil?

MALCOLM X: Because that's what he is. What do you want me to call him, a saint? Anybody who rapes, and plunders, and enslaves, and steals, and drops hell bombs on people . . . anybody who does these things is nothing but a devil.

Look, Lomax, history rewards all research. And history fails to record one single instance in which the white man—as a people—did good. They have always been devils; they always will be devils, and they are about to be destroyed. The final proof that they are devils lies in the fact that they are about to destroy themselves. Only a devil—and a stupid devil at that—would destroy himself!

Now why would I want to integrate with somebody marked for destruction?

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us to get away from the devil as soon and as fast as we can. This is why we are demanding a separate state. Tell the slave master we will no longer beg for crumbs from his table; let him give us some land of our own so we can go for ourselves. If he doesn't give us some land, there is going to be hell to pay. . . .

LOMAX: But we have made some gains. . . .

MALCOLM X: What gains? All you have gotten is tokenism—one or two Negroes in a job or at a lunch counter so the rest of you will be quiet. It took the United States Army to get one Negro into the University of Mississippi; it took troops to get a few Negroes in the white schools at Little Rock and another dozen places in the South. It has been nine years since the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools, yet less than ten per cent of the Negro students in the South are in integrated schools. That isn't integration, that's tokenism! In spite of all the dogs, and fire hoses, and club-swinging policemen, I have yet to read of anybody eating an integrated hamburger in Birmingham.

You Negroes are not willing to admit it yet, but integration will not work. Why, it is against the white man's nature to integrate you into his house. Even if he wanted to, he could no more do it than a Model T can sprout wings and fly. It just isn't in him.

Now The Honorable Elijah Muhammad says it would be the easiest thing in the world for the white man to destroy all Black Muslims. We contend that the white man is a devil. If he is not a devil, let him prove it!

He can't do it, Lomax; it isn't in him; it is against his nature. . . .

LOMAX: This is strong gospel, Minister Malcolm; many people, Negro and white, say what you preach amounts to hate, that your theology is actually anti-Semitic. What is your comment to that?

MALCOLM X: The white people who are guilty of white supremacy are trying to hide their own guilt by accusing The Honorable Elijah Muhammad of teaching black supremacy when he tries to uplift the mentality, the social, mental and economic condition of the black people in this country. Jews who have been guilty of exploiting the black people in this country, economically, civically, an otherwise, hide behind—hide their guilt by accusing The Honorable Elijah Muhammad of being anti-Semitic, simply because he teaches our people to go into business for ourselves and take over the economic leadership in our own community. And since the white people collectively have practiced the worst form of hatred against Negroes in this country and they know that they are guilty of it, now when The Honorable Elijah Muhammad comes along and begins to list the historic deed—the historic attitude, the historic behavior of the white man in this country toward the black people in this country, again, the white people are so guilty and they can't stop doing these things to make Mr. Muhammad appear to be wrong, so they hide their wrong by saying "he is teaching hatred." History is not hatred. Actually we are Muslims because we believe in the religion of Islam. We believe in one God. We believe Muhammad is the Apostle of God. We practice the principles of the religion of Islam, which mean prayer, charity, fasting,

brotherhood, and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that since the Western society is deteriorating, it has become overrun with immorality, that God is going to judge it and destroy it, and the only way the black people who are in this society can be saved is not to integrate into this corrupt society but separate ourselves from it, reform ourselves, lift up our moral standards and try and be godly—try to integrate with God—instead of trying to integrate with the white man, or try and imitate God instead of trying to imitate the white man.

LOMAX: It is suggested also that your movement preaches violence.

MALCOLM X: No, sir. The black people of this country have been victims of violence at the hands of the white men for four hundred years, and following the ignorant Negro preachers, we have thought that it was godlike to turn the other cheek to the brute that was brutalizing us. Today The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is showing black people in this country that, just as the white man and every other person on this earth has God-given rights, natural rights, civil rights, any kind of rights that you can think of, when it comes to defending himself, black people—we should have the right to defend ourselves also. And, because The Honorable Elijah Muhammad makes black people brave enough, men enough to defend ourselves no matter what the odds are, the white man runs around here with a doctrine that Mr. Muhammad is advocating the violence when he is actually telling Negroes to defend themselves against violent people.

LOMAX: Reverend Martin Luther King teaches a doctrine of nonviolence. What is your attitude toward this philosophy?

MALCOLM X: The white man supports Reverend Martin Luther King, subsidizes Reverend Martin Luther King, so that Reverend Martin Luther King can continue to teach the Negroes to be defenseless—that's what you mean by nonviolent—be defenseless in the face of one of the most cruel beasts that has ever taken people into captivity—that's this American white man, and they have proved it throughout the country by the police dogs and the police clubs. A hundred years ago they used to put on a white sheet and use a bloodhound against Negroes. Today they have taken off the white sheet and put on police uniforms and traded in the bloodhounds for police dogs, and they're still doing the same thing. Just as Uncle Tom, back during slavery used to keep the Negroes from resisting the bloodhound or resisting the Ku Klux Klan by teaching them to love their enemies or pray for those who use them despitefully, today Martin Luther King is just a twentieth-century or modern Uncle Tom or religious Uncle Tom, who is doing the same thing today to keep Negroes defenseless in the face of attack that Uncle Tom did on the plantation to keep *those* Negroes defenseless in the face of the attack of the Klan in that day.

Now the goal of Dr. Martin Luther King is to give Negroes a chance to sit in a segregated restaurant beside the same white man who has brutalized them for four hundred years. The goal of Martin Luther King is to get the Negroes to forgive the people the people who have brutalized them for four hundred years, by lulling them to sleep and making them forget what those whites have done to them, but the masses of black people today don't go for what Martin Luther King is putting down. . . .

LOMAX: Then your movement does not share the integration goals of the NAACP, CORE, Martin Luther King's movement, and the Student Nonviolent movement.

MALCOLM X: You don't integrate with a sinking ship. You don't do anything to further your stay aboard a ship that you see is going to go down to the bottom of the ocean. Moses tried to separate his people from Pharaoh, and when he tried, the magicians tried to fool the people into staying with the

Pharaoh, and we look upon these other organizations that are trying to get Negroes to integrate with this doomed white man as nothing but modern-day magicians, and The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is a modern-day Moses trying to separate us from the modern-day Pharaoh. . . .

. . . Everybody has a God and believes that his God will deliver him and protect him from his enemies! Why can't the black man have a God? What's so wrong when a black man says his God will protect him from his white foe? If Jehovah can slay Philistines for the Jews, why can't Allah slay crackers for the so-called Negro?

LOMAX: Is that the reasoning behind your remark after the assassination of President Kennedy? You are reported to have said that Kennedy's death was an instance of "chickens coming home to roost."

MALCOLM X: Yes, but let's clear up what I said, I did not say that Kennedy's death was a reason for rejoicing. That is not what I meant at all. Rather I meant that the death of Kennedy was the result of a long line of violent acts, the culmination of hate and suspicion and doubt in this country. You see, Lomax, this country has allowed white people to kill and brutalize those they don't like. The assassination of Kennedy is a result of that way of life and thinking. The chickens came home to roost; that's all there is to it. America—at the death of the President—just reaped what it had been sowing.

LOMAX: But you were disciplined for making these remarks; The Honorable Elijah Muhammad has publicly rebuked you and has ordered you not to speak in public until further notice.

MALCOLM X: This is true. I was wrong; the Messenger had warned me not to say anything about the death of the President, and I omitted any reference to that tragedy in my main speech. But during a question-and-answer period someone asked about the meaning of the Kennedy assassination, and I said it was a case of chickens coming home to roost. Now about that suspension—it's just as if you have cut off a radio. The radio is still there, but it makes not sound. You can cut it back on when it pleases you.

LOMAX: How long do you think this suspension will last?

MALCOLM X: Only The Honorable Elijah Muhammad can answer that. I don't think it will be permanent. . . .

LOMAX: Are not Negroes American citizens?

MALCOLM X: If they were citizens, you wouldn't have a race problem. If the Emancipation Proclamation was authentic, you wouldn't have a race problem. If the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution were authentic, you wouldn't have a race problem. If the Supreme Court desegregation decision was authentic, you wouldn't have a race problem. All of this hypocrisy that has been practiced by the so-called white so-called liberal for the past four hundred years that compounds the problem, makes it more complicated, instead of eliminating the problem.

LOMAX: What, then, do you see as the final result of all these demonstrations?

MALCOLM X: Any time you put too many sparks around a powder keg, the thing is going to explode, and if the things that explodes is still inside the house, then the house will be destroyed. So The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is telling the white man, "Get this powder keg out of your house—let the black people in this country separate from you, while there's still time." If the black man is allowed to separate and go into some land of his own where he can solve his own problems, there won't be any

explosion, and the Negroes who want to stay with the white man, let them stay with the white man—but those who want to leave, let them go to The Honorable Elijah Muhammad. . . .

LOMAX: According to your own newspaper, one of the things you Muslims may *do* in the near future is vote.

MALCOLM X: Yes. After long and prayerful consideration, The Honorable Elijah Muhammad allowed us to announce the possibility of Muslims voting. The announcement came at our annual Saviour's Day Convention in Chicago.

LOMAX: What does it mean?

MALCOLM X: Mr. Muhammad is the only one who can explain that fully. However, I can say that we may register and be ready to vote. Then we will seek out candidates who represent our interests and support them. They need not be Muslims; what we want are race men who will speak out for our people.

LOMAX: There are rumors that you may run against Adam Clayton Powell.

MALCOLM X: Why must I run against a Negro? We have had enough of Negroes running against and fighting with each other. The better bet is that we would put a Muslim candidate in the field against a devil, somebody who is against all we stand for.

LOMAX: What are the chances of Black Muslims joining us in picket lines for better jobs? ...

MALCOLM X: As I told you, only Mr. Muhammad can answer that. But let me tell you something: Better jobs and housing are only temporary solutions. They are aspects of tokenism and don't go to the heart of the problem.

This is why integration will not work. It assumes that the two races, black and white, are equal and can be made to live as one. This is not true.

The white man is by nature a devil and must be destroyed. The black man will inherit the earth; he will resume control, taking back the position he held centuries ago when the white devil was crawling around the caves of Europe on his all fours. Before the white devil came into our lives we had a civilization, we had a culture, we were living in silks and satins. Then he put us in chains and put us aboard the "Good Ship Jesus," and we have lived in hell ever since.

Now the white man's time is over. Tokenism will not help him, and it will doom us. Complete separation will save us—and who knows, it might make God decide to give the white devil a few more years.



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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you work your way through “A Summing Up: Louis Lomax Interviews Malcolm X,” answer the following questions in the space provided.

Questions	Answers
Why does Malcolm X call white people “devils”?	
Why does the Nation of Islam not try to integrate blacks into American society?	
What solution does Malcolm X propose and how would this provide what blacks most need?	
How does Malcolm X defend the Nation of Islam from the criticism that they preach black supremacy and violence?	
Why does Malcolm X not approve of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s approach to securing civil rights?	

<p>Does Malcolm X think black Americans are citizens of the United States? What does he cite to support his opinion of the political status of black Americans?</p>	
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## A Journalist's Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

[From Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots,"](http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1145) November 10, 1963  
<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1145>

...

I would like to make a few comments concerning the difference between the black revolution and the Negro revolution. There's a difference. Are they both the same? And if they're not, what is the difference? What is the difference between a black revolution and a Negro revolution? First, what is a revolution? Sometimes I'm inclined to believe that many of our people are using this word "revolution" loosely, without taking careful consideration of what this word actually means, and what its historic characteristics are. . . .

Look at the American Revolution in 1776. That revolution was for what? For land. Why did they want land? Independence. How was it carried out? Bloodshed. Number one, it was based on land, the basis of independence. And the only way they could get it was bloodshed. The French Revolution—what was it based on? The land—less against the landlord. What was it for? Land. How did they get it? Bloodshed. Was no love lost; was no compromise; was no negotiation. I'm telling you, you don't know what a revolution is. 'Cause when you find out what it is, you'll get back in the alley; you'll get out of the way.

The Russian Revolution—what was it based on? Land. The landless against the landlord. How did they bring it about? Bloodshed. You haven't got a revolution that doesn't involve bloodshed. And you're afraid to bleed. I said, you're afraid to bleed.

As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled. You bleed for white people. But when it comes time to seeing your own churches being bombed and little black girls be murdered, you haven't got no blood. You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true. How are you going to be nonviolent in Mississippi, as violent as you were in Korea? How can you justify being nonviolent in Mississippi and Alabama, when your churches are being bombed, and your little girls are being murdered, and at the same time you're going to violent with Hitler, and Tojo, and somebody else that you don't even know?

If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it's wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it's wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country. . . .

So I cite these various revolutions, brothers and sisters, to show you—you don't have a peaceful revolution. You don't have a turn-the-other-cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution. The only kind of revolution that's nonviolent is the Negro revolution. The only revolution based on loving your enemy is the Negro revolution. The only revolution in which the goal is a desegregated lunch counter, a desegregated theater, a desegregated park, and a desegregated public toilet; you can sit down next to white folks on the toilet. That's no revolution. Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality. . . .

Revolution is bloody. Revolution is hostile. Revolution knows no compromise. Revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way. And you, sitting around here like a knot on the wall, saying, “I’m going to love these folks no matter how much they hate me.” No, you need a revolution. Whoever heard of a revolution where they lock arms, as Reverend Cleage was pointing out beautifully, singing “We Shall Overcome”? Just tell me. You don’t do that in a revolution. You don’t do any singing; you’re too busy swinging. It’s based on land. A revolutionary wants land so he can set up his own nation, an independent nation. These Negroes aren’t asking for no nation. They’re trying to crawl back on the plantation. . . .

Just as the slavemaster of that day used Tom, the house Negro, to keep the field Negroes in check, the same old slavemaster today has Negroes who are nothing but modern Uncle Toms, 20th century Uncle Toms, to keep you and me in check, keep us under control, keep us passive and peaceful and nonviolent. That’s Tom making you nonviolent. It’s like when you go to the dentist, and the man’s going to take your tooth. You’re going to fight him when he starts pulling. So he squirts some stuff in your jaw called novocaine, to make you think they’re not doing anything to you. So you sit there and ’cause you’ve got all of that novocaine in your jaw, you suffer peacefully. Blood running all down your jaw, and you don’t know what’s happening. ’Cause someone has taught you to suffer—peacefully.

The white man does the same thing to you in the street, when he wants to put knots on your head and take advantage of you and don’t have to be afraid of your fighting back. To keep you from fighting back, he gets these old religious Uncle Toms to teach you and me, just like novocaine, suffer peacefully. Don’t stop suffering—just suffer peacefully. As Reverend Cleage pointed out, “Let your blood flow in the streets.” This is a shame. And you know he’s a Christian preacher. If it’s a shame to him, you know what it is to me.

There’s nothing in our book, the Quran—you call it “Ko-ran”—that teaches us to suffer peacefully. Our religion teaches us to be intelligent. Be peaceful, be courteous, obey the law, respect everyone; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery. That’s a good religion. In fact, that’s that old-time religion. That’s the one that Ma and Pa used to talk about: an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and a head for a head, and a life for a life: That’s a good religion. And nobody resents that kind of religion being taught but a wolf, who intends to make you his meal.

This is the way it is with the white man in America. He’s a wolf and you’re sheep. Any time a shepherd, a pastor, teaches you and me not to run from the white man and, at the same time, teaches us not to fight the white man, he’s a traitor to you and me. Don’t lay down our life all by itself. No, preserve your life, it’s the best thing you’ve got. And if you’ve got to give it up, let it be even-steven.

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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you work your way through Malcolm X's "Message to the Grassroots," answer the following questions in the space provided.

Questions	Answers
<p>What does Malcolm X think the goal of any revolution should be?</p>	
<p>How does Malcolm X justify violence as a means for black Americans to improve themselves?</p>	
<p>According to Malcolm X, what is the difference between a "Negro" revolution and a "black" revolution?</p>	
<p>According to Malcolm X, what are "Uncle Toms" and how do they slow progress for blacks in America?</p>	

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Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

[Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Power of Nonviolence"](http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1131) (June 4, 1957)  
<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1131>

From the very beginning there was a philosophy undergirding the Montgomery boycott, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. There was always the problem of getting this method over because it didn't make sense to most of the people in the beginning. We had to use our mass meetings to explain nonviolence to a community of people who had never heard of the philosophy and in many instances were not sympathetic with it. We had meetings twice a week on Mondays and on Thursdays, and we had an institute on nonviolence and social change. We had to make it clear that nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. It does resist. It is not a method of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually.

## NOT TO HUMILIATE BUT TO WIN OVER

Another thing that we had to get over was the fact that the nonviolent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. This was always a cry that we had to set before people that our aim is not to defeat the white community, not to humiliate the white community, but to win the friendship of all of the persons who had perpetrated this system in the past. The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community. A boycott is never an end within itself. It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption.

Then we had to make it clear also that the nonviolent resister seeks to attack the evil system rather than individuals who happen to be caught up in the system. And this is why I say from time to time that the struggle in the South is not so much the tension between white people and Negro people. The struggle is rather between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory it will not be a victory merely for fifty thousand Negroes. But it will be a victory for justice, a victory for good will, a victory for democracy.

Another basic thing we had to get over is that nonviolent resistance is also an internal matter. It not only avoids external violence or external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. And so at the center of our movement stood the philosophy of love. The attitude that the only way to ultimately change humanity and make for the society that we all long for is to keep love at the center of our lives. Now people used to ask me from the beginning what do you mean by love and how is it that you can tell us to love those persons who seek to defeat us and those persons who stand against us; how can you love such persons? And I had to make it clear all along that love in its highest sense is not a sentimental sort of thing, not even an affectionate sort of thing.

## AGAPE LOVE

The Greek language uses three words for love. It talks about *eros*. *Eros* is a sort of aesthetic love. It has come to us to be a sort of romantic love and it stands with all of its beauty. But when we speak of loving

those who oppose us we're not talking about *eros*. The Greek language talks about *philia* and this is a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends. This is a vital, valuable love. But when we talk of loving those who oppose you and those who seek to defeat you we are not talking about *eros* or *philia*. The Greek language comes out with another word and it is *agape*. *Agape* is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men. Biblical theologians would say it is the love of God working in the minds of men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. And when you come to love on this level you begin to love men not because they are likeable, not because they do things that attract us, but because God loves them and here we love the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. It is the type of love that stands at the center of the movement that we are trying to carry on in the Southland—*agape*.

## SOME POWER IN THE UNIVERSE THAT WORKS FOR JUSTICE

I am quite aware of the fact that there are persons who believe firmly in nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but I think every person who believes in nonviolent resistance believes somehow that the universe in some form is on the side of justice. That there is something unfolding in the universe whether one speaks of it as a unconscious process, or whether one speaks of it as some unmoved mover, or whether someone speaks of it as a personal God. There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice and so in Montgomery we felt somehow that as we struggled we had cosmic companionship. And this was one of the things that kept the people together, the belief that the universe is on the side of justice.

God grant that as men and women all over the world struggle against evil systems they will struggle with love in their hearts, with understanding good will. *Agape* says you must go on with wise restraint and calm reasonableness but you must keep moving. We have a great opportunity in America to build here a great nation, a nation where all men live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. We must keep moving toward that goal. I know that some people are saying we must slow up. They are writing letters to the North and they are appealing to white people of good will and to the Negroes saying slow up, you're pushing too fast. They are saying we must adopt a policy of moderation. Now if moderation means moving on with wise restraint and calm reasonableness, then moderation is a great virtue that all men of good will must seek to achieve in this tense period of transition. But if moderation means slowing up in the move for justice and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of the deadening status quo, then moderation is a tragic vice which all men of good will must condemn. We must continue to move on. Our self—respect is at stake; the prestige of our nation is at stake. Civil rights is an eternal moral issue which may well determine the destiny of our civilization in the ideological struggle with communism. We must keep moving with wise restraint and love and with proper discipline and dignity.

## THE NEED TO BE “MALADJUSTED”

Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word. It is the word “maladjusted.” Now we all should seek to live a well—adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things within our social order to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I call upon you to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic effects of the methods of physical violence and to tragic militarism. I call upon you to be maladjusted to such things. I call upon you to be as maladjusted to such things. I call upon you to be as maladjusted as Amos who in the midst of the injustices of his day cried out in words that echo across the generation, “Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.” As

maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who had the vision to see that this nation could not exist half slave and half free. As maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out, "All men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who dreamed a dream of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. God grant that we will be so maladjusted that we will be able to go out and change our world and our civilization. And then we will be able to move from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.



## A Journalist's Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you work your way through Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "The Power of Nonviolence," answer the following questions in the space provided.

Questions	Answers
<p>How does King defend his philosophy of nonviolence against the claim that it is cowardly or passive? In what way does he consider it strong?</p>	
<p>What is the goal of nonviolent resistance?</p>	
<p>What does King mean by <i>agape</i> love and how does it shape his strategy for social change?</p>	
<p>Explain how King thinks God is involved in the Civil Rights Movement?</p>	
<p>How does King respond to those who counsel the Movement to pursue "a policy of moderation"?</p>	

## A Journalist's Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

From Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963:  
<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf>

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN:

While confined here in the Birmingham City Jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities "unwise and untimely." . . . But since I feel that you are men of genuine goodwill and your criticisms 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 affiliate organizations all across the South--one being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary and possible we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented and when the hour came we lived up to our promises. So I am here, along with several members of my staff, because I have basic organizational ties here.

Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, 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 inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country. . . .

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: 1) Collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive. 2) Negotiation. 3) Self-purification and 4) Direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community.

Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than any city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal and unbelievable facts. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation. . . .

. . . So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through a process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?" We decided to set our direct-action program around the Easter season, realizing that with the exception of Christmas, this was the largest shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. . . .

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 nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. . . . 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 with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, "Why didn't you give the new administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one before it acts. . . .

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. . . .

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* and there are *unjust* laws. I would agree with Saint 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 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. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. . . . So I can urge men to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.

. . . Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes

from becoming registered voters and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote despite the fact that the Negro constitutes a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?

These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. 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 hope you can see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law as the rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do it *openly, lovingly*, (not hatefully as the white mothers did in New Orleans when they were seen on television screaming “nigger, nigger, nigger”) and with a willingness to accept the penalty. 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. . . .

We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. . . .

. . . Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn’t this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn’t this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical delvings precipitated the misguided popular mind to make him drink the hemlock? Isn’t this like condemning Jesus because His unique God-Consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, that it is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time. . . . All that is said here grows out of a tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. . . . We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, and forever realize that the time is always ripe to do right. . . .

You spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of the extremist. I started thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of “somebodiness” that they have adjusted to segregation, and, of a few Negroes in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security, and because at points they profit by segregation, have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness, and hatred comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best-known being Elijah Muhammad’s Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable “devil.” I have tried to stand between these two forces saying that we need not follow the “do-nothingism” of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. There is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I’m grateful to God that, through the Negro church, the dimension of nonviolence entered our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, I am convinced that by now many streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as “rabble rousers” and “outside agitators” those of us who are working through the channels of nonviolent direct action and refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black-nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare. . . .

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. 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. Whenever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being “disturbers of the peace” and “outside agitators.” But they went on with the conviction that they were “a colony of heaven,” and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be “astronomically intimidated.” They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church’s silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are. . . .

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. 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 etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries our fore-parents labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation--and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. 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.

I must close now. But before closing I am impelled to mention one other point in your statement that troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping “order” and “preventing violence.” I don’t believe you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its angry violent dogs literally biting six unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I don’t believe you would so quickly commend the policemen if you would observe their ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you would watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you would see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you will observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I’m sorry that I can’t join you in your praise for the police department. . . .

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of the most inhuman provocation. . . . One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, and thusly, carrying our whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. . . .

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

Martin Luther King, Jr.

## A Journalist’s Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** As you work your way through King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” answer the following questions in the space provided.

Questions	Answers
<p>Does King consider himself an “outsider” by staging a civil rights protest in Birmingham? List three reasons he gives in response to this criticism.</p>	
<p>Explain the four-step process King outlines for their nonviolent campaign.</p>	
<p>Does King recognize the danger of breaking laws in order to change them? How does he connect the means of civil disobedience with its aim in order to justify this form of nonviolent resistance?</p>	
<p>Does King think the tension stirred up by his protest movement helps or hinders social and political reform?</p>	

How does King respond to the charge that he is an extremist? Whom does he identify as the real extremists?

Why is King hopeful about the prospects for equal rights for black Americans? Give specific examples and reasons he mentions to support your answer.



# A Journalist's Report: The Better Vision for Black Americans

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing Your Newspaper Column

**Directions:** Incorporate all of the following guidelines into your newspaper article:

(a) An introductory paragraph or two, including general statements and a few specific details about conditions facing black Americans (use notes taken from the website of the National Park Service);

(b) A paragraph assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Malcolm X's vision of a separate nation for black Americans;

(c) A paragraph assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of "the beloved community," in which the peaceful integration of black and white Americans into one society occurs;

(d) The writer's judgment of the two visions: Which one offers the better solution to the needs and problems confronted by the black community?

(e) Justification of the choice: Why is this vision better? Give three or four reasons supporting this claim.

## Assessment

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### *Evaluate, Reflect, Dialogue*

**Directions:** Instruct students to give a one- or two-paragraph answer to any or all of the following questions.

Questions	Answers
<p>Give your evaluation of the strongest claims Malcolm X made regarding why integration will not work and justify your choice. Make sure you include a consideration of why some blacks would have viewed his approach as legitimate in the early 1960s?</p>	
<p>Do you think Malcolm X gave sufficient evidence to establish the claim that black Americans deserve a separate nation: as he put it, “some land of his own where he can solve his own problems”? Why or why not?</p>	

Why does Malcolm X disagree with both the goal and the method of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolent protest movement?

How did Martin Luther King, Jr. expect that his nonviolent protest methods would help to produce a "beloved community"? Connect his means with his ends.

If you had a chance to sit down and talk with either or both men, what would you ask them that you do not yet understand, and what would you want to say to them?