*Martin Luther King Jr. – Letter from Birmingham Jail*

**Pre-reading Questions**

1. What kind of injustice did Martin Luther King find in Birmingham?
2. Why was Martin Luther King disappointed in the white churches?

**Questions for Critical Reading**

1. Define “nonviolent direct action” (para. 2). In what areas of human experience is it best implemented? Is politics its best area of application? What are the four steps in a nonviolent campaign?
2. Do you agree that “law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice” (para. 24)? Why? Describe how law and order either do or do not establish justice in your community. Compare notes with your peers.
3. King describes an unjust law as “a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does no make binding on itself” (para. 17). Devise one or two other definitions of an unjust law. What unjust laws currently on the books do you disagree with?
4. What do you think is the best-written paragraph in the essay? Why?
5. King cites “tension” in paragraph 10 and elsewhere as a beneficial force. Do you agree? What kind of tension does he mean?
6. In what ways was King an extremist (para. 30-31)
7. In his letter, to what extent does King consider the needs of women? Would he feel that issues of women’s right are unrelated to issues of racial equality?
8. According to King, how should a government function in relation to the needs of the individual? Does he feel, like Thoreau’s “Chinese philosopher,” that the empire is built on the individual?

**Calendar Question**

Discuss the question of what one does when one must face an unjust law. What are the real choices? What are the moral imperatives.

King worked very hard on behalf of African-American people in the South. It is useful to see in his letter the extent to which he expressed concern for one race over another. To what extent is this a “nonracial” document.

J**ournal Entry**