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| **Source Bank 2:**  **Source 2A**- Martin Luther King, Jr., open letter to those who questioned the Birmingham campaign tactics, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963  **Source 2B**- Image bank: Photographs of attacks on protesters during the Birmingham campaign, 1963  **Source 2C**- James Bevel, Civil Rights leader of Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the 1960s, oral history interview conducted by James A. Devinney about the Birmingham campaign (excerpt), November 13, 1985  **Source 2D**- John F. Kennedy, presidential address on civil rights (excerpts), June 11, 1963 | |

**SOURCE A:**

NOTE: An extensive excerpt of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” was reprinted in *The Atlantic* on April 16, 2013, the occasion of its 50th anniversary. Teachers and students can locate the excerpt on *The Atlantic’s* site ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com/)) by performing a search for “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

The unabridged letter is also available at a number of university websites, including that of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University

([https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu](https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/)). Under “Featured Documents” in its “King Papers” area, the site contains links to electronic versions of the original letter and an audio version.

SOURCE B: Image bank

IMAGE 1



Image 1: Police dogs attack high school student Walter Gadsden during the Birmingham campaign. The photograph by Bill Hudson was published in the May 4, 1963, *New York Times*.

© AP Photo/Bill Hudson.

IMAGE 2



Image 2: Marchers being sprayed by a high-pressure fire hose during the Birmingham campaign. The photograph by Charles Moore was published in the May 17, 1963, issue of*Life* magazine.

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SOURCE C:

### **JAMES A. DEVINNEY: What made Birmingham a city to focus on?**

JAMES BEVEL: Well, it had a reputation equal to the Mississippi—Birmingham had a reputation equal to the Mississippi Delta in terms of its brutalization of people. It was known for its—Bull Connor, its police department, its violation and bombing, and denigrating black people and it was very resistant city. Klan, a lot of Klan activity. A lot of suppression. And so, that made it special because the greater the resistance in the application of the science of nonviolence, the clearer the issues become for the onlooker.

### **JAMES A. DEVINNEY: So, are you saying that in order for nonviolence to work, it has to be met with violence?**

JAMES BEVEL: No, I said that it, it crystallizes when it's like contrasts. You have a better means of showing and revealing and bringing out the contradiction when there is an adamant attitude in people about superimposing their attitudes upon other people. So that you get a better contrast when you have people who are very adamant about that.

**JAMES A. DEVINNEY: You've talked about the oppression of a city like Birmingham, Bull Connor's reputation and things like that. I want to move forward to the point where you decided to involve children. I mean, if it was such an oppressive environment, wasn't that kind of risky to involve children?**

JAMES BEVEL: Well, in terms of the nature of the situation because of the intense suppression and the conditioning of the adults, it was necessary to use children because children had not been indoctrinated into that kind of violence and suppression. So they could come on the situation with an—a fresh approach. But it wasn't particularly dangerous from our point of view of using children. At that particular point children were in Vietnam. Guys seventeen was in Vietnam and our thinking was that if a young person could go to Vietnam and engage in a war, then the person certainly the same age and younger could engage in a nonviolent war that didn't violate the constitution of the people, property, and that when you use that method the chances of getting injured is very little anyway.

**JAMES A. DEVINNEY: OK, tell me about the adult response to your use of the children.**

JAMES BEVEL: Well it was good. A lot of adults would come out. One of the things we were interested in was getting the American black community involved. And in a city like Birmingham, you can't hardly go to a church, say in Chicago, where there is not a member in that church that is not related to Birmingham. So if you put several thousand children from Birmingham, say in jail, you sort of affected the religious community in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cincinnati, so you wanted to get the black community involved in it. We wanted to get the black community in Birmingham involved and the way you get the people involved is get their children involved. A lot of people were afraid to come to mass meetings in terms of the—the Alabama Bureau of Investigation would be around taking pictures and harassing people.

So when the children became involved, they became involved, which meant they started coming to workshops and mass meetings. And our position was, rather than, kind of, get your children out of the movement, join the movement with your children. That the reason we had was faced with segregation because they themselves hadn't assessed the responsibility of breaking the attitudes and the patterns of misbehavior, say from their parents, and if the students didn't break those patterns then they would live a life of degeneracy in that kind of state. So, it was like the parents pretty much agreed that, and most parents even when it's dangerous and risky, they have a deep sense of appreciation and respect for young people when they're doing what's right. I mean, all of them knew it was potentially dangerous, but they knew it was honorable, and they knew it was noble and they knew it was right. So they didn't fight against it. And then you had myself, and Fred Shuttlesworth, Abernathy, and Martin King preaching, and it's very difficult to go against the logic and the reasoning of a preacher who is really in the—about the business of preaching and all.

**JAMES A. DEVINNEY: All right, let's just go on. Tell me, tell me a story about what it was like when you started to train all those children. You had thousands of children that you were trying to train. There must have been some funny incidents.**

JAMES BEVEL: Well, what happened—I had come out of the Nashville movement and the Mississippi movements where we had basically used young people all the time. And, well, at first King didn't want me to use young people because I had eighty charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor—minors—against me in Jackson, Mississippi for sending young people on the Freedom Ride. Well, that was about five to ten, twelve people would go on demonstrations each day and my position was well, you can't get the dialogues you need with a few people. Besides, most adults have bills to pay, house notes, rents, car notes, utility bills, but the young people wherein they can think at the same level are not, at this point, hooked with all those responsibilities. So, a boy from high school, he get the same effect in terms of being in jail in terms of putting the pressure on the city as his father and yet he is not, there is no economic threat on the family because the father is still on the job*.*

So the strategy was, OK, let's use thousands of people who won't create an economic crisis because they're off the job, so the high school students was like our choice. And we brought that to them in terms of you're adults, but you're still sort of living on your mamas and your daddies, so it is your responsibility in that you don't have to pay the bills, to take the responsibility, to confront the segregation question. And what we did, we went around and started organizing say like, the queens of the high schools, the basketball stars, the football stars, so you get the influence and power leaders involved. And then, they in turn got all the other students involved. Because it was only about, like I said, 15 people a day demonstrating was willing to go to jail because the black community did not have that kind of cohesion in terms of a camaraderie. People knew each other, but only in terms of on their way to jobs, on their way to church, but the students they have sort of community they'd been in for say, ten, eleven, twelve years since they were in elementary school, so they had bonded well.

So if one went to jail, that was a direct effect upon another when because they was classmates. Wherein parents, people live in the community do not have that kind of closeness, so the strategy for using the students was to get the whole involvement. To help them overcome the crippling fears of dogs, and jails, and to help them start thinking through problems on their feet, to think through a living problem causes you to think. Wherein if you're just reading books and referring, but once you get involved, you have to think.

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SOURCE D:

John F. Kennedy, presidential address on civil rights (excerpts), June 11, 1963

It ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstration in the street. It ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.

It ought to be possible, in short, for every American to enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color. In short, every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated, as one would wish his children to be treated. But this is not the case today….

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would be content with the counsels of patience and delay?...

Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them.

The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives.

We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative bodies and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

It is not enough to pin the blame on others, to say this is a problem of one section of the country or another, or deplore the facts that we face. A great change is at hand, and our task, our obligation, is to make that revolution, that change, peaceful and constructive for all….

Next week I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law. The federal judiciary has upheld that proposition in the conduct of its affairs, including the employment of federal personnel, the use of federal facilities, and the sale of federally financed housing.

But there are other necessary measures which only the Congress can provide, and they must be provided at this session. The old code of equity law under which we live commands for every wrong a remedy, but in too many communities, in too many parts of the country, wrongs are inflicted on Negro citizens and there are no remedies at law. Unless the Congress acts, their only remedy is in the streets.

I am, therefore, asking the Congress to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public -- hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments.

This seems to me to be an elementary right. Its denial is an arbitrary indignity that no American in 1963 should have to endure. But many do.

Public domain. Transcript is available at Primary Resources: Civil Rights Announcement, 1963, “JFK,” The American Experience, PBS website,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/jfk-civilrights/>

Video is available at “President John F. Kennedy’s Civil Rights Address,” C-Span, YouTube website,<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BEhKgoA86U>.