

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR *BIRMINGHAM REVOLUTION*

1. On page 12, Gilbreath asserts that “the idea of race is so entrenched in our thinking that it’s almost impossible to imagine not seeing the world through a racialized lens.” Do you think it’s possible to not see race in our daily interactions? Why or why not?
2. According to one Christian leader, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” suggests that the fight for social justice is “an essential mark of the gospel” (p. 17). How does the idea of justice fit into your understanding of the Christian gospel?
3. Birmingham activist Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth remarked that social movements emerge when ideas, people, and God’s power come into proper alignment (p. 30). What are some examples of this phenomenon in action?
4. Chapter 2 features fourteen key themes and experiences that shaped Martin Luther King Jr.’s future. Which of them surprised you the most? Why? Reflect on how these experiences helped form his character.
5. In chapter 3 the white Lutheran pastor Robert Graetz said the civil rights movement was a *church* movement (pp. 50-51). Why do you think people are prone to overlook this fact? What do you think the movement would have looked like without the involvement of the church?

6. In chapter 4, how did the participants in the student-led sit-in movement and Freedom Rides embody Woodley's "spirituality of risk and doing" (described on page 55)?
7. In chapter 5, King's caution is shown in contrast to Shuttlesworth's assertiveness. How did both men's personalities help shape the Birmingham campaign?
8. The circumstances that preceded Dr. King's arrest in Birmingham on Good Friday almost derailed the movement. According to King, he had to "make a faith act" (p. 70). What do the events in room 30 of the Gaston Motel tell us about King's understanding of faith?
9. The "Birmingham Eight," whose public statement opposed Dr. King's presence in Birmingham, were actually sympathetic to the general aims of the civil rights movement (see chapter 6). Do you think history has been fair to them? Why or why not?
10. In chapter 7, Gilbreath argues that Dr. King's anger was a motivating factor in his activism. Do you agree? Explain why or why not.
11. Gilbreath suggests "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was part spiritual treatise and part press release (p. 99). What does this tell us about the Birmingham campaign and Dr. King's approach?
12. According to one scholar, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" represented "a culmination of all of King's ideas, theology, experiences, and civil rights tactics" (p. 107). How do you see all of these things coming to bear in King's letter?
13. In chapter 10, teenagers Janice Kelsey (p. 123) and Fred Burnett (p. 126) encountered two different sides of the youth marches in Birmingham. Reflect on their differing perspectives of the events.

14. Chapter 11 explores how our perceptions of Dr. King have become distorted over the years. Before reading this book, what was your perception of King? What is it now?
15. Birmingham native Diane McWhorter observes that many Birminghamians have tried to go from “amnesia” to “closure” regarding their city’s history (p. 155). “You can’t go around it,” she says. “You must go through it.” What does it mean to “go through” our difficult history?
16. Gilbreath says evangelical perceptions of Martin Luther King Jr. can serve as a “measuring stick” of how far the movement has come since his death (pp. 158-59). How would you measure the movement’s progress on race and social justice?
17. In the epilogue (pp. 167-69), Gilbreath offers four concluding ideas about Dr. King and the Birmingham revolution: (1) know where your power comes from; (2) embrace your inner Shutlesworth; (3) let no man despise your youth; (4) live your letter. What might these ideas look like in your personal faith journey?