



EPISODE 4:
NO EASY WALK (1961–1963)

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Birmingham, Alabama, May 7, 1963. In Birmingham the SCLC faced Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene “Bull” Connor, who used fire hoses to disperse antisegregation demonstrators.

“No Easy Walk” follows the expansion of the Southern civil rights campaign into a mass movement. Late in 1961, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)* and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. joined William Anderson and the Albany Movement in a comprehensive campaign against the city’s strict racial laws. Unlike some earlier protests, however, the demonstration in Albany, Georgia did not spark the usual bout of police brutality: shrewdly, local police chief Laurie Pritchett had studied the movement’s tactic of nonviolence and did not allow physical attacks on the demonstrators—thereby avoid-

ing violent confrontations and negative publicity. Without a clear victory, King decided to leave Albany and wait for new opportunities to challenge segregation.

From the impasse in Albany, the story moves to the high-stakes confrontation in Birmingham, Alabama—the largest industrial town in the South. In 1962, King and the SCLC joined the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth’s attempt to suspend commerce in downtown Birmingham using nonviolent tactics. Opposing them was the segregationist Commissioner

*The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed in 1957 after the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama (see Episode 1). The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was selected as its leader. The SCLC represented a coalition of local church members and reflected the religious nature and structure of black communities in the South. The organization’s goal was to lead the struggle against segregation using tactics of nonviolence and civil disobedience.

1961	
Nov.	In Albany, Georgia, black activist groups (later joined by King and the SCLC) form the Albany Movement to campaign for the desegregation of their city
Dec.	Protests in Albany are not met with the usual bout of police brutality, and although 500 demonstrators are arrested, no clashes are reported
1962	
Aug	Unable to achieve definitive gains in Albany, King and the SCLC leave the city
1963	
Apr.-May	King and the SCLC organize massive demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, rallying thousands of young black students. King is arrested
Apr. 16	While imprisoned, King publishes a <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> defending the act of nonviolent civil disobedience in response to criticism of the movement by white clergy
May 3	In Birmingham, police under the orders of Eugene “Bull” Connor retaliate harshly against the student marchers with police dogs and fire hoses
May 10	Birmingham begins taking measures to desegregate downtown businesses
Aug. 28	King, A. Philip Rudolph, and Bayard Rustin lead over 200,000 people to Washington, DC in a march for “jobs and freedom.” On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, King delivers his most renowned speech, “I Have a Dream”
Sep. 15	Four young black girls are killed when the Ku Klux Klan bombs the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham
Nov. 22	President Kennedy is assassinated during a presidential motorcade through Dallas, Texas, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumes the presidency

of Public Safety, Eugene “Bull” Connor. When Connor had King and other leaders hauled off to prison, the SCLC sent children to the streets of Birmingham. During the demonstrations, the media played a crucial role in exposing the brutality used by law enforcement in confronting the young demonstrators. Through television and the press Americans were exposed to scenes of children battered by high-power fire hoses and of protestors mauled by snarling dogs. The incendiary combination of Connor’s violent response and the extensive media coverage prompted President John F. Kennedy to address the crisis for the first time on national television.

“No Easy Walk” then turns to the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963). In a moment of exceptional unity, civil rights leaders drew nationwide attention to the economic and civic grievances of black Americans. The episode concludes with the tragic death of four black girls in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How did participants evaluate the success and failure of the events in Albany, Birmingham, and Washington? How would you evaluate them?
2. What strategies did movement activists employ in their efforts to transform Albany, Birmingham, and the nation? What kinds of resistance did they meet?
3. What compromises were civil rights leaders pressured to make in pursuit of a common goal?
4. Must a nonviolent movement provoke a violent backlash in order to achieve its goals? What other strategies could the protestors have used to expose the violence and injustice of segregation?
5. What is the role of the media in exposing injustice and influencing public opinion?
6. This episode tracks the expansion of the Southern civil rights campaign into a true mass movement. What events and factors contributed to this change?

Document 1: THE ALBANY MOVEMENT

The Albany Movement was a coalition of civil rights organizations that took its name from the small rural town in Georgia. Formed in the fall of 1961 and led by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the SCLC and local activist groups, the Albany Movement conducted a campaign against segregation. The demonstrators in Albany faced off against local police chief Laurie Pritchett, who purposely avoided excessive violence and negative publicity. The Albany Movement met with only limited success; despite massive participation, none of the facilities in town were desegregated (see the William G. Anderson excerpt below). In the summer of 1962, with no clear victory at hand, King and the SCLC left Albany. The Albany Movement ended, but the lessons learned there were applied to later struggles. While some saw it as King’s lowest point, others saw great value in the experience. The excerpts below reflect on the legacy of the Albany campaign:

WILLIAM G. ANDERSON

— *Head of the Albany Movement and a longtime friend of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The Albany Movement was a qualified success. Qualified in that at the time the movement came to an end—and it didn’t come to an abrupt end; it was sort of phased out, marked by the cessation of the mass demonstrations and the picketing—none of the facilities had

been voluntarily desegregated. The buses had become desegregated, the train station, the bus station. But these were being desegregated by federal edict. It was not a voluntary move on the part of the people of Albany. But the lunch counters, the parks, and other public accommodations were not desegregated and there were no blacks employed as clerks in the stores at the time the Albany Movement came to an end, that is, in the sense of no more mass demonstrations.

But the Albany Movement was an overwhelming success in that, first of all, there was a change in the attitude of the people: the people who were involved in the movement, the people involved in the demonstrations, because they had made a determination within their own minds that they would never accept that segregated society as it was, anymore. There was a change in attitude of the kids who saw their parents step into the forefront and lead the demonstrations. They were determined that they would never go through what their parents went through to get the recognition that they should have as citizens. Secondly, the Albany Movement was a success in that it served as a trial or as a proving ground for a subsequent civil rights movement. It gave some direction. The mistakes that were made in Albany were not to be repeated. For example, that settlement on a handshake in December 1961. That would never be repeated anytime in the future.

Bringing in Dr. King was probably the smartest thing that we ever did. Not only did we get the benefit of having a well-established, well-experienced civil rights organization as a part of the Albany Movement, but it also brought in world attention. The eyes of the world were focused on Albany primarily because of Dr. King. There was not a major newspaper in the world that was not represented in Albany. Not a major television network in the United States that was not represented in Albany. Having seen the results of his coming there in terms of the increase in the number of media people present, I know that they came there because Dr. King was there. He was a media event. We needed the media attention because we thought that we could not get what we were looking for by appealing to the local people. There would have to be outside pressure, and the only way we could get the pressure would be for the media to call to the attention of those outside people what was happening in Albany.¹

ANDREW YOUNG

– Former executive director of the SCLC and a Georgia Congressman

When Martin left Albany he was very depressed. But he knew what had happened. He really felt that it was a federal judge that called off that movement. He had a very emotional exchange with Burke Marshall over that, because he felt that the Kennedy administration had helped to undercut the possibility of continuing in Albany.

The weakness of the Albany Movement was that it was totally unplanned and we were total-

ly unprepared. It was a miscalculation on the part of a number of people that a spontaneous appearance by Martin Luther King could bring change—that it wasn't just a spontaneous appearance by Martin Luther King, it was the planning, the organizing, the strategy that he brought with him that brought change. The weakness was not understanding that.

The strength was that I don't know that there were any more powerful and beautiful people. Albany was one of those areas where blacks seemed to be still intact culturally. The singing, the folklore, had a kind of indigenous power to it that meant you couldn't walk away from Albany, Georgia.²

CHARLES SHERROD

— *Former SNCC Field Secretary in Albany*

Some people talk about failure. Where's the failure? Are we not integrated in every facet? Did we stop at any time? What stopped us? Did any injunction stop us? Did any white man stop us? Did any black man stop us? Nothing stopped us in Albany, Georgia. We showed the world.³

CONNECTIONS

1. Scholars and activists describe the activities of civil rights participants as “campaigns.” How is a civil rights campaign different than from a political campaign? What constitutes victory in a civil rights campaign?
2. What were the goals of the campaign in Albany?
3. How would you evaluate the success of the Albany campaign? Why did some regard the Albany Movement as a failure? What lessons did King and the SCLC learn in Albany about effective methods to confront segregation? What lessons did others learn? How do you explain the different perspectives?
4. What tensions within the civil rights movement did the Albany campaign expose?
5. Andrew Young—former executive director of the SCLC and a US congressman—recently attempted to analyze the goals of the movement. Young argues that its nonviolent approach sought to avoid emotional reactions to violence. It aims to transform the oppressor rather than defeat it:

“Any kind of emotional outburst—violence, arrogance, intentional martyrdom—endangers the process of transformation. Emotionalism confirms the prejudices of those that nonviolence aims to transform. The oppressed must be transformed too. They must learn to value and respect themselves, to understand the way they support an oppressive system, and they must learn to forgive those who have hurt them. In the process of citizenship schooling, the boycott, mass meetings, and demonstrations, people grew in understanding and gained a sense of their own worth, power, and dignity.”⁴

What goals did Young set for civil rights protests? Based on these goals, how would you evaluate the successes and failures of the Albany Movement?

Document 2: LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM JAIL

In 1963, following the inconclusive struggle in Albany, Georgia, King and members of the SCLC went to bolster the campaign against the unyielding government of Birmingham, Alabama. King drew upon the lessons learned from Albany, and in order to draw media attention, he deliberately got himself arrested.

While King was in jail, a group of clergymen published an open letter to him in the *Birmingham News*. The letter charged that the “demonstrations are unwise and untimely” and urged black citizens to act peacefully, “withdraw support from these demonstrations,” and “unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham.”⁵ Written on the margin of a *New York Times* article, King’s reply reflected deep disappointment with the call for restraint in the face of the inhumanity of Birmingham segregation. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” gave voice to the distress and frustration of Southern blacks and explained the rationale for confronting segregation in the streets:

April 16, 1963 Birmingham, Alabama

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.” Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas [...] But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

[...] You may well ask, “Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn’t negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiations. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which 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. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word “tension.” I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that 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, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. [...]

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely [. . .] My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is a historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but as

Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.[...] We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience⁶

CONNECTIONS

1. How did King respond to the charge that the protests in Birmingham were "unwise and untimely"? How would you respond? What rationale did King offer for his actions? Why did he think that the struggle against segregation could not be confined to courtrooms and polite negotiations?
2. King describes the challenges of explaining the brutality of segregation and violence to his six-year-old daughter? How would you explain segregation and violence to a child? What would you want him or her to know?
3. Why did King think it was necessary to create "constructive nonviolent tension" in order to effect change? How can tension help to change people's perspectives?

4. King wrote about the “degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness’” prevalent among blacks in America. What did he mean by the term ‘nobodiness’? How, according to the King’s letter, do indignities like name-calling rob blacks of their individuality and humanity? Can you think of other examples in which people are made to feel like “nobodies” because of the way they’re treated?

Document 3: **PRESIDENT KENNEDY ADDRESSES CIVIL RIGHTS**

Throughout May of 1963, the media broadcast horrific images of young black protestors assaulted by the powerful spray of fire hoses, attacked by ferocious police dogs, and brutalized by “Bull” Connor’s police in Birmingham. The images and news reports of police officers and firemen assaulting their black neighbors created a painful dissonance in the minds of many Americans. In the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and the escalating conflict in Vietnam—both carried out in the name of freedom and democracy—the legally sanctioned violence against blacks threatened to expose America’s war rhetoric as hypocritical and self-serving. By June, segregationist violence compelled President John F. Kennedy to publicly respond to the civil rights crisis. For the first time, a president declared that segregation had no place in American life and urged firm action to address its damaging and lasting effects.

Good evening, my fellow citizens:

[...]Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Vietnam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

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 demonstrations in the street, and 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.

The Negro baby born in America today, regardless of the section of the Nation in which he is born, has about one-half as much chance of completing a high school education as a white baby born in the same place on the same day, one-third as much chance of completing college, one-third as much chance of becoming a professional man, twice as much chance of becoming unemployed, about one-seventh as much chance of earning \$10,000 a year, a life expectancy which is 7 years shorter, and the prospects of earning only half as much.

This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that

threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right.

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 then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.

We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it, and we cherish our freedom here at home, but are we to say to the world, and much more importantly, to each other that this is a land of the free except for the Negroes; that we have no second-class citizens except Negroes; that we have no class or caste system, no ghettos, no master race except with respect to Negroes?

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 street. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is a time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.

[...] 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. [...]

I am also asking Congress to authorize the Federal Government to participate more fully in lawsuits designed to end segregation in public education. We have succeeded in persuading many districts to desegregate voluntarily. Dozens have admitted Negroes without violence. Today a Negro is attending a State-supported institution in every one of our 50 states, but the pace is very slow.

[...] We cannot say to 10 percent of the population that you can't have that right; that your children can't have the chance to develop whatever talents they have; that the only way that they are going to get their rights is to go into the streets and demonstrate. I think we owe them and we owe ourselves a better country than that.⁷

CONNECTIONS

1. President Kennedy points to several contradictions inherent in twentieth-century American democracy. What were they? Why did they become especially significant in June 1963?
2. Who did President Kennedy address in his speech? How did he frame the problem of segregation? If you were to address the nation on the problems of racism today, how would you frame the problem? What arguments would you use to support your position?
3. What moral principles did President Kennedy articulate in his speech? What was his democratic vision for post-segregation America?
4. What role did President Kennedy assign to the federal government in promoting a society with equal opportunity for all Americans?

Document 4: WE WANT OUR FREEDOM AND WE WANT IT NOW!

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-111234



August 28, 1963. Roy Wilkins, NAACP Executive Director, on the Mall, leading protestors to the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington. The massive demonstration led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

By the summer of 1963, John Lewis was recognized as one of the most prominent leaders of the civil rights movement. The third chairman of SNCC, Lewis spoke for a new generation of activists who advocated a more confrontational nonviolent approach in the fight against segregation. Lewis was slated to speak at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, along with King, A. Philip Randolph, and executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Roy Wilkins. The day before the march, however, Lewis was told that some felt his speech was too critical of the administration and that it threatened the fragile alliance between

mainstream civil rights leaders and President Kennedy.

A. Philip Randolph, an elder civil rights statesman who first conceived of the March on Washington for Civil Rights in 1941, urged Lewis not to jeopardize the march with radical rhetoric. He requested that Lewis rewrite his speech, and reluctantly Lewis agreed. In his memoir, *Walking with the Wind*, Lewis recalled what it was like to finally step up to the podium:

As I began, I actually wondered if I'd be able to speak at all. My voice quavered at first, but I quickly caught the feeling, the call and response, just like at church. The crowd was with me, hanging on every word, and I could feel that. [...]

The speech itself felt like an act of protest to me. After going through what I had been through during the past sixteen or so hours, after feeling the pressures that had been placed on me and finally stepping out and delivering these words, it felt just like a demonstration, a march. It felt like defiance. [...] I felt defiance in every direction: against the entrenched segregation of the South; against the neglect of the federal government; also against the conservative concerns of the establishment factions, black and white, that were trying to steer the movement with their own interests in mind rather than they needs of the people.

By the time I reached my closing words, I felt lifted both by a feeling of righteous indignation and by the heartfelt response of those hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children before me, who burst into cheers with each phrase:

We will not stop. If we do not get meaningful legislation out of this Congress, the time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the streets of Jackson, through the streets of Danville, through the streets of Cambridge, through the streets of Birmingham. But we will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today.

By the force of our demands, our determination, and our numbers, we shall splinter the desegregated South into a thousand pieces and put them back together in the image of God and democracy.

We must say, "Wake up, America. *Wake up!!!*" For we will not stop and we *will* not be patient.⁸

Forty years after this speech, Lewis—now a congressman— was asked to give the keynote address in a commemorative ceremony for the fortieth anniversary of the March on Washington. In his speech, he reflected on what had changed in 40 years, and on what work still remained:

In 1963, I was on the outside protesting, looking in. I could not even register to vote in my native state of Alabama. Now, because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, because of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, I am on the inside making laws.

Forty years ago, hundreds of thousands of ordinary Americans came to Washington to demand justice of their leaders. The President—the Congress—heard their words—caught their spirit—and made our country a better place.

Because of the March, because of the involvement of hundreds and thousands of ordinary citizens, we experienced what I like to call a nonviolent revolution under the rule of law—a revolution of values, a revolution of ideas. We have made much of Dr. King’s dream come true. I wish Medgar Evers, President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy were here today to see just how far we have come.

And while we have come a great distance—while we have made great progress—we still have a distance to go.

As the leaders of our people—as Members of Congress—we must recall the passion, the vision, and the determination that made the United States the greatest nation on earth.

Call it the spirit of our Founding Fathers. Call it the spirit of Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt or FDR [President Franklin D. Roosevelt]. Call it the spirit of the March on Washington. Call it the spirit of history.

We must recapture this spirit. As a nation and a people, we must take this spirit and make it part of our thoughts, our actions and our lives. If we do this, we can make Dr. King’s Dream come true. We can build what we liked to call the Beloved Community—a truly interracial democracy—a community at peace with itself.

And when we reach that Beloved Community—when we are one nation, one people, one house and one family—we will come to the end of a March that our nation started some forty years ago.⁹

CONNECTIONS

1. Why was Lewis asked to change his speech? What does his story reveal about the delicate balance between politicians and activists in the context of a movement for social change?
2. What was Lewis asked to compromise? When is it important to compromise? How do you know when to compromise and when to stand on principle? Is it possible to do both?
3. Leaders of the March on Washington sought comprehensive civil rights, full and fair employment and integrated education and housing for all blacks. Forty years later, how did Lewis evaluate the accomplishments on the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom? What message did he want his audience to understand?
4. Lewis dreamed that America would one day be a “Beloved Community—a truly interracial democracy—a community at peace with itself.” What does the term “Beloved Community” mean? What is the role of politicians in helping America achieve that goal? What is the role of ordinary citizens?

Document 5: WE ALL DID IT

On a Sunday morning in September 1963, a bomb exploded in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Four black girls, preparing for church, were killed: Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins. A few days after the bombing, Charles Morgan, Jr., a white lawyer, addressed the Young Men's Business Club, calling on his peers to think deeply about their responsibility for the bombing:

Four little girls were killed in Birmingham Sunday. A mad, remorseful, worried community asks, "Who did it? Who threw that bomb? Was it a Negro or a white?"

The answer should be "We all did it." Every last one of us is condemned for that crime and the bombing before it and the ones last month, last year, a decade ago. We all did it.

A short time later, white policemen kill a Negro and wound another. A few hours later two young men on a motor bike shoot and kill a Negro child. Fires break out and, in Montgomery, white youths assault Negroes. And all across Alabama, an angry guilty people cry out their mocking shouts of indignity and say they wonder, "Why?" "Who?" Everyone then "deploras" the "dastardly" act.

But, you know the "who" of "who did it?" is really rather simple. The "who" is every little individual who talks about the "niggers" and spreads the seeds of his hate to his neighbor and his son. The jokester, the crude oaf whose racial jokes rock the party with laughter. The "who" is every governor who ever shouted for lawlessness and became a law violator.

It is every senator and every representative who in the halls of Congress stands and with mock humility tells the world that things back home aren't really like they are. It is courts that move ever so slowly and newspapers that timorously defend the law. It is all the Christians and all the ministers who spoke too late in anguished cries against violence.

It is the coward in each of us who clucks admonitions. We are ten years of lawless preachments, ten years of criticism of law, of courts, of our fellow man, a decade of telling school children the opposite of what the civics books say. We are a mass of intolerance and bigotry and stand indicted before our young. We are cursed by the failure of each of us to accept responsibility, by our defense of an already dead institution.

Sunday, while Birmingham, which prides itself on the number of its churches, was attending worship service, a bomb went off and an all-white police force moved into action, a police force which has been praised by city officials and others at least once a day for a month or so. A police force which has solved no bombings. A police force which many Negroes feel is perpetrating the very evils we decry. And why would Negroes think this?

There are no Negro policemen; there are no Negro sheriff's deputies. Few Negroes have served on juries. Few have been allowed to vote, few have been allowed to accept

responsibility, or granted even a simple part to play in the administration of justice. Do not misunderstand me. It is not that I think that white policemen had anything whatsoever to do with the killing of these children or previous bombings. It's just that Negroes who see an all-white police force must think in terms of its failure to prevent or solve the bombings and think perhaps Negroes would have worked a little bit harder. They throw rocks and bottles and bullets. And we whites don't seem to know why the Negroes are so lawless. So, we lecture them[...]

Those four little Negro girls were human beings. They have lived their fourteen years in a leaderless city; a city where no one accepts responsibility; where everybody wants to blame somebody else. A city with a reward fund [for information on capturing the bombers] which grew like Topsy as a sort of sacrificial offering, a balm for the conscience of the "good people." The "good people" whose ready answer is for those "right-wing extremists" to shut up. People who absolve themselves of guilt. The liberal lawyer who told me this morning, "Me? I'm not guilty," then proceeded to discuss the guilt of the other lawyers, the ones who told the people that the Supreme Court did not properly interpret the law. And that's the way it is with the southern liberals. They condemn those with whom they disagree for speaking while they sigh in fearful silence.

Birmingham is a city in which the major industry, operated from Pittsburgh, never tried to solve the problem. It is a city where four little Negro girls can be born into a second-class school system, live a segregated life, ghettoed into their own little neighborhoods, restricted to Negro churches, destined to ride in Negro ambulances, to Negro wards of hospitals or to a Negro cemetery. Local papers, on their front and editorial pages, call for order and then exclude their names from obituary columns.

And who is really guilty? Each of us. Each citizen who has not consciously attempted to bring about peaceful compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States, each citizen who has ever said, "They ought to kill that nigger," every citizen who votes for the candidate with the bloody flag; every citizen and every school-board member and school teacher and principal and businessman and judge and lawyer who has corrupted the minds of our youth; every person in this community who has in any way contributed during the past several years to the popularity of hatred, is at least as guilty, or more so, than the demented fool who threw that bomb.

What's it like living in Birmingham? No one ever really has and no one will until this city becomes part of the United States.

Birmingham is not a dying city; it is dead.¹⁰

In his memoir *Leaving Birmingham* journalist Paul Hemphill recalled:

As soon as Morgan had finished, an eager young businessman jumped to his feet and moved that the YMBC go out and find itself a black member immediately, right now. When the motion failed even to get a second, Morgan knew his days in Birmingham were over. The speech made the *New York Times* the next day, *Life* magazine two weeks later; and in December of that year Morgan wrote a stinging essay in *Look* magazine, entitled “I Saw a City Die.” It was more or less his public announcement that he, like so many other promising young men before him, was leaving Birmingham.¹¹

CONNECTIONS

1. Who did Morgan hold responsible for the bombing? How did he explain his opinion? What examples did he use to underscore his argument?
2. What did his speech reveal about the ways in which racism was sustained and reinforced by good citizens who say they oppose racial violence and abuse?
3. Did Morgan lose his leverage to influence the future of Birmingham when he decided to leave? How can ordinary citizens change attitudes and conditions in their communities?
4. What does it take to stand up against a group that tolerates racism and hate? Have you ever stood up to peers when you felt their actions were immoral?

¹ Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 113–14.

² *Ibid.*, 112–13.

³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1996), 252.

⁵ “Letter to Dr. King from Clergymen,” *Birmingham Public Library*, <http://www.bplonline.org/Archives/faqs/letterrespondedtobymartin-lutherking.asp> (accessed on May 4, 2006).

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, Stanford University, http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/liberation_curriculum/pdfs/letterfrombirmingham_wwcw.pdf (accessed on July 20, 2006).

⁷ John F. Kennedy, “Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights,” *John F. Kennedy Library and Museum*, <http://www.cs.umb.edu/~rwhealan/jfk/j061163.htm> (accessed on May 4, 2006).

⁸ John Lewis with Michael D’Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998), 227–28.

⁹ John Lewis, “Commemoration Speech of the March on Washington,” *U.S. Department of State International Information Programs*, <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/civilrights/s072403.htm> (accessed on May 8, 2006).

¹⁰ Anthony Lewis and *The New York Times*, *Portrait of a Decade: The Second American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1964) 200–2.

¹¹ Paul Hemphill, *Leaving Birmingham* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1993), 154.