

Radicalizing an Idea: Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X

Overview:

Part of the fabric of democracy is the people's voice should be heard, but when it falls on deaf ears, how do we reclaim our power? American society originates and transforms as its citizens respond to unfair or unjust authority. When authority ignores us, we dump tea in a harbor; we march and protest in the streets; or we, through thought or deed, lash out against the people in authority. But, societies also must subscribe to a code of ethics for citizens to feel civilization's security. Does all this lashing out and fighting meet our ethical standards? How do we decide? How do we, as citizens, become Thoreau's "corporation with a conscientious"? These are the questions explored in the following unit, pairing Thoreau's seminal texts "Resistance to a Civil Government" and "A Plea for Captain John Brown" with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet."

Essential Questions:

- Is civil disobedience a morally acceptable way to create change?
 - Why do people resist their governments?
 - How do governments respond? What are the consequences of each response or lack of response?
 - How should we resist our government? Is violence ever morally acceptable? What makes people turn to violence?
- How are people persuaded?
 - What is rhetoric?
 - What tools do we use to get our point across?

Objectives:

I can...

- Compare and contrast how different authors deal with similar ideas
- Compare and contrast how one author's ideas change over time
- Analyze how historical events affect the people surrounding them
- Create and articulate my own opinion about civil disobedience by utilizing rhetorical strategies
- Use a variety of texts and historical contexts to support my own opinions
- Analyze an author's and/or speaker's use of rhetorical devices

Iowa Core Standards Met:

Reading Informational Texts:

- [RI.11-12.1](#)
- [RI.11-12.2](#)
- [RI.11-12.3](#)
- [RI.11-12.5](#)
- [RI.11-12.8](#)
- [RI.11-12.9](#)

Speaking and Listening:

- [SL.11-12.1](#)
- [SL.11-12.4](#)

21st Century Skills--Civic Literacy:

- [SS.9-12.PSCL.1](#)
- [SS.9-12.PSCL.5](#)

Day One:

Plan:

- Journal
 - Using at least 20 sentences total, outline an argument that you have witnessed or been a part of recently.
 - Who was in the argument?
 - What was each side's position? What was their main point?
 - What happened during the argument? What was the outcome?
- Rhetoric Notes: [Prezi](#)
 - Go through Aristotelian Triad, Golden Triangle, etc.
- Assignment
 - Read and annotate: Combining Ethos, Logos, and Pathos→ Conversations pgs. 18-21

Day Two:

Plan:

- Review of strategies
 - Open journal from yesterday
 - Write 3 sentences about the logical appeal
 - Write 3 sentences about the ethical appeal
 - Write 3 sentences about the emotional appeal
- Background on Thoreau
- Assignment:
 - Begin reading and annotating excerpts from "Resistance to a Civil Government"

Day Three:

Plan:

- Journal:
 - Using at least 20 sentences total, why do we have a government? What's its job? If we complain about it all the time, why can't we just get rid of it?
 - What does Thoreau think about the purpose of gov't?
- Finish reading and annotating sections of "Resistance to a Civil Government"
- Assignment: once done, take notes over the rhetorical devices section of the Prezi

Day Four:

Plan:

- Opener:
 - Take out Thoreau annotations
 - Look through your annotations
 - Find:
 - A quote that needs discussion
 - A question you had about the text
 - Your best annotation
 - Get into your small groups→ 2 minute rotations
 - Discuss your quote: each person must speak (8 minutes)
 - Ask your question: same procedure (8 minutes)
 - Share your annotations (8 minutes)
 - Grade your annotations and turn in
- Civil Rights background presentation
 - Two column notes

Day 5:

- Read and annotate Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

Day 6:

Plan:

- Journal:
 - What are the issues for you that are worth protesting? What would the gov't have to do for you to protest? What would be foolish to protest?
- MLK, Jr. annotations:
 - Choose a two highlighters and a partner
 - With one color, highlight and label all the rhetorical devices you see
 - With the other color, highlight the places where Thoreau and Dr. King share similar ideas
 - Post on each section of the board
 - Facilitate whole class discussion
 - Ending question: On page 11 of "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Dr. King lists abuses the black community has endured up to this point. What would your response be to these abuses? When would you turn violent? Is there a point?

- Presentation on the American history of civil disobedience
 - Revolution and John Brown and the abolitionists
- Begin reading and annotating sections of “A Plea for Captain John Brown” by Thoreau

Day 7:

Plan:

- Finish “John Brown”
- Journal:
 - Is John Brown a patriot or terrorist? Would you back John Brown’s actions at Harpers Ferry? If you support him, how would you: money, speeches, joining the raid?
- Take notes over claims portion of the Prezi
- Facilitate conversation/debate
 - Label on side of the classroom “patriot” and the other “terrorist”
 - Have them sit on the side they most agree with
 - Gather and create arguments using different types of claims and rhetorical strategies
 - Present each side; one rebuttal each; then closing arguments
- Add to journal: would you change sides? Why or why not? What was persuasive or not about the other side?

Day 8:

Plan:

- MX Background Information
 - Paragraph from his autobiography
 - Conversation: What do you notice? What assumptions do you have about this man?
 - Show Biography.com video
- **Annotating “Ballot or the Bullet”** (piece attached)
 - Handout piece and explain procedure for partner annotating:
 - Desks are arranged in pairs facing each other, creating three long columns across the room
 - Find partner and sit across from them
 - Listen to a section of the speech and underline words to look up
 - Annotate with your partner for 5 minutes
 - Look up words
 - Summarize
 - Find examples logos, pathos, and ethos
 - Rotate partners

- Listen to a section
 - Work with their partner for 5 minutes
 - Rotate
- **Comparing MX and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**
 - Students will write a journal answering the following question:
 - **After reading both Dr. King and Malcolm X, who do you think was more persuasive, and why?**
 - **Requirements:**
 - **Use rhetorical language**
 - Logos: How was the message persuasive?
 - Pathos: Which emotion was stronger? Who used more literary devices?
 - Ethos: Who seemed more credible? Who has a persona you want to follow?
 - **Must be a well-formed paragraph (at least 15 sentences):**
 - Topic Sentence
 - Explanation
 - Examples from the text
 - 1, 2, 3 with transitions in between
 - Concluding Sentence

Days 9 and 10:

Plan:

- Speech Final and work days

Days 11 and 12:

Plan:

- Listen to speeches and fill out Listening Guide

Resistance to Civil Government (Civil Disobedience) is an essay by Henry David Thoreau that was first published in 1849. In it, Thoreau argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule their consciences, and that they have a duty to resist the government's attempts to make them the agents of injustice. Thoreau was motivated in part by his disgust with slavery and the Mexican–American War (1846–1848).

Why are we reading this?

· So we can understand civil disobedience, analyze the evolution of protesting, and begin to prepare for our speech, which will answer the question, “Is civil disobedience a morally acceptable way to create change?”

Directions:

We are **ANNOTATING** this piece:

Step 1: Number and chunk the text

Step 2: Actively read and make notes

Types of Notes:

1. Vocabulary and references
2. Summarize main ideas
3. Comment
4. Connect to what you already know about Thoreau

Breaking Down the Rhetoric:

1. What are Thoreau's main claims and points made in this piece? (Hint: Paragraph-by-paragraph, they should directly relate to your summaries.)
2. What makes him believable? What topics does he address that add to his credibility?
3. What metaphors, similes, analogies, rhetorical questions, and instances of repetition make the piece persuasive?

Step 3: Connect to the purpose

- How should gov'ts respond to dissenters?
- What is our role as citizen within a gov't?
- Extremism--what actions are acceptable and under what circumstances?

excerpts from Resistance to a Civil Government (Civil Disobedience)

Henry David Thoreau

1.) I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe- "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have...

2.) But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

3.) After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?- in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislation? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice...

4.) The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put

themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others- as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders- serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few- as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men- serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it...

5.) Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them... Why is [the government] not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and do better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels?

6.) If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth- certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn...

7.) I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year- no more- in the person of its tax-gatherer... My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with- for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel- and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he

is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action. I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name- if ten honest men only- ay, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love better to talk about it: that we say is our mission, Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man...

8.) Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles....If any think that their influence would be lost there [in prison], and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible.... But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now...

9.) I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of

wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous...

10.) Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of men being forced to have this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live? When I meet a government which says to me, "Your money or your life," why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do: I cannot help that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man...

From the Birmingham jail, where he was imprisoned as a participant in nonviolent demonstrations against segregation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in longhand the letter which follows. It was his response to a public statement of concern and caution issued by eight white religious leaders of the South.

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Types of Notes:

1. Vocabulary and references
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3. Comment
4. Connect to what you already know about the Civil Rights Movement

Breaking Down the Rhetoric:

1. What are King’s main claims and points made in this piece? (Hint: Paragraph-by-paragraph, they should directly relate to your summaries.)
2. What makes him believable? What topics does he address that add to his credibility?
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Step 3: Connect to the purpose

- Just vs. unjust laws
- Direct action campaigns
- Extremism

Letter from Birmingham Jail

16 April 1963

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

- 1.) I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "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... Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked 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 promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.
- 2.) But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.
- 3.) 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 within its bounds.
- 4.) You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

- 5.) In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation. ...
- 6.) 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 negotiation. 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....
- 7.) 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 an 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.
- 8.) We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well-timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

- 9.) We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps 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 county 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 impatience.
- 10.) 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, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical

for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

- 11.) Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether 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...Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong....
- 12.) Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?
- 13.) Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First-Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.
- 14.) I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

- 15.) Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.
- 16.) We should never forget that everything Adolf 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. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's anti-religious laws....
- 17.) In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery?... We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber....
- 18.) You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community...
- 19.) I have tried to stand between the two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they

refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies--a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare. ...

20.) But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists....

Henry David Thoreau delivered this speech in Concord, Massachusetts, two weeks after the raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859. His unequivocal defense and admiration of Brown stood against popular opinion of the time, much of it mirroring the characterization by the abolitionist newspaper the Liberator as “a misguided, wild, and apparently insane effort.” The excerpt below is the final third of the speech.

Why are we reading this?

· So we can understand civil disobedience, analyze the evolution of protesting, and begin to prepare for our speech, which will answer the question, “Is civil disobedience a morally acceptable way to create change?”

Directions:

We are ANNOTATING this piece:

Step 1: Number and chunk the text

Step 2: Actively read and make notes

Types of Notes:

1. Vocabulary and references
2. Summarize main ideas
3. Comment
4. Connect to what you already know about Thoreau

Breaking Down the Rhetoric:

1. What are Thoreau’s main claims and points made in this piece? (Hint: Paragraph-by-paragraph, they should directly relate to your summaries.)
2. What makes him believable? What topics does he address that add to his credibility?
3. What metaphors, similes, analogies, rhetorical questions, and instances of repetition make the piece persuasive?

Step 3: Connect to the purpose

- How should gov’ts respond to dissenters?
- What is our role as citizen within a gov’t?
- Extremism--what actions are acceptable and under what circumstances?

"All is quiet at Harper's Ferry," say the journals. What is the character of that calm which follows when the law and the slaveholder prevail? I regard this event as a touchstone designed to bring out, with glaring distinctness, the character of this government. We needed to be thus assisted to see it by the light of history. It needed to see itself. When a government puts forth its strength on the side of injustice, as ours to maintain slavery and kill the liberators of the slave, it reveals itself a merely brute force, or worse, a demoniacal force. It is the head of the Plug-Uglies. It is more manifest than ever that tyranny rules. I see this government to be effectually allied with France and Austria in oppressing mankind. There sits a tyrant holding fettered four millions of slaves; here comes their heroic liberator. This most hypocritical and diabolical government looks up from its seat on the gasping four millions, and inquires with an assumption of innocence: "What do you assault me for? Am I not an honest man? Cease agitation on this subject, or I will make a slave of you, too, or else hang you."

We talk about a representative government; but what a monster of a government is that where the noblest faculties of the mind, and the whole heart, are not represented. A semi-human tiger or ox, stalking over the earth, with its heart taken out and the top of its brain shot away. Heroes have fought well on their stumps when their legs were shot off, but I never heard of any good done by such a government as that.

The only government that I recognize,--and it matters not how few are at the head of it, or how small its army,--is that power that establishes justice in the land, never that which establishes injustice. What shall we think of a government to which all the truly brave and just men in the land are enemies, standing between it and those whom it oppresses? A government that pretends to be Christian and crucifies a million Christs every day!

Treason! Where does such treason take its rise? I cannot help thinking of you as you deserve, ye governments. Can you dry up the fountains of thought? High treason, when it is resistance to tyranny here below, has its origin in, and is first committed by, the power that makes and forever recreates man. When you have caught and hung all these human rebels, you have accomplished nothing but your own guilt, for you have not struck at the fountain-head. You presume to contend with a foe against whom West Point cadets and rifled cannon point not. Can all the art of

the cannon-founder tempt matter to turn against its maker? Is the form in which the founder thinks he casts it more essential than the constitution of it and of himself?

The United States have a cottle of four millions of slaves. They are determined to keep them in this condition; and Massachusetts is one of the confederated overseers to prevent their escape. Such are not all the inhabitants of Massachusetts, but such are they who rule and are obeyed here. It was Massachusetts, as well as Virginia, that put down this insurrection at Harper's Ferry. She sent the marines there, and she will have to pay the penalty of her sin.

...The only free road, the Underground Railroad, is owned and managed by the Vigilant Committee. They have tunnelled under the whole breadth of the land. Such a government is losing its power and respectability as surely as water runs out of a leaky vessel, and is held by one that can contain it.

I hear many condemn these men because they were so few. When were the good and the brave ever in a majority? Would you have had him wait till that time came?--till you and I came over to him? The very fact that he had no rabble or troop of hirelings about him would alone distinguish him from ordinary heroes. His company was small indeed, because few could be found worthy to pass muster. Each one who there laid down his life for the poor and oppressed was a picked man, culled out of many thousands, if not millions; apparently a man of principle, of rare courage, and devoted humanity; ready to sacrifice his life at any moment for so much by laymen as by ministers of the Gospel, not so much by the fighting sects as by the Quakers, and not so much by Quaker men as by Quaker women?

This event advertises me that there is such a fact as death,--the possibility of a man's dying. It seems as if no man had ever died in America before; for in order to die you must first have lived. I don't believe in the hearses, and palls, and funerals that they have had. There was no death in the case, because there had been no life; they merely rotted or sloughed off, pretty much as they had rotted or sloughed along. No temple's veil was rent, only a hole dug somewhere. Let the dead bury their dead. The best of them fairly ran down like a clock. Franklin,--Washington,--they were let off without dying; they were merely missing one day....Only half a dozen or so have died since the world began. Do you think that you are going to die, sir? No! there's no hope of you. You haven't got your lesson yet. You've got to stay after school. We make a needless ado

about capital punishment,--taking lives, when there is no life to take. Memento mori! We don't understand that sublime sentence which some worthy got sculptured on his gravestone once. We've interpreted it in a grovelling and snivelling sense; we've wholly forgotten how to die.

But be sure you do die nevertheless. Do your work, and finish it. If you know how to begin, you will know when to end.

These men, in teaching us how to die, have at the same time taught us how to live. If this man's acts and words do not create a revival, it will be the severest possible satire on the acts and words that do....

One writer says that Brown's peculiar monomania made him to be "dreaded by the Missourians as a supernatural being." Sure enough, a hero in the midst of us cowards is always so dreaded. He is just that thing. He shows himself superior to nature. He has a spark of divinity in him....

When I reflect to what a cause this man devoted himself, and how religiously, and then reflect to what cause his judges and all who condemn him so angrily and fluently devote themselves, I see that they are as far apart as the heavens and earth are asunder.

The amount of it is, our "leading men" are a harmless kind of folk, and they know well enough that they were not divinely appointed, but elected by the votes of their party.

Who is it whose safety requires that Captain Brown be hung? Is it indispensable to any Northern man? Is there no resource but to cast this man also to the Minotaur? If you do not wish it, say so distinctly. While these things are being done, beauty stands veiled and music is a screeching lie. Think of him,--of his rare qualities!--such a man as it takes ages to make, and ages to understand; no mock hero, nor the representative of any party. A man such as the sun may not rise upon again in this benighted land. To whose making went the costliest material, the finest adamant; sent to be the redeemer of those in captivity; and the only use to which you can put him is to hang him at the end of a rope! You who pretend to care for Christ crucified, consider what you are about to do to him who offered himself to be the savior of four millions of men.

Any man knows when he is justified, and all the wits in the world cannot enlighten him on that point. The murderer always knows that he is justly punished; but when a government takes

the life of a man without the consent of his conscience, it is an audacious government, and is taking a step towards its own dissolution. Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong? Are laws to be enforced simply because they were made? or declared by any number of men to be good, if they are not good? Is there any necessity for a man's being a tool to perform a deed of which his better nature disapproves? Is it the intention of lawmakers that good men shall be hung ever? Are judges to interpret the law according to the letter, and not the spirit? What right have you to enter into a compact with yourself that you will do thus or so, against the light within you? Is it for you to make up your mind,--to form any resolution whatever,--and not accept the convictions that are forced upon you, and which ever pass your understanding?....

I am here to plead his cause with you. I plead not for his life, but for his character,--his immortal life; and so it becomes your cause wholly, and is not his in the least. Some eighteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified; this morning, perchance, Captain Brown was hung. These are the two ends of a chain which is not without its links. He is not Old Brown any longer; he is an angel of light.

I see now that it was necessary that the bravest and humanest man in all the country should be hung. Perhaps he saw it himself. I almost fear that I may yet hear of his deliverance, doubting if a prolonged life, if any life, can do as much good as his death.

"Misguided"! "Garrulous"! "Insane"! "Vindictive"! So ye write in your easy-chairs, and thus he wounded responds from the floor of the Armory, clear as a cloudless sky, true as the voice of nature is: "No man sent me here; it was my own prompting and that of my Maker. I acknowledge no master in human form."

And in what a sweet and noble strain he proceeds, addressing his captors, who stand over him: "I think, my friends, you are guilty of a great wrong against God and humanity, and it would be perfectly right for anyone to interfere with you so far as to free those you willfully and wickedly hold in bondage."

And, referring to his movement: "It is, in my opinion, the greatest service a man can render to God."

"I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God."

You don't know your testament when you see it.

"I want you to understand that I respect the rights of the poorest and weakest of colored people, oppressed by the slave power, just as much as I do those of the most wealthy and powerful."

"I wish to say, furthermore, that you had better, all you people at the South, prepare yourselves for a settlement of that question, that must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it. The sooner you are prepared the better. You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled,--this negro question, I mean; the end of that is not yet."

I foresee the time when the painter will paint that scene, no longer going to Rome for a subject; the poet will sing it; the historian record it; and, with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the Declaration of Independence, it will be the ornament of some future national gallery, when at least the present form of slavery shall be no more here. We shall then be at liberty to weep for Captain Brown. Then, and not till then, we will take our revenge.

On April 12, 1964, one month after splitting with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X gave his "Ballot or the Bullet" speech at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit. It was the fullest declaration of his black nationalist philosophy. Mainstream black ministers tried to block Malcolm X from using the church, saying "separatist ideas can do nothing but set back the colored man's cause." But the church hall had already been rented out for the event. "The Ballot or the Bullet" became one of Malcolm X's most recognizable phrases, and the speech was one of his greatest orations. Two thousand people – including some of his opponents -- turned out to hear him speak in Detroit.

Why are we reading this?

So we can understand civil disobedience, protesting, and begin to prepare for our speech, which will answer the question, "Is civil disobedience a morally acceptable way to create change?"

Directions:

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Types of Notes:

1. Vocabulary and references
2. Summarize main ideas
3. Comment
4. Connect to what you already know about the Civil Rights Movement

Breaking Down the Rhetoric:

1. What are MX's main claims and points made in this piece? (Hint: Paragraph-by-paragraph, they should directly relate to your summaries.)
2. What makes him believable? What topics does he address that add to his credibility?
3. What metaphors, similes, analogies, rhetorical questions, and instances of repetition make the piece persuasive?

Step 3: Connect to the purpose

- What is necessary in the fight for civil rights?
- What has the gov't done to this point? How does MX respond?

Malcolm X "The Ballot or the Bullet" King Solomon Baptist Church, Detroit, MI, April 12, 1964

- 1.) ... This afternoon we want to talk about the ballot or the bullet. The ballot or the bullet explains itself. But before we get into it, since this is the year of the ballot or the bullet, I would like to clarify some things that refer to me personally, concerning my own personal position...
- 2.) So today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic and social philosophy is black nationalism. You and I – [applause] As I say, if we bring up religion, we'll have differences, we'll have arguments, and we'll never be able to get together. But if we keep our religion at home, keep our religion in the closet, keep our religion between ourselves and our God, but when we come out here we have a fight that's common to all of us against a enemy who is common to all of us. [applause]
- 3.) The political philosophy of black nationalism only means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community. The time when white people can come in our community and get us to vote for them so that they can be our political leaders and tell us what to do and what not to do is long gone. [applause]...
- 4.) The political philosophy of black nationalism only means that if you and I are going to live in a black community... We must, we must understand the politics of our community and we must know what politics is supposed to produce. We must know what part politics play in our lives. And until we become politically mature, we will always be misled, led astray, or deceived or maneuvered into supporting someone politically who doesn't have the good of our community at heart. So the political philosophy of black nationalism only means that we will have to carry on a program, a political program, of reeducation – to open our people's eyes, make us become more politically conscious, politically mature. And then, we will – whenever we are ready to cast our ballot, that ballot will be cast for a man of the community, who has the good of the community at heart. [applause]...
- 5.) The political ... the economic philosophy of black nationalism only means that we have to become involved in a program of reeducation, to educate our people into the importance of knowing that when you spend your dollar out of the community in which you live, the community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer, the community out of which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer. And because these Negroes, who have been misled, misguided, are breaking their necks to take their money and spend it with the Man, the Man is becoming richer and richer, and you're becoming poorer and poorer. And then what happens? The community in which you live becomes a slum. It becomes a ghetto. The conditions become rundown. And then you have the audacity to complain about poor housing in a rundown community, while you're running down yourselves when you take your dollar out. [applause]...

- 6.) Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim or a nationalist, we all have the same problem. They don't hang you because you're a Baptist; they hang you 'cause you're black. [applause] They don't attack me because I'm a Muslim. They attack me 'cause I'm black. They attacked all of us for the same reason. All of us catch hell from the same enemy. We're all in the same bag, in the same boat.
- 7.) We suffer political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation. All of 'em from the same enemy. The government has failed us. You can't deny that. Any time you're living in the 20th century, 1964, and you walking around here singing "We Shall Overcome," the government has failed you. [applause]...And the white liberals who have been posing as our friends have failed us. And once we see that all of these other sources to which we've turned have failed, we stop turning to them and turn to ourselves. We need a self-help program, a do-it-yourself philosophy, a do-it-right-now philosophy, a it's-already-too-late philosophy. This is what you and I need to get with. And the only time – the only way we're going to solve our problem is with a self-help program. Before we can get a self-help program started, we have to have a self-help philosophy. Black nationalism is a self-help philosophy...
- 8.) Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude it changes your behavior pattern. And then you go on into some action. As long as you got a sit-down philosophy you'll have a sit-down thought pattern. And as long as you think that old sit-down thought, you'll be in some kind of sit-down action. They'll have you sitting in everywhere. [laughter]
- 9.) It's not so good to refer to what you're going to do as a sit-in. That right there castrates you. Right there it brings you down. What goes with it? What – think of the image of someone sitting. An old woman can sit. An old man can sit. A chump can sit, a coward can sit, anything can sit. Well, you and I been sitting long enough and it's time for us today to start doing some standing and some fighting to back that up. [applause]...
- 10.) Why does it [1964] look like it might be the year of the ballot or the bullet? Because Negroes have listened to the trickery and the lies and the false promises of the white man now for too long, and they're fed up. They've become disenchanted. They've become disillusioned. They've become dissatisfied. And all of this has built up frustrations in the black community that makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent. Whenever you got a racial powder keg sitting in your lap, you're in more trouble than if you had an atomic powder keg sitting in your lap. When a racial powder keg goes off, it doesn't care who it knocks out the way. Understand this, it's dangerous.

- 11.) And in 1964, this seems to be the year. Because what can the white man use, now, to fool us? After he put down that March on Washington – and you see all through that now, he tricked you, had you marching down to Washington. Had you marching back and forth between the feet of a dead man named Lincoln and another dead man named George Washington, singing, "We Shall Overcome." [applause] He made a chump out of you. He made a fool out of you. He made you think you were going somewhere and you end up going nowhere but between Lincoln and Washington. [laughter]
- 12.) So today our people are disillusioned. They've become disenchanted. They've become dissatisfied. And in their frustrations they want action. And in 1964 you'll see this young black man, this new generation, asking for the ballot or the bullet. That old Uncle Tom action is outdated. The young generation don't want to hear anything about "the odds are against us." What do we care about odds? [applause]
- 13.) When this country here was first being founded, there were thirteen colonies. The whites were colonized. They were fed up with this taxation without representation. So some of them stood up and said, "Liberty or death!" I went to a white school over here in Mason, Michigan. The white man made the mistake of letting me read his history books. [laughter] He made the mistake of teaching me that Patrick Henry was a patriot, and George Washington – wasn't nothing nonviolent about ol' Pat, or George Washington. "Liberty or death" is was what brought about the freedom of whites in this country from the English. [applause]
- 14.) They didn't care about the odds. Why, they faced the wrath of the entire British Empire. And in those days... the British Empire was so vast and so powerful that the sun would never set on it. This is how big it was, yet these thirteen little scrawny states, tired of taxation without representation, tired of being exploited and oppressed and degraded, told that big British Empire, "Liberty or death." And here you have 22 million Afro-Americans, black people today, catching more hell than Patrick Henry ever saw. [applause]...
- 15.) Why is America – why does this loom to be such an explosive political year? Because this is the year of politics. This is the year when all of the white politicians are going to come into the Negro community. You never see them until election time. You can't find them until election time. [applause] They're going to come in with false promises. And as they make these false promises they're going to feed our frustrations, and this will only serve to make matters worse. I'm no politician. I'm not even a student of politics. I'm not a Republican, nor a Democrat, nor an American – and got sense enough to know it. [applause]...I'm one of the 22 million black victims of the Democrats. One of the 22 million black victims of the Republicans and one of the 22 million black victims of Americanism. [applause] And when I speak, I don't speak as a Democrat

or a Republican, nor an American. I speak as a victim of America's so-called democracy. You and I have never seen democracy – all we've seen is hypocrisy. [applause]

16.) When we open our eyes today and look around America, we see America not through the eyes of someone who has enjoyed the fruits of Americanism. We see America through the eyes of someone who has been the victim of Americanism. We don't see any American dream. We've experienced only the American nightmare. We haven't benefited from America's democracy. We've only suffered from America's hypocrisy. And the generation that's coming up now can see it. And are not afraid to say it. If you go to jail, so what? If you're black, you were born in jail. [applause]...

17.) Twenty-two million black victims of Americanism are waking up and they are gaining a new political consciousness, becoming politically mature. And as they become – develop this political maturity, they're able to see the recent trends in these political elections. They see that the whites are so evenly divided that every time they vote, the race is so close they have to go back and count the votes all over again. Which means that any block, any minority that has a block of votes that stick together is in a strategic position. Either way you go, that's who gets it. You're in a position to determine who'll go to the White House and who'll stay in the doghouse. [laughter]

18.) You're the one who has that power. You can keep Johnson in Washington D.C., or you can send him back to his Texas cotton patch. [applause] You're the one who sent Kennedy to Washington. You're the one who put the present Democratic administration in Washington, D.C. The whites were evenly divided. It was the fact that you threw 80 percent of your votes behind the Democrats that put the Democrats in the White House....

19.) Oh, I say you been misled. You been had. You been took. [laughter, applause] I was in Washington a couple of weeks ago while the senators were filibustering and I noticed in the back of the Senate a huge map, and on this map it showed the distribution of Negroes in America. And surprisingly, the same senators that were involved in the filibuster were from the states where there were the most Negroes. Why were they filibustering the civil rights legislation? Because the civil rights legislation is supposed to guarantee boarding rights to Negroes from those states. And those senators from those states know that if the Negroes in those states can vote, those senators are down the drain. [applause]...

20.) This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death. It's freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody. [applause] America today finds herself in a unique situation. Historically, revolutions are bloody, oh yes they are. They have never had a bloodless revolution. Or a nonviolent revolution. That don't happen even in Hollywood [laughter] You don't have a revolution in which you love your enemy. And you don't have a revolution in which you are

begging the system of exploitation to integrate you into it. Revolutions overturn systems. Revolutions destroy systems.

- 21.) A revolution is bloody, but America is in a unique position. She's the only country in history, in the position actually to become involved in a bloodless revolution. The Russian Revolution was bloody, Chinese Revolution was bloody, French Revolution was bloody, Cuban Revolution was bloody. And there was nothing more bloody than the American Revolution. But today, this country can become involved in a revolution that won't take bloodshed. All she's got to do is give the black man in this country everything that's due him, everything. [applause]
- 22.) I hope that the white man can see this. 'Cause if you don't see it you're finished. If you don't see it you're going to become involved in some action in which you don't have a chance. We don't care anything about your atomic bomb; it's useless, because other countries have atomic bombs...
- 23.) So it's the, it's the ballot or the bullet. Today, our people can see that we're faced with a government conspiracy. This government has failed us. The senators who are filibustering concerning your and my rights, that's the government. Don't say it's southern senators, this is the government. This is a government filibuster. It's not a segregationist filibuster, it's a government filibuster...And anytime you find the government involved in a conspiracy to violate the citizenship or the civil rights of a people in 1964, then you are wasting your time going to that government expecting redress. Instead you have to take that government to the world court and accuse it of genocide and all of the other crimes that it is guilty of today. [applause]
- 24.) So those of us whose political and economic and social philosophy is black nationalism have become involved in the civil rights struggle. We have injected ourselves into the civil rights struggle. And we intend to expand it from the level of civil rights to the level of human rights. As long as you fight it on the level of civil rights, you're under Uncle Sam's jurisdiction. You're going to his court expecting him to correct the problem. He created the problem. He's the criminal! You don't take your case to the criminal, you take your criminal to court. [applause]...
- 25.) So I say in my conclusion, the only way we're going to solve it: we got to unite. We got to work together in unity and harmony. And black nationalism is the key. How we gonna overcome the tendency to be at each other's throats that always exists in our neighborhood? And the reason this tendency exists – the strategy of the white man has always been divide and conquer. He keeps us divided in order to conquer us. He tells you, I'm for separation and you for integration, and keep us fighting with each other. No, I'm not for separation and you're not for integration, what you and I are for is freedom. [applause] Only, you think that integration will get you freedom; I think that separation will get me freedom. We both got the same objective, we just got different ways of getting' at it. [applause]...

