

Letter from Birmingham Jail: Evaluating Newspaper Articles

The objective of this activity is to examine different newspaper articles written about the events in Birmingham in the spring of 1963. Your goal is to identify various perspectives, evaluate the reporter's bias and to pinpoint any misinformation.

Directions: Read each of the articles and fill in the chart.

500 are Arrested in Negro Protest at Birmingham

New York Times, May 3, 1963

List the Facts in the Article	What is the opinion of the reporter about the event?	What important information does this article exclude?

Birmingham Police Clash with 1,000

Los Angeles Times, May 5, 1963

List the Facts in the Article	What is the opinion of the reporter about the event?	What important information does this article exclude?

Strife in Alabama: Children March Off to Jail in Racial Protest
Los Angeles Times, May 7, 1963

List the facts in the article	What is the opinion of the reporter about the event?	What important information does this article exclude?

Negro Girl's Define 'Freedom' From Cell in Birmingham Jail
New York Times, May 9, 1963

List the facts in the article	What is the opinion of the reporter about the event?	What important information does this article exclude?

Discussion questions:

Which article provides the most accurate information about the events? Do any of the facts seem contradictory? Were you able to identify any bias among the writers? Was any of the information inaccurate based on other sources you have used in the classroom? Which sources are most reliable?

Birmingham Police Clash With 1,000

Los Angeles Times (1886-Current File); May 5, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times

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Birmingham Police Clash With 1,000

Negroes Yield After Dousing By Water; U.S. Starts Inquiry

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP). A taunting crowd of more than 1,000 Negroes defied policemen, dogs and high velocity water hoses Saturday before their own leaders persuaded them to disperse.

Doused for about an hour with water, they gave ground grudgingly. Finally, two Negro ministers pleaded with remnants of the crowd to leave.

Some of the Negroes threw rocks and other missiles. A fireman, Billy Hoak, was treated for a head injury from a flying brick.

Police said nearly 200 Negroes were arrested—including 111 children under 16. More than 1,600 have been arrested since demonstrations started April 3.

Kennedy Dismayed

The trouble broke out as President Kennedy expressed dismay over the situation and his brother, Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy, dispatched two of his key civil rights aides to Birmingham. The attorney general canceled a speech and stayed at his office.

Burke Marshall, chief of the Justice Department's civil rights division, talked with several officials, including Sheriff Melvin Bailey.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., integration leader, said he was scheduled to meet with Marshall. However, King left for the airport to return to Atlanta for the weekend without meeting him.

King declined comment on whether demonstrations might be halted.

Gov. George C. Wallace deplored them, calling them useless.

After policemen cleared a park where Negro spectators had gathered, two Negro ministers urged the crowd to leave.

Ministers Issue Plea

"Will you please go home?" pleaded the Rev. William Greer, pastor of a Birmingham church. He bor-

rowed a loudspeaker from a police officer.

"Your leaders have asked you all to go home. Please do not cause trouble," he said.

"We don't want a riot," said the Rev. James Bevels. "Lives could be lost. I saw at least 25 Negro men with guns."

It was the third straight day of a stepped up campaign against racial segregation in this steel city, Alabama's largest.

At least two women and several men were knocked off their feet Saturday when firemen turned on the high-pressure hoses.

The water was used after someone threw a pop bottle at police. The bottle broke near Police Commissioner Eugene (Bull) Connor and

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RACIAL CLASH

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he ordered: "Give them the water."

Police held the dogs in readiness.

A huge roar welled up from the crowd as the dogs were brought up. The Negroes did not disperse immediately as they did Friday.

Two Negroes with rocks attempted to climb on top of a car but ran when a police dog approached.

The Negroes started to give ground gradually as firemen played the hose into the crowd. White spectators cheered when the water hose was brought into play.

Another 1,000 Negroes gathered in the area and shouted encouragement to the embattled demonstrators. Many were old Negro women.

One Negro teen-ager ran toward a group of policemen and struck an officer in the chest with a rock. The policeman chased him, whacked him across the back with his billy club, then let him go.

Stripped Trees

Two of the fire hoses were equipped with monitor guns which take water simultaneously from two hoses. Water from these hoses hits with such force that it knocked the bark from trees 100 ft. away.

White spectators numbering in the hundreds were ordered to move away from the area. They obeyed.

An employee of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, Doris Guice, 30, of Birmingham, was dragged more than 20 ft. by a deputy and plainclothes

detectives through a gravel parking lot after she refused to get off a sidewalk.

Several young Negroes were placed in a school bus. Some jumped out of the windows, but police quickly rounded them up again.

Two Negro girls ran around the park clad only in slips—their outer clothing had been ripped off by the water. Several Negro youths had their shirts torn off.

Twenty-five Negroes were arrested Saturday morning in a march on City Hall.

Minutes later two Negro women slipped through police lines and knelt on the steps of City Hall. Police arrested them and one girl wept as she was being led to police headquarters. Later, two other Negro women walked up to the steps, knelt and bowed their heads. They too, were arrested.

An estimated 700 Negroes, including some as young as 7 years old, were arrested Thursday. Another 250 were taken into custody Friday when police used police dogs on a leash and fire hoses to turn back marchers.

In Washington, Atty. Gen. Kennedy canceled a speech

to remain in his office Saturday after sending Marshall and Joseph F. Dolan, assistant deputy attorney general, to Birmingham.

President Kennedy was reported dismayed at the situation, a visitor to his

office said. John P. Roche, national chairman of the

Americans for Democratic Action, said the President discussed the use of police dogs and water hoses to break up the Negro demonstrators with him.

STRIKE IN ALABAMA

Children March Off to Jail in Racial Protest



DEMONSTRATOR DOWNED.—Three Birmingham, Ala., policemen restrain a Negro woman after she refused to obey orders to move along and got into scuffle with the officers. Such skirmishes were few despite the numerous arrests.

Birmingham Scene of Turmoil; Scores Arrested by Police

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (UPI)—Hundreds of Negro school children with comedian Dick Gregory in the lead marched off to jail Monday in the biggest civil rights demonstration the South has ever seen.

More than 800 demonstrators—many carrying blankets past midnight when word of toothbrushes and school was spread at five books—marched from a mass church meetings that school meeting at the 18th Street children arrested. Monday Baptist Church into the streets were kept in an open jail of walking policemen who complain during a hundred that set up roadblocks with storm.

Angry Negroes streamed from the churches and high schools toward the jail, but blankets were thrown away and the marchers were dispersed to Birmingham jail.

Promptly arrested. Prison officials said the about 150 Negroes carrying Negro children were outside night protesting when the third storm. Negroes protesting and the children were arrested in front of stores in the downtown area. Police promptly arrested them.

A few hours later, a special committee of Negroes and whites convened to work out ways of ending the 14 days of racial demonstrations which have rocked this city and filled jails to overflowing.

By late Monday afternoon, Birmingham attorney general U.S. attorney general in charge of civil rights who has been working behind the scenes for three days here to direct ending of tensions.

Marching leader told segregationist demonstrators with those last Thursday during those arrested Monday in Birmingham. Those arrested Monday included a white reporter and scores of students—the first time he was arrested. Another demonstration appeared imminent, shortly.

Strife in Alabama

Los Angeles Times (1886-Current File); May 7, 1963;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times

ALABAMA JAILINGS

Continued from First Page as an uneasy calm settled over the city, authorities had made at least 867 arrests — bringing the total arrested in the month-long protest to more than 2,200 Monday's jailings easily surpassed those last Thursday during similar demonstrations.

Those arrested Monday included a white reporter and scores of students — the youngest appeared about 12 — who skipped classes to take part in the massive drive to crack the city's rigid segregation barriers.

They joined hundreds of fellow demonstrators already sleeping shoulder to shoulder on concrete floors in three jails in the city.

In one of the few cases of scuffling, a Negro man tangled briefly with a policeman, fearing his shirt. He seemed to be trying to get the policeman's pistol, but was quickly subdued.

A Negro woman was dragged kicking and scratching from the front porch of a home and subdued by three policemen, one with his knee on her chest.

Seeks Truce

Monday's demonstrations came while Marshall conferred with leaders of both sides to seek a truce and ease the crisis that began building April 3.

The Negroes have demanded four concessions as the price for calling off the demonstrations: better employment opportunities, desegregation of downtown lunch counters; release of the estimated 1,200 Negroes still in jail from earlier arrests and creation of a bi-racial committee to work out plans for gradual desegregation of public schools.

The Negroes began pouring from the church, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed the estimated crowd of 2,000, with Gregory in the lead.

Comic Leads Group

The Negro comic led his group up to a police blockade where he was halted and asked if he had a parade permit. He replied no, and police told him to turn around.

"No, we'll stay here," he said and the police herded them to waiting paddy wagons.

The others followed in groups of 20 to 30 and officers situated atop buildings with walkie talkies alerted

police who swarmed in the area.

The demonstrations Monday were calm and carefully planned with only a few isolated cases of scuffling. Among those arrested was Barbara Demming, a white news reporter for The Nation magazine.

At the city jail, already packed with earlier demonstrators, Supt. Robert K. Austin, said "we have the jail at capacity and the jail yard is packed. It's standing room only out there."

Austin said the state fairgrounds auditorium and other facilities there were being used to house juveniles.

Austin said many of the adults arrested would be sent to the county jail. He said he understood city officials were getting ready to ask nearby counties for boarding space at their jails.

To Expel Students

School Supt. Theo Wright has said that students who cut classes would be suspended or expelled.

Just as Gregory arrived at the 16th St. church a fireman accidentally turned on a hose nozzle that lightly sprinkled Gregory and other spectators. The spurt of water lasted no more than 10 seconds.

This was the nearest thing approaching use of the fire hoses that were put into play earlier to halt demonstrators.

King emerged from a meeting of Negro leaders to say "some victories have been achieved but it is too early to tell whether they will be lasting."

But shortly after King returned to the church, which was ringed by helmeted police who broke up crowds of Negroes when they gathered outside, Negroes began streaming from the meeting hall. An estimated 2,000 had gathered inside.

Gregory led 18 Negro teenagers on a march toward the downtown area. Stopped by police who demanded if he had a permit to parade, Gregory replied no and refused to budge.

He and the Negro youths were hauled away in a paddy wagon, less than a block after leaving the church.

500 Are Arrested in Negro Protest at Birmingham

By Foster Hailey Special to the New York Times

New York Times 1857-Current; May 3, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers

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500 ARE ARRESTED IN NEGRO PROTEST AT BIRMINGHAM*
By FOSTER HAILEY Special to The New York Times
New York Times 1857-Current; May 3, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The
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500 ARE ARRESTED IN NEGRO PROTEST AT BIRMINGHAM

Young Marchers Cheered by Elders in Biggest Series of Demonstrations in City

By FOSTER HAILEY

Special to The New York Times

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., May 2
—Hundreds of young Negroes, many of them in their teens or even younger, demonstrated through the streets of Birmingham this afternoon.

By an unofficial count, about 500 of them were arrested after hours of demonstrations against the city's racial segregation practices.

At one time, demonstrations by groups of from 10 to 50 boys and girls were going on simultaneously at four different places several blocks apart.

The police confined most of the demonstrations to the Negro business, church and residential district west of City Hall and north of the main downtown business area.

But one group of 20 youths penetrated almost to the steps of City Hall, the main goal of the demonstrators, before being stopped. Three other groups reached the downtown shopping corners.

Offer No Resistance

There was no resistance to arrest by the laughing, singing groups of youngsters, although some of the smaller participants dropped their signs and ran when the police approached. Most of the marchers fell to

their knees and prayed as the police stopped them.

Half a dozen fire engines were deployed at strategic corners after the first hour of demonstrations. Hoses were strung at one point, but the water was not turned on. The city's squad of police dogs was not used.

Every available police vehicle was pressed into service to haul the young demonstrators to jail or juvenile court. When even those, and some Jefferson County sheriff's cars, proved inadequate, school buses were used by the police.

Cheered by Their Elders

One little girl who said she was 6 years old was seen being placed in a police wagon with other demonstrators. What happened to her was not known. The jail receives only prisoners 18 or older; younger prisoners are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which does not disclose its proceedings.

It was by far the largest series of demonstrations staged in Birmingham since a direct action campaign was begun here a month ago. The arrests made today will probably exceed the total for the four previous weeks.

It was strictly a youth movement today. Elder Negroes stood on the sidelines and cheered.

"Sing, children, sing," called one elderly Negro woman as she followed one group up Sixth

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Negro Girls Define 'Freedom' From Cell in Birmingham Jail

By Philip Benjamin Special to the New York Times

New York Times (1886-Current File); May 9, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times
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Negro Girls Define 'Freedom' From Cell in Birmingham Jail
By PHILIP BENJAMIN Special to The New York Times
New York Times (1857-Current file); May 9, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times
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Negro Girls Define 'Freedom' From Cell in Birmingham Jail

By PHILIP BENJAMIN

Special to The New York Times

BIRMINGHAM, Ala., May 8 — Anita Woods said today: "My mother told me I had to serve my time."

Anita is a 12-year-old Negro girl, one of the thousand or more juveniles arrested here on Monday for rioting against racial segregation.

She is at the Jefferson County Detention Home, along with about 110 other girls, none older than 13.

Anita spoke with a reporter in a locked room she shares with 20 other Negro girls, all arrested for parading without a permit, a violation of Section 1159 of the General City Code.

The room was hot and steamy; downstairs, the main corridor and offices of the detention home were coolly air-conditioned.

"Do you want to go home?" the girls were asked.

"Yes!" they chorused.

"But I'd do it again," Anita Woods said. "I'll keep on marching till I get freedom."

"What is freedom?" a reporter asked.

"It's equal rights," another girl shouted. "I want to go to any school and any store downtown and sit in the movies." She giggled. "And sit around in a cafeteria."

They were asked why their

parents had not come to get them, since, in a change of policy, Juvenile Court Judge Talbot Ellis had decided to permit parents to call for their children in exchange for signing an appearance bond, instead of the \$500 cash bond that was previously required.

It was then that Anita Woods announced what her mother had told her.

Dale G. Oltman, the chief probation officer of the juvenile court, a soft-spoken former Nebraskan, said the detention home normally accommodated 62 youngsters. With the present population of 110 or so, it was like having guests drop in unexpectedly, he said. The home is doing its best to feed and bed the children, he said, "but of course, it's not like home."

Some of the inmates slept in blankets on the floor, he said.

The youngest person arrested in the riots was a 7-year-old girl. She was picked up by her parents yesterday.

Boys between 13 and 18 were being held in the Jefferson County Jail and the Bessemer Jail. Girls from 13 to 18 were in the 4-H Club building at the State Fairgrounds. There were 594 girls there just after the arrests Monday. Only 200 were there today. Girls arrested last Monday outnumbered boys by almost two to one.