**Excerpt from *A New Sense of Direction* by Martin Luther King, March 1968.**

*In March 1968, only a few months before his death, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech to the SCLC entitled “A New Sense of Direction.” In it, he announced the direction he thought the Civil Rights movement should take and his reaction to the wave of race riots that occurred in Northern cities over the previous year.*

Non-violence must be adapted to urban conditions and urban moods. Non-violent protest must now mature to a new level to correspond to heightened black impatience and stiffened white resistance. The higher level is *mass civil disobedience*. It is a concept well known in our struggle for justice. There must be more than a statement to the larger society—there must be a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point…

It must be open and conducted by large masses without violence. If the jails are filled to stop us, the meaning will become even clearer. The Negro will be saying, I am not avoiding penalties for breaking the law, I am willing to endure all your punishment because your society will not be able to endure the stigma of violently and publicly oppressing its minorities to preserve injustices. Mass civil disobedience as a new stage of struggle can transmute the deep anger of the ghetto into a creative force. To dislocate the functioning of a city without destroying it can be more effective than a riot because it can be both longer lasting and more costly to the larger society, but not only destructive. It is a device of social action that is more difficult for the government to quell by superior force. The limitation of riots, moral questions aside, is that they cannot win, and their participants know it. Hence riots are not revolutionary but reactionary because they invite defeat. They offer an emotional catharsis [release], but they must be followed by a sense of futility [uselessness]. Civil disobedience in its mass application has the prospect of success. It is militant and defiant, but not destructive.

1. Why would MLK be calling on a new “mass” form of civil disobedience?
2. Does this new “mass civil disobedience” sound different from other forms of non-violent protest that MLK had supported in the past? Why or why not?

1. Why does MLK argue that riots will never work in the quest for more equal rights? Do you agree or disagree? Why?