



Strategy #3 – Change through Civil Disobedience Listening Guide

Civil disobedience is the belief that unjust laws should not be obeyed. Governments and laws are effective only when they are obeyed. By refusing to comply and accepting the consequences, citizens can call into question a law’s validity. The strategy has been used not only as a way to draw attention to unjust laws, but also to erode the power of unjust governments by denying their authority. These are the voices of people who sought to promote change through civil disobedience. Please review the quotations and answer the questions below.

	Swaminathan Gounden, South Africa	Aung Din, Burma	Gwen Saunders Gamble, United States	Chimedtseren Byambajar, Mongolia
What policy or law was disobeyed? Why?				
What form did the disobedience take?				
What consequences were faced as a result?				

For further discussion:

In what ways were these experiences similar?

In what ways were these experiences different?

Do you think refusing to obey an unjust law is a responsible strategy for promoting change?

Change through Civil Disobedience Quotations

Swaminathan Gounden, South Africa

It was a White area. So we defied, we went there and pitched our tents there and stayed there, thinking that the police are going to come and arrest you and put you in prison and that's what we wanted. We wanted to show the world that we are resisting, but they didn't do that. They used their own tactics. They didn't do that, but what they did was they used White hooligans. They came, they started hitting the resisters, you know, left, right and center, injuring them in the process. There was an Indian policeman who was there, and they didn't worry if it was an Indian police and they hit him and he died. Now, anyway, the police came, arrested them and put them in prison. From that point onwards, we used to send batches of Indians, and not only Indians, Coloureds, some Whites, some Africans, all who sympathized with the NIC [National Indian Congress,] all went to court with them. This went on; over 2,000 people went to court. The idea behind the whole thing was to focus the attention of the entire world you know, to say this is how the Non-Whites are being treated and this is what we are doing in order to see what the White Government gives us what we require. You know, that was the idea behind the passive resistance that was in 1946.

Aung Din, Burma

Then we made a one week—we called for civil disobedience. Civil disobedience we mean, at the time the [Burmese military] regime made the announcement—put the martial law in the country. Then more than five person are not allowed to gather. And there is a lot of “no marching,” “no gathering,” so many restrictions. So, our civil disobedience campaign is that we would challenge these affairs, rules and laws — that we will gather more than five person. We will talk about politics and we will talk about the national reconciliation. We'll talk about democracy and human right. We will march anywhere as long as we can. So, this is our campaign. We try to bring back the courage of the people by using this one week of civil disobedience.

Gwen Saunders Gamble, United States

I participated in just about all of it. But there were certain marches where you went to jail. There were marches where people, it was like a control group, they would go and they would sit in and they were asked to leave. That group left, you know, without being arrested. So, when you went, when you went to march, and if you were asked to leave, you knew whether you were going to jail or not at that time and you got that instruction from the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. So, it wasn't impromptu. You knew what you're going to do unless you're out there doing something you had no business doing, which—that rarely happened. But the night before I went to jail, I stood up the night before and I signed up to go to jail. So, you must sign up so they could know who's in...

I was arrested at J.J. Newberry's and J.J. Newberry's was like a five and dime store. But to me, they had the best hamburger and milkshake in the world. Although we had to go through all kinds of problems to get served to get it, because when you can walk into the lunch counter upstairs, you would always see the white girls and the boys up there sitting down and fellowshiping and enjoying their hamburgers and milkshakes and we had to go to the basement. Now, if you went to the basement and there were other whites down there, you can order but you have to stand at the end of the counter, the lunch counter, to order it. So, that's the place I went when I was arrested. We went in and there were maybe ten of us. We had a seat at the lunch counter and the waitress saw us coming. So, she ran in the back, peeking at us through the peephole in the door. We sat there for maybe five minutes or so, and the next thing we know, here comes police to the door. And they came directly to me because I was the captain of the group. How did he know I was the captain? I don't know, but he did come to me. This one particular officer came to me and he said, "You're protesting without a permit and I'm going to ask you to leave." And I refused, I didn't say a word. He said it again, "You're protesting without a permit. Now, you will go to jail if you don't get your – and get out of here." I acted just like he didn't say anything. So, finally he said, "all right, everybody here, get up, line up and go outside." Well, we knew, we had been taught, if you don't, then you're resisting arrest. So, we got up and we lined up outside the building.

Chimedtseren Byambajar, Mongolia

This struggle took place because the youth of that time opposed and fought against the Communist regime of that time to bring down one-party domination, to create a free market, to declare a democracy and human rights and to change the society of that time, which was wrong. This struggle began by the biggest type of political struggle—the hunger strike. The reason why is that period was a communist society. We and our youth had a chance to change that society without making a war and causing confrontation, and the only thing they had was their body from their parents and given by God. Our friends staked their life and came here to change these things into freedom and fought for it. Then we called this the Hunger Strike of Khuvsgul.

...I really saw that the people who staked their own lives to change society were really courageous people. I did not participate in the hunger strike personally and I pitied them sometimes. Just to give you an example, I came in the morning to my home to have a meal and also had a meal in the afternoon and in the evening. In the meantime, I got hungry. But how about these people, how many days did they go hungry without any food? And I saw that struggling this way takes a lot of courage. It was a wonderful thing. I understood from these people how powerful this struggle is, how dear this struggle is for the motherland, and also to create a democracy. I did not understand it before. I understood from these youth. Therefore, these people are really amazing, brave and had a lot of energy coming from them. Why they fought for this thing, and I am really proud of them. I still respect and love them.