

# MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

## LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. penned a significant letter while he was imprisoned in Birmingham, Alabama. Originally intended for a specific purpose, the letter expanded to address broader issues of freedom and inequality. The "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is considered a lasting and crucial document in American theology and philosophy. In 1963, Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was called to Birmingham to support a protest against severe segregationist policies.

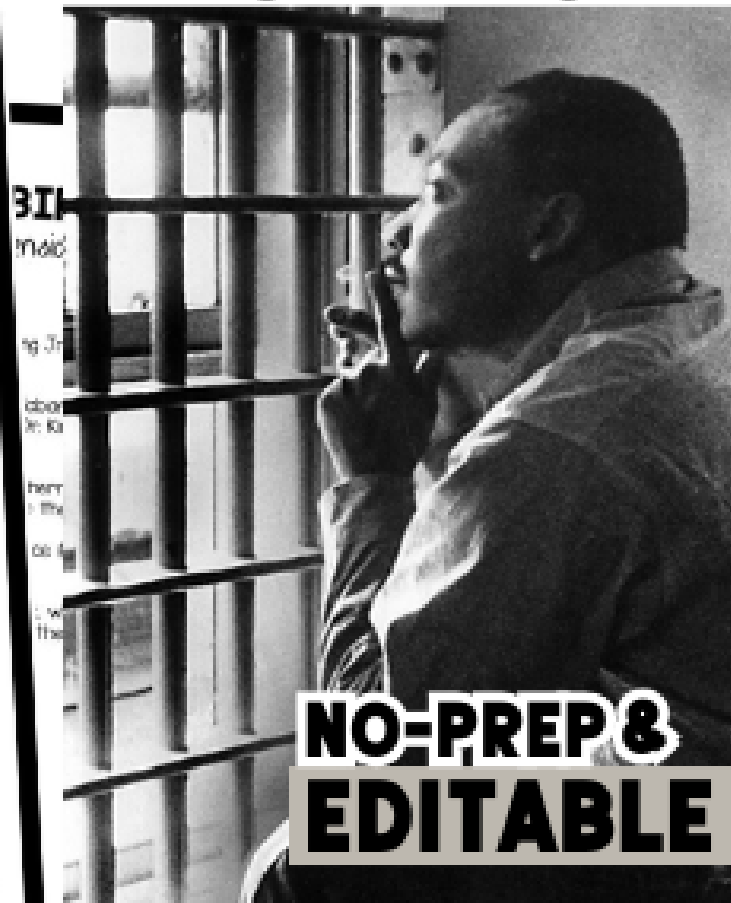


The SCLC, renowned for its successful movements, had previously triumphed in the Montgomery bus boycott. Seeking their next civil rights victory, Dr. King identified Birmingham as a strategic location due to its Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, known for his bold and brutal racist stance. Connor, initially restrained during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, used minimal violence against protesters, avoiding national media attention.

To draw attention to the cause, Dr. King and allies initiated a public protest without a permit, hoping for arrest. Dr. King was indeed arrested, but with minimal violence, and placed in solitary confinement, away from media scrutiny. Frustration heightened when he learned about a published open letter, signed by eight local clergymen from various faiths. These clergymen, opponents of segregation, criticized Dr. King and the SCLC, labeling them as outsiders causing trouble.

Enraged by the criticism and the neglect of his commitment to non-violence, Dr. King wrote a response on the margins of a local newspaper, highlighting his disappointment and determination. Released from solitary, he continued writing on a legal pad. Despite the initial limited impact, the "Letter" gained significance as it circulated and was later published in Dr. King's 1964 book *Why We Can't Wait*. Although overshadowed by his "I Have a Dream" speech, the "Letter" had a profound impact, influencing freedom movements globally.

"Letter from Birmingham Jail" is a testament to the nonviolent struggle for American Civil Rights, resonating worldwide. Translated into multiple languages, it remains a vital piece of



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"Letter From Birmingham Jail" is a testament to the persistent struggle for American Civil Rights, resonating worldwide. Translated into multiple languages, it has inspired protests in Argentina, Poland, China, Iran, and remains a vital piece of American philosophy studied in schools and colleges.

READING COMPREHENSION

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# LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

## Comprehension Questions

### Questions:

1. Why did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. write the "Letter From Birmingham Jail"?
2. What role did Birmingham, Alabama, and its Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, play in Dr. King's strategy for the Civil Rights Movement?
3. How did Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) attempt to draw attention to the cause in Birmingham?
4. What criticisms did Dr. King face from local clergymen, and how did he respond to them?
5. Despite its initial limited impact, why did the "Letter From Birmingham Jail" become a significant document in the American Civil Rights Movement and beyond?

## Answers Key

### ••Questions Requiring Explanation••

1. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the "Letter From Birmingham Jail" while he was incarcerated in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. He wrote the letter in response to a protest against segregationist policies. However, the letter primarily addressed various questions of broader significance.

2. Birmingham, Alabama, and its Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, played a crucial role in Dr. King's strategy for the Civil Rights Movement. Birmingham was chosen as a primary target for the "Letter From Birmingham Jail" because of its reputation as a "laboratory of segregation" and its role in the city's desegregation efforts.

3. Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) attempted to draw attention to the issue in Birmingham by leading a peaceful protest without a permit. In King's words, they sought to "bring about a change in the status quo" and "bring about a change in the status quo."

4. Dr. King faced criticisms from eight local clergymen of different faiths who, despite being opponents of segregation, labeled him and the SCLC as outsiders, "outside agitators" in Birmingham. Their criticism of King for coming into the situation without first persuading them to accept his views.

5. Despite its initial limited impact, the "Letter From Birmingham Jail" became a significant document in the American Civil Rights Movement and beyond because it "clarified Dr. King's commitment" to non-violence, addressed the concerns of friends and foes, and influenced broader movements globally. The letter gained more exposure over time and was later published in Dr. King's "Where Do We Go From Here: The Next Steps" book, leading to its importance.

QUESTIONS

ANSWER KEY  
INCLUDED

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