
Lesson Excerpt: A Modern Reference to Natural Rights: “Letter From Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr

Focus

Students learn of a modern example in which the issue of natural rights is raised, discussed, and asserted by a notable public figure

Suggested Reading

Letter from a Birmingham Jail -<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>

Activity

Read the letter King wrote on April 16, 1963, while he was imprisoned in Birmingham Jail during America’s Civil Rights movement. Paragraphs 11-13 are of particular importance to our exploration of Natural Rights.

1. Summarize the main points of the letter.
2. Record references King makes to historical religious and legal thinkers on natural law and natural rights.
3. What does King say about God’s moral law, natural rights, and civil rights?
4. How does King’s modern reference to natural rights show the influence of Judeo-Christian thought and Bible-based thinkers on ideas about the Law of Nature/universal moral law, natural rights, and civil rights in America?

Resource: *The Miracle of America High School Teacher Course Guide*

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