Objective

April 16th, 2013 marks 50 years since Martin Luther King Jr. began writing his letter from Birmingham Jail.

The Anna Julia Cooper Project is participating in the worldwide celebration by filming a reading of the letter. Over the past three weeks students, staff and faculty at Tulane have chosen parts of the letter that stood out to them and have been filmed reading it. The film will be available online and will be a part of the celebration held by the Birmingham Public Library.

Letter From Birmingham Jail
A Worldwide Celebration
April 16, 2013

"I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Letter from Birmingham Jail

History

Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested on Good Friday, April 12th, 1963 for violating Alabama’s law against mass public demonstrations and was kept in solitary confinement. For King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had joined with the existing local movement, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights in a direct action campaign to attack Birmingham’s segregation system by putting pressure on the city’s merchants during the Easter season, the second biggest shopping season of the year.

During his time in jail King wrote “Letter from Birmingham Jail” on the margins of the Birmingham News newspaper in reaction to a statement published in that newspaper by eight Birmingham clergymen condemning the protests, calling them “unwise and untimely”. When King ran out of space the letter continued on scraps of paper. The Birmingham Campaign is infamous for the photos of marchers being blasted by fire hoses or attacked by police dogs, under the orders of Commissioner “Bull” Connor.

By Leah Jaques
Media Intern at the Anna Julia Cooper Project