

ARIZONA **THEATRE** COMPANY

The
Mountaintop

By
Katori Hall



PLAY GUIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About ATC 1

Introduction to the Play 2

Synopsis 2

Meet the Characters 2

Meet the Playwright 3

Interview with the Director 3

Martin Luther King, Jr. 5

The Last Days 7

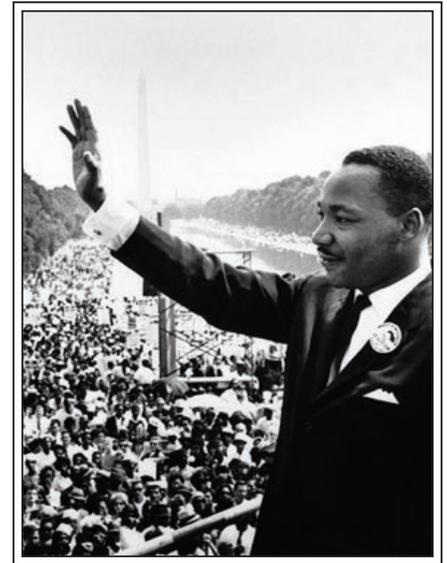
Civil Rights: A Timeline of Critical Events 8

Themes in the Play 10

“I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” 11

References and Glossary 17

Discussion and Activities 22



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
Delivering his “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

The Mountaintop Play Guide written and compiled by Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Associate, and Amber Justmann, Dramaturgy Intern. Discussion questions and activities provided by April Jackson, Education Manager, Amber Tibbitts and Bryanna Patrick, Education Associates.

Penumbra Theatre Company also produces extensive study guides for each of their plays. Additional information available at penumbra theatre.org.

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ABOUT ATC

Arizona Theatre Company is a professional, not-for-profit theatre company. This means all of our artists, administrators and production staff are paid professionals, and the income we receive from ticket sales and contributions goes right back into our budget to create our work, rather than to any particular person as a profit.

Each season, ATC employs hundreds of actors, directors and designers from all over the country to create the work you see on stage. In addition, ATC currently employs about 100 staff members in our production shops and administrative offices in Tucson and Phoenix during our season. Among these people are carpenters, painters, marketing professionals, fundraisers, stage directors, computer specialists, sound and light board operators, tailors, costume designers, box office agents, stage crew – the list is endless – representing an amazing range of talents and skills.

We are also supported by a Board of Trustees, a group of business and community leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to assist the theatre in financial and legal matters, advise in marketing and fundraising, and help represent the theatre in our community.

Roughly 150,000 people attend our shows every year, and several thousand of those people support us with charitable contributions in addition to purchasing their tickets. Businesses large and small, private foundations and the city and state governments also support our work financially.

All of this is in support of our vision and mission:

OUR VISION IS TO TOUCH LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF THEATRE.

Our mission is to create professional theatre that continually strives to reach new levels of artistic excellence and that resonates locally, in the state of Arizona and throughout the nation. In order to fulfill our mission, the theatre produces a broad repertoire ranging from classics to new works, engages artists of the highest caliber, and is committed to assuring access to the broadest spectrum of citizens.



The Temple of Music and Art, the home of ATC shows in downtown Tucson.



The Herberger Theater Center, ATC's performance venue in downtown Phoenix.

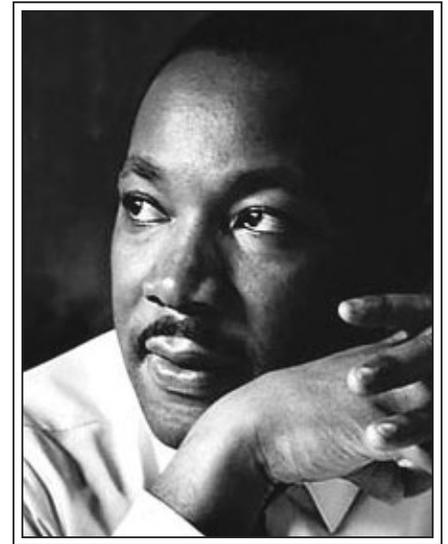
INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

The Mountaintop — By Katori Hall — Directed by Lou Bellamy

The Lorraine Motel. Memphis. 1968. In this gripping re-imagining of the events on the eve of his assassination, we find Martin Luther King, Jr. in his motel room after delivering one of his most memorable speeches — when an unexpected visitor arrives with surprising news. Through this encounter, Dr. King is forced to confront his doubts, destiny and legacy to his people. A soul-stirring hit in London and on Broadway, *The Mountaintop*'s dramatic, magical storytelling gives us insight into King, the man, and reaches a summit that might surprise you.

SYNOPSIS (SPOILER ALERT!)

It is late in the evening on April 3rd, 1968 at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has just come back from speaking to the city's striking sanitation workers and their supporters. Thunder crashes around his motel room, putting King on edge and in desperate need of a pack of cigarettes and a cup of coffee. As he begins putting together another rallying speech for his supporters, a knock on the door introduces the young and beautiful motel maid, Camae, who greets him bearing his coffee and even a few cigarettes in her pocket. King takes an immediate and slightly flirtatious liking to the girl and Camae, while amicable, makes moves to leave for fear of getting in trouble for slacking on her first day of work. Ever the persuasive speaker, King manages to keep Camae with him in room 306, driving the discussion by asking her opinion on his moustache and praising her beauty. Their conversation soon turns to politics, and Camae candidly discusses her perspectives on the Reverend's public actions. Camae demands violent opposition rather than Dr. King's brand of peaceful protest during this civil rights movement and in that validates King's perspective that America has yet to learn how to carry out positive change. As the content of the conversation grows heavier, so does the booming thunder outside, and King begins to unravel as the fear of his imminent death comes to light. King panics at the thought of the future because he knows when he is taken to Heaven by the angels, his work will be left unfinished. Camae acknowledges the reality of his fear but assures him that work like his cannot be left to just one person. She leads him to see that in his race for justice, the time will come to pass the baton to others, who will finish the race for him.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



James T. Alfred who plays Martin Luther King, Jr. in Arizona Theatre Company's production of *The Mountaintop*.



Erika LaVonn who plays Camae in Arizona Theatre Company's production of *The Mountaintop*.

MEET THE CHARACTERS

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., the iconic reverend and leader of the American Civil Rights Movement whose advocacy for nonviolent civil disobedience and social unity helped define the path toward civil equality and determine the future of race relations in the United States.

CAMAE, the fictional maid at the Lorraine Motel who meets and comforts King during what will come to be his last night on earth before his assassination. Her name is derived from the name of Katori Hall's mother, Carrie Mae, who stayed home from King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech at the Memphis Sanitation Strike due to bomb threats, and regretted that missed encounter for the rest of her life.

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

KATORI HALL is a playwright and performer hailing from Memphis, Tennessee. Her award-winning play *Hoodoo Love* premiered at the Cherry Lane Theatre in 2007. It was developed under Lynn Nottage as part of the theatre's 2006 Mentor Project. *Hoodoo Love* received three AUDELCO nominations (Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, August Wilson Playwright Award). Her other plays include: *Remembrance*, *Hurt Village*, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*, *On the Chillin' Circuit* and *Freedom Train* (KCACTF ten minute play national finalist). Her work has been developed and presented at the following venues: the American Repertory Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Cherry Lane Theatre, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Schomburg Center, BRICLab, Women's Project, World Financial Center, Lark Play Development Center, New Professional Theatre, The O'Neill Theatre, The Juilliard School, Stanford University, and Columbia University. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Lecompte du Nouy Prize, North Manhattan Arts Alliance Fellowship, New York State Council on the Arts Commission Grant, New Professional Theatre Writers Festival Award, Fellowship of Southern Writers Bryan Family Award in Drama, New York Foundation of the Arts Fellowship in Playwriting and Screenwriting, Royal Court Theatre Residency, and the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award. She has also been a Kennedy Center Playwriting Fellow. As an actor, her credits include: *Law & Order: SVU*, *The President's Puppets* (The Public), *Growing Up a Slave* (American Place Theatre), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (American Place Theatre), the world premiere of *Amerika* (Theatre de la Jeune Lune/American Repertory Theatre), *Spring Awakening* (Moscow Art Theatre School), *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (Classical Theatre of Harlem), *Schooled* (WOW Café Theatre), and *Black Girl* (Sande Shurin Theatre). As a journalist, her work has been published in *The Boston Globe*, *Essence*, *Newsweek*, and *The Commercial Appeal*. She graduated from Columbia University in 2003 with majors in African American Studies and Creative Writing. She was awarded top departmental honors from the university's Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS). In 2005, she graduated from the American Repertory Theatre Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University, receiving a Master of Fine Arts in Acting. She is now a student in The Juilliard School's Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program. She is a proud member of the Women's Project Playwrights' Lab, the Lark Playwrights' Workshop, and the Dramatists Guild. www.katorihall.com

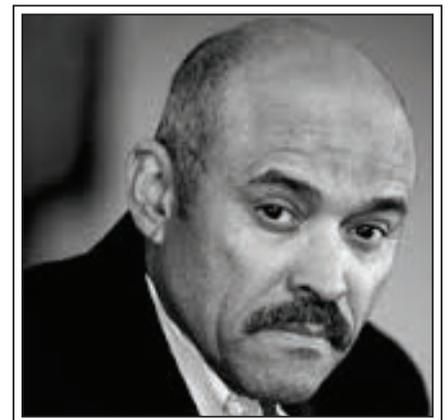


Playwright Katori Hall.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Lou Bellamy, the Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre Company and long-time ATC collaborator, returns to Arizona to direct Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*, having also directed ATC's memorable productions of *Jitney*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. ATC Literary Associate Katherine Monberg asked him some questions about the play.

KM: Welcome back to ATC, and thank you for taking the time to answer some questions! *The Mountaintop* centers on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a well-known and well-loved icon of the American Civil Rights Movement. What are some of the challenges that arise when creating a character and a play around a figure that an audience knows so well?



Lou Bellamy, director of ATC's production of *The Mountaintop*.

LB: It is important to stress that Katori Hall has created a fictional treatment which constructs events in the Lorraine Motel the night before Dr. King is to be assassinated. No one knows exactly what transpired the night before a sniper's bullet stopped the life of one of the most influential American leaders of our time. To me, her drama is more a reflection of ourselves and our society than it is, perhaps, about MLK. But, then, aren't all leaders reflections of ourselves? The journey that MLK takes in the play is everyman's journey. Her drama confronts Martin Luther King with the ultimate and inevitable challenge which every human must face: one's own mortality. Her use of a seemingly innocuous motel maid as the tour guide who ushers the protagonist through personal and public introspection is surprising and delightful. What I find most intriguing in Ms. Hall's play is the way in which MLK, the icon and MLK, the man are constantly thrown into contrast and relief with one another. As the iconology is stripped away, we become witness to the struggles and fallibility of a man. Her portrait is of a man who in many ways is no different than any of us. His evolution, his journey becomes ours and the denouement is not only a tribute to the life, power and significance of MLK, but a record of our societal evolution. The result is at once striking and ennobling. It should send audiences from the theater informed and uplifted.

KM: What impact does a piece like this have for audiences in our community, our schools?

LB: Much of my thinking on this subject is addressed above. Again, I would stress that this is a "fictional account" of the night before King's assassination. What is worthwhile, for me, is that Hall's portrayal presents the audience with King both as a man and as a leader. His evolution is presented as a reflection of the evolution of our society. Again, his journey is our journey both as Americans and as world citizens.

KM: As an Arizona Theatre Company/Penumbra Theatre Company co-production, this production of *The Mountaintop* will begin in Arizona before traveling first to North Carolina, and then to Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul, Minnesota. What are some of the benefits and challenges of bringing *The Mountaintop* to such different locales? Do you think that a change in location could change the impact of the show in any way?

LB: I believe that universality of MLK's life and impact has specific relevance in any American community. His life and struggle for social justice and equality made us all better persons and impelled the union towards a more perfect edition of itself.

KM: What are you most looking forward to about the process of putting this play together?

LB: I'm most looking forward to working with the actors who will bring this project to life. Both are immensely talented and both have earned my respect for accurate and complicated portrayals of African American men and women. I've directed both actors on many other projects. There is an amount of trust that should bring great dividends for this project.

KM: One last question for you: Our annual fund message this year is: *Why Theatre?* We are asking our donors, our audiences and our staff what makes theatre important in our lives. In 200 words or less can you give us your *Why Theatre?* moment, inspiration, experience? What made you decide to dedicate your life to the telling of stories on the stage?

LB: Nothing replicates the moment of engagement between actor and audience. It is different for every performance and entirely impossible to predict. This unpredictability brings a degree of danger to the encounter. The material, when shaped and supported by artistic focus, can be emotionally powerful and nothing short of life-altering. I approach every production with the hope that it will yield that magical and elusive "moment of engagement" with my fellow man. That moment when we completely and totally understand and feel for each other.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born January 15th, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He graduated from the segregated public school system at the age of fifteen, skipping the ninth and eleventh grades, before going on to earn his bachelor's degree from Morehouse College, his BD from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania and then his doctorate from Boston University. While in Boston, King met his future wife, Coretta Scott, whom he married in 1953.

In 1954, King decided against an academic career in favor of an active ministry, accepting an offer to become the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. The following year, he was selected by leaders of the black community in Montgomery to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), formed to protest the arrest of Rosa Parks for her refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man. As the primary spokesman of the year-long Montgomery bus boycott, King was quickly established as a political and social leader, advocating a nonviolent strategy of civil disobedience that called upon the black religious communities to peacefully uproot the status quo of racial and economic inequality.

In late 1956, King co-founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to continue the expansion of the nonviolent civil rights movement begun in Montgomery. He rose to national prominence with the publication of his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* in 1957. In September 1958, at a book signing in New York City, King experienced his first assassination attempt as he was stabbed with a steel letter opener by Izola Curry, requiring three days of surgery to remove it from its precarious position in his chest.

Known for his remarkable ability to form partnerships across numerous organizations, King drew together labor unions, peace organizations, reform organizations, and religious groups in the fight for civil rights. With the aid of the American Friends Service Committee, King visited India in 1959 to study the nonviolent social activism practiced by Mahatma Ghandi, which greatly influenced King's peaceful approach toward social progress that he would advocate through the entirety of his life and career.

In 1960, the King family moved to Atlanta to be near SCLC headquarters, where Martin Luther became co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church alongside his father. In October of that year, King was arrested during a sit-in at a lunch counter in Atlanta; the charges were dropped, but he was arrested in violation of his probation for a traffic offense soon afterward. Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy got involved to protest King's imprisonment, and he was soon released.

In 1963, King, alongside the SCLC and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, began a series of nonviolent demonstrations in Birmingham to protest racial inequality, carefully orchestrated to attract national attention, and prompting President Kennedy to introduce major civil rights legislation. King was jailed again for his involvement in a demonstration in downtown Birmingham that ended in violent opposition when police turned dogs and fire hoses on the gathering. While in prison, King penned his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" that encouraged continuing peaceful protest, and articulated that it was the moral responsibility of the people — all people — to break unjust laws.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering a speech.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his family.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, 1963.

King's "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963 remains one of the most iconic and oft quoted speeches of the 20th century, as he turned the familiar words of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" into a resounding call for action, equality, and freedom. He was named *TIME* Magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1963 and in 1964, at 35 years of age, Martin Luther King, Jr., became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to combat racial inequality through nonviolence.

In March of 1965, a March for Voting Rights from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, sparked a wave of violent opposition known as "Bloody Sunday." A second march was cancelled due to a restraining order, and King, unwilling to violate the order, personally led a third attempt in which a procession of 2,500 people knelt and prayed at the blockade built to prevent their passage through the city, before dispersing.

This event, as well as King's appeal to the white middle class, lost King some support among younger, more militant African American leaders, but it helped to further launch the Civil Rights Movement to the very forefront of congressional action. 1964 had seen the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which eliminated legal segregation and racial discrimination in the United States, and 1965 brought the Voting Rights Act, which eliminated the disenfranchisement of African Americans across the nation.

Between 1965 and 1968, King continued his quest for justice, speaking in support of international peace, protesting the war in Vietnam and identifying links between discrimination and poverty as he launched the Poor People's Campaign to combat economic inequality, in partnership with the SCLC.

On April 4, 1968, after delivering his famous and prophetic "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech at the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee, Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed on the balcony outside room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. His death sparked riots and demonstrations across the country as the search continued for his assassin, James Earl Ray, who was apprehended two months later during an attempt to flee persecution and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

On April 8, 1968, Coretta Scott King led a silent march of approximately 40,000 people through the streets of Memphis, to honor the fallen hero of American civil rights. King was buried the next day in his hometown of Atlanta with no mention of his awards and honors, at his request, but with the simple acknowledgements that he had tried during his lifetime to "feed the hungry," "clothe the naked," and "love and serve humanity."



Martin Luther King, Jr. leading the March for Voting Rights from Selma to Montgomery, before violence erupted on "Bloody Sunday," 1965.



Jackie Kennedy and Coretta Scott King at the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr.

THE LAST DAYS

The words of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s final speech from April 3, 1968, appear to be eerily prophetic, his symbolic sighting of the Promised Land seemingly morphed into reality with his untimely death the following evening.

MEMPHIS SANITATION STRIKE

On February 1, 1968, two sanitation workers were killed by a malfunctioning garbage truck in Memphis, Tennessee, prompting nearly two weeks of struggle between the city of Memphis and its sanitation workers to settle safety and wage concerns, and culminating in the initiation of a city-wide strike on February 11th. Approximately 1,300 African American sanitation workers walked off the job in protest of poor treatment, discrimination, and dangerous working conditions, and seeking permission to join the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees labor union.

By the 15th of February, trash had begun to pile up in the streets, prompting Mayor Henry Loeb to hire strikebreakers, white sanitation workers who travelled with police escort. The next two months saw an escalation of protests, from sit-ins to demonstrations, as the sanitation workers and supporters were challenged by the Memphis police and Mayor Loeb, who had declared the strike to be illegal and refused to meet with strike leaders.

Support for the sanitation workers' strike was severely split along racial lines, and garnered much of its support from the black religious community in Memphis. During a protest event on February 23rd, the police entered into an altercation with the protestors, prompting the local black leaders to form Community on the Move for Equality (COME), which attracted the attention of the national media, the NAACP, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The strike came to symbolize the greater struggle against racial inequality in Memphis and led to the slogan "I Am a Man" as a unifying theme to support civil rights.

On March 28, Dr. King led a peaceful protest march through the city that was halted with extreme violence and police brutality, resulting in the death of 16-year-old protester, Larry Payne. King returned to Memphis on April 3rd to deliver his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech at the Mason Temple, the headquarters of the Church of God in Christ.

Dr. King was assassinated the following evening on his balcony at the Lorraine Motel. Four days later his widow, Coretta Scott King, led a silent march through the streets of Memphis in support of the sanitation workers' strike. An agreement was reached the following week, promising wage increases and union recognition, and becoming a major turning point in the quest for racial and economic equality in Memphis.

THE LORRAINE MOTEL

During his final stay in Memphis, King was booked to share room 306 at the Lorraine Motel with his close friend and colleague Reverend Ralph David Abernathy. Abernathy later told the House Select Committee on Assassinations that King and his colleagues so frequently stayed in that same room that it was known as the "King-Abernathy Suite."



Demonstration during the Memphis Sanitation Strike in 1968.



Jesse Jackson, King and Ralph Abernathy on the balcony at the Lorraine Motel on April 3, 1968.



Mug shot of James Earl Ray, from his first arrest in 1955.

THE ASSASSINATION

At 6:01pm on Thursday, April 4, 1968, King was shot by a sniper's bullet while standing on the second floor balcony outside his motel room. The bullet entered through his right cheek and travelled down his spinal cord, severing the jugular vein and breaking his jaw, neck, and several vertebrae before lodging in his shoulder. Reverend Abernathy, who was inside the room at the time, ran to the balcony to find King unconscious on the floor. King was rushed into surgery at St. Joseph's Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 7:05pm.

Witnesses saw a man, later identified as escaped convict James Earl Ray, dash from a rooming house across the street where he'd been renting a room shortly after the shot was fired. Nearby, police found a rifle, purchased under a false name, and binoculars with Ray's fingerprints on them. Ray fled to Toronto, Ontario, where he obtained a Canadian passport under the alias Ramon George Sneyd. He was captured on June 8 leaving the UK from London's Heathrow Airport when a ticket agent noticed that the name on his passport was on a watchlist distributed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The UK extradited Ray to Tennessee where he pled guilty to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on March 10, 1969, and was sentenced to 99 years in prison.

Three days after his confession, Ray recanted, claiming that he had been persuaded to enter a guilty plea by his attorney to avoid a potential trial conviction which carried with it the possibility of the death penalty. Ray claimed that he had met a man in Montreal, known to him as "Raul," who had been deeply involved in the assassination, hinting at a conspiracy and alleging that he himself had not personally pulled the trigger when King was killed. Upon investigation, it was determined that Ray had occasionally been untruthful, and he attempted to withdraw his guilty plea and obtain a trial for the rest of his life, to no success. Ray was one of seven convicts to escape from Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary in 1977, and upon his recapture was sentenced to an additional year in prison, bringing his total sentence to 100 years. Ray died in prison in 1998, at 70 years of age, from complications related to hepatitis C.

CIVIL RIGHTS: A TIMELINE OF CRITICAL EVENTS

1954

- *Brown v. Board of Education* declares segregation in public schools unconstitutional, overturning the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that established the "separate but equal" doctrine.

1955

- Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till is brutally lynched in Mississippi for allegedly whistling at a white woman.
- Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, sparking the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

1957

- Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is founded, electing Martin Luther King, Jr. as president.

1960

- Four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College enact a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter.
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is formed at Shaw University.

1961

- Student volunteers known as "freedom riders," sponsored by The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the SNCC embark on bus trips throughout the south to test out new desegregation laws; many are attacked by angry mobs along the way.
- The Albany Movement begins, ending in summer 1962. Local activists embark on an ambitious campaign to eliminate segregation in Albany, Georgia. Though few concessions were secured, it is generally considered a valuable learning experience for King and other civil rights leaders.



Emmett Till



Freedom riders, 1961.

1962

- James Meredith becomes the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi; President Kennedy mobilizes 5,000 federal troops to quell the ensuing riots.

1963

- Martin Luther King, Jr., is arrested during anti-segregation protests in Birmingham, Alabama, where he writes his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to support nonviolent protest.
- Demonstrators are attacked with fire hoses and police dogs during protests in Birmingham. The brutal images are televised and published around the country.
- NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers is murdered outside his home in Mississippi.
- 250,000 people join the March on Washington, culminating in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial.
- Four young girls attending Sunday school are killed when a bomb explodes at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, sparking race riots in Birmingham.

1964

- The 24th Amendment abolishes the poll tax in 11 southern states, instituted after Reconstruction to make it difficult for poor blacks to vote.
- President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting segregation and discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin.

1965

- Malcolm X is assassinated in New York City.
- March from Selma to Montgomery in support of voting rights is brutally stopped by a violent police blockade, dubbed “Bloody Sunday” by the media.
- Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Race riots erupt in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles.
- President Johnson issues Executive Order 11246, enforcing affirmative action.

1966

- The Black Panther Party, a militant black revolutionary socialist group, is founded in Oakland, California.

1967

- Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the SNCC, coins the phrase “black power” in a speech in Seattle.
- *Loving v. Virginia* declares the prohibition of interracial marriage unconstitutional.

1968

- Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated after delivering his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech at a sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis, Tennessee.
- President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibiting discrimination in housing.

1971

- Supreme Court upholds busing as a legitimate means for achieving integration of public schools in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*.

1988

- Civil Rights Restoration Act is passed, expanding non-discrimination laws within private institutions receiving federal funds, and overriding President Reagan’s veto.

1991

- President Bush signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, after two years of debates.

1992

- Race riots erupt in Los Angeles after a jury acquits four white police officers in the videotaped beating of African American Rodney King.

1995

- The Million Man March takes place on the National Mall in Washington, DC to raise political awareness of economic and social inequalities plaguing the African American community, initiated by controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

2003

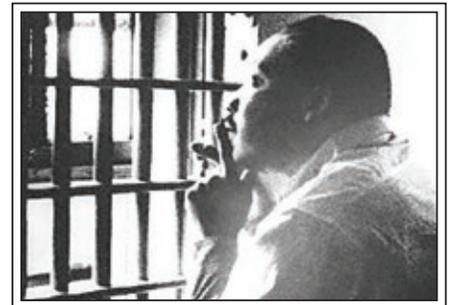
- Supreme Court upholds the University of Michigan Law School’s policy, ruling that race can be one of many factors considered by college admissions committees.

2008

- Senator Edward Kennedy introduces the Civil Rights Act of 2008, which proposes to ensure that federal funds are not used to subsidize discrimination, and strengthen consequences and accountability for violations of civil and workers’ rights.



James Meredith, escorted to class at the University of Mississippi by U.S. Marshals.



Martin Luther King, Jr. in jail in Birmingham, Alabama.



Image of brutality from Bloody Sunday, 1965.



Rodney King after being beaten by police in 1992.

THEMES IN THE PLAY

PASSING THE BATON

By 1968, the fatigue and pressure of being a major spokesman for American civil rights and a rallying point for people and organizations across the country had begun to catch up with King. During his autopsy it was determined that although he was only 39 years old at the time of his death, King's heart showed the wear and tear normally found in a 60-year-old man, the premature aging attributed to the stress of a life lived so publicly and in a position that attracted so much animosity.

One of the recurring themes of *The Mountaintop* is a desire to be free from the harshness of life imposed on King and his family by his role in the civil rights movement, which forever contends with the driving desire to accomplish the great goals that King helped establish for the United States and for the African American population. He takes on an almost manic aspect as his passion for freedom and equality fights with his exhaustion, an oncoming cold, and a deep and anxious love for his family, who live in a permanent state of potential danger. King struggles to see himself and his achievements as a portion of a greater story which will continue after him like the passing of a baton in a race, equipped with all that King accomplished during his leg of the journey.

MAN VS. SYMBOL

While many know the name and the general resume of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Mountaintop* invites us to see the man behind the legend that led the country through the treacherous landscape of the civil rights movement, and introduces us to Martin Luther King, Jr.: the man, with his own doubts and fears that lie beneath the surface of the great American icon. As playwright Katori Hall states:

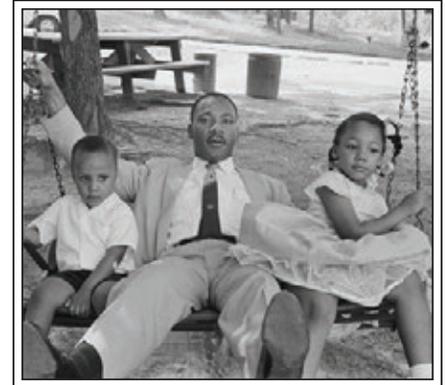
This isn't the "I Have a Dream" King. This is King the man, not the myth. I want people to see that this extraordinary man, who is actually quite ordinary, achieved something so great that he actually created a fundamental shift in how we as a people interact with each other. That's a beautiful thing. And I want people in the audience to be like, "If this man, who was so... so much a human being can achieve such great things then I as this... complicated human being, can create great things too."

NON-VIOLENCE

King's staunch support of nonviolent civil disobedience never wavered, becoming a beacon of integrity and strength in a tense and contentious period of American history. It did, however, spark some disagreement, often from young black leaders who viewed it as a weak and passive response to blatant, and occasionally violent, injustice. Malcolm X and the Black Panthers were both notable advocates of a more violent approach toward social change that, at times, threatened to overtake the peaceful protests that King deemed necessary to success.

Malcolm X was a widely influential African American Muslim minister who supported the Nation of Islam, a religious movement founded in Detroit in 1930 that advocated for the improvement of the spiritual, mental, social, and economic condition of the African American community. The Nation of Islam came to be known for its strong demands regarding black self-reliance, including the desire for a separate country for black people in America, leading to accusations of being a black supremacist organization. In 1964, Malcolm X was excommunicated from the Nation of Islam and formed the religious organization Muslim Mosque, Inc., and the secular Organization of African American Unity that advocated for Pan-Africanism, black nationalism, and the right to defend oneself through any means necessary, including violence. He was assassinated before giving a speech in February, 1965.

The Black Panther Party was a black revolutionary socialist organization that gained notoriety through confrontational, militant, and violent opposition to police, though the officially articulated principles of the Black Panthers were socialist and Marxist in nature. Ideological differences caused disagreement in the party, and by 1982 the Black Panthers had dissolved.



Martin Luther King, Jr. relaxing with two of his children.



The only meeting between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, at a press conference outside the Senate debate of the Civil Rights Act. 26 March 1964.

“I’VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINTOP”



Ralph David Abernathy walking with Martin Luther King, Jr.



Bishop Julian Smith, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Reverend Ralph Abernathy in a civil rights march in Memphis. 28 March 1968.



Ralph Abernathy and King being booked in 1956.

On April 3, 1968, King delivered his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech to a crowd of striking sanitation workers and their supporters in Memphis, Tennessee. In what would be his final public appearance, King made an impassioned appeal for unity, economic equality, and nonviolence while demanding that the United States live up to the ideals it was founded upon.

“I’VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINTOP”

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy and his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about. It’s always good to have your closest friend and associate to say something good about you. And Ralph Abernathy is the best friend that I have in the world. I’m delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow.

Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. And you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general and panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, “Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?” I would take my mental flight by Egypt and I would watch God’s children in their magnificent trek from the dark dungeons of Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the Promised Land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn’t stop there.

I would move on by Greece and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon. And I would watch them around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and aesthetic life of man. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would even go by the way that the man for whom I am named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tacked his ninety-five theses on the door at the church of Wittenberg. But I wouldn’t stop there.

I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating President by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there.

I would even come up to the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but "fear itself." But I wouldn't stop there.

Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy."

Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee — the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world: it's nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today.

And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy that He's allowed me to be in Memphis.

I can remember — I can remember when Negroes were just going around as Ralph has said, so often, scratching where they didn't itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world.

And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying — We are saying that we are God's children. And that we are God's children, we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we've got to stay together. We've got to stay together and maintain unity. You know, whenever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.

Secondly, let us keep the issues where they are. The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers. Now, we've got to keep attention on that. That's always the problem with a little violence. You know what happened the other day, and the press dealt only with the window-breaking. I read the articles. They very seldom got around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers are on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them, and that Mayor Loeb is in dire need of a doctor. They didn't get around to that.

Now we're going to march again, and we've got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be — and force everybody to see that there are thirteen hundred of God's children here suffering, sometimes going hungry, going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out. That's the issue. And we've got to say to the nation: We know how it's coming out. For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.

We aren't going to let any mace stop us. We are masters in our nonviolent movement in disarming police forces; they don't know what to do. I've seen them so often. I remember in Birmingham, Alabama, when we were in that majestic struggle there, we would move out of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church day after day; by the hundreds we would move out. And Bull Connor would tell them to send the dogs forth, and they did come; but we just went before the dogs singing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me around."

Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on." And as I said to you the other night, Bull Connor didn't know history. He knew a kind of physics that somehow didn't relate to the transphysics that we knew about. And that was the fact that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before the fire hoses; we had known water. If we were Baptist or some other denominations, we had been immersed. If we were Methodist, and some others, we had been sprinkled, but we knew water. That couldn't stop us.

And we just went on before the dogs and we would look at them; and we'd go on before the water hoses and we would look at it, and we'd just go on singing "Over my head I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons, and sometimes we were stacked in there like sardines in a can. And they would throw us in, and old Bull would say, "Take 'em off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And every now and then we'd get in jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers, and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to; and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham. Now we've got to go on in Memphis just like that. I call upon you to be with us when we go out Monday.

Now about injunctions: We have an injunction and we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand some of these illegal injunctions. Maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren't going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.

We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must have a kind of fire shut up in his bones. And whenever injustice is around he tell it. Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and saith, "When God speaks who can but prophesy?" Again with Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow the preacher must say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me, and he's anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

And I want to commend the preachers, under the leadership of these noble men: James Lawson, one who has been in this struggle for many years; he's been to jail for struggling; he's been kicked out of Vanderbilt University for this struggle, but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people. Reverend Ralph Jackson, Billy Kiles; I could just go right on down the list, but time will not permit. But I want to thank all of them. And I want you to thank them, because so often, preachers aren't concerned about anything but themselves. And I'm always happy to see a relevant ministry.

It's all right to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now, we are poor people. Individually, we are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively — that means all of us together — collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. Did you ever think about that? After you leave the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I could name the others, the American Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles. We don't need any Molotov cocktails. We just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say, "God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you."

And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy — what is the other bread? — Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's Bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike. And then they can move on town — downtown and tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right.

But not only that, we've got to strengthen black institutions. I call upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank. We want a "bank-in" movement in Memphis. Go by the savings and loan association. I'm not asking you something that we don't do ourselves at SCLC. Judge Hooks and others will tell you that we have an account here in the savings and loan association from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We are telling you to follow what we are doing. Put your money there. You have six or seven black insurance companies here in the city of Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We want to have an "insurance-in."

Now these are some practical things that we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here.

Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school — be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus, and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters of life. At points he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew and throw him off base....

Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air, and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho. And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn't stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But he got down with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, this was the great man, because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother.

Now you know, we use our imagination a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn't stop. At times we say they were busy going to a church meeting, an ecclesiastical gathering, and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn't be late for their meeting. At other times we would speculate that there was a religious law that "One who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony." And every now and then we begin to wonder whether maybe they were not going down to Jerusalem — or down to Jericho, rather, to organize a "Jericho Road Improvement Association." That's a possibility. Maybe they felt that it was better to deal with the problem from the causal root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effect.

But I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It's possible that those men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles — or rather 1200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about 2200 feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked — the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job?" Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" The question is, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question.

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

You know, several years ago, I was in New York City autographing the first book that I had written. And while sitting there autographing books, a demented black woman came up. The only question I heard from her was, "Are you Martin Luther King?" And I was looking down writing, and I said, "Yes." And the next minute I felt something beating on my chest. Before I knew it I had been stabbed by this demented woman. I was rushed to Harlem Hospital. It was a dark Saturday afternoon. And that blade had gone through, and the X-rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery. And once that's punctured, you're drowned in your own blood — that's the end of you.

It came out in *The New York Times* the next morning, that if I had merely sneezed, I would have died. Well, about four days later, they allowed me, after the operation, after my chest had been opened, and the blade had been taken out, to move around in the wheel chair in the hospital. They allowed me to read some of the mail that came in, and from all over the states and the world, kind letters came in. I read a few, but one of them I will never forget. I had received one from the President and the Vice President. I've forgotten what those telegrams said. I'd received a visit and a letter from the Governor of New York, but I've forgotten what that letter said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl, a young girl who was a student at the White Plains High School. And I looked at that letter, and I'll never forget it. It said simply,

Dear Dr. King,

I am a ninth-grade student at the White Plains High School.

And she said,

While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I'm a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze.

And I want to say tonight — I want to say tonight that I too am happy that I didn't sneeze. Because if I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1960, when students all over the South started sitting-in at lunch counters. And I knew that as they were sitting in, they were really standing up for the best in the American dream, and taking the whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1961, when we decided to take a ride for freedom and ended segregation in interstate travel.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1962, when Negroes in Albany, Georgia, decided to straighten their backs up. And whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent.

If I had sneezed — If I had sneezed I wouldn't have been here in 1963, when the black people of Birmingham, Alabama, aroused the conscience of this nation, and brought into being the Civil Rights Bill.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have had a chance later that year, in August, to try to tell America about a dream that I had had.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been down in Selma, Alabama, to see the great Movement there.

If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been in Memphis to see a community rally around those brothers and sisters who are suffering.

I'm so happy that I didn't sneeze.

And they were telling me — now, it doesn't matter, now. It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us. The pilot said over the public address system, "We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night."

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.

And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!

And so I'm happy, tonight.

I'm not worried about anything.

I'm not fearing any man!

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

REFERENCES AND GLOSSARY

“ABEL WAS SLAIN BY HIS BROTHER CAIN”: In the Book of Genesis, the brothers Cain and Abel were the children of Adam and Eve, Cain being the first human born and Abel the first to die, at his brother’s hand.

“YOU SHO’LL IS UGLY”: A quote from Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

A NUCLEAR 8 MILE: 8 Mile is a cultural and racial dividing line in Detroit, featured in many songs by rapper Eminem; Three Mile Island was the site of a partial nuclear meltdown in Pennsylvania in 1979, the worst accident in U.S. commercial nuclear power plant history.

A WHITE BRONCO FLEES INTO THE NIGHT: A reference to former athlete and actor O.J. Simpson who was accused of killing his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Smith, and her friend Ronald Goldman in June 1994. Simpson owned a white Bronco, in which he threatened to attempt suicide while police embarked on a massive chase to apprehend him following their initial investigation.

ABERNATHY: Reverend Ralph David Abernathy, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s close associate and fellow leader of the American Civil Rights Movement.

AFRO PICKS: A long toothed comb used to style an afro.

AIDS: Acronym for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, a fatal disease caused by the HIV virus, first reported in the U.S. in 1981.

ALBANY: The Albany Movement was an ambitious attempt to eliminate racial segregation in Albany, Georgia in 1961-62. Though few concessions were won, it is considered a valuable learning experience for many of the leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr.

AND BLACK PRESIDENTS: Reference to Barack Obama, the first African American President of the United States, elected to office in 2008 and again in 2012.

AND JENA SIX: Six black teenagers who were convicted after beating Justin Barker, a white student at Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana in 2006.

AND ON AND ON/TIL THE BREAK OF DAWN: Song lyric from Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight,” the first hip hop song to break into the Billboard Top 40.

ANDREW YOUNG: American politician, activist, and pastor.

ANGELA DAVIS: A political activist and leader of the Communist Party USA who was involved in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and, though never officially a member, had close ties to the Black Panther Party.

ANOTHER KENNEDY KILLED: Senator Robert “Bobby” Kennedy was a leading candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination when he was assassinated by Sirhan Sirhan in 1968; his elder brother, President John F. Kennedy, had also been assassinated in 1963.

APARTHEID FALLS: Apartheid was a system of racial segregation in South Africa, developed after World War II and remaining until the 1994 democratic election, won by Nelson Mandela.

ASSATA SHAKUR: Member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, an underground militant black nationalist organization that was active in the U.S. mainly during the 1970s.

BAYARD RUSTIN: An American leader in social movements for civil rights, socialism, non-violence, and gay rights. He was instrumental in organizing the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963.

BERLIN WALL: The Berlin Wall was erected by communist East Germany in 1961 to halt emigration to democratic West Germany, and was regarded as a major symbol of communist oppression and the division between communism and democracy. It was dismantled in 1989, and East and West Germany reunited as a single state in 1990.

BET: An acronym for the most prominent African American television network, Black Entertainment Television, officially launched in 1980.

BIGGIE: African American rapper also known as The Notorious B.I.G., killed in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles in 1997.

BILL CLINTON: Bill Clinton was the 42nd President of the United States, serving two terms from 1993-2001.

BLACK PICKET FENCES: A reference to the 1991 book *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black Middle Class* by Mary Pattillo-McCoy which posits that even in a supposedly “post-racial” America, the black and white middle classes remain separate and unequal. The title is also a commentary on the racial undertones of the phrase “white picket fence,” supposed to represent a perfect and successful achievement of the American Dream through the ownership of a house with a white picket fence.

BLACK RAISED FISTS: A symbol and political slogan of the Black Power movement, a name for various ideologies adopted by many independent groups, aimed at achieving self-determination for people of African and Black descent. The movement was especially prominent in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

BLASPHEMIN': Speaking ill of God.

BLOODS: A primarily African American gang founded in Los Angeles in 1972 to combat the power of the Crips.

BOB MARLEY: Jamaican reggae singer and songwriter.

BOUGIE: A slang term used to describe a person who is acting above their station.

BUNIONS: An inflamed swelling on the foot or more commonly inside the ball of the big toe.

CANAAN: An ancient country in southwestern Asia on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, comprised of modern day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and the western parts of Jordan and Syria; a place of pilgrimage for Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

CLARENCE THOMAS: The second African American to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States.

COFFINS COMING HOME: A reference to the casualties of war, with particular reference to the Vietnam War.

COLIN POWELL: American statesman and retired Army General who became the first African American to serve as the United States Secretary of State.

COLUMBINE: A school shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, when students Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris murdered 12 students and a teacher before taking their own lives.

CONDI RICE: Nickname for Condoleezza Rice, the first female African American Secretary of State.

CORNS: A hard callus developed on toes or feet from ill-fitting shoes.

CRACK CORNERS: Street corners on which one can purchase crack cocaine, often a gang activity.

CRACK: Freebase form of cocaine that can be smoked.

CRIPS: A primarily African American gang founded in Los Angeles in 1969; one of the largest and most violent associations of street gangs in the U.S., historically in conflict with the Bloods.

DIABETES: A group of metabolic diseases in which a person has high blood pressure due to insufficient production of insulin.

DON'T ASK DON'T TELL: A 1993 U.S. discriminatory policy regarding homosexuals serving in the military, officially repealed in 2011.

DRIVE-BYS: Refers to a hit-and-run shooting, carried out upon a target from a moving vehicle.

DROVE THE CHEVY TO THE LEVEE/BUT THE LEVEE WAS DROWNED: Lyrics to the song "American Pie" by Don McLean, bastardized to reference Hurricane Katrina.

EZEKIEL: A book of the Bible.

FORSOOK/FORSAKE: To abandon.

HOOCHIE COOCHIE: Euphemism for sex.

I AM SOMEBODY!: A 1950s poem by Reverend William K. Borders, Sr.

I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD: A funk song recorded by James Brown.

IF IT DOESN'T FIT, YOU MUST ACQUIT: A reference to the ill-fitting glove that O.J. Simpson tried on in court as "proof" that he wasn't the killer of Nicole Brown Smith and Ronald Goldman in 1994. O.J. Simpson was acquitted in a highly publicized trial, due to questionable acquisition and handling of evidence.

IRAQ: Middle Eastern country with a long history of conflict with the United States.

ISSAC HAYES: African American performer who strongly influenced the southern soul music genre.

JAMES BROWN: African American musician known as the founder of funk music and "the Godfather of Soul."

JAMES BYRD: An African American man murdered by white supremacists in Jasper, Texas in 1998.

JESSE FOR PRESIDENT: Referring to Jesse Jackson, who became the second African American to campaign for presidency of the United States in 1984.

JULIAN BOND: American social activist and leader in the American Civil Rights Movement.

KATRINA, KATRINA: Referring to Hurricane Katrina that struck New Orleans in 2005, the sixth strongest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded.

KOOLS: A brand of menthol cigarettes.

LYNCH: Implying punishment such as whipping, tarring, feathering, and to inflict a death sentence, usually by hanging.

MALCOM X: A widely influential African American activist, associated with the Nation of Islam until 1964.

MARION BARRY: An African American politician currently serving on the Council of the District of Columbia; served as mayor of DC from 1979-1991.

MASON TEMPLE: The headquarters of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee.

MCDONALD'S: The largest chain of hamburger fast food restaurants in the world, which faces significant criticism for its generally unhealthy but affordable food options.

MONTELLE: A reference to Montelle Taylor, a 17-year-old African American who was shot and killed in Toledo, Ohio, on June 10, 2011; his homicide remains unsolved.

MTV: An acronym for the television network, Music Television.

NBA: National Basketball Association, a sports association in the United States.

NILE: The Nile River is the longest river in the world, and serves as Egypt's major water supply.

NO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: The Middle East has been the site of various major political and religious conflicts throughout the 20th century.

OLYMPICS: African American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the gold and bronze medalists in the 200m race at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, raised their fists in a Black Power salute for the duration of the national anthem. It is largely considered to be one of the most overtly political statements ever made at a modern Olympic Games.

OPRAH: Arguably the most influential African American woman of the 20th century, best known for her talk show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

OSAMA: Osama bin Laden was the founder of al-Qaeda, the Sunni militant Islamist organization that claimed responsibility for the September 11 attacks on the United States. From 2001, he was a major target of the U.S. war on terror until he was killed by U.S. forces in May 2011.

PALL MALL: A premium cigarette brand that catered to the upper class and named after the well known London street, Pall Mall.

PANTHER: Referring to the African American revolutionary socialist organization, the Black Panther Party.

PHARAOHS: Rulers of Ancient Egypt.

POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN: A 1968 effort that demanded economic and human rights for the impoverished, organized by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and carried out in the wake of King's assassination.

PRESS N' CURL: A hair straightening technique used by African American women.

PROMISED LAND: A common name for Heaven; also a reference to Canaan, the land inhabited by Moses and his people after wandering for 40 years in the desert following the Jewish exodus from Egypt.

PULPIT: A stage or platform used for public speeches, often used in reference to a clergyman delivering a speech to a congregation.

REAGAN WINS AGAIN: Ronald Reagan was elected to two terms as President of the United States, winning the 1980 and 1984 Presidential elections. Reagan opposed many civil rights initiatives throughout his career including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Restoration Act was passed in 1988, overriding his presidential veto.

REDEMPTION SONG: A musical work by Bob Marley, considered to be his greatest work.

RIVERSIDE: Reference to Riverside Church in New York City, where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "Beyond Vietnam" speech on April 4, 1967.

ROBBEN ISLAND SETS MANDELA FREE: Nelson Mandela is a South African anti-apartheid politician and revolutionary who served 27 years as a political prisoner before being released from prison in 1990. He was imprisoned on Robben Island from 1962-1982.

RODNEY KING SCREAMS: 'CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?': African American Rodney King was the victim of a videotaped police beating in 1992. The officers involved, all white, were acquitted, sparking massive race riots in Los Angeles that killed 53 people.

RON BROWN: An American politician, and the first African American to hold the position of the United States Secretary of Commerce.

ROOTS: *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* is a 1976 novel by Alex Haley that follows the life of Kunta Kinte, an 18th century African captured and sold into slavery in the United States, and his descendants. The novel and its highly popular television adaptation, *Roots*, is considered to be one of the most important works of the 20th century.

RUBY DEE: An African American actress most well known for her role in the film version of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

RUN-D.M.C.: An American hip hop group founded in 1981, largely considered to be one of the most influential acts in the history of hip hop culture.

RWANDA BLEEDS: The Rwandan Genocide was a mass slaughter of the Tutsis by the Hutus that took place in 1994 in the East African state of Rwanda. Over 500,000 people were killed during a period of 100 days.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: Former President of Iraq, toppled by a joint UK and U.S. military force in April of 2003. Apprehended in December, he was tried by the Iraqi Special Tribunal for various crimes against humanity and executed in 2006.

SIDDITY: An air of superiority; conceited; "stuck up."

SIDNEY POITIER: American-born Bahamian actor; the first African American to win an Academy Award for Best Actor.

SKINHEADS: A subculture group that initially appeared in the 1960s that came to be known for militant white supremacist and neo-Nazi convictions.

SMACK: One of many street names for heroin.

SOUL TRAIN: An American musical variety show, in syndication from 1971 to 2006, that showcased R&B, soul, and hip hop music.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES: Vocalizing an incomprehensible stream of sound as a part of a religious experience.

SPIKE LEE: An African American film maker whose movies largely focus on race.

SPOOK: A spectre, apparition, or ghost; also refers to someone involved in espionage.

ST. AUGUSTINE: An influential developer of Western Christianity and philosophy.

STONEWALL RIOTS: Riots that ensued when members of the homosexual community demonstrated violent acts against a police raid in Greenwich Village on June 28, 1969.

SUPER FLY: A 1972 Blaxploitation film directed by Gordon Parks, Jr. that portrays an African American cocaine dealer trying to escape from the underworld drug business.

THE CHILDREN OF THE NILE: A Biblical reference to the Hebrew population of Egypt, who were slaves to the Pharaohs before being led to the Promised Land by Moses; a reference to slavery.

THE COSBY SHOW: A television sitcom based around an upper-middle class African American family, starring Bill Cosby.

THE JEFFERSONS: A television show revolving around a wealthy African American couple, a spin-off of *All in the Family*, which satirized the racist views of the white working class character Archie Bunker.

THE SUPERDOME: A large sports complex where a huge number of New Orleans residents were evacuated to during Hurricane Katrina.

THE TOWERS SIGH/THE WORLD TURNS GRAY/SEPTEMBER 11TH/ONE BRIGHT MORNING DAY: A reference to the World Trade Center towers in New York City that were demolished using hijacked planes on September 11, 2001, becoming the single most deadly terrorist attack in United States history, and sparking the U.S.'s War on Terror.

TOM LEE PARK: A city park west of downtown Memphis, Tennessee named after Tom Lee, an African American who saved the lives of 32 people when the steamboat *M. E. Norman* sank in 1925.

TUPAC: African American rapper, killed in a drive-by shooting in 1996.

VIETNAM: The easternmost country on the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War spanned the years 1955-1975.

WALK THIS WAY: Song released in 1975 by American rock group Aerosmith. It was covered in 1986 by hip hop artists Run-D.M.C., introducing a new 1980s musical sub-genre known as rap rock, a melding of rock and hip hop.

WASHINGTON MALL: Reference to the National Mall, an open-area national park in downtown Washington, DC which includes the area between the Lincoln Memorial and the United States Capitol, where the Washington Monument is located; where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech.

WE SHALL OVERCOME: A protest song by Joan Baez that became a key anthem of the American Civil Rights Movement.

WINSTONS: A best-selling brand of cigarettes.

WOOLWORTH’S: An extremely successful American five-and-dime store.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Most people are at least somewhat familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his role as a leader of the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Describe your impressions of Martin Luther King, Jr., before seeing this play. What did you already know of or imagine about him as a person or a leader?
2. How has your impression of Martin Luther King, Jr., changed since seeing this play? Did the playwright Katori Hall’s fictional portrayal of the man alter your understanding or perception of his life and work?
3. Do you think Hall’s portrayal of Martin Luther King, Jr., was accurate, or did she take too many liberties? How do we separate the man from his iconic status?
4. What does the word “martyr” mean to you? Does it have positive or negative connotations? Would you consider Martin Luther King, Jr., a martyr? How might that label affect his impact as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement?
5. Hall makes brief mention of the fact that the Beatles had risen to enormous fame over the same period that Martin Luther King, Jr., was spreading his word. What do you think was the purpose of juxtaposing these two cultural icons in this dramatic work? What does it say about the country at that time?
6. Why do you think Hall chose to characterize Camae the way that she did? What purpose did Camae’s character serve in this play? How does the revelation of her true character change your impression of her, or of her relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr.?
7. The play makes regular reference to Malcolm X, another influential African American activist and contemporary of King’s. Compare and contrast speeches by Malcolm X to those of Martin Luther King, Jr. Did these two men, who were fighting for the same cause, take the same approach to that fight? What were their methods? What were the pros and cons to each method?

8. Martin Luther King, Jr. received criticism from fellow activists who felt his nonviolent approach to protesting the inequalities suffered by the African American community was too pacifist and produced no results. In *The Mountaintop*, Camae says “Walking will only get us so far” — an allusion to both MLK’s pacifist approach and his many freedom marches. Looking back on the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, as outlined in this Play Guide, do you agree with Camae’s statement? Did Martin Luther King, Jr.’s nonviolent approach accomplish what he hoped it would?
9. The full text of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous “I Have Been to the Mountaintop” speech is included in this Play Guide. Read and discuss its relevance in today’s society. Do you think we, as a country, have reached “the mountaintop?” What does your version of “the mountaintop” look like?
10. Martin Luther King, Jr. has become an icon of the American Civil Rights Movement. Do you think that iconic status would sit well with him?
11. What challenges do you think an actor faces when preparing to portray a historical figure on stage? How would their preparation differ from when portraying a purely fictional character?
12. What was your favorite design element of this show (set, costumes, lighting, sound)? How did these design elements contribute to the story? Did any of them detract from the story?

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES

1. “Passing the baton” is a major theme in *The Mountaintop*. Martin Luther King, Jr., is concerned about who will continue fighting for civil rights after his life is over. What do you think his advice would have been to the next generation of civil rights activists had he really known that April 3, 1968, was to be his last night living? Write a letter, as Martin Luther King, Jr., to that next generation detailing instructions on how to carry the baton into the future.
2. Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that, even if it didn’t happen in his lifetime, the American people would reach “the mountaintop.” Write an inspirational speech that describes your vision for the future of America and how we as a society can reach “the mountaintop” together.
3. In the first moments of the play, we hear Martin Luther King, Jr., rehearsing an unfinished speech, potentially titled “Arrogant America.” Finish the speech that Katori Hall’s MLK never got to deliver; you can use the following lines from the play as a starting point: “America, America, my country ‘tis of thee. . . My country who doles out constant misery. . . War abroad. Then war in your streets. . .”

THEATRE ARTS ACTIVITIES

1. Camae’s final monologue in the play has elements of spoken word or slam poetry to it, as a flowing litany of references to the past, present, and future of the Civil Rights Movement. Individually or in groups, write and perform your own list-poems chronicling a modern day struggle you see or experience in your community.
2. Augusto Boal’s invisible theatre and rainbow of desire tools and philosophies can be used to explore how we perceive and experience oppression today.
 - a. Think about a time in your life that you witnessed or experienced an injustice — on a small personal level or as a symptom of a larger societal problem.
 - b. In a small group, recreate the story of that incident in a moving tableau as it happened in reality. Rehearse and identify the protagonist(s) and the antagonist(s).
 - c. When presenting your moving tableau to the class, invite other students to change the outcome of that incident of oppression by either reshaping the actions of one of the tableau’s participants, or by taking over that role themselves and choosing a different action. Repeat until the spectators and actors can agree on an “ideal outcome.”
 - d. Discuss the ways in which we — as protagonists and antagonists — can effect change in the future by remembering to focus on the “ideal outcomes” that we would like to participate in as individuals and as a society.