



THE MOUNTAINTOP

by *Katori Hall*

THE MOUNTAINTOP

by Katori Hall

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A gripping reimagination of events the night before the assassination of the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On April 3, 1968, after delivering one of his most memorable speeches, an exhausted Dr. King retires to his room at the Lorraine Motel while a storm rages outside. When a mysterious stranger arrives with some surprising news, King is forced to confront his destiny and his legacy to his people.

"Even before the first flash of lightning — and there will be plenty of that before evening's end — an ominous electricity crackles through the opening moments of THE MOUNTAINTOP."

—The New York Times

"[THE MOUNTAINTOP] crackles with theatricality and a humanity more moving than sainthood." —New York Newsday

"... as audacious as it is inventive ... [a] thrilling, wild, provocative flight of magical realism ... Hall keeps her audience guessing ... This is playwrighting without a net, a defiant poke in the eye of all historical conventions and political correctness ... The King that is left after Hall's humanization project is somehow more real and urgent and whole."

—Associated Press

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DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

THE MOUNTAINTOP

BY KATORI HALL

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE MOUNTAINTOP — HALL

CHARACTERS

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

CAMAE

PLACE

Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel.

TIME

April 3, 1968.

THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Lights up. Night. April 3, 1968. Room 306. The Lorraine Motel. Memphis, Tennessee. The outside street lights project the shadows of rain sliding down the pane onto the walls.

The motel room door creaks open. The rain pours outside. Enter Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tired. Overwrought. Wet. He is ready to take his shoes off and crawl into bed. He coughs. He is hoarse. He stands in the doorway, the red and yellow motel sign casting a glow onto his face. He yells out of the door into the stormy night.

KING. Abernathy, get me a pack of Pall Malls, when ya go. Naw. Naw. Naw. I said Pall Malls. I don't like those Winstons you smoke. You can call me siddity all you like, I want me a Pall Mall. Pall Malls, man! Don't be cheap. Be back soon, man. I'm wanting one. Bad. That's right ... That's right ... *(He closes the door. He locks the deadbolt. Click. He chains the door. Rattle. Then he pulls the curtain tight over the window. He walks around in the darkness, but he knows the lay of the room well. He turns on a lone lamp that instantly illuminates the room. Water stains pockmark the walls. Bright orange and fading brown '60s decor accent the room. The carpet is the color of bile. He loosens his tie. Unbuttons his shirt. Coughs. An opened briefcase lies on one of the two full beds, covered with rumpled peach sheets. He picks up his sermon papers from the bed. Reading.)* "Why America is going to hell ... " *(He goes into the bathroom.)* "Why America is going to hell ... " *(We hear him urinate. He flushes the toilet. He walks back into the room.)* They really gonna burn me on the cross for that one. *(He turns on a lone lamp that instantly illuminates the room.)* "America, you are too ARROGANT!" *(He goes to the nightstand and checks the empty coffee cups.)* What shall I say ... what shall I say ... *(He goes to the black rotary phone on the nightstand*

between the beds. He dials.) America ... Ameri — (He stops. In complete silence: unscrews the receiver. Checks the phone for bugs. None there. Screws the receiver back. Checks the nightstand. None there. Sighs. Dials again.) Room service? There's not any more room service, tonight? When did it stop? Last week? We were here last week and y'all were still serving room service 'til midnight. Been always able to get me a cup of coffee when I wanted it. Needed it. Pardon? I just want a coffee. One cup. (Pause.) Thank you! Got to do some work before I go to bed. You can bring it on up. Room 306. (He smiles a broad smile.) Yes, we call it the "King-Abernathy Suite," too. I appreciate that, sir. We thank you for your prayers, sir. We're not gonna stop. These sanitation workers gonna get their due. I'm here to make sure of that. Yes, sir! My autograph, sir? (Beat.) Uh-h-h-h ... I don't give those out. I only give thanks. Sorry, sir. Yes. It'll be right up? Five minutes? Thank you kindly. Kindly. (He hangs up. He gives the phone a "what the fuck was that about" look.) "America, America, my country 'tis of thee ... " (He begins to take off his shoes.) "My country who doles out constant misery — " (He smells them.) Woooooh! Sweet Jesus. I got marching feet and we ain't even marched yet! (He throws them down. He turns to rifle through his suitcase.) Shit. She forgot to pack my toothbrush again. (He dials on the rotary phone. Singing to himself.) Corrie, pick up ... Corrie pick up, Corrie, Corrie, pick up ... (She doesn't. He puts the phone down.) My country who doles out constant misery. War abroad. Then war in your streets. (Under his breath.) "Arrogant America." What shall I do with — (He throws himself back on the bed. There is a knock at the door. He rushes to go and answer. He undoes the deadbolt, then the chain.) Reverend, about time, man. The store ain't but down the street — (Enter Camae, a beautiful young maid. She stands in the doorway, one hand holding a newspaper over her head to catch the rain, the other balancing a tray with a cup of coffee.)

CAMAE. Room service, sir.

KING. That was fast.

CAMAE. Well, I been called quickie Camae befo'. (He is taken aback, stunned by her beauty. She waits and waits and waits. He snaps out of it.)

KING. Where are my manners? Come on in. (He steps aside. She walks in. Dripping over everything.)

CAMAE. Where would you like me to put this?

KING. On the table over there. (She sets the tray on the downstage table, bending slightly at the waist. King appreciates his view. Beat. She looks back; he looks away.) How much is that gonna cost? CAMAE. Folk down there say it's on the house. For you. It like this yo' house, they say. So you ain't gotta pay them. But you can pay me a tip for gettin' my press' n' curl wet out in this rain. (She holds out her hand. He smiles and pulls money from his billfold.)

KING. You new?

CAMAE. First day, sir.

KING. That's why. I haven't seen you before. Stayed here plenty a' times, but I've never seen your face.

CAMAE. I done seen yo's befo' though.

KING. Oh, have you?

CAMAE. Of course. On the TV down at Woolworth's. You like the Beatles.

KING. Wish folks would listen to me like they listen to the Beatles.

CAMAE. Mm-hm. 'Specially white folks. (King laughs, then breaks into a fit of coughs.) Sound like you needin' some tea, not no coffee. You got a cold?

KING. (Straining.) Just done got to getting hoarse. Shouting.

CAMAE. And carryin' on.

KING. No, not carryin' on. Testifying.

CAMAE. Shame I ain't get a chance to see ya tonight. I heard you carried on a storm up at Mason Temple.

KING. How you know?

CAMAE. Negro talk strike faster than lightnin'. They say folks was all cryin'. Sangin'. Mmph. Mmph. I woulda liked to have seen that. Somethin' to tell my chирren. "When I wun't nothin' but a chick-a-dee, I seen't Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr., cuttin' up in the pulpit." Mmmhmmmm. I bet that was somethin' to see. (King goes to peek out the window.)

KING. Wish it had been more folks there.

CAMAE. How many was there?

KING. Mmmmm. A couple thousand.

CAMAE. Honey, that a lot.

KING. Coulda been more, in my humble opinion.

CAMAE. But it was stormin'. Tornadoes and all get out. You can't get no Negro folks out in no rain like this.

KING. And why is that?

CAMAE. God'll strike you down if you move 'round too much. That what my momma used to say. When it storm like this my momma say, "Be still!" But I thank she just wanted us chiren to sit our tails down somewhere 'cause the lightnin' spooked her nerves so bad. Personally, I just thank God be actin' up.

KING. Do He? Is that why you didn't come? *(Pause. She wants to say something, but changes her mind.)*

CAMAE. Naw. It my first day here. At work. Wanted to come in early.

KING. Well, I can't blame folks. Shoot, I almost didn't go.

CAMAE. Why that?

KING. Aint been feeling too good.

CAMAE. Aww, a little sick?

KING. You could say that ... Personally, I don't think God's what kept folks in their houses tonight. Folks just don't care.

CAMAE. Folks 'fraid of gettin' blown up. Churches ain't even safe for us folks. *(Thunder and lightning. Boom. Boom. Crackle! King jumps slightly.)* You ... alright?

KING. *(Fidgeting.)* Sure ... sure. *(Beat. She goes stage left, she checks the bathroom. Takes some wet towels out and slings them across her shoulder.)*

CAMAE. You need anythang else 'fore I go?

KING. Actually ... if you got a cigarette ...

CAMAE. Cigarettes and coffee? That ain't a diet befitin' of a preacher.

KING. "Judge not and ye shall not be judged."

CAMAE. Honey, I hears that. I guess if you was at home you'd be eatin' mo' right.

KING. I suppose.

CAMAE. What you miss the most she make?

KING. Her egg sandwiches.

CAMAE. Mmmmm. I likes them, too. Make one every day for myself. *(She pulls out a pack of cigarettes. Offers him one. He takes it gladly. Looks at it closely. Staring her down, he puts it in his mouth. She takes out a lighter. Lights it for him.)*

KING. Not too many women running 'round smoking Pall Malls. Impressive.

CAMAE. Quite. My daddy smoked Pall Malls. Said Kools'll kill ya.

KING. Have yourself one.

CAMAE. What?

KING. Smoke one with me.

CAMAE. *(Smiling.)* Naw, naw, Preacher Kang. You 'bout to have my boss up after me. I don't know what the rules is yet. Don't know where the dark corners in this place is to hide and smoke my Pall Malls. Don't even know which rooms to lay my head for a quick nap.

KING. What about this one? *(Beat. She looks at the bed.)*

CAMAE. Last folk up in here was doin' the hoochie-coochie for pay. I wouldn't lay down in that bed if somebody paid me.

KING. So what kinds of rules does a little lady like you break?

CAMAE. None that involve no preacher, I tells ya that.

KING. Everybody should break a rule every now and then.

CAMAE. Yessir. I's agrees witcha. But not tonight ... Not tonight.

KING. Have one wit' me. Ain't nobody gonna come looking for you.

CAMAE. *(Nervously laughs.)* You the one gone get caught. Kidnapping me like this.

KING. Just one. 'Til my friend come back with my pack. *(Beat. She sighs. She takes a cigarette out and lights it. Inhales. Lets it all out. They look at each other.)*

CAMAE. You sho'll do try hard at it.

KING. Well ... you're pretty.

CAMAE. I know. Even my uncle couldn't help hisself. You have fun tonight?

KING. Fun?

CAMAE. It gotta be fun. Otherwise you wouldn't do it.

KING. Not any fun in this.

CAMAE. Sound like grand fun to me. Standin' up there in the middle of them great big old churches. People clappin' for you. Fallin' out. *(To herself.)* Must be muthafuckin' grand to mean so much to somebody. Shit, GODDAMN, must be grand. *(Beat.)* Where a needle and thread to sew up my mouth? Here I is just a cussin' all up in front of you, Dr. Kang. I cuss worsen than a sailor with the clap. Oooo, God gone get me! I'm goin' to hell just for cussin' in front of you. Fallin' straight to hell. *(He laughs.)*

KING. No ma'am, 'cordin' to your face, you done fell straight from heaven. *(King sips his coffee.)*

CAMAE. You li' pulpit poet, you. I likes you.

KING. I likes you, too. *(The phone rings.)* Excuse me.

CAMAE. Well, I'll just be on my — *(He motions for her to stay. Then puts on his "King voice.")*

KING. Dr. King, here. *(Voice shifts.)* Oh. Corrie. Yes. I did call. You didn't pick up. Oh. You were at a meeting. Oh. It went fine. Not as many people there, but ... it was enough. I am getting hoarse, I know. Yes, I'm drinking my tea. I'm drinking tea right now. *(He looks at Camae who snickers. He motions for her to be quiet.)* You know you forgot to pack my toothbrush? Yep. *(He laughs, checks his breath.)* I'll just get another one in the morning. Don't worry, darling. You can't remember everything. *(Silence.)* Did they call? What they say this time? Hmmm. Hmm. Ugly voices. Mmph. You worried? I'm not. *(He takes a long drag on his cigarette.)* The children asleep? Oh. She still up. She shouldn't be up so late past midnight. Oh, she can't sleep. Well, let me talk to her. *(Pause.)* Hey, it's Paw. Mmm-hmm. What Paw say? You have to listen to your maw when Paw's not there. Yes. You having trouble sleeping? Me, too, sometime. You know what I do? I just lay down and pray for a bit and that makes me nod off in no time. It makes everything real peaceful. You promise you gonna be good? Okay, let Paw speak to your maw. Oh. She's in the bathroom, now? Just tell Yolanda and the boys Paw'll see 'em when I get back. Tell Maw I love her. Good night, Bernice. *(He hangs up the phone.)*

CAMAE. You shouldn't lie like that.

KING. Like what?

CAMAE. About drankin' tea. Lyin' tail.

KING. Coffee can't cure a cold, can it?

CAMAE. Coffee wit' some whiskey in it can. *(She pulls out a flask and casts a dollop into his cup.)* This what the Irish call "cough syrup." *(King laughs heartily.)* She's beautiful. Yo' wife. I seen't her on the TV down at Woolworth's, too. Coretta Scott K—

KING. *(Correcting.)* Mrs. King.

CAMAE. Oh. Yes. Mrs. King. *(He drinks his coffee.)*

KING. The color of coffee with a lot of milk and a lot of sugar. Just how I like it.

CAMAE. Well, I likes my coffee black and bitter. *(He looks at the name tag on her chest.)*

KING. "Carrie Mae." That's not what you said earlier.

CAMAE. Folk shorten it. Call me Camae.

KING. Carriemae?

CAMAE. Naw, naw, naw! CA-MAE. Camae.

KING. Doesn't make any sense.

CAMAE. It do too. Say it wit' me. *(Slowly.)* Camae.

KING. Cammmae.

CAMAE. Camae!

KING. *(Teasing.)* CAR-mae?

CAMAE. *(Annoyed.)* CAMAE!

KING. *(Laughing.)* Camae!

CAMAE. *(Laughing, too.)* Right! Right! There ya go. Sound good comin' outcho mouth.

KING. A lot of things do.

CAMAE. Sho'll do.

KING. Sho'll do. *(Beat.)*

CAMAE. Well, you ax for me if you need anything else. Just pick up the phone and give me a hollah. The switchboard man'll get me.

KING. I can ask for you especially?

CAMAE. If me is what you want. *(Beat.)*

KING. Alrighty then.

CAMAE. Alrighty then. *(Camae slowly makes her way to the door. She looks back to him. Smiles. She then opens the door. The storm has gathered more fury outside. BOOM, BOOM. BOOM!)*

KING. *(Stuttering.)* C-c-can I ask you a question before you go? And you promise to answer me open and honest?

CAMAE. Depend on what the question is.

KING. You won't think me less of a man, if I ask?

CAMAE. I might.

KING. I've been needing a woman's perspective on this.

CAMAE. Like I say, it depend on the question. Shoot. *(She closes the door. Beat.)*

KING. Do you think I should shave off my mustache? *(Beat.)*

CAMAE. Yes. I was just sayin' that to myself just then, "He look so damn ugly with that mustache."

KING. Really?

CAMAE. Naw! I thought you was gone ask me about somethin' mo' important than that.

KING. That is important! My physical appearance is important. To the people.

CAMAE. Go on somewhere wit' that!

KING. I'm serious! Tell me the truth. Mustache, no mustache? *(He covers his mustache with his hand, then uncovers and covers again.)* Mustache, no mustache? Mustache, no mustache?

CAMAE. *(Laughing.)* Where is that man witcho Pall Malls so you can stop axin' me crazy questions?

KING. I don't know where Ralph is. I just thought I'd get a woman's opinion.

CAMAE. Well, have you axed yo' wife? *(Beat.)*

KING. No.

CAMAE. Well, ax her then. She the one supposed to make them kinds of decisions anyway. *(King goes to the mirror downstage and peers at his face.)*

KING. Just tryin' to shave some years off. I done got to looking old.

CAMAE. You have. You look older. In person. When women get older, they get ugly. When men get older they get ... handsome. Wrinkles look good on a man. Especially when they got some money to go wit' they wrinkles.

KING. Women do like men with wrinkles, don't they?

CAMAE. I don't. I likes 'em young and wild. Like me.

KING. Like you?

CAMAE. Yes, Preacher Kang.

KING. *(Smiling at the memory.)* I used to be young and wild myself.

CAMAE. You a preacher. That's part a' y'all job requirement. How you know what you ain't supposed to do if you ain't done it, yasef? Folk won't listen to you otherwise. That what I call "work experience." More than qualify ya for the position.

KING. And what qualify you to be a maid?

CAMAE. I'm betta at cleanin' up other folks' messes than my own. I was called to do this.

KING. Well. I think I was, too. *(King sees that his cigarette is gone.)*

Can I have another one?

CAMAE. You ain't gone leave me here to work through the night wit' nothin' to smoke on. Shhhh-iii — ooooo! All I got is one square left.

KING. Perhaps we can share? *(He moves closer to her. Beat.)*

CAMAE. Like, I say, you SHO'LL try hard at it. *(He holds his hand out.)*

KING. Well, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. *(As she speaks the following, she hands him her last cigarette. Lights it for him. Then throws her empty pack into the trash can.)*

CAMAE. Mmph, mmph, MMPH! These goddamn folk got you chain-smokin' harder than a muthafucka. *(Beat.)* There I go! Got to cussin' again. I am so sorry, Preacher Kang. I am SO SORRY. I should be 'shamed of myself. God gone get me for that one, too.

KING. Don't worry. I forgive you.

CAMAE. I'm glad somebody do. *(They look at each other softly.)*

KING. Well, I guess you got other folks' messes to clean up ... I don't mean to keep ya. Don't forget your umbrella. *(He hands her the wet newspaper she had brought in.)*

CAMAE. Unh, unh. That ain't mine. Thass yours. Boss told me to bring that up for you. Sorry, I got it wet.

KING. Well, I thank ya. Thank ya kindly. *(He looks at the newspaper.)* April 4th? Howd y'all get tomorrow's paper?

CAMAE. *(She shrugs.)* Tomorrow already here.

KING. *(Reads.)* "King Challenges Court Restraint. Vows to March." They got that right! This Mayor Loeb calls himself not allowing these sanitation workers to march. *(To himself.)* Over my dead body. "Yesterday two U.S. marshals sped across town to serve the Negro leaders with copies of the order. They found Dr. King and four other defendants at the Lorraine Motel ..." *(He reads further and further.)*

CAMAE. Folks can send you flowers. Since they know where you stayin'.

KING. That ain't the only thing they can send me. *(Reads.)* "The city said it was seeking the injunction as a means of protecting Dr. King ... "We are fearful that in the turmoil of the moment, someone may even harm Dr. King's life ... and with all the force of language we can use, we want to emphasize that we don't want that to happen ..." *(Chuckles to himself.)* Wish the mayor had jurisdiction over air planes, too. You know, Camae, somebody called in a bomb threat on my plane from Atlanta to Memphis today? Thank God they didn't find one.

CAMAE. Just another day on the job.

KING. Mmmhmm.

CAMAE. Civil rights'll kill ya fo' them Pall Malls will. *(Beat. They look at each other. Then laugh really, REALLY hard.)*

KING. I like your sense of humor. Like mine ... morbid. *(They laugh harder and harder ... BOOM! Crickle, CRACK. The thunder rolls. King jumps, terribly frightened. Slightly embarrassed, laughing it off.)* Wheew! Thought they got me! *(He puts his hand over his chest. He begins to breathe hard.)*

CAMAE. You alright! You alright!

KING. Yes. Yes. I am. *(He tries to collect himself.)*

CAMAE. Don't tell me a grown man like you 'fraid of lil' lightning?

KING. No. *(Beats.)* No, that's not what I'm afraid of.

CAMAE. Oh. The thunder?

KING. Yes, the sound. It sounds like —

CAMAE. Fireworks. *(He contemplates this for a spell.)*

KING. Yes. Indeed it does.

CAMAE. Don't be scurred of a lil' fireworks. I loves me some fireworks. Mama used to take us on down to Tom Lee Park to see the fireworks every Fourth of July.

KING. Independence Day.

CAMAE. That right, y'all bougie black folk call it Independence Day. I can't seem to quite call it that yet.

KING. You sho'll is pretty, Camae.

CAMAE. That 'bout the third time you done tole me that.

KING. Second.

CAMAE. The first time you told me witcho eyes.

KING. You saw me?

CAMAE. Hell, a blind man coulda seen't the way you was borin' holes through my clothes. Awwww, you blushin'? *(King nods his head.)*

KING. Which is really hard for a black man to do. I'm embarrassed.

CAMAE. Shuga, shush. You just a man. If I was you, I'd be strain' at me, too.

KING. Well, I guess it's your turn to forgive me.

CAMAE. Forgiven and forgotten.

KING. Thank you, Camae. For the ... square?

CAMAE. I got some family from Detroit. That what they call 'em up there.

KING. So you've been to Detroit? How'd you like it?

CAMAE. I said I got family from up there. I ain't never been.

KING. Dont.

CAMAE. Why?

KING. Negro folks done seemed to have lost their manners up there. Like to riot and carry on.

CAMAE. Honey, I need to move up there then. 'Cause these white folks down here 'bout to be catchin' flies now the way they be actin wit' Negroes these days. I need to catch the first Greyhound up there. Detroit niggah heaven, you ax me.

KING. So are you an honorary Panther? *(She grows like a panther; she's pretty good.)*

CAMAE. Walkin' will only get you so far, Preacher Kang.

KING. We're not just walking; we're marching.

CAMAE. Whatever it is, it ain't workin'.

KING. It doesn't work when you have riffling Negroes who call themselves using a peaceful protest to get a free color television.

CAMAE. Who done did that?

KING. Just last week me and my men organized a march for —

CAMAE. Them garbage men?

KING. *(Correcting.)* Yes, the sanitation workers. Must have been thousands upon thousands of people there. Thousands! Everybody from old men to teenage girls to little boys holding up signs that read, I AM A MAN. Somehow they squeezed me to the front, we linked arms and the march began. "I AM A MAN! I AM A MAN!" we shouted. Well, we hadn't walked but one block before we heard the sound of glass breaking. I was swept up in a tornado of arms, legs, coughing, mace. I didn't wanna leave those people, Camae. I did not wanna leave them, but ... my men pushed me into a passing car, and ... I looked through that back window and saw such blessed peace descend into chaos. *(Beats.)* Dont they know, you can't be marchin' down the street, bust into store windows, and then go get you a free color television. We're marching for a living wage ... not a damn color TV! It just gives these police an excuse to shoot innocent folks. Like that boy ... that sixteen-year-old boy they shot. Last week? *(Quietly to himself.)* Larry Payne. Larry Payne. Larry Payne. I'll never forget his name ... Well, we back and we gonna do it right this time. So Larry Payne won't have to have died in vain. *(He peeks out of the window talking as if Camae is not there.)* Where is that niggah wit' my pack?

CAMAE. Maybe he got struck talkin' wit' some crazy lady in a morle room, too. *(King does not laugh.)* I'm funny. Laugh.

KING. I'm worried. I don't want anything to happen to him. He happen upon something in the night, don't know what I'd do without him.

CAMAE. That your best friend?

KING. More loyal than a dog. He the one called me down to the church tonight. Got me out of bed. Just ain't been feelin' right. *(Camae gazes at him softly. King shakes himself out of it.)* He probably downstairs wit' my brother 'nem. Dont like to hang around me too much. I done got to bein' so moody nowadays. "Forget about last week, Martin," he says. Forget about it ... *(He painfully smiles.)* After the march, the papers called me "Chicken A La King." Said I was a Commie coward that leaves other people to clean up my mess. Martin Loser King ...

CAMAE. Seem like times been a lil' rough on you.
 KING. Who you telling? Who are you telling. ... *(He peeks out of the window.)* This rain's just relentless. Looking like a monsoon in Memphis.
 CAMAE. *(She looks at him somberly.)* Well, God aint gone stop cryin' no time soon. *(He hands her his half-smoked cigarette. Beat. She takes it. She takes a long drag between her forefinger and her thumb.)*
 KING. You smoke like a man.
 CAMAE. You smoke like a fruit.
 KING. Aww, Camae, don't use those kinda words ...
 CAMAE. What, you root for the fruits?
 KING. Indeed I do. Alla God's children got wings.
 CAMAE. Well ... I agrees witcha on that one. But ... you just aint smokin' it right.
 KING. Well, how am I supposed to smoke it?
 CAMAE. Like, it's going out of style. Like you need it. Like you want it. That's how I smoke. Make a woman feel sexy. I bet I know why you smoke.
 KING. Why?
 CAMAE. To feel sexy. 'Cause you look it. *(Beat.)*
 KING. Aw, Camae. Now, you really makin' me blush. *(Pause.)* I do though, don't I?
 CAMAE. Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr. Smokin'. Aint' that somethin'? Wish I could take a picture of it.
 KING. What, you with the FBI?
 CAMAE. Naw. Something bigger. *(She hands him back the cigarette. He smokes it like a "man." He strikes a sexy pose and blows out a smoke ring. Camae pretends to snap pictures.)* There ya go. Just like that. Just like that! Pull harder. Harder. If you want to lead the people, you got to smoke like the people. That way the people'll listen to ya. *(Beat.)*
 KING. You don't think they listen?
 CAMAE. Oh, they listen. They go out and march. Then they get they press 'n' curls ruined by fire hoses. Folk done got tired though, Preacher Kang. *(Sighs.)* Like I say, walkin' will only get us so far —
 KING. *(Annoyed.)* Well, killin' will get you hung.
 CAMAE. Aint' nobody said nothin' bout no killin'. Camae all about ass-whippin's. How about a march for ass-whippin's?
 KING. That's not gonna do.
 CAMAE. Well, we need to be doin' somethin' else.

16

KING. So what are we supposed to do?
 CAMAE. Somethin'. Somethin' else. Hell, I got bunions and corns for days. *(Camae takes off her shoes and sits down on the bed to rub her feet.)*
 KING. Y'all Negroes always want to complain but never have another plan of action. You sound worse than Andy or better yet, Jesse. Everybody can shoot holes in your ideas, but they can only come up with "somethin' else."
 CAMAE. I got a plan. But ... I'm just a woman. Folk'll never listen to me.
 KING. So if you were me, what would you do?
 CAMAE. Really? You wanna know what lil' old me would do?
 KING. Yes.
 CAMAE. You really wanna know what I'd do?
 KING. Yes. I. Do. *(Beat.)*
 CAMAE. Can I borrow your jacket?
 KING. Sure.
 CAMAE. And yo' shoes? *(He hands them to her. She puts them on. She stands on top of one of the beds. King looks on in awe. She steadies herself. Throughout her speech King is her congregation, egging her on with well-timed sayings like, "Well!" "Preach!" Or "Make it plain!" With a "King" voice.)* Chuuch! We have gathered here today to deal with a serious issue. It is an issue of great paponderance — you like that? — Paponderance! It is a matter of importance more serious than my overgrown mustache: HOW do we deal with the white man? I have told you that the white man is our brother. And he should be treated as such. We touch our brother with the softest of hands. We greet our brothers with the widest of smiles. We give our brother food when he is hungry. But it is hard to do this when our brother bears his fist upon our flesh. When he greets us with "Nigger" and "Go back to Africa," when he punches us in our bellies swelling with hunger. Abel was slain by his brother Cain and just like the Biblical times, today the white man is killing his Negro brethren, shacking his hands, keeping us from rising to the stars we are booooouuuund to occupy. We have walked. Our feet swelling with each step. We have been drowned by hoses. Our dreams being washed away. We have been bitten by dogs. Our skin forever scarred by hatred at its height. Our godly crowns have been turned into ashtrays for white men at lunch counters all across the South. To this I say, my brethren, a new day is coming. I'm sick and tired of being

17

sick and tired, and today is the day that I tell you to KILL the white man! (*Soft voice.*) But not with your hands. Not with your guns. But with your miiiiiiiiid! (*Back to regular voice.*) We are fighting to sit at the same counter, but WHY, my brothers and sisters? We should build our own counters. Our own restaurants. Our own neighborhoods. Our own schools. The white man ain't got nothin' I want. Fuck the white man! FUCK the white man! I say, FUCK 'em! (*Camae looks to King sooooo embarrassed.*) I AM SO SORRY, Preacher Kang. Ooooooo. I just can't control my mouth.

KING. Obviously, neither can I. (*She steps down off the bed. And begins to pull off his jacket.*)

CAMAE. Well, you axed. That's what I would say ... if ... I was you.

KING. That's what you would have me say?

CAMAE. Why not?

KING. "Fuck the white man"? (*Long heavy beat.*) I likes that. I think that'll be the title of my next sermon.

CAMAE. Ooooooo! Folks ain't gone know what to do with that.

KING. Amen! Fuck 'em!

CAMAE. I never thought I'd hear you say that!

KING. Oooooo! They got me so tired, Camae. All this rippin' and runnin', rippin' and runnin', around this entire world and for what? FOR WHAT? White folks don't seem to want to listen. Maybe you're right. Maybe the voice of violence is the only voice white folks'll listen to. (*He coughs.*) I'm tired of shoutin' and car-ryin' on, like you say. I'm hoarse. (*He grabs Camae's flask and drinks.*) Sometimes I wonder where they get it from. This hatred of us. I have seen so many white people hate us, Camae. Bombin' folks' homes. Shootin' folks ... blowin' up children.

CAMAE. Make you scared to bring a Negro child into this world, the way they be blowin' 'em up.

KING. Yes, Camae! They hate so easily, and we love too much.

CAMAE. Last time I heard you was preachin' "everybody the same." Negro folk. White folk. We all alike.

KING. Well, at the most human level we are all the same.

CAMAE. What one thing we all got in common? (*Beat. He searches hard to come up with an answer.*)

KING. We scared, Camae. We all scared. Scared of each other. Scared of ourselves. They just scared. Scared of losin' somethin' that they've known their whole lives. Fear makes us human. We all need the same basic things. A hug. A smile. A —

CAMAE. Smoke?

KING. (*Frustrated.*) Which I could use one more of. Where is that niggah wit' my pack? (*Camae goes to the window, but can't see past the rain.*) He always out there runnin' his mouth. Worse than me sometimes. You see him?

CAMAE. Naw.

KING. He'll be back. He know I don't like to be alone too long ... (*Beat. He looks back toward Camae.*) I just wish you had another one. To share, of course. (*Camae pulls another pack of Pall Malls from her maid's uniform. King stands confused.*) I thought you gave me your last one?

CAMAE. I did. But I'm a magician. I got more where that came from.

KING. More tricks up your sleeve?

CAMAE. Well, as you can tell ... I ain't yo' ordinary ole maid. (*He looks her up and down.*)

KING. Certainly! Certainly! Not too many maids spouting off well-formed diatribes like that.

CAMAE. What, you thank us po' folk can't talk? You thank we dumb?

KING. Naw, naw, that's not what I said, now —

CAMAE. You thank you always gotta talk for us?

KING. No, that's not what I said —

CAMAE. Then what you sayin'?

KING. I'm sayin' ... that most maids don't sound like professors.

CAMAE. Well, let me school you, you bougie Negro. I don't need no Ph.D. to give you some knowledge, understand. Divinity school? HUH! You don't know who you MESSIN' WTT!

KING. Well, Camae I just ... I just like ya style. Didn't mean to offend ya. Just wanted to compliment ya. You sang it real pretty. (*She calms down.*)

CAMAE. Well ... tell me ... How are my "oratorical skills"? — see, ye'en thank I knew them words — How are my oratorical skills compared to —

KING. Mine?

CAMAE. Sho. (*Beat.*)

KING. I'm better.

CAMAE. Awwwww, really, now?

KING. You made it sound real pretty, now, but really ... I'm better. Nobody can make it pretty like me. I've been doing this for years, darlin'. Gonna be doin' it 'til the day I die.

CAMAE. But was it good?

KING. For a woman, yes.
 CAMAE. And if I was a man?
 KING. Then you'd be Malcolm X.
 CAMAE. So, you callin' Malcolm X a sissy?
 KING. No, that's not what I said, Miss Camae.
 CAMAE. You callin' Malcolm X a sissy?
 KING. No, I'm not, Camae.
 CAMAE. I'ma tell it on you! *(She runs and opens up the door and screams at the top of her lungs into the pouring night sky.)* MALCOLM, MARTIN THANK YOU A SISSY!
 KING. CAMAE! Come from out that door! / You gone get STRUCK!
 CAMAE. You hear that, Malcolm! He callin' you A SISSY! *(The thunder rolls and Camae laughs at the sky threatening to crackle again. To Malcolm in the sky.)* I'd strike him down for that, too, if I was you. *(King grabs her by the waist and slams the door.)*
 KING. Didn't your mama teach you how to be still when it's thundering and lightning?
 CAMAE. Didn't I tell you I was hardheaded and ain't mind her one bit?
 KING. Well, God don't like to be laughed at.
 CAMAE. Why? I laugh at God all the time. God funny as hell. God a fuuuuunnny-ass muthafucka. *(Beat.)*
 KING. I don't like the way you talk about God. You might need to leave, you blasphemini' God like that. *(Beat.)*
 CAMAE. I was just tryin' to make you laugh. Bring a little laughter to your life. I like makin' folks laugh, Preacher Kang. God knows you need it —
 KING. I don't mind laughin'. I like a good joke. Got to. Nowadays, I just don't like how you talk about God.
 CAMAE. I'm sorry. God don't mind it. God ain't like siddiry folk. God even like dirty jokes.
 KING. How you know what God like?
 CAMAE. 'Cause I do. I know God liked Malcolm X. And you woulda liked him, too. He didn't drank. Smoke. Cuss. Or ...
 Chear. On. His Wife. *(Beat.)*
 KING. *(Why?)* And how are you privy to this information? *(She stares him down.)*
 CAMAE. Like I said befo', Negro talk strike faster than lightning'. *(Pause.)* Did you ever meet him?

20

KING. Once. But we never got a chance to really —
 CAMAE. Talk?
 KING. Before he got —
 CAMAE. Killed? *(Pause.)* That's a shame.
 KING. He was only 39. *(To himself.)* I'm 39 ... *(Pause.)*
 CAMAE. He in heaven.
 KING. Is that right?
 CAMAE. You'll see him there ... One day.
 KING. Camae, you talk a lot of nonsense sometimes.
 CAMAE. Nonsense comin' out of a pretty woman's mouth ain't nonsense at all. It's poetry.
 KING. No, I think that's — what would yo' kinda folk say — bullshit?
 CAMAE. Oooooo, I likes it when ya feathers get ruffled. You get all blunt. It look cute on you. But you will. In heaven.
 KING. So you think he in heaven right now?
 CAMAE. Why wouldn't he be?
 KING. I don't know, now. He talked a lot of —
 CAMAE. Truth?
 KING. A lot of violence. He had a weakness for violent words. Speak by the sword, die by the sword —
 CAMAE. Speak by love, die by hate. *(Pause.)* We all have weaknesses. Preacher Kang. I'm sho' you got yo' own. Just ain't never let nobody ... know. *(Beat.)* For what it worth, I know God like you. The real you.
 KING. Do He really?
 CAMAE. She likes you.
 KING. She?
 CAMAE. She told me She like you. That if you was in heaven, you'd be Her husband.
 KING. *(Smiles a big toothy grin.)* Oh, Camae! Is that what God said?
 CAMAE. Yeap.
 KING. So God in love with me?
 CAMAE. She ain't "in love." She "in like!" In like with Her some Dr. Kang.
 KING. I think God ain't told you nothin'. I think it's you who want me for yo' husband.
 CAMAE. Mmmmm. Me and God ain't got the same taste. I don't like no man wit' no smelly feet.

21

KING. They do stink, don't they? Don't tell nobody.

CAMAE. Honey, yo' shoes off. I thank the whole world know by now. Who woulda thunk Dr. Kang got stanky feet? Oooo! And you got holes in yo' socks, too? *(King laughs at her. At himself.)*

KING. You make it easy.

CAMAE. Make what easy?

KING. To make a man forget about it all. About ... all ... this ...

CAMAE. That what I'm here for.

KING. What else you here for? *(He has begun to take off his tie. He struggles a bit. He's gotten stuck.)*

CAMAE. What, you tryin' to lynch yo'self? Here, let me help ya. *(They stand face to face. Close. Camae slowly untangles him from it. He stares into her face. Transfixed. He reaches up to touch her face. She smiles.)*

KING. Thank you.

CAMAE. You welcome. *(BOOM! BOOM! Crickets! CRACK! He stumbles back in a daze. Faint. He begins to hold his chest.)* You awright?

KING. I can't breathe.

CAMAE. Well, I've been known to have that effect on mens.

KING. No, I mean. I can't. I can't / can't, can't. Breathe —

CAMAE. Oh, my God. Oh, God! / Did I do something wrong?

KING. I can't can't can't / breathe. I can't breathe.

CAMAE. Oh, my God! I did / something wrong! I did something!

KING. Can't can't / can't can't can't breathe —

CAMAE. Just look into my eyes. / Just look right there.

KING. I can't. I can't. I can't.

CAMAE. Michael?

KING. Can't can't / can't —

CAMAE. Michael! Michael! MICHAEL! Michael, just breathe!

KING. *(Sotto voce.)* Can't can't / can't can't —

CAMAE. I'ma get you through this. I'ma get you through this night. *(Just as soon as it starts, the thunder in King's heart stops, and he sits stunned, staring at Camae. Silence. They breathe together ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ...)*

KING. You called me Michael.

CAMAE. *(Knowing she did.)* I did!

KING. Yes. You. Did. You called me Michael.

CAMAE. You — you — scared me —

KING. How would you know that?

CAMAE. Know what?

KING. To call me that?

CAMAE. Call you what?

KING. YOU KNOW WHAT THE HELL I'M TALKING ABOUT.

CAMAE. Calm down, Mich — I mean, Preacher Kang. I didn't mean to call you out yo name —

KING. But that is my name. My childhood name. How do you know my real name? My Christian name? *(He slowly backs away from her. Softly.)* Oh. So, you one of them, huh?

CAMAE. I'm so sorry. I never wanted to do this. This is so hard for me to do —

KING. *(Shaking his head.)* An incognegro. A spy.

CAMAE. I was sent to —

KING. WHAT? Tempt me?

CAMAE. Hell, you was the one tempting me, getting me all off my job!

KING. I don't wanna hear it. Get out.

CAMAE. No.

KING. I said get out. You spook.

CAMAE. I was only doing my job —

KING. I said GET OUT! Coming in here tempting me! *(Enraged, King overturns the furniture, searching for bugs he may have glossed over.)*

CAMAE. Preacher Kang!

KING. *(He yells to no one in particular.)* What, y'all think you can trap me? Record me with a woman? Well, you're not going to catch me!

CAMAE. Preacher Kang, stop / acting so paranoid!

KING. Sending tapes to my wife. Tryin' to break up my family. Tryin' to break my spirit!

CAMAE. Preacher Kang, calm down!

KING. You think you can break me! *(Screaming to no one in particular.)* Well, YOU can't break me! You WILL NEVER BREAK ME AGAIN! *(King grabs Camae by her arm and aggressively pulls her towards the door.)*

CAMAE. You're hurting me! Preacher / Kang, you're hurting me!

KING. How much they pay you, you spook? How much?

CAMAE. Let go, you're hurting me!

KING. Where the hell is Ralph? Ralph! I got a spook!

CAMAE. You wrong! You wrong!

KING. Where in the HELL is Ralph? HEY! *(He opens the door. A*

wall of snow covers the doorway.) HEEEEEE... (A huge gust of wind blows in snow that piles at his feet. He lets go of Cammae's arm. He stands in awe. Looking at the snow.) It's snowing ... in April.

CAMMAE. It snow sometimes in spring. Here. In Memphis. (He looks back at her. He looks back at the snow at his feet. He looks back at her again. Bear. He closes the door. Then opens it again. He blinks.)

KING. It's still there. The snow. It's still there.

CAMMAE. As it should be. (He closes the door again.)

KING. No, no, no, I'm just tired. I'm tired. I'm seeing things that ain't there.

CAMMAE. Oh, it's there.

KING. No, it's not. Tell me it's not. (He pulls the curtains back from the windows. They, too, are filled to the brim with snow.)

CAMMAE. See, it's there.

KING. No. No. No. You've drugged me. Slipped something in my coffee. Some hippie pills in my coffee! Got me seeing things that ain't there.

CAMMAE. I just put some whiskey up in there to relax you —

KING. You put some hippie pills in my coffee! Made me see. Snow. Snow? Snow ... (He opens the door again and sees the snow is still there. His heart threatens to jump out of his chest.) I can't can't go anywhere. I can't get out. I can't get OUT!

CAMMAE. Relax! CALM DOWN! (He rushes to the phone. Picks it up.)

KING. Help! HELP! No dial tone.

CAMMAE. Michael!

KING. Quit calling me that! QUIT CALLING ME THAT! (Cammae lunges toward him. He jumps over the bed.)

CAMMAE. We need to calm you down! You gone give yo'self a heart attack. / You might be 39 but you got the heart of a 60-year-old man.

KING. I can't can't can't go. I can't can't. (He backs himself against the wall.)

CAMMAE. Michael! / Shhhhhhh!

KING. How do you know so much about me!? Who in the hell are you? WHO IN THE HELL ARE YOU? (Cammae blows on the end of a cigarette. It lights up. King stands stunned. Loooooong-aaaaaass bear.) Wow.

CAMMAE. I know. Angel breath is some hot breath.

KING. You're. An. Angel?

CAMMAE. In the flesh.

KING. So, where are your wings? (She points to her breasts.)

CAMMAE. These'll get me anywhere I need to go.

KING. Wow. An angel?

CAMMAE. Yes. I'm here to take you to the other side.

KING. The other side? So I'm not dead?

CAMMAE. No. Not yet. (Bear.)

KING. Wheww! 'Cause I was about to get mad if heaven looked like this. (They look around the room that's been torn apart in their tussle. Suddenly very serious.) I'm not going to hell, am I?

CAMMAE. Naw. Naw. Naw! Heaven is where we headed.

KING. (With wide eyes.) Good. Good. Good. Do all angels look as good as you?

CAMMAE. Yes.

KING. Heaven must be mighty nice then. I wonder what the women in hell look like?

CAMMAE. Honey, they finer. Why you thank they in hell?

KING. Cammae, you're really an angel? (He looks at her incredulous. She nods her head.)

CAMMAE. Sorry I called you Michael. Not too many folk prolly know that 'bout you. God said that yo' Christian name kinda calms you. Ralph call you that, too. Calms you down quick fast. It a nice name. It ain't better than Cammae, though.

KING. I changed it / when my daddy did.

CAMMAE. When yo' daddy did. When you was just five. I done read yo' file. But I don't know why y'all wanna be named after some Martin Luther though. I met him in the cafeteria today and he was kinda weird. Very. (He slowly circles Cammae.)

KING. You're really an angel?

CAMMAE. What else I got to do for you to believe me? Cry flowers?

KING. But but — but why did God send you? (Pause.)

CAMMAE. What you mean by that?

KING. Why He —

CAMMAE. She!

KING. She send you? You're not what I was expecting.

CAMMAE. Shiiiiiit, you wunt what I was expecting. Preacher Kang!

KING. Well, I'm not perfect.

CAMMAE. That you ain't!

KING. Hey, hey, don't judge me, you cussin', fussin', drankin' angel!

CAMMAE. Well, God know what you like, henh!

KING. Hey, hey, that ain't fair now!

CAMAE. The truth ain't gotsta to be fair. It's the truth.

KING. But why you?

CAMAE. Believe you me, I ain't want this job. First day? Bring over you? The Kang? I ain't wanna do it. But God been gettin' these prayers from a littlun named Bunny. *(A voice flutters out of Camae's mouth like a butterfly. It softly lands inside the room.)* "Please, God, don't let my daddy die alone." When I heard it ... Well, it just 'bout broke my heart. I just had to come ... *(Camae actually does start to cry, and flowers bloom at her feet. Beat.)*

KING. You know her nickname ... Bernice, my sweet Bernice. My baby girl spoke to you?

CAMAE. Her prayers are powerful. I can tell she's your'n. She gots a way with words. A gift. Soundin' like she gone be a preacher one day. I don't like chitren too much, but she ... she somethin'.

KING. My Bunny, my baby girl. Even she knows ...

CAMAE. Yes. I gotta take you to the other side. *(Pause.)* Look, I know you afraid, Preacher Kang —

KING. How you know I'm afraid?

CAMAE. Because ... You should be. *(She points to the door of the motel. Beneath the door burns bright red. The door begins to bulge and wane as fingers begin to push and poke through. King slowly walks toward the door, drawn to the danger, drawn to the bullet ...)*

KING. You talk about fear. Camae, well ... I have felt fear. Felt it in my guts. Felt it in my toes. Felt it even when I stood in front of my own congregation in my own church. There beneath that old rugged cross, I quaked and shook with fear. My insides churned and I fought hard to keep them from leaping out of my mouth. You see, a Negro man is not safe in a pulpit. Not even in a pulpit of his own making. Sunday mornings have been the mornings when I am most afraid. 'Cause in this country a pulpit is a pedestal, and we all know that in America, the tall tree is felled first. Tall trees have more wood to burn, Camae. We are the sacrifice.

CAMAE. You been knowin' I was comin', haven't you?

KING. Yes. Oh, yes. I have dreamed of you. Rather had nightmares. In my darkest hours, I've even prayed for you with eyes wide open. Been so many death threats that some nights I have asked God, "Please just get it over with." Even tonight at the church ... *(He softly cups her face in his hand.)* Who knew death would be so

beautiful? Almost make a man wanna die.

CAMAE. You not afraid of me?

KING. Fear has become my companion, my lover. I know the touch of fear, even more than I know the touch of my own wife. Fear, Camae, is my best friend. She is the reason I get up in the morning. 'Cause I know if I'm still afraid, then I am still alive.

CAMAE. Tomorrow. When it time, you gone have to take my hand.

KING. Tomorrow? But I'm not ready to die.

CAMAE. But God say it time.

KING. No, it's not my time. I ain't ready. I still have work to do. *(He points to the papers back at his desk and he goes to sit down. He writes.)* "Why America is going to hell — *(King voice back on.)* A country that sends its boys to bathe little-bitty brown babies in the blood of our greed is headed for a crossroads of conscience — "

CAMAE. You hear what I said, you ain't gone be able to finish that, nah.

KING. — And the consequence? Our young are flown back home in star-strangled coffins. Unwashable our hands as we stand at heaven's gates, wondering why our God will not let us in. And why won't He?

CAMAE. Shel

KING. She let us in? 'Cause America is going to hell! Cast down like Lucifer in the pit to burn, baby, burn!

CAMAE. *(Under her breath.)* And I thought I was the radical.

KING. A tsunami of rage is rolling across the bottom of our seas and America, my sweet America, is surrounded by rising water, waiting to drown. Pharaohs will be overthrown, when that great wave of change casts them into the rolling waters! But the children of the Nile will rise, they will RISE, my brethren! Can I get an amen? I SAID can I get an amen?

CAMAE. AMEN!

KING. *(Panting, spent from his inspiration.)* See, that'll make a good sermon, won't it?

CAMAE. Hell, I'd sit in a pew for a few for that one.

KING. So you agree with me? Well, I gots to finish my sermon and I need to be alone to finish my sermon so ... you gone have to fly on away. *(He continues scribbling with his pen, fast and furiously.)*

CAMAE. Preacher Kang —

KING. Exactly one year ago, I stood in that pulpit in Riverside and

shoured that this war would be our own violent undoing, freedom's suicide ... Well, I'll tell you, there weren't too many Amens that Sunday. But who is a man who does not speak his heart's conscience? He is not a man, but I am a man. If only they could see that love is the most radical weapon there is. But they won't listen. Instead, they have called me every name but a child of God. Even my own men, "You splittin' the movement, Martin, you splittin' the movement! You can't focus on war, and poverty, and Negroes!" CAMAE. Well, ain't you just a civil rights leader? You can't be talkin' 'bout war, then this, then that.

KING. And why the hell not?

CAMAE. Who you thank you is, the president? Preacher Kang, you can't call all the shots, all the time —

KING. (*Under his breath.*) Just for a little bit more time, just a little bit more ... (*He goes back to his speech, writings, cutting, editing.*) America, America —

CAMAE. — Preacher Kang —

KING. — My country 'tis of thee,

CAMAE. — You makin' my job harder —

KING. — My country who doles out constant misery —

CAMAE. — Harder than it already is —

KING. — War abroad, then war on your streets, arrogant America —

CAMAE. — This hard on me —

KING. (*Bolting from his desk.*) Hard on YOU? What about it bein' hard on me? On my family? On Corrie? On the movement? HAS GOD THOUGHT ABOUT THAT?!

CAMAE. God ain't the one you need to be mad at while you up there yellin'! God ain't the one you need to be blamin' —

KING. Then who needs to be blamed?

CAMAE. It ain't who needs to be blamed, Preacher Kang. It's what. It ain't a who, it's a what, Preacher Kang. Evil is not under God's jurisdiction. But good, good is.

KING. Well, can't you stop it? Catch whatever's comin'?

CAMAE. That ain't my job. God said I gotta get you ready to come on home.

KING. But we still got work to do. I got more sermons in me, more goals, more ... plans! (*He gets down on bended knee.*) Camae, I wanna do another march on Washington. Bigger. Better. Bolder.

CAMAE. Another dream of yours?

KING. But I wanna make this one a reality! The plan. It's all in

the works. It's called the Poor People's Campaign!

CAMAE. Poor People's Campaign? What that is? It bet' not be no 'nother march. You / and yo' marches.

KING. Listen to me.

CAMAE. You and yo' / marches!

KING. Please, Camae! Listen! (*She sits down on the bed and starts eating popcorn out of her maid's uniform.*)

CAMAE. I'm listening. Gone.

KING. We've been organizing this campaign all year. All year. Imagine, Camae. On the Washington Mall, not thousands, but millions —

CAMAE. Millions of Negroes on the Washington mall? / Shiiiiiiiit.

KING. No, no, not just Negroes. White folk, Chinese folk, Indian folk, Mexican folk all banding together to shame this country. All kinds of poor folks pulling their mule wagons across the Washington Mall. A rainbow of people chanting, "Stop the war on Vietnam! Start the war on Poverty!"

CAMAE. Uh, unh! How 'bout, "Make Love! Not Poverty!"

KING. Hey, I like that one, roo! They can call me Commie King all they like, I don't care. Poor people matter, Camae. They matter! That's why we had to come here. Not to walk, but to march. Peacefully. Memphis is just a dress rehearsal for the big one. Memphis is just the beginning.

CAMAE. Yo' men'll carry it on.

KING. But I'm the leader of this movement. The head of the body.

CAMAE. Well, the body will just have to grow another head, 'cause Memphis is the end of the road for you.

KING. End of the road? But ... but ... can't you ... Can't you ask God?

CAMAE. Honey, I can't do you no kinda special / favors!

KING. Just til the end of the month? 'Til I see this plan on through? Just 'til April 29th.

CAMAE. And what if She let you? You just gone keep on saying one more day, one more month, one more this, one more that!

KING. No, I won't.

CAMAE. Yes, you will! I know you, Preacher Kang.

KING. But I have so much work to do —

CAMAE. But what about yo' mens? Can't they see it through?

KING. They don't dream the same dreams I do, Camae. They think I'm crazy to dream this big, and maybe I am a little crazy, but

how can we fight the war in Vietnam but not the wars against Negroes in our streets? How can we try to put a man on the moon, but not feed starving children in Mississippi? There's just so much I gotta do. So much I haven't yet accomplished. So much ... I GOTTA FINISH WHAT I STARTED!

CAMAE. It ain't all about you! YOU! YOU! Gosh, you men are so selfish. They always thank it's 'bout them. Them! THEM! Hah! Well, let me tell you something, Preacher Kang. Let me tell you! Like most men, you ain't gone be able to finish what you started. KING. My house has been bombed! I have been pelted wit' rocks. My arm twisted behind my back. My face shoved into a ground of gravel. I have been kicked at. Spit at. Pummelled. Abused. Looked at with the deepest scorn. I have been stabbed in my chest. And I walked away. Alive! Alive! If I woulda sneezed, I woulda died.

CAMAE. *(Under her breath.)* Well, I'm glad you ain't have no cold that day.

KING. *(Ignoring her.)* Look at the life I've lived. You tell me I ain't got favor wit' God! After all that? Tell me I ain't jumped over every hurdle of this race!

CAMAE. Well, sometimes you done cleared the hurdles and sometimes ... you ain't. Remember Albany? You done brought us far. But you a man. You just a man, baby. You're not God, though some folk'll say you got mighty close. You know ... sometimes, you've failed. *(Beat. The wind sinks out of his sails.)*

KING. Like when that boy ... that boy got shot. Larry Payne.

CAMAE. Well, that wun't yo fault. Police killed that boy. Not you.

(Beat. Camae stands silent.)

KING. ... So this motel room will become my tomb? But I have survived so much ...

CAMAE. Honey, I know all about your trials and tribulations. I done read yo' blessings file. It bigger than yo' FBI file and that bigga than the Bible. I know it might be hard for you to leave this life ... yo' family ... and all yo' plans. But you gone have to pass off that baton, little man. You, in a relay race, albeit the fastest runner we done ever seen't. But you 'bout to burn out, superstar. You gone need to pass off that baton ... *(Beat.)*

KING. I know I have dropped this baton so many times over this race. But I promise, I ain't gonna do it again. Tell Her.

CAMAE. Tell Her?

KING. Yes, tell Her I promise, I won't ever drop this baton again.

Tell Her, She needs to let me stray. Ask Her. For me. CAMAE. *(Hissing.)* You ain't supposed to question God. That's the rule. You know that!

KING. There ain't no rules for an angel like you!

CAMAE. Shhhiiii! God gots rules! I had to read the whole Bible today —

KING. Please. Camae.

CAMAE. Dr. KANG!

KING. PLEASE! *(Pause.)*

CAMAE. Well ... whatchoo gone give me?

KING. *(He smiles seductively.)* A kiss from the Kang.

CAMAE. I don't want no kiss from you, 'cause you ain't brushed yo teeth.

KING. Please, Camae ... *(King goes down on bended knee. He plucks one of the flowers from the carpet and hands it to her in submission. Beat.)*

CAMAE. *(Disgusted.)* Ughhh. *(Camae snatches it from him. She walks over to the rotary phone on the nightstand beside the bed. She dials a really long phone number.)* You lucky I remember this. This just my first day. *(She waits and waits ... and waits. Finally, someone on the other end picks up. King sits beside Camae and tries to listen in on the conversation.)* Hey, St. Augustine. What up? Yeah ... Can I speak to God? *(Beat.)* What She doin'? *(Pause.)* Ohhhhhhh ... *(To King.)* There are some forest fires. She had to go make some rain and — *(To St. Augustine.)* Uhh, humh. When She gone be back? Well ... Can you call Her cell phone? 'Cause this man is really gettin' on my nerves. I'm tryin' to get him on the program. Yeah, I KNOW! That's what I tried to tell him. You know ... Martyrs. *(Pause.)* Sho' can. *(To King.)* He tryin' to get Her on the cell.

KING. The cell?

CAMAE. It's like ... a phone that ain't got no cord.

KING. A phone wit' no cord?

CAMAE. Sorra like when you talkin' to God. Don't need no real cord, She just sorta ... answers — *(Beat. She perks up. Someone has come to the phone.)* Hello there, God. It's me. Camae. Mmm-hmm. How it goin'? *(She looks at King.)* It goin' pretty good. Yep. Yeah, I'm halfway through my shift. Taking a break ... but ... uhm ... Well, there's a bit of problem. He say he ain't ready. That what I told him. I know ... I know ... I KNOW.

KING. Let me talk to Her.

CAMAE. No —
KING. I wanna talk to yo' supervisor! *(Camae puts her hand over the phone.)*

CAMAE. Shhh! I'm tryin' to butter Her up first.
KING. Let me talk to Her! *(He tries to snatch the phone from Camae.)*

CAMAE. Hold on a got-gum minute, Preacher Kang! *(Pause.)* Yes. But he stubborn! *(She looks at him.)* And quite convincing. He sho'll do got a way wit' words. I know You told me. You wanna talk to him? Well, good. 'Cause he wanna talk to You. *(Camae hands the phone over to him. King snatches it. Cleans his throat. Puts the phone to his ear. Beat.)*

KING. Uhm. God? It's uhhmm ... *(Putting on his "King" voice.)* Dr. Martin Luther King, J — oh, yes, Michael, to you ... Yes ma'am ... yes ma'am ... yes ... ma'am. *(He pulls the phone from his ear and whispers.)* Is She —

CAMAE. Black? Mmhm. And PROUD ... *(King puts the phone back to his ear.)*

KING. God, ma'am, You don't sound like I thought You'd sound. No, no, no. Pardon me, if that offends. I like how You sound. Kinda like my grandmama. Well ... it is a compliment. I loved her dearly ... I love You more, though. Camae told me that You might be busy tonight. Oh, You have time for me? For one of Your favorites? *(He smiles at Camae, who rolls her eyes.)* God, are You alright? You sound hoarse. Oh, You tired? Well, it must be tiring to be everywhere all at the same time. *(He laughs nervously.)* Well, God ... I don't mean to trouble You, ma'am, but I wanted to ask You something ... You see I have always listened to You, honored Your word, lived by Your word ... *(He lowers his voice.)* For the most part. *(Raises it back to normal.)* God, please don't strike me down for askin' this, but ... I want to live. I have plans. Lots of plans in my head and in my heart and my people need me. They need me. And I need to see them to the Promised Land. *(Beat.)* I know that's not what I said earlier tonight, I know, but ... I wasn't lying exactly. *(He looks at Camae.)* I just didn't know she was comin' so, so ... soon. I meant every word I said tonight when I spoke to those people. Dead honest! No, no, no pun intended ... God, I just ... I want to see my people there, the tide is turning ... war is becoming the order of the day and I must, I must convince them to stay vigilant ... We've come too far to turn back now ... God, listen

to me ... Who else is betta' fit for this job? I mean, who will take my place? *(He hears Her answer.)* JESSE! *(Pause.)* I-I-I just thought Ralph would make a better — No, no, no, no, I have not turned vain. On the contrary. I'm but a servant for You, God, ma'am. Yes, I've been a servant for You all my life. At one point in time, I might notta been up for the challenge, but I knew this was all par for the course and I did Your will. I honored YOUR WILL, God, ma'am. Let me not die a man who doesn't get to hug his children one last time. Let me not die a man who never gets to make love to his wife one last time. Let me not be a man who dies afraid and alone. *(Long pause.)* Then why'd You pick me, huh? Hmmm, no disrespect, but if You didn't know what I could do, what my *(Hissing.)* talents were then ... You got some nerve. Dragging me here to this moldy motel room in Memphis. To die. HUH! Of all places! Well, I am angry. There have been many a' nights when I have held my tongue when it came to You. But not tonight, NOT TONIGHT. I have continuously put my life on the line, gave it all up. Gave it all up for You and Your word. You told me, that'd I'd be safe. Safe in Your arms. You protected me all this time, all this time! Glued a pair of wings to my back, but now that I've flown too close to the sun, I'm falling into the ocean of death. God, how dare You take me now. NOW! I beg of You. I plead — God? Ma'am? God? *(Long heavy silence.)*

CAMAE. *(Whispers from the corner.)* What She say?

KING. I think ... I think She hung up on me.

CAMAE. Hmmm. Coulda been a dropped call. *(Pause.)*

KING. A dropped call? How does one "drop" a call? This angel talk you speak.

CAMAE. You act like I'm speakin' in tongues.

KING. Well, you speak of things I know nothing about.

CAMAE. Yes, I speak of the future.

KING. The future?

CAMAE. Ooooooooooo! YOU DONE GOT ME IN TROUBLE!

BLE! God gone ran my hide from brown to barbecue.

KING. How did I get you in trouble?

CAMAE. Look, I can't just call Her for you! You gone make me lose my wings. *(She rubs her breasts.)*

KING. Good, you need to lose them! Maybe you'll stop luring

men to their deaths! *(Pause.)* I can't believe She hung up on me.

CAMAE. I woulda hung up on you, too. Yellin' like that.

KING. God hung up on me. She forsook Her servant.

CAMAE. She ain't forsake you neither. She just ain't wanna hear yo' shirt. She got the right. She is God, ya know?

KING. And I am Dr. King, ya know? *(Beat.)*

CAMAE. Don't mark me, man ...

KING. "Ya know? Ya know?"

CAMAE. I do NOT sound like that.

KING. Least you don't say, ya dig? Ya dig? Ya dig? Like a Black Panther Parry angel! That's how you would sound if you said it, too. Ya dig?

CAMAE. Ohhhh. *(She picks up a pillow lying on the bed and pets him with it.)*

KING. Camae! God gonna get you. Beain' up one of Her favorites like this!

CAMAE. Can't believe She done sent me to come get you wircho crazy ass. *(She pets him with a pillow again and again. King picks up a pillow to protect himself. She misses him this time. Laughs heartily.)*

You thank you so funny, Preacher Man.

KING. That's right! Hit me! Hit me if you think you bad! *(He is quick and surprisingly good at pillow fighting. He clobbers her over the head with the pillow.)*

CAMAE. OW!

KING. That's what you get for bawling the Kang of pillow fightin'! *(He pummels her again with the pillow. She flies across the bed.)*

CAMAE. You can't hit angels with pillows!

KING. Where is that rule?

CAMAE. In the Bible!

KING. Uh, unh! Where?

CAMAE. Ezekiel, fool! *(She clobbers him one good time. He falls onto the bed. Her pillow bursts and feathers flutter out. Spilling across the room. He hits her back, and his pillow bursts. More feathers fly across the room. They laugh. They laugh as feathers are falling. Falling everywhere like the rain was before and the snow was before. There is a feather blizzard inside Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. And King and his death angel roll in the feather storm of their own making. Their pillows, now devoid of fluff are tossed to the wayside and then King takes Camae and starts tickling her.)* Stop it!

KING. I bet you're ticklish.

CAMAE. Don't tickle me!

KING. Why?

CAMAE. 'Cause I ma pee on you!

KING. Angels don't pee.

CAMAE. Try me. That's in the Bible, too.

KING. No, it's not!

CAMAE. Watch out, my piss gone burn you! Tsssssss!

KING. I don't believe you.

CAMAE. You betta'! *(He tickles her.)* I'm peein'! STOP! I'm peein'!

(He finally somehow pins Camae onto her back. He is on top of her. They stop. Gazing into each other's eyes. Out of breath. A bit sweaty.)

KING. I never thought death would be so beautiful.

CAMAE. Sometimes. Tonight's a good night. I remembered my rouge. *(Beat.)*

KING. Camae?

CAMAE. Yes, Preacher Kang.

KING. Hold me. *(Bear. King's eyes well with tears and this strong grown man dissolves into the child no one ever saw. He slides down on top of her. Crying. Crying his heart out. Sobbing. And Camae holds him. And rubs his back as if he were a child.)*

CAMAE. *(Softly.)* There ... there ... let it all out. Give it all to me. I will take it all ... there ... there ... give it all to me.

KING. *(Hiccupping like children do.)* I've been prayin' that it would stop.

CAMAE. There ... there ... / Shhhhhhh.

KING. That it would all go away. I never wanted to do this. I just wanted to be a minister in my small church.

CAMAE. But when your Maker calls you, you must heed the call.

KING. I just wanted to be a minister. That was enough. That was enough ...

CAMAE. But God had bigger plans for you.

KING. Why me?

CAMAE. Why not you?

KING. 'Cause I'm ... just a man. I know now, I know. And it's time for me to come on home. Help me. Help me get my things together. *(King rises and heads to his suitcase. He begins to pack it.)*

CAMAE. You won't be needing that. Won't be needing that at all. Heaven got all you need. *(King looks around the room.)*

KING. Well ... I need to leave my men some instructions. Notes.

CAMAE. They can do it on they own.

KING. But I need to tell them what to do when I'm ... gone.

CAMAE. They'll know what to do. You've taught them well. *(Soft pause.)*

KING. Well ... my wife ... I need to call my wife ... *(King runs to the phone and dials. He sings into it again.)* Corrie pick up. Corrie pick up. Corrie, Corrie pick up. *(She doesn't pick up. Silence. He finally hangs up the phone. Long heavy beat.)* I always bought her flowers when I went away. Always with the mind that they would last long enough 'til I made it home. Sometimes they would. Most times they didn't. I could never make amends, so I bought her flowers that would stand in for those passin' pockets of time just as I existed for her. I picked a beautiful flower called Absence. And it bloomed like dandelions, a weed she could never rid her garden of. Last week, when I was home, I walked past this shop, and I saw the most perfect flowers. Radiant red carnations. I went into the store, and, you know what I found out, Camae? They weren't real. My eyes had fooled me. But I bought those flowers, and they arrived yesterday morning just before I left to board the plane to Memphis. She came to me, with a twinkle in her eyes and said, "Why, Martin. You never give me these old artificial things ... " I smiled. "Today is different. Today ..."

CAMAE. You knew she'd need a flower that could last forever.

KING. If only I could tell them how sorry I am. If only I could have been there with them. I missed birthdays. I missed holidays. I — CAMAE. You did what you had to do. We needed you. The world needed you.

KING. Many a times I've wanted to quit. To give up the ghost.

CAMAE. But you didn't. You prevailed.

KING. I don't know for what! I've sacrificed my marriage, my family. My health, for what?

CAMAE. Powerful the man that get more done dead than alive.

KING. I don't want to be a martyr.

CAMAE. But the suit fits you well.

KING. I am a man. I am just a man.

CAMAE. Tomorrow, you'll be a man made martyr. No, better yet! A saint!

KING. Don't call me that. I'm a sinner, not a saint. I'm not deservin' of the title.

CAMAE. You think I am?

KING. You must. God musta been impressed with how you've lived your life —

CAMAE. *(Quietly.)* No ... She wunt. *(Camae turns away.)*

KING. But I thought angels were perfect.

CAMAE. You perfect?

KING. No.

CAMAE. Then why should I be? Honey, I've robbed. I've lied. I've cheated. I've failed. I've cursed. But what I'm ashamed of most is I've hated. Hated myself. Sacrificed my flesh so that others might feel whole again. I thought it was my duty. All that I had to offer this world. What else was a poor black woman, the mule of the world, here for? Last night, in the back of a alley I breathed my last breath. A man clasped his hands like a necklace 'round my throat. I stared into his big blue eyes, as my breath got ragged and raw, and I saw the hell this old world had put him through. The time he saw his father hang a man. The time he saw his mother raped. I felt so sorry for him. I saw what the world had done to him, and I still couldn't forgive. I hated him for stealing my breath. When I passed on to the other side, God — ooooo, She is more gorgeous than me. She the color of midnight and Her eyes are brighter than the stars. Her hair ... well ... just you wait til you see Her hair — God stood there before me. With this look on Her face. I just knowed She was just sooooo disappointed in me. I was just a-cryin', weepin' at Her feet. Beggin' Her not to throw me down. All that sinnin'. All that grime on my soul. All that hatred in my heart. But then I looked up and saw that She was smilin' down at me. She opened Her mouth, and silence came out. But I heard Her loud and clear. "I got a special task for you and if you complete it, all your sins will be washed away." I opened my file. And I saw my task was you. What could lirtle old me, give to big old you? I thought you was gone be perfect. Well, you ain't, but then you are. You have the biggest heart I done ever knownt. You have the strength to love those who could never love you back. If I had just a small fraction of the love you have for this world, then maybe, just maybe I could become half the angel you are. *(Long heavy beat.)*

KING. Will I die at the hands of a white man, too? *(Beat.)*

CAMAE. Yes. Speak by love. Die by hate.

KING. Where will it be?

CAMAE. On the balcony just right there. *(They look to the room's door.)*

KING. How?

CAMAE. Surrounded by those who love you.

KING. Will you be there to clean up the mess?

CAMAE. It would be a honor, Preacher Kang.

KING. Will there be others after me? To carry on the baton.
CAMAЕ. Many, many will carry it on, but there'll never be another you. You are a once-in-a-lifetime affair.
KING. Is the future as beautiful as you?
CAMAЕ. Yes ... and it's as ugly as me, too.
KING. I wanna see it.
CAMAЕ. I don't know if you could handle it. It might break your heart.
KING. My heart already weary, Camae. I wanna see it before I die.
CAMAЕ. But I thought you done already seen the Promised Land?
KING. In my dreams, but I wanna see it with my eyes. My own eyes. If I see --- really see it, I will die a happy man tomorrow. I will go willingly into your arms, Camae. If you just let me see these dreams I'll never ever see. (*Beat. A trembling King reaches out to Camae. She doesn't take his hand.*)
CAMAЕ. I'll let you see, but when you're called back you'll have to come. I'ma have to take you on home tomorrow.
KING. What time shall I meet you?
CAMAЕ. 6:01 P.M.
KING. Is it gonna hurt?
CAMAЕ. You won't feel the hurt. The world will.
KING. You promise?
CAMAЕ. I promise. You ready? (*King nods, gulping back tears.*)
Let's take you to the mountaintop. (*Camae walks up to him and kisses him. He becomes woozy in her arms. She stares at him. Lightning flickers as images from that fateful day, April 4, 1968, begin to seep through the hotel walls.*)
The Prince of Peace. Shot.
His blood stains the concrete outside Room 306
A worker wipes away the blood but not before
Jesse baptizes his hands on the balcony
The baton passes on
(*More and more images of the American experience consume the walls as the world begins to disintegrate right before their very eyes.*)
Memphis burning
DC burning
Cities burning
Vietnam burning
Coffins coming home

Another Kennedy killed
The baton passes on
Bayard Rustin
Stonewall riots
Andrew Young
Julian Bond
Bob Marley
Redemption songs
Angela Davis
Assatta Shakur
Afro picks
Black raised fists
Olympics
The baton passes on
(*The images have picked up in speed and the world continues to float away. It's almost as if King is surrounded by the images, walking through the future that he will never inhabit.*)
White children
Black children
Crayola-color children
Together in a cafeteria
Roots
The Jeffersons
Sidney Poitier
Superfly
Isaac Hayes
James Brown
I'm black and I'm PROUD!
Jesse for President
I am somebody!
(*Camae begins to float away into another world. Another dimension. Her voice becoming an echo as the future continues to consume the stage.*)
Crips
Bloods
Blue
Red
White
Crack
Smack

Marion Barry
Tracks
AIDS
Reagan wins again
Berlin walls
Apartheid falls
Robben Island sets Mandela free
Rodney King screams:
"Can't we all just get along?"
The baton passes on
No peace in the Middle East
Ruby Dee
"You sho'll is ugly!"
Spike Lee
Rwanda bleeds
Bill Clinton
Niggah, please
Skinheads
The Cosby Show
Baby mamas
Soul Train
Montel
Don't Ask Don't Tell
Run-DMC
BET
MTV
"Walk This Way"
The baton passes on
And on and on
'Til the break of dawn
For the American song
We shall overcome
A white Bronco flees into the night
"If it doesn't fit, you must acquit"
James Byrd
Columbine
Ron Brown
Colin Powell
Clarence Thomas
Tupac

Oprah
Biggie
Crack corners
From Crenshaw
To MLK Boulevard
Saddam Hussein
Osama bin Laden
George Bush
Condi Rice
The towers sigh
The world turns gray
September 11th
One bright morning day
Katrina, Katrina
American as apple pie
Drove the Chevy to the levee
But the Levee was drowned
The Superdome
Drive-bys
McDonald's
Diabetes
Iraq
NBA
High-paid slaves
The children of the Nile rise
A nuclear 8-Mile
Black picket fences
And Jena 6
American flags
And black presidents!
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
The baton passes on
(*The good, the bad and the ugly of America continue to proceed like
a fluid mental freeway into the very edge of now and perhaps beyond.
It's like a river with no levee and the images flood our senses, our
minds, and our hearts. The sound and the fury of it all rises to a fre-
netic peak until BOOM! CRICKLE! CRICKLE-CRACK! A flash of
lightning illuminates the stage. And suddenly King stands in the deep*)

dark blue of the blackness, walking amongst a pulpit placed in the stars. He is looking over our heads. Past us, through us, floating above us in the silence.)

KING. What is this vision I see before me? Could this be my wildest dream? There it is. There ... It ... Is ... A land where hunger is no more. A land where war is no more. A land where richness is no more, poverty is no more, color is ... no more. Destruction ... is no more. Only love. Radical, fierce love. The Promised Land here on Earth. I accept. I will never walk through that blessed garden over yonder ... that lush land just on the far side of the moon. It ... is ... so ... *(King's mouth cannot articulate his dreams, for once he is speechless. His eyes well with tears.)* Well ... nobody said it was gonna be easy. Nobody said it would happen in an instant. Everybody said we'd never get there. But then again nobody thought we'd make it this far. Can I get an Amen? I said can I get an Amen! You have wandered the desert. The flaming sands burning your feet. But you are standing at the edge of Canaan on a mountaintop made of the dreams of men and women who have paid the ultimate price with their lives. Children of the Nile, you must rise, as you can no longer walk weary through this world with willowed backs. Your time is now, I tell you NOW! The baton may have been dropped. But anyone can pick it back up. I don't know where in the race we are, but pick up that baton and pass, pass, pass it along. This baton is no longer the burden my image can bear. For you are the climbers, the new carriers of the cross. I beg you, implore you, don't give in and toss it off. On this here mountaintop there is beauty to behold, the Promised Land, your Promised Land in black, red, white, blue, brown and gold. Canaan is calling! She is calling for you to come! The Promised Land is so close, and yet so far away, so close and yet so far away so close and yet so — *(In a small pinpoint of light Camae's hand comes from behind King, settling on his trembling shoulder.)*
CAMAE. Time. *(Blackout.)*

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

Papers
Tray with cup of coffee
Newspaper
Wallet with money
Wet towels
Pack of cigarettes, lighter
Flask
Pack of cigarettes
Flowers
Papers, pen
Popcorn
Pillows, pillow feathers
Suitcase



The Rep

September 26 – November 4, 2012

THE
MOUNTAINTOP

Play
Guide

The Mountaintop

PLAY GUIDE

•
Written by

Leda Hoffmann
Education Coordinator

•
Additional writing by

Zachary Schley
Education Intern

Lindsey Schmeltzer
Education Intern

•
Study Guide edited by

Brent Hazelton
Associate Artistic Director

Jenny Kostreva
Education Director

Lisa Fulton
Marketing Director

•
Graphic Design by

Megan Gadiant
Eric Reda

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Mark Clements
Artistic Director

Dawn Helsing Wolters
Managing Director

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Milwaukee Repertory Theater
presents

THE MOUNTAINTOP

By Katori Hall

September 26 – November 4

Stiemke Studio

MARK'S TAKE:



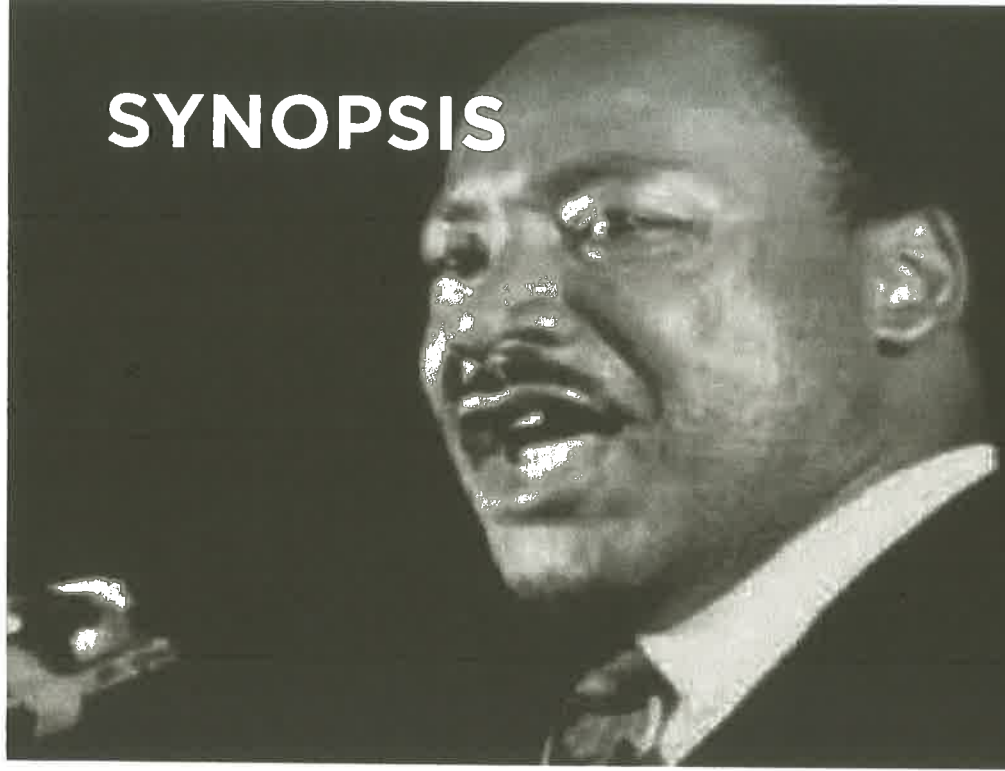
"The Mountaintop isn't a biography, per se, but rather a very smart, very funny, very moving, and very respectful exploration of the ideas that were occupying Dr. King's mind on the night prior to his death. The maid character is essential to this innately theatrical play, but impossible to describe without giving away a clever twist that the audience will absolutely lap up!"

-Mark Clements, Artistic Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 3	Synopsis
Page 4	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Page 5	Katori Hall
Page 6	The "Mountaintop" Speech
Page 7	MLK Jr.'s Final Days
Page 9	The Civil Rights Movement
Page 11	Vocabulary
Page 12	Themes
Page 13	Creating the Rep Production
Page 14	Interview with May Adrales, Director
Page 16	Visiting The Rep

SYNOPSIS



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!

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
"Mountaintop" Speech, April 3, 1968

After his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., retires to his room in the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He is tired, overwrought, in need of clarity, and deeply questioning both the success of and his value to the Civil Rights movement.

Camae, a beautiful young hotel maid, enters. She is as awed by Dr. King's fame as he is by her beauty. The chemistry between them sparks immediately, and Dr. King invites her to sit and talk for awhile. Their ensuing conversation, lasting throughout the long night, covers topics both personal and political—from Dr. King's children, to the Memphis Sanitation Strike, to a debate about violent versus non-violent revolution.

As the evening progresses, Camae grows more mysterious, revealing thoughts and events about which only Dr. King could know. As it becomes increasingly clear that Camae is more than just an ordinary maid, she leads Dr. King through a powerful, vivid exploration of his life and legacy on what would become his final night on earth.



CHARACTERS

KING
The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

CAMAE
A maid at the Lorraine Motel.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led the American Civil Rights Movement from December, 1955, to April 4, 1968, preaching a philosophy of non-violent protest, grassroots organizing, and civil disobedience.

Dr. King was born into a religious family. His grandfather and father were pastors of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. King drew on his faith for his principles and spoke frequently about his duty to God.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with his wife, Coretta and their first daughter, Yolanda.

Dr. King attended segregated public schools in Georgia, and then attended Morehouse College, an African-American institution in Atlanta, from which both his father and grandfather had graduated. Dr. King then studied theology for three years at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where he was elected president of a predominantly white senior class. He then enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University, completing his residence for the doctorate in 1953. In Boston, he met and married Coretta Scott, a young woman studying at the New England Conservatory of Music. They would have two sons and two daughters.

By 1954, Dr. King was a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. When the Montgomery bus boycott began in 1955, Dr. King became one of the leaders of the movement.

The Montgomery bus boycott became one of the most successful non-violent demonstrations in modern history. During the boycott, King was arrested and his home was bombed, but he emerged as a great leader of the non-violent Civil Rights Movement. The boycott lasted 382 days and ended with a Supreme Court decision declaring bus segregation unconstitutional.

In 1957, Dr. King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), formed to provide leadership for the growing Civil Rights Movement. For the next eleven years, Dr. King travelled the country speaking over twenty-five hundred times, leading protests, and acting against injustice. He wrote "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," a manifesto for the civil rights movement, following his arrest during a protest in Birmingham; he told over 250,000 people "I Have a Dream" during a march in Washington, D.C.; and he led thousands in marches from Selma to Montgomery. At the age of thirty-five, Dr. King became the youngest person to win a Nobel Peace Prize. He gave the prize money to the Civil Rights Movement.

In April of 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, to support a sanitation workers strike, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. The news shook the nation. Dr. King remains a symbol of non-violence across the world and he is the only non-president to have a memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

📖 For further resources on Dr. King go to www.MilwaukeeRep.com/season/mountaintop.html

KATORI HALL



Katori Hall

Katori Hall is a playwright and performer from Memphis, Tennessee. Her work has been produced on Broadway, in London's West End, and in regional theaters throughout the United States.

As an African-American growing up in a predominately white neighborhood, Hall was very aware of racial issues and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement as a child. She was raised in a working-class household, the youngest of four daughters. In 2003, she graduated from Columbia University

and continued her training at Harvard and Julliard.

While training as an actor at Columbia, Hall felt a lack of roles for African-American women. At that moment, she knew she had to write. Today, Katori Hall's published plays include *The Mountaintop*, *Hoodoo Love*, *Hurt Village*, and *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*.

The Mountaintop was inspired by Hall's mother, Carrie Mae Golden. In 1968, Carrie Mae asked her mother if she could go to hear Dr. King speak at the Mason Temple. Her mother did not let her go because she feared that the church would be bombed. The female character in *The Mountaintop*, Camae (short for Carrie Mae), is named for Katori Hall's mother, giving her the chance she never had to meet Dr. King.

📄 For more on Katori Hall go to www.MilwaukeeRep.com/season/mountaintop.html



Katori Hall

THE “MOUNTAINTOP” SPEECH

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his final speech at Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 3, 1968. He spoke to support a strike by sanitation workers, and expressed his vision for the future of Civil Rights. His comments about the end of his life seem to predict his own death. Below are some selected quotes from the speech.



“Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today . . . – the cry is always the same:

We want to be free.”

“Somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly, somewhere I read of the freedom of speech, somewhere I read of the freedom of the press.

Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right.”

“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.”

“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’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!”**

QUESTIONS

Dr. King mentions death frequently in this speech. Was Dr. King predicting his own death the night before his assassination?

Dr. King is remembered as a great public speaker. What rhetorical devices does he use in the speech to captivate the audience?

From this speech, how does King imagine the future of the Civil Rights struggle?

📖 The full text of “The Mountaintop” speech can be found at www.americanrhetoric.com. For more on “The Mountaintop” speech visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com/season/mountaintop.html

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S FINAL DAYS

MEMPHIS SANITATION STRIKE

The Memphis Sanitation Strike began on February 11th, 1968, incited by the poor working conditions and the recent deaths of workers Echol Cole and Robert Walker, two black men crushed by the accidental trigger of a compactor machine, on February 1st, 1968. Along with these deaths, twenty-two black sewage workers were sent home that day without pay while their white supervisors were paid. These events incited the strike of nearly all 1,300 black sanitation workers in Memphis. They campaigned for better wages, benefits, safety, and union recognition. Even with a recommendation from the city committee, Mayor Henry Loeb refused to comply with their requests. With support from the community and organizations such as the NAACP, they organized a city-wide boycott. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., became actively involved in the effort. Dr. King spoke at a rally on March 8th, and led a march on March 18th. Though Dr. King preached non-violence, the march became violent as a group of rowdy students used their picket signs to break windows and loot stores. As a result, sixty people were injured and one boy died. During the strikes and marches, men waved and wore signs that bore the slogan "I AM A MAN." Despite being warned that the strike could not resolve peacefully, Dr. King returned to Memphis on April 3rd, giving his final speech, "I Have Been to the Mountaintop," at Mason Temple to rally the city and speak on behalf of the people of the city of Memphis. The strike ended on April 12th with the sanitation workers winning better wages, equipment, and treatment.



Strikers in the Memphis Sanitation Strike, 1968

"Must have been thousands upon thousands of people there...Everybody from old men to teenage girls to little boys holding up signs that said, I AM A MAN."

-King, *The Mountaintop*

RALPH ABERNATHY

Born on March 11th, 1926, Ralph Abernathy was a leader of the Civil Rights Movement and a close friend to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Abernathy served overseas during WWII, obtained a B.A. in Mathematics from Alabama State University, and a M.A. in Sociology from Atlanta University. He was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1948. Abernathy was an active member in the NAACP and chaired the committee on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. After Rosa Parks' famous boycott, Abernathy - along with Dr. King and nearly 150 other ministers - came together and formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Through their association, they boycotted the public bus system in Montgomery and made a lasting imprint on the Civil Rights Movement. After Dr. King stepped down as President of MIA, Abernathy was appointed President. He was also made Vice-President of the SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, by Dr. King because King believed that, in the event of his death, Abernathy would be the best candidate to carry the movement forward. For years, the two men travelled together, shared the same hotel rooms and jail cells, and spent their leisure time together with family and friends. Abernathy was present at the assassination, cradling his beloved friend in his arms until the paramedics arrived. After Dr. King's death, Abernathy took up the leadership of the SCLC and followed through with Dr. King's plan to help the sanitation workers. Later, he organized the Poor People's Campaign, the last major movement of the SCLC. Abernathy resigned in 1977 from the SCLC and returned to pastoral work at the West Hunter Baptist Church.



Ralph Abernathy

"More loyal than a dog. He the one called me down to the church tonight. Got me out of bed."

-King, *The Mountaintop*



The Lorraine Motel, room 306

LORRAINE MOTEL

Originally known as the Windsor Hotel, the Lorraine Motel was built in 1925 as a white-only establishment. In 1942, Walter and Loree Bailey purchased the Windsor, renamed it the Lorraine Motel, and opened it to African-American guests. During legal segregation, it hosted many black celebrities such as Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Aretha Franklin. Dr. King and his colleague, Ralph Abernathy, stayed at the Lorraine so often that their room was known as the “King-Abernathy Suite”. The motel became famous as the site of Dr. King’s assassination. Dr. King and Abernathy were on a trip to support and help organize a sanitation strike and protest occurring in Memphis, Tennessee. Standing outside

his second story room, Dr. King was shot. Today, the motel is a National Civil Rights Museum, a privately owned museum honoring Dr. King and the Civil Rights struggle. The “King-Abernathy Suite,” Room 306, is the same as it was on April 4th, 1968, the night Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated.

“Room 306. Yes, we call it the ‘King-Abernathy Suite,’ too.”

-King, *The Mountaintop*



Colleagues gather on the balcony outside the Lorraine Motel's Room 306, just a few feet from where Dr. King was shot, April 4, 1968. Photo: Henry Groskinsky, Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images

ASSASSINATION

At 6:01 p.m., on April 4th, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot by gunman James Earl Ray while standing on the balcony outside Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. Paramedics took him to St. Joseph Hospital where he was pronounced dead at 7:05 pm. Dr. King had been standing on the balcony talking to friends and associates in the parking lot below when the shot was fired. He was struck in the chin by the bullet which proceeded into his neck and shoulder. Ray, 39, purchased his rifle through a false alias and rented a room nearby at a rooming house at 422 ½ South Street. A witness in the room next to Ray’s recounted how the shared bathroom was locked and occupied. After he heard the gun

shot, the witness heard Ray running down the hall and opened his door in time to see Ray turning the corner with a large object tucked underneath his coat. Ray wrapped his gun, binoculars, and other belongings in a green blanket and dumped them outside the nearby Canipe Amusement Company.

“Speak by love. Die by hate.”

-Camae, *The Mountaintop*

His belongings, including the gun, were found later with Ray’s fingerprints on them. After a two-month, worldwide man hunt, Ray was caught at London’s Heathrow Airport. James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to the murder, and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He died in prison in 1998.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

With the end of slavery in the United States came a new set of laws treating African-Americans as second-class citizens. For over ninety years, the "Jim Crow Laws" enforced racial segregation in education, housing, transportation, and public facilities.

The Civil Rights Movement struggled in the 1920s and 1930s. By the mid-1950s, the federal government began to support Civil Rights activists. In 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" school facilities were unconstitutional, ordering integration in public schools. In the decade that followed, Civil Rights activists, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., fought a hard battle for equal rights. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, the Civil Rights of all Americans were established by law.

CIVIL RIGHTS TIMELINE

Rosa Parks refuses to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, as required by city ordinance; the



Rosa Parks

Montgomery Bus Boycott follows, and the bus segregation ordinance is eventually declared unconstitutional.

1954 — U.S. Supreme Court declares school segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

1955

The federal government uses the military to uphold African-Americans' civil rights as soldiers escort nine black students to desegregate **Little Rock High School**.

1957 — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., helps found the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference** to work for full equality for African-Americans.

At the **Greensboro Sit-in**, four black college students refuse to move from the lunch counter of a Greensboro, NC, restaurant where black patrons are not served,



The Greensboro Sit-in

launching sit-ins across the South.

1960

1962



Malcolm X

Malcolm X becomes the National Minister of the Nation of Islam. He rejects the non-violent Civil Rights Movement and preaches African-American separatism and securing equal rights through "any means necessary."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his "**I Have a Dream**" speech to hundreds of thousands of supporters during the



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

March on Washington, the largest Civil Rights march in history.

1963 — Arrested for a protest in Birmingham, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., writes the "**Letter from a Birmingham Jail**," a manifesto for the Civil Rights Movement.



1964

With Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in attendance, President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law

Congress passes the **Civil Rights Act**, giving the federal government powers to prosecute discrimination based on race in employment, voting, and education.

A year after splitting with the Nation of Islam, **Malcom X is assassinated** in New York City.

The **Voting Rights Act is passed**, outlawing the practices used to disenfranchise African-American voters.

Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American justice on the Supreme Court.

The **Poor People's March on Washington**, a march against poverty planned by King before his death, goes on.



Selma to Montgomery March

1965

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., organizes a **march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama**. Police beat and teargas protesters; the images are shown on television across the country.

1965

1966

Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seales found the **Black Panther Party**, a radical black power group.

1967

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated.

1968

The event sparks riots across the country.



King speaks to supporters on the National Mall on August 28, 1963.

VOCABULARY

Baton — an object passed off between team members in a relay race

“I know I have dropped this baton so many times over this race.”

– King

Bougie — derived from “bourgeois”; a derogatory term describing someone who aspires to be of higher class

“Well, let me school you, you bougie Negro. I don’t need a PhD to give you some knowledge, understand?”

– Camae

Catchin’ flies — behaving as though in a state of drunkenness

“Cause these white folks here ‘bout to be catchin’ flies now the way they be acting wit’ Negroes these days.”

– Camae

Diatribes — a bitter verbal attack or criticism

“Not too many maids spouting off well-formed diatribes like that.”

– King

Incognegro — a derogatory term referring to an African-American who tries to hide their African heritage

“An incognegro. A spy.”

– King

Injunction — a legal order commanding a person or group of persons to do or not do a particular action

“The city said it was seeking the injunction as a means of protecting Dr. King. . . .”

– King

Larry Payne — a 16-year-old boy, shot by Memphis Police during the sanitation strike

“[Violence] just gives these police an excuse to shoot innocent folks. Like that boy . . . that 16-year-old boy they shot . . . Larry Payne. Larry Payne. Larry Payne. I’ll never forget his name.”

– King

Malcolm X — an African-American Muslim minister, public speaker, and human rights activist; he was assassinated in February 1965

“I know God liked Malcolm X. And you woulda liked him, too. He didn’t drink. Smoke. Cuss.”

– Camae

Martyr — a person who suffers or is killed while defending a principle, belief, cause, or idea

“You’ll be a man-made martyr. No, better yet! A saint!”

– Camae

Oratorical — a characteristic of someone with eloquent and superior public speaking ability

“Well...tell me... How are my ‘oratorical skills’—see y’en thank I knew them words?”

– Camae

Panther — a reference to the Black Panther Party, an African-American revolutionary group active from 1966 until 1982

“So are you an honorary Panther?”

– King

Preponderance — carrying superior weight, power, or importance

“We have gathered here today to deal with a serious issue. It is an issue of great preponderance”

– Camae

Promised Land — in the Bible, the land promised by God to Abraham; also, a place or situation believed to hold ultimate happiness

“I have plans. Lots of plans in my head and in my heart and my people need me. They need me. I need to see them to the Promised Land.”

– King

Poor People’s Campaign — a campaign organized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to address the issues of economic justice and housing for America’s poor

“The plan. It’s all in the works. The Poor People’s Campaign!”

– King

Siddity — a term for someone who is pretentious or conceited

“You can call me siddity all you like, I want me a Pall Mall.” – King

Spook — a term for a spy; also, a derogatory term for an African-American

“Well, you’re not gonna catch me again! Where the hell is Ralph?/Ralph! I got a spook!”

– King

Square — a term for a cigarette

“You ain’t gone leave me here to work through the night wit nothin’ to smoke on. ... All I got is one square left.”

– Camae

THEMES

MAN VS. ICON:

The face of the Civil Rights Movement during the fifties and sixties, Martin Luther King, Jr., had a well-crafted public image. People know him as a leader, a preacher, and a moving public speaker. *The Mountaintop* looks past the public figure that King presented and remembers him as a real person. King calls his wife and children after an exhausting day, as well as relaxes with a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

QUESTIONS:

What responsibilities come with being a leader? How does being the leader of a movement affect a person's behavior?

In *The Mountaintop*, King says "everybody should break a rule now and then". Is that true? Is it accepted that our leaders break rules? Are leaders held to a higher standard than others?

Did your view of Martin Luther King, Jr., change after seeing *The Mountaintop*? If so, how?

"Well, sometimes you done cleared the hurdles and sometimes...you ain't. You done brought us far. But you a man. You just a man, baby. You're not God, though some folk'll say you got mighty close."

-Camae, The Mountaintop

NON-VIOLENCE:

Dr. King is perhaps best known for his steadfast belief in non-violence as the path to Civil Rights. Unlike some of King's counterparts such as Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, who believed violence was sometimes necessary to promote social change, King enforced non-violence in the marches and protests associated with him. Some followers believed King should use more aggressive tactics when fighting for equality, but King firmly believed that non-violence was the key to achieving progress in the fight for Civil Rights and equality. In *The Mountaintop*, playwright Katori Hall pits King's non-violent beliefs against the beliefs of a young maid, who considers herself an "honorary Black Panther".

Camae: "Walkin' will only get you so far, Preacher Kang."

King: "We're not just walking; we're marching."

-The Mountaintop

QUESTIONS:

How did King's non-violent approach to the Civil Rights movement help strengthen and validate the movement in America?

How can non-violence affect social change?

PERSEVERANCE:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., faced many obstacles as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement. In *The Mountaintop*, we are introduced to a worn-down, tired King. His voice is hoarse from all his public speaking. He is scared for his family, for his movement, and for himself after receiving numerous death threats, but his faith in his actions is so strong that he keeps pushing forward. King knows that the only way to reach the "Promised Land" is to persevere despite the obstacles in his way.

QUESTIONS:

Despite being afraid, Dr. King kept pushing forward. How can fear motivate a person into positive action?

What other personal characteristics helped King succeed during his fight for equality? When do we see those characteristics personified in *The Mountaintop*?

When times become hard, how do we as a community persevere? As individuals?

"My house has been bombed!... My arrn twisted behind my back. My face shved into a ground of gravel. I have been kicked at. Spit at. Pummeled. Abused. Looked at with the deepest scorn...After all that? Tell me I ain't jumped over every hurdle of this race!"

-King, The Mountaintop

PASSING THE BATON:

King is afraid that the Civil Rights Movement will end without him. *The Mountaintop* asks the audience to look at how far we have come since Dr. King's death, and challenges the audience to continue to work towards his dream of equality. Mentioning others that have picked up the baton and carried the movement forward, *The Mountaintop* looks to the future, and asks the audience to think about how far the movement has come.

QUESTIONS:

Have we reached the Promised Land? In what areas have we succeeded? In what areas are we still improving? In Milwaukee? In America?

Where is social injustice still prevalent in our society? What can we do to "pick up the baton" in our daily lives?

"But you gone have to pass off that baton, little man. You in a relay race, albeit the fastest runner we done ever seen't. But you 'bout to burn out, super star. You gone need to pass off that baton..."

-Camee, *The Mountaintop*

CREATING THE REP PRODUCTION

The Mountaintop takes place in Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel, the room in which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spent his final night. Today, the Lorraine Motel is the National Civil Rights Museum and visitors can look into the room, left as it was on King's final night.

Director May Adrales and Set Designer Lee Savage traveled to Memphis to visit the Lorraine Motel before starting rehearsals for *The Mountaintop* in Milwaukee. The set replicates many aspects of the hotel room. For the purposes of the production, some details have changed but the shape and color of the room, as well as the objects in it, are historically accurate to the moment in time the play depicts.

The Mountaintop production team and the shops at Milwaukee Rep used historical photos and information from the National Civil Rights Museum to research the exact details of the hotel room. Look for the details on the set. Below are two examples of the research and work that went into creating historically accurate props for *The Mountaintop*.



J. Bernard Calloway & Nikiya Mathis

THE BRIEFCASE

In Memphis on April 4th, 1968, photographer Henry Groskinsky took photos of King's hotel room right after the assassination. The prop shop used Groskinsky's photo of Dr. King's briefcase to create the briefcase used in The Rep's *The Mountaintop*. The prop shop found a similar briefcase, and dyed it to match the color of the original. The briefcase in the play includes many of these same objects found in the photo, including the book *Strength to Love*, a collection of Dr. King's sermons. All of King's writings on the set - sermons, letters, etc., in the briefcase and on the tables are in King's handwriting, created from images of original documents.

THE CHAIR

Based on photos of the original chair in Room 306, the prop shop custom built a chair with structure and fabric similar to the original. For the fabric on the chair cushions, the prop shop found fabrics closely matching the stripes and then sewed the fabrics together to create the stripes on the chair.



Dr. King's briefcase. Photo: Henry Groskinsky, Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images



Nikiya Mathis

INTERVIEW WITH MAY ADRALES, DIRECTOR



May Adrales

Milwaukee Rep Education Coordinator Leda Hoffmann sat down with May Adrales, director of The Mountaintop, to talk about the play, Martin Luther King, and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement.

Leda Hoffmann: This is your second show at The Rep, having directed *Yellowman* last season, also in the Stiemke Studio. What

has it been like working in this space a second time, now on *The Mountaintop*?

May Adrales: I have a long history with both plays. *Yellowman* was the first play I assisted. I have been friends with Katori Hall for a while and saw the first workshop of *The Mountaintop* at the Lark Play Development Center. I have seen these two projects grow and my perspective on them changed as I got older.

In terms of the space, I love working in the Stiemke black box. In both instances we were able to change the seats, although *The Mountaintop* is a much more dynamic seating change. That, to me, is the best kind of theater, when you have the least amount of distance between the last row of the house and the actors. In both of these plays, you want to be as close to the actors and their experience as possible. It has been a really great treat to be able to work in that space and to imagine it in a way that can be a very intimate experience.

Leda: How do you feel that these two plays relate to each other?

May: *Yellowman* is solely about a specific ethnic group – Black Americans and internal racism within that community. At the same time, *The Mountaintop* deals with the late 1960s Civil Rights Movement that was splintering. King was in a really troublesome spot as a Civil Rights leader in his last year and a half or so. There were lots of different factions going on and he found himself in moments of real failure of how to create change in urban cities and in the North.

I was reading in his biography by David Garrow about how difficult it was for King to use his

non-violent philosophies and methods in places like Chicago and in Watts. When he spoke after the Watts Riots, people booed him because they felt he did not know what he was talking about. King dealt with different problems in the North than in the South. That idea of splintering of movements, internal racism within a group that has already been discriminated against, those are things that the two plays have in common.

Leda: You have worked with Katori Hall before. How does knowing her and conversations with her affect the way that you approach this piece?

May: With this piece I have a more distant relationship. I know Katori as a friend, so of course, if there is anything that I want to ask I can always contact her. We had a much more intimate working experience working on *WHADDABLOODCLOT!!!* because that was a premiere and whenever you are working on a premiere the playwright/director relationship becomes a marriage of sorts, looking at every single line and looking at the rhythms. I had her read some lines aloud to me to see how she heard it.

What was great about getting to know her and then coming to this project is understanding how specific she is with her writing. No matter how mundane or ordinary it may sound or read on the page, she has a real rhythm in her head. She would often say, “if I wanted a beat there, I would have written it. If I wanted a pause there, I would have written a pause.” That is one thing that has been fun working on this piece, having worked with her.

She is a real poet and the language that she uses is very rich and colorful and teeming with life. In *The Mountaintop*, the characters are great orators and chewing on that language is really exciting.

Leda: This play explores both King as an icon and as a man. In rehearsals and with J. Bernard Calloway (the actor playing King), how did you go about exploring this character?

May: One of the things I asked him in auditions is “how do you feel about playing Martin Luther King?” It is very difficult to play a historical figure, much less an icon, martyr, and world leader. Inevitably, he is going to be different. It was important to me to be close to the right age of King because I feel this play deals a lot with mortality and dying before your time.

We have been looking at documentaries, speeches, books, and his writings as a way to build the given

circumstances of what King was at that time. What would his point of view on everything they bring up in the play have been? Some of that has to be conjecture because we will never know, but we had to find out how he feels about women, how he feels about the Black Panther movement, and Malcolm X, and how he feels about what a leader is. Those are all things that we had to deduce from the text and supplement with the readings and videos we watched.

Leda: You went down to Memphis before rehearsals started with Lee Savage, the set designer for *The Mountaintop*. What was that like?

May: It really informed the entire design of the set. At the National Civil Rights Museum, you go through the entire Civil Rights Movement and it ends at a hallway looking in through these glass windows at Room 306. That is the perspective from which the audience looks at the play. The audience is basically in that hallway looking into Room 306. When I was describing the space to the cast on the first day, I said it is like one audience bank is in Room 307 and one audience bank is in Room 305.

There is nothing like going to the real place and seeing the balcony where King was shot, seeing his affects in the room, and also seeing that it is unfair that he died there. In *The Mountaintop*, King talks about the fact that it is a moldy hotel room. It is going to be his tomb. It is ironic - he was a great Civil Rights leader, he had a huge mission planned, the Poor People's Campaign, this march on Washington, and then he is in a moldy hotel room working on a small sanitation workers strike and that is how he meets his end. There is something powerful about seeing that and seeing the humble nature of where he died.

Leda: This play looks to the future and talks about the Civil Rights Movement and its legacy. How does it leave us?

May: I often wonder what Martin Luther King would do if he could look at today. I think he would be amazed - you know Jesse Jackson said, "This is the dream" as he pointed at the soon-to-be President Obama after the election. That alone brings tears to my eyes. Especially for King, he felt like working through the government, working through the system, getting more Black elected officials, was crucial in getting to advance his people. Alabama, for instance, has more Black elected officials than any other state. I think he

would be thrilled with that. It is such progress.

I think that he would be so saddened about the voter disenfranchisement that is happening in swing states - Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin included. It is a subtle poll tax, closing places at 4:15 when people do not have cars and cannot get off work early to go and vote. People have to get voter IDs when they have been voting for years. That is a travesty. We fought really hard for our democracy. The only way democracy can work is if you are an active citizen and can vote.

We do not have as much blatant racism now but we are up against a classism that we have not faced since before the Great Depression. That is terrifying because economic disparity is just the beginning of another segment of our population that is not getting basic needs. There is definitely much further to go. The text is asking you to look, as an audience member, at where we left off, where King left off, and what he wanted to do and where we are and what we still need to do.

Leda: Recently, you became a Rep Associate Artist and you are in conversations about the dialogue Milwaukee Rep is having with its community. What sort of things do you hope *The Mountaintop* brings to this conversation as we move forward?

May: I hope that it helps bring in a more diverse audience. This play can be for a lot of people. Age diversity is really important. I think this in the kind of piece that you can go to churches and community groups and get them involved and coming to see it. I was excited, with *Yellowman*, towards the end, that more people were coming because of outreach into the community.

As well, bringing works of new playwrights to Milwaukee Rep is important - this is not *The Mountaintop's* premiere but it is fresh from Broadway. I know that is part of [Artistic Director] Mark Clements' vision.

Being an Associate Artist, my relationship to The Rep has changed because I am more invested in every aspect of it and in making sure that I build relationships with the people who work at the theater as well as getting to know the community more. I hope that continues. I am really excited to be back and it is such a special feeling to come back to a place where you had previously never been before and find comfort and the home of it. ●

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.



Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Photo by Michael Broslow.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The entrance to the Stiemke Studio is located by the large rotunda staircase.

THE REP VALUES YOUR SUPPORT: Financial support enables The Rep to do more:

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- Provide a richer theater experience by hosting Rep In Depth, Talkbacks, and creating Play Guides to better inform our audiences about our productions
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You can also contact Lisa Fulton, *Director of Marketing & Interim Director of Development*, 414-290-5377, lfulton@milwaukeeerep.com.

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STUDY GUIDE

The Mountaintop

By Katori Hall
Directed by Ron OJ Parson



SETTING

April 3, 1968

**Room 306, Lorraine Motel
Memphis Tennessee**



CHARACTERS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Thirty-nine, Nobel Peace
Prize-winning civil rights
movement leader

Camae. Twenties, Lorraine
Hotel maid.



SYNOPSIS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. retires to room 306 in the Lorraine Motel after giving a speech to a Memphis church congregation during the sanitation workers' strike. When a mysterious young hotel maid comes to visit him during the night, King is forced to confront his mortality and the future of his people.

THEMES

Legacy and Impact:

The Mountaintop looks at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy as a leader of the civil rights movement, but also asks viewers to understand the positive and negative impact they can make on the world around them.

Fact and Fiction:

Playwright Katori Hall's portrayal of Dr. King is not a factual one, but a magical imagining of the last night of his life. Hall uses facts about him as well as rumors that appeared during his lifetime to create her character of Dr. King, exploring a humanized King and the place of fact and fiction in how we view him today.

Conviction and Adversity:

As Dr. King examines his own legacy, Hall looks at the consequences of doing what you feel is right even in the face of difficulty and resistance. Hall's characterization of King gives the audience a window into the personal struggle of a heroic figure.

FACT AND FICTION IN THE MOUNTAINTOP

Camae: *"What could little old me, give to big old you? I thought you was gone be perfect. Well, you ain't, but then you are. You have the biggest heart I done ever knownt. You have the strength to love those who could never love you back. If I had just a small fraction of the love you have for this world, then maybe, just maybe I could become half the angel you are."*



The Mountaintop is a fictional portrayal of the last night in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life. Katori Hall's portrayal of King himself is also a fiction; though the conversation in the play addresses actual events in King's life – many of which are outlined in this packet – Hall was not interested in presenting a "real" King. She looks at the play as a magical reimagining of what could have happened on the night before his assassination. "He had vulnerabilities and fears," she said in an interview with the *Washington Post*. "This is a man that provided a fundamental shift in American society. King forced us to see people of color are not second-class citizens; they are equal. He did this extraordinary thing. But he wasn't superhuman. He always said, 'I'm a sinner. Not a saint.' That is the King you will see in *Mountaintop*."

FACT AND FICTION IN THE MOUNTAINTOP

The work has been criticized for taking liberties with the dialogue, which Hall did not take from King's speeches or writings. The dialogue is her own, as is the character of Camae, and presents an unusual characterization of King. He is a smoker. He flirts with a hotel maid. He acknowledges accusations that he cheated on his wife. Hall wrote a character for King that reflected her interest in seeing him as a vulnerable human being. "During this time, he was dealing with the heightened threat of violence, he was



tackling issues beyond civil rights -- economic issues -- and was denouncing the Vietnam War," she said (*The Root*). "So I wanted to explore the emotional toll and the stress of that."

The Dr. King presented in *The Mountaintop* is one writer's imagining of what he might have been like, just as the portrayal of God in the play is Hall's imagining of what God would be like if He were a She. Over and over in interviews, Hall says that her interest was in creating human characters: "If you want a play with King on a

pedestal, there is a play for you over there. If you want a sanitized version of black women, there is a play over there. I can't please everybody" (*Washington Post*). Above all, Hall hopes that humanizing King will make him more accessible: "It was important to see the humanity in this hero so we can see the hero in ourselves" (*Washington Post*).

THE CHARACTERS:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Excerpted from the King Center's biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the less than 13 years of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership of the modern American Civil Rights Movement, from December, 1955 until April 4, 1968, African Americans achieved more genuine progress toward racial equality in America than the previous 350 years had produced. Dr. King is widely regarded as America's pre-eminent advocate of nonviolence and one of the greatest nonviolent leaders in world history.



Some of Dr. King's most important achievements include:

- **In 1955**, he was recruited to serve as spokesman for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was a campaign by the African-American population of Montgomery, Alabama to force integration of the city's bus lines. After 381 days of nearly universal participation by citizens of the black community, many of whom had to walk miles to work each day as a result, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in transportation was unconstitutional.
- **In 1957**, Dr. King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization designed to provide new leadership for the now burgeoning civil rights movement.



THE CHARACTERS:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- **In 1963**, he led a coalition of numerous civil rights groups in a nonviolent campaign aimed at Birmingham, Alabama, which at the time was described as the “most segregated city in America.” The subsequent brutality of the city’s police, illustrated most vividly by television images of young black people being assaulted by dogs and water hoses, led to a national outrage resulting in a push for unprecedented civil rights legislation. It was during this campaign that Dr. King drafted the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” the manifesto of his philosophy and tactics.
- **Later in 1963**, Dr. King was one of the driving forces behind the March for Jobs and Freedom, more commonly known as the “March on Washington,” which drew over a quarter-million people to the national mall. It was at this march that Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, which cemented his status as a social change leader and helped inspire the nation to act on civil rights.



THE CHARACTERS:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- **In 1964**, at 35 years old, Martin Luther King, Jr. became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **Also in 1964**, partly due to the March on Washington, Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act, essentially eliminating legalized racial segregation in the United States. The legislation made it illegal to discriminate against blacks or other minorities in hiring, public accommodations, education or transportation, areas which at the time were still very segregated in many places.
- **The next year, 1965**, Congress went on to pass the Voting Rights Act, which was an equally-important set of laws that eliminated the remaining barriers to voting for African-Americans, who in some locales had been almost completely disenfranchised. This legislation resulted directly from the Selma to Montgomery, AL March for Voting Rights lead by Dr. King.
- **Between 1965 and 1968**, Dr. King shifted his focus toward economic justice – which he highlighted by leading several campaigns in Chicago, Illinois – and international peace – which he championed by speaking out strongly against the Vietnam War. His work in these years culminated in the “Poor Peoples Campaign,” which was a broad effort to assemble a multiracial coalition of impoverished Americans who would advocate for economic change.



THE CHARACTERS:

Camae

Negro talk strike faster than lightnin'. They say folks was all cryin'. Sangin'. Mmph. Mmph. Mmph. I woulda liked to have seen that. Somethin' to tell my chirren. "When I wun't nothin' but a chick-a-dee, I seen't Dr. Martin Luther Kang, Jr., cuttin' up in the pulpit." Mmmhmmmm. I bet that was somethin' to see.



In contrast to Dr. King, the character of Camae is fictional. Hall created Camae to be the opposite of Dr. King: a "working-class, mouthy woman; honorary Black Panther Party angel who doesn't always believe that nonviolence is the answer" (*The Root*). Hall thought that the clash between two characters who were so different would be more interesting than putting Dr. King in a room with someone like his friend Ralph Abernathy.

Camae was based at least in part on Hall's mother. Her mother grew up in Memphis around the corner from the Mason Temple and wanted to go hear King speak in 1968, but bomb threats kept her from attending. "When my mom told me that story, I thought, 'If my mother was afraid to go to the church, then Dr. King must have been really afraid to go to the church,'" says Hall. Her mother regretted that she missed her final chance to see King speak, and because of that, Hall based the maid character on her mother. "It was a way to put my mother in the room with King because I knew she didn't get a chance on April 3, 1968" (*The Washington Post*).

APRIL 3, 1968

On April 3, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. flew to Memphis to give a speech in support of the sanitation workers' strike.

The strike began on February 11, 1968 after the deaths of two African American employees on February 1. Echol Cole and Robert Walker died when their trash compressor truck malfunctioned while they were taking shelter from the rain with the garbage, because city rules prohibited them from waiting anywhere else. On February 12, most of Memphis' sanitation and sewage workers did not go to work, and the mayor, Henry Loeb, refused to meet with the strikers. By February 15, 10,000 tons of trash were piled in the city, and Loeb began to hire white strike breakers.



King first visited Memphis on March 18 to speak at a rally in front of 15,000, and he promised to return the next week to lead a march. That march occurred on March 28 and was peaceful until some protestors started breaking windows. The police response was violent, involving batons and tear gas, and ended in the shooting death of a sixteen-year-old boy named Larry Payne.

APRIL 3, 1968

On April 3, King went back to Memphis to speak to a crowd at the Mason Temple. His colleagues in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference advised him not to, but King hoped to turn the Memphis movement back to nonviolence.

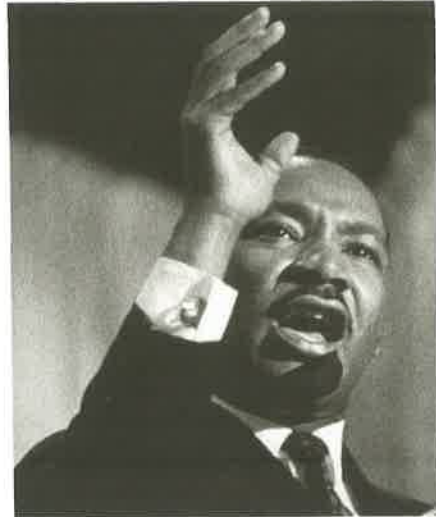
On his way to Memphis, his plane was delayed because of a bomb threat. By the time he arrived, King was exhausted and had developed a cold, and asked his friend Ralph Abernathy to speak for him at the Mason Temple. Abernathy agreed, but realized when he began speaking that people had gathered in the hundreds to hear King speak. He called King and convinced him to brave the storm to speak. When King arrived, he received a standing ovation, and gave the speech known as "I've Been to the Mountaintop."

Afterwards, King returned to his room at the Lorraine Motel, which is where *The Mountaintop* begins.



"I'VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINTOP"

The speech on April 3, 1968 which has come to be known as "I've Been to the Mountaintop" was the last speech Martin Luther King, Jr. gave. The speech addressed the immediate concerns of the sanitation workers, but also became a reflection by King on his work with the civil rights movement.



The conclusion of the speech sets the tone for the play and what would happen to Dr. King the following day:

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 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, or what would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers.

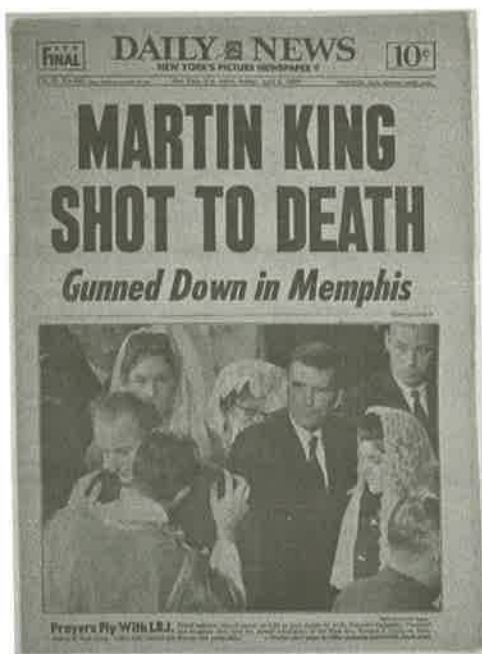
Well, I don't know what will happen now; we've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter to with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life—longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want 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.

APRIL 4, 1968

In the evening of April 4, King was preparing to leave the Lorraine Motel for dinner at the home of a Memphis minister. He stepped out onto the balcony of room 306 to speak with SCLC colleagues, who were standing in the parking lot below his room. At 6:05 PM, an assassin fired a single shot from a balcony across the street from the Lorraine. The bullet hit King and caused severe injuries. He was rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital where doctors attempted surgery, but he was pronounced dead at 7:05 PM. James Earl Ray, a 40-year-old escaped fugitive, confessed to and was convicted of the assassination.

President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a national day of mourning on April 7. On April 8, King's widow Coretta Scott King and surviving family joined 42,000 others in a silent march in Memphis in honor of King and in support of the sanitation workers. His funeral service was held the next day in Atlanta. More than 100,000 attendees followed King's coffin through the streets of Atlanta before his burial.

The sanitation workers' strike continued until April 16, when Memphis finally recognized the sanitation workers' union and agreed to increase their pay.



MLK's ASSOCIATES:

Ralph Abernathy

KING

I'm worried. I don't want anything to happen to him. He happen upon something in the night, don't know what I'd do without him.

CAMAE

That your best friend?

KING

More loyal than a dog.



Ralph Abernathy was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s closest friend and advisor. While a graduate student at Atlanta University, Abernathy heard King preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church. In his autobiography, Abernathy describes being jealous of King's "learning and confidence" and says he immediately saw that King was gifted. Abernathy introduced himself to King, marking the beginning of their friendship.

Abernathy and King worked closely together over the years, beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott. They were jailed together 17 times. They were both Baptist ministers and officers in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and in the early 1960s both moved to Atlanta to commit more time to the SCLC. At King's request, Abernathy eventually became the vice-president of the SCLC, because King knew that Abernathy could lead the organization if King himself died.

After King was assassinated in 1968, Abernathy did become the SCLC's president and led the march that King had planned to support the Memphis sanitation workers.

MLK's ASSOCIATES:

Jesse Louis Jackson

KING

God, listen to me... Who else is betta' fit for this job? I mean, who will take my place? (He hears Her answer.)

JESSE?! I – I – I just thought Ralph would make a better – No, no, no, no, I have not turned vain.



Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1941. He became active in the civil rights movement when attending Greensboro's North Carolina A & T College, participating in sit-ins and demonstrations. He organized a group of students to go to Selma, Alabama in 1965 to help King with the local voting rights campaign. Before he went home, Jackson asked Ralph Abernathy if he could join the SCLC and begin setting up for a campaign in Chicago. Though King and Abernathy did not know Jackson, they hired him.

When King moved to Chicago in 1966, he and Jackson began Operation Breadbasket, the SCLC's economic development and empowerment program. Jackson was quickly promoted to national leader of Operation Breadbasket with King's encouragement.

Jackson was talking to King from below King's balcony at the Lorraine Motel when King was assassinated. After King's death, Jackson continued to lead Operation Breadbasket and followed in King's footsteps to become a Baptist minister. Newspapers at the time called him King's successor and he remained with the SCLC until 1971, when he formed People United to Save Humanity (PUSH). In 1984, he formed the National Rainbow Coalition, a social justice organization, which ultimately became the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. He tried for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination twice, winning several primaries in 1988. His latest organization is called the Wall Street Project and continues Operation Breadbasket's mission to create economic opportunity for minorities.

BLACK NATIONALISM:

Malcolm X

KING

So are you an honorary Panther?

She growls like a panther; she's pretty good

CAMAE

Walkin' will only get you so far, Preacher Kang.

KING

We're not just walking, we're marching.

CAMAE

Whatever it is, it ain't workin'.



In the 1960s, the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Black Power movement advocated for economic self-sufficiency, racial pride for African Americans, and black separatism. Black Nationalists were critical of King, the SCLC, and other organizations that focused their reform work on nonviolent interracial activism. King was equally critical of black nationalists for their abandonment of nonviolence. He did not agree with their view that American society could not be fixed.

Malcolm X became the most visible supporter of Black Nationalism and often challenged King's approach. In *Malcolm X Speaks*, he said, "We want freedom now, but we're not going to get it saying 'We Shall Overcome.' We've got to fight to overcome" (38). While they were ideological opposites and often publicly criticized each other, the two respected each other, and Malcolm X frequently sent King articles on the NOI and invited him to forums for black leaders. King never accepted his invitations. They met only once during the Senate debate on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, speaking briefly in a hallway after a press conference given by King.

In 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated. King spoke of the murder as a great tragedy, but it did not ease the ideological battles between supporters of King and supporters of Malcolm X.

COUNTER INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM:

J. Edgar Hoover

KING

What, y'all think you can trap me? Record me with a woman? Well, you're not going to catch me! Sending tapes to my wife. Tryin' to break up my family. Tryin' to break my spirit!

John Edgar Hoover became the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 1924. In the 1950s, Hoover focused on anti-Communist fears that were a result of the Cold War. The FBI began conducting surveillance on civil rights and labor organizations. King was monitored by the FBI beginning in 1955, due in part to Hoover's suspicion that King had Communist ties.

In 1956, Hoover created the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which was used to target King. Following the 1963 March on Washington, King's home and the SCLC headquarters were wiretapped. Hoover even installed microphones in King's hotel rooms. While no Communist connection was proved, the monitoring produced alleged evidence of extramarital affairs. After the investigation, the FBI anonymously sent King a tape recording of him "carousing" in a Washington, D.C. hotel room and a letter that the SCLC interpreted as telling King to commit suicide to avoid public shame.

Hoover continued to approve investigations into King to attempt to discredit him among his supporters, government officials, and the media. When King openly condemned the Vietnam War in April 1967, the FBI took this as proof of Communist ties and stepped up their surveillance. Shortly thereafter, the FBI created a COINTELPRO against "Black Nationalist—Hate Groups" to target SCLC, King, and other civil rights leaders. An FBI report from the 1970s concluded that the attempts to discredit King had "unquestionable" negative effect on King and the civil rights movement.

After King was assassinated, the FBI was responsible for the investigation that found his killer.

RESOURCES

The King Center

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/>

“Established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (“The King Center”) has been a global destination, resource center and community institution for over a quarter century. Nearly a million people each year make pilgrimage to the National Historic Site to learn, be inspired and pay their respects to Dr. King’s legacy.”

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute

<http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php>

“Building upon the achievements of Stanford University’s Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project, the King Research and Education Institute provides an institutional home for a broad range of activities illuminating the Nobel Peace laureate’s life and the movements he inspired. The Institute’s endowment supports programs that serve as an enduring link between Stanford’s research resources and King’s dream of global peace with social justice.”

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Malcolm X and Black Nationalism

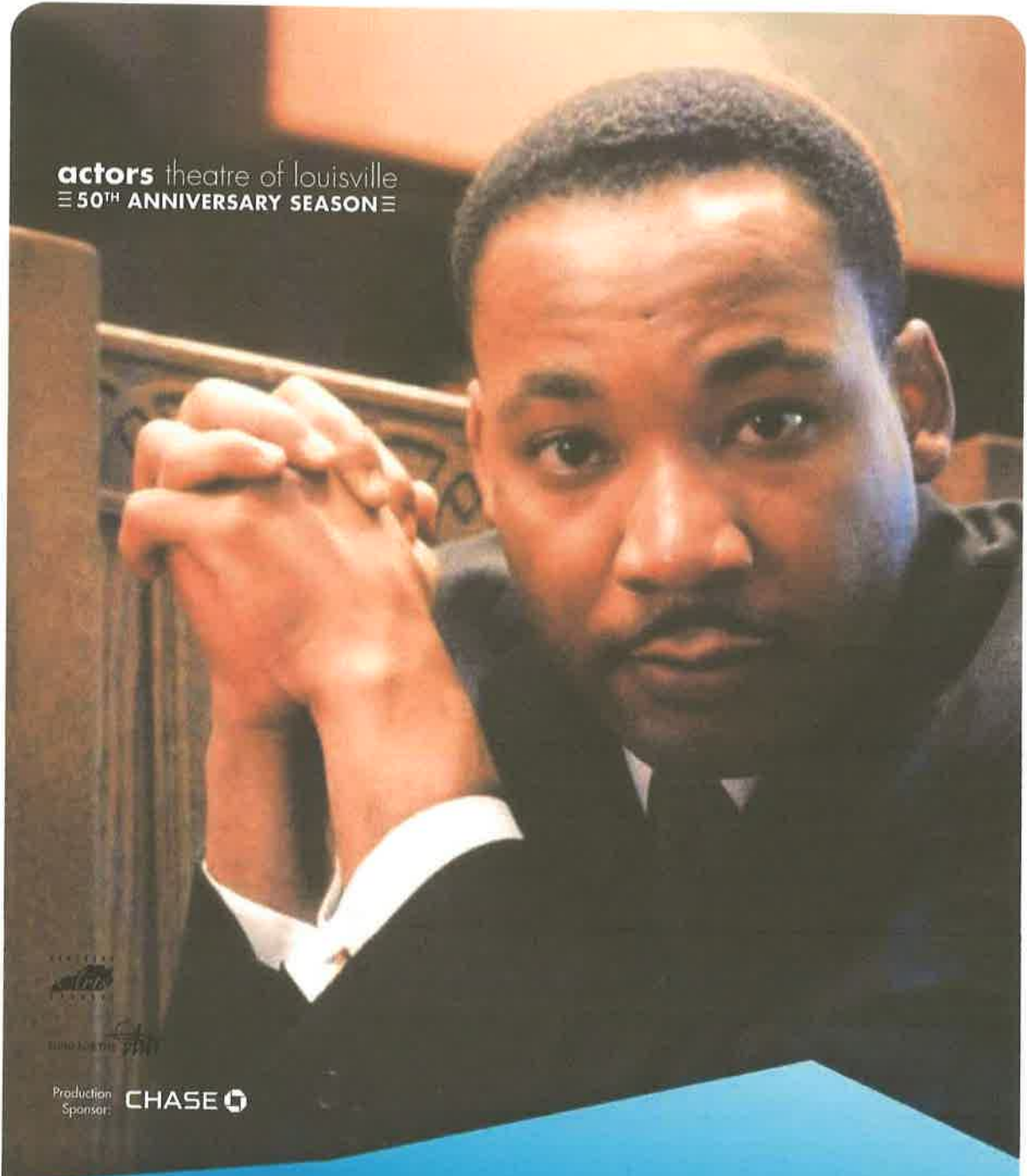
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PLAY GUIDE

actors theatre of louisville
50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON



ACTORS THEATRE OF LOUISVILLE
50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON
Production Sponsor: CHASE

BROWN-FORMAN SERIES

THE MOUNTAINTOP

BY KATORI HALL
DIRECTED BY GIOVANNA SARDELLI

ABOUT THE MOUNTAINTOP PLAY GUIDE

This play guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts, and to encourage essential questions that lead to an enduring understanding of the play's meaning and relevance.

Inside you will find information about the plot and characters within the play, as well as articles that contextualize the play and its production at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Oral discussion and writing prompts encourage your students to reflect upon their impressions and to analyze and relate key ideas to their personal experiences and the world around them. These can easily be adapted to fit most writing objectives. We encourage you to adapt and extend the material in any way to best fit the needs of your community of learners. Please feel free to make copies of this guide, or you may download it from our website: ActorsTheatre.org. We hope this material, combined with our preshow workshops, will give you the tools to make your time at Actors Theatre a valuable learning experience.

The Mountaintop student matinees and this play guide address specific **EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will identify or describe a variety of roles needed to produce a dramatic performance.
- Students will analyze the use of repetition in creating humor.
- Students will explain how a variety of perspectives creates greater insight into a field or endeavor.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding our play guides, please contact Steven Rahe, Director of Education, at 502-584-1265 ext. 3045.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2-3** *The Mountaintop* Synopsis, Characters and Setting
- 4-5** "Just a Man": Katori Hall's deeply human Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in *The Mountaintop*
- 6-7** Climbing the Mountain: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Fight for Civil Rights
- 8** Bridgework
- 9** Communication Portfolio, Discussion Questions

actors**education**

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Play Guide by: Betsy Anne Huggins, Jane B. Jones,
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SYNOPSIS

The Mountaintop takes place on the evening of April 3rd, 1968 in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s motel room in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. King is a prominent leader in the Civil Rights Movement and a proponent of non-violent civil disobedience. He marches, gives speeches and has been arrested several times in support of Civil Rights. Among supporters he is a beloved hero, among opponents he is a dangerous threat to the status quo.

In *The Mountaintop*, an exhausted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. returns from a prophetic speech during the sanitation workers' strike and is visited by a mysterious maid, Camae, with a much greater mission than delivering his coffee. With vivid theatrical imagination and powerful emotion, playwright Katori Hall beautifully fictionalizes the final hours of Dr. King's life in this Olivier Award-winning drama about leadership, legacy and mortality.

SETTING

The evening of April 3rd, 1968. Room 306, the Lorraine Motel. Memphis, Tennessee.

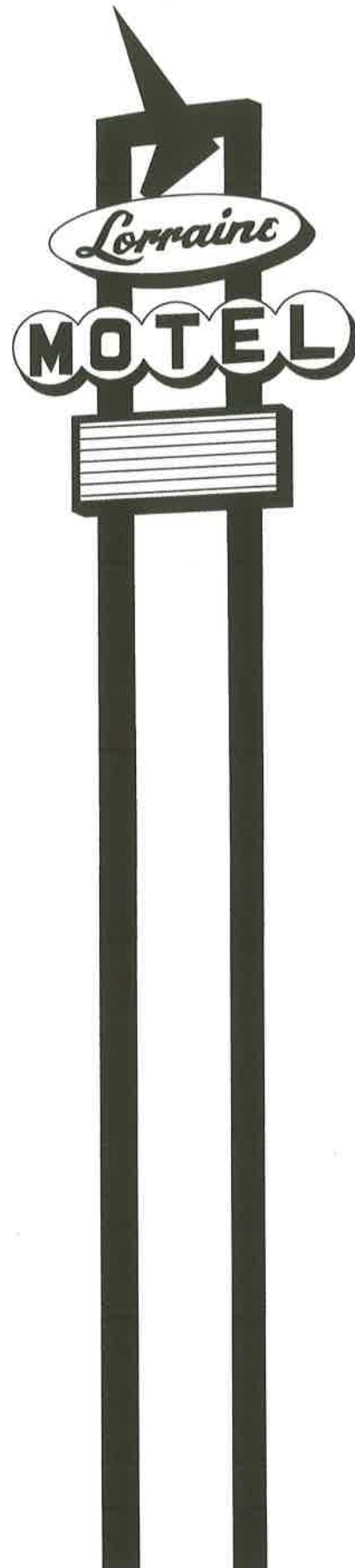
CAST OF CHARACTERS

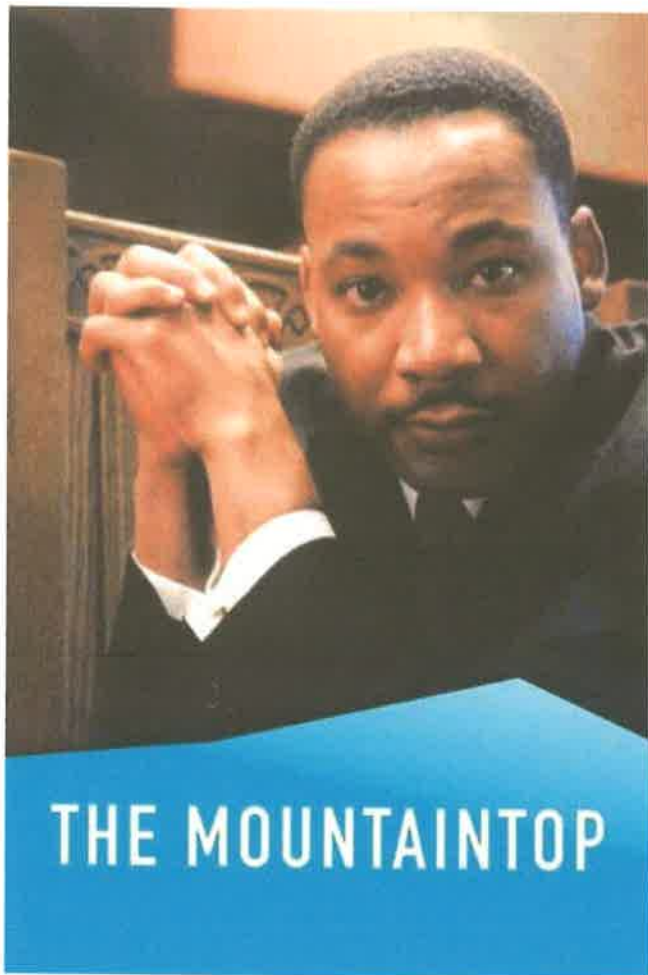
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a prominent Civil Rights activist.

CAMAE

Camae is a young African-American woman who works at the Lorraine Motel.





“JUST A MAN”: KATORI HALL’S DEEPLY HUMAN DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. IN *THE MOUNTAINTOP*

“I’m just a man...I’m a sinner, not a saint,” confesses Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in *The Mountaintop*, Katori Hall’s reimaging of the famed Civil Rights Movement leader’s last night in this world. In *The Mountaintop*, we visit the Memphis motel where King was staying when he was assassinated in April, 1968. But, as the character’s statement above indicates, this is no docudrama or reverential tribute to the Reverend’s achievements. Rather, Hall suggests that behind closed doors, Martin Luther King was more ordinary than we might expect. Yes, he had a heroic drive to crusade for justice, and an extraordinary ability to inspire millions with his speeches—but Hall imagines that underneath the brave words, he must have harbored flaws and fears we can all relate to.

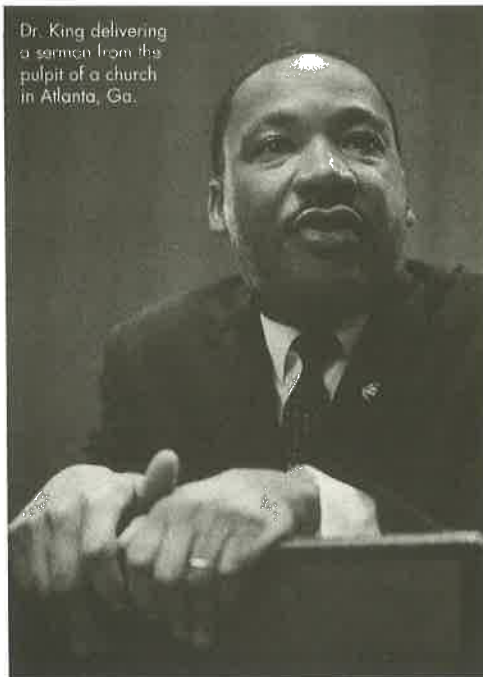
The Mountaintop’s depiction of Dr. King is a blend of fact and authorial invention. As Hall explained in a recent interview with NPR, “This play is highly fictionalized, almost anti-historical, even though it starts on April 3, 1968.” King was indeed lodging in Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel that evening, having flown to Tennessee to support black sanitation workers on strike. What transpires in Room 306 in Hall’s script, however, is her fantasy about what his state of mind might have been. The story begins when King returns to the room, having just delivered his prophetic “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address at Mason Temple. He’s tired, stressed, and craving a cigarette. Welcome distraction arrives in the form of Camae, a young maid who brings him coffee and a newspaper. With no small amount of flirting, he convinces her to keep him company for awhile. Initially she’s intimidated by his celebrity, but as the night wears on, she proves more than a match for the venerable “Preacher Kang.” She questions the efficacy of his emphasis on non-violent methods of protest. She calls him out for having smelly feet. And when he jumps at the sounds of the storm raging outside, or clutches at his overburdened heart in a moment of panic, she’s a source of solace.

A Dr. King who smokes and drinks whiskey? A Dr. King who's faced bomb threats and bullets and police brutality, but is afraid of thunder? It might seem hard to believe—shocking, even. But in pulling him off his pedestal, Katori Hall is after something much deeper. She describes her portrayal as “a very human approach to Dr. King.” According to Hall, it's easy to look at a figure like Martin Luther King, Jr. and forget that, like us, he was once flesh and blood. Our history books have elevated him to near-sainthood, making his myriad accomplishments seem superhuman. Seeing King light up a cigarette or notice an attractive woman or reach out for reassurance brings him back down to earth. He becomes someone with whom we can empathize, because he's fallible and vulnerable. And all that he's achieved becomes even more impressive, because we realize it was the work of a man, not a myth.

Exploring King's humanity is also a project of personal significance for Hall. An African-American woman from Memphis, she grew up literally surrounded by the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement—and aware that, for all the Movement's successes, as a society we still have farther to go in the march toward true equality. For example, despite the substantial progress King made with desegregation in the legal system, Hall's was the only black family in their neighborhood. “I had to contend with people hating me for no reason at all... just due to our unfortunate history as Americans,” she has said. “I just had to figure out, where does this come from? What are we fighting for?” In *The Mountaintop*, we watch King ask himself the same questions and admit to Camae that he feels like a failure. Hall's digging into King's doubts illustrates a difficult answer: meaningful change usually can't be achieved quickly or without struggle, and there's always more to be done. In his “I've Been to the Mountaintop” speech, King envisioned a better future almost within reach—but in Hall's play, no matter how hard he fights the fact of his imminent death, he won't live to see his dream become reality. Now, Hall implies, it's our turn to fight for the better future that King foresaw.

It's no wonder that *The Mountaintop* has resonated with audiences both in America and abroad. Upon its 2009 London premiere, it won the prestigious Olivier Award for Best New Play. In 2011 it was produced on Broadway, starring Samuel L. Jackson and Angela Bassett, and has spread to countless other stages across the country. With heart, humor, and theatrical spectacle, Katori Hall's luminous play reminds us that if King could accomplish so much despite his many foibles, than maybe in our own small ways, we can too. As Hall puts it: “Showing the humanity in our heroes allows us to see the hero in ourselves.”

—Hannah Rae Montgomery



Dr. King delivering a sermon from the pulpit of a church in Atlanta, Ga.

“A beautiful and startling piece...keeps you marveling to the end.”

—*The Independent*

“Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop* crackles with theatricality and a humanity more moving than sainthood.”

—*Newsday*

“*The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall exceeds all expectations: theatrically, emotionally and politically... Rather than polemical agitprop or a reverential portrait, Hall has created a feisty, human, interesting character study, made all the more intriguing by our knowing what is about to happen.”

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN: DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech contains the famous final words of a renowned leader cut down at the pinnacle of his career. Below, a brief timeline documents some key events in his uphill battle for racial and socioeconomic justice.

January 15, 1929

Martin Luther King, Jr. is born Michael King in Atlanta, Ga., to a pastor of the same name.

1934

Reverend King, Sr. changes his name to "Martin Luther," in honor of the German religious reformer. King, Jr. follows suit.

1948

King graduates from Morehouse College and enrolls in Crozer Theological Seminary, where he earns his Bachelor of Divinity in 1951.

1954

King becomes pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala.

June 5, 1955

King receives his Ph.D. from Boston University.

December, 1955

After Rosa Parks' arrest for refusing to give her bus seat to a white man in Alabama, King organizes the Montgomery Bus Boycott to protest segregation on the city's transportation lines. The Boycott lasts for 382 days, and cements King's growing reputation as a crusader for Civil Rights.



Rosa Parks, 1955

1956

On June 4, a federal district court rules that segregation on buses in Alabama is unconstitutional. The case makes it all the way to the Supreme Court, which, on November 13, upholds the district court's decision.

1957

Along with a group of fellow civil rights activists, King founds the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which unites Civil Rights organizations with African-American churches in a non-violent push for reform.

April, 1963

The SCLC campaigns against segregation of public spaces in Birmingham, Ala., by staging peaceful marches and sit-ins. Police respond with such brutality that the footage makes national news. Following an arrest, King composes his famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail," in which he refutes the critique that Civil Rights activists should pursue change gradually through the legal system. The situation, he insists, calls for direct action.

August 28, 1963

King and the SCLC help orchestrate the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, a peaceful demonstration demanding that the government end segregation in schools and discrimination by employers, and increase the minimum wage for African-Americans. More than a quarter of a million people attend; at the time, it is the largest gathering of protesters in D.C. history. King delivers his seminal "I Have a Dream" speech.

July 2, 1964

Thanks to King's efforts, President Lyndon Johnson enacts the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. It also forbids segregation in schools, businesses, and public places.

October 14, 1964

King is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



Marchers reach Montgomery, 1965

March, 1965

King and the SCLC assist with three attempts at a mass march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., to advocate for equal voting rights. The first attempt provokes a nationwide outcry when police attack protesters with tear gas and billy clubs. Only on the third attempt do the protesters reach Montgomery safely. The Selma-Montgomery marches lead to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, which helps to prohibit poll taxes, literacy tests and similar measures practiced by some Southern states to discourage African-Americans from registering to vote. (On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court will overturn significant portions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.)

April 4, 1967

King speaks out against the Vietnam War, in an address titled “Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break Silence.” He argues that money spent on fighting in Vietnam should be used to fight poverty at home. King’s stance on Vietnam reflects the Movement’s growing understanding that the issue of Civil Rights, war and poverty are interconnected.

1968

King focuses increasingly on the plight of America’s poor. He and the SCLC plan the Poor People’s Campaign, aimed at getting the government to direct funds toward urban renewal and closing the wage gap. King strives to assemble “a multi-racial army of the poor” to march on Washington. He’s criticized by other Civil Rights leaders, who say his goals have become too broad.

April 3, 1968

King arrives in Memphis, Tenn., to support black sanitation workers on strike for fairer treatment. He delivers his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address at Mason Temple. The next day, he is assassinated outside his room at the Lorraine Motel. His death provokes riots across the country and he’s mourned by millions, including in an iconic speech by Robert F. Kennedy.

His close associates Reverend Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Jackson, among others, continue King’s work with the SCLC. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan will sign a bill establishing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day to honor King’s inspiring legacy of achieving social change through non-violent action.

—Hannah Rae Montgomery

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech is known not only as the last address King would ever give, but also because in it, he seems to predict his imminent death. Despite private doubts and fears, however, King declares the prospect of death doesn’t bother him; he’s living for a vision of the entire nation’s future, not just his own. And he has faith that one day, America will see that vision realized.

“Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it 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...Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,
speech at Mason Temple, April 3, 1968.

“Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort.”

—Robert F. Kennedy, April 4, 1968.

“By his own accounts, [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] was a man frequently racked with doubt, a man not without flaws, a man who, like Moses before him, more than once questioned why he had been chosen for so arduous a task—the task of leading a people to freedom, the task of healing the festering wounds of a nation’s original sin. And yet lead a nation he did...Like Moses before him, he would never live to see the Promised Land. But from the mountaintop, he pointed the way for us.”

—Barack Obama, address at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
National Memorial Groundbreaking Ceremony,
November 13, 2006.

BRIDGEWORK

BUILDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STAGE AND CLASSROOM

The following exercises combine creative drama, theatre concepts and core content to connect the theatre experience with drama activities in your classroom. By exploring drama as a mode of learning, students strengthen skills for creative problem solving, imagination and critical thinking.

AT YOUR DESK

1. Dr. King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech has been described as prophetic, or accurately predicting the future. Read his speech and identify what he might have anticipated for his own life and for the Civil Rights Movement. Share with a partner or the class what you think he expected and what parts of the text support your opinion.
2. A supporter of non-violent civil disobedience, Dr. King was arrested several times for protesting unfair and unequal treatment of African-Americans. Is there a political, humanitarian or environmental cause that you believe in so strongly that you would be arrested if you thought it would make a difference? If so, what is your cause and why do you believe it is important? If not, how did you come to that decision?

AWAY FROM YOUR DESK

1. "Exploding Atom" activity: Have students stand in a circle. Instruct the students to walk closer to the center of the circle depending on how strongly they agree/disagree with the statement you offer i.e., if they strongly agree they walk to the center, if they have mixed feelings they might walk a few steps in, if they strongly disagree they might take a few steps out of the circle. Start with more low risk statements and then move to more potentially controversial statements. After students move to their spots, give some time for discussion about why people moved where they did.
 - o Potential statements:
 - ✓ I like ice cream.
 - ✓ I like eating the school cafeteria lunch.
 - ✓ I like riding the bus.
 - ✓ I have a strong sense of right and wrong.
 - ✓ I think it's important to talk to people about what I value and care about most in life.
 - ✓ I think it's important to talk to people who disagree with my values.
2. Public vs. Private: In The Mountaintop we see a fictional moment from Dr. King's private life. In this activity students will explore how people present themselves differently in public and private. Have students stand in a circle. Ask students to respond physically to each of the following prompts by creating a silent, still statue with their whole body.
 - o Create a statue that embodies
 - ✓ how you feel today.
 - ✓ how you wish for people to see you in life.
 - ✓ how you feel at home when you're relaxed and by yourself.
 - ✓ how you see the principal at our school.
 - ✓ how you imagine the principal at home.
 - ✓ how you see a favorite celebrity on the red carpet.
 - ✓ how you imagine that same celebrity at home with their family.

Ask students how the statues changed over the course of the exercise. What did they notice? Were there similarities between the various public personas? The private ones? What do they think would happen if you asked the statues to speak? How do the students speak differently in public/at school vs. at home?