

This is no ordinary night...when history meets humanity.

THE MOUNTAIN TOP

By Katori Hall

Directed by Xerron X Mingo



February 4 – 16, 2025

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Study Guide

A HISTORY OF *THE MOUNTAINTOP*



On the evening of April 3, 1968, just one day before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his powerful "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. In it, he declared, "We've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through." Along with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. King had conceived the Poor People's Campaign, which called for economic and human rights for impoverished Americans from all walks of life. Tragically, he was unable to see his vision through. On April 4, 1968, Dr. King was shot on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis at 6:01 p.m. He was rushed to St. Joseph's Hospital, where he was pronounced dead an hour later at 7:05 p.m.

The Mountaintop is a powerful, thought-provoking play that imagines the final night of Dr. King's life. Playwright Katori Hall, a native of Memphis, TN, was deeply influenced by her mother's personal connection to Dr. King's visit to the city. Her mother had wanted to attend his final speech at Mason Temple in 1968 but was prevented from doing so by Hall's grandmother, who feared the church would be bombed. Hall's mother later described it as her greatest regret, as the next day Dr. King was assassinated. Inspired by this legacy, Hall created *The Mountaintop*, where Dr. King meets a maid named Camae, whose name is derived from Hall's mother, Carrie Mae. Hall remarked, "I wanted to put both of them in the same room and give my mother that opportunity that she didn't have in 1968."

The Mountaintop premiered in 2009 at Theatre 503 in London, where it received widespread acclaim for its bold narrative and emotional depth. In March 2010, Hall became the first Black woman in history to win the Olivier Award for Best New Play. The play moved to Broadway in 2011, where it earned a Tony Award nomination for Best Play. *The Mountaintop* invites audiences to reflect on the complexity of Dr. King's legacy and the continuing fight for equality. Through Hall's dynamic storytelling, it has become an important work in contemporary American theatre, blending historical fiction with an intimate portrayal of a pivotal moment in history.

THE MOUNTAINTOP

By Katori Hall

Original Broadway production produced by Jean Doumanian, Sonia Friedman Productions, Ambassador Theatre Group, Raise the Roof 7, Ted Snowdon, Alhadeff Productions/Lauren Doll, B Square + 4 Productions/Broadway Across America, Jacki Barlia Florin/Cooper Federman, Ronnie Planalp/Moellenberg Taylor and Marla Rubin Productions/Blumenthal Performing Arts, in association with Scott Delman.

The Mountaintop was developed at the Lark Play Development Center, New York City, and was first produced by Theatre 503 in June 2009 and further produced at Trafalgar Studio One in July 2009 by Sonia Friedman Productions and Jean Doumanian, Tali Pelman for Ambassador Theatre Group, Bob Bartner, Freddy DeMann, Jerry Frankel, Ted Snowdon and Marla Rubin Productions Ltd.

The Mountaintop was developed at the 2008 Bay Area Playwrights Festival, a program of the Playwrights Foundation (Amy L. Mueller, Artistic Director).

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Any video and/or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

Recommended for ages 14+ Contains strong language.

WARNING: the use of floating turkey feathers and theatrical haze will be used in this production.

Run time is 90 minutes.

SETTING

April 3, 1968. Room 306 at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN

THE CAST

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Shabazz Green*
Camae Anquanizia Hall*

UNDERSTUDIES

Understudies never substitute for listed performers unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance. For Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: Keith Allen Davis, Jr[†]; For Camae: Marquita K. Levy

*Indicates member of the Actors' Equity Association

[†]Indicates Associate Artist

THE CAST



KEITH ALLEN DAVIS, JR.[†] (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. U.S./ Assistant Director) is an actor, writer, musician, and director from Meridian, Miss. He recently received his Bachelor of Arts in theatre arts at Alabama State University. During his time at ASU, he has been cast in and worked on productions such as *Dreamgirls*, *The Wiz*, *Tracks*, *Slammin II*, and *Blues for An Alabama Sky*. He has also written for and co-directed Montgomery, Alabama's performance for the worldwide festival of The Walk (Little Amal) in 2023. Since graduating, he was cast as Tim Allgood in *Noises Off* at New Stage Theatre. He hopes to continue to use all the tools he has acquired from Alabama State to propel him successfully into his professional career. Follow his music and acting pages on Instagram, @thebabyboykeith and @keithalldavisjr !



SHABAZZ GREEN* (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) is thankful to make his New Stage Theatre debut in such a breathtaking play. A New Jersey native, notable New York Credits: *Bars and Measures* (Urban Stages); *Philosophy for Gangsters* (Beckett Theatre); *Intruder: The Musical* (Hudson Guild). Regional productions include: *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The Play That Goes Wrong* (Syracuse Stage); *Oklahoma!*, *A Christmas Carol* (Denver Center for the Performing Arts); *Cinderella*, *Hands on a Hardbody*, *In The Heights* (Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center); *Topdog/Underdog* and *Sister Act* (Lake Dillon Theatre Company), *Mamma Mia* (Village Theatre); *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Greenbrier Valley Theatre); *The Ballad of Trayvon Martin* (New Freedom Theatre); *Little Rock* (Passage Theatre). Shabazz also appeared on screen in the film *Romance in the Digital Age*. FEAR NOT! @shabazzgreen www.shabazzgreen.com



ANQUANIZIA HALL* (Camae) A native of Meridian, MS, is an award-winning director, actor, writer, and singer. She is the owner and CEO of Rosebud Productions, LLC based here in MS. Hall attended college in Los Angeles at AMDA College and Conservatory of the Performing Arts where she graduated with honors and received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting. You can find Hall in projects on Amazon Prime and Tubi. Her first supporting role in a film was acting alongside GRAMMY winner, Cedric Burnside. Hall has been seen onstage as Beverly in *Chicken & Biscuits* at New Stage, *Dreamgirls*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Trouble in Mind*, and more. Hall is now preparing for a role that will be filmed in Los Angeles, preparing for grad school, and allowing God to lead her path (Matthew 6:33). AnquaniziaHall.com. Thank you Xerron, Francine, and New Stage for another wonderful experience.



MARQUITA K. LEVY (Camae U.S.) is excited to be returning to New Stage Theatre! She is a graduate of THEE Jackson State University, where she received her B.S. in mass communications. Levy last appeared at New Stage as Nancy in *Gaslight*. Additional New Stage credits include *Chicken and Biscuits*, *Lend Me a Soprano*, *Clue*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, and several Unframed Productions. Levy would like to thank her family and friends for their continuous love & support.

PRODUCTION TEAM

XERRON MINGO (Director/Education Director) is a graduate of Florida A&M University. Born and raised in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. While living in New York City, he worked as a health & safety manager for Apple TV and HGTV productions. He also worked as a testing secretary and production coordinator for television shows with LIONSGATE and AppleMusic Reviews. For the past ten summers, Mingo has worked at Raquette Lake Camps teaching musical theatre to students from all across the world. Mingo could not be more blessed to continue teaching, coaching, and mentoring in his third season as Education Director at New Stage Theatre. During New Stage's 58th season on our mainstage, he directed *Chicken & Biscuits* and *Sister Act, Jr.* Mingo also directed the touring productions of *Junie B. Jones*, *The Musical*, *Anne & Emmett*, and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Unframed). Mingo played the Macy's Store Manager in *Elf, The Musical* and served as the choreographer for the production. He also directed *Mean Girls, Jr.* and played the role of Gabriel in *Fences*. Mingo also played the role of Fezziwig in *A Christmas Carol* at New Stage in 2021. He has worked professionally at a plethora of regional theaters in a handful of states. Mingo continues to live in the light and encourages everyone else to do the same.

MATTEA PIERCE (Production Stage Manager) is a graduate of Belhaven University with degrees in both theatre and graphic design. Past New Stage credits for Stage Management include: *Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*, *Gaslight*, *Noises Off*, *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, *Lend Me a Soprano*, *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *Elf The Musical*, *The Secret Garden*, *Chicken & Biscuits*, and *Ring of Fire* (ASM). She is excited to be a part of New Stage's 59th Season – Your Place for Broadway Shows.



CASEY NELMS (Production Manager) is a proud Mississippian born and raised in Pearl, Miss. She received her Bachelor of social work from Belhaven University followed by her master's of social work from the University of Southern California. While living in Los Angeles, she transitioned from a robust therapy career to producing and supervising productions in the film industry. Nelms has been fortunate enough to work with companies such as Lionsgate, Patriot Pictures, and Convoke Media, as well as many others, and now happily serves as production manager at New Stage Theatre. She lives on the Ross Barnett Reservoir with her husband and their two droopy-faced beagles, Olive and Mabel.

ALBERTO MEZA (Sound/Projection Designer and Company Liason) is a graduate of Belhaven University with a BFA in Theatre. He is from Brandon, MS and is grateful to work in the only professional regional theatre in Mississippi. He began working with New Stage Theatre in 2020 and has continued to work in multiple positions over the recent years. Some of his regional design credits for both Sound and Projections include: *Pipeline*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *A Christmas Carol*, *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, *Clue*, *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Ring of Fire*, *Elf The Musical*, *Chicken and Biscuits*, *Beautiful*, *Gaslight*, and *Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*. He worked with Belhaven University Theatre as their professional guest artist as the Sound Engineer/Designer for their main stage productions, *Wizard of Oz*, *The Spitfire Grill*, and *Cinderella*. He recently had the opportunity to be the Lighting Designer in New Stage Theatre's recent production of *Gaslight* and he was able to Light Design with Hinds CC on their show *Radium Girls* and was able to work as a guest Technical Director at Wells APAC for their recent dance program, *Rodeo*. Meza was the streamer and editor behind the Thursday Night Virtual Plays, Conversations, & Cocktails that was presented over the virtual season at New Stage Theatre.

BRADEN GRAVES (Scenic Designer) is a scenic and lighting designer and technical director. He teaches theatre design at Belhaven University and has previously collaborated with New Stage Theatre on *Elf the Musical*, *Beautiful the Carole King Musical*, and *Million Dollar Quartet Christmas*. Braden earned his BA in theatre from George Fox University and his MFA from The Ohio State University. His past work includes designing and constructing productions for Broadway Rose Theatre Company, Actors Theatre Columbus, and The Contemporary Theatre Co., as well as serving as a designer and fabricator for Curtis Elliott Design Ltd. His designs have been recognized by the Kennedy Center, USITT, and SETC, and he was featured in the 2023 USITT Emerging Artist Showcase.

RICHARD LAWRENCE (Technical Director) serves as the parliamentarian of Fondren Theatre Workshop and has appeared in *A Christmas Memory* at New Stage, FTW's *The Rocky Horror Show*, *Buck Nekkid for Jesus*, directed FTW's *Every Christmas Story Ever Told*, and most recently appeared as Trekkie Monster in *Avenue Q*. He was also the director of the widely successful productions of *Cabaret* and *Company*, which were joint productions of FTW and Actor's Playhouse of Pearl, with support from New Stage. Lawrence has been seen

in New Stage productions of *The Trip to Bountiful* and UnFramed's *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues, How I Learned to Drive, The Weir, Circle Mirror Transformation,* and *Dublin Carol*. Lawrence has won three Best Set awards at Mississippi Theatre Association conferences, and has also won Best Set at Southeastern Theatre Conference.

MATTHEW WEBB (Lighting Designer) is thrilled to return to New Stage this season, having previously lit *Beautiful, Clue, 9 to 5,* and *I Just Stopped By to See the Man*. Regionally, Matt's designed with Arkansas Rep in Little Rock, Playhouse on the Square in Memphis, and Cumberland County Playhouse in east Tennessee. Nationally, he's worked with Seattle Rep, Arden Theatre, Asolo Rep, Syracuse Stage, Seattle Children's Theatre, the Contemporary American Theater Festival, ZACH Theatre, and many others. Matt, a proud Mississippi State University alum and former faculty member, is currently the Assistant Professor of Lighting Design at the University of Houston, and he holds an MFA from the University of Washington. www.mwebbdesign.com

DEONICA DAVIS (Costume Designer) is from Pearl, MS with her BFA from The University of Southern Mississippi. She is a graphic designer by day and seamstress and maker by night. She recently brought her talents to New Stage, starting as a volunteer and eventually earning the title of Costume Designer for plays such as *Anne and Emmett, Sunset Baby* and *Acts of Creation. Chicken and Biscuits* was her first mainstage production to costume for working alongside Caleb Blackwell. Deonica's costume work can also be found at Pearl Community Theater; most recently their production of Disney's *Moana Jr*.

JOEY FORD (Properties Designer) was born in Atlanta and raised in Salt Lake City UT. He is a born problem solver and a maker by trade. In addition to fabricating sets and props for New Stage, Joey works as a prop maker and production assistant on high-definition film shoots and has solid computer and audio/video skills. When not at New Stage, he is a practiced fire breather and bakes apple pies from scratch.

CREW

Assistant Director	Keith Allen Davis Jr.†
Lead Electrician	Matthew McMurtry
Costume Shop Supervisor	Nina Frost
Scenic Artist	Michael "Monte" Montgomery
Production Assistant	Darby Frost
Construction	Ness Koegel, Antonio Juarez, Joey Ford, Dave Ellis, Jimmy Robertson
Running Crew	Joey Ford, Cecil Hill, Oliver Morgan, Keith Allen Davis, Jr.†, Cameron Vipperman†, Tatiana Grace†, Jacob Heuer†, Ashlyn Pinkerton†
Light Board Operator	Michael "Monte" Montgomery
Sound Board Operator	Callie Jackson
Company Liason	Alberto Meza

†Indicates Associate Artist

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.

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.



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!”

📖 The full text of “The Mountaintop” speech can be found at www.americanrhetoric.com.

QUESTIONS

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

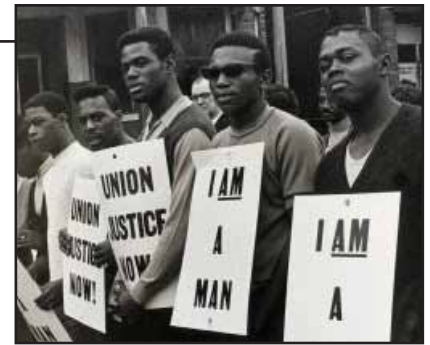
Dr. King is remembered as a great public speaker. What rhetorical devices does he use in the speech to captivate the audience?

From this speech, how does King imagine the future of the civil rights struggle?

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 across the way 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

- 1954 — U.S. Supreme Court declares school segregation unconstitutional in ***Brown v. Board of Education*** ruling.
- 1955 — Rosa Parks refuses to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, as required by city ordinance; the **Montgomery Bus Boycott** follows, and the bus segregation ordinance is eventually declared unconstitutional.
- 
- Rosa Parks
- 1957 — The federal government uses the military to uphold African-Americans’ civil rights as soldiers escort nine black students to desegregate **Little Rock High School**.
- 1960 — 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, launching sit-ins across the South.
- 
- The Greensboro Sit-in
- 1962 — **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.”
- 
- Malcolm X
- 1963 — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his **“I Have a Dream” speech** to hundreds of thousands of supporters during the March on Washington, the largest Civil Rights march in history.
- 
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 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

Audience Etiquette



For many of your students, *The Mountaintop* may be their first theatre experience. It may be helpful to discuss with them the expected behavior of an audience. New Stage asks that prior to the performance, students are made aware of the following:

- Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- Be sure to go to the bathroom before the performance begins. It is hard to leave once the performance begins.
- Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- Please do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- Absolutely no gum chewing, eating or drinking in the theatre.

Noise

Live theatre means live actors who can hear not only what is happening on the stage, but in the audience as well. While laughter and applause at appropriate time are appreciated by the actors, excessive noise and talking is not. Even whispering voices can be distracting to the actors and others in the audience.

- Do not talk during the performance.
- Cell phones are prohibited in the theatre. If you have one turn it off and put it away and do not bring it out during the performance.

Applause

Applause is used to acknowledge the performers and to voice appreciation or approval. Traditionally, applause comes before intermission and during curtain call which happens at the end of a performance when the cast returns to the stage for bows.

About **New Stage Theatre**

*Winner of the 2019 Governor Arts Award for Excellence
in Theatre, located in the heart of Jackson.*



The Theatre

New Stage Theatre is located in Jackson, Mississippi. New Stage Theatre was chartered as a nonprofit organization in 1965 and produced its initial season in the winter and spring of 1966. New Stage's first home was an adapted church at the corner of Gallatin and Hooker Streets. The theatre produced 13 seasons in the 150-seat church before moving to its present site in Belhaven in 1978.

Built in 1963 for the Jackson Little Theatre, the 12,000 square foot structure includes the 364-seat Meyer Crystal Auditorium, and a flexible, smaller performing space, the Jimmy Hewes Room. The theatre also owns the five other structures on the site, four of which are used for actors' housing and one for offices. In 1997, the theatre complex was designated as the Jane Reid Petty Theatre Center in recognition of the New Stage founder's contributions to the development of professional theatre in Mississippi.



The Mission

The mission of New Stage Theatre is to provide professional theatre of the highest quality for the people of Mississippi and the southeast. New Stage is committed to producing important contemporary works and classics, selected for their artistic merit and their power to illuminate the human condition. Challenging new works in development are included through the Eudora Welty New Play Series named for the distinguished writer who helped found New Stage. New in recent years is The Mississippi Plays Series.

More about **New Stage Theatre**

The theatre is dedicated to cultivating and educating a culturally diverse audience by gathering the finest available resources including playwrights, actors, directors, designers, technicians, administrators, trainees, and board members. Integral to the theatre's total effort, New Stage's Education Department maximizes its impact within our surrounding community, through artistic and technical apprenticeships, which mount touring programs facilitated by our Apprentice Company, aided with classroom materials for schools statewide, and developing curricula for and instructing youth classes.



Mainstage Productions

New Stage produces five plays each year in its subscription series, in addition to a holiday show, an annual student matinee, and a musical theatre summer camp featuring local youth. Mainstage productions range from master works to contemporary classics to new plays. All productions carry the mark of professional quality for which the theatre has long been recognized. Additionally, New Stage has a second season called Unframed, overseen by Artistic Director Francine Reynolds and facilitated by our Apprentice Company and Education staff, that features contemporary works. New plays are read and developed through the Eudora Welty New Plays Series and the Mississippi Plays Series.



The Staff

The theatre staff is comprised of seven full time administrative and artistic staff members, six full time production staff members, four acting apprentices, and three part time employees. All actors are paid and typically one to two AEA actors are hired per production.

Study Guide: *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall

TEACHER EVALUATION FORM

Name: _____ School: _____

What is your overall reaction to the production?

How would you rate the production values of the performance (costumes, set, props, lighting, special effects)?

How did your students react to the production?

Please comment on the educational value of the program.

What is your overall reaction to the question and answer (talk-back) session?

How did you hear about New Stage's production of *The Mountaintop*? What other plays would you like your students to see?

How could this Study Guide be more effective for use in your classroom? Please explain.

Please have your students fill out the enclosed student evaluation forms. We want to hear from them too! Evaluations not only help us improve our programming, but help us find sponsorship for bringing quality theatre to you!! Thank you for your continued support!

Please return this form with any additional comments to:

New Stage Theatre Education

1100 Carlisle Street, Jackson, MS 39202, or email to xmingo@newstagetheatre.com

STUDY GUIDE: *The Mountaintop* by Katori Hall

STUDENT EVALUATION FORM

Name: _____ School: _____ Grade _____

What was your overall reaction to the play?

How would you rate the production values of the play (costumes, scenery, props, lighting, special effects)?

What was your favorite part of the play?

Did you learn anything from this production? If so, what?

Which character in the play did you most identify with? Why?

Have you ever seen professional theatre production at New Stage or elsewhere? Would you recommend a friend to see a production at New Stage and why?

What other stories would you enjoy seeing staged by live actors?

Other comments and observations:

Please return this form with any additional comments to:

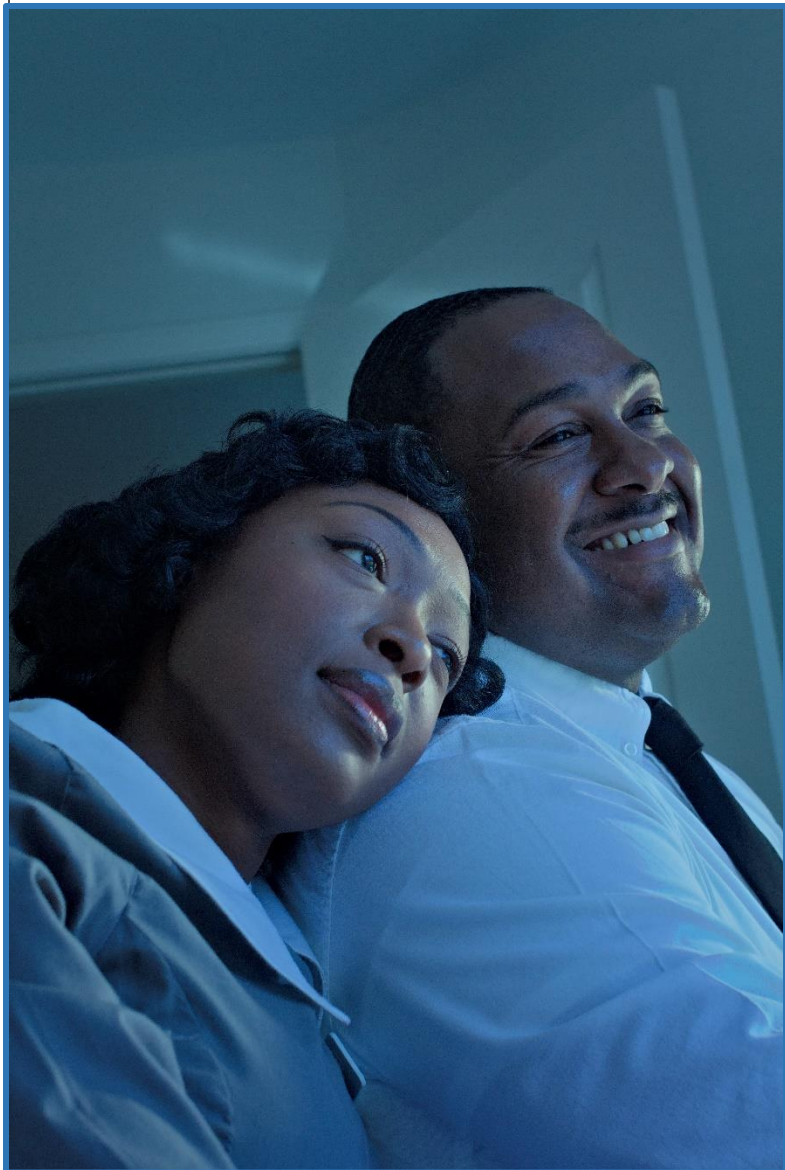
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Some of the material in this study guide was provided by The Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. New Stage is grateful for their contribution.

The Cast of New Stage Theatre's Production of *The Mountaintop* in photos below.



THE MOUNTAINTOP
By Katori Hall
Directed by Xerron X Mingo
February 4 – 16, 2025
This is no ordinary night...when history meets humanity.