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THE PLAY

The year is 1968 and the Civil Rights Movement is splintering. African-American sanitation workers in Memphis are on strike. The last march that Civil Rights Movement leader Martin Luther King, Jr. organized on their behalf took a violent turn. Now King is back in Memphis doggedly striving for a peaceful outcome for the striking workers.

It is the evening of April 3, the night before King's assassination. He has just given his famous "Mountaintop" speech to a Memphis congregation. Weary and hoarse, he returns to the Lorraine Motel in downtown Memphis.

During his last night on earth, King is visited by Camae, a beautiful Lorraine Motel maid who comes to deliver his coffee. As they get to know each other, discussing the state of civil rights and racial equality in America and smoking Pall Malls, we have an intimate introduction to the very personal Martin Luther King, Jr. What is King like when he steps down from his pulpit as leader? What does it take for one man to lead such an important and trying movement? What happens when he has to face his mortality before his mission is fulfilled? ●

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THE MOUNTAINTOP

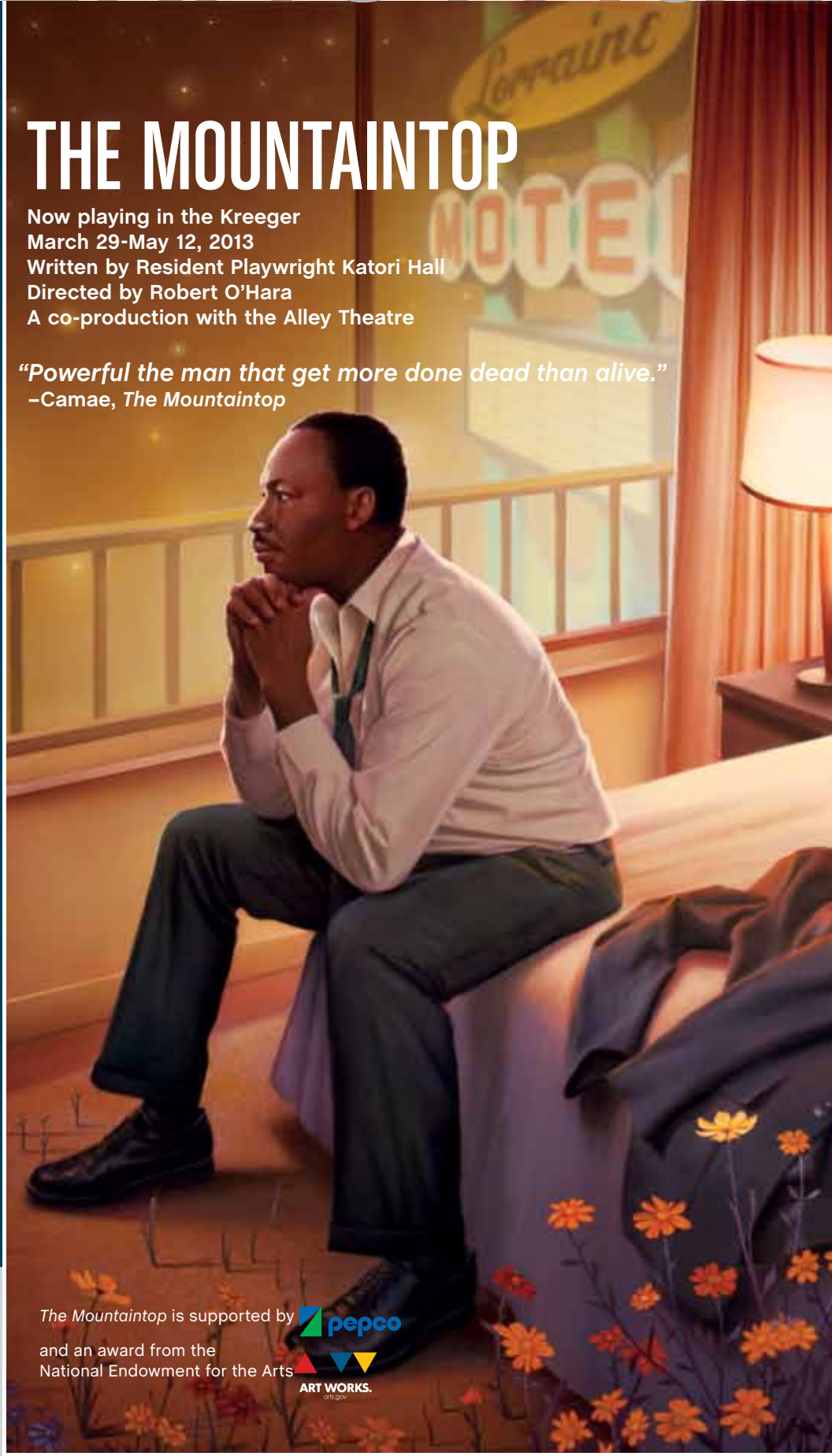
Now playing in the Kreeger
March 29-May 12, 2013

Written by Resident Playwright Katori Hall

Directed by Robert O'Hara

A co-production with the Alley Theatre

*"Powerful the man that get more done dead than alive."
-Camae, The Mountaintop*



The Mountaintop is supported by 

and an award from the
National Endowment for the Arts

 ART WORKS.
arts.gov

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:



Katori Hall

"I want people in the audience to be like, 'If this man – who is so much a human being – can achieve such great things, then I, as this complicated human being, can create great things too.'"

–Katori Hall

Growing up in Memphis, Tennessee as the youngest of four siblings, Katori Hall began acting at a young age. She was an imaginative child, and said she had about 15 imaginary friends. She also had dreams of a life in New York City.

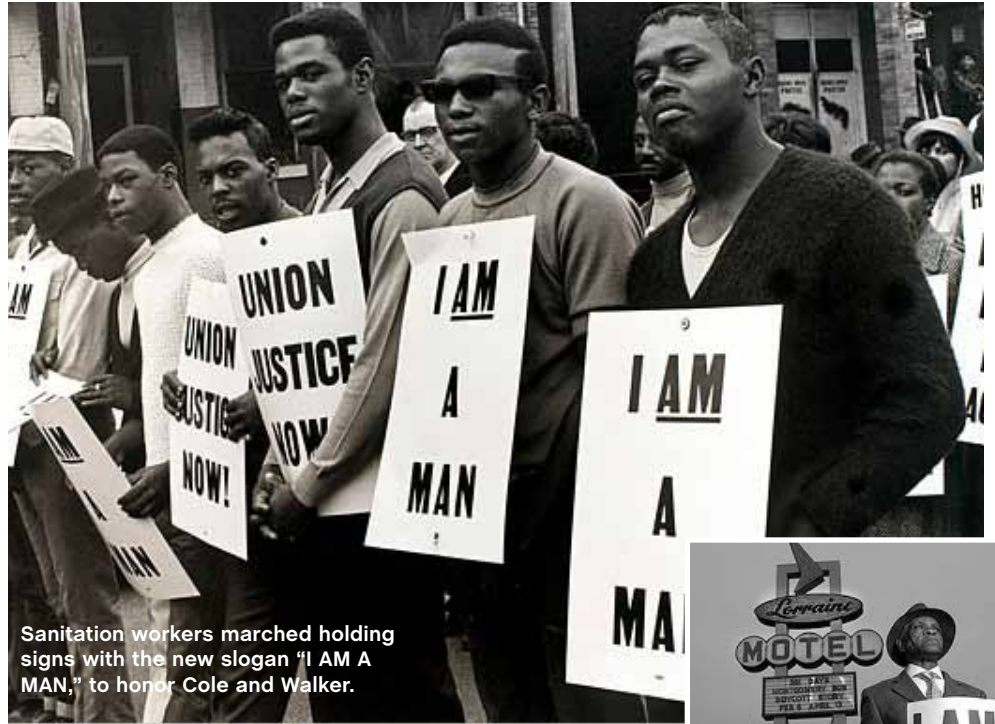
She went on to study acting at Columbia University. At Columbia, she and her scene partner were supposed to research scenes for their type (the characters an actor is most likely to play because of age, race, etc.). They could not find any scenes for two young African-American women. Hall realized, "If I really want to see myself in all my beauty and complexity staring back at me I would have to do it myself."

After she graduated from Columbia, Hall studied at the American Repertory Theatre Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University, and then at the Juilliard School's Lila Acheson Wallace playwriting program. Her plays include *Hurt Village*, *Hoodoo Love*, *Remembrance* and *WHADDABLOODCLOT!!!!*.

In 2010, at age 28, Hall became the first black woman in history to win the Olivier Award, Britain's equivalent to the Tony Award, for Best New Play for *The Mountaintop*. The play opened on Broadway in 2011 starring Samuel L. Jackson and Angela Bassett.

Camae is named for Hall's mother. Carrie Mae was not allowed to see King speak in 1968 because her mother thought it was too dangerous. Through Camae, Hall's mother finally gets to meet King.

1968 SANITATION WORKERS STRIKE IN MEMPHIS



Sanitation workers marched holding signs with the new slogan "I AM A MAN," to honor Cole and Walker.



Sanitation jobs (like trash collection) were low-paying, highly dangerous and

almost entirely occupied by African-American men. The Memphis sanitation workers wanted pay raises, union recognition, safety equipment, leave for inclement weather and health benefits. Tension between the sanitation workers and the city of Memphis was building when two events triggered the strike.

During a heavy rainstorm in February of 1968, two Memphis sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed when the trash compactor of a truck was accidentally turned on. On that same day, in the terrible weather, 21 black sewer workers were cut without pay while their white supervisors stayed on for the day with pay. As a result, 930 of the sanitation workers in Memphis walked off the job.

Immediately Mayor Loeb announced the strike was illegal. The City Council, along with representatives from both black and white civic groups, tried to resolve the conflict with Loeb, but to no avail. Local clergy and community leaders began a campaign, including boycotts and **civil disobedience**. With arrests and violence, the strike became a major civil rights struggle with national attention.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. agreed to support the

sanitation workers and to lead a large march and work stoppage on March 28, 1968. Almost 1,300 striking sanitation workers marched, many with their families. A bomb threat delayed King's flight and, by the time he arrived, violence had broken out. King made it away safely, but about 60 people were hurt. One young man named Larry Payne was killed. King was distraught. He negotiated with the disagreeing parties and committed to a peaceful march scheduled for April.

King was assassinated before the march took place. His assassination intensified the strike. The fear of riot spread and still Loeb refused to make any compromises. On April 8, 1968, 42,000 people joined in a silent march with King's widow. Eight days later, the union was recognized, wages were increased, and the strike ended.

civil disobedience - the refusal to obey certain laws or governmental demands in order to provoke changes in legislation or government policy, characterized by nonviolent techniques like marching, boycotting, picketing and nonpayment of taxes.



CIVIL RIGHTS, 1968

The Civil Rights Movement did not end with King's assassination, but it was in the midst of a major shift. The Civil Rights Movement began as a movement dedicated to African Americans gaining equal access to the basic rights of U.S. citizenship. It took place at the local and national level with the most momentum during the 1950s and 1960s. Civil rights activists pursued goals of equality through the legal process, negotiations amongst civic leaders, petitions, and nonviolent sit-ins, marches and boycotts.

In the mid-1960s, the movement was transitioning from an emphasis on racial discrimination and voting rights to an emphasis on dignity, self-sufficiency and freedom from oppression. While many African-American activists continued to work through national organizations and nonviolent demonstrations, young people in particular were frustrated with the slow progress and persisting racial injustice. Some were becoming more militant. Major organizations like the Student



Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, led by Stokely Carmichael, began to call for "Black Power" rather than racial integration. Malcolm X encouraged self-defense in the face of attack. The Black Panther Party

gained support, advocating community organization and service projects, but also armed resistance when necessary.

Before his death, Martin Luther King, Jr. was working tirelessly to keep the peace and to broaden the movement's focus to include jobs and freedom from poverty for all people. ●

a! ACTIVITY: What are current events in civil rights? Choose a recent event in local or national news and explain how it fits into the struggle for civil rights.

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT TIMELINE

Martin Luther King, Jr. was an important leader of the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle for African Americans to achieve equal rights. These included equal opportunity for and access to voting, housing, education, employment and public facilities.



1954 - **Brown v. Board of Education** decision is reached by the Supreme Court, a major legal victory during the Civil Rights Movement in which racial segregation was legally outlawed in public schools.



1955 - **Rosa Parks** organizes a successful 381-day boycott of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama to protest segregated seating in 1955. Martin Luther King, Jr. joined and gained recognition.



1957 - King forms the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)** and successfully draws on the power of black churches as a part of the civil rights movement.



1960 - **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** is founded; lunch counter sit-ins begin.



1961 - SNCC organizes the **Freedom Rides of 1961**- Both black and white Freedom Riders rode commercial buses from Washington, D.C. into the South to test the 1960 Supreme Court decision to outlaw segregation in interstate transportation terminals. Riders are beaten, arrested, and have their bus burned. However, this prompts the court to enforce the desegregation ruling.



1963 - Eugene "Bull" Connor, Birmingham's commissioner of public safety, ruthlessly uses police dogs, fire hoses, violence, and arrests against King's nonviolent demonstrations. This brutality gets the attention of President John F. Kennedy's administration.

King delivers his "**I Have a Dream**" speech to a 250,000-person march on Washington.



1964 - **The Civil Rights Act of 1964** is passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. It bans racial discrimination in public areas including: hotels, restaurants, education, and other public spaces and legally created equal job opportunities.

King receives the Nobel Peace Prize.



1965 - **Malcolm X** is assassinated. He was a proponent of the black Muslim faith. He confronted the mainstream nonviolent civil rights movement by urging followers to defend themselves against white aggression "by any means necessary."

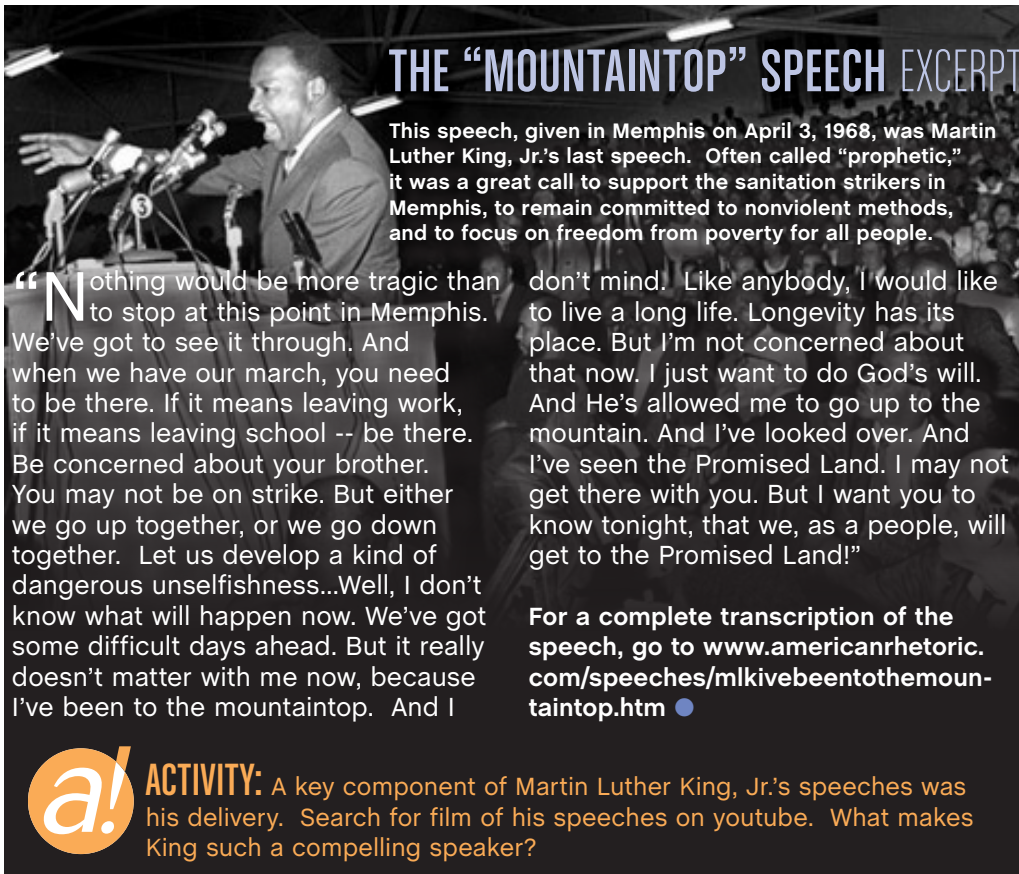
1966 - **Stokely Carmichael** becomes chairman of the SNCC and begins drawing the group away from nonviolence and calling for "Black Power." **The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense** is founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, advocating self-defense among minority communities against the U.S. government, and revolutionary socialism through mass organizing and community-based programs.



1967 - King begins the **Poor People's Campaign**, focusing on jobs and freedom for the poor of all races.

1968 - King delivers the "Mountaintop" speech. **King is assassinated** on April 4. SCLC leads the march with Coretta Scott King to end the Sanitation Strike in Memphis on April 8, 1968.

a! ACTIVITY: At the end of the play, Camae gives a different sort of timeline in her "the baton passes on" speech. When you watch the play, see how many references you understand. Which ones don't you understand? Research what they are and why they fit in her speech.



THE "MOUNTAINTOP" SPEECH EXCERPT

This speech, given in Memphis on April 3, 1968, was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last speech. Often called "prophetic," it was a great call to support the sanitation strikers in Memphis, to remain committed to nonviolent methods, and to focus on freedom from poverty for all people.

“Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school -- be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together. Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness...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!"

For a complete transcription of the speech, go to www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm ●

a! ACTIVITY: A key component of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches was his delivery. Search for film of his speeches on youtube. What makes King such a compelling speaker?

THE ASSASSINATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Standing on the balcony of room 306 at the Lorraine Motel, Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed by a sniper's bullet. The shot hit at 6:05 PM on April 4, 1968 and, though King was rushed to the hospital, he was pronounced dead one hour later. His assassination sparked riots across the United States, resulting in more than 40 deaths and damage in over 100 cities. After King's death, President Lyndon B. Johnson called for a day of national mourning.

The play is set on the eve of this assassination. We know that the man we see on stage will die the next evening, although he has no idea. Knowing something as the audience that the characters on stage don't know is called "dramatic irony."

THREE What makes a leader?
ONE What is the current state and the future of civil rights in the United States?
TWO
THREE What is the relationship between a public figure's public and private life?
BIG QUESTIONS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ON THE WEB

The King Center (largest repository of MLK primary source material):
www.thekingcenter.org

Remembering MLK's Prophetic "Mountaintop" Speech:
www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89326670

Freedom's Story: Teaching African-American Literature & History:
www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org

The Civil Rights Movement: www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement

Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
- Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
- Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
- Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

Enjoy the show!



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