

# The Mountaintop Study Guide



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# Synopsis



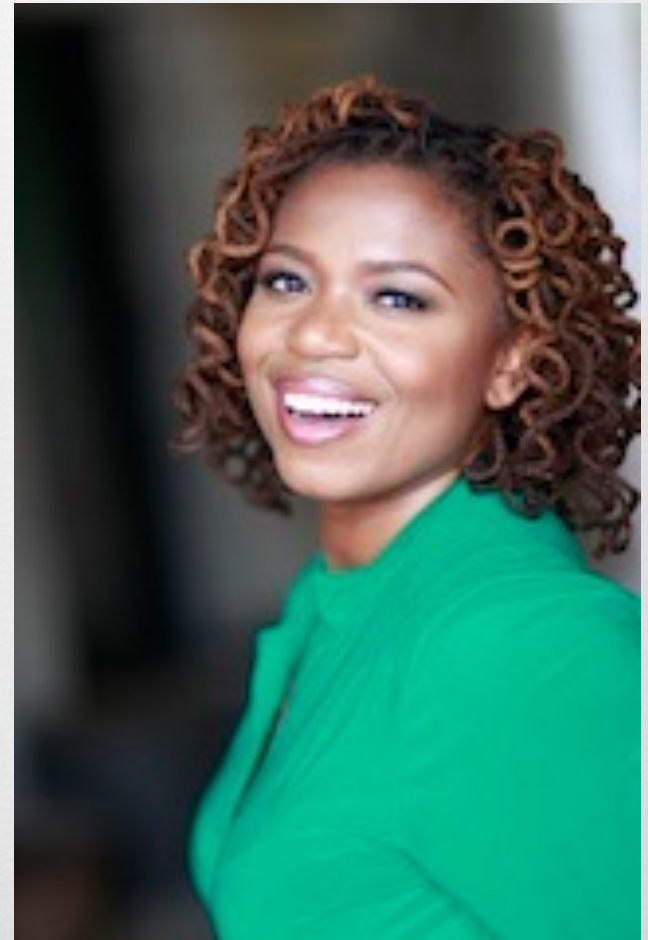
❧ **The Mountaintop** is a two person drama which imagines the last hours of the life of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The entire play is set in Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel, the evening before his assassination. King is alone, trying to create yet another powerful speech. When he orders a cup of coffee from room service, a mysterious woman arrives, bringing much more than a late-night beverage. What follows is a reflective, often funny, and touching conversation in which Dr. King examines his achievements, his failures, and his dreams.

# Katori Hall

## Playwright



- ☞ Born: May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1981
- ☞ Hometown: Memphis TN
- ☞ Education:
  - ☞ Columbia University
    - ☞ African American Studies
    - ☞ Creative Writing
  - ☞ Harvard University
    - ☞ Master of Fine Arts in Acting
  - ☞ Juilliard
    - ☞ Graduate of the Playwriting Program
- ☞ Themes revolve around the African American experience and the many struggles therein



# Words from the Playwright



☞ “To many people, [*The Mountaintop*] is almost blasphemous: How dare you take King off a pedestal? I say, How dare I not? I’m a dramatist. I’m supposed to put human beings on stage. People are people. People bleed. People die. People are afraid. My purpose is to tell stories that wouldn’t necessarily be told.”

- Katori Hall



NPR Interview with  
Katori Hall:

<https://tinyurl.com/hn5ap7w>

# Production History

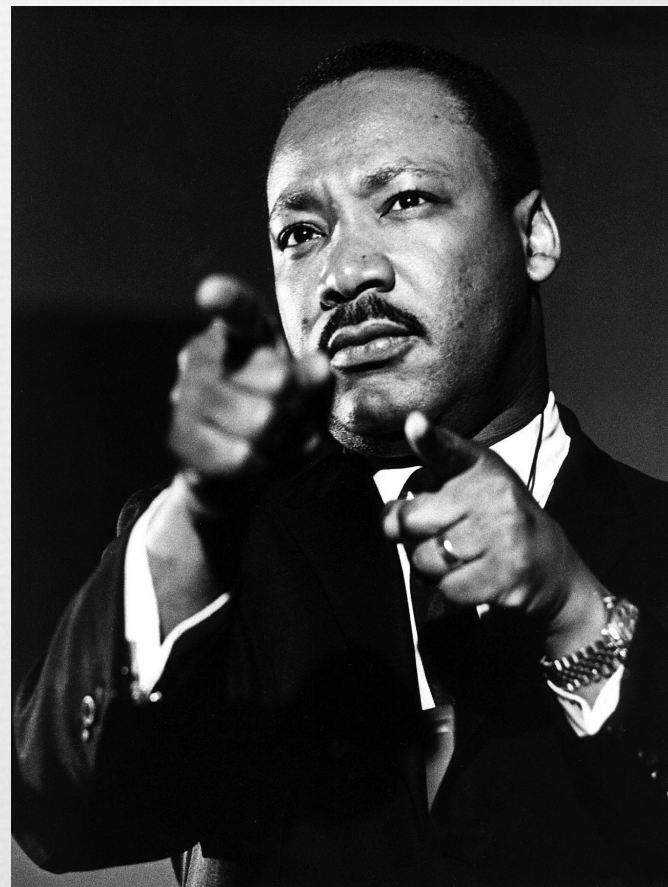


- ❧ Premiered in London in June of 2009
- ❧ Three week, sold out engagement
- ❧ Led to a run on the West end
- ❧ Won the Laurence Olivier Best New Play Award
  - ❧ Katori Hall was the First black woman to receive this honor
- ❧ Broadway Premier – September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011
  - ❧ Samuel L. Jackson made his Broadway debut alongside Angela Bassett
  - ❧ Closed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012

# Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



- œ Born; January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1929 Atlanta, GA
- œ Died: April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968 Memphis, TN
- œ Nobel Peace Prize Winner – 1963
- œ Presidential Medal of Freedom – 1977
- œ Congressional Gold Medal – 2004



# Martin Luther King Jr.

as a

# Civil Rights Leader



- ❧ 3<sup>rd</sup> generation pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta
- ❧ Education: Atlanta Public Schools – Morehouse College – Crozer Theological Seminary – Boston College
- ❧ Following his graduation from Boston, Dr. King and his wife, Coretta, moved to Montgomery Alabama
  - ❧ Here he became a leader of the 1955 Bus Boycott
- ❧ Dr. King spoke at over 2,500 public events
  - ❧ One year delivering as many as 450 individual public speeches
- ❧ Iconic proponent of nonviolence
  - ❧ Influenced by Mohandas Gandhi
  - ❧ Winner of Nobel Peace Prize
  - ❧ Face and leader of many iconic largely peaceful marches and protests



# The Mountaintop Speech



On the night of April 3, 1968 King gave a speech at the Mason Temple Church in Memphis. This speech is more commonly known as *The Mountaintop* speech. In it he seemed to foreshadow his own untimely passing, or at least to strike a particularly reflective note, ending with these historic words: “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 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 Assassination



- Initially delayed by a bomb threat on his plane, Dr. King arrived in Memphis Tennessee on Wednesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968 to prepare for a march the following Monday.
- The next evening, as he prepared to leave the Lorraine Motel for a dinner at the home of Memphis minister Samuel Kyles, King stepped out onto the balcony of room 306 to speak with friends and colleagues standing in the parking area below. In this moment, an assassin fired a single shot that caused severe wounds to the lower right side of King's face and neck. An ambulance rushed King to St. Joseph's Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead at 7:05 P.M.



# The Lorraine Motel



Room 306 was often referred to as the “King/Abernathy Suite” due the frequency with which Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy utilized the room.



Following the assassination of Dr. King, the Lorraine Motel was turned into a National Civil Rights museum, with a focus on preserving room 306 as it was on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968



# Themes



## ❧ To Err is Human

❧ In writing the play, Katori Hall chose to explicitly portray Dr. King as imperfect. The audience is made aware of several faults which serve to make his story approachable and his legacy honest.

## ❧ Forgiveness

❧ In our imperfection, we often turn to forgiveness for redemption and assurance. This play touches on the forgiving nature of God in a unique way and also addresses the importance of learning to forgive oneself.

# Works Cited



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