

STUDY GUIDE

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

THE MOUNTAIN TOP



THE MOUNTAINTOP

06.06–07.09.2023

GIL CATES THEATER

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Brian Dunning, Amy Levinson, Elizabeth Kegley, Tara Ricasa

STUDY GUIDE COMPILED BY

Brian Allman

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ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

THE MOUNTAINTOP

WRITTEN BY
KATORI HALL

DIRECTED BY
PATRICIA MCGREGOR

SCENIC DESIGNER
RACHEL MYERS

COSTUME DESIGNER
MYLETTE NORA

LIGHTING DESIGNER
LAP CHI CHU

SOUND DESIGNER
CRICKET S. MYERS

PROJECTION DESIGNER
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PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER
ALYSSA ESCALANTE

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
AMBER R. DETTEMERS

CASTING DIRECTOR
PHYLLIS SCHURINGA, CSA

CAST



**JON MICHAEL
HILL**
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



**AMANDA
WARREN**
CMAE

SYNOPSIS

It's April 3, 1968, and Martin Luther King, Jr. returns to the Lorraine Motel after delivering his history-altering "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. When he orders room service, a young maid arrives with a revelation that calls Dr. King to confront unwelcome truths. As a lightning storm rages outside, the legacy of America's most revered civil rights leader is laid bare to reveal his profound humanity. A single night's reckoning with racism, righteousness, and the rocky path toward justice, *The Mountaintop* imagines what Dr. King's last night on Earth could have been.

RUNNING TIME 90 minutes, no intermission.

PRODUCTION NOTES Contains the smoking of herbal cigarettes, profanity, and discussions of adult subject matter including violence and infidelity.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



KATORI HALL *Playwright*

Olivier Award-winning and two-time Tony Award-nominated Memphis native Katori Hall is the book writer and co-producer of the West End and Broadway hit, *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*. She's the executive producer and showrunner of *P-Valley*, the breakout Starz drama based on her play *Pussy Valley*. Katori's latest piece, *The Hot Wing King*, premiered in spring 2020 at Signature Theatre, rounding out her three-play residency and winning a Pulitzer Prize. She is best known for *The Mountaintop*.

The play, which fictionalizes the last night in Martin Luther King's life, won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2010. Katori's other works include the award-winning *Hurt Village*, *Hoodoo Love*, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, and *The Blood Quilt*. She is the director of the award-winning short *Arkabutla*. Katori is an alumna of Columbia University, ART at Harvard University, and Juilliard. She's a graduate of the Sundance Episodic Lab's inaugural class, the Sundance Screenwriting Lab, and Ryan Murphy's Half Initiative Directing Program. Katori's other awards include a Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, The Lark Play Development Center Playwrights of New York (PoNY) Fellowship, National Black Theatre's August Wilson Playwriting Award, NAACP Image Award for Best Television Drama, and many more.



PATRICIA MCGREGOR *Director*

Born in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, Patricia McGregor is the Artistic Director of New York Theatre Workshop, as well as a director and writer working across disciplines. Los Angeles credits include *Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole* (co-writer and director; Geffen Playhouse); *Skeleton Crew* (Geffen Playhouse); *Good Grief* (Center Theatre Group); *Place* (Los Angeles Philharmonic, Brooklyn Academy of Music); *Sisters in Law* (Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts); *Shakespeare: Call and Response*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *What You Are*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Measure for Measure* (The Old Globe). McGregor has twice been profiled by

The New York Times for her direction of world premieres. New York credits include *Hamlet* (The Public Theater); *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Roundabout Theatre Company); *bronsville song (b-side for tray)* (Lincoln Center Theater); *Indomitable: James Brown* (Apollo Theater); *Holding It Down* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art); *Adoration of the Old Woman* (INTAR Theatre); *Blood Dazzler* (Harlem Stage); *Four Electric Ghosts* (The Kitchen); and the world premiere of *Hurt Village* (Signature Theatre Company). Other credits include *The Parchman Hour* (Guthrie Theater); *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Spunk* (Cal Shakes). She was a Paul & Daisy Soros Fellow at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale.

MLK JR., RADICAL



PHOTO COURTESY UNSEEN HISTORIES/UNSPLASH

Martin Luther King was no prophet of unity. He was a radical. Martin Luther King, Jr. is useful to just about everyone nowadays. For President Donald Trump, celebrating King is a chance to tell everyone that he shares “his dream of equality, freedom, justice, and peace.” For Ram trucks, it’s a chance to well, sell trucks.

This wasn’t always the case. In 1983, 15 years after King’s death, 22 senators voted against an official holiday honoring him on the third Monday in January. The North Carolina senator Jesse Helms undertook a 16-day filibuster of the bill, claiming that King’s “action-oriented Marxism” was “not compatible with the concepts of this country”. He was joined in his opposition by Senators John McCain, Orrin Hatch, and Chuck Grassley, among others.

[President] Reagan reluctantly signed the legislation, all the while grumbling that he would have preferred “a day similar to Lincoln’s birthday, which is not technically a national holiday.” And guess what? He had a reason to be hesitant. The real Martin Luther King, Jr. stood for a radical vision of equality, justice, and anti-militarism that rebelled against Reagan’s entire agenda. Today more than ever, we need to rediscover that champion of working people.

The *Disneyfied* version of Dr. King begins and ends with his role as a civil rights leader, who summoned Christian teachings, as well as Gandhian tactics, and told us of his dream that “one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’”

But in the same oft-quoted *I Have a Dream* speech from 1963, King celebrated the “marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community” and spoke of the “fierce urgency of now”. For his own militancy, King was hounded by the FBI, denounced as a communist, and bombarded with death threats. Only 22% of Americans approved of the Freedom Rides fighting segregated transportation. By the mid-1960s, 63% of Americans had an unfavorable opinion of King, according to polls.

THEMES & TOPICS

Martin Luther King Jr was a part of a much wider movement, standing alongside socialists such as Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin, and A Philip Randolph in not just attempting to dismantle the Jim Crow system, but replacing it with an egalitarian social democracy.

Despite President Lyndon Johnson's shepherding of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, ending legal apartheid in the United States, King became even more radical as the decade went on. As he put it in 1967: "We aren't merely struggling to integrate a lunch counter now. We're struggling to get some money to be able to buy a hamburger or a steak when we get to the counter."

King wasn't willing to drop his internationalist commitments to achieve this change. He had long been a supporter of anti-colonial struggles in developing countries and in an April 1967 address at Riverside Church in Harlem, he alienated his liberal allies by challenging the slaughter in Vietnam and the broader system of imperialism that made poor people, black and white alike, "kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools". Despite rebukes from more than 160 newspaper editorials the next day and his permanent alienation from liberal allies in the Democratic party, he pressed on.

Now calling himself a democratic socialist, through his Poor People's Campaign, King was set to create the kind of movement that could fight for not just political but economic freedom for all. He wasn't *just* a civil rights activist, he was a tribune for a multiracial working-class - people who faced poverty, racism, and joblessness, but who when banded together could wield tremendous power.

King traveled to Memphis in April 1968, where he was assassinated by white supremacist James Earl Ray, to support striking sanitation workers. His advisers warned against the trip. There were the threats to his life, and there were other campaigns and commitments too. But King knew he had to be there. He knew what side he was on.

Martin Luther King Jr wasn't a prophet of unity. He was a champion of the poor and oppressed. And if we want to truly honor his legacy, we'll struggle to finish this work.

SOURCE

Courtesy of TheGuardian.com, "Martin Luther King was no prophet of unity. He was a radical" by Bhaskar Sunkara

‘NOT RACIST’ IS NOT ENOUGH: PUTTING IN THE WORK TO BE ANTI-RACIST



PHOTO COURTESY UNSEEN HISTORIES/UNSPLASH

by Eric Deggans

When the topic of racism comes up, I often think of a billboard in the small town of Harrison, Arkansas. It was a sign promoting a white supremacist radio station called White Pride Radio. The sign’s message, emblazoned next to the picture of a cute-looking white girl with a cute-looking dog, read “It’s not racist to [heart] your people.”

My takeaway: Even white supremacists don’t want to be called racist.

Which might explain why, for people dedicated to fighting racism, simply saying you’re “not racist” doesn’t feel like quite enough. To effectively defeat systemic racism—racism embedded as normal practice in institutions like education and law enforcement—you’ve got to be continually working towards equality for all races, striving to undo racism in your mind, your personal environment and the wider world.

In other words, you’ve got to be anti-racist.

You may know me as NPR’s TV critic. But I’ve also spent years exploring how systemic racism affects media and society. I’ve written a book about it, called *Race-Baiter*, and built a TEDx talk around how to talk about race across racial lines. As a Black man who speaks often on these subjects, I find race, racism and anti-racism to be things people think they know but often don’t—at least, not as well as they think they do.

As the world continues to sort through a racial and civil rights reckoning kicked off by police killings of Black people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, now more than ever, people want to know how to be anti-racist. After talking to a few experts, I and the good folks at Life Kit have come up with a few suggestions.

Tip #1: Accept that we've all been raised in a society that elevates white culture over others. Being anti-racist will mean first challenging those notions inside yourself.

This was one of the most important takeaways from my conversation with Anneliese A. Singh, who just joined Tulane University as its first Associate Provost for Diversity and Faculty Development. She's also written a workbook on these issues called *The Racial Healing Handbook*. "Everyone who lives in the United States kind of learns some form of anti-Black racism," Singh says. "I think we have to ask ourselves that question...How does anti-Black racism live within us?" Singh calls white supremacy "white body supremacy," a term used by therapist Resmaa Menakem, as a way to emphasize how racism has a visceral, physical impact; elevating white bodies, and bringing trauma to non-white ones.

She suggests some people may even go through a process similar to the stages of grief—especially those who have privilege because of their white or light skin—when they uncover their unconscious bias and realize how extensively systemic racism affects their perspectives. "I'm going to be in denial if I'm white or have light skin about how white supremacy works," she says. "[We'll move] through that denial into some anger...And then when we go into acceptance, I think then we can really leverage our lives to make a difference."

Tip #2: Learn the history of racism and anti-racism, especially in America, to educate yourself about the complexities of the issues you'll be confronting.

A glance at the 2020 bestseller lists reveals lots of great books on anti-racism, from Ibram X. Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist* to Layla Saad's *Me and White Supremacy* and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. Most of them note that, for white folks, anti-racism involves learning to accept that white people have a racial culture, too. I've said white supremacy's greatest advantage is that white racial culture in America is often treated like it's invisible; not directly talked about among white people, some of whom joke that they have no culture.

Singh says people of color can benefit from similar study and introspection, with a particular focus on identifying and challenging any ideas that may breed colorism or contempt for other non-white groups. She calls this dynamic of elevating whiteness among non-white people, "internalized whiteness."

One important note for white people: When people of color share their experiences with white supremacy, believe them.

"I can't tell you how many people I've seen who claim to be anti-racist and care about building anti-racist organizations," Singh says. "But when people of color speak, they're like, 'Oh, well, they're doing it wrong.' Or 'That's one (person's experience).' You have an opportunity in that moment to believe what that person is saying."

Tip #3: Seek out films and TV shows which will challenge your notions of race and culture and dive in deeply, learning to see anti-racism in new ways.

I'm probably biased, but I've always felt TV shows and films teach us how to dream about what is possible in society and what ought to be. (For example: I insist Morgan Freeman's performance as a Black American president in *Deep Impact* and Dennis Haysbert's turn as President David Palmer on *24* made it easier for some voters to imagine a Black POTUS when Barack Obama came around.)

So I wasn't that surprised when Justin Simien, creator of the Netflix drama *Dear White People*, told me viewership for his series jumped 600 percent after George Floyd's death sparked an international dialogue on anti-racism. *Dear White People* centers on a group of non-white students at a mostly white, Ivy League college as they negotiate issues of identity, classism, anti-racism vs racism, homophobia and more. One poignant storyline features a young Black student, Reggie Green, who is nearly shot by a campus security guard at a party. Reggie then finds himself haunted by flashbacks of the traumatic event as well-meaning acquaintances attempt to check in on him. Simien says the scenes with Reggie show, without lecturing the audience, how attempts to ask a Black person about racial trauma can sometimes backfire.

"The whole goal of it is for you to care so deeply about these [characters] that you don't realize you're being taught anything," he adds. "When you see that he had a gun pulled on him and he had this near-death experience, and now for the rest of the school year, everyone's coming up to him asking him, 'Are you OK? Is there anything I can do?' You understand how that's not enough."

THEMES & TOPICS

Simien suggests viewers pass up “feel good” TV shows and films showing indisputably virtuous Black people overcoming racism, often in the Jim Crow South, with help from well-meaning white people (in other words, skip screenings of *The Help* or *Green Book*.) Well-made TV shows and films about anti-racism should be messier and much more provocative. “You should feel challenged in some way by the piece because it’s so subversive,” Simien says. “[Racism is] ubiquitous and it’s systemic and we can’t see it...Racism lives in our collective blindspots. That’s why it’s so pernicious. So, there has to be a moment in the piece where you go, ‘Oh! I didn’t think about it like that.’”

The goal: to expose yourself to art that cuts through prejudices and stereotypes, allowing you to finally, fully see people of color.

“I had a friend put it this way,” Simien says. “We’re inviting people to see us for the first time and it should break your heart that you haven’t seen us yet’...That I have to interact with you through a character version of myself because I think you can’t handle my daily truth. [That] should break your heart.”

Tip #4: Find local organizations involved in anti-racism efforts—preferably led by people of color—and help uplift their voices and ideas.

This tip comes courtesy of Arisha Hatch, the Vice President and Chief of Campaigns at Color of Change—a civil rights organization founded in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina. She says learning to uplift non-white voices—even those who may disagree with you—is important for white people seeking to be anti-racist. “Part of being an ally and part of letting go of privilege is, I think, putting yourselves in situations where you may be uncomfortable,” Hatch adds. “You may have a different idea, but...you’re actively working to support organizers and activists who have been thinking about these systemic problems for generations.”

Also, Hatch says to be an effective anti-racist, you must assess your own power—where are the spheres where *you* can have the most influence? Beyond the

obvious strategy of confronting family and friends who may be racist, consider this: When you sit down at a PTA meeting at your child’s school, which parents do you speak with and get to know? At work, are you considering how procedures or strategies may advantage whiteness, and are you helping to challenge them?

Are you spending money with businesses that are owned by non-white people? If you or a relative has a rental property, are you seriously considering applications from non-white people? These are ways you can make a difference in your own environment, where *you* have power. Remember, anti-racism is about pushing past knowing better and instead actively doing better.

One thing is clear: Pulling all of this off takes a lot of energy and can feel overwhelming. And it doesn’t help that one way people perpetuate systemic racism in America is by encouraging others to accept the status quo and reject many anti-racist ideas as too extreme. But there is no better feeling than really making progress on working to build a better world. And these tips offer great ideas for starting on a long and rewarding road.

Above all, Color of Change’s Hatch suggests keeping one, optimistic thing in mind.

“This is what winning looks like and feels like,” she says of the current drive toward racial equity in law enforcement, politics, corporate America and elsewhere. “The moral arc of history is on our side and we are getting closer and closer every day to a culture that actually embraces the beauty and creativity of Black people in our lives.”

SOURCE

Courtesy of NPR. Eric Deggans; [tinyurl.com/27s2cys6](https://www.tinyurl.com/27s2cys6)

CONTINUING MARTIN'S MESSAGE: bell hooks



PHOTO COURTESY/KARJEAN LEVINE/GETTY IMAGES

Born in Kentucky in 1952, bell hooks would travel to the West Coast for an undergraduate degree at Stanford, and go on to have a successful career as a writer (she published over a dozen books) and as an educator and activist (she taught at numerous prestigious universities, including Stanford and Yale, and engaged with audiences as a speaker throughout her life). But bell hooks was more than a scholar. Her ideas are original and radical, and they continue to impact the lives of people who've read her and find themselves at the margins of society. This is so because bell hooks did more than write about oppression, marginalization, feminism, capitalism, and black liberation. She also managed to tie all of these struggles, histories, and experiences together in such a way that, no matter who you are, what she has to say speaks to you because she shows you how they have impacted—and continue to impact—your life.

Writing as a black woman, who had lived through the terrors of the Jim Crow South, bell hooks was most concerned with critiquing and dismantling what she would later call the **dominator culture** in the United States—"the system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." In a nutshell, the struggles against racism, sexism, and economic inequality are interwoven together, and we can't understand or liberate ourselves from any one of these struggles alone without also understanding and liberating ourselves from the other two struggles. These struggles are all of our struggles because we were all born into, or now live in, the same dominating and violent American culture. This idea is the main insight of bell hook's thought, and it is what makes her such an original, radical thinker and writer. It is what makes her relevant today.

SOURCE

Courtesy of uncoverkc.org,
"Remembering bell hooks on
Martin Luther King Jr Day"
tinyurl.com/4sdyanza

THEMES & TOPICS

Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (1981) is bell hook's classic work. She talks about the history of the black liberation movement from a feminist lens, including about the patriarchy in the black liberation movement and how the feminist movement, led by mostly white women, often excluded or marginalized their black sisters.

Another book, which any residents of Kansas or Missouri who have ever questioned whether they belong in their home state may find interesting, is ***Belonging: A culture of place*** (2009). In this book, bell hooks recalls her experience of returning home to Kentucky after living on the east and west coasts. She talks about how she dealt with returning to the place where she experienced trauma in her childhood and how she rediscovered an independent, non-conformist, anti-racist "culture of anarchy" exemplified by "Appalachian black folks" which had been suppressed by the culture of white supremacy.

A more gentle introduction to bell hook's ideas is her book ***Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*** (2000). In this book, she explains what feminism is and why anyone should care, no matter who you are, and she does so using compelling and non-academic language.

Finally, in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr., who preached love and understanding instead of hate and fear, we recommend bell hook's book, ***all about love*** (2001). In this book, bell hooks talks about the healing power of love—of self-love, sexual love, romantic love, of letting yourself be loved—even after experiencing trauma and the hatred and violence of others. By coming to accept ourselves, and accepting love into our lives, which is something Martin Luther King, Jr. would also suggest we do, we can allow ourselves not to live in fear and not to meet violence with violence. As bell hooks says:

"The transformative power of love is not fully embraced in our society because we often wrongly believe that torment and anguish are our "natural" condition. This assumption seems to be affirmed by the ongoing tragedy that prevails in modern society. In a world anguished by rampant destruction, fear prevails. When we love, we no longer allow our hearts to be held captive by fear. The desire to be powerful is rooted in the intensity of fear. Power gives us the illusion of having triumphed over fear, over our need for love."

DID YOU KNOW?

- Author bell hooks (September 25, 1952 – December 15, 2021) opted not to capitalize her name, hoping to keep the public's focus on her work. Born Gloria Jean Watkins, the writer changed her name to honor the name of her great-grandmother.

ALL THE KING'S MEN

Oscar Wilde was the first to pen the phrase, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." In the Geffen Playhouse production of *The Mountaintop*, Jon Michael Hill takes on the role of preacher Martin Luther King, Jr. Take a look back at some of the other incredible artists that too have played the inspirational activist.

PAUL WINFIELD

Paul Winfield was the first to star as the civil rights leader, in NBC's 1978 television miniseries *King*. The three-part series garnered a total of eight Emmy nominations (including an outstanding lead actor nod for Winfield) and one win for music composition.

JAMES EARL JONES

The 1982 miniseries *Freedom to Speak*, which featured a wide range of historical figures including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sojourner Truth, and Daniel Webster, saw James Earl Jones portray both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Frederick Douglass.

ROBERT GUILLAUME

Then best known for his role in the Golden Globe-nominated series *Benson*, Robert Guillaume portrayed the leader in the 1985 film *Prince Jack*, which chronicled the presidency of John F. Kennedy.

CLIFTON POWELL

Clifton Powell portrayed the activist in ABC's TV movie *Selma, Lord, Selma*. Set in 1960s Alabama, the 1999 drama centered on a young girl's bold decision to join the civil rights movement upon being stirred by one of King's speeches.

COURTNEY B VANCE

Courtney B. Vance played King in the television miniseries *Parting the Waters* in 2000. He went on to win an Emmy for portraying another real-life person, Johnnie Cochran, for 2016's *The People v. O. J. Simpson: American Crime Story*.

LEVAR BURTON

Alongside film lead Will Smith, LeVar Burton starred as King in 2001's *Ali*. The film, set mainly during the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, told the story of pro boxer Muhammad Ali.

JEFFREY WRIGHT

In the 2001 TV movie *Boycott*, Jeffrey Wright and Carmen Ejogo portrayed Dr. King and his wife Coretta Scott King (Ejogo played the role of King's wife again in 2014's *Selma*). The film raked in three nominations and one win at the NAACP Image Awards.

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

In his Broadway debut in 2011, Samuel L. Jackson portrayed King in the stage production *The Mountaintop*. The play was set in Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis and depicted the leader's final moments before his assassination.

DEXTER SCOTT KING

Dexter Scott King, the second son of King and wife Coretta, starred as his own father in 2002's *The Rosa Parks Story*, a TV movie based on the life of civil rights activist Rosa Parks.

MALIK YOBA

Malik Yoba starred as the leader in 2013's *Betty & Coretta*. The TV movie, which traced the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's widowed wives following their husbands' assassination, featured Mary J. Blige and Angela Bassett as Coretta Scott King and Betty Shabazz.

NELSAN ELLIS

True Blood's Nelsan Ellis brought King to the screen in *Lee Daniels' The Butler*. The 2013 film followed White House butler Cecil Gaines (played by Forest Whitaker) as he lived through the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and other milestones in history. Oprah Winfrey and David Oyelowo co-starred.

DAVID OYELOWO

David Oyelowo took on the leading role of director Ava DuVernay's 2014 King biopic *Selma*, which depicted King's 1965 voting rights campaign and the famed march from Selma to Montgomery. The actor earned a Golden Globe nomination for his performance.

SOURCE

Courtesy of The Hollywood Reporter; "Martin Luther King, Jr. in Hollywood: 12 Actors Who've Played the Activist" tinyurl.com/y9bdyrk9

ABOUT EDUCATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PHOTO COURTESY HISTORY IN HD/UNSPASH



MLK in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday, August 28, 1963. The purpose of the march was to advocate for the civil and economic rights of African Americans.

While both parties attempt to claim Dr. King, the Republicans have a much harder time doing so without distorting history and the truth. But the truth is, most politicians would distance themselves from Dr. King's stunning (and spot-on) indictments of capitalism.*

The United States education system is failing its students—despite the best efforts of teachers. The lack of a nationwide curriculum, a devastating underfunding crisis, and an overall scarcity of resources put the U.S. in the 22nd ranking of the 2019 Worldwide Educating for the Future Index, down four spots from 2018. The supposed “greatest country in the world” didn’t even crack the top 10 in best education systems globally when measured by “policy approaches, teaching conditions, and broader gauges of societal freedom and openness” as opposed to exam-like outputs, which the U.S. system prioritizes. Whether it’s woefully lacking sex education or inaccurate history lessons, the country’s patchwork education system not only leaves a lot to be desired but perpetuates systemic classism, sexism, and other discriminatory biases. In 2021, at least 21 states have introduced legislation that would limit the discussion of race and racism in public schools.

A successful education system is more than top exam scores. A good education will prepare its students for the future outside of their classroom. It will include curricula left out of dated textbooks; provide an honest, unflinching account of the world we live in; empower students to get involved with issues they care about and seek more information on their own. This kind of up-to-date, quality education should be available to all students, regardless of the tax bracket or geographic location of their school districts.

Capitalism is defined as an economic system in which a country’s trade, industry, and profits are controlled by private companies. The United States and many other nations around the world are capitalist countries, but capitalism is not the only economic system available.

Younger Americans, in particular, are challenging long-held assumptions about the way our economy functions. With climate crisis posing a grave threat to our collective future, millions living below the poverty line, the economic and social shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and unemployment wave still reverberating, and the richest 1% accumulating ever-more wealth, Gen Z and Millennials say they have grown increasingly disillusioned with capitalism.**

“We must recognize that we can’t solve our problem now until there is a radical redistribution of economic and political power... this means a revolution of values and other things. We must see now that the evils of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism are all tied together... you can’t really get rid of one without getting rid of the others... the whole structure of American life must be changed. America is a hypocritical nation and [we] must put [our] own house in order.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr. in a report to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Staff, May 1967.*

SOURCES

Courtesy of: *Katie Halper, CommonDreams.org (tinyurl.com/yc35xb59)

**Kim Kelly, Teenvogue.com (tinyurl.com/yckjdk6w)

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL



“Separate but Equal”... Without these eyes, I couldn’t see you... Without this nose, I couldn’t know you...Without these lips, I couldn’t touch you...So stop tearing me apart...Because without this face you couldn’t feel me...It’s an open-ended story of getting to know the face that you see every day when you look in the mirror... don’t judge...

“Separate but Equal” was inspired by my acute awareness that my smile upon greeting someone makes me completely approachable to strangers. Then, I had the secondary thought that not everyone uses a smile as an invitation and how different life can be.



“Separate but Equal” was created in July 2022 by Lonnie Hughes, ACTivator (Instagram: @Hollywoodjunkii).

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN ALLMAN



What is your position and how long have you been at the Geffen?

My position at the Geffen Playhouse is Director of Education & Community Engagement. I have been running the Education & Community Engagement department off and on since 2020 and officially became Department Director in September of 2022. I have been working with Geffen Education since 2015.

What educational, artistic, and professional experiences led to your working at the Geffen?

My key experiences start in the Midwest, with my 20+ years of work and training with ComedySportz. At the time, I directed the largest high school improvisation training program in the nation. In my undergrad, I studied Film & Theater at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. After moving to Los Angeles, I received my M.F.A. from UCLA in Theater, Film, & Television. During my 19 years in Los Angeles, I have trained, taught, and worked with The Actors' Gang, Improv Olympic, The Bootleg Theater, UCLA, Geffen Playhouse, and A Fairy Hunt Children's Theater. In 2015, I became a Geffen Teaching Artist. In 2016, I became the Artistic Director of the award-winning Defiance Theater Company in North Hollywood. I was also an elected member of the NoHo Neighborhood Council for District 5. I also acted as Secretary, and as Chair of the Arts & Humanities Committee. In 2019, I became the Manager of Theater Education for Geffen Playhouse.

What are your primary responsibilities as Director of Education & Community Engagement?

My primary responsibilities are to set and maintain a budget for Education & Community Engagement programs, develop and oversee lesson plan facilitation, schedule and attend workshops, and supervise a fantastic team of teaching artists.

What key skills and dispositions does one need to possess as a department director in this day and age?

I approach my role as Director of the Education & Community Engagement department with respect for diversity, fighting for

equity, and championing inclusion. This is manifested in lesson planning, use of vocabulary and communication, hiring and maintaining staff, and budgeting. I show up every day with an "anti-racist" attitude and agenda.

How important is an Education & Community Engagement department to a theater company?

Not all theater companies have an Education or Community Engagement department. Geffen Playhouse stands out for its unique theater-making modules, complete student experiences, and exceptional staff. One of the basic building blocks of theater is education, or imparting important information that others need to improve their lives. Likewise, performing for an audience is all about community engagement. I am proud of how much Geffen Education & Community focuses on our school and community partners.

Was there a pivotal moment when you realized you wanted a life in the arts or did it occur incrementally?

In 7th grade, I stepped out onto the stage of my middle school's cafe/gym/auditorium, in a Western version of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. I received a round of applause for committing to my character's heavy, rolling gait; fake mustache; over-the-top cowboy drawl. It was a complete out-of-body experience, and I knew at that moment I would commit my life to the theater. I appreciate my parent's support of my dreams.

What do you find most challenging about your work?

The most challenging part of my work is finding time to facilitate workshops like I did when I was a part-time teaching artist. I spend more time in my cubicle than in the classroom.

What do you find most rewarding?

The most rewarding part of my job is educating others in theater arts at a not-for-profit organization like Geffen Playhouse.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette.”

THE AUDIENCE’S ROLE The audience plays an essential role during the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring their performance to life.

THE AUDIENCE’S EXPERIENCE Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important to engage in behaviors that will not disturb or distract them—nor fellow audience members. These actions include:

- Turn off cell phones during the performance
- Remain seated until the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking before or after the show, or during intermissions
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops before play begins
- Keep your focus on the action happening onstage.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, and kindly request that you do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.

We recommend that you post your responses and thoughts in the lobby after the performance, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and to continue the conversation with us online.

AUDIENCE AWARENESS ACTIVITY Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- If you were onstage performing in a play, how would you want the audience to behave?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



PHOTO BY JEFF LORCH

Depending on the time available and your participants' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate and respect differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching this show? Engaged? Conflicted? Amused? Inspired? Provoked? Put off? What made you feel this way?
- What other versions or interpretations of the story of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life have you seen before? How does this version compare to others?
- What did you enjoy most about the play? What did you find difficult to enjoy? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- How would you describe the inner life of each character in the play? Are they conflicted? If so, how and why?
- Did you identify or empathize with any of the characters? If so, which character(s) and why? If not, why not?
- How familiar were you with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s personal life?
- How have racist ideas and laws impacted your daily life?
- What did you find most moving about the play?
- What did you appreciate most about the actors' performances?
- How did the set, props, costumes, lighting, and sound contribute to the impact of the show?
- What is your reaction to the reveal about Camae's character?
- Would you recommend this production of *The Mountaintop* to other theatergoers? Why or why not?

RESOURCES

JOIN the NAACP at www.naacp.org/join-naacp/become-member.

CALL the National Drug Hotline at **1-844-289-0879** if you or a family member needs help.

LEARN more about Implicit Bias and Structural Racialization at the National Equity Project at tinyurl.com/NEPimplicitbias.

EDUCATE YOURSELF about everyday words and phrases that have racist connotations at tinyurl.com/CNNwords.

KNOW more about how white privilege protects white people in every aspect imaginable at tinyurl.com/EFwhiteprivilege.

LISTEN to how the FBI tried to destroy MLK with wiretaps, and blackmail at npr.org/transcripts/956741992.

LOCATE your local library to learn more about Martin Luther King, Jr. at lacountylibrary.org/library-locator.

OVERCOME your biases by walking boldly toward them with Verna Myers at youtu.be/uYyvbgiNZkQ.

REACH OUT to the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health if you are suffering from overwhelming grief or loss at dmh.lacounty.gov/resources/grief-loss.

READ the letter that the FBI sent to MLK while in jail at tinyurl.com/VOXletter.

WATCH MLK talk about the “New Phase” of Civil Rights Struggle at youtu.be/2xsbt3a7K-8.

TEXT OR CALL “988” nationwide to connect directly to the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

VIEW 48 protest photographs that changed the world at tinyurl.com/48pictures.

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