

Black Studies 4235  
Fall, 2005  
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30F Ketchum  
MWF 0900-0950; ABA  
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## I. SYNOPSIS

### **THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

Justice, love and hope. Racism, poverty and war. The first describes the man, Martin Luther King, Jr. and his goals; the second describes the issues of his time. From November 1955, until his death on 4 April 1968, King was a significant player on the public stage. During these years, we know him principally as a civil rights leader and antiwar activist. However, he was much more. Indeed, now that there is a federal holiday symbolizing what he stood for, what he believed, and the goals he sought, there is the danger of forgetting that he was a man subject to the shortcomings of any man. That his agenda of realizing the Beloved Community, where people are evaluated in terms of the content of their characters rather than the color of their skins, is only partially realized and in real danger of being reversed. Not only has the United States become more conservative and less humane in the years since his death, it is in the process of redefining and repositioning itself in keeping with the demands of a new century. This new positioning, in my opinion, will further distance it from a sensitive and conscious attention to its domestic needs resulting in a more oppressive and less democratic society than was the case before especially now that terrorism is a topic of everyday conversation and the subject of harsher and more stringent policies from the legislative arena. Thus, the focus of this course is directed toward understanding the man, his times and the work he was about (altering the balance of power in US society to better realize the founding concepts of "America"—Freedom, Liberty, Equality, and Justice—and their import for our times) before he was brutally assassinated while lending moral support to a garbage collector's strike in Memphis, Tennessee.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS OF INSTRUCTION

### A. Background readings:

1. Peter J. Ling, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*
2. James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope.*
3. Vincent Harding, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### B. Supplementary readings. I will make these available directly after the course begins. They are intended to supplement the background readings and amplify selected course topics.

### C. Methods of Instruction

1. Structurally, this course is organized around several significant events in the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. They are: Origins and early training; the Montgomery Bus Boycott; The Era of "nonviolence;" The Challenge of Black Power and the war in Vietnam; and the meaning of Martin Luther King, Jr. in this day and at this time.

2. Operationally, the course is intended more as forum than lecture. What this means is that you must prepare for each class session because it is probable that you will be asked to offer a synopsis of and opinion on the materials you have read and/either participate in student-led small discussion groups at each meeting. Accordingly, to successfully transit the course, you are required first, to take responsibility for the quality of your own education because education, as distinct from schooling, is a participatory process; the instructor helps those who help themselves. To learn you must question: what you know, what you believe, and, what you have previously taken on faith. Second, you must acquire discipline (the ability to focus and utilize your resources efficaciously) that will assist you in securing mastery over whatever talents you possess. No matter how much talent you believe you have, if you have no discipline, you have no talent. And third, you must commit to excellence however you choose to define that word. These tasks begin with your reading and finishing the Ling book as quickly as you can as it is intended to provide biographical context for the course. You are then encouraged to begin reading the Washington volume as it contains many of the speeches and writings King gave during his public period. Finally, there is the Harding volume authored by one of King's speechwriters and a critical thinker in his own right. As you go through them prepare questions that might assist you to seek out the circumstances that attended each item you examine and acquire a sense of what meaning that item has for you in this day and time. Use these questions to explore issues of value and ideal that inform American society, the character of its moral compass and its progression towards securing the goals articulated in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States.

**WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE PERFECT UNION, ESTABLISH JUSTICE, INSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY, PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENCE, PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY, DO ORDAIN AND ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.**

As written, this goal statement superintends six core values to which there have been differing levels of commitment in the 214 years since its ratification. They are: Individuality and achievement; Liberty; Political Equality; Rule by Law; Self-

government; and Capitalism. Clearly, there is inherent conflict in the articulation of these values given the social origins, interests, and standing of their authors.

There is also, in the way the society has evolved, a lost-prevention character inherent in the realization of these values as the several constituencies that comprise the American People—in particular those on the periphery of the society—have engaged the obstacle course and scavenger hunt called the American Dream. One question that might help you here is raised in Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment adopted in 1868: In our consideration of the character of social relations is there a difference between equal treatment and treatment as an equal? If there is a difference in your mind, what meaning do you make of it? And finally, what is the import thereof for the realization of the earlier cited goals?

### III. TOPICAL OUTLINE

- A. Black History and Black Protest
- B. The Black Church as Vehicle for Black Liberation
- C. A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- D. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Some Aspects of his Theology
- E. The Montgomery Bus Boycott
- F. The Era of "Nonviolence"
- G. The Challenge of Black Power
- H. The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- I. Death and Transfiguration
- J. The Meaning of Martin Luther King, Jr.

#### IV. MEASURES AND METHODS OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

There will be two measures of performance evaluation used in this course this term. They are both written and each is worth 45 percent of your final grade for a total of 90 percent.

A. The late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was of the opinion that a man is not fully alive until he has found something for which he is willing to die. Employing that notion as conceptual model, your task this semester is one of increasing self-awareness by focusing on two questions: "What for me is important?" And, "What am I willing to do to get what I want?" These questions are directed at assisting you to get a sense of your own moral compass and how you employ it to make choices the *sine qua non* (essence) of life. Accordingly, in the first of your two written assignments this term, you will line out a response to question one (1) listing two or three items ordinarily in terms of their significance for you. Next, you will describe and explain the ways in which these items are important and how they came to be so. You are restricted here to not less than four (4) or more than six (6) pages total. In doing this you might want to use King's life as witness for elucidating the ways struggle builds character.

In the second of your two written assignments, you will address question (2) beginning first with a summary reiteration of your responses to question one. Please understand and appreciate that all action transpires within a value framework that gives it meaning, thus the preceding sentence. Having done that you will then be ready to say what you are willing to do to get what you want. After doing this, I wish you to consider the consequences of your proposed actions for yourself, others and the arenas within which you operate over as broad a range and scope as you can. These three items are to be addressed in not less than seven (7) or more than nine (9) pages. As there are no "correct" answers to either of these questions, you are encouraged to trust your feelings in responding to the assignment.

**Assignment 1 is due in my mailbox in Room 30 Ketchum Building not later than 1600, Friday, 7 October 2005.**

**Assignment 2 is due in the same place not later than 1600, Friday, 2 December 2005.**

**NOTE WELL: LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL RESULT IN LOWERED GRADES.**

**B. THE DAY MY EVALUATION OF YOUR WORK TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER THE PROCESSES OF ITS CREATION IN IMPORTANCE, YOU HAVE A PROBLEM. NOT ONLY IS GRADING NOT FAIR AND NOT OBJECTIVE, IT HAS VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH EDUCATION. PURELY AND SIMPLY,**

IT IS THE EXERCISE OF POWER THROUGH THE AUTHORITY OF THE TEACHER. ITS END IS PURPOSELY POLITICAL: TO LIMIT ACCESS TO A SMALLER AND MORE ELITE GROUP.

C. All work submitted must be an original copy. No reproductions (Xerox, mimeo, ditto, e.g.) will be accepted. **Make sure you keep a copy of the work you submit--papers do get lost.**

D. Because each of us has a different image of what a specific grade means, I offer herewith what the various letters mean for me.

1. "A." Evident mastery of the materials. A neat, solid, tightly organized presentation wherein you make your case with authority.
2. "B." A solid work but unimaginative in character. Covers all the bases but rarely transcends the party line to express new insights or understandings.
3. "C." Mediocre presentation. Follows the letter not the spirit of the assignment. Lacks substance, effort, care and concern.
4. "D." A weak and ineffectual presentation. A thoroughly disorganized endeavor from start to finish.

F. GRADES SHALL BE DETERMINED ON THE BASIS OF HOW EFFECTIVELY YOU ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA.

1. Appropriate evidence of a thorough review of the pertinent literature for your work. This will be shown through the compilation of a significant bibliography, where warranted, addressing the major and minor aspects of your project. 15.
2. Demonstrated understanding of your project, its supporting materials, and its relations. This will be reflected in the thought, detail, and examination of issues (indicators of rigor, discipline and skill) that appear in your paper. In short, how completely you have developed the character of your presentation. 35.
3. Effective transmission of the meanings you have made of your labors. This will be reflected in the organization of the work (form) and the manner (style) with which they are communicated. To achieve maximum impact and effectiveness, purpose, direction, focus, proper distribution of emphases and evidence to support your contentions must be clear; coherence and credibility are important here. 35.
4. Errors in composition. These include: neatness of final copy, spelling, syntax, grammar, typing and verb/subject agreements. 15.