
On The Road to Black Power

June 1966: Memphis to Jackson
Language, Race and Identity



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The Most Southern Place on Earth / June 2023

Project/Lesson Rationale

My IB English Language and Literature 12 students spend all of second quarter studying the speeches, sermons and essays of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Though I understand the need to broaden the scope of the study of the Civil Rights movement beyond the “holy trinity” of MLK, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, and I take every opportunity to supplement our study with historical contexts and lesser known voices, our task in this IB course is to focus on a substantial range of selections from a single author. Our King unit has a rare depth as his lesser-known works are seldom taught in their entirety. We don’t teach the burnished and sanitized King. Students leave with a much richer and complicated understanding of King’s foundational philosophy, evolution of thought, and political impact. I also put a significant emphasis on his difficult last three years and the psychic toll his shift to peace and poverty took. The unit concludes with students writing and sharing their reflections on how King’s words resonate for them in 2023. Students often choose a King text for their IB oral exams 3rd quarter. They often struggle navigating between King’s historical use of racial terminology and preferred modern usage (with many regrettable cringe moments for IB instructors and examiners). Though I have done a mini lesson on language and race, perhaps a more comprehensive examination of the pivotal moment that happened in Mississippi in 1966 that shifted language would be instructive, provocative, and hopefully memorable for students.

Lesson Sequence



- Read & Discuss NYT article on black/Black
 - Context for James Meredith's March Against Fear
 - James Meredith & Stokely Carmichael bios
 - Read extract from Mark Whitaker's "Say It Loud"
 - View & Discuss scenes from "King in the Wilderness"
 - Visual analysis of Bob Fitch photographs
 - Map of march route: Memphis to Jackson
 - Read King's essay "Black Power" from "Where Do We Go From Here"
 - Assessment: Rhetorical analysis Timed Commentary
 - Primary Document Analysis
 - Delta State University Student Sit-In "10 Demands"
 - "Voices from the Sit-In" documentary
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Guiding Questions



- ★ What are the various historical contexts and connotations of words used to describe and identify race and why do they matter?
 - ★ How does language evolve and change in response to historical, political and cultural forces?
 - ★ How is the debate between King and Stokely Carmichael on the use of the words “Black Power” a model for civil dialogue?
 - ★ How does Fitch’s photojournalism capture the moods, conflicts, and significance of this historical moment?
 - ★ How is this linguistic shift in the Civil Rights Movement depicted in scenes from the film “King in the Wilderness”?
 - ★ What are King’s reservations, criticisms, and persuasive arguments about the use of the slogan “Black Power” as outlined in his essays? What are the counterarguments?
 - ★ How is the rapid and widespread adoption of new language demonstrated in the “10 Demands” list from the Delta State University Sit-In of 1969?
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Notes on Language & Identity

“Negro”: “black” in Spanish & Portuguese, preferred term through mid 20th century (only use when quoting King directly)

“Colored”: common in 1920s-1930s; “polite” term sometimes used by King; logical issues (purple?)

“African American”: popularized in 1970s-1980s by Jesse Jackson

“Black”: preferred term since 1968 on; generally interchangeable with African American; capitalized

“People of Color”: multicultural alliance

Read & Discuss the NYT article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/black-african-american-style-debate.html>



March Against Fear Route, June 1966



Stokely Carmichael Biography

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/carmichael-stokely>

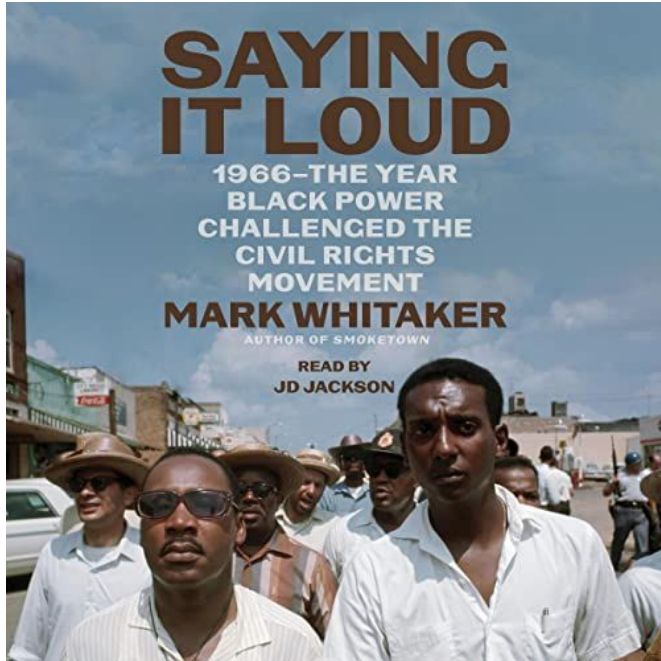


James Meredith Biography

<https://50years.olemiss.edu/james-meredith/>



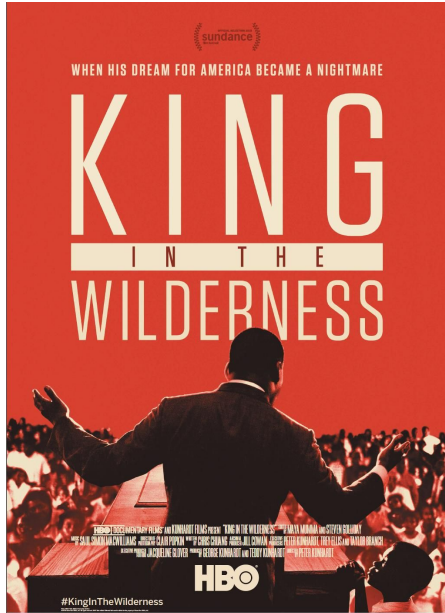
Mark Whitaker's "Saying It Loud"



Read extract from Whitaker.

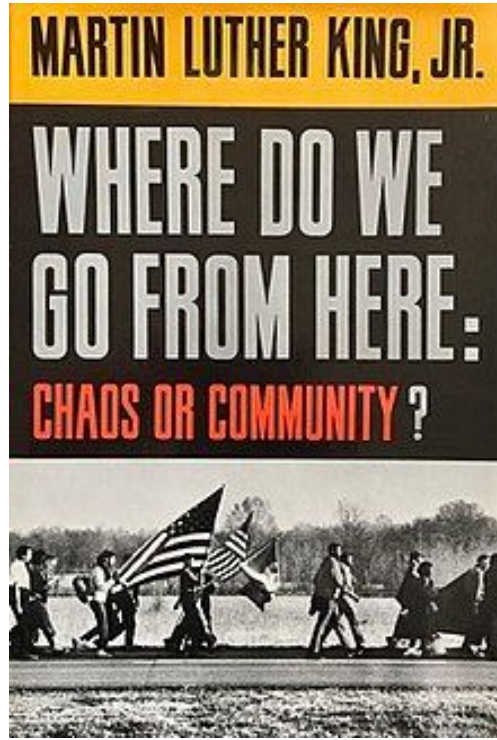
- Summarize the key events of the 1966 March Against Fear
 - How are King and Carmichael alike? How are they different?
 - How do King and Carmichael engage in civil dialogue despite their fundamental disagreements?
 - How does Whitaker make the argument that the King/Carmichael debate over "Black Power" was the turning point in the Civil Rights Movement?
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King in the Wilderness



- View the scenes of the 1966 March Against Fear
- ◆ Initial observations?
 - ◆ Describe how King and Carmichael interact.
 - ◆ Who are other notable figures and what is their impact?
 - ◆ Analyze the civil dialogue techniques in the exchanges.
 - ◆ How is conflict and disagreement resolved?
 - ◆ How is conflict unresolved?
 - ◆ Why do you think this was such a pivotal moment?
 - ◆ Discuss the connotations of “Black Power”
 - ◆ How does the crowd respond to Carmichael? How does King respond?
 - ◆ Does King seem defeated or renewed?
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Read King's essay "Black Power"



- How does King express his reservations about the term "Black Power"?
- What familiar rhetorical techniques does King use to build his argument?
- Do you find King's reasoning persuasive? Why or why not?
- Annotate the essay and prepare for a timed commentary in class.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/black-power>

Bob Fitch Photography Archive: Meredith March Against Fear

<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/fitch/browse/meredith-march-against-fear-june-1966>



Whole class observations of the subjects Fitch captures during the March

- Small Group Activity:
- ◆ Choose one of Bob Fitch's photos
 - ◆ Initial observations?
 - ◆ Visual techniques?
 - ◆ Mood? Framing? Characterization? Symbolism?
 - ◆ Present to whole class with draft thesis statement
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Voices from the Sit-In

<https://www.deltastate.edu/dei/voices-from-the-sit-in/>

https://www.deltastate.edu/dei/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2022/10/Voices-from-the-Sit-in_Booklet-Spread.pdf

View & Discuss the documentary

Examine the primary source document: Ten Student Demands

What do you notice about the use of racial language? How can you connect it to the King/Carmichael debate? What does this suggest has happened in American culture between the march in 1966 and the sit-in in 1969?



VOICES FROM THE SIT IN

produced & directed by
Ted Fisher

The true story of a protest,
told by those who lived it.



featuring professors Maggie Daily Crawford,
Mary Carter, Talmadge Davis, & Muriel McCraney
Lucas 1966-1969 Student Government Association
President James W. Powers; Delta State professors
Georgene Clark & Dr. Charles Westmoreland;
& current student Sykina Butts.

Producers/Directors: Ted Fisher
Cinematographers: Antonio Carrion, Keenan Davis, Ted Fisher
Sound Recordists: Corinne Davis, Audrianna Kurvis, Brian P. Henderson, Krystal Schmalz, Daniel Weissen
Additional Cinematography: Corinne Davis, Brian P.H., Mickey Aziz, Melissa C. Smith
Associate Producers: Sykina Butts, Dr. Arlene Sardis, Dr. Corey Friskner, Michelle Johnson, Michael C. Stanley, Tyler Wells

Filmed at The Digital Media Arts Center at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi.

Montana English Language Arts Content Standards, 11th & 12th Grades

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.

RI.11- 12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, cultures, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RI.11- 12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

RI.11-12.8

Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts including those that dealt with American Indians, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy.

SL.11-12.1.d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, with specific attention to culture; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.



“Let everything happen to you. Beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final.”

~Rainer Maria Rilke, “Go to the Limits of Your Longing”

