

October 31. . . . King and the Transformation of the
Civil Rights Movement

Readings: The two documents in Manual for session 10. Read also McKnight, **The Last Crusade, Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2.**

Class: Documentary entitled “The Promised Land,” from the series “Eyes on the Prize.

Note: The Main purpose of this session is to test (and possibly revise) your impressions of Dr. King and his role as the only national civil rights leader of the 1960s. When we celebrate King’s birthday as a national holiday the image that comes readily to mind is that of a rather smoothed-over, respectable national hero dedicated to achieving racial justice by appealing to the moral conscience of white America through his campaigns of praying and marching. This image bears little resemblance to the political King of 1967-1968, who was transforming the civil rights movement into a broader struggle for economic justice and redistribution of political power. In the process of this transformation King emerged in the eyes of certain elements in government, the protectors of privilege, like the FBI, as the most dangerous radical of the century.

Questions: After reading the assigned material test your understanding with the following questions:

What is the image of Vietnam-era America that King portrays in his antiwar speech, “A Time to Break Silence.” A short summary will suffice.

What does King hope to accomplish with his “Poor People’s Campaign”?

How does the PPC mark a sharp political shift by King away from the civil rights struggle of the 1960s?

What does Fred Folsom’s op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* reveal about the legitimacy of the FBI’s intense interest in King and the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference(SCLC)?

Include in your journal any questions that arise from the readings.

November 7th The FBI’s Vendetta Against King. . . .

Readings: Read session 11 in the Manual. Read also McKnight, **The Last Crusade**, Chapter 3.

Note: All the documents (some of which were used to inform Chapter 3 of my book) should provide some idea of how the FBI’s COINTELPRO or counterintelligence programs (Hooverspeak for “dirty tricks”) were targeted against King and the SCLC.

Page 13 KING

To begin with, there are several FBI documents that are revealing in terms of the Hoover FBI's hatred for King. The first is an invitation to King to commit suicide before he was to accept the Noble Peace Prize.

Moore to Sullivan, 2/29/1968, is generally known as the "Black Messiah" letter. How would you characterize the language of this Hoover directive?

The rest of the documents are mostly related to how the FBI planned to exploit the March 28th violence and use it to undermine and destroy King's credibility. These are all used in context in Chapter 3, "Memphis: Days of Rage, Days of Sorrow."

Note: Do not read the section in the Manual for this period titled "Afterward." I have reserved parts of this for the November 16th session.

Some Questions: Begin with certain relationships: King makes Memphis his step-off for the Poor People's Campaign (PPC). The PPC is scheduled to begin in Washington on April 12, 1968. Who might have benefited from the March 28th violence? How? What is the purpose of the FBI's campaign to vilify King in the press over the violence in Memphis? The March 28th violence forces King's hand. How? What tentative conclusions can you draw from all this?

Include any questions in your journal.

Class: Excerpts from the documentary, "Who Killed King?" (If time does not permit we will see it next session.)

November 16th . . . James Earl Ray and the American System
Of Justice. . . .

Background Notes: Unlike the JFK case the alleged assassin in the murder of Dr. King was apprehended, sentenced, and remained in jail until he died several years ago.

As with JFK, the murder of King was a political crime—the most notorious civil rights murder in the history of this republic. What we want to do in this session is to be as clear as possible about the facts in the case. How was justice served in the Ray case? What is the record of the American justice system in this second major political assassination of the 1960s?

The source we will use is Weisberg's Frame-UP. This is the only reliable work on the case as far as the instructor is aware. Moreover, Weisberg had close contact with Ray over a period of years and was Ray's investigator when he first appealed for a *habeus corpus* hearing before the U.S. Court of Appeals in the 1970s.

Readings: Manual for session 13. Limit your reading only to "Brief for Petitioner-Appellant." James Earl Ray vs. J. H. Rose. Read also Weisberg, Frame-UP Chapters 1-3 and 5 to 10. The Brief for Petitioner is the closest thing Ray had by way of a defense.

Questions: The questions are framed to allow you to answer them with the broadest strokes, incorporating those facts you feel are the most appropriate in blocking out the Ray case. Also your own personal reactions to what is going down here may be therapeutic. Record any questions and we'll deal with them in class.

1. (Weisberg, 1-3): What kind of case did the FBI mount to get Ray extradited from England. Pick out what you think may have shown that this was a political case from the outset.
2. (Chpts. 5-10): What was the relationship between Ray's first lawyer, Arthur Hanes, and the commercially successful writer Bradford Huie? How were Ray's interests protected or not protected in this arrangement? Does the concept of "conflict of interests" come to mind?
3. Does Percy Foreman's entrance into the case as Ray's second lawyer satisfy the interests of justice and the public's right to know what happened in Memphis on April 4, 1968? This should be clarified in the Brief for the Petitioner.
4. Are you clear about why Ray decided to plea guilty in this case? Was this plea coerced?
5. Finally, how do you evaluate the role of Judge Battle and the Justice Department in the chapter Weisberg titles, "The Deal."? What conclusions jump to mind about how this whole arrangement went down? What does it say about the American justice system when a political crime of this magnitude is interjected into the judicial system?

Strongly suggested: To get some idea of the pressures on Ray while he was waiting trial in Memphis turn to session 11 in the Manual for that section titled, "Afterword." I wrote this for *The Last Crusade* but the publisher wanted to reduce the page count so it was tossed out. Read especially pp. 8-14 of the "Afterword" to get some idea of how Ray's rights were violated and how the FBI managed to influence the public in the Ray case with pre-trial publicity.

This is a lengthy assignment but it is your last required written response for the course.

November 21st . . . Who Killed Dr. King? The Jim Green Story

Readings: At the end of Session 13 I have included the testimony of three witnesses Ray's defense attorneys used in his habeus corpus hearing in 1974. All three raise questions about the "official truth" of Memphis. They should be reviewed.