10 March 2007

Dear Professor Hansen’s Honors Lyceum Students,

I’m David Carter, one of Dr. Hansen’s History Department colleagues who specializes in the history of the African American-led civil rights movement. It will be a pleasure visiting with you this Thursday and discussing with you (and listening to and watching) some of the rhetorical traditions of that social movement.

Would each of you please print this .pdf out and bring it to the class with you for reference on Thursday, having clicked on and reviewed the url’s and audio / video in the interim?

Listed (and in some cases briefly described) below are some audio and video clips of American rhetoric (with transcripts provided in almost all cases) related to the civil rights movement. I realize that time is a precious commodity, but I hope you will have an opportunity to review these materials before Thursday’s class meeting, even if you have to “skim” and “skip” (in audio / video terms) through some of the longer items. I’ll be playing excerpts of some of these speeches to facilitate our discussion on Thursday, but our discussion will be immeasurably richer if you’ve been able to immerse yourselves in these materials in advance. You’ll note that I identify each of the clips with the recommendation for either a “close review” [please listen to and review the speech in its entirety] or a “skim / skip” review” [please familiarize yourself with the speech style and sample the speech and accompanying transcript selectively].

I’ve opted to list the following clips in chronological order for reasons that I can elaborate upon when we meet on Thursday. For those interested in additional background on the history of the civil rights era, accompanying the re-release of the award-winning documentary *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1985* is an extraordinarily content-rich website at: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/index.html). For those curious about the documentary series’s overall narrative arc, you can get a good feel for the focus of the 14 hour-long episodes at: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/index.html). As a shameless “plug” for one of my own classes, I would also encourage anyone interested in the history of America’s civil rights movement to consider registering for a course I teach every 2-3 semesters, “History 3080: The Civil Rights Movement.” It will be offered next in the Fall 2007 semester, and I would welcome having any of you in the class. I’m always pleased when non-history and non-education majors sign up for it as it makes for a richer mix in terms of discussions and disciplinary approaches to the subject matter.

TECHNOLOGICAL NOTE: Note that some of the web-based clips whose url’s are included below may be slow to load. Also note that for the clips and transcripts at [www.americanrhetoric.com](http://www.americanrhetoric.com) it can be useful to read along with the transcripts as you listen to audio clips. Some of you may find it useful to “right click” with your mouse on an indicated audio link, then from the resulting drop-down menu select “Open Link in New Window” [or “Open Link in New Tab” for those of you who use a tabbed browser like Firefox, Safari, or the latest version of Microsoft’s Internet Explorer]. This will allow you to be reading along in a transcript in your main window while the audio plays in another window (or browser tab).

For Thursday’s class, please try to review the following items:

**CLIP ONE (close review):**


To help you with chronology, be aware that on June 11, 1963 Alabama Governor George Wallace had briefly “stood in the schoolhouse door” at the University of Alabama to block the admission of two African American students seeking to desegregate the
University. Later in the evening following the conclusion of Kennedy’s speech, white terrorist Byron De La Beckwith assassinated Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi, so June 11, 1963 was a momentous day on the civil rights movement timeline. See “Afterword” at the bottom of this file for discussion of - and audio links to - another important speech JFK had given the preceding day, June 10.

**CLIP TWO** *(close review):*

Access this speech and its transcript at: [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm)
with embedded YouTube video available at this url as well as the full audio.

**[SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE: if any of you have a chance, I highly encourage you to engage two other video clips; first, access relatively brief video clips of the March day’s events at: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/08_washington.html?video](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/08_washington.html?video)
To access this video, hover your mouse pointer over the “Explore the Documents” graphic showing an animation of documents; when you hover over those documents, you should be able to select: “Part 3: A Dream and JFK.” Once that page loads, select the video clip reading “The ‘Dream’ that Almost Didn’t Happen (5:31)”; you’ll find out that at least one of King’s close associates (the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker) argued strongly against King’s incorporation of the “I Have a Dream” message in his address to the March on Washington crowd of 250,000 plus.
Finally, If some of you have time, I would encourage you to review the transcript of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Chairman John Lewis speech earlier in the afternoon before King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech at the August 28, 1963 March on Washington, at: [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/sources/ps_washington.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/sources/ps_washington.html)
I will play audio and/or video of speech excerpts from this in the class and discuss some of the tensions that took place on the speaker’s platform that day, with the Kennedy Administration deeply worried about the possibility of any anti-Administration or anti-Democratic Party rhetoric, and some of the labor and civil rights leaders resenting King’s selection of speech themes that afternoon.]*

**CLIP THREE** *(“skim / skip” review):*

Access the “Ballot or Bullet” speech transcript with audio divided into two segments at: [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/malcolmxballotorbullet.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/malcolmxballotorbullet.htm)
or in a single mp3 at: [http://www.historicaldocuments.com/MacolmXBallotortheBullet.mp3](http://www.historicaldocuments.com/MacolmXBallotortheBullet.mp3)
“The Ballot or the Bullet,” variants of which Malcolm X gave over a number of months in the year preceding his assassination early in 1965, is a long speech. For those who don’t have time to listen to all of it, skim through the transcript and then listen to the passages that you find the most interesting. As you listen, try to compare Malcolm X’s rhetorical style to that of Martin Luther King, Jr., considering differences in cadence and delivery, the use of humor, and the ways in which whites and blacks are characterized by the speakers. Consider differences in King’s and Malcolm X’s backgrounds, the differences in the audiences they typically addressed, and other variables.

**[SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE: if any of you are especially interested in the rhetoric of Malcolm X, another very good example of his rhetorical style and content in his “Message to the Grassroots,” delivered in Detroit, Michigan on November 10, 1963, with audio and transcript available at: [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/malcolmxgrassroots.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/malcolmxgrassroots.htm) ]

**CLIP FOUR** *(close review):*

Fannie Lou Hamer, testimony at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, August 22, 1964 seeking to have the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation of which she was a member seated in lieu of the all-white segregated Mississippi “Regular” Democratic Party.
Access this speech and its transcript at: [http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html)
Hamer was an African American sharecropper with very little in the way of a formal education. You can read up on the background for Hamer’s testimony and listen to her remarks at this website.
CLIP FIVE  (“skim / skip” review):
Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Time to Break Silence,” address at Riverside Church in New York City, April 4, 1967, coincidentally one year to the day before his assassination on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. Access this speech and its transcript at:
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm
This is a long speech and I do not expect all of you will have time to listen to all of it. Do please quickly read over the transcript, though, noting that in this speech articulating King’s opposition to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War he refers to “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today -- my own government.” He also attempts to rebut those critics of his anti-Vietnam War stance who argued that he should “stick to civil rights” and not speak out about American foreign policy. When we meet on Thursday I’d like us to consider King as someone far more complex than the public figure commemorated each January; historians (most of them staunch defenders of King, and some of whom worked closely with him) have referred to “the King nobody knows” and “an inconvenient hero,” arguing that in some ways our nation has “sanitized” or “airbrushed” King’s legacy, particularly giving inadequate attention to his anti-Vietnam War stance and his anti-poverty efforts (as I imagine some of you know, King was assassinated while assisting striking garbage workers in Memphis, in the midst of planning a larger “Poor People’s Campaign” that was to have involved a massive campaign of civil disobedience in mid-1968 in Washington, D.C. by economically disadvantaged Americans of every racial and ethnic background).

CLIP SIX  (“skim / skip” review, but do make sure to listen to the speech’s conclusion):
Martin Luther King, Jr., “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” address in Memphis on April 3, 1968, less than 24 hours before his assassination the following evening. Access this speech and its transcript at:
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm
I would urge you to watch the brief embedded YouTube video clip of these last few moments of King speech that evening, the last public remarks of his life before he was assassinated early the following evening on April 4. You may wish to read the entire transcript and listen to the linked audio clip of the entire speech. Most commentators, however, are most drawn to the last half-dozen paragraphs of the speech featured in the YouTube video clip. It’s important to note that these closing remarks that so many have seen as a sort of “foreshadowing” of King’s own death the next day are made by King after the civil rights leader has been discussing an earlier attempt on his life by a deranged woman in New York City in 1958. For those with time, the speech is worth engaging in its entirety.

CLIP SEVEN  (close review):
Democratic Party presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy announcing Martin Luther King’s assassination to a primarily African-American audience in Indianapolis, Indiana on April 4, 1968, most of whom had not yet heard the news. Kennedy himself was assassinated just two months later on June 5, 1968. Access this speech and its transcript at:
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/RFK/onMLKdeath.html
Excerpts of this event can also be found at:
The speech can also be accessed in audio format only at:
http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/RFK/Statement+on+the+Assassination+of+Martin+Luther+King.htm
In my opinion it can be very powerful to listen to this speech without referencing the video, but I leave that to your discretion and preferences.

[SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE: if any of you are interested, you can read and hear Edward “Teddy” Kennedy’s funeral eulogy for his slain brother Robert Kennedy at:
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ekennedytributetorfk.html . Teddy Kennedy has typically served as a polarizing figure in American political history, but to me this is an extraordinarily powerful eulogy, in large part because it contains many of RFK’s own words. The last one to two minutes are highly emotional, and include Teddy Kennedy echoing the simple but powerful rhetorical turn-of-phrase often used by his brother Robert: “Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say why not.” ]
A final note in advance of the class meeting Thursday: I will also be suggesting that along with the “spoken word” tradition, the role of “movement music” is particularly significant in understanding the mass mobilization of so many thousands of movement “footsoldiers” during the peak movement years, and may be every bit as important as the “speech” / spoken rhetoric tradition highlighted in the items above. For those interested in “movement music,” there are some marvelous audio clips available at:  
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/resources/res_audio.html

I look forward to meeting with you, and if any of you have any questions in advance of the Thursday, March 15 meeting, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail at:  dcarter@auburn.edu .

David Carter, Associate Professor of History

An Afterword: For those of you who have found some of these clips interesting, I would commend to your attention two or three additional items, even if you don’t have an opportunity to review the transcripts or listen to them for some time:

1) John F. Kennedy’s American University commencement speech - a foreign policy address - on June 10, 1963, the day preceding JFK’s civil rights address that heads up the list of clips above. Seldom has an American president delivered speeches this important on two successive days. Access this speech and its transcript at:  
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkamericanuniversityaddress.html

The most oft-quoted passage has been seen by many historians and contemporaries as a peace overture to Soviet Union leaders. Kennedy says: “So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s futures. And we are all mortal."

Historians have paid far less attention to a section later in the speech which seems to address civil rights and respect for law in America as an issue fundamentally linked to JFK’s discussion of peace and freedom on a global scale. I’ll probably have more to say about this in class on Thursday. Here Kennedy says: “Finally, my fellow Americans, let us examine our attitude towards peace and freedom here at home. The quality and spirit of our own society must justify and support our efforts abroad. . . . In too many of our cities today, the peace is not secure because freedom is incomplete. It is the responsibility of the executive branch at all levels of government -- local, State, and National -- to provide and protect that freedom for all of our citizens by all means within our authority. It is the responsibility of the legislative branch at all levels, wherever the authority is not now adequate, to make it adequate. And it is the responsibility of all citizens in all sections of this country to respect the rights of others and respect the law of the land.”

2) Martin Luther King, “Our God is Marching On,” March 25, 1965, speech at the successful conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March. Access this speech’s transcript at:  
http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Our_God_is_marching_on.html

If you ever have the chance, try to listen to or view video clips of this speech, as in my opinion it is nearly as majestic in its rhetorical power as King’s “I Have a Dream” speech of August 28, 1963.

3) Black Power advocate Stokely Carmichael on the nature of “Black Power” delivered in 1966. Access this speech and its transcript at:  
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stokelycarmichaelblackpower.html

For a very different iteration of “Black Power,” see clips of Carl Stokes, the first African American to win a mayoral election in a major metropolitan city, Cleveland, you may wish visit and review material at:  
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/14_power.html#video