

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

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EXKURSIONSBERICHT/EXCURSION REPORT

ENGLISH LK Q2

*AMERICAN DRAMA GROUP EUROPE, AKADEMIE DER
KÜNSTE; 02/24/2017*



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Introduction

On Friday the 24th of February at 9:00 am the LK English Q2 visited the Academy of Arts in Berlin to view the stage play “The Life and Death of Martin Luther King“, which was authentically performed by the “American Drama Group Europe”.

Slavery was and Racism still is a cruel part of history of the United States of America, affecting generations of African-Americans to suffer in ways not even imaginable for us today. Try to understand, try to feel, anger, hate, anxiety, the fear of not knowing what happens to you and your family the next day in the morning, whether you would ever wake up again. Put all of that into a bowl and mix it up, noticing the growing weight of a stone in your own heart, pulling you down, ripping off your rights, just because of the color of your skin. It is a shame, pure ignorance, tragic and so much more that history took place the way it did, that there was so much hate, fear, and disrespect in a country once ruled by the Native-Americans. After that there were the settlers of the Mayflower and many more, with the British colonies came the slaves, shipped from Africa to the USA. Even the Declaration of Independence pointing out that “all men are created equal”, just resulted in discussions about the right or wrong of slavery (The answer seems totally clear for us, back then peoples minds must have been either lost or they had none at all), but did not stop it. On the 1st of February in 1863 Abraham Lincoln made progress in the fight against slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation, legally freeing slaves from ten states, where they could live as a free souls, even that happened 30 years after the proclamation of Lincoln. One more thing I would like to address, which rarely mentioned today is the fact that the USA are a country built by immigrants, formed by the influence of a big variety of nationalities and cultures. Speaking the truth, if history and immigration, cause to conflicts and problems in other countries, would have taken place differently the USA would not be what they are today, but what price did so many generations pay? The history went on slavery ended, but racism was and still is a fact of everyday life for people not only in the USA. For all bad things happening in the world, there can't be any other reason than a fear of the unknown, pushing people to acts of violence, forming the scaffolding of sinners, hate. I do not want to get lost in this topic, even though it is something you can write a ton of books about, but I would like to leave you with this, before you start reading the report of our excursion:

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

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Report

If I had to summarize this play in one word, I would question the sense of arts the person asking me has.

As we sit down in our row in the middle of this ,in a way comfortable, Theater the mass is slowly silencing. Suddenly the lights and the whole scene change from a refreshing atmosphere, including students and teachers talking about the most simple things in life, to a different time, a time were morals and laws were different.

A singing opening of all five actors:

“Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me
And before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free“
(post Civil War African-American freedom song; “Oh Freedom!”)

In my opinion, this song is perfectly chosen by the “American Drama Group Europe”, because it represents thoughts about the troubles these men and women had to face and the desire of freedom they enjoyed. As interesting as the start is the play goes on, a women, representing Rosa Parks, waiting for the bus, next to a white citizen. She asks the man whether there is a toilet, he answers: “Only for whites”. More trouble to come. Placing the bus boycott of Montgomery in the play is important, because this was the beginning of a revolution, of an uprising, and in this play the way of introducing Martin Luther King Jr. to the audience by showing him at home with a friend, who tries to convince Martin Luther King Jr. to get involved in the bus boycott, which will later be his first campaign. So the story of one man, existing and fighting for justice without violence begins once again on that stage in front of our eyes. During the play, there are small episodes of singing, one even with a choreography, which show the emotion of the moment quite well, it is comprehensibly why they chose these musical-like elements, because some feelings such as the one of being discriminated for the color of ones skin, are more difficult to express only with words, but better to present to an audience through singing and music. Another interesting method of expression is the usage of masks, black and white ones, which the actors carried to show the skin color of the different characters in the play. With that the actors could have intended to direct a feeling of equality to the audience, by wearing these masks no matter what their own skin color was.

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Another aspect to mention is the integration of only a very few elements on stage, mainly just a chair and a small side table, with which they first created the bus with Rosa in it, then the living room of Martin Luther King Jr and the pedestal of his probably most famous speech “I have a dream” or the hotel where he later stayed and died, due to a fatal shot while he was smoking on the balcony.

Although all actors did not use any microphones (except the news journalist, and a megaphone in the scene of the speech “I have a Dream”), the sound and clearness of their voices was astonishingly understandable. Once again I would like to point out the amazing job the actors did. All of them had their own ways of identifying with the roles, but all presented high class acting to us too. Sometimes there were moments of amusement, thanks to the individual interpretation and behavior of the actors, even though this topic is quite serious and ought to be dealt with in a serious way.

In the end I can only say that this stage play was a perfect introduction into the topic of civil rights and African-American movements, which we will discuss more detailed in the new section of our class lessons.

Information on Martin Luther King Jr.

	<i>Personal details</i>	<i>Campaigns</i>
<i>Born</i>	Michael King Jr. January 15, 1929 Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.	Montgomery bus boycott Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom Youth March for Integrated Schools Albany Movement Birmingham campaign Walk to Freedom March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom
<i>Died</i>	April 4, 1968 (age 39) Memphis, Tennessee, U.S.	St. Augustine movement Selma to Montgomery marches
<i>Awards</i>	Nobel Peace Prize • Presidential Medal of Freedom Congressional Gold Medal	• Chicago Open Housing Movement March Against Fear Memphis sanitation strike Poor People’s Campaign