

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Mark: \_\_\_\_\_ / 15

Teacher or Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

In this week's homework, we will consolidate what we did in class. To this end, we will settle the debate on the acceptability of blackface; re-answer what made King a great leader throughout the Montgomery bus boycott; and analyze more excerpts of King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail."

### Unmasking Blackface

Read excerpts from the following two articles, "The problem with blackface" and "In defence of blackface," and answer the question "Is blackface ever acceptable?"

#### **The problem with blackface by Philip S.S. Howard**

##### **What is blackface?**

Blackface is the practice of non-Black people darkening their skin in deliberate attempts to impersonate Black people.

Minstrel performers, pretending to be Black, engaged in borrowed and bastardized forms of Black music and dance to entertain their audiences.

##### **Stereotyping is violence**

An obvious problem with blackface is its representational violence — the way in which it openly ridicules Black people.

In Blackface minstrelsy, performers used burnt cork or shoe polish to paint their skins completely black, leaving wide areas around the mouth that would variously be left uncovered, or painted red or white giving the appearance of oversized lips.

Overall, the makeup was a deliberate attempt to disdainfully represent Black people as outlandish. Once in blackface, minstrels would use exaggerated accents, malapropisms, awkward movements and garish attire to further ridicule Black people.

##### **Dehumanizing through echoes of slavery**

We live in the "afterlife of slavery," as Prof. Saidiyah Hartman's famously wrote. In other words, Black life today continues to be entangled in social relations that are extensions of the antiblack relations of slavery.

The much more central issue with blackface, then, is the way in which it reinscribes these relations.

First, the very need to use garish make-up as part of the process of portraying Black people

reveals an attempt to establish an essential difference between Black and white people.

It draws on the logic of biological racism, which argued that the physical features of Africans were visible evidence that Black people were inferior to white people on a presumed evolutionary hierarchy, and therefore that they could justifiably be enslaved.

Second, blackface reinscribes the relations of slavery in the ways that it involves the putting on and taking off of blackness. It makes the Black body property to be appropriated and discarded at will.

In her book *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiyah Hartman demonstrates that white pleasure during slavery was achieved by forcing Black people to act merry for the entertainment of white people, with no regard for themselves

### **Black people in blackface**

Research interviews I have conducted with Black students who have worn blackface or otherwise participated in campus blackface incidents have demonstrated that they did so to win the approval of their white peers.

This approval, however, is achieved only by co-operating in the deprecation of blackness, creating a no-win situation for the Black person who must sacrifice their dignity in order to be accepted.

But as antiblackness, and blackface itself, are ongoing, it is impossible to wear blackface as a message of resistance without simultaneously reinscribing the relations one desires to challenge.

### **In Defence of Blackface** by Thaddeus Russell

In fact, blackface performances are not always unambiguously antagonistic toward African Americans. Several scholars of the phenomenon have argued that blackface has usually been, to some degree, an expression of envy and an unconscious rebellion against what it means to be "white."

Some early blackface minstrel performance was clearly little more than anti-black parody, but many historians see the songs and dances of T.D. Rice, Dan Emmett, Dan Rice (Abraham Lincoln's favorite), and other originators of the genre as expressions of desire for the freedoms they saw in the culture of slaves. "Just as the minstrel stage held out the possibility that whites could be 'black' for awhile but nonetheless white," David Roediger, the leading historian of "whiteness," has written, "it offered the possibilities that, via blackface, preindustrial joys could survive amidst industrial discipline." Similarly, the Smith College scholar W.T. Lhamon argues that slave culture represented liberation to blackface performers and fans, who "unmistakably expressed fondness for black wit and gestures." In early blackface minstrel shows, whites identified with blacks as representations of all the freedoms and pleasures that employers, moral reformers, and churches "were working to suppress."

For whites, they argue, minstrelsy offered the opportunity to indulge in a "carefree life liberated from oppression, responsibilities, and burdens"; and for blacks it represented freedom as well. "Despite the appearance of minstrelsy as a servile tradition, there were elements of *liberation* in it from its very beginning, and these were instrumental to its popularity."

It should therefore be no surprise that, though they certainly never expressed a wish to be enslaved, the white men who invented blackface performance often sang of a wish to be like slaves. Their songs celebrated the free, joyous, and sensual movements of slave dances—which were condemned by Victorian moralists as barbarous—and the slaves' relaxed attitudes toward love and work.

The two best-known songs of early blackface minstrelsy, Dan Emmett's "Dixie" and T.D. Rice's "Jump Jim Crow," are commonly regarded as anthems of Southern racism. But in their original versions, they were actually laments for being born white. In "Jump Jim Crow," the singer sympathizes, in slave dialect, with those "who happen to be white." It is "dar misfortune, and dey'd spend ebery dollar, if dey only could be gentlemen of color. It almost break my heart to see dem envy me."

We will likely never know what motivates contemporary blackface performers. But those who reject the beliefs planted in our culture by Puritans and Victorians might consider the possibility that, like the originators of the practice, they are joining a 200-year, unconscious struggle for freedom.

Is blackface acceptable? Explain.

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Grammar: There are no errors.

0.25 0.5 0.75 1

Structure: There is a topic sentence, transitions, and a concluding sentence.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1
Style: There is strong diction and a variety of sentence structures.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1
Content: There is a logical argument that is supported with examples and explanations.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 1.75 2

### Leading by Example

Read the following article on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership.

#### **When Martin Luther King, Jr. Became a Leader** by Louis Menand

When Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery city bus, on December 1, 1955, King was a twenty-six-year-old minister just a year into his job at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, in Montgomery, who imagined that he might one day become a professor. The legendary boycott that followed Parks's arrest was not King's idea, and, when he was informed of the plan, he did not immediately endorse it. He did after some reflection, though, and offered a room in the basement of his church for the organizers to meet.

On December 5th, a mass meeting was called, to be held in the building of another African-American congregation, the Holt Street Baptist Church. That afternoon, the boycott organizers met in King's church basement and voted to call themselves the Montgomery Improvement Association. Then, to his surprise, and probably because he was not well known, and no one else was eager to accept the risk of white reprisal, King was elected the group's president.

What had given King pause about endorsing the boycott was a concern that it might be unethical and unchristian. The boycott might be unethical because, if it shut down Montgomery buses, it would deprive other riders of a service that they depended on, and deprive bus drivers of the way that they made a living. It might be unchristian because it was a response to an injury by inflicting an injury. It was revenge.

King felt that he had to work through these worries about the movement before he could lead it. "I came to see that what we were really doing was withdrawing our cooperation from an evil system, rather than merely withdrawing our support from the bus company," he writes in the autobiography. "The bus company, being an external expression of the system, would naturally suffer, but the basic aim was to refuse to cooperate with evil."

Movements are created when a leader emerges to speak on behalf of the aggrieved. And the

role of the leader is to hold the aggrieved together long enough to accomplish their goals, or some of them. King did not only have to deal with the obstacles presented by Southern whites. In a way, Bull Connor and George Wallace were the least of his problems. The brutality of their racism, and their refusal to hide it, worked to the movement's advantage. Physically, Connor and Wallace had all the advantages, but it was easy to demonstrate the movement's moral superiority.

More dangerous were the schisms within. Thurgood Marshall, the N.A.A.C.P. lawyer who argued *Brown v. Board of Education* before the Supreme Court, dismissed King's protests as street theatre. Malcolm X called the March on Washington "the farce on Washington." Younger activists in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee resented King's celebrity, and would later expel its white members. After 1965, the movement took a turn away from King's nonviolent and integrationist spirit.

But King never gave up on nonviolence, and he never compromised on his goals. He knew that the end of Jim Crow did not mean the end of racism, and he persisted in demonstrating for justice and equality until, fifty years ago this week, he met the fate that was in the cards, part of the deal, from the moment that he rose to speak from the pulpit of the Holt Street Church. It was not that speech but the moment of indecision before it, the moment when he asked himself what the ethical implications were of what he was about to do, that made King a leader. How many of our leaders ask themselves that question today? How many of us ask it?

What made Martin Luther King, Jr. a great leader throughout the Montgomery bus boycott? Cite Louis Menand's article, "When Martin Luther King, Jr. Became a Leader" and this week's lecture. You are more than welcome to do your own research.

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Grammar: There are no errors.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1
Structure: There is a topic sentence, transitions, and a concluding sentence.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1
Style: There is strong diction and a variety of sentence structures.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1
Content: There is a logical argument that is supported with examples and explanations.	0.25 0.5 0.75 1 1.25 1.5 1.75 2

Sender: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Recipient: You

On April 16, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. penned "Letter From Birmingham Jail." Fifty-six years later, many of the issues that King addressed in his letter still plague us. Read the following excerpts from King's letter, and make meaningful text-to-self and text-to-world connections.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides - and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of

nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

<p>Text-to-Self Connections</p> <p>You are connecting the text to your own life, experiences, and feelings.</p>	<p>Text-to-World Connection</p> <p>You are connecting the text to world events and history</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This reminds me of . . .</li> <li>• I understand how the character feels because . . .</li> <li>• The setting makes me think about another place . . .</li> <li>• I experienced this myself . . .</li> </ul> <p><u>Write at least 5 text-to-self connections.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This happened in real life . . .</li> <li>• This is like something I heard on the news . . .</li> <li>• This happened when . . .</li> <li>• This story is similar to . . .</li> </ul> <p><u>Write at least 5 text-to-world connections.</u></p>



<div></div> <div>_____ / 2.5 marks (0.5 marks each)</div>	<div></div> <div>_____ / 2.5 marks (0.5 marks each)</div>
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