

# Seeing and Reading Civil Rights

## ENGL 4456: Readings in Literary Nonfiction

Professor Donal Harris

M/W: 12:40 – 2:05pm



Gordon Parks, contact sheet, "Memphis, 1968"

"The world seldom believes the horror stories of history until they are documented via the mass media," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in 1961. In anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Dr. King., this course will study how the Civil Rights movement employed the mass media – in particular, photography – to broadcast its various political messages.

Each week we'll look at some of the key images and words that defined the Civil Rights movement, as well as more recent nonfiction about the movement's lasting political and artistic impact. We'll place these texts in their historical and intellectual context, analyze them as visual and rhetorical constructions, and assess how they fit into the broader conversations around political and artistic representation taking place among activists, artists, photographers, editors, politicians, reporters, and readers. Photographers will include (among others) Gordon Parks, Roy DeCarava, Ernest C. Withers, and Charles Moore, and we'll read works by Dr. King, Stokely Carmichael, Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Sona Sanchez, Teju Cole, and others.

This course will introduce students to research tools in the University of Memphis Special Collections, and there will be a class trip to the Brooks Museum's exhibit "Black Resistance: Ernest C. Withers and the Civil Rights Movement."

Please contact Donal Harris ([donal.harris@memphis.edu](mailto:donal.harris@memphis.edu)) with any questions.