

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X

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Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying documents (A-F). Some of these documents have been edited for the purposes of these exercises. This question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the sources of the document and the author's point of view.

Essay Question: In this lesson you learned about the Civil Rights Movement and its prominent leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Discuss the differences in the philosophies of these two men. You may use any background information from the articles you read and your two column notes to help you. **Be sure to discuss their different points of view in your response.**

Document A: Martin Luther King Jr., "Speech at the Great March on Detroit" (June 23, 1963)

taken from: <http://www.mlkonline.net/detroit.html>

My good friend, the Reverend C. L. Franklin, all of the officers and members of the Detroit Council of Human Rights, distinguished platform guests, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot begin to say to you this afternoon how thrilled I am, and I cannot begin to tell you the deep joy that comes to my heart as I participate with you in what I consider the largest and greatest demonstration for freedom ever held in the United States. And I can assure you that what has been done here today will serve as a source of inspiration for all of the freedom-loving people of this nation.

I think there is something else that must be said because it is a magnificent demonstration of discipline. With all of the thousands and hundreds of thousands of people engaged in this demonstration today, there has not been one reported incident of violence. I think this is a magnificent demonstration of our commitment to nonviolence in this struggle for freedom all over the United States, and I want to commend the leadership of this community for making this great event possible and making such a great event possible through such disciplined channels...

Now Birmingham and the freedom struggle tell us something else. They reveal to us that the Negro has a new sense of dignity and a new sense of self-respect. (Yes) For years— (*That's right. Come a long way*) I think we all will agree that probably the most damaging effect of segregation has been what it has done to the soul of the segregated as well as the segregator. It has given the segregator a false sense of superiority and it has left the segregated with a false sense of inferiority. (*All right*) And so because of the legacy of slavery and segregation, many Negroes lost faith in themselves and many felt that they were inferior...

1. Who is Martin Luther King, Jr. addressing in this speech?

2. Why does Martin Luther King call the March on Detroit a magnificent demonstration of discipline?
3. According to this speech, what is the most damaging effect of segregation for the segregator?
4. According to this speech, what is the most damaging effect of segregation for the segregated?

Document B: Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations" (Address at a Freedom Rally)

taken from: <http://www.mlkonline.net/progress.html>

...There are three basic attitudes that one can take toward the question of progress in the area of race relations. And the first attitude that can be taken is that of extreme optimism. Now the extreme optimist would argue that we have come a long, long way in the area of race relations. He would point proudly to the marvelous strides that have been made in the area of civil rights over the last few decades. From this he would conclude that the problem is just about solved and that we can sit comfortably by the wayside and wait on the coming of the inevitable.

The second attitude that one can take toward the question of progress in the area of race relations is that of extreme pessimism. The extreme pessimist would argue that we have made only minor strides in the area of race relations. He would argue that the rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings of discontent that we hear from the Southland today is indicative of the fact that we have created more problems than we have solved. He would say that we are retrogressing instead of progressing. He might even turn to the realms of an orthodox theology and argue that hovering over every man is the tragic taint of original sin and that at bottom human nature cannot be changed. He might even turn to the realms of modern psychology and seek to show the determinative effects of habit structures and the inflexibility of certain attitudes that once become molded in one's being. (*Yes*) From all of this he would conclude that there can be no progress in the area of race relations. (*Alright, Alright*)

Now you will notice that the extreme optimist and the extreme pessimist have at least one thing in common: they both agree that we must sit down and do nothing in the area of race relations. (*Yes*) The extreme optimist says do nothing because integration is inevitable. The extreme pessimist says do nothing because integration is impossible. But there is a third position that is another attitude that can be taken, and it is what I would like to call the realistic position. The realist in the area of race relations seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites while avoiding the extremes of both. (*Yeah*) So the realist would agree with the optimist that we have come a long, long way. But, he would go on to balance that by agreeing with the pessimist that we have a long, long way to go. (*Amen*) And it is this basic theme that I would like to set forth this evening. We have come a long, long way (*Yes*) but we have a long, long way to go. (*Amen*)

5. From this Martin Luther King, Jr. speech, what is the 1st attitude toward the question of progress in the area of race relations and what would it argue?
6. What is the 2nd attitude toward the question of progress in the area of race relations and what would it argue?
7. What do the extreme optimist and the extreme pessimist agree on when dealing with race relations?
8. What is the 3rd position and what does it seek to do?

Document C: Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (April 16, 1963)

taken from: <http://www.mlkonline.net/progress.html>

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN: While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas... But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham..." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights... Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program... We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I... am here because I was invited here...

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town...

Moreover, I am cognizant [aware] of the interrelatedness [unity] 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.

You deplore [disapprove of] the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying [contradiction to] the fact that racial injustice engulfs [surrounds] this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation...

9. According to this excerpt Martin Luther King did not normally answer peoples' criticisms. Why did he decide to in this letter?

10. State several reasons why Martin Luther King, Jr. was in Birmingham.

11. What are the four basic steps of a nonviolent demonstration according to Martin Luther King, Jr.?

12. What types of racial injustices were African Americans experiencing in Birmingham when this letter was written?

Document D: Malcolm X Speech: "The Black Revolution" (June, 1963)

Taken from: http://www.malcolm-x.org/speeches/spc_06_63.htm

...God wants us to separate ourselves from this wicked white race here in America because this American House of Bondage is number one on God's list for divine destruction today... He warns us to remember Noah never taught integration, Noah taught separation; Moses never taught integration, Moses taught separation. The innocent must always be given a chance to separate themselves from the guilty before the guilty are executed. No one is more innocent than the poor, blind American so-called Negro who has been led astray by blind Negro leaders, and no one on earth is more guilty than the blue-eyed white man who has used his control and influence over the Negro leader to lead the rest of our people astray...

America herself is now facing her day of judgment, and she can't escape because God Himself is the judge. If America can't atone for the crimes she has committed against the twenty million so-called Negroes, if she can't undo the evils that she has brutally and mercilessly heaped upon our people these past four hundred years...America has signed her own doom. And you, our people, would be foolish to accept her deceitful offers of integration at this late date into her doomed society.

Can America escape? Can America atone? And if so how can she atone for these crimes? In my conclusion I must point out that... a desegregated theater; a desegregated lunch counter won't solve our problem. Better jobs won't even solve our problems. An integrated cup of coffee isn't sufficient pay for four hundred years of slave labor. He also says that a better job, a better job in the white man's factory, or a better job in the white man's business, or a better job in the white man's industry or economy is, at best, only a temporary solution...the only lasting and permanent solution is complete separation on some land that we can call our own. Therefore, this problem can be solved and solved forever just by sending our people back to our own homeland or back to our own people, but that this government should provide the transportation plus everything else we need to get started again in our own country. This government should give us everything we need in the form of machinery, material, and finance-enough to last for twenty to twenty-five years until we can become an independent people and an independent nation in our own land... if the American government is afraid to send us back to our own country and to our own people, then America should set aside some separated territory right here in the Western hemisphere where the two races can live apart from each other, since we certainly don't get along peacefully while we are together.

... The size of the territory can be judged according to our population. If a seventh of the population of this country is black, then give us a seventh of the territory, a seventh part of the country. And that is not asking too much because we already worked for the man for four hundred years.

...it must not be in the desert, but where there is plenty of rain and much mineral wealth. We want fertile, productive land on which we can farm and provide our own people with food, clothing, and shelter. ...

And in my conclusion I repeat: We want no part of integration with this wicked race of devils. But... we should not be expected to leave America empty-handed. After four hundred years of slave labor, we have some back pay coming; a bill that is owed to us and must be collected. If the government of America truly repents of its sins against our people and atones by giving us our true share of the land and the wealth, then America can save herself. But if America waits for God to step in and force her to make a just settlement, God will take this entire continent away from the white man. And the Bible says that God can then give the kingdom to whomsoever he pleases. I thank you.

13. What does Malcolm X say is the only permanent solution to the problem of segregation?

14. What should the government provide to African Americans and for how long?

15. If the government won't pay for transportation for African Americans, what does Malcolm X suggest as an alternative?

Document E: Malcolm X Speech "God's Judgment of White America" (The Chickens Come Home to Roost)

taken from: <http://www.malcolmsonline.com/speeches-gods-judgement.html>

The time is past when the white world can exercise unilateral authority and control over the dark world. The independence and power of the dark world is on the increase; the dark world is rising in wealth, power, prestige, and influence. It is the rise of the dark world that is causing the fall of the white world. As the white man loses his power to oppress and exploit the dark world, the white man's own wealth (power or "world") decreases. His world is on its way down; it is on its way out...and it is the will and power of God himself that is bringing an end to the white world.

You and I were born at this turning point on history; we are witnessing the fulfillment of prophecy. Our present generation is witnessing the end of colonialism, Europeanism, Westernism, or "White-ism"...the end of white supremacy, the end of the evil white man's unjust rule. I must repeat: The end of the world only means the end of a certain "power." The end of colonialism ends the world (or power) of the colonizer. The end of Europeanism ends the world (or power) of the European...and the end of "White-ism" ends the world (or power) of THE WHITE MAN.

According to the Christian Bible, Judgment Day is that final hour when God will cause "those who led others into captivity to go into captivity themselves"...and "those who killed others with the sword to be killed by the sword of justice themselves." Justice only means that the wicked slave master must reap the fruit (or harvest) of the evil seeds of slavery he has planted. This is justice! Other slave empires received justice, and now White America must receive justice. According to White America's own evil past, which is clearly recorded on the pages of history, so shall God judge her today.

16. According to Malcolm X in this speech what is on the increase?

17. What is decreasing?

18. What is the present generation witnessing?

19. What does Malcolm X say injustice means?

Document F: Taken from Malcolm X speech "The Ballot or the Bullet"

taken from: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/malcolmxballotorbullet.htm>

I'm a Muslim minister. The same as they are Christian Ministers...And I don't believe in fighting today in any one front, but on all fronts. In fact, I'm a "Black Nationalist Freedom Fighter."...

...today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic, and social philosophy is Black Nationalism...we have a fight that's common to all of us against a [sic] enemy who is common to all of us.

The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community...The time when white people can come in our community and get us to vote for them so that they can be our political leaders and tell us what to do and what not to do is long gone. By the same token, the time when that same white man, knowing that your eyes are too far open, can send another negro into the community and get you and me to support him so he can use him to lead us astray -- those days are long gone too...

The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that if you and I are going to live in a Black community -- and that's where we're going to live, 'cause as soon as you...move out of the Black community into their community, it's mixed for a period of time, but they're gone and you're right there all by yourself again. We must...understand the politics of our community and we must know what politics is supposed to produce. We must know what part politics play in our lives. And until we become politically mature we will always be misled, lead astray, or deceived or maneuvered into supporting someone politically who doesn't have the good of our community at heart. So the political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we will have to carry on a program, a political program, of re-education to open our people's eyes, make us become more politically conscious, politically mature, and then we will -- whenever we get ready to cast our ballot, that ballot will be... cast for a man of the community who has the good of the community of heart.

The economic philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we should own and operate and control the economy of our community...You can't open up a black store in a white community. White men won't even patronize you. And he's not wrong. He's got sense enough to look out for himself. You the one who don't have sense enough to look out for yourself. The white ...man is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community. But you will let anybody come in and take control of the economy of your community, control the housing, control the education, control the jobs, control the businesses, under the pretext that you want to integrate. No, you're out of your mind...

20. According to this Malcolm X speech, what was the political philosophy of Black Nationalism?

21. Why did Malcolm X believe that African Americans should be politically mature?

22. What was the economic philosophy of Black Nationalism according to Malcolm X?

Essay Question: In this lesson you learned about the Civil Rights Movement and its prominent leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Discuss the differences in the philosophies of these two men. You may use any background information from the articles you read and your two column notes to help you. **Be sure to discuss their different points of view in your response.**