

Martin luther king jr.,malcolm x, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ...

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INTRODUCTION Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were both born in a period in history when anti-racism and anti-segregation sentiments were taking root among the black population in the U. S. One of the key contributing factors was the increase in the number of African Americans who were educated. Education had endowed the African American community with enlightened individuals such as Martin Luther King's father, Rosa Park and John Elton Bembry. The environment in which Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X grew up in was already ripe with revolution and it only needed energetic, creative, young, energetic, educated and passionate individuals such Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Although, both King and Malcolm X are historically known to be advocates for the rights of African Americans their approaches and perception were shaped from different perspectives. The ideologies of King and Malcolm X though similar in fighting for the right of African Americans, were different in a number of ways both socially and culturally as a result of different avenues of development they experienced

1. How different or similar in social origins were King and Malcolm? How may their differences in experiences and backgrounds help explain their differences of view?

King and Malcolm X came from families that had significant differences socially, culturally, economically and ideologically. King was brought up in a rather financially stable family where his father was able to provide for them for a comfortable life. According to Darby, King was brought up in a middle-class family where they lived in a good house and never lacked in food and clothing (8). Martin's parents had completely black heritages and Martin's

father was a Minister of the Baptist Church. King also enjoyed formal education and later became a respectable member in his community. Malcolm X on the other hand did not enjoy the kind of stability King had. Although Malcolm X's father had a complete black heritage and is actually described as being proud of his heritage, Malcolm's mother had a white father, was a bit light skinned and was ashamed of her mixed heritage. According to Wainstock, Malcolm's mother would instill in her children the importance of being black and actually favored her black children " over the light skinned Malcolm (5). Malcolm's encounters with racism were characterized by violence and outright hatred. In his early years their house was burnt by the racist group called the Black Legion (Wainstock 6). Malcolm also felt that his imprisonment was not primarily due to burglary but because of his involvement with white women from the upper class (Wainstock 19). After the death of his father and the institutionalization of his mother, Malcolm was forced to live in foster homes before eventually living with his sister. The lack of a stable familial background perhaps led to Malcolm's involvement in crime and drugs later in his life.

King's stable background and formal education gave him a clear view of the state of things and he even realized the laws and institutions and not the whites were to blame for racism and racial segregation. However, Malcolm X's perception was that the whites were the cause of most his sufferings and the sufferings of other African Americans. In essence, King's perception was objective while Malcolm's perception was more subjective.

2. Explain Martin Luther King's ideology and goals?

King's ideologies had root in his father's beliefs that Africans were not less human beings and deserved to be treated equally with the whites. Coming from a relatively well-off family, King realized that even their social status did not eliminate racial prejudice. King's education allowed him to realize that the whites were not to blame and change could only be realized by letting Americans realize the evils associated with racism. King also managed to learn about the approaches of Gandhi in India and he realized the strength and impact of non-violence demonstrations. After the non-violent and successful boycott against the Montgomery Bus Company, King's beliefs in non-violent approaches were strengthened. King's Christian beliefs in forgiveness enabled him to avoid retaliation even after open and violent attacks such as the bombing of his house.

3. Explain Malcolm X's ideology and goals.

Malcolm's ideologies and goals were rather complex as compared to King's. Having encountered the violence and hatred in racism, Malcolm readily embraced the ideologies of Elijah Muhammad and Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam's ideologies had racial sentiments because it believed that African Americans should be relocated to Africa and as a result separated from the Whites. Malcolm's past experiences with whites were unpleasant and he perhaps developed hatred and resentment against whites. Malcolm could also have embraced Islam in a bid to rebel against Christianity which he felt was full of hypocrites. According to Wainstock, Malcolm would openly blaspheme against God while in church claiming that those who taught Christianity never practiced its teachings (20). However, in an apparent self-retrospection and as a result of his self-education while in jail, Malcolm's

ideologies changed and he began publicly preach against the racist beliefs of the Nation of Islam. In essence, Malcolm's ideologies had changed from seeking the separation of African Americans from whites to fighting for the civil rights of African Americans. The change in ideology ultimately cost him his life.

4. How did MLK and Malcolm X's ideologies evolve?

King's ideologies were shaped around having an America where people were not judged by their racial background as demonstrated by the famous "I have a Dream Speech" (Darby 92). King felt that the white community was a victim of laws and institutions built on prejudice and stereotyping. King never demonstrated any hatred for the whites and he made sure that his approaches were free of violence. King always strived to demonstrate to the whites that their negative perceptions towards African Americans were ill-founded and prejudicial. Therefore, King's major objective was to show the white community the evil side of racism and racial segregation. King's non-violence approach was also shaped by his strong Christian background and Gandhi's movement in India. Racism to King was an instrument used to bring about division in America. King sought to change the mindset of Americans towards believing that all races were equal and therefore deserved to be treated equally. Malcolm's ideologies experienced significant changes especially when he realized discrepancies in a given set of beliefs in an ideology. While in jail Malcolm resented Christianity because he realized the discrepancies what was taught and was actually done. Malcolm readily embraced the ideologies of the Nation of Islam perhaps because of the strict faith demonstrated by the followers. However, when he realized that the

racism sentiments fulfilled by the Nation Islam were no different from the racism against blacks, Malcolm changed his ideologies to non racist. Malcolm began advocating for the civil rights of African Americans instead of separation of whites and African Americans.

CONCLUSION

Both King and Malcolm are historically recognized for their open fight for the rights of African Americans in the U. S. However, their ideologies and beliefs had significant differences due to their social and cultural backgrounds. But their strong beliefs in an America without racism caused both of them their lives and helped shaped the history of African Americans in the U. S.

Works Cited

Darby, Jean. Martin Luther King Jr. Minnesota: Lerner Publications Company, 2005. Print.

Wainstock, Dennis. Malcolm X, African American Revolutionary. New York: McFarland & Company, 2009. Print.