

# M.I.k and malcolm x compare and contrast

Sociology



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Throughout the Civil Rights movement in the United States, no two people were more influential than Martin Luther King, Jr (MLK) and Malcolm X. The popular opinion nowadays is to idolize MLK's philosophy of peaceful protest and racial unity as the goal we are striving to achieve as a society, while labelling Malcolm X's philosophy as crude, primitive, and irrational.

In this essay, I want to challenge the overall “effectiveness” of MLK's philosophy on the ground that his vision may never be a reality. I assert that while nonviolence and racial integration under MLK's vision would almost certainly lead to a more peaceful society, I find that Malcolm X's legacy of self-defense and revolution is more applicable to today's society because it is doubtful that humans will ever achieve total equality in any sense (racial, economic, social, sexual, etc.) due to both the tragedy of power and the inherent selfish nature of humans.

As many Americans know very well, a primary component of MLK's philosophy is the concept of nonviolence in protest and demonstrations, with the intention of overcoming evil with love. MLK addresses this philosophy by first identifying two types of people in the Negro community; those who “as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect... that they have adjusted to segregation” and those that “are full of “bitterness and hatred and come perilously close to advocating violence”?.

It is important to understand this distinction because MLK is absolutely not advocating for complacency (among both blacks and whites), yet he also asserts that the Black Nationalist movement is full of hatred and despair.

Citing Jesus as his example, MLK calls for the Negro community to be "extremists for the cause of justice", not "for the preservation of injustice", and likewise "extremists for love" instead of "extremists for hate".

Furthermore, MLK acknowledges the natural thirst for justice among blacks and realizes that "the Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations... if his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence".

Therefore, what MLK is calling for is protests, which he terms "direct action", while preserving the justice of such actions by not stooping to the level of injustice that is being perpetrated toward them. After all, "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed". This strict adherence to nonviolence may also be motivated by this desire to unify the white and black races, and ultimately erase the bad blood between the two, which would be more difficult if violence were taking place.

The ultimate goal that MLK wanted society to obtain is the racial integration of blacks and whites in every manner possible, beyond the obvious forced legal integration. Having realized the futility of their movement without some degree of white support, MLK expresses great disappointment with "the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice" and claims that "lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection".

However, MLK does express his thanks "that some of our white brothers have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too small in quantity, but they are big in quality"), which implies that he welcomes and even implores both the black

and white disappointments with the white church and its leadership, stating that " he felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be some of our strongest allies".

MLK would not have directly addressed many white people and groups if he did not find their help to be of great importance to the Civil Rights movement. MLK also frequently addresses the white people in his letter as " our white brothers", which is a term that suggests more than mere allies; if blacks and whites saw each other as " brothers", they would be members of the same family and would entrust their lives to each other, which cannot be said for temporary political/social alliances formed out of mutual utility.

It is interesting to note that MLK's language of nonviolence and brotherhood between races was a social anomaly at the time, and is sadly still not a reality in today's society. For precisely this fear of impracticality and excessive idealism, Malcolm X rejects MLK's philosophy in favor of a more traditional and pragmatic philosophy of self-defense and forcible revolution.

Before addressing Malcolm X's call to violence and revolution, it is important to frame his argument in the proper way; namely, the permanent segregation of whites and blacks, with all whites being the " common enemy" of all blacks. The primary evidence that Malcolm X draws upon to make this assertion is a historical argument of whites colonizing the world; " they were all Europeans, blond, blue-eyed, and white skinned... they realized all over the world where the dark man was being oppressed, he was being oppressed by the white man".

Malcolm X also addresses that the entire power structure in the United States was based on white ideals<sup>10</sup>, so even the white men who were not outwardly hostile were still indicative of the inherent inequality in the system.

This point of view lies in stark contrast to MLK's view of whites as their "brothers" and possibly as necessary advocates for the Civil Rights movement, though Malcolm X would probably point out that the mere fact that MLK perceived the Civil Rights movement to be impossible without white support suggests what was inherently wrong with the whole system; that blacks were not able to peaceably obtain their rights without white support.

Even if the Civil Rights movement were "successful", it would be founded in part on white interests, which Malcolm X believed would always be separate from black interests, no matter what time period.

Furthermore, Malcolm X defines these black people (like MLK) who wanted to work alongside whites as "house Negroes" because they were resigned to their fate as inferiors and were brainwashed to believe that their situation was as good as it could get, much like former slaves. For this perceived inability to coexist peacefully, Malcolm X calls for a violent revolution against the whites that he coined "black nationalism".

Drawing again on historical evidence, Malcolm X asserts that there is no such revolution without violence, and there is no way for blacks to obtain their rights without such a revolution. Citing examples of the American Revolution, French Revolution, and Russian Revolution, Malcolm X claims that "you haven't got a revolution that doesn't involve bloodshed... and you're afraid

to bleed” I?, referring to the large portion of the black community that was in favor of MLK's nonviolence doctrine.

Malcolm X justifies violence by saying that violence happens abroad, and some of the members of the American military that partake in this violence were blacks - " if it's right for American to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it's right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country”.

Malcolm X takes this justification a step further and even claims that those blacks who were willing to suffer peacefully were akin to “ modern Uncle Toms” in the way that they were being controlled by their slave masters, and that “ this is the way it is with the whiteman in America... he's a wolf and you're sheep”.

In stark contrast to MLK's sorrow for blacks who commit violence, Malcolm X has nothing but contempt for the blacks who were willing to suffer peacefully, claiming that “ if you're afraid of Black Nationalism, you're afraid of revolution.” The language of “ nationalism” is a term that Malcolm X uses to address the building of a nation; if the blacks wanted to build a nation for themselves, they had to engage in Black Nationalism, which inevitably consists of justified violence.

After contrasting the two different doctrines, it is easy to see why public opinion would favor MLK, especially considering modern society's disgust toward violence. While I do find MLK's philosophy to be more attractive and desirable, which I'm sure even Malcolm X would agree with, the question is not about who is more “ right”, but about which idea would realistically work.

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In 2015 today, the only way that the media would even cover the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, or Freddie Gray is if some black protesters engaged in riots; if everything had been peaceful and civil, the media would possibly mention the events, but ultimately gloss over them. MLK is speaking from the position of "having a dream", which entails an idealistic future, whereas Malcolm X speaks from the position of being "down to earth", analyzing historical trends and finding the most pragmatic solution.

I am not implying that Malcolm X's ideas were "superior" to MLK's in any way; in fact, I find MLK's ideas to be much more sophisticated and logically reasoned. Sadly, it is difficult to logically dictate the actions of human beings, as humans are ultimately irrational and overwhelmingly self-centered. So what am I trying to say? I think MLK would be gravely disappointed in how little today's society has progressed in terms of true racial equality, and his ideas may remain as nothing more than dreams, albeit brilliant dreams.