

Malcolm x vs. dr. king: passive vs; aggressive

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Africans were brought to America by Europeans, not of their own volition, but in chains, without the knowledge that over the next several hundred years, generations and generations of our people would be brutally and unjustly treated as nothing more than property or animals. The era during which slavery flourished, Africans were bred, overworked, beaten, lynched, and stripped of any positive identity or self respect. When slavery was abolished in 1865, Africans, or former slaves, were left without a " place" in America. Where did they fit in? What was the role that they were to play as, so called, American citizens? Some, undertook the role of " leader", and preached and taught what they felt was the best process by which, blacks could achieve equality. From the beginning, however, there were conflicts concerning the nature of how this was to be accomplished. This discrepancy over passive and aggressive attitude concerning the advancement of blacks in America has permeated, and at times, divided the black community from the time that Africans were brought here in chains, until the present. Malcolm X's philosophies, which centered more on blacks accepting themselves, and loving themselves, and creating their own sense of pride, was deemed racist by the media and he was portrayed as militant/violent by the Civil Rights Activists, when in fact Malcolm X's teachings contain the exact remedy that we " victims of America" (Malcolm X uses this term to distinguish the fact that blacks were not brought to America out of their own volition) need in order to live the best lives in the conditions that we have been forced into by whites. Booker T. Washington, born in 1856, was a prominent leader of the black community during the years following the abolishment of slavery, who believed that equality and respect for blacks would be gained over time.

Washington preached to his followers that they should work on bettering themselves, not through liberal education, but by learning a trade or vocation which could be of service to either the black or white community, and that in time, whites would allow blacks to assimilate into their society. William Edward Burghardt Dubois, born in 1868 and more commonly known as W. E. B Dubois, was Washington's adversary. Dubois preached that blacks should demand their rights, both human and civil, and that this was the only way that whites, who ultimately controlled the society, would grant blacks any civil liberties at all. Dubois also preached that blacks should not depend upon whites for anything. During the Civil Rights/Black Power movement in the 50', 60's, and 70's, two essential leaders emerged, and undertook the roles as leaders of the non-violent/passive and armed/aggressive movement that would ultimately give Blacks their " freedom". Martin Luther King and Malcolm X aimed toward a similar goal for blacks. Both wanted it to be realized by blacks and whites that blacks were not inferior to whites in any way. King and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (The name Malcolm adopted after his visit to Mecca) respectively employed non-violent and aggressive (which is often times termed as violent) methods to achieve the common goal. King is associated with the Civil Rights, non-violent, passive leader in the struggle. Malcolm X is linked to the Black Power, armed, " By any means necessary" aggressive solution to the race/class problem, which gave black a sense of self worth and empowerment, which would be lost if complete integration was achieved. Dr. Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929 into a middle-class family. His father was a well respected minister and businessman in the Atlanta, GA area. King was blessed with a life unlike the

common black family in that time period, though that does not mean that he did not sympathize with the poverty stricken majority. King attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and subsequently Crozer Theological Seminary, located in Chester, PA. Martin Luther King was passionate about the Civil Rights Movement, and was arrested several times, and even went so far as to meet with President Eisenhower in attempt to further advance and integrate colored people in the United States. Martin Luther King adopted six Principles of Non-violence (1) Non-violence is a way of life for courageous people (2) Non-violence seeks to win friendship and understanding (3) Non-violence seeks to defeat injustices, not people (4) Non-violence holds that suffering can educate and transform (5) Non-violence chooses love instead of hate (6) Non-violence believes that the universe is on the side of justice. Malcolm X's upbringing was drastically different from Dr. King's, in that it was more violent, which had a direct bearing the extreme resentment Malcolm felt towards Whites. In contrast to King's comfortable upbringing, Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, was born to mother who " looked like a white woman" (The Autobiography of Malcolm X p2). He, eventually, like his mother learned to resent his fair complexion because, instead of feeling as though it was a status symbol, both realized that it was the mark of an evil " white devil" who raped Malcolm's mother's mother. Malcolm and his mother both married people whose complexion was darker than their own in an attempt to rectify the guilt that they harbored. Malcolm's father followed the teachings of Marcus Garvey, and believed " ...that freedom, independence and self-respect could never be achieved by the Negro in America, and that therefore

the Negro should leave America to the white man and return to his African land of origin" (The Autobiography of Malcolm X p2). Domestic abuse was commonplace in the Little home. The Little home was burned to the ground by The Klu Klux Klan, the same hate group which was responsible for the murder of Malcolm's father. Malcolm's father was cruelly murdered (as were all of his siblings except one), and the known culprits were never held accountable. After his father's murder, Malcolm's mother was left to raise eight children on her own. Soon after his father was killed, Malcolm's mother had a mental breakdown, and the children were split up among different foster families. These negative course of events influenced the antipathy that Malcolm felt towards whites. Likewise, Dr. King's comparatively comfortable lifestyle directly influenced the passive attitude that he portrayed in regards to the Civil Rights Movement. In school, Malcolm spent his early years enduring the negative effects of integration, considering himself the class " mascot", and being told that " realistically" he could not achieve his dream of becoming a lawyer solely on the basis that it was " ...no realistic goal for a nigger"(The Autobiography of Malcolm X p 38). The culmination of the negative experiences that Malcolm suffered encouraged his adamant outlook concerning the empowerment of blacks instead of complete integration. Malcolm publicly opposed the " turn the other cheek" philosophy of King. Malcolm X believed in the black revolution, which encouraged Black Nationalism, defined in a speech entitled " By Any Means Necessary" by Manning Marable " The basis of African American nationalism is the national identity and collective consciousness and experience of people of African descent in the United States, a consciousness of nationality which

is at odds with the mainstream culture, ideology, society and political values which are held by this system" (By Any Means Necessary: The life and Legacy of Malcolm X; Marable). While Dr. King insisted that desegregation/integration was a positive change for blacks in America, Malcolm emphasized Black pride and empowerment. On the subject of integration, Malcolm made the following comment, " I believe in the brotherhood of man, all men, but I don't believe in brotherhood with anyone who doesn't want brotherhood with me. I believe in treating people right, but I'm not going to waste my time trying to treat somebody right who doesn't know how to return the treatment" (Malcolm X; speech 12/12/1964, NY). Malcolm used terms such as " White Devil" and " Beautiful Black brothers and sisters" what this did was provoke a sense of pride within Blacks. Instead of glamorizing the white culture, and desiring to assimilate into it, Malcolm X realized that " The black man in North America was mentally sick in his cooperative, sheep like acceptance of the white man's culture" (The Autobiography of Malcolm X p319). This " sheep like acceptance" that Malcolm was criticizing was Dr. King's main strategy. King wanted to endure the maltreatment of whites with a silent, yet dignified, non-violent attitude. Malcolm did not understand what this passiveness would accomplish. He felt that self-defense was the logical response o the constant brutality that Blacks were faced with. Dr. King and Malcolm X had variable solutions to the same problem dealing with blacks' " place" in the American society . King stressed the non-violent philosophy that encouraged blacks to peacefully protest until they were allowed to integrate completely into the white society. Malcolm X's philosophy centered more on blacks accepting

themselves, and loving themselves, and creating their own sense of pride. Malcolm X promoted the improvement of the black community instead of the complete integration into the white community. " It's just like when you've got some coffee that's too black, which means it's too strong. What do you do? You integrate it with cream, you make it weak. But if you pour too much cream in it, you wont even know you ever had coffee. It used to be hot, it becomes cool, It used to be strong, it becomes weak. It used to wake you up, now it puts you to sleep" (" Message to the Grass Roots," Malcolm X). This metaphor accurately describes the immense loss that Malcolm felt would be dealt the black community if they dismissed their own culture and were assimilated into the white society. Malcolm X criticized the complacent attitude of " hen pecking Uncle Tom's" such as Martin Luther King. Malcolm X stressed revolution, and thought that the serene approach of the Civil Rights Movement, led by Dr. King and financed by whites, would lead to the loss of black pride because it would encourage blacks to " try to be white" in order to " fit in" the white society. Today, blacks have the same legal rights as whites, but there is still blatant racism in America. Blacks have integrated into the white society, and the loss that Malcolm feared has become a reality. We straighten our hair in order to make it look like theirs, wear their clothes, and learn a school curriculum that centers around their history. There are more black men in prison than in college, and the percentage of black owned businesses is considerably disproportionate to the black population. The Civil Rights Movement was successful, and the Black Power Movement has been forgotten, but have blacks found their " place"?

SOURCES: Haley, Alex; The Autobiography of Malcolm X; Ballantine

Publishing Group; 1964 Malcolm X; " Message to the Grass Roots," speech, Nov. 1963, Detroit (Published in Malcolm X Speaks, ch. 1, 1965) Malcolm X; speech, Dec 12, 1964, New York, NY Marable, Manning; " By Any Means Necessary: The Life and Legacy of Malcolm X", speech; New York, NY