

# Malcolm x and gandhi: a philosophical comparison of their leadership as shown in ...

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The paper "Leadership of Malcolm X and Gandhi as Shown in the Movies" is an engrossing version of an essay on biographies. Malcolm X and Gandhi were two extraordinary thinkers and highly charismatic leaders of the twentieth century with completely different philosophical outlooks and approaches. The same is reflected in the biopic movies made in honor of each of them. Although both lived in violent times and the people who they represented lived under oppression, Gandhi was a pacifist, whereas Malcolm X was an outright activist. Both challenged a racially different group to improve the lives of their own people but whereas Gandhi desired nonviolence and cordial relations, Malcolm X advocated open racism. This paper makes further brief comparisons with respect to their style of leadership, handling of conflict, relating with others, and the evolution of their political views based on the two films.

The way Gandhi used nonviolence effectively against the ruling British was to create no more than civil disobedience, for example by encouraging people to refuse to obey certain unjust laws and refuse to pay taxes. However, his approach was to endure suffering and not attempt to perpetuate the cycle of violence. He thus took a spiritually higher stance. His leadership was an inspiration to Martin Luther King and far removed from that of Malcolm X. The approach of Malcolm X, on the other hand, is clearly portrayed at the opening of the movie with his inflammatory speech.

The history of both leaders also involved a famous march and it is worth exploring this for comparative purposes. In one of the most picturesque parts

of the film, Gandhi is shown leading a march to the sea to teach people how to make salt despite a prohibition to do so. The purpose was thus to improve the well being of his people through self-sufficiency while at the same time demonstrating opposition to the British salt tax. Gandhi's philosophy was to make people focus first on self-discipline before opposing oppressors. This approach based on compassion and truth is known as ' Satyagraha'.

Malcolm's march was to a hospital in Harlem, in which a Muslim was recovering from police brutality. It is after this episode that Malcolm advanced as a leader in the Nation of Islam. There was another peaceful march for civil rights on Washington in his time, but Malcolm was against it. Thus, Malcolm's aim was to highlight oppression rather than teach something that would be practically useful for his people.

As far as the accuracy of the films is concerned, Malcolm X is based more or less faithfully according to his autobiography. The film Gandhi is also historically accurate and Gandhi too left an autobiography, but its title, ' The stories of my experiments with the truth', speaks for itself. Gandhi was always obsessed with the truth but for Malcolm, this stage in life came much later. However, it was his constant openness for the truth that actually facilitated the eventual change.

In terms of their evolution then, or rather change of political views; those of Malcolm X were most dramatic. In showing this, the movie makes good use of real footage from Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Makkah and meetings with

other Muslim political leaders. In the end, Malcolm's conflict became internalized and he had to deal with it and come to terms with the reality before he could become somewhat more like Gandhi who was already more mature. The change was so significant that the new Malcolm denounced racism and aligned himself with mainstream Islam based on ideas of peace and brotherhood.

In short, Gandhi's style of leadership was more spiritual with a focus on developing self-discipline as well as promoting self-sufficiency. He handled conflict in a peaceful way and tried to champion peaceful relations. In contrast, Malcolm X knew and practiced no means other than violence, adopted a racist ideology, and thus led his people to be in direct conflict with others, until that is, his inner struggle and search for the truth transformed him.