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In post-war America, fight against racism threatened to turn the country upside down. The struggle reached crescendo in the 1960s and in the midst of it all were two charismatic and articulate leaders in the person of Martin Luther King, Jr.

and Malcolm X. They were similar and different in so many ways. Their differences forced them to be at odds when it comes to dealing with the problems related to the cry for equality and justice with regards to plight of African-Americans.

Their similarities on the other hand allowed them to cross paths and made them the iconic leaders of the struggle of the Negro race. Their shared passion for freedom and equality made them targets and their commitment to their ideals cause them to die from an assassin's bullet and silenced at the prime of their lives. Martin Luther King's political ideas may come as weak to many of his critics but what he contributed can be considered as more effective when it comes to shaping contemporary African-American politics of today.

## **Similarities**

They chose to walk different paths but there are similarities. First of all they share an intense belief that things cannot remain as they were. Both men shared the idea that in order to transform American society there must be a radical transformation that must occur first within the person, and then onwards to the community and to the national level. In fact they believed that they had a major role to play in this struggle and they were sure of this

fact that they were willing to change their names to suit their mission in life. Martin Luther King was born Michael King.

[1] Malcolm X obviously was not born with an unusual surname. He was christened as Malcolm Little.[2] They were exposed to the racism of the post-war era and they were committed to be change agents for their people and their nation. Their ideas and their words came from a religious base. They were ministers in their respective religions. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the son, grandson and the great-grandson of Baptist ministers and when he grew up it was understandable why he chose to become a fourth-generation Baptist minister.

[3] Malcolm X is not a preacher's son but when he became an adult he joined the Nation of Islam and then he became a minister in that religious organization. When King and Malcolm X would speak they would speak with power and charisma but their ideas have religious undertone to it. Their political ideas stem from a dream that one day all African-Americans can walk the streets with their head held high. A dream of total emancipation from the negative effects of slavery and the desire for freedom in all aspects of life.

In Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom he said, " It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream ... that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ' we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"[4] This was the burning passion in his heart. The same can be said of Malcolm X who could not accept the status quo and was gripped

by a vision that someday African-Americans will no longer be considered as second-class citizens.

## **Differences**

They are so much alike but at the same time they are also miles apart when it comes to the core principles of their political theories. Malcolm X believed that African-Americans need to be more aggressive - that they had to assert themselves when it comes to their constitutional rights as citizens of the United States of America and their God-given rights as human beings. More importantly, Malcolm X's core teachings were all about "moral principles of self-defense, retaliation, and power." [5] Martin Luther King, Jr.

on the other hand chose nonviolent resistance "through unconditional love and direct action." [6] In other words Martin Luther King, Jr. is a firm believer in the principles of non-violent resistance against the oppressors of the Negro race. His role-model is none other than Mahatma Gandhi.

Their differences in this regard may partly explain why King is more revered than Malcolm X. In fact there are only a few people in America who do not know this peace-loving man. Once a year, Americans celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Aside from that, Mr. King also received the Nobel Peace Prize. He received the award for his achievements in the fight for equality, freedom, and justice using non-violent means. And at the age of 35 he is considered as one of the youngest to ever receive a Nobel Prize.

The same accolades were never given to Malcolm X. The second major difference can be seen in how they envision the future when it comes to the relationship between blacks and whites. King wanted integration. He did not only believe that racism can be eradicated he also believed that black and whites can live in relative harmony. One writer was able to capture King's actions and beliefs more succinctly when he wrote, " Although King's Gandhian tactics were radical at the time, his goals in 1965 were mainstream: inclusion of black citizens in an integrated American democracy.

"[7] During this period some questioned the effectiveness this political theory and there were many criticisms hurled at King but at the end he was vindicated. Malcolm X on the other hand felt that King's vision is a mere illusion and that there is no logic to the idea that all of a sudden white people will relinquish control. One commentator was able to summarize the rationale for the call for separation as opposed to integration; citing Malcolm X the author wrote the following: " Because they believed they would never ' pierce the present white power structure' they decided to form a separate party and elect Negroes to office.

"[8] This is why many disapproved of King's non-violent stance. For Malcolm X this mindset will never work against the entrenched power of the white people. Malcolm clarified it even further by stating words to this effect: " In the etiquette of race relations, the condition of the oppressed was ameliorated, if at all, through entreaty and supplication and only by the dominant class and at its pace." [9] Malcolm X felt that progress is moving at a snail's pace and something has to be done. It must also be pointed out that <https://assignbuster.com/in-up-and-live-out-the-true/>

their differences is exemplified in the way they crafted their speeches, declarations, and actions when they are in the public eye. This has affected the way they handled their social and political activities. It can be argued that whereas both men were activists only one of them is an expert when it comes to dealing with mainstream politics and manage the tension between the oppressed and frustrated black minority as well as the white majority.

For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr.

was able to work with the former President Johnson and their collaboration resulted in the creation of landmark laws whose impact is still felt to this day.

[10] Malcolm X on the other hand succeeded in alienating himself from mainstream society and he could not influence the White House to help him to reach his goals. Martin Luther King, Jr. may have a better feel for politics but to the eyes of his critics this has become a liability. This is because the radicalized segment of the African-American community wanted substantial results. They may have interpreted King's cautious stance as a sign of weakness. It was viewed with contempt by many African-Americans, especially the young people.

Malcolm X's fiery rhetoric was more desirable for them. In the words of one author, " They weren't willing to wait for the slow, patient, methods of the NAACP, or even the civil rights movement, to take effect." [11] No one will know how far Malcolm X would be willing to go when it comes to his ideas of self-defense and retaliation because he was gunned down at the prime of his life just like his contemporary Martin Luther King, Jr. But it can be said that the non-violent approach to the issues of racism has been proven more effective than the alternative.

## Conclusion

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X shared the same dream and it is the dream that one day racism will end and that the members of the Negro race will come to know the true meaning of the phrase that all men were created equal. However, they differ sharply when it comes to the methods that they believe could make this dream come true.

King adhered to a Gandhi-like non-violent approach and sought to integrate with the mainstream society. Malcolm X opted for more desperate measures and was willing to retaliate against their oppressors. Radicalized members of the African-American community frowned upon the slow - and most of the time ineffective strategies of King - and were excited with the ideas articulated by Malcolm X. But in the end it was the non-violent confrontational tactics of King that awakened the conscience of Americans both black and white.

Every year Americans commemorate the contributions of King through a national holiday that bears his name and that alone is enough to testify when it comes to the positive impact of his legacy. " King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1929-1968)." The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research Education Institutue, accessed 14 February 2011. [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc\\_martin\\_luther\\_king\\_jr\\_biography/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_martin_luther_king_jr_biography/) " Malcolm X (1925-1965)." The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research Education Institutue, accessed 14 February 2011. [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc\\_martin\\_luther\\_king\\_jr\\_biography/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_martin_luther_king_jr_biography/)

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