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Chasing the Dream: The Civil Rights Movement and Desire for American Equality

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Introduction

> What is crucial here is that unless we can manage to accept, establish some kind of dialogue between those people whom I pretend have paid for the American dream and those other people who have not achieved it, we will be in terrible trouble. I want to say, at the end, the last, is that is what concerns me most. We are sitting in this room, and we are all, at least I'd like to think we are, relatively civilized, and we can talk to each other at least on certain levels so that we could walk out of here assuming that the measure of our enlightenment, or at least, our politeness, has some effect on the world.
>
> James Baldwin[1]

When one thinks of the civil rights movement, no two individuals are more prominent than Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. While both played pivotal roles in the movement, many tend to think of them as entirely separate, fixed entities. The reality is that Martin and Malcolm both led complicated lives, and changed significantly over time in terms of their ideologies. Something that is often left out of the discussion on these two individuals is the ways in which their philosophies and ideologies began to converge later in their lives. While Martin is most associated with the black integrationist perspective and Malcolm the black nationalists, by the time both died they were far more similar than some might think. This is doubly true when considering the way they are expected to be taught in the U.S. History curriculum, as individuals who lived and worked in a vacuum, representing two distinct movements and ideologies. Historian and theologian James H. Cone argued that while Martin King saw America as "essentially a dream...as yet unfilled," Malcolm X viewed America as a living nightmare. Despite this dichotomy, the two men had visions that were rapidly converging towards the end of their lives, and historically were often complementary of one another. How these ideologies complemented one another, sometimes converged, and the role they played in the scope of the civil rights movement will be the focus of this unit.

Rationale

I teach at a neighborhood high school located in North Philadelphia. The School District of Philadelphia lists the demographics of the school as 59% Hispanic, 30% African American, 8% White, 2% Asian and 1% Other. 100% of the student body qualifies for free breakfast and lunch.

Many of my students have a limited view of the civil rights movement; most history textbooks leave out much of the complexities and nuance of different factions within the struggle for racial equality. For example, it is often insinuated that there was a unified black coalition fighting for greater equity across the county. This is untrue, as there was much disagreement along ideological lines, such as in the case of black integrationists and black nationalists. One of the primary goals of this unit is to examine the complexities and evolutions of Martin, Malcolm, and the movements they represented. By giving a more complete picture of the civil rights movement, students will gain a deeper understanding and exercise critical thinking skills beyond basic analysis and retention of the incomplete narrative that is usually presented.

Martin and Malcolm’s Early Roots

Both men’s early lives and experiences profoundly shaped their identities and ideologies. Martin King had a stable family life as a child and relative stability and protection from racism. Conversely, Malcolm grew up in a broken family, deprived of many basic comforts, thus shaping his views on what it meant to be black in America. In “The Conservation of Races” W.E.B. Du Bois mused whether one could be black *and* an American. Two different answers to this question summarize Martin and Malcolm’s opposing views. Furthermore, it is next to impossible to review the ideologies and actions of these two men and the movements they represented without discussing their religious upbringings.

Martin King would have likely answered “yes” to Du Bois’ question about black identity. He was an integrationist, someone who believed that it was possible to achieve justice and equity in America while also peacefully coexisting within white communities. This type of optimism is rooted in the traditions of freedom and democracy espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Integrationists believed that the American ideals of equal justice under the laws could and should apply to everyone, and that a meaning and peaceful cohabitation was possible between white and black citizens. King’s religious upbringing shaped his ideologies and politics and he often appealed to other Christians in his pursuit of racial equality. Supporters and allies of Martin King were optimistic, whether they were fully-fledged integrationists or activists looking to advance the cause for social and racial justice. Raised by a family of Baptist ministers, King believed that even during bouts of widespread violence and heightened racial tensions African Americans could still be successful and prosperous.

Malcolm X took the opposite stance. The early roots of black nationalism go back to the seventeenth-century, when African slaves united in a common struggle against slavery. They longed to return to their homeland, knowing that they were not meant for servitude. These same ideologies pervaded Malcolm X’s thoughts, especially as he began to think of America as a living nightmare that blacks could not and should not endure. The central claim of black nationalism is that black people are primarily Africans and not Americans. With this separate idea of identity, this feeling of existing in America physically, but with an identity that belonged elsewhere, the history of Malcolm’s development and eventual relationship with the Nation of Islam becomes clearer. During his time with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm came to believe that African Americans were the chosen race of God. He was explicitly anti-integration and believed in achieving racial justice by any means

necessary. While Martin King and the integrationists believed that God was inherently on their side, Malcolm X thought that God would only help those who help themselves.

While Martin & the integrationists and Malcolm & the black nationalists are often described through the lenses of their religious upbringings and affiliations, the core methodologies that those affiliations dictated are worth examination as well. Martin and Malcolm may have been opposed to one another, however, their approaches of nonviolence and self-defense, respectively, worked in tandem. In his analysis, James Cone asserts "the difference between them...was a matter of emphasis, contexts and perspectives on America."[2] Their opposing views had more in common than they may have thought at the time, and would certainly converge before long.

Malcolm X extolled the values of self-defense, that African Americans should seek freedom by any means necessary. He believed that black people had the right to do whatever necessary to gain freedom in the same way that all other human beings have the same right. Martin King's approach of nonviolence was just as salient as Malcolm's. He made the claim that nonviolent direct action is not simple passivity or acquiescence, but merely a different form of resistance. Malcolm may have spoken to the visceral, physical feelings of African Americans, but Martin spoke to the political realities that went hand in hand with their minority status in America. Nonviolence proved to be a powerful tool against segregation in the South.

Martin and Malcolm were both men of the people; they believed that freedom would be achieved through collective action throughout black communities. The Montgomery bus boycott was instrumental in transforming the civil rights movement into a mass movement. Martin used the black faith to stir the poor masses to rise up against oppression. On the other hand, Malcolm inspired the masses in northern ghettos. Coming from a deprived background himself, Malcolm had much more credibility than Martin, who had a comparatively privileged upbringing. Malcolm was able to speak from experience, and that resonated with the plight experienced by so many African Americans during the civil rights movement and the history that preceded it. He spoke of action, often explaining that while the poverty and misery that many found themselves in was not directly their fault, it was still their responsibility to free themselves from it; in other words, Malcolm could motivate others to action through shared experience. While both men represented different ideologies and different goals before and during the civil rights movement, in many ways they were two sides of the same coin.

> The leadership style of combining 'protest,' 'accommodation,' and 'self-help' was particularly suited for the South and consistent with the spirituality of the black church. Protest emphasized the right of black people to share in the benefits of America on an equal level with whites; accommodation meant that the black fight for equality would always be non-violent, using the American democratic and Christian traditions of freedom as a way of appealing to the conscience of whites; and self-help stressed the economic, educational and moral development of the black community, thereby accenting blacks' self-worth and self-confidence as a people. The black middle class believed that success in education, morality, and business would eventually cause whites to accept them as human beings and thus as equal partners in the social and political life of America.[3]

Faith in the American political and religious traditions and the perceived progress of the black middle class instilled an optimism that blacks would eventually achieve full citizenship. According to popular integrationist ideology, blacks could achieve success if they studied, worked and saved their money with rigor and fidelity.

After several tumultuous experiences with white supremacy in his youth, Martin was decidedly anti-white. When required to stand on a 90-mile bus ride to Atlanta to accommodate newly boarding white passengers, he claimed that he had never been so angry in his life. Martin later shed his anti-white feelings after coming into contact with white students in college through working with interracial organizations. King eventually came to understand that racism was structural and more linked to the political economy of capitalism than any personal actions.[4]

While active in his church and writing his dissertation in the mid-1950s, King still found time for political activism. Montgomery, Alabama was known as the "Cradle of the Confederacy," and the encompassing shadow of segregation permeated all aspects of life for African Americans. Perhaps the most visceral blow to black feelings of self-worth was the segregated bus service. In the wake of several bus-related incidents in Montgomery, a committee was formed to discuss conditions with the bus company and the City Commission. Martin was asked to serve on the committee, paving the way for his emergence as the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott, even before Rosa Parks' famous civil disobedience. King also joined the Alabama Council on Human Relations. Working in tandem with the NAACP's use of the courts to force change, the council attempted to utilize education as a tool to create more positive outcomes for African Americans.[5]

While MLK held a middle-class, integrationist vision of the American dream of blacks and whites working together, Malcolm looked at America from the perspective of blacks living en-masse in the dregs of society. Martin may have viewed America as a dream yet to be fulfilled, but Malcolm saw the sociopolitical reality of America as a nightmare for the majority of African Americans.

> Black civil rights leaders were especially unkind in their characterization of Malcolm. In a debate with him at Harvard, Walter C. Carrington of the NAACP described Malcolm's philosophy as 'the best thing that happened to the KKK since the invention of the bedsheet.' Ralph Bunch said that he was 'mentally depraved.' James Farmer of CORE called Malcolm a 'talented demagogue.' Bayard Rustin said that he was a 'conservative forced in the Negro community' whose 'violent rhetoric' was a 'cop-out.'[6]

Malcolm was heavily influenced by his upbringing and environment just as Martin was. If Martin's middle-class, integrationist experiences as a youth had profound effects on his ideologies and politics throughout his life, so too did Malcolm's growth and development as a product of the northern poor black masses. Malcolm's father was perhaps the largest influence on his politics during his early years; Malcolm remembered his father as a dedicated nationalist who would often bring him to Garveyite UNIA meetings.

"He 'learned early that crying out in protest could accomplish things.' 'If you want something,' he contended, 'you had better make some noise.'" After the death of Malcolm's father, his mother was faced with the harrowing task of trying to raise eight children during the depression years of the 1930s. She was eventually backed so far into a corner that she had to accept public relief. The welfare agents began to become more oppressive, later breaking up the Little family due to the implications of Malcolm's mother being unable to care for them. Malcolm blamed the state agency for destroying his family and saw it as legal, modern slavery, with a white man, the judge, in charge of a black man's children.[7] In stark contrast to Martin's middle-class upbringing of relative comfort and prosperity, Malcolm's parents could not shield him and his siblings from institutional racism, violence, and the adverse psychological effects of the ensuing traumatic experiences.

While serving a prison sentence for burglary, Malcolm discovered the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, which radically changed his life. After assuming leadership of the Nation in the wake of Wallace D. Fard's disappearance, Muhammad rewrote its definition to be explicitly anti-white and anti-Christian. Malcolm saw Christianity as consistent with white, middle class identity, and Islam as the religion of the black ghetto experience. Two central claims of the Nation of Islam attracted Malcolm: its definition of the white man as the devil and the affirmation of black history and culture. This type of thinking, however, would be overshadowed by a growing demand for racial justice. In the wake of World War II there was a growing demand for a more egalitarian American society.

Brown v. Board of Education

Brown v. Board of Education was a landmark Supreme Court case that served as an integral part of the civil rights movement. The idea of "separate-but-equal" educational services was found to be unconstitutional and not, in fact, equal at all. The Supreme Court had previously ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregated public facilities were legal, as long as the facilities were equal. Jim Crow laws created the type of government-sanctioned separatism that dominated American society for the ensuing sixty years.

There was a wave of racial progressivism in the wake of World War II, and big changes were on the horizon. In hindsight it the oncoming wave of civil rights gains during this period in history could seem natural, but it was not always clear-cut. The NAACP was initially resistant to strike and picketing efforts against a segregated high school in Prince Edward County, Virginia, however, this would pave the way for *Brown v. Boardof Education*. NAACP lawyers eventually agreed to challenge Jim Crow education in Virginia, but with the caveat that students must be willing to directly challenge segregation. Lawsuits were filed in South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington, D.C., but the namesake of *Brown* began in Topeka, Kansas.

Oliver Brown filed a class-action lawsuit against the Board of Education of Topeka in 1951 after his daughter, Linda Brown, was barred entry from Topeka's white elementary schools. The justices consolidated the five cases into one, with Brown's name appearing on the docket as a sort of historical happenstance. As Peter Irons asserts in *A People's History of the Supreme Court*, "what matters is that both men [Brown and Harry Briggs, plaintiff in another related lawsuit] challenged their children's segregation at a time when the Court was finally ready ready to confront the 'separate but equal' doctrine of the *Plessy* decision."[8] The fortuity of the Court's racial attitudes was in many ways a reflection of public opinion concerning race in the wake of World War II. It would to be safe to say then that there was a pervasive wave of integrationist ideology in America during the period when the *Brown* decision was rendered.

Brown's lawsuit claimed that schools for black children were inherently unequal to white schools and thus violated the equal protections clause of the 14th Amendment. Thurgood Marshall, then head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, served as the chief attorney for the plaintiffs. The justices were initially opposed on how to rule on educational segregation, delaying resolution of the cases, but a crucial turn of events played out in 1953, before *Brown* was to be heard. Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson had held the belief that the *Plessy* verdict should stand, but he died in September before the case was formally heard in the Supreme Court. President Eisenhower replaced him with Earl Warren, who was governor of California at the time. Warren shifted the balance, opening the discussion with the claim that he could not "see how segregation can be justified in this day and age."

Warren's support of integration also influenced opposition justices such as Robert H. Jackson and Felix Frankfurter. As Michael J. Klarman posits, "all judicial decision making involves both legal and extralegal—or

"political"—considerations; the latter include influences such as the judges' personal values, social mores, and external political pressure."[9] If political pressure could and did influence Supreme Court decisions, then clearly integrationist ideology had won the day. While the battle over school segregation had been won, the war was not over. The Supreme Court rendered the verdict but was met with resistance, especially in the South. Despite the benign intentions of the Court's ruling, many school districts and politicians at the local level evaded or resisted desegregation and integration in their respective states. The ruling of *Brown II* a year later impelled lower and federal and district courts to desegregate, but the majority of efforts were intentionally delayed or drawn out to impede any sort of meaningful progress. "…it was obvious after *Brown* that the white Southerner's idea of deliberate speed was not what most black citizens had in mind."[10]

A large population of white Northerners initially celebrated the Brown ruling, but it was dependent upon the belief that *Brown* did not apply to them and the communities they lived in. Things were more clear-cut in the South, as a campaign known as Massive Resistance began in the wake of the ruling. White politicians utilized every method under the sun to resist the Supreme Court's mandate. Commenting on this in 1963, Malcolm X mused, "wasn't it impractical that the Supreme Court could issue a desegregation order nine years ago and there's still only 8 percent compliance?"[11] Siphoning state tax dollars to fund all-white private schools, shutting down schools and entire schools systems were some of the methods employed in white resistance. The school system in Prince Edward County, Virginia was inoperable for five years until the Supreme Court ordered the schools to reopen.[12]

The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act

If, in some ways, *Brown* symbolized the North in 1954, the South's violent dissent and campaign of Massive Resistance was symbolized by the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmet Till in Mississippi. While there was a lack of widespread support among Northern whites for desegregation when it stood to affect their own communities, white liberals remained the chief advocates for civil rights in the north alongside the NAACP. Conversely, the opposition in the South was led by the White Citizens Council and the Ku Klux Klan. These diametrically opposed groups were putting the full force of their operations behind making their respective visions the norm for the whole of American society. It was in this environment that Martin's vision of the American Dream took shape.

The Second World War helped to foster the unwillingness of blacks in the south to accept their second-class status in society. Many fought and died in the fight against fascism, and this was a truth that not only made the realities of oppression at home harder to accept, but empowered resistance movements in both nonviolent and more militant senses. The Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-56 began a wave of nonviolent resistance. Followed by the freedom rides and the Albany Movement in 1961, the Birmingham Campaign and the March on Washington in 1963, among others, nonviolent direct action on behalf of the integrationists set the stage for forthcoming civil rights legislation.

Blacks in the north enjoyed more political and civil rights than their Southern counterparts. The black vote helped to secure the presidency for Kennedy in 1960. With that said, much of what Martin King and his fellow integrationists strove towards was in direct opposition to the rise of black nationalism in the North. Around the time that nonviolent direct action campaigns were starting to take off, black nationalists led by Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam had just begun their rise to prominence. Indeed, "nationalists did not share the integrationists' sharp distinction between the South and the North,"[13] and thus advocated a different message entirely. More militaristic, King and other integrationists grappled with the fact that nationalists did not want to put an end to segregation. Content to initially ignore them, Martin was forced to

confront Malcolm and black nationalist ideology due to his public presence and eloquence in espousing nationalist ideals on a large scale.

During the New Deal, Supreme Court justices allowed for greater government regulation of businesses under the Commerce Clause in the Constitution. This set the foundation for the Federal government to later enact civil rights laws preventing both public and private sector discrimination. Combined with the aforementioned social and political climate of the 1950s and 60s, the stage was set for the Kennedy Administration to attempt to enact sweeping civil rights legislation. The bill was first proposed by Kennedy in his Report to the American People on Civil Rights.[14] JFK met with Republican leaders before the television address to the nation. Initially met with support, Senate Minority and Majority Leaders did, however, reject provisions guaranteeing equal access to places of public accommodations. Compromise bills were drafted, and deliberations were bogged down with political impediments, perhaps most strongly embodied by Howard W. Smith, a Democratic Representative and segregationist from Virginia, who reported the bill out of the Judiciary Committee and voiced his intent to stonewall the bill indefinitely.

In the wake of Kennedy's assassination, the political climate shifted dramatically. Johnson stepped into the presidency and began to exercise the political capital he had built up over years as the reputed master of the Senate. Johnson had not only the moral narrative of furthering JFK's civil rights agenda in the wake of his death, but there was also widespread support among integrationists and black nationalists. In April of 1963, in the now-famous Letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin King wrote "…justice too long delayed is justice denied." While that sentiment may have been typical among civil rights activists at the time, it certainly was appropriate during the buildup to the eventual passage of the legislation. Days after Kennedy was assassinated, in an address to a joint session of Congress, Johnson declared, "no memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights bill for which he fought so long." Even Malcolm X weighed in, compelling LBJ to "…go in there right now and take a moral stand—right now, not later."[15]

After passing in the House, Johnson wanted the bill to pass as quickly as possible in the Senate. Johnson knew that the Senate was where previous civil rights bills had gone to die, and thus had to maneuver effectively to get the legislation passed. Despite the fact that the majority opinion—even in the Senate—was in favor of civil rights, the Southern Caucus had defeated every prior attempt at legislated equality. Johnson did not allow Congress to hold other bills hostage in the struggle for passage of the civil rights bill; a tax cut bill had already recently been completed, and in fact had served as one of the major bargaining chips in the previous struggle to pass the bill. LBJ was also steadfast in his resolution not to allow any other bills to be held hostage during the negotiation of the civil rights bill in the Senate. After a 14-hour filibuster and 60 congressional working days, Democratic Whip Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota was able to secure the 67 votes required to end the filibuster.

The Senate was able to garner enough votes to achieve cloture of the filibuster, and the bill was passed by both houses of Congress. Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964. The Voting Rights Act would follow in 1965 and delivered on the promises of the 14th Amendment. Johnson would go before Congress, in the wake of the march on Selma, across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and declare, "*we* shall overcome."[16] During this period, on March 26, 1964, Martin King and Malcolm X met for the first and only time in person. They had both come to hear the Senate debate on the bill. This meeting occurred near the end of both of their lives and was symbolic of the convergence of their ideologies as the country made prodigious gains in the civil rights movement.

In order to capitalize on the promises of the Civil Rights Act, black Americans needed another arrow in the quiver—the vote. Johnson believed it would give them the power to “do the rest for themselves.”[17] But the road to the Voting Rights Act was not guaranteed, nor was it easy. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 attempted to guide the registration process of black voters, but it was met with fierce resistance by white Southerners. In Selma, Alabama sheriff James G. Clark blocked the voter registration activity sponsored by SNCC and other suffrage workers. President Johnson refused to send in federal marshals to protect workers assisting with voter registration. Martin King came at the behest of these workers and was arrested for his support.

In February of 1965, Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot defending his mother from assault by a state trooper during a night march in nearby Perry County. Several reporters were also the victims of violence. [18] Prior to his support for LBJ to secure passage for the Civil Rights Bill, Malcolm X had weighed in on the Kennedy assassination, claiming that it was a matter of “chickens coming home to roost.” Elijah Muhammad, fearing Malcolm was becoming too powerful, suspended him from the Nation of Islam. Shortly thereafter, Malcolm left the organization, took a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, and in June 1964 founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Advocating that racism, not the white race, was the enemy, Malcolm now held a decidedly more moderate philosophy and even attracted the support of members of SNCC. Despite this, Malcolm’s home was firebombed in February of 1965 and Malcolm was shot and killed just one week later at a rally for his organization by members of the Nation of Islam. Grass roots politics was becoming increasingly violent.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference formulated plans for a mass march from Selma to Montgomery on Sunday, March 7, 1965. 600 protestors including King were attacked by state troopers and Sheriff Clark’s country police with tear gas and physical violence. This event became known as “Bloody Sunday” and received national media attention. The mass march was then rescheduled for the ninth of the month. King was urged by Johnson and other major players in the government not to go through with the march. He was also facing a federal injunction against it. Nevertheless, King went through with it, alongside 1,500 other protestors. King crossed the bridge, prayed, then turned around—he had made a deal with federal authorities to go ahead with the protest while still saving face. SNCC workers and other activists were not pleased with this perceived betrayal, and King’s leadership took a hit as a result.

That same evening, white people beat a Unitarian minister from Boston to death. This created a national outcry and pushed Johnson to action. On March 15 Johnson announced he would submit legislation for voter registration in a televised address to Congress. The events at Selma and prodigious white resistance and racially-charged violence spurred Congress to pass the Voting Rights act of 1965, and Johnson signed it into law on August 6. Embodying the rallying cry of the civil rights movement, it was clear that integrationist ideology had won over yet again, and secured the right to democratic participation in a manner unthinkable a century prior. For Martin King, the historic victory had come at the cost of the devaluation of his leadership and reputation among the groups with whom he had worked closely. [19]

Martin and Malcolm’s Convergence

Black nationalist ideology bore the scars of slavery. It was indeed a central part of the black nationalist identity in the time of Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. In *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, Dean E. Robinson argues that the lingering effects of slavery produced a “…crisis of Afro-American cultural and political identity.” On the topic of integrationist ideology, Robinson argues that at one time or another all great black leaders had supported black nationalism, and the civil rights movement could not become revolutionary until its aims transcended mere racial integration.[20] Both of these elements became increasingly true for Martin and Malcolm as their ideologies began to converge during the 1960s.

Malcolm eventually severed ties with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. After making a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, Malcolm returned to the U.S. with a newfound understanding that white people were not the enemy, but rather it was racism itself that must be fought. Malcolm did continue to reject outright integration and advocated separation, but also conceded that a separate black state or return to Africa was unlikely to happen in the short-term. His speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet", symbolized his shifting mindset, with a heightened importance toward the democratic processes that African Americans had newfound and widespread access to. The old nationalistic separatist would never have supported such measures.[21] After Malcolm's death, Martin King began a shift toward more radical politics, turning away from the American dream and peering into Malcolm's nightmare.

During the early phases of the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin still believed in the separate but equal doctrine created by *Plessy*. A few weeks later, he had a revelation, believing that justice within a segregated system was inherently contradictory. Martin's shifting ideology was affected profoundly by the four girls killed in a Birmingham church bombing, the assassination of JFK, and the killing of civil rights workers throughout the movement. Martin would later share his optimism over a newfound militancy within black communities across the nation. Militancy among blacks was largely an element of nationalist efforts during this time, evidenced by the rhetoric of Malcolm and the Nation of Islam. After Malcolm's assassination in 1965, Martin grew increasingly disenchanted with American society, despite the gains made during the civil rights movement. "Living under the daily threat of death, agonizing over the black nationalists' talk about using violence, and frustrated by the U.S. government's continued escalation of the Vietnam war…" Martin continued to grow more oppositional to a system that was still unequal despite the successes of the last decade.[22]

On December 25, 1967 Martin delivered a speech at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. This speech reflected his changing position on race relations in America, and painted a portrait of a tired, frustrated Martin. The optimism that Martin had displayed throughout most of his career as a civil rights activist was all but gone. Not giving in to complete cynicism, however, Martin explained that while no longer optimistic, he still had hope. "Yes, I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes, but in spite of that I close today by saying I still have a dream, because, you know, you can't give up in life. If you lose hope, somehow you lose that vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of all. And so today I still have a dream."[23] This somber, dejected mentality shows that Martin had lost hope in the notion of racial equality in America. In the 1950s this type of thinking from Martin would have been unthinkable, closer perhaps to the more moderate philosophies that Malcolm X exhibited later in his life, just before his death.

The ultimate historical irony of the work and lives of Martin King and Malcolm X is that they would not live to see the fruits of their labors. While prodigious gains had been made for African Americans during the civil rights movement, it would be years until a more egalitarian America was achieved and, indeed, true equality is still scant at best. Revolutionaries like Martin and Malcolm often and unfortunately become martyrs for the causes they represent. Malcolm was killed by members of the Nation of Islam after his break with them, Martin by the whites he was hoping to free of racism. While both men in the end may have had more similarities than differences, and there is often considerable argument about who was more successful in achieving their goals during the civil rights movement, the legacies of both cannot be understated. The continued relevance of their work and ideologies is still necessary today, as America is far from a post-racial society, but in many ways their work serves as inspiration to continue to strive toward the egalitarian society both would come to demand.

Unit Objectives

1. Read, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and discuss the influence of black integrationist ideology, methodology, and the roles it played in key events during the civil rights movement
2. Read, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and discuss the influence of black nationalist ideology, methodology, and the roles it played in key events during the civil rights movement
3. Compare and contrast the lives and actions of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X—how they were similar, how they were different, how they intersected, and how that all played a role in the civil rights movement.
4. Analyze and understand the political processes that led to key civil rights legislation being passed, such as how a bill becomes law, and how President Lyndon Johnson was able to navigate the political processes in order to get the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts to achieve passage in the Senate.
5. Participate in a class-wide debate over the effectiveness of integrationists on behalf of Martin and nationalists on behalf of Malcolm. Students will use evidence and knowledge gained throughout the unit to facilitate their arguments.

Teaching Strategies

One of the core goals of this unit is for students to develop a strong understanding of the way democracy in America developed before, during, and after the civil rights movement. American society experienced fundamental changes during this period, and the legislative actions required to achieve these changes must be understood in order for students to be more active and informed citizens. Many of the activities in this unit will challenge students to consider their own ideologies and how they align or contrast with those of Martin, Malcolm, and other prominent figures in the civil rights movement.

Students will be provided with the necessary background information covered in this unit through a variety of pedagogical techniques. These include, but are not limited to, direct instruction via lecture, close-reading, whole-class and small group discussions, multimedia analysis, rhetorical analysis, thought experiments, and activities simulating democratic processes.

The culminating activity for this unit will be a class-wide debate in which students utilize knowledge and evidence gained from the unit to answer the same question that James Baldwin and William F. Buckley debated in 1965, “is the American dream at the expense of the Negro?” Students will take a stance on this issue and will curate their responses using evidence from prior class activities. Care will be taken to ensure that the dialogue is productive and evidence-based.

Sample Lesson Plans

The Civil Rights Act and How a Bill Becomes Law

Objective: Evaluate and discuss the political process for a how a bill becomes law in the United States, analyzing the Civil Rights Act as a case study and example of that process.

Materials:

- Text of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Procedure:

This activity will take place toward the middle or end of the unit, due to where the events surrounding the passage of the Civil Rights Act fall in the scope of the historical narrative. Alternatively, this activity could be used simply to teach the process for how a bill becomes law. Because the Civil Rights Act was met with numerous oppositions throughout its drafting and the ensuing debates, it exemplifies the process of legislating and just how difficult it can be to pass such sweeping legislation. Explain to students that the Civil Rights Act had to pass a number of hurdles to secure passage in 1964, and this is the same process that all legislation in Congress must follow.

Distribute the text of the Civil Rights Act to the class. The full text can be provided, it can be paired with a simplified version, or select portions of the text can be projected on the board at the front of the room. Explain to the class that the Civil Rights Act was a hotly contested bill from its inception when President John F. Kennedy initially proposed it, and its passage was never guaranteed. It is also important to explain the role that President Johnson played in securing passage of the bill; his reputation as "master of the senate" helped him navigate the ensuing debates over the bill that all-too-often result in the death of legislation.

Essential elements:

- Bill Introduction – A congressperson has an idea, it could be suggested by a president or an interest group.
- Committee Referral – Bills can start in either house, but the bill for the Civil Rights Act began in the House of Representatives. The proposal goes to a committee that drafts the bill and sends it to the floor for debate if the committee votes in favor of the bill.
- House Rules – The bill is debated on the floor of the House. It must receive at least 238 votes in order to pass the House and be sent to the Senate for debate. An Open Rule allows for amendments to the bill. Bills often die via the Open Rule because members of Congress who oppose the bill can bundle unfavorable amendments that will not secure passage. In one case, a Virginia segregationist introduced an amendment to ban employment discrimination against women, hoping to kill the bill, but the amendment passed and the House approved the bill by a vote of 290-130.
- Filibuster – Any bill can be filibustered, when a Senator threatens to keep debating the bill until it is tabled. Historically, the filibuster has been a powerful tool in preventing bills from passing the Senate. Democrats filibustered the bill for 75 days, one of the longest in U.S history. With Johnson's assistance and some behind-the-scenes dealing, the filibuster was ended with the two-thirds vote required. Filibuster being overturned is a rarity, and shows the importance of the legislation.
- Passage – The President has the ability to sign the bill into law or veto it and overturn it. The veto can

be overridden by a two-thirds vote from both houses of Congress. In this case, Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964.

Class Debate: Martin's Dream or Malcolm's Nightmare?

Objective: To synthesize and employ prior unit knowledge in a class-wide debate. The topic of the debate is the opposing philosophies of black integrationists and black nationalists, exemplified by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, respectively, and which was more successful in achieving significant civil rights gains.

Materials:

- "Message to the Grassroots" by Malcolm X
- "I Have a Dream…" by Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Prior unit materials and content knowledge

Procedure:

The culminating project for the unit is a class-wide debate in which students must explore which philosophy was more fully realized during the civil rights movement: black integrationist philosophy or black nationalist philosophy. Students will explore their side of the debate topic through prior unit materials, including previously utilized resources, content knowledge, and excerpts from "Message to the Grassroots" by Malcolm X and "I Have a Dream…" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Given that the debate requires students to draw on prior knowledge, unit materials, and newly-provided resources, time must be devoted to debate preparation. Students can be given the two documents several days in advance and must either select which side of the argument they will operate from or be assigned one to ensure there is an even number of students on both sides. Explain that students will be exploring both sides of the argument through the debate, and must consider the opposition as they formulate their arguments. Students should arrive on the day of the debate with their notes prepared and their stance regarding the topic selected.

Each debate team should open with an overview of their topic and an opening statement. It should be evidence-based and utilize material from the selected speeches and prior unit topics and materials. The debate should focus around the major anchors of the unit: The development of black integrationist and nationalist ideologies, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, and the similarities and differences between Martin and Malcolm, as they relate to the civil rights movement. Students should structure their arguments with three main points, supported by factual evidence and excerpts from the readings, along with three questions for the opposition. Each side will have 10 minutes to speak, with the teacher keeping track of time. At the end of the debate a leader from each side should deliver the closing arguments as well as a summary of the opposition.

Bibliography

Caro, Robert A. *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power.* Random House, 2012. Caro's five volume biography of Johnson is exhaustive and rife with details about the role Kennedy and Johnson played in the civil rights movement. *The Passage of Power* is particularly helpful in understanding precisely how significant Johnson's role was in securing the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.

Cone, James. *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* 4th ed., Orbis Books, 2017. Cone's book forms the backbone for this curriculum unit. He weaves an elucidating narrative of the lives of Martin King and Malcolm X, how they were similar, how they differed, and how they were more alike than many might think.

Hine, Darlene Clark, William C. Hine and Stanley Harrold. *African Americans: A Concise History* 4th ed. Pearson, 2012. A useful primer on African American history, and specifically helpful in teaching this unit for its 21st chapter on the civil rights movement.

Irons, Peter. *A People's History of the Supreme Court*. Penguin Books, 2006. Informative and useful beyond the scope of this unit, this book is nonetheless a great retelling of many of the most significant Supreme Court cases in history. The chapters on *Brown v. Board* give a detailed rendition of the events surrounding the case.

Klarman, Michael J. *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History.* Oxford University Press, 2007. Klarman delivers a concise primer on the history of racial [in]equality in America. The later chapters in particular served as the basis for much of this unit.

Robinson, Dean E. *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought.* Cambridge University Press, 2001. It initially proved difficult to find a focused history of black nationalism in America, but Robinson's book provided the solution to that issue. A detailed, yet concise history of black nationalist ideology and its development throughout American history, this book helps to fill in the details on figures like Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.

Student Reading List

Baldwin, James and William F. Buckley. *Is the American Dream at the Expense of the American Negro?* Debate at Cambridge University, England, 1965. Baldwin articulates the plight of African Americans eloquently in his debate with Buckley. This resource is helpful for a general overview of the types of inequality that persists in the United States.

Haley, Alex. "An Interview with Malcolm X" *Playboy Magazine,* May 1963. A great interview that takes readers into the mind of Malcolm X. Students can make use of this interview in the debate at the end of the unit.

Hannah-Jones, Nicole. "It Was Never About Busing" *The New York Times*, July 12, 2019. A timely article that discusses the failure of forced busing in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the nefarious roots of that opposition. A surefire discussion-starter that shows just how gradual racial progress has been in America.

Kennedy, John F. *Radio and Television Address on Civil Rights.* June 11, 1963. Kennedy's address on civil rights set the stage for the ultimate passage of civil rights legislation the following year. A critical resource for beginning that conversation.

King, Martin Luther. *I Have a Dream…* August 28, 1963. One of the most famous speeches in American history, let alone the civil rights movement. This speech is symbolic of Martin King and black integrationist ideology.

King, Martin Luther. *A Christmas Sermon on Peace.* Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA., December 24, 1967. This speech exhibits Martin's changing ideology, exhibiting his loss of hope in the premise of racial equality in the United States. A good resource to use when discussing the changing and converging ideologies of Martin and Malcolm.

Klarman, Michael J. *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History.* Oxford University Press, 2007. I mention this book a second time in the Student Reading List because chapters nine and ten are great, concise descriptions of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the civil rights movement. An excellent resource to use for in-class readings.

Remnick, Noah. "The Civil Rights Act: What JFK, LBJ, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X Had to Say" *The Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2014. Another useful resource for contextualizing the civil rights movement via the voices of the major players.

X, Malcolm. *Message to the Grass Roots.* November 10, 1963. Malcolm was heavily critical of the March on Washington in this speech. It gives readers good insight into Malcolm and black nationalist ideology, particularly the militant style that Malcolm often spoke of.

Appendix A: Implementing Common Core Standards

Common Core Standards addressed in this unit:

Key Ideas and Details

RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas of information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.11-12.3 Evaluation various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.11-12.1A-D Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspectives, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Endnotes

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1. James Baldwin and William F. Buckley. (1965) "Is the American Dream at the Expense of the American Negro?" Debate at Cambridge University, England.
2. James Cone, "Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?" 4th ed. Orbis Books, 2017, 2.
3. Ibid., 21.
4. Ibid., 26.
5. Ibid., 36.
6. Ibid., 38-40.
7. Ibid., 42-44.
8. Peter Irons, "A People's History of the Supreme Court" Penguin Books, 2006, 383.
9. Michael J. Klarman, "Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History" Oxford University Press, 2007, 147-52.
10. Dean E. Robinson, "Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought" Cambridge University Press, 2001, 37.
11. Alex Haley, "An Interview with Malcolm X" *Playboy Magazine,* May 1963.
12. Nikole Hannah-Jones, "It Was Never About Busing" *The New York Times*, July 12, 2019.
13. James Cone, "Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?" 4th ed. Orbis Books, 2017, 60.
14. John F. Kenney, "Radio and Television Address on Civil Rights" June 11, 1963.
15. Noah Remnick, "The Civil Rights Act: What JFK, LBJ, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X Had to Say" *The Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2014.
16. Robert A. Caro, "The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power" Random House, 2012, 558-70.
17. Ibid, 569.
18. Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine and Stanley Harrold, "African Americans: A Concise History" 4th ed. Pearson, 2012, 527.
19. Ibid, 528.
20. Dean E. Robinson, "Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought" Cambridge University Press, 2001, 74.
21. James Cone, "Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?" 4th ed. Orbis Books, 2017, 194.
22. Ibid., 231-43.
23. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA., December 24, 1967.

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