

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X grew up in different environments. King was raised in a comfortable middle-class family where education was stressed. On the other hand, Malcolm X came from an underprivileged home. He was a self-taught man who received little schooling and rose to greatness on his own intelligence and determination. Martin Luther King was born into a family whose name in Atlanta was well established. Despite segregation, Martin Luther King's parents ensured that their child was secure and happy.

Malcolm X was born on May 19, 1925 and was raised in a completely different atmosphere than King, an atmosphere of fear and anger where the seeds of bitterness were planted. The burning of his house by the Klu Klux Klan resulted in the murder of his father. His mother later suffered a nervous breakdown and his family was split up. He was haunted by this early nightmare for most of his life. From then on, he was driven by hatred and a desire for revenge. The early backgrounds of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were largely responsible for the distinct different responses to American racism. Both men ultimately became towering icons of contemporary African-American culture and had a great influence on black Americans. However, King had a more positive attitude than Malcolm X, believing that through peaceful demonstrations and arguments, blacks will be able to someday achieve full equality with whites. Malcolm X's despair about life was reflected in his angry, pessimistic belief that equality is impossible because whites have no moral conscience. King basically adopted an integrationalist philosophy, whereby he felt that blacks and whites should be united and live together in peace. Malcolm X, however, promoted nationalist and separatist doctrines. For most of his life, he believed that only through revolution and force could blacks attain their rightful place in society. Both X and King spread their message through powerful, hard-hitting speeches. Nevertheless, their intentions were delivered in different styles and purposes. "King was basically a peaceful leader who urged non-violence to his followers. He travelled about the country giving speeches that inspired black and white listeners to work together for racial harmony." (pg. 135, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Freedom Movement) Malcolm X, for the most part, believed that non-violence and integration was a trick by the whites to keep blacks in their places. He was furious at white racism and encouraged his followers through his speeches to rise up and protest against their white enemies. After Malcolm X broke away from Elijah Mohammed, this change is reflected in his more moderate speeches.

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's childhoods had powerful influences on the men and their speeches. Malcolm X was brought up in an atmosphere of violence. During his childhood, Malcolm X suffered not only from abuse by whites, but also from domestic violence. His father beat his mother and both of them abused their children. His mother was forced to raise eight children during the depression. After his mother had a mental breakdown, the children were all placed in foster homes. Malcolm X's resentment was increased as he suffered through the ravages of integrated schooling. Although an

intelligent student who shared the dream of being a lawyer with Martin Luther King, Malcolm X's anger and disillusionment caused him to drop out of school. He started to use cocaine and set up a burglary ring to support his expensive habit. Malcolm X's hostility and promotion of violence as a way of getting change was well established in his childhood.

Martin Luther King lived in an entirely different environment. He was a smart student and skipped two grades before entering an ivy league college at only the age of 15. He was the class valedictorian with an A average. King paraded his graduation present in a new green Chevrolet before his fellow graduates. He was raised in the perfect environment where dreams and love were generated. King and X's childhoods are "a study in polarity." (pg. 254, Reflecting Black)

Whereas, Malcolm X was raised in nightmarish conditions. King's home was almost dream-like. He was raised in a comfortable middle-class home where strong values nurtured his sense of self-worth. Sure, many have admired Malcolm X and Martin Luther King for the way that they preached. "Both King and Malcolm X promoted self-knowledge and respect for one's history and culture as the basis for unity." (pg. 253, Reflecting Black.) Other than the fact that they were similar in some ways, they also had many differences that people admired, both in belief and speech. Malcolm X, in many ways, was known to many as an extremist. For most of the time that he spent as an Islamic minister, he preached about separatism between blacks and whites. He also preached about black nationalism, and as some would call it, "black supremacy," (reporter from Malcolm X movie). Malcolm X had been misled all through his life. This can be shown especially at the time when he broke away from the black Muslim party, because he realised that they were misleading him by telling him that separatism between blacks and whites is the only way to go. They also misled him by telling him that separatism is a part of the Islamic religion. Malcolm X's life was known to many as a nightmare because he was abused and haunted by both blacks and whites. Malcolm X blamed many of the conditions that blacks in the United States lived in on the whites. He also talked about how the white man still sees the black man as a slave.

Martin Luther King appeared to many as calm and idealistic. Many say his calmness came from his peaceful, middle-class life. For instance, King preached about equality for blacks and whites. He also preached about getting this equality through a non-violent way. King's popularity was more than any other black leader's popularity. "King urged blacks to win their rightful place in society by gaining self-respect, high moral standards, hard work and leadership. He also urged blacks to do this in a non-violent matter," (pg. 255, Reflecting Black)

The difference is in Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's backgrounds had a direct influence on their later viewpoints. As a black youth, Malcolm X was rebellious and angry. He blamed the poor social conditions that blacks lived in on the whites. "His past ghetto life prepared him to reject non-violence and integration and to accept a strong separatist philosophy as the basis for black survival," (Internet,

Malcolm X anniversary). He even believed at one time that whites were agents of the devil. As a result, "Malcolm X recommended a separatist and nationalist strategy for black survival," (pg. 57, Malcolm X: The man and his times) He believed that only through violence would conditions change. He saw no evidence that white society had any moral conscience and promoted the role of the angry black against racist America. King's philosophies presented a sharp contrast to those of Malcolm X. He believed that through hard work, strong leadership, and non-violent tactics, blacks could achieve full equality with whites. His belief in non-violence even extended to a woman who nearly killed him. He was reported as saying, "don't persecute her, get her healed," (pg. 52, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Freedom Movement).

Near the end of their lives, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's beliefs became more similar. Malcolm X corrected himself after his break with the black Muslim movement. He now emphasised unity and change through black pride and respect for oneself rather than through hate and revenge. King, on the other hand, became somewhat angry at the lack of progress made on equality. He started promoting non-violent sabotage, which including blocking the normal functioning of government. At one time, Malcolm X actually wanted "to join forces with King and the progressive elements of the Civil Rights Movement," (pg. 262, Malcolm X: The man and his times). To many, King and Malcolm X were heroes of the Civil Rights Movement. However, many have also seen that King was more pessimistic, while Malcolm X was more optimistic about separatism for most of his life. Some have said that later on in their lives, they had taken the opposite roles and changed.

The speeches of King and X reflected both men's visions on improving America. Both men believed that if blacks were to attain freedom, they first needed to achieve self-respect. However, Malcolm X's speeches were delivered in a revolutionary tone which could incite his listeners to hatred of white America. Malcolm X used direct and to the point language which could be understood by all levels of society. "He had mastery in language and could project his ideas," (Internet, Remember Malcolm X) This creativity in language helped build the Black Muslim Movement in the United States. In his "Definition of a Revolution" speech, delivered in November 1963, Malcolm X openly justifies violence as a way of gaining equality. "And if it is right for America to draft us and teach us how to be violent in defence of the country, then isn't it right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country," (pg. 253, Malcolm X: The man and his times). He encouraged blacks to hate white America and to revolt against them. "Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way," (pg. 255, Malcolm X: The man and his times). In his speech "God's Judgement of White America", delivered on December 1, 1963, Malcolm X again promoted his separatist philosophy. "America must set aside some separate territory here in the Western Hemisphere

where the two races can live apart from each other, since we certainly don't get along peacefully while we are here together," (pg. 287, Malcolm X: The man and his times) After Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, he reappraised white America and modified somewhat his racist and anti-white beliefs. This change is reflected in his "Communication and Reality" spoken to the American Domestic Peace Corps. "I am against any form of racism. We are all against racism. I believe in Allah. I believe in the brotherhood of man, all men, but I do not believe in the brotherhood with anybody who does not want brotherhood with me," (pg. 289, Malcolm X: The man and his times)

Martin Luther King was an equally strong speaker. However, most of his speeches were given to encourage white and black people to work together for racial harmony. He especially wanted to teach impressionable black youth that equality could be gained through non-violent methods. These ideals are reflected in his famous "I have a dream" speech, where King addressed to over 250 000 people. In this speech, King urges black people to never forget their dreams. King preaches that in the eyes of God, the blacks are as good as any other race and should be treated as equals. "I have a dream that one day every valley will be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the glory of the lord shall be revealed, and all shall see it together," (Internet, Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech) Unlike Malcolm X, King does not incite his followers to riot and hate, but encourages his followers to remember that all people are God's children and that hopefully one day all American can join together to sing "My country tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing..." King's eventual disillusionment became because of the lack of success the blacks were making in America. This discomfort is reflected in his "A time to break the silence" speech. In this speech, he openly condemns American involvement in the Vietnam war. He preaches that America should solve its own racial and social problems before sending vulnerable young men, especially black men, to fight other country's battles. "So we have been respectfully forced with the cruel irony of watching Negroes and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to sit them together in the same schools," (Internet, A time to break the silence speech)

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are both remembered as leaders who fought for a difference in black America. Both tried to bring hope to blacks in the United States. They also tried to instil within blacks power and strength so they could rise above all the hatred that surrounded them, but both of them had very different ways of promoting their message. Malcolm X had a much more extremist approach. Many say that this approach came from his neglectful childhood and early adulthood. King had a much more calm approach. Some have said that this non-violent approach came from his safe, middle-class environment. Even though they were different in addressing their messages about black respect and pride, they both had the same goal in mind. That goal was to

achieve equality between all races.