



University of Tennessee, Knoxville
**Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative
Exchange**

University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects

University of Tennessee Honors Program

4-2005

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and MalcolmX: The Power and Legacy of Prophetic Discourse in the Civil Rights Movement

Shannon Marie Metz

University of Tennessee - Knoxville

Follow this and additional works at: http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Metz, Shannon Marie, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and MalcolmX: The Power and Legacy of Prophetic Discourse in the Civil Rights Movement" (2005). *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*.
http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/888

This is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Tennessee Honors Program at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X:
The Power and Legacy of Prophetic Discourse in the
Civil Rights Movement

Shannon Metz
Senior Project
April 4, 2005

Abstract

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X utilized prophetic discourse during a time of social revolution to develop a sense of identity, address social issues, and initiate change in society through terminology based on historical plights and redemption. The two men appealed to a sense of heritage, passionately exposed then-present crimes and needs, and called for action to secure the future. This paper will briefly address the background of the Civil Rights Movement, ~~biological~~ information of two of its most prominent leaders, their intended audiences, and the results of their discourse, but will focus on the actual words, techniques, and themes that helped make the Movement such a large scale success. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X utilized key techniques such as religious and dream imagery, metaphors, strong diction, repetition, and allusions to powerfully appeal to their audiences and give the Civil Rights Movement a solid and strong direction. Both men were excellent communicators, and the study of their works proves the power of persuasive English techniques and exactly why the two men were such influential figures in American history. A closer look at some of their most significant works also reveals the continuing importance of their messages in present-day American society.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Works by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	
<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i>	3
“I Have a Dream” Speech	8
“I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” Speech	11
“Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community” Speech	15
Works by Malcolm X	
“Black Man’s History” Speech	17
“The Ballot or the Bullet” Speech	20
<i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>	24
Conclusion	29
Bibliography	36

Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement was a period of inspiration, struggle, and power. The strength and intensity of the Movement was due in large part to the eloquent and prophetic discourse of its two most prominent leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. As true prophets, these men helped create a sense of identity by verbalizing solid problems to address, direct courses of action, and hope for a future of freedom and equality in America. This paper will seek to identify exactly how and why these two men were such successful masters of rhetoric, which is defined by Aristotle as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion”

(<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/aristotleonrhetoric.htm>). While national history, personal background, intended audience, and tangible effects will be mentioned, the focus of the paper will be on the rhetorical techniques of Dr. King and Malcolm X and the importance of studying their works.

Although segregation and “separate but equal” ideologies had long been practiced in America, racial tensions began escalating after World War II. Numerous blacks migrated to the North, and the racial violence and protests in the south became national news. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that “separate but equal” is unconstitutional in public education. In August of 1955, two white men were acquitted of charges in the Emmett Till murder trial in Mississippi and in December of the same year, Rosa Parks made her famous refusal to give up her seat on a bus in Alabama. This sparked the yearlong Montgomery Bus Boycott, headed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (<http://www.cnn.com/EVENTS/1997/mlk/links.html>).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a native of Atlanta, Georgia and a graduate of Morehouse College. In college and seminary, he focused on sociology and theology, and during his studies “he took a particular interest in Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy” (McElrath, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”). After attending seminary in Pennsylvania, King returned to the south and “in 1954...became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery Alabama” (McElrath, “Martin Luther King, Jr”). After Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat, the Montgomery Improvement Association elected King president and began to organize a city bus boycott. The boycott was a success, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated buses are unconstitutional, and King went on to help found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. After participating in a sit-in, he was arrested (McElrath, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”) and penned his extremely poignant *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in 1963. The first of his great speeches followed, when he delivered “I Have a Dream” in Washington, D.C. This speech was nationally televised and would be studied as literature for decades to come. His last address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?” in 1967 was followed in 1968 by his last public speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.” This paper will focus on these four works and King’s progression of styles, themes, and persuasive techniques.

While King fought against racial violence in the South, Malcolm X was working diligently to create a sense of identity and disenfranchisement in the North. Malcolm Little was born in Nebraska to a Black Nationalist Baptist preacher. Malcolm’s family was terrorized by a white supremacist organization called Black Legion and his father was murdered in Michigan. After Malcolm’s mother was left alone to raise eight children and

later had a nervous breakdown, the children were divided among orphanages and foster homes. Although Malcolm proved a good student and hoped to become a lawyer, a white male teacher's negative comments ended that dream and Malcolm's motivation to learn. He moved to Boston and later Harlem, New York as a teenager where he became involved in drugs, prostitution scams, gambling, and burglary. He was arrested and sentenced for seven years for burglary. While in prison, he educated himself and learned about the Nation of Islam. He devoted himself to the Nation upon his release from prison and quickly became a religious leader. Malcolm changed his name to Malcolm X because he felt "Little" was a name given by a slavemaster. He traveled to several large northern cities preaching about white oppression of the black man and that blacks should utilize violent self-defense "by any means necessary" to achieve an equal and separate nation within America (Omi and Winant 98). "Malcolm utilized newspaper columns, radio, and television to communicate the Nation of Islam's message across the United States. His charisma, drive, and conviction attracted an astounding number of new members" (http://www.africawithin.com/malcolmx/malcolm_bio.htm). His highly influential autobiography and two of his speeches, "Black Man's History" and "The Ballot or the Bullet," show the development of his themes and rhetorical strategies.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is an impressive work as a "model of cogent reasoning and stinging refutation" (Solomon 81) in the style of a biblical epistle, such as the letters the apostle Paul wrote from prison (Clark 34). The *Letter* is a response to several white Southern clergymen who had criticized the Civil Rights Movement. King answers their charges in a series of systematic arguments supported by religious,

historical, and patriotic examples. Amidst these claims and examples, King inserts his themes of a people disenfranchised, struggling by means of direct and nonviolent action, and a future of freedom.

The *Letter from Birmingham Jail* begins in epistolary style, with a greeting to “My Dear Fellow Clergymen,” and seems at first to have the tone of a personal note. King states his intention to answer their criticisms only because they are “men of genuine good will.” Immediately thereafter, almost as if addressing a court instead of “fellow clergymen,” King’s tone turns defensive and he begins to refute their claim that he is an “outsider.” Treating the situation as a legal case, he begins to argue his legal standing on three levels. First, he is a guest, “here because I was invited here... because I have organizational ties here.” Second, he has a moral and religious responsibility and because “injustice is here,” he is “compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town.” Third, he has legal standing as an American, for “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” For this reason, he argues that “injustice” is a matter for national jurisdiction and “Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.”

After establishing his standing on this matter, King begins to establish his case by giving the “hard, brutal facts of the case.” He refutes the clergymen’s challenge that he should negotiate instead of undertake direct action with the facts that nothing has been achieved by negotiation and “we have endured postponement after postponement.” He goes on to conclude that “We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the

conscience of the local and the national community.” He advocates that direct action will create a “constructive, nonviolent tension” to bring about change. He states that because “It is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily... it must be demanded by the oppressed.” Amid his rational sequence of arguments, he inserts a prophetic and moving metaphor of “rising” “from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood” to appeal to ideals of equality and enlightenment.

The next claim King refutes is that he has not allowed enough time to pass for his goals to be accomplished. He forcefully argues that “We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights.” He takes this opportunity to rebuke the clergymen in the statement “Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dart of segregation to say, ‘Wait.’” This barb also serves to reinforce the persecution of the blacks while calling attention to the whites’ ignorance or lack of standing concerning this issue. King reminds his audience about the reality of the issues at hand by giving numerous graphic examples including lynching, “hate-filled policemen,” opportunities “closed to colored children,” “unconscious bitterness,” being “harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro... plagued with inner fears and outer resentments,” and men “plunged into the abyss of despair.” His strong language commands attention and leads to his call for necessary relief.

King returns to his legal rationale but places a moral spin on the issue of civil disobedience. He argues that moral and eternal laws are God-given and if manmade laws conflict, moral men have an obligation not to obey the manmade laws. King alludes to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas in his arguments that moral laws exist above

secular laws, and he pacifies opposition in his argument that “an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.” King goes on to give renown and respected examples of civil disobedience from biblical, ancient, and American histories. He names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Christians in the Roman Empire, and the Boston Tea Party. He uses this technique again to refute the claim that he is an extremist. He argues that he is rather a mediator between “complacency” and the “bitterness and hatred” of Black Nationalists, calling “Elijah Muhammad’s Muslim movement” by name. King contends that although he calls for action, it is not the violence of the Nationalists and if Americans “refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will... seek ...black-nationalist ideologies” which would be “a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare.” This scare tactic serves to make civil disobedience seem much more appealing in comparison. King also gives examples of famous “extremists” who fought for radical ideas from the biblical and national traditions: Jesus, Amos, Paul, Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson. These comparisons lend him more credibility by associating himself with such remarkable leaders.

King turns the tone from defensive and explanatory to harsh and indicting at this point. He criticizes the “white moderate” for not assuming their responsibility as Americans and realizing “that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action.” He goes on to state his disappointment in the “white church” because so many “have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent

behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.” He effectively indicts hypocrisy and weakness in the “white church” because it has become “a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound... an archdefender of the status quo.” He writes as a pastor admonishing his parishioners for “we have blemished and scarred that body [of Christ] through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.” His sermon-like letter continues with a story of “some noble souls” who have acted out and “carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment” and ends with a “challenge” to “come to the aid of justice.”

Before concluding his letter, King reminds his audience of the “inexpressible cruelties of slavery” and refutes the clergymen’s praise of the Birmingham police. King educates the readers about the very real brutal violence of the officers in graphic descriptions meant to horrify: “dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes,” the officers “push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls... slap and kick old Negro men and young boys...refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together.” King prophesies that “One day the South will recognize its real heroes,” the protestors who endured such treatment. He offers a poignant vision of these “real heroes” before concluding his letter:

One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Here King again uplifts Christian and American values of courage, justice, “democracy,” freedom, and sacrifice (Hoover 60) over segregation and maintaining “the status quo.”

King concludes his letter by humbly begging forgiveness if he misrepresented the truth, hopes his readers will be “strong in the faith” and that he may meet them as “a fellow clergyman and Christian brother,” and a last metaphor/prophecy. Almost as if in prayer, he encourages the clergymen to “hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted ... in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.” This image of enlightenment and equality is poetic and moving, leaving an impression of good will despite King’s harsh indictments and rational “case” for direct action. The letter ends as it began, as a biblical epistle of love and well-meaning admonishment. An epistle and a legal case, full of effective metaphors, imagery, and allusions, *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is a brilliant series of arguments for civil disobedience, immediate action, and more involvement in and education of the realities of the Civil Rights Movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” Speech

King’s 1963 speech “I Have a Dream” was delivered to over 250,000 attending white and black Americans in Washington, DC. It was televised and later distributed and studied as literature, which has made the speech perhaps the most well-known and symbolic of all the discourse of the Civil Rights Movement. The speech is powerful, pleasing, and prophetic as it emphasizes public morality and overcoming oppression (Bobbitt 12). In fact, the dream is almost a divinely-inspired vision of the “promised land” of future American equality. Here King utilizes metaphors, similes, religious allusions, and repetition to craft an extremely evocative and persuasive speech.

The speech begins with a stylized allusion to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which is patriotic and inspirational. King's early metaphors are also religious allusions to salvation and hell as he talks about "a great beacon light of hope" and "a joyous daybreak" versus "the flames of withering injustice." He continues to use oppositional metaphors such as the Negro's "lonely island of poverty" versus "a vast ocean of material prosperity" that is America. He describes the racial inequality in America as the Negro "languishing in the corners of American society" and living as "an exile in his own land," which serves to educate others about inequality while giving blacks a sense of entitlement to American rights. He expands on this idea of entitlement while also appealing to an American heritage by alluding to the founding fathers and the constitutional rights of all Americans to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Here King uses the Constitution as a form of American covenant, the promises of which have not been kept for all Americans (Solomon 69). To make an analogy, he utilizes the metaphor of a "bank of justice" that must allow equality and opportunity to the "people of color" it has "defaulted." These common metaphors serve to invoke indignation and wrongful offense.

At this point, the speech's tone increases in urgency and force. Metaphors of light and dark are applied to the affective ideals of justice, freedom and security as the "dark and desolate valley of segregation" and the "quicksands of racial injustice" highlight the promises of "the sunlit path of racial justice" and "the solid rock of brotherhood." Biblical references, this time to the "paths of righteousness" found in Psalms 23 and Psalms 40:2: "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock," make for inspirational and moving prophetic discourse. King goes

on to juxtapose imagery of a “sweltering summer” with “invigorating autumn,” and “the whirlwinds of revolt” with “the bright day of justice.” Metaphors, similes, and religious allusions continue as King speaks of the “cup of bitterness and hatred,” “storms of persecution,” and ““justice ... like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream,” which is an allusion to the prophet Amos in Amos 5:24. King uses these images to convey his message of nonviolence and cooperation between the races. He diffuses tensions by applying a biblical principle that “unearned suffering is redemptive.”

Here King turns to patriotic allusions of the Declaration of Independence and the American Dream. He mentions several southern states and includes the north in an attempt to create a sense of unity, and then prophesies that “one day this nation will rise up.” He returns to biblical imagery of a “table of brotherhood” to further his theme of cooperation and equality, and then prophesies Mississippi’s transformation from a “desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression,” to “an oasis of freedom and justice.” His extremely effective speech continues with an allusion to innocence and the future by referencing his children and hope for their freedom. He makes another biblical reference, this time to Isaiah 40:4, when he states that “one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”

King’s imagery progresses from “images of black bondage, white guilt, and national obligation” to “purificatory images of struggle and movement from negative to positive terms” (Bobbitt 83). The imagery develops to that of “an elevated plane of meaning in which images of dreams and mountains are used to communicate a transcendent vision of equality, fulfillment of national promise, and secular/spiritual

redemption” (83-84) to complete King’s “guilt-purification-redemption form of the speech” (83). At the conclusion of his speech, King uses this redemption imagery as he appeals to a sense of unity and national identity over racial identity. His last contrasting metaphors are those of turning the “jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.” He envisions that “we will be free one day,” and “all of God’s children will be able to sing...let freedom ring.” King repeats this American mantra several times, demanding that “freedom ring” everywhere in America and thereby builds force and power to the climax of his speech. This climax is the last great image of unity, freedom, equality, and brotherhood- it is “that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!” This image transcends religious barriers, racial barriers, and offers an image of “children,” equal in relationship to God, singing of freedom from bondage (113). This powerful image of freedom is one of the greatest and most moving prophecies of the Civil Rights Movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” Speech

King’s last speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” was delivered to a group of Memphis sanitation workers on strike. This speech shows a clear departure from the confident “I Have a Dream” speech in that “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” is not nearly as polished or structured. The style is almost conversational, with several digressions and is seemingly spontaneously delivered. Although similar imagery and allusions are present, King’s tone is more desperate, demanding, and his course of action is more realistic in “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”. This speech’s importance is indisputable

because it shows King's progression from noble and lofty ideals of future brotherhood, interracial cooperation, and equality to a desperate last resort calling for immediate black solidarity and action as a separate entity.

King speaks directly to his audience in this speech by addressing the people and identifying with them. He says, "as you know," "either we go up together, or we go down together," "like anybody, I would like to live a long life," and "we, as a people" to establish trust and common ground with his audience. His casual, conversational style shows not only in his addresses to his audience but in his digressions. King gives personal anecdotes, beginning with "you know, several years ago..." and "I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane." In the middle of his arguments, he randomly thanks God and other ministers. These digressions make his speech difficult to follow at times and seem sporadically intermixed with King's typical biblical allusions. These allusions, such as the ones to Amos, Christ, and the Good Samaritan, reinforce King's theme of each individual's responsibility for direct action. King also utilizes historical allusions to give the current racial struggles of America context as a development to timeless and universal slavery. First, there was Egypt and later Rome, which were two great nations with slaves. He goes on to mention Lincoln, but Lincoln is painted as a reluctant leader instead of a courageous savior. This is yet another example of King's development from a lofty, idealistic perspective to a more serious and realistic one.

Although this speech is markedly different, some aspects of "I Have a Dream" are still apparent. King utilizes his trademark light/dark imagery as he says that African-Americans are in "dark and dreary nights" and that although America is a dark place

because of the struggles taking place, “only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working.” He is still a prophet in the midst of turmoil, and he addresses this turmoil in his declarations that “the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around.” His paints a larger picture than America by including the racial strife in South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana as he begins to create an identity of all oppressed non-whites, “the colored peoples of the world.” King also speaks in global instead of American terms when he begins referring to “the human rights revolution,” which serves to emphasize that civil rights are basic, inalienable human rights.

This desperation continues to manifest itself in King’s speech as he reminds his audience that “we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God’s children.” These basic statements contrast with the lofty “dream” King once spoke of. Now, instead of seeing one day when there will be perfect harmony and respect, he can only remind everyone of basic truths seemingly forgotten. He also begins to reference “unity” as necessary for black, instead of American, solidarity. His allusion to slavery in Egypt also serves to polarize white and black Americans as he puts a face on oppression: “Pharaoh...kept the slaves fighting among themselves...when the slaves get together, that’s the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.” He also takes a harder stance on the direct course of action, giving statistics for the black minority in America to use “economic withdrawal” to initiate change. He also encourages fortifying black business: “we’ve got to strengthen black institutions... You have six or seven black insurance companies in Memphis. Take

out your insurance there.” He claims that “these are some practical things we can do... we are putting pressure where it really hurts.”

King now urges immediate action. His focus has shifted from a future of equality in “I Have a Dream” to the present and its need for direct action. He says, “It's all right to talk about “streets flowing with milk and honey,” but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here.” He goes on to urge “nonviolence or nonexistence,” and that “if something isn't done, and in a hurry... the whole world is doomed.” King’s demand for immediate direct action and black solidarity show a distinct shift from the pure American patriotism and integration ideals in “I Have a Dream.” This speech is less polished, but more realistic and informal, which may lend his arguments less credibility but more of a personal impact. Although this speech isn’t nearly as poetic and beautiful as “I Have a Dream,” his theme of individual responsibility and action leaves the reader with much more substance and personal responsibility to consider. King’s casual style and digressions only make him seem more human and therefore give this speech more appeal to the common man, which shows his adaptation to his audience. This speech also shows King’s varying styles and his shifting focus from an idealistic utopia to the “now,” “down here [on earth],” and “tonight.” However, he still manages to reiterate his prophetic vision of hope in his conclusion: “He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land...we, as a people, will get to the promised land...Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" Speech

King's speech "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" was his last address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as president. The speech is highly structured and uses facts in addition to his characteristic allusions and imagery in order to form a strong argument, much like *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. In contrast to "I Have a Dream," this speech utilizes strong legal, personal, and moral diction such as "crimes," "stripped of the right," "confined," and "evil" to invoke an incensed response. This speech is more harsh and establishes the clear theme that America must be "restructured". King gives the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement tangible faces and polarized sides by referring to "a nation that will keep people in slavery," "a system that still oppresses us," the "white man's crimes against him [the black man]," "the prevalence of discrimination," and "a violent racial situation."

These terms are much stronger indictments than King usually made in his public speeches. The lofty language of "I Have a Dream" is barely present in "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" as King briefly mentions "justice," "truth," and "brotherhood". These ideals are balanced by a realistic course of action in this speech as King insists that "love without power is sentimental and anemic." Like in "I've Been to the Mountaintop," King focuses on then-present conditions in order to justify the need for direct action. He utilizes this opportunity to cite "alarming" statistics of education and workforce inequalities which are assumed to be the results of "a system that still oppresses us." After these discomfoting facts, he immediately launches his arguments for direct action. He first encourages vague moral action such as "we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up." He goes on to clarify this course of

action by suggesting that African-Americans “organize our strength in terms of economic and political power.”

King’s theme has changed since “I Have a Dream,” as it now more realistic and fundamental. He once again encourages nonviolence, but his perspective has changed slightly. He states

It is perfectly clear that a violent revolution on the part of American blacks would find no sympathy and support from the white population and very little from the majority of Negroes themselves. This is no time for romantic illusions and empty philosophical debates about freedom... what is needed is a strategy for change, a tactical program that will bring the Negro into the mainstream of American life as quickly as possible.

He follows with characteristic language of “love” against “hate,” but now he demands individual responsibility in “a strong, demanding love.” His speech begins to sound like a sermon when he states, “God is love,” and then turns philosophical as he argues that “he who has love has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.”

King keeps his audience’s attention by suggesting that “I move to my conclusion,” but his sermon continues as he calls “the problem of racism, the problem of exploitation, and the problem of war... the triple evils that are interrelated.” He keeps the attention of the people by addressing them again in the style of a sermon-like dialogue: “If you will let me be a preacher just a little bit...”. He then tells the biblical story of Nicodemus to prime the audience for his declaration “America, you must be born again!” He makes a solid return to his theme of restructuring society and then invokes passion in his distinguishing imagery of “dark yesterdays of segregated schools” and “bright tomorrows of quality, integrated education.” He also turns inequalities into loaded metaphors in his statement “let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that

separate...wealth and comfort and ...poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice.”

King’s repetition of “let us be dissatisfied” shows a shift from his focus on a utopian future in “I Have a Dream” to a determined and clear focus on present disparities. He speaks out against race riots and even digresses to oppose the “unjust, evil war in Vietnam.” These contemporary issues are more pertinent to his audience and the fact that he mentions them shows his growth beyond noble dreams to real-life problems and solutions. His prophecy of the future is also more realistic as he foretells the obstacles to overcome on the way to gaining equality: “the road ahead will not always be smooth. There will be rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment...setbacks [and] the fatigue of despair.” King remains hopeful and encourages his people to remain strong and courageous “as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom.” He also places the earthly turmoil into an eternal perspective by focusing on “God’s power and human power”. As in “I Have a Dream,” he ends on a hopeful, biblical vision that “with this faith we will be able to sing... We have overcome.”

Malcolm X’s “Black Man’s History” Speech

Malcolm X delivered “Black Man’s History” to a group of Muslims in 1962, and this is perhaps the most well-known speech from his early career. He prefaces his arguments with the assumption that his audience should “have a knowledge of history no matter what you are going to do,” and “the thing that has made the so-called Negro in America fail, more than any other thing, is your, my, lack of knowledge concerning history.” He then launches into his argument that the black man preceded and created the

white man. He supports his argument through reinterpretation of the Bible, contemporary observations of racial differences, and a “true” history of an ancient race of black men. He argues that the white man is “weak” and “evil,” practicing “tricknology” all over the world, and uses this claim to support his overall theme of separation from the white race. Stylistically, his speech is lengthy, verbose, and unpolished. His arguments are flawed, and his imagery and rhetorical questions are not well-developed. This speech is best studied in contrast with his later speeches and writings, to show his development as a person, a leader, and as a persuasive speaker.

Malcolm X’s argument in this early speech has shaky foundations at best. First of all, he consistently defers to the wisdom of “The Honorable Elijah Muhammad.” He seems to believe that this man’s theories are indisputably perfect and therefore needs no other factual support. What support he does give is in the terms of scientific numbers and rates about the earth’s circumference, revolutions, etc., but this does not support his story of an ancient black “scientist” forming the moon with explosives. Later, he argues that white people briefly turned into dogs for a while in Egypt and therefore like dogs today. He interprets the biblical story of Jacob to be the story of Yacub, who created the white race, and he interprets the story of those in bondage in Egypt to mean both the white “dogs” in caves and the black men in America who have been enslaved for four hundred years. His arguments are illogical and outlandish, but serve to create a polarized history of black and white men.

Malcolm X labels “black” men to be “all those who are non-white,” and he takes a universal perspective from the outset, which he attributes to his Muslim faith. He advocates for Muslim and black pride by contrasting with the white race’s Christianity

and oppression. He argues that Christianity teaches people to “look down on black and up at white” in such songs as “Wash Me White As Snow,” and that Islam is the greater religion because “there is no limit to the Muslim history,” as there is with Christianity and Judaism. He erroneously characterizes Jewish people as “blue-eyed, blond-haired, pale-skinned,” and attempts to interpret Judeo-Christian history to match Elijah Muhammad’s version. Malcolm X utilizes the Bible as “a book of history,” but supports the “Holy Koran” and Islam as the “true” religion for all non-white peoples because “we don’t separate our color from our religion.”

Malcolm X goes on to argue that black people are actually superior to white people although the role of the black man in America is more that of a child and “you and I fell into his trap and were made deaf, dumb, and blind by him” even though “there is no intelligence more powerful than the intelligence of the black man.” He also argues that white men, who he refers to as “crackers,” are more “susceptible to weakness,” which must be a moral defect because “no one can give biological evidence to show that black actually is the stronger or superior of the two.” He goes so far as to call the white race “devils” and the black race “gods” in the statement, “this is what the black man did to the white man, brothers. This is what the gods did to the devils.” He also argues that there are “twenty-four wise black men who live right here on this Earth, but no one knows who they are,” who get together to write a book of history every 25,000 years. These two separate histories create two separate worlds, one of ignorant and inferior white Christianity and Judaism, and one of superior, although oppressed, black Islam. Malcolm X argues that America is a “House of Bondage” and it is time to “‘awaken’ the Lost Sheep” so that they may make a choice between integration and separation. He warns

that “if we integrate we will be destroyed along with them. If we separate then we have a chance for salvation.”

Although Malcolm X utilizes literary techniques in rhetorical questions such as “Why? What are they getting at?” and imagery such as “today dark mankind is waking up,” this speech is not very persuasive to an educated audience because of its flawed and outlandish arguments. His theories are extremely racist and hinge on truth as declared by “The Honorable Elijah Muhammad.” “Black Man’s History” is, on the whole, narrow-minded and lacks the sophistication and credibility of Malcolm X’s later works. This speech is best studied in contrast to his later works in order to show the development of Malcolm X’s ideologies and persuasive techniques.

Malcolm X’s “The Ballot or the Bullet”

In two short years, from 1962 to 1964, Malcolm X’s style of communication developed dramatically. His 1964 speech, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” is extremely polished, concise, well-supported, and persuasive. He offers two options for the future of the black man in America, taking back their “human rights” either by exerting political power or by violence. Either way, he demands action “by any means necessary,” in contrast with Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy. Malcolm X outlines clearly what is happening at that time, creates two sides of the battle, and then explains the two strategies his side may take. He makes a strong, logical case while prophesying the future of America, and his eloquence and solid arguments create an extremely persuasive and convincing speech.

Although Malcolm X states “I’m still a Muslim,” his focal issue from the outset is racial inequality because race in America transcends religious, class, and education

levels. His audience has already broadened considerably from “Black Man’s History,” and instead of arguing for the domination of a minority religion in America, he acknowledges, “it’s time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have a common problem.” He addresses this “common problem” as the “political oppression,” “economic exploitation,” and “social degradation,” all “at the hands of the white man.” He immediately tempers this “white man” and “cracker” language with the qualification that “it doesn’t mean that we’re anti-white,” but rather “we’re anti-exploitation, we’re anti-degradation, we’re anti-oppression.” Shifting the focus from superficial race to chosen actions appeals to personal responsibility and accountability, which broadens his audience to include all people while making his message less offensive and more persuasive.

Early in his speech, Malcolm X foretells that “1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed” because it is “a political year” of elections, which prepares his audience for his subsequent arguments for immediate action. He exclaims, “Time has run out!” and warns against “white politicians...white political crooks will be right back...with their false promises...it can only lead to one thing, an explosion.” He then launches into a critique of the Democrats for blaming their inaction on the Dixiecrats, arguing that Dixiecrats are Democrats as well. He tempers his political critique with statements such as “I’m not a politician,” but this does not take away from his credibility. Rather, he relates better to the common black people because he is not partisan. He even goes so far as to say “I’m not an American. I’m one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism...nothing but disguised hypocrisy.”

Malcolm X takes this anti-America stance because of the “conspiracy,” “trickery,” “treachery,” and “window-dressing” of the American government. He boldly argues that the white-dominated government, also referred to as “Uncle Sam,” is responsible for the continuance of oppression in America and that this government is illegitimate by its own standards. He uses legal language to support this argument by stating hard facts. Because “half of the people in the South can’t even vote,” “this is not even a government that’s based on democracy.” Because of this, “half of the ...congressmen ...are there illegally, are there unconstitutionally.” This practice “violate(s) the constitutional amendments that guarantee the people of that particular state or county the right to vote.” His legal arguments continue as he states that because segregation has been outlawed by the Supreme Court, those who still practice segregation are “depriving you of ...your legal rights,” which is “criminal”. Malcolm X goes one step further by arguing that black Americans should “take the case of the black man in this country before the nations in the UN” because America has denied its citizens human rights.

Malcolm X makes valid and strong arguments about the illegitimacy of the American government, which opens his readers and audience up to his criticism of other civil rights leaders, such as King. Malcolm X flips King’s “I Have a Dream” metaphor about eating at an integrated table of brotherhood in the sentence “I’m not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner.” He takes a realistic approach and uses this metaphor to argue that blacks are not Americans because they have been denied American “civil rights”. Malcolm X counters King’s idealistic “dream” with the flat

statement, "I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare." Malcolm X also counters King's moral appeal to white Christians in *Letter from Birmingham Jail* by arguing that "America's conscience is bankrupt," so "we ourselves have to lift the level of our community." He borrows from King again, taking King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" bank metaphor to another level. Malcolm X declares that blacks do not deserve rights just because they were born in America, but because they have invested "sweat and blood" in America for "three hundred and ten years" in the workforce and army. This makes the denial of American rights even more glaringly hypocritical.

Malcolm X uses these strong, concise, and well-supported claims to argue for direct action. He again uses the imagery of a sleeping people and says "it's time in 1964 to wake up." Action is a responsibility, or "your little children will grow up... and think 'shame'...if you don't take an uncompromising stand." He advocates blacks arming themselves, killing attacking police dogs, guerilla warfare, and violence in response to violence, because "you should never be nonviolent unless you run into some nonviolence." Like King, Malcolm X makes clear that blacks have "legal rights...moral rights" to fight injustice, but Malcolm X encourages these men to "die for what you believe in. But don't die alone." He follows up this hard theme with imagery, that of "Uncle Sam's hands...dripping with blood, dripping with the blood of the black man in this country...and you over here singing 'We Shall Overcome.'" This imagery is very effective and shows the inadequacy of dreaming of freedom, which primes the audience for his conclusion that "we're not going to get it [freedom] saying 'We Shall Overcome.' We've got to fight until we overcome." His reiteration of "it must be the ballot or the

bullet” gains momentum with each highly affective literary technique and well-supported argument.

This speech is clear, polished, structured, and very convincing. Malcolm X displays brilliant communication skills as he appeals to all black people regardless of religion, education, or class. He goes farther to appeal to other nations by mentioning the United Nations and then says “we will work with anybody...who is genuinely interested in tackling the problem.” He makes educated legal arguments, clearly outlines the issues of the Civil Rights Movement, discusses direct and realistic courses of action for conquering oppression, and foretells an “explosive year” of action. The speech is solid and brilliant, showing Malcolm X’s growth and development as an individual and a communicator after his “Black Man’s History” speech.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

The autobiography of Malcolm X is captivating and well written. By its very nature, it is personal and honest. This revealing glimpse into Malcolm X’s life shows his development of ideologies, his personal experiences, and his growth through these experiences. While Martin Luther King, Jr. preached unity and integration achieved through civil disobedience in the south, Malcolm X preached separatism and black nationality through violent self-defense in the North. Malcolm X’s language is harsh and direct instead of lofty and idealistic, and his prophetic discourse is no dream of the distant future but of immediate change. He overcomes a stereotypical role of an uneducated black convict to become a self-educated, disciplined, and extremely powerful leader in what is arguably one of the best examples of empowerment in the Civil Rights Movement.

The autobiography begins with offensive and strong language as Malcolm X rebukes “the white rapist’s blood that is in me” (Malcolm X 5), and he repeatedly refers to “the white man” as evil incarnate. Although his racism is disturbing, the story of his childhood begins to show in graphic detail the inequalities he faced as an African-American youth. He experienced the KKK, harassment by white police, racial slurs from white children, and his family was destroyed by what he viewed as a white American-male-dominated state. First, his father was murdered, his mother was fired because “the people saw us [children], and realized she was actually a Negro” (15), and his mother lost her sanity shortly thereafter. White officials questioned the children and attempted to use them against their mother’s case, which only heightened Malcolm X’s resentment. The children were finally taken by officials and rehoused with foster families after his mother was institutionalized. All of these horrors Malcolm X would later attribute to the “evil” white American male. In fact, he goes so far as to compare the white state’s control over black children to slavery (24) and disgustedly tells of blacks’ dehumanizing treatment “as numbers” in America (25). His childhood plays an obvious role in his development not only of ideologies but of style and character. He learns to take what he needs for survival and that “if you want something, you had better make some noise” (11).

Malcolm X goes on to tell of racism he encountered in the classroom as his teacher tells him that he cannot become a lawyer because “a lawyer-that’s no realistic goal for a nigger” (41). His stories are heart-wrenching and told from the perspective of a colorblind youth, which makes his later characterizations of whites even more stark and painful. His adolescence is filled with various pleasures such as dancing and selling drugs as he engages in interracial dating and delves into Harlem nightlife. He is a

stereotypical convict and threat to the white male in every way imaginable as he dates a white girl, steals at night, and has little respect for authority. His arrest and subsequent imprisonment are even racially motivated as he insists the long sentence for robbery was due to his involvement with white women.

Malcolm undergoes an enormous transformation in prison. He finds the Nation of Islam, changes his name to Malcolm X instead of Malcolm Little, and he has a vision of a leader in the Nation of Islam. He educates himself and begins to form strong views about the oppression and brainwashing of blacks in America, and how their actions only perpetuate a vicious cycle of self-destruction. He blames himself for his wrongdoing, but he ultimately blames the structure of the “white man’s America” (39) that creates the environment of racial inequality. He strongly states, “I have no mercy or compassion... for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight” (25). He ironically finds his freedom in prison as he experiences a sort of cleansing and redemption (188), and begins to preach his newfound “truth” to other inmates.

This “truth” is a prophecy of the “dark world” rising up against the “white man’s world” of exploitation. He considers himself to be “battling the white man” (195) as he speaks out against the “whitened” history taught by Americans (189). He tells another history, that blacks were once superior and created the “white, blue-eyed devils” (181) mentioned in his “Black Man’s History” speech. The Nation of Islam offers him this explanation as well as relationships of “respect and dignity” between blacks instead of those which were “jealous and suspicious” (212). This faithful devotion to what is in America a minority religion and his blatant hatred for whites makes his speeches

seriously offensive and threatening to the majority, and has led to the characterization of Malcolm X as a militant and extremist, but his themes must be considered for their value in contrast to Dr. King's integrationist arguments and Malcolm X's later views.

Malcolm X's "uncompromising words" (229) are crucial to his success as a speaker and as a leader. His eloquence and strength lend power to an oppressed people. His vivid imagery, such as "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock, Plymouth Rock landed on us!" (219) creates a heightened sense of oppression and a break from common American history. He gives blacks a sense of identity beyond American oppression as he tells of their African roots and a relationship to all those under oppression by claiming that all non-whites are "black" (219). He is extremely polarizing and his prophecies of "a racial showdown" (302) and of the black man returning to the top of civilization are empowering and compelling. He offers an attractive alternative of taking back "human rights" from white oppressors and seizing equality. He argues for separation, which he claims is different from segregation because it gives the people a choice to be set apart (268). He speaks passionately for unity and cooperation of all blacks and he appeals to blacks regardless of social class. He speaks eloquently and "jive," whatever it takes to communicate with his audience. His versatility and concern created a powerful and easily recognized persona throughout the Northeast.

Few would disagree that Malcolm X was a persuasive speaker and a powerful leader, but the most important lessons of his life are often left unmentioned. He is usually characterized as militant, violent, and offensive, which he often was, but his second "rebirth" is not widely discussed. He grows immensely from his trip to Mecca, where he realizes that people of all complexions are Muslims and that racial pressures are

nonexistent on his pilgrimage. He learns that all white men are not “devils” and begins to qualify his statements, such as “I have learned that not all white people are racists. I am speaking and my fight is against white *racists*. I firmly believe that Negroes have the right to fight against these racists, by any means necessary” (401). Malcolm X also admits that his “belief in Elijah Muhammad” was “very dangerous” and begins to “search for truth and justice” (400). He realizes his own previous racism when he says, “a blanket indictment of all white people is as wrong as when whites make blanket indictments against blacks” (395). The experience of other nations truly brings to light the race issue in America and Malcolm X’s experience abroad opens his eyes to the reality that there can be “brotherhood between all men, of all nationalities and complexions” (395).

This enlightenment is even more profound given Malcolm X’s childhood and adolescent experiences. From this new perspective, he begins to ask very serious and critical questions such as how America may atone for its oppression of blacks. De facto equality, such as “a desegregated cup of coffee, a theater, public toilets- these are not atonement” (405), which suggests a necessary inspection into the very heart of American society. This journey takes him abroad again and he learns to view the unique racism in America in all of its complexities. Instead of labeling white men as “inherently evil,” he notes that there is something about American society which creates a “racist psychology” (406). He lets white people into his plan to achieve a truly equal society by giving them the charge to stand up to the racism in their own communities. He urges complete “respect” (413), “non-violence” (412), and stronger communities, which are good and noble ideals. Malcolm X admits that his personal experiences lead him to “respond

positively” to the notion that white men were devils (414) and that he was “ignorant” (415). However, he is ever the prophet and gives hope to his people because “it is only after the deepest darkness that the greatest joy can come; it is only after slavery and prison that the sweetest appreciation of freedom can come” (415).

Malcolm X’s beautiful conclusion is extremely powerful because he admits his wrongs and achieves a profound insight into the “racial psychology” of America (406). He grows beyond his own racism, humbly changes his perspective, and argues for redemption of all men until the end, of which he becomes a living example. He achieves freedom and overcomes his own faults in what is arguably the most important text produced in the Civil Rights Movement.

Conclusion

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X are clearly effective and persuasive communicators. King’s “charismatic authority” is grounded in a well-established biblical tradition (Robinson 144). He utilizes Christian imagery of light and darkness, allusions to famous prophets, and a sermon-like style to create a sense of collective oppression, establish a method of action, and prophecy a future of freedom. He captivates audiences across religious, racial, gender, and class barriers to convey a “dream” of future equality in a colorblind America. While his earliest works, such as “I Have a Dream,” build upon a foundation of utopian ideals, his discourse becomes increasingly more demanding, urgent, and realistic over time, as seen in “Where Do We Go From Here?: Chaos or Community”.

Malcolm X also creates a sense of collective identity as he argues for ethnic separatism first to other African-Americans and then to all people. He identifies himself

with common men and his direct language is very effective. While his rash language in “Black Man’s History” repels white audiences, his later works appeal to all people regardless of race. He grew as an effective speaker and urged violent self-defense in order to obtain equal racial standing. In his later works, Malcolm X is a much more eloquent, persuasive, and open-minded communicator. Both men, albeit through different methods, establish a collective identity, verbalize social injustices, call for justice, and prophesy a future of true equality.

Obviously, neither King nor Malcolm X can be credited with beginning the Civil Rights Movement, although many scholars allow that King’s “I Have a Dream” speech inspired national leaders’ “openly advocating [of] federal civil rights legislation” (Patton 61). The “social revolution” actually began in 1954, with *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was immediately followed by Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her bus seat and subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. Meanwhile, “other blacks pressed their demands for equal rights through lunch-counter sit-ins, marches, and ‘freedom rides’” (Greenblatt). During this time, the KKK increased its enrollment, white and black civil rights activists were murdered, and buildings were bombed and burned (Robinson 146). Almost a decade passed before significant legislation was passed again, as Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, thereby “outlawing discrimination in employment and public accommodations” (Greenblatt). In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, which “outlawed literacy tests and similar qualification devices used to keep blacks off the rolls” (Greenblatt). In 1968, the Fair Housing Act was established to prevent discrimination in housing. While it is not clear if either Malcolm X or King’s speeches, letters, or autobiography directly inspired civil rights legislation, this cannot

detract from recognizing the impact their discourse had on American history. Although neither King nor Malcolm X began the Movement, their “rearticulation of black collective subjectivity” was crucial to the success of resistance (Omi and Winant 92).

Placed in a national historical context, the Civil Rights Movement follows the Reformation, American Revolution, and Civil War as one of many struggles toward an American ideal of freedom (Watson 18). The works of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm beautifully communicate typical American ideals of justice, freedom, and equality by utilizing imagery, metaphors, and powerful diction. While these works should be studied in order to more fully understand the various experiences during the Movement, their messages are still applicable and necessary today. Almost forty years have passed since the last of these works was penned, and a reader would be remiss not to analyze the messages in relationship to present-day America.

King dreamed of a table of brotherhood. Malcolm X dreamed of an economically and politically strong black nation within America. Today, “equal opportunity,” “affirmative action,” and “diversity” are household words, and civil rights legislation seems to be complete. Although “by any measure, African-Americans’ social, economic, and political standing has vastly improved since ...the 1950s and ‘60s,” “by all the same measures- wealth, income, life expectancy, school success, crime rates- blacks lag far behind whites” (Greenblatt). Racial inequalities may be rooted in “discrimination [which] still exists despite civil rights laws, undercutting blacks educationally and economically” (Greenblatt). African-American males’ median incomes are 73% that of white males, blacks receive less “access to sophisticated medical treatments,” are “more likely to pay higher, ‘predatory’ mortgage rates,” receive lower standardized test scores,

and are seven times as likely as white Americans to be incarcerated (Greenblatt). One study found that “the unemployment rate for [black] college graduates has continued to climb...whereas for whites, it’s been fairly stable,” the Harvard Civil Rights Project found that “Southern public schools are re-segregating” (Greenblatt), and only half of one percent of all marriages in America are interracial (Shipler 117). Also, “racial incidents... continue to erupt, periodically shattering Americans’ complacency about race and signaling to many observers that racist sentiments still linger in some psyches” (Greenblatt). Clearly, the “racial psychology” that Malcolm X articulated still exists.

The racism that Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X fought is entrenched in American society and did not disappear with the Civil Rights Movement. America

has been an extremely ‘color-conscious’ society. From the very inception of the Republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one’s political rights, one’s location in the labor market, and indeed one’s sense of ‘identity.’ The hallmark of this history has been racism, not the abstract ethos of equality (Omi and Winant 1).

Some argue that race is so deeply embedded in the American psyche that “race will *always* be at the center of the American experience” (6). While Martin Luther King, Jr. called for a “race free society” (92), this notion quickly proved too idealistic. Both King and Malcolm X worked instead to “rearticulate” the racial position of blacks in America by taking “elements and themes of [blacks’] culture and traditions and infuse[ing] them with new meaning” (93). Martin Luther King, Jr. utilized religious references such as that of the slaves’ exodus from Egypt while Malcolm X spoke of social inner-city conditions, but both adapted what African-Americans already understood to advocate for political equality. The resulting legislation of the Civil Rights Movement has been studied as historical fact, as if there is no legacy to the messages of King and Malcolm X.

Today, some argue that the civil rights legislation these leaders worked for went too far. The Reagan administration argued that because during the Civil Rights Movement, the state was “attempting to eliminate racial discrimination... it legitimated group rights, established affirmative action mandates, and spent money on a range of social programs which, according to the right, debilitated, rather than uplifted, its target populations” (Omi and Winant 114). Twenty years after the fire hoses and police dog attacks, the federal government almost succeeded in undoing all the Movement accomplished. In 2003, the Supreme Court found in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that “using race as one factor among many in determining individual admissions was acceptable” to public universities (Greenblatt), and affirmative action is still at work throughout the nation.

Although much progress has been made, the “racial psychology” Malcolm X so aptly described is still evident today. Although he and Martin Luther King, Jr. left a lasting impression on history during the Civil Rights Movement, their works are still applicable. In 2005, Americans stand to gain much from studying this literature. While the current political language of equality and diversity entices Americans to believe that race is no longer an issue, the statistics prove these terms superficial at best. Civil rights legislation has not solved the problems of discrimination and de facto segregation. Therefore, to achieve King’s dream of brotherhood and equality in a “race free society” (Omi and Winant 92), individuals must work to overcome their deeply rooted personal prejudices and ignorance.

Malcolm X’s *Autobiography* is an incredible opportunity to experience racism, a racist perspective, and transcendence above the American mentality of racial ignorance.

Malcolm X has been portrayed as a militant and a kind of Faust (Robinson 149), so his works have tragically been disregarded by much of the white population. While King's utopian "I Have a Dream" is still often studied in public schools, the utopian ideal either seems unrealistic, a failed prophecy, or worse yet, students assume that the goal has been achieved. King's later works, encouraging solidarity and direct methods of economic and political action to achieve change, are rarely mentioned. Since King addresses Christian audiences, his works have enjoyed more publicity than those of Malcolm X but are still only studied briefly. Unfortunately, the symbol "X" is viewed by most whites as a sign of black power, militancy, and invokes fear.

Americans should study both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's works in order to more fully appreciate transcendent qualities and human rights. Both men's works have considerable value as lessons about the realities of discrimination and prejudice, possible effective ways to affect social change, and civic duty to act for good. The urban poverty of blacks and de facto segregation taking place in America (Shipler x) prove that integration, which is "the blending of parts into a unified whole," "has never been accomplished in the United States. It is a promise unfulfilled, a dream unrealized" (34). However, King's dream should still be a goal for Americans, not just "a goal unattainable" (34). Malcolm X's works show his personal growth and give a glimpse of American society from the outside, which shows the deeply lodged racism of the nation. His obvious racism and remarkable transformation are enlightening and offer hope that racist Americans can change. While racism in America is certainly not limited to black/white relations,

the fountainhead of injustice has been located between the blacks and whites, and that legacy remains the country's most potent symbol of shame. Nothing tests the nation, or takes the measure of its decency, quite like the rift between black and white. No improvement would be felt as broadly as that between black and white; fundamental progress in that arena would reverberate throughout other ethnic problems in the land (x).

Clearly, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X are still powerful, persuasive communicators with a message Americans would do well to study once again.

Bibliography

- Bellah, Robert et. al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985.
- Bobbitt, David. *The Rhetoric of Redemption: Kenneth Burke's Redemption Drama and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" Speech*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.
- Bloom, Jack M. *Class, Race, & the Civil Rights Movement*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Calloway, Thomas, and Lucaites, ed. *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1993.
- Clark, E. Culpepper. "The American Dilemma in King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail*." Calloway-Thomas, Carolyn and John Louis Lucaites, eds. *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1993. pp. 33-49.
- Greenblatt, Alan. "Race in America." *The CQ Researcher Online*, vol. 13. July 11, 2003. pp. 593-624. Retrieved April 5, 2005, from <http://library.cqpress.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/cqresearcher/cqresrre2003071100>.
- Hoover, Judith D. "Reconstruction of the Rhetorical Situation in *Letter from Birmingham Jail*." Calloway-Thomas, Carolyn and John Louis Lucaites, eds. *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1993. pp. 50-65.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. King, Coretta S. ed. *The Words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Newmarket Press, 1983.
- Miller, Keith. *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources*. New York: The Free Press, 1992.
- Malcolm X. Haley, Alex, ed. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1964.
- McElrath, Jessica. "Martin Luther King, Jr." Viewed April 5, 2005. http://www.afroamhistory.about.com/cs/martinlutherking/a/bio_mlk.htm
- Omi, Michael and Winant, Howard. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Inc., 1986.
- Paris, Peter. *Black Leaders in Conflict*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1978.

- Patton, John. "A Transforming Response: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*. Vol. 7, No. 1, 2004. pp. 53-66.
- Shipler, David. *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- Solomon, Martha. "Covenanted Rights: The Methaphoric Matrix of 'I Have a Dream'." Calloway-Thomas, Carolyn and John Louis Lucaites, eds. *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1993. pp. 66-84.
- Sunnemark, Fredrik. *Ring Out Freedom!: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- Watson, Martha S. "The Issue is Justice: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Response to the Birmingham Clergy." *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*. Vol. 7, No. 1, 2004. pp. 1-22.

http://www.africawithin.com/malcolmx/malcolm_bio.htm

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/aristotleonrhetoric.htm>

<http://www.cnn.com/EVENTS/1997/mlk/links.html>

www.malcolm-x.org/speeches/spc_12_62.htm