



Malcolm X

A POWERFUL CONTRAST to Martin Luther King's Civil Rights Movement was the Black Panther Party, a militant socialist organization that believed in 'Black Power'. Its program

demanded Land, Bread, Housing, Education, Clothing, Justice, and Peace and it spread throughout the black ghettos of the big cities.

Another call for black power came from the

Muslim, Malcolm X, who was born Malcolm Little in 1925. His father, a Baptist minister, was murdered in 1929 by a splinter-group from the Ku Klux Klan. His mother tried to hold together the family of 8 children but she had a nervous breakdown and Malcolm was sent to a foster home. Growing up he got into so much trouble that he ended up doing 8 years for burglary.

In prison he studied hard and also joined the Black Muslim group, the Nation of Islam, led by Elijah Muhammad. On his release in 1952 Malcolm decided to fight for black self-respect with the motto: "You can't negotiate upon freedom, you either fight for it or shut up." In one of his speeches he said the following:

“We are Africans, and we happen to be in America. We are not Americans. We are a people who formerly were Africans who were kidnapped and brought to America. Our forefathers weren't the Pilgrims. We didn't land on Plymouth Rock; the rock was landed on us. We were brought here against our will; we were not brought here to be made citizens ... If you're interested in freedom, you need some judo, you need some karate – you need all the things that will help you fight for freedom ... You don't need a debate ... You need some action! ”

THE BALLOT OR THE BULLIT

Unlike Martin Luther King, who called for love and non-violence, Malcolm X demanded “to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.” Later this was shortened to “the ballot or the bullet”.

Such aggressive talk frightened not only all white people but also Martin Luther King, who was calling for love and non-violence as the only way for blacks to gain their rights and integrate fully into American society. Malcolm X rejected integration: “An integrated cup of coffee is insufficient pay for 400 years of slave labor.” He called non-violence “the philosophy of a fool”, and attacked Martin Luther King's speech, I have a dream: “While King was having a dream, the rest of us Negroes are having a nightmare.”



1. THINK-PAIR-SHARE©

Explain why Malcolm X believed in fighting in contrast to MLK's non-violence.

Think of conflicts in your own country (political conflicts, gang related conflicts, etc). Give reasons for solving conflicts with or without violence.

2. VOCABULARY

List ten words that have to do with democracy.

Share them with three classmates. Explain why you chose them.

3. DISCUSS – IN GROUPS

Martin Luther King was shot dead, Malcolm X and John F. Kennedy too. Why do you think they were killed?

The Think-Pair-Share structure is presented on page 70.



THE NEW MALCOLM X

After quarrelling with Elijah Muhammed, Malcolm left the Nation of Islam and visited countries in the Middle East, including the Muslim holy city of Mecca. He came home with a new message of integration of all races and a new-found acceptance of black and white living together:

“During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug) - while praying to the same God - with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the ‘white’ Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.

We were truly all the same (brothers) - because their belief in one God had removed the ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior, and the ‘white’ from their attitude.

I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the Oneness of Man - and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their ‘differences’ in color ... ”

THE ASSASSINATION

Malcolm X had just begun to preach this new message in 1965 when he was shot dead by 3 members of the Nation of Islam who called him a traitor. Malcolm X’s influence continues to this day, however. His speeches and style have been used in hip-hop culture, while Spike Lee’s film featuring Denzel Washington as Malcolm X has been very influential.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is a massive bestseller, and together with Martin Luther King he is read and studied in schools and universities – as well as on the street.

February 21, 1965: Malcolm X murdered by three members of the Nation of Islam.

