

VIOLENCE VERSUS NON-VIOLENCE

When historians in the times to come look back upon the civil rights struggles of the mid-20th century, there are two men whose lives they cannot possibly ignore—The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm (Big Red) Little, better known throughout the world as Malcolm X.

Despite the fact that both were born Negroes in the United States, they followed different paths that brought them both into the international limelight, espousing radically different philosophies and yet, strangely, working toward the same end—the winning of the dignity of manhood for the black man in America.

There Were Similarities

While most people think of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King as being as far apart as the North and South Poles, there were many similarities between the two. Each was born the son of a Baptist minister and they were born only three years apart (King is 36 and Malcolm was 39 when he died). King was born in Atlanta, Ga., where one could have expected racial violence at any time during his childhood. Malcolm was born in Omaha, Neb., a Midwestern town not usually thought of as being violently anti-Negro. Yet there Malcolm saw his home burned to the ground by Ku Klux Klansmen and his militant father—a black nationalist follower of Marcus Garvey—was later found bludgeoned on street-car tracks. Malcolm's memories of white Midwesterners was much more bitter than King's memories of white Southerners.

Strangely, both Martin Luther King and Malcolm X turned to the East for their philosophies. Malcolm first moved into the Black Muslim faith headed by Elijah Muhammed and later into what he called the true faith of Islam, the orthodox Moslem religion, after his break with Elijah. King turned to India and the teachings of the Hindu, Mohandas K. Gandhi, for his philosophy of non-violence, a philosophy which fitted well his religion taken from Jesus Christ, one of the first preachers of non-violence during his life on earth.

Brave men both, King and Malcolm received almost constant threats against their lives. King was stabbed by a demented woman in a New York bookstore but, fortunately, recovered. Malcolm was not so fortunate. It is ironic that both the woman who stabbed King and the group who assassinated Malcolm were Negroes.

Both brilliant and articulate, the highly educated King and the scarcely-formally-educated-at-all Malcolm demonstrated often that they could hold their own against some of the best minds in the nation. Radio and TV interviews vied for the opportunity to put them before microphones and listeners were seldom disappointed. Both were sought as lecturers at leading colleges and universities throughout the U.S. and abroad.

King's Role Is Different

The role of Martin Luther King in the fight for civil rights is, indeed, quite different from that of Malcolm X. The majority of Negroes are Christians with the teachings of Christ implanted deep within their hearts and soul. They have been brought up to believe that God will show them the way and that, eventually, they will be led out of their troubles and woe. They want to continue believing this and King, a man of God, a Baptist minister, keeps strengthening their beliefs for them. He will suffer any persecution, risk and danger, involve himself in any demonstration to prove that each victory—no matter how small—brings the Negro that much closer to his goal. He has a bravery that wins respect, a calmness that inspires trust, a dedication that brings support and a deep and abiding religious faith that seems to bring love. His followers seem to say, "How can the white man continue to hold out against all this goodness?"

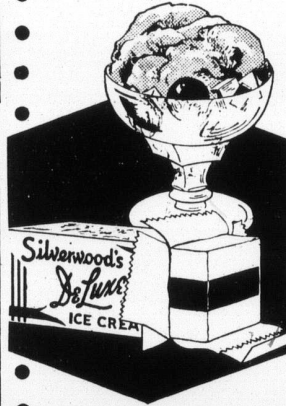
Only History Can Tell

Which philosophy will most quickly win full freedom for Negroes in America today is a subject debated hotly almost every time a group of Negroes gets together. The young and the impatient espouse the philosophy of Malcolm X—the Malcolm of the last year, the Malcolm who said it was possible for whites and Negroes to get along and who dropped the Black Muslim cry of complete segregation and "some land of our own." Some of the more mature Negroes see King's non-violent way as the quickest road to a lasting settlement of the race problem. But on one thing they all agree—the race problem must be solved and solved quickly. The decision as to how it will be solved lies as much with white America as it does with Negro America—perhaps even more so. Even Malcolm X, himself, and the Black Muslim group from which he defected never advocated the initiation of violence—saying only that violence should be met with violence.

As the Negro more and more is given his place as a man in society, the danger of the masses turning to violence grows less and less.

—Courtesy of The Ebony.

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