

Civil Rights Speeches Assignment

By August 1963, the Civil Rights movement was in full swing, but King still wasn't getting the laws he wanted to protect African Americans. The support promised by the Kennedy administration wasn't coming and those in the movement decided a large scale demonstration was the only solution.

Leaders in the Civil Rights movement gathered 250,000 marchers from all races to demonstrate in front of the Lincoln memorial. Although many speeches were made during the demonstrations, the most significant was the "I Have a Dream" speech given by MLK, Jr. A few years later, a more militant wing of the civil rights movement began to emerge. This group consisted of younger members of the movement who were growing increasingly impatient with King's approach. This movement was headed by several different figures, but the most prominent was Malcolm X. His speech reflects a very different approach to the movement.

Please view and read each of the speeches below. Although it is possible to just read the script, you'll want to view the speech itself if you can...seeing their expressions and hearing the emotion in their voices really adds to the understanding of this movement and the passionate way each of them felt.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the "I Have a Dream" Speech
Malcolm X and the "Ballot or the Bullet" Speech

When you have viewed both speeches, complete the free response question below:

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s went through several different stages with many different leaders and positions. Although Dr. King dominated the rhetoric throughout the movement, another, more militant fork in the movement emerged. This was led by Malcolm X. After viewing the speeches made by each, address the movement in terms of the following:

a. What is the difference in tone between King and Malcolm X's speeches?

- i. King and Malcolm X both shared a desire for equality between white and black Americans; Malcolm X, however, differed from King's views in several ways. Malcolm X's speech carried a more aggressive tone, encouraging a fight for deserved rights. King sought to be moving in a different way, seeking to inspire and encourage peaceful resolution rather than a violent confrontation.

b. What is the difference between them when it comes to racial and religious issues?

- i. Martin Luther King Jr. was, of course, a very religious individual, being a Baptist Minister Christianity factored greatly into his life and his career as a Civil Rights Activist. From his early start in the 1950s and the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, religion not only influenced King's ideas, but also his connection to the people and his public speaking ability. As a Christian who extolled Christian virtues in his movement, King Jr. also had the ability to connect with and move white Americans.

Differing from this, Malcolm X was a Sunni Muslim Minister and activist. He too had great public speaking skills, and his religious views factored into his views on race and Civil Rights. By dint of being Muslim, he had less of a connection to white America and was less able to relate to them, giving a more fiery and harsh tone to many of his ideas. Both King Jr. and Malcolm X shared the message of racial equality being a necessary payment for the years of injustice and unfair treatment suffered by African-Americans, but came to different conclusions revolving around that same message.

c. How was the movement impacted by each of these figures?

i. Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrated the power of nonviolence and contributed significant credibility to the Civil Rights movement as a result. His passion in speaking and his nature as a Christian Minister also helped improve the credibility of the Civil Rights movement. Civil Rights was no longer seen as something supported by rabble-rousers and instigators, but by peaceful, reasonable, religious people. King Jr. became a leading and influential spokesperson that catapulted the movement into the national spotlight. Malcolm X influenced the movement by introducing the Black Power philosophy, emphasizing self-defense and the rights and powers of African-Americans. Both denounced racism and helped move the Civil Rights movement forward, but while King Jr. contributed a new, peaceful method of protest and a credible appearance, Malcolm X's major impact was giving the African-Americans themselves spirit and will to accomplish their goals.

d. Discuss the impact of each attitude in terms of any civil rights case you've studied in this unit. The case can be many years after the '60s as long as you can make a connection...feel free to get creative.

i. Despite violence and intimidation, Martin Luther King Jr.'s movement pulled through during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. They proved that nonviolence worked and that they were capable and willing to work for justice. The Supreme Court affirmed a lower court ruling that declared the segregation of the Montgomery bus system to be illegal, marking a watershed moment for the Civil Rights Movement. This would not have been accomplished without the nonviolence and Christian aspects of King's movement lending Civil Rights credibility and earning it the admiration of onlookers.