

Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare Study Guide

**Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare
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Plot Summary

Martin and Malcolm and America is a study in contrasts between the two great black civil rights leader of the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. The author, Cone, a minister during the civil rights era, seeks to show, contrary to the followers of King and Malcolm X, that King and Malcolm X were not polar opposites in their ideas, did not hate one another, and moved towards one another's views before their assassinations. Cone also uses their stories and his interpretations of their philosophies to argue that their ideas are complimentary and must be used by the black community to advance their interests.

The book begins with an introduction that contrasts the ideas of the two figures; Martin Luther King, Jr. believed in the American "Dream" that racial equality could come to America, whereas Malcolm X believed in the American "Nightmare" that the black community had suffered and that Americans could not heal. Martin King believed in the philosophy of integration, with blacks and whites living as one, whereas Malcolm X believed in the philosophy of segregation, with blacks becoming conscious of their racial identity, separating themselves from whites, and promoting their own interests and values. Malcolm X was a believer in Black Nationalism, whereas King rejected such ideas. However, the African-American community contains these two ideas within their culture; many see their ideas and lives as antagonistic, but Cone wants to argue otherwise.

The first eight chapters contrast King's and X's stories. Chapter 1 explains King's early, southern, middle-class Christian upbringing, which Cone argues disposed him to believe in the American Dream. Chapter 2 explains Malcolm X's early, northern, lower class upbringing which alienated him from Christianity and left him in prison. Chapter 3 discusses King's philosophy of racial justice, his conception of the American Dream as one of liberty and equality, and how he put his ideas into practice through the use of nonviolent protest. Chapter 4 discusses Malcolm X's philosophy of racial justice, his conversion to the Nation of Islam, his relationship with Elijah Muhammad, his philosophy of self-love, black supremacy, and devotion to Islam. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the profound religious influences in the lives of Martin King and Malcolm X, King's from Christianity and Malcolm X's from the Nation of Islam. King's Christianity led him to believe in universal brotherhood and human equality; whereas Malcolm's Muslim theology evolved but always included an anti-Christian, black separatism and friendliness to violent revolution. Chapters 7 and 8 show how towards the end of their lives Malcolm and Martin moved close to one another's views. Chapter 9 weighs the relative merits of both views, showing how they can compliment and correct one another. Chapter 10 criticizes them for not being sufficiently anti-sexist and socialist, and Chapter 11 discusses their continuing legacy in culture, politics, American Christianity, organization strategy and so on. Chapter 12 concludes the book.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

This book concerns the relationship between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's ideas. Their senses of American life are best described, respectively, as "dream" and "nightmare." Their legacies are still controversial. They differed on the use of violence and in their religions; King was a Christian and Malcolm X a Muslim. The media always presented the two men as rivals, but they were fond of one another, for the most part. However, their meeting on March 26th, 1964 represents two strands in African-American resistance tradition: integrationism and nationalism. The integrationist believes that a black man can be both American and black, whereas the nationalist denies this. Most black intellectuals have embodied both ideals to varying extents.

The integrationist tradition dates back to Frederick Douglass and the founding of the NAACP. Integrationists are characterized by their optimism and faith in American principles of freedom and democracy. Black nationalists date back to the slave revolts of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, and later the black separatist Marcus Garvey. They believed in black emigration from the United States and the creation of a separate society with its own unique African heritage. They claim that blacks are primarily Africans, not Americans. Integrationists are characterized by a desire for equality, nationalists by the glorification of a unique black identity. Integrationists tend to be Christians, whereas most nationalists are members of the Nation of Islam. In Black Muslim theology, God is black and the white races were the creation of a renegade black scientist named Yacob, from millennia past. In this view, blacks are divine and the European races are devils. Integrationists and nationalists compliment one another, but they have different spirits. Integrationists are practical, nationalists "desperate."

The conflict between nationalism and integrationism is the core conflict of the book and these two philosophies are best represented by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., respectively.



Chapter 1: The Making of a Dreamer (1929-55)

Chapter 1: The Making of a Dreamer (1929-55) Summary and Analysis

The "I Have a Dream" speech best categorizes Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of optimism and hope. King believed in the American dream of freedom and equality for all. His views date back far into black history in the United States.

King was born January 15th, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia to a religious, middle-class family. His father was a pastor, along with his grandfather. He grew up participating in a community agitating for equality and justice. The NAACP helped to spread these values, often understood religiously, throughout the black community. Their protests symbolized a desire for equality with whites. The black middle class believed strongly in education, morality and business. Whites would eventually accept blacks, on this view. King's community of middle-class blacks believed in "self-help." King's father taught him the three S's—"Spending, Saving and Sharing." The King family never relied on public assistance. While King was confronted with racism, he never let it diminish his self-worth. He wanted to hate white people but believed it was his Christian duty to love them. King believed that black people should think of themselves as free even when they were not. King's Christianity helped to buttress all of these values, particularly the idea of human equality.

King also believed that much of racism was due to economic injustice, primarily from capitalism. He came to reduce his hatred of whites through working with them in college. His relationship towards religion became more hostile at this time, although he eventually came back to the faith. His experience reading Mahatma Gandhi also influenced him towards cooperation and love. He came to see the struggle for justice as a struggle for the "social aims of Jesus." King believed that hatred was the result of sin, both personal sin and the sin embodied by his social institutions. King believed that Christ redeemed the world for sin and that in him we are "all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). His organizational activities reflected these values that he learned in childhood and in his higher education. Racism is the result of fear and fear could be conquered through social activism and social justice.



Chapter 2: The Making of a Bad Nigger (1925-52)

Chapter 2: The Making of a Bad Nigger (1925-52) Summary and Analysis

Malcolm X is known for his unparalleled ability to point out the injustice committed against African-Americans. He always sought to tell the truth about the relationships between blacks and whites in the United States and the world. Unlike King, he did not have a university education; he came from the "bottom" of black society, not from the middle class. X rejected integration and wanted to affirm his blackness over and against his American identity.

X saw American society from the perspective of "black masses living at the bottom of the social heap." Concerning the March on Washington, Malcolm X quipped, "While King was having a dream, the rest of us Negroes are having a nightmare." (39) Malcolm X's heritage has often been distorted by King's followers, who saw him as hate-mongering and undermining the black cause. Many saw his views as representative of a "black Ku Klux Klan." His legacy was assaulted from the day of his murder on February 21st, 1965, including attacks from the Washington Post, Newsweek and the New York Times. His reputation abroad was similar. Further, many in the black community believed that his rhetoric undermined the cause of racial justice. However, in recent years, Malcolm X has been given a second look, with many revising their opinions about him.

Malcolm "Little" was born in Omaha, Nebraska on May 19th, 1925, in a family of seven, four of whom were birthed by his mother, a Grenadian immigrant. He spent his childhood in Lansing, Michigan and worked as a "hustler" in Boston and New York. Due to these activities, he was sent to prison on February 27th, 1946. Malcolm was the son of a Baptist preacher from Georgia, but his father never had a regular pastorate position. His father was involved in the fight for racial justice, but he was a nationalist and follow of Marcus Garvey. His father taught him to be proud of his black heritage. Malcolm X, however, became a Muslim in prison, a Sunni who followed the unusual theology of Eiljah Muhammad.

X educated himself in prison, and often wrote of his childhood as a "nightmare" because his family was chased by the clan and other anti-black groups. His mother and father attacked one another and his brothers, sisters and himself. His home life was a disaster. X spent much of his childhood hungry, often eating grass. The family accepted public assistance as well. However, the welfare workers broke up their family. X's mother had a breakdown. This experience helped to create Malcolm X's philosophy of race. Much of X's Christian experiences were in an integrated church, where whites discriminated against him. His believed he would never be accepted by whites and loved living in Harlem because he was surrounded by blacks.



His teacher, Elijah Muhammad, born in 1897, grew up to be a Christian minister but left the faith because he did not believe Christianity could effectively aid the fight for racial justice. He became a follower of Wallace D. Fard, who created the first Black Muslim temple. The Nation of Islam, as it came to be called, was anti-white and anti-Christian. In prison, X converted to the views of Elijah Muhammad, when his brother Reginald taught him Muhammad's theology. He changed his attitudes and behavior and decided to pursue his self-education. X converted in 1948 and found the teachings of Elijah Muhammad a "blinding light." The Nation of Islam also affirmed Malcolm X's emphasis on blackness. After he left prison, he came under the direct tutelage of Elijah Muhammad. Integrationism was the way of "college-educated Negro elites" who only wanted to imitate whites. He saw no good in white people.



Chapter 3: I Have a Dream (1955-64)

Chapter 3: I Have a Dream (1955-64) Summary and Analysis

Three ideas formed King's understanding of the American dream: his image of "North" and "South" and the role of black people in that relationship, the creation of black resistance among Southern blacks, and the emergence of black nationalism in the North. In the South, King and many blacks saw themselves in Old Testament terms. They were the Jews in Egypt—the South—who wished to escape to Canaan—the North. Southern states repressed blacks violently for decades; in 1954, when school segregation was ended, the North's power was brought forward in King's mind. The lynching of 14 year old Emmet Till symbolized the South. Freedom was available to blacks, just over the hill. The idea of the American dream was also intended (in part) to contrast with Muhammad and Malcolm X's concept of race relations. X saw little difference between the North and the South; the Southerners were at least honest about their racism.

King had a complex understanding of the American Dream. It was not the popular image of achieving wealth or fame through one's own talents or merits. Instead, he had two distinct conceptions, one earlier in life and one later. King's first concept of the American Dream developed as the idea that "justice could be achieved through love" and nonviolence. The American dream was a dream of justice, and being treated with equal dignity and respect. The ideas of love and justice are both present in King's early thought, but justice came first. This is a unique emphasis of the author's; he wants to draw a similarity between X and King's early lives, both of which were primarily concerned with racial justice. King's early fights were for simple racial equality and the fight against evil. His idea of justice grew broader than a simple struggle between blacks and whites, however. He began to think of the fight for racial justice in the context of the whole world, and in terms of universal brotherhood and love. As time progressed, King's conception of the American Dream became one of love, and while justice was still important, love was the primary virtue. X even thought well of King for his struggles and values. X often declined to criticize King.

King began to speak of the American Dream in the 1950s. He talked about the dream of true democracy, understood as an implication of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The idea that "all men are created equal" was crucial. He also emphasized that rights derived from God directly. In some ways, the idea of the "dream" was directed at whites, arguing that they should apply the principles they hold dear consistently. King believed that whites could be convinced of the morality of his cause. He further argued that American Presidents could not represent freedom abroad if they did not liberate blacks at home. He demanded that Southern moderate whites stand up and fight. King never gave up on white Americans.

King believed that blacks did not need to understand the hypocrisy of white America. Instead, he believed that they needed to be motivated to convince whites of this



inconsistency. He urged blacks to pursue a "redemptive role" in the civil rights struggle, by convincing whites of the healing power of love and the demand for justice. This "redemptive" role consisted of five goals: self-respect, high moral standards, whole-hearted work, leadership, and non-violence.

King believed that due to the American legacy of black oppression, blacks had lost their sense of self-respect. They must remember that they are God's children. Further, blacks must demand the respect of others by demonstrating it through high moral standards. He wanted less black crime and fewer blacks dependent on state welfare. King encouraged blacks to pursue hard work, to make use of the freedom they already had. Just because blacks were oppressed did not mean they could not work hard. For this and his other standards, Malcolm X criticized King for promoting white values in the black community. King emphasized education alongside learned, courageous leadership and he had to demonstrate this leadership because he was mid-way between two groups of blacks—conservative blacks who did not want to "rock the boat" and radical black nationalists. King worried about Malcolm X's leadership because he thought it appealed to dark emotional sources. Finally, King emphasized nonviolence as both the moral and practical way to achieve positive social change. Jesus and Gandhi were his main influences. X thought that nonviolence "disarmed" blacks, but King argued that it "disarmed" whites. In King's view, nonviolence was not weak; it required real strength to "meet hate with love." While King was often worried about X's influence and message, he eventually came to see him as a fellow freedom-fighter.

King's values began to spread across the world, particularly as he visited other countries like Mexico and Ghana. He thought the United States should donate food internationally. He also demonstrated his values in Birmingham and the March on Washington. While Malcolm X was cynical about the civil rights bill that Kennedy put forward, King was excited. X was at the March on Washington, but only as an "uninvited observer." As the violence against blacks continued, many became disillusioned with nonviolence and came to agree with Malcolm X. King always believed that the "American Dream" could become a reality.



Chapter 4: I See a Nightmare (1952-63)

Chapter 4: I See a Nightmare (1952-63) Summary and Analysis

To understand Malcolm X's point of view, one must understand the struggle that black people faced during his time. Many blacks in past decades had escaped to the North, hoping for freedom, only to find despair and frustration there. They were oppressed in the North as well, and were unwelcome. Many felt that the quality of life for blacks in the North was worse than in the South. Racism was ubiquitous across white society. Scholars who study Black Muslims believe that Malcolm X was most responsible for transmitting this idea to the blacks of his movement.

X was paroled from Charlestown State Prison in 1952. Elijah Muhammad's religious movement was small, with about four hundred members. X was totally committed to Muhammad and came to lead "temple seven" of the Nation of Islam. The movement was authoritarian but X submitted happily to Muhammad. Muhammad gave his blessing to X's marriage to Betty in 1958. X believed the Nation of Islam gave meaning to his life and taught him to respect himself as an African man. Between 1953 and 1959, few knew of Malcolm X outside of the black community; he focused only on recruiting blacks. He always emphasized the "satanic" nature of whites. Blacks were "mental slaves" and needed to be "woken up." He often taught blacks through lecturing. In 1957, X became known to the black community when one of his church members was brutally beaten by police. X brought one hundred members of the "Fruit of Islam," a "paramilitary" group, to stand in front of the police station in Harlem. The crowd grew to eight hundred and the police were worried. He demanded that his church member receive medical treatment. The black community took notice.

X continued to attack whites and northern white liberals particularly. He had no interest in convincing whites of anything; he did not believe he could, unlike King. He wanted merely to organize blacks, and wished to enrage whites that they might know how blacks felt. X believed that white crime against blacks was the worst in history. King came in for criticism for cooperating with whites, but avoided direct confrontation for some time. He often felt slighted by King because King did not address him and in the 1960s, Muhammad allowed X to criticize King. He saw middle-class blacks like King as hood-winked lovers of the values of northern white liberals. Black poor people appreciated his honesty and bluntness. Eventually, X's message was brought to the attention of the news media on Mike Wallace's news show. Many whites thought of King as a radical, but Malcolm X made him look soft, declaring that God would lead a war of revolution against whites. In his debates with whites, he was often able to maneuver them into a position to make his message look reasonable; he out-debated the head of the SCLC so badly, that Wilkins required that other members of the civil rights movement not debate him.



Malcolm X preached distinct values from King. His conception of justice was "an eye for an eye." Allah would bring revenge against whites and destroy them. X preached five values: unity, self-knowledge, self-love, self-defense and separation. Unity was unity amongst black people against whites. Blacks must love one another and achieve their freedom together. He thought that blacks must have self-knowledge in that they must be freed from their mental slavery, imposed upon them by whites. Self-love meant the love of one's person and one's blackness. Non-violence failed to meet the requirement of self-love because it was "defeatist." Separation was one of X's most important values; blacks should not associate with whites and should develop their own, practically segregated community. Integration was not freedom, it was "begging"; separation was freedom. Whites will not permit true integration. He even advocated territorial separation for blacks, arguing that blacks should have their own states and perhaps a country.

Malcolm contrasted himself with King by speaking of the American Nightmare rather than the American Dream. However, it would be wrong to understand Malcolm as merely reacting to King, as Malcolm developed his views independently of King. The author of the book, James Cone, believed that King revolutionized social relations for the better, but that Malcolm X understood the "depth" of the problem of racism in the North.

During 1963, Malcolm was forced to sound more political and less religious due to rumors about Elijah Muhammad's extramarital affairs. He began to proclaim the end to black commitment to nonviolence. He even attacked the March on Washington as being too friendly to whites. He believed it accomplished nothing. Two months after the march, he convened a group of blacks and formed the Freedom Now party, an all-black political party. He gave his famous "Message to the Grass Roots," which was his answer to King's speech. During the speech, it became clear he was intending to break with Muhammad. He urged blacks to be unified together, to forget their differences amongst one another and focus on a common enemy. Blacks must form a worldwide revolution of black people. He likened the differences between him and King as the distinction between a "field negro" and a "house negro." The "field Negroes" were the majority. He saw King's March as a takeover of the movement by whites. X's rhetoric may seem harsh, but he was pained by black poverty and suffering.



Chapter 5: We Must Love Our White Brothers

Chapter 5: We Must Love Our White Brothers Summary and Analysis

Perhaps the primary differences between King and Malcolm were religious and they represented two different religious traditions in the African-American Community—between Christianity and Islam. Black Christians tended to be integrationists, whereas black Muslims tended to be nationalists. However, Christianity was dominant and the Nation of Islam was largely confined to the North and the urban poor.

King was a Christian in the black Baptist tradition and was deeply influenced by Protestant liberal theology. He believed America had failed to live up to its destiny. King's faith was based on his resonance with suffering, freedom and justice and rejected the view that God believed whites were better than blacks. God wanted to make race relations better and blacks must have faith in the black experience as a Christian experience. King's faith was found primarily in his preaching and social practice, not in his writings, the author argues. King believed very strongly that Christ was with him and that Christ even touched his life personally, his vision. He believed strongly in three Christian virtues: justice, love and hope. King always emphasized truth, but he understood the greatest truth as love. King saw his faith as one who sits at the foot of the cross of Jesus, and this emphasis separated him from liberal theologians. God restores the broken and He restores broken communities. Redemption was at the heart of Christianity. Suffering is something that must be born on behalf of love for others. King's commitment to nonviolence derived directly from Christianity. His theology often separated him from white Christians and Black Muslims in the freedom movement. King always emphasized that black people were Americans and that they would not separate themselves or leave their homes.

Despite his theology in action, King considered himself a traditional liberal Protestant who rejected "fundamentalist" religion. Early on in his education, King was attracted to the liberal Protestant idea of the goodness of humanity and the ability of faith to bring social change. He believed that the world was moving towards greater degrees of goodness, in part due to his liberal theological influences. He said that "a lie cannot live forever" because he believed that eventually God would bring justice into the world.

King also had a major impact on the style of American Church practice. America understood its theology primarily in terms of white Protestantism. Malcolm X stood outside of this self-understanding, but Martin King pushed himself inside of it. King was appalled by the lack of support for his cause from white Christian churches. However, he did not give up, and continued to reach out to white churches throughout his adult life. He argued that segregation was profoundly incompatible with Christianity. His

frustration with the inaction of white churches was best embodied in his Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Despite King's frustration with white churches, black churches eagerly supported his cause. The SCLC was, after all, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. White churches tended to separate religion and politics, but black churches saw them as going together, particularly on racial issues. For blacks, religious matters were political, since they were oppressed on such a profound level. As a young minister, the book's author, Cone, was always shocked at how white Christians did not understand the Christian idea of the equality of persons. However, black churches understood and regularly set aside their denominational differences to work together. King often criticized the black church for being too one-sided, anti-intellectual, otherworldly, and a context for class snobbery. He wanted to emphasize content-full, strong, thoughtful faith. In Cone's view, King embodied the best of the Christian tradition and helped blacks and whites discover that American Christianity was not merely a white man's religion.



Chapter 6: White Man's Heaven Is a Black Man's Hell

Chapter 6: White Man's Heaven Is a Black Man's Hell Summary and Analysis

Malcolm X's faith is complex and hard to understand because his religious views began as those of a minority religion and then evolved in their own direction. He wanted to serve God but was deeply alienated from Christianity. He grew up in a white church that discriminated against him and found most consolation in his father's and Marcus Garvey's "back to Africa" movement. X was drawn to the Nation of Islam because it was practically designed to appeal to the black underclass, to support a people that felt hated. Christianity, some would argue, was created for the needs of whites, and many of its heroes were portrayed as white. For X, his faith was all about justice; Islam therefore was the only religion for the black man. He was given permission by Elijah Muhammad to preach his own thoughts about Islam and so he had an opportunity for theological development.

Malcolm believed in "doom for white America," which was based on the Black Muslim myth of Yacob, the idea of justice and judgment from the Bible, and historical observation. Malcolm X always stressed justice and judgment, with less on love and forgiveness. He did not believe that blacks should love whites. For X, Islam was the religion of black and brown people, the people of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The Nation of Islam was founded in part because many black Muslims felt ignored by Muslims in other parts of the world. However, Malcolm still understood himself as part of the worldwide Islamic community. Over time, Malcolm wanted to make connections with the Muslim world and made his pilgrimage to Mecca. He also supported Arabic countries in their dispute with Israel.

Many do not understand X's religious commitment; he believed himself to be a minister of God, but serving God was understood as a fight for justice. In many ways, Malcolm was more "religious" than King due to all the strictures on behavior that he practiced. They had some similarities, relying on the Old Testament stories, revelation, heaven, hell, suffering, a personal God. However, King made love his emphasis, along with the cross of Jesus, but justice was Malcolm X's main focus. King believed that love of the oppressor was the way to achieve justice, but for X loving black people was most important. King had hope that God would redeem humanity, and Malcolm X hoped that God would judge white humanity.

Malcolm X rejected Christianity as the "white man's religion." He argued that it had been used to dominate African people. His hatred was not defined by Christian doctrine, however, so much as Christian practice. The author argues that Malcolm X perceptively understood the role of European Christianity in oppressing wide swaths of the world. He believed this continued as he was ignored by the black Christian community. Islam was

the religion of the black man and X found that he could easily convert black people away from Christianity. Christianity, to Malcolm X, was white nationalism, whereas Islam was Black Nationalism. However, Malcolm X's faith faltered in the early 60s when he broke from Elijah Muhammad.



Chapter 7: Chickens Coming Home to Roost (1964-65)

Chapter 7: Chickens Coming Home to Roost (1964-65) Summary and Analysis

Malcolm X often warned about racial war; segregation could not survive without violent struggle. Blacks would not remain passive, X told whites. He believed that God was going to judge white America. However, his religious affiliations were about to change as he broke with Elijah Muhammad.

We have already seen the Malcolm X was completely obedient to Muhammad from 1948 through 1963. Muhammad's word was gospel, and Muhammad rewarded Malcolm for his service with leeway to speak as he wished and wealth for his family. The two were close. However, a schism occurred. Muhammad and his people argued that Malcolm's ninety-day silencing and separation was due to his disobedience; Muhammad had commanded his ministers not to comment on the tragedy. When Muhammad let Malcolm speak in his place two weeks afterward, X decided to mention the Kennedy assassination as God's judgment of America in a Q and A as "chickens coming home to roost." This was due to America's "climate of hate" but the media ran with the quote. Muhammad strongly condemned him and silenced him for ninety days. Malcolm was shocked but submitted.

However, Malcolm later discovered that some officials with the Nation of Islam in Chicago sought to oust him. They were troubled by his nationalism and believed he had become less religious than political. Elijah Muhammad and his ministers did not share Malcolm's political philosophy. They also seemed jealous of the attention he received. Further, Elijah Muhammad had engaged in adultery despite giving harsh sentences to his followers for the same behavior. Muhammad tried to justify himself, but Malcolm could not accept it; in the end, he was too honest and Muhammad too hypocritical for their relationship to continue.

Apart from Muhammad, Malcolm began to change, and was seen as the leader of black masses in the ghetto. He continued to contrast himself with King but they also had similarities; he deliberately moved towards King in 1964, however. He became less anti-Christian and de-emphasized religious differences in his "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech. X was still militant, however. When he spoke of acquiring weapons, the FBI put its agencies on alert. However, Malcolm's new interest in voting, strikes and boycotts signaled a change. He strove for black unity and de-emphasized his criticisms of other black organizations. His changes met with mixed reviews, particularly because he would not abandon his militancy. Many black civil rights leaders still distanced themselves from him.



During this time, Malcolm X traveled to Africa, particularly Nigeria and Ghana. He learned more about mainstream Islam and met serious white Muslims. This challenged his Black Nationalist philosophy. His trip to Mecca completely transformed him, and he continued to de-emphasize Black Nationalism. He came to see himself as a worldwide fighter against the oppression of people of color, and spent time traveling the world to speak to Muslims and African organizations.



Chapter 8: Shattered Dreams (1965-68)

Chapter 8: Shattered Dreams (1965-68) Summary and Analysis

Martin Luther King, Jr. lived the dream he preached. He acted as if equality under the law and the dignity of the black person were already widely recognized facts. King developed further as time progressed. He came to emphasize love as primary over justice, and so integration became his ideal as the embodiment of love. King believed that God was acting to liberate people in history. He regarded the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as great progress, but then sought to bring genuine voting rights to the black community. While Johnson stalled, King pressed on with marches, despite the killing and beating of his people. During this time, King believed in whites.

However, the Watts ghetto revolt in Los Angeles in 1965 brought Malcolm X's philosophy into practice. King was disturbed and realized that the problem of racism ran deeper than he realized. King was criticized by the rioters and began to change his thinking, to see "two Americans." Formal equality under the law would not be enough. The material conditions of blacks must be changed; otherwise, their new rights were hollow. Thus, King began to focus on public housing, public assistance, education and other means of raising the material gains of the black poor. King rejected Marxism, but he was friendly to socialism. King's focus moved from mere racial issues to concerns about social justice and the violence of war. King was never a black nationalist, but he did believe that whites were "pinning us in central cities ... We're hemmed in. We can't get out." As a result, he thought blacks should gain political power in the cities, which was seen as a move towards black separatism. King criticized the concept of Black Power as fomenting hatred and violence, but he believed that it had a powerful effect on black self-esteem. As he initiated the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, he began to emphasize the beauty of black people and black intellectuals. He also emphasized that Christianity was not merely a white man's religion and became increasingly disillusioned with white moderates, particularly during the Poor People's Campaign. His protests against the Vietnam War only increased these sentiments. He did not enjoy criticizing his government but he felt the need to stand up against racism, poverty and militarism.



Chapter 9: Two Roads to Freedom

Chapter 9: Two Roads to Freedom Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 begins Cone's analysis of the two thinkers' similarities and differences. They did not associate, largely because of King's desire not to be tainted by Malcolm's bad reputation. However, they fought for the same goal, the liberation of black people. This was their common goal, but they had different means of achieving it. Cone believes that King's strategy worked best in the South, Malcolm in the North, King for Christians, Malcolm X for those alienated from Christianity. However, Cone believes both had flaws in their strategies. King simply never understood the degree of black oppression and alienation due to his middle-class background. He could not understand the black ghetto in the same way that Malcolm X could. Malcolm X's power came from African heritage, not Christianity. He believed in self-confidence. Malcolm understood that race riots would come, but Martin understood the downside of violence well—whites would simply use violence as an opportunity to kill blacks.

Cone argues that both of their methods were effective, but for the regions they came from, Martin King for the Southern, Christian, rural black populations, and Malcolm for the Northern, less religious, urban populations. However, Cone also emphasizes the Malcolm and Martin both moved towards one another in the end, King as much as Malcolm X. King would even say that he sometimes identified with Malcolm X. When he turned to the North, he began to speak of blackness. He became less sympathetic to reformism and more hostile to white moderates and white liberals. While their images before the media would not allow them to associate, they were profoundly interested in one another and shared a mutual respect.

In many ways, they also corrected one another. Malcolm prevented King's philosophy from letting whites take advantage of blacks with no consequences. Some even argued that King's demand that blacks love whites was too burdensome. However, Martin's worries about Black Nationalism, violence and Black Power were also well-placed. Malcolm thought the threat of violence would scare white people into recognizing blacks, but Cone believes he was wrong about that. These two men represented American blacks' dual identity—as Americans (King) and as Africans (Malcolm). They represented the conflict in the soul of black America.

Chapter 10: Nothing but Men

Chapter 10: Nothing but Men Summary and Analysis

Both Malcolm and Martin had deep flaws as human beings; they must not be seen as messiah figures. They completely missed sexism as a profound evil. They were both strongly patriarchic, and were no different from whites on this score. Black people cannot excuse or justify their sexist attitudes. Malcolm was much worse than King on this issue and was partly misogynistic. In fact, many black leaders today are upset about how they treated and spoke about women at the time. Due to the decay of black families, black leaders focused on getting black men to be men, and often ignored women. However, over time, various black women entered the movement, like Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Jo Ann Robinson, Mary Fair Burks, and many others. Oddly, however, early figures in black history like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois were friendlier to women's rights. Malcolm and Martin often expressed their gratitude towards the women in their movement.

Martin and Malcolm also both failed to understand classism, despite their growing recognition of classism in their later years. Both never asked the radical questions necessary to truly change economic conditions that oppressed blacks. In Cone's view, both were too hostile to communism, absorbing the natural American hostility to the idea. Neither were students of socialism and neither understood it. Martin began to think harder about socialism before his death, but his interest did not have time to flourish.

Chapter 11: Making Their Mark: Legacies

Chapter 11: Making Their Mark: Legacies Summary and Analysis

In 1965, Malcolm X was killed in Harlem, and three years later, Martin was killed in Memphis. Martin's legacy has been celebrated across the country, even with a national holiday, while public recognition of Malcolm has been far less significant. The admirers of Malcolm X have resented this. Cone argues that the followers of both men have spent too much time exaggerating their differences. Completing their legacies requires melding their strategies and philosophies. Their focus can be applied to black culture, where Malcolm had much more to say; blacks need a racial identity as part of their path to freedom. Black people must learn to love themselves. In politics, both had much to contribute and helped blacks to understand how political progress is contextual. Further, King had a deeper, more resonant philosophy that grounded the case for racial equality. Both were also important for their critiques of American Christianity, Martin as an internal critic and Malcolm as an external critic. Martin Luther King got white churches to think about racism; no religious thinker has influenced American Christianity more in the 20th Century. Both also had unique and important qualities as leaders that blacks should emulate. Neither gained financially from their activism and both paid for their causes with their deaths. Martin had tact and Malcolm lacked it when it mattered. Both believed in being intelligent, well-spoken and well-educated. Free people must be educated. Both left a strong legacy of being self-critical, humble and willing to develop as thinkers and activists.

Martin and Malcolm gave black people the important contrast between nonviolence and self-defense, showing us when both are appropriate, practical and demanded by justice. They were both able to set crucial and contrasting tones for racial justice, militancy and humor, when the time called for it. Further, neither leader was an elitist at the top of their movements. They were down-to-earth and respected the intelligence of their allies and followers. Finally, both figures developed connections with liberation movements worldwide.



Chapter 12: Conclusion

Chapter 12: Conclusion Summary and Analysis

Charismatic leaders are not the salvation of black people today, whose condition is in many ways worse than it was during Malcolm and Martin's day. They are important because they symbolize different ideas and approaches to the struggle for justice, but we need them brought together. Racism must be fought and still pervades American social life. Further, America is still a nightmare for the poor who can barely survive. Ronald Reagan devastated both minorities and the poor. Racism, poverty, sexism, class exploitation, and imperialism must be fought today and the legacies of Malcolm and Martin must aid us but not define us.



Characters

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is the most famous civil rights leader of the 20th century. He grew up in a loving home in Atlanta, Georgia, the son of a minister, and middle-class. King grew up a Christian, studied theology and philosophy in college and graduate school and came to believe in the Christian ideals of equality, justice and universal love. He believed that whites could be convinced to accept blacks and believed that blacks should be integrated into American society. He came to believe in Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent protest and practiced his theology and philosophy in his activism on behalf of racial equality. King believed that Malcolm X was deeply confused about his philosophy of violent revolution and self-defense along with his philosophy of Black Nationalism.

King believed that integrationism was the goal of any morally right conception of racial justice. Blacks and whites must break down racial barriers and live together; when Malcolm X advocated black separatism and violent insurrection, King criticized him. Despite often ignoring Malcolm X's influence, he came to see the racism in the North that X spoke of with such passion. He also came to understand X's idea of building black self-love and the uniqueness of black culture, as he came to understand depth of racial hatred that Malcolm X understood so well.

Malcolm

In contrast to King, Malcolm X grew up in poverty in the North with parents who went to a white church where he was discriminated against. X saw his parents abuse one another, him and his brothers and sisters. As he moved around the country, ending up in New York City, he became a hustler and eventually went to prison for his activities. In prison, Malcolm X converted to Islam and believed he had a vision of the leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad. As he educated himself in prison, he came to believe that his experience with poverty and racism was not unique and that black people had been ruthlessly oppressed all over the country for centuries. He did not believe in reconciliation with white people and came to develop a philosophy of black supremacy and black separation. He also believed that King's philosophy of nonviolence disarmed black people against their oppressors and that integrationism would undermine the uniqueness and beauty of the black community. For X, racism was a much deeper problem than King realized. King failed to appreciate the fact that the black community needed empowerment and needed to feel hatred and rage against their oppressors. However, towards the end of his life, particularly after he broke with Elijah Muhammad, he increasingly admired King, significantly reducing his criticisms of King and allying with him to fight for black voting rights. When he made his pilgrimage to Mecca, he came to believe that Allah loved all people, no matter their color.



Elijah Muhammad

The second leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad had Malcolm X as his apostle. X believed that he had seen Muhammad in a vision and would do whatever he said. However, eventually, Muhammad's affairs and Malcolm X's outbursts caused the two of them to split.

Gandhi

The Indian revolutionary who taught a philosophy of nonviolence resistance, he was a major impact on King.

Jesus Christ

The founder of the Christian religion whose philosophy of universal love, redemption and justice inspired King in his own struggles for justice.

Frederick Douglass

A famous 19th century black believer in racial equality who inspired King.

Marcus Garvey

An early 20th century black nationalist who started a "back to Africa" movement where blacks would return to their "homeland." X's father was influenced by Garvey, and X remembered going to Garveyite meetings with him. X followed Garvey's black separatism.

Martin Luther King, Sr.

King's minister father who taught him Christian values and to value all persons as equals.

Earl Little

X's minister father who helped to alienate X from Christianity; he beat his wife and left his children in poverty. He was also a follower of Marcus Garvey.



The Nation of Islam

The splinter group from Islam that consisted of black nationalists, founded by Wallace D. Fard, and led by Elijah Muhammad during the 40s, 50s and 60s. Malcolm X led members of the Nation of Islam in his movement.

The SCLC

The Southern Christian Leadership Council that King led to fight for racial justice.

Yacob

According to the Nation of Islam, Yacob was an ancient renegade black scientist who created the "white devil" race in his laboratory.

Reginald Little

Malcolm X's brother who brought him to the Nation of Islam

Wallace D. Fard

The founder of the Nation of Islam



Objects/Places

Atlanta

The city where King was born and raised.

Lansing, Michigan

The city where Malcolm X grew up.

New York City

The city where Malcolm X worked as a hustler and was arrested and where he led Temple Seven of the Nation of Islam.

Selma

The Alabama town where King led a famous march on behalf of voting rights.

Birmingham

The Alabama town where King was imprisoned and wrote Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Detroit

The headquarters of the Nation of Islam.

Washington, D.C.

The city where King led his famous March on Washington and gave his I Have a Dream speech, that Malcolm X harshly criticized.

Birmingham Jail

The jail where King was incarcerated and wrote Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Charleston State Prison

The state prison where Malcolm X was imprisoned and converted to Islam.

Letter from Birmingham Jail

King's famous letter encouraging the Christian ministers of Birmingham to endorse his conception of racial justice as entailed by their Christian commitments.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Malcolm X's famous autobiography that helped to build his movement, even long after his death.

The Civil Rights Act

The Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 banning discrimination against blacks; it was passed largely due to King's efforts. Malcolm X applauded King's activism on its behalf.

The Voting Rights Act

The 1965 Voting Rights Act that protected blacks' right to vote. Also brought on by King's activism, Malcolm X applauded it.

Themes

Integrationism vs. Separatism

The author of the book, James Cone, argues that King and Malcolm X had two distinct and contrasting philosophies of racial justice and argues that both had advantages and disadvantages. King advanced the philosophy of integrationism. Integrationism holds that racial justice is achieved when blacks are integrated into the wider white society as equals and treated with equal dignity. Cone argues that King's upbringing disposed him to integrationism because he grew up in the south, where Christianity was strong amongst blacks, and because of his middle-class experience and his liberal Protestant education. King's philosophy of nonviolence also derived from his circumstances and was appropriate for activism in the south.

Malcolm X, in contrast, advocated a philosophy of separatism and Black Nationalism. Separatism held that whites were the enemies of blacks and could not be reconciled with the black community. Blacks must separate culturally and geographically from whites in order to protect and grow their own culture, families and communities. X believed that the white race was oppressive and wicked and that there was no point in reconciling with them. His philosophy was shaped by his lower class, Northern urban and Islamic background. His poverty helped him to understand the idea (in Cone's opinion) that white oppression led to economic deprivation, whereas his Northern, urban background helped him to understand the pervasiveness of racism across the United States and the depth of the problem of racism. Finally, his background in the Nation of Islam caused him to believe that God was going to judge white people for their crimes against blacks and that revolution was coming.

Christianity vs. the Nation of Islam

One important theme in the book is the contrast Cone draws between King's Christian theology and Malcolm X's Islamic theology. King was raised in a loving Christian household; his father was a minister who fought for racial justice and racial equality. He said that he came to believe in a loving God because he grew up in a loving home. King had doubts about the truth of Christianity, particularly as he became disillusioned with the "fundamentalism" that was practiced in his home church of Ebenezer Baptist. When he went to college, he was introduced to liberal theology, which emphasized the goodness of humanity and the impossibility of the persistence of injustice due to God's guiding hand in history. However, he was also attracted to a theological school known as neo-orthodoxy, which helped him to retain many of his older theological beliefs, such as the power of God's redemption and the pervasiveness of human sin. He also developed a theology of nonviolent resistance with evil. However, Cone argues that King's theology was mostly practiced in preaching and activism, where he first emphasized the importance of God's justice and later came to focus increasingly on the universality of God's love for humanity and humanity's equal worth in God's eyes.



Malcolm X was alienated from Christianity as a young man, growing up in a white church where he was constantly discriminated against. He was an atheist for a time until he discovered Islam and the variant of Islam practiced by Elijah Muhammad and his brother Reginald. The Nation of Islam believes that white people are the spawn of Satan, created in a lab by a renegade scientist named Yacob. Whites have oppressed the world for millennia and must be stopped. At the very least, they should not be associated with. Malcolm X observed strict Muslim practices on eating, sex, garb, and marriage. He emphasized self-love, self-help, chastity, and the separation and self-defense of the black community. His understanding of God was as a God of justice and judgment. God would liberate the black man from white oppression and bring judgment and doom on white America.

The Need for Both Figures

Towards the end of the book, Cone emphasizes that the black community needs the philosophies of both figures. King understood the importance of nonviolence resistance, forgiveness, love and the practicality of political reform on behalf of racial justice. However, Cone argues that King's middle-class background shielded him from the depth of the evils of racism and his Christianity caused him to place the excessive burden on blacks to forgive and love white people. Further, Christianity prevented him from understanding the need of blacks to be enraged and hateful of white oppression. On the other hand, Malcolm X preached violence which while fine in self-defense was impracticable and would alienate whites from bringing about racial justice. Malcolm also emphasized rage too much and did not understand the goodness of forgiveness. Further, while he understood the depth of racism he did not understand the fact that blacks would not separate themselves from white society and that integrationism was a far more realistic strategy for American blacks. Cone also argued that King missed the importance of the black identity, instead emphasizing equality with whites. Blacks needed to focus on self-love, developing their own community standards, and teaching themselves how to live as free people with a dignity. Cone believed that Malcolm X and Martin King represent two halves of the black American's soul—King the American aspect of blacks and Malcolm the African aspect. Both must be understood as representing only a part of black people, not the whole.



Style

Perspective

Cone's perspective is clear throughout the book. He begins the book with the goal of showing that Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's philosophies of race and political activism were not incompatible, but rather needed one another. He further argued that King and X moved towards one another towards the end of their lives, seeing the point in each other's life and work. King seeks to contrast the two men in order to illustrate their similarities and the ways in which they both represent the soul of African Americans. Cone appears to make a concerted effort to rehabilitate Malcolm X's image, one that he argues has been marred by the followers of King. In fact, the followers of both figures have spent too much time maligning one another rather than working together for racial justice.

Cone criticizes both Malcolm and Martin for their sexism and classism; he also believes that they were insufficiently sympathetic with socialism. However, in this way, their failures were related. Black people are in many ways worse off than they were during Malcolm and Martin's time, Cone argues, and black people must unite to fight not only for blacks as a whole, but for women and the redistribution of wealth. Blacks must see the legacies of both as representing part of themselves and unite to fight for justice against the—largely white—forces of oppression that remain in American society.

Tone

James Cone is a Christian minister who believes very strongly in racial justice for blacks. He believes that faith and political activism should be mixed and that blacks should have many priorities in fighting for justice and community, priorities that include both those of King and those of Malcolm X. His tone, therefore, is mixed. On the one hand, he brims with rage at the injustices perpetrated by whites against blacks. He also is very critical of those who would oppose Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's memories, attacking one and worshiping the other. He is insistent in maintaining that both were great, but flawed, men that had differences, yes, but many unnoticed similarities as well. Thus, he is not only critical of the white community but seeks mostly to convince blacks to work together rather than fight one another over the contested legacies of their most beloved leaders. Cone has a tone of urgency; he believes that the condition of blacks is in some ways worse than it was in Malcolm and Martin's day and that blacks must unite to fight for justice. He continues his critical tone as well, arguing that Malcolm's philosophy of violence was impractical and that King did not understand the depth of racism against blacks, particularly in the North. He holds them accountable for being sexists and insufficiently socialist. Thus, we can see the author's tone as urgent, critical and deliberate.

Structure

The structure of the book is one based in contrast. The introduction presents us with King's American "Dream" and Malcolm X's American "Nightmare." It sets up the contrast run through the entire book. Chapters 1 through 8 discuss King and X in a cycle, Chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7 about King, Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8 about X. Chapters 1 and 2 contrast their upbringings. Chapter 1 explains King's early, southern, middle-class Christian upbringing, which Cone argues disposed him to believe in the American Dream. Chapter 2 explains Malcolm X's early, northern, lower class upbringing which alienated him from Christianity and left him in prison. Chapters 3 and 4 contrast their philosophy of racial justice. Chapter 3 discusses King's philosophy of racial justice, his conception of the American Dream as one of liberty and equality, and how he put his ideas into practice through the use of nonviolent protest. Chapter 4 discusses Malcolm X's philosophy of racial justice, discussing his conversion to the Nation of Islam, his relationship with Elijah Muhammad, his philosophy of self-love, black supremacy, and devotion to Islam. Chapters 5 and 6 contrast their theologies. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the profound religious influences in the lives of Martin King and Malcolm X, King's from Christianity and Malcolm X's from the Nation of Islam. King's Christianity led him to believe in universal brotherhood and human equality, whereas Malcolm's Muslim theology evolved but always included an anti-Christian, black separatism and a friendliness to violent revolution. Chapters 7 and 8 show how, towards the end of their lives, how Malcolm and Martin moved closer towards one another's views.

By Chapter 9, Cone discusses King and Malcolm X as a pair, pointing out how their philosophies complement one another and how the black community needs both views as representative of a duality within the soul of African-Americans. Chapter 10 criticizes them both; they were both sexists and insufficiently socialist. Chapter 11 sees them as having complimentary influences in culture, politics, organizational strategy, and so on, while Chapter 12 concludes the book.



Quotes

"I have a dream that one day ... sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." (1)

"I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare!" (1)

"It is quite easy for me to think of a God of love mainly because I grew up in a family where love was central and where lovely relationships were ever present." (19)

"I think that an objective reader may see how in the society to which I was exposed as a black youth here in America, for me to wind up in a prison was really just about inevitable." (38)

"I am not interested in being American, because America has never been interested in me." (38)

"We are simply seeking to bring into full realization that American dream—a dream yet unfulfilled." (58)

"God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men. God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race." (76)

"What is looked upon as an American dream for white people has long been an American nightmare for black people." (89)

"White people follow King. White people pay King. White people subsidize King. White people support King. King is the best weapon that the white man, who wants to brutalize Negroes, has ever gotten in this country, because he is setting up a situation where, when the white man wants to attack Negroes, they can't defend themselves, because King has put this foolish philosophy out—you're not supposed ... to defend yourself." (108)

"I have come to believe more and more in a personal God—not a process, but a person, a creative power with infinite love who answers prayers." (120)

"The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die, to wait until death, for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we're dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars here on this earth!" (151)

"We are not fighting for integration, nor are we fighting for separation. We are fighting for recognition as human beings." (181)

"We didn't land on Plymouth Rock, the rock landed on us." (198)



"The judgment of God is on America now!" (213)

"If King loses, worse leaders are going to take his place. Look at the black Muslims." (244)

"Dr. King wants the same thing I want—freedom!" (246)

"Freedom is not free." (288)

"The price of freedom is death." (288)

"Respect me, or put me to death." (288)

"If physical death is the price I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from the permanent death of the spirit, then nothing could be more redemptive." (315)



Topics for Discussion

Explain the contrast between the American "Dream" and the American "Nightmare."

Explain how Cone thinks the differences in Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X's upbringings led to their philosophical differences.

Explain three philosophical differences between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

Explain the differences between King and X's religious beliefs; how did these differences influence their philosophy and activism?

To what extent is the widespread criticism of Malcolm X deserved?

What was Malcolm X's critique of King's philosophy and activism? How accurate do you think that critique is?

What do you think of Cone's view that the legacies of King and X are complimentary and mutually corrective? Explain your answer in detail.

What do you think of Cone's criticisms of King and X? What were his criticisms? To what extent are they effective?