

Name: _____

ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY?

Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Pursuit of Civil Rights

Essential Question: Could a violent “by any means necessary” strategy ever have been justifiable in pursuit of civil rights?

Task: After reading Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. and their philosophies on resistance in pursuit of civil rights, write an argumentative essay that discusses their philosophies and evaluates which was more justifiable under the circumstances of the Civil Rights Era. Be sure to support your position with evidence from the texts.

Skill #1 – Understanding the Question:

Directions: In the space below, rewrite the essential question and the task in your own words. Be prepared to share-out your answer with the class.

Skill #2 – Active Reading:

Directions: Complete these steps for *each* of the following nine documents:

- Read the guiding questions first.
- Then, as you read the text, underline key terms or phrases that highlight the main idea of the text.
- Finally, use the key terms and phrases that you underlined to help you answer the questions.

Document 1: Malcolm X’s Speech at the Organization of Afro-American Unity – June 28, 1964

So we have formed an organization known as the Organization of Afro-American Unity which has the same aim and objective – to fight whoever gets in our way, to bring about the complete independence of people of African descent here in the Western Hemisphere, and first here in the United States, and bring about the freedom of these people by any means necessary.

That's our motto. We want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary. We don't feel that in 1964, living in a country that is supposedly based upon freedom, and supposedly the leader of the free world, we don't think that we should have to sit around and wait for some segregationist congressmen and senators and a President from Texas in Washington, D. C., to make up their minds that our people are due now some degree of civil rights. No, we want it now or we don't think anybody should have it...

...This is our aim...In essence it only means we want one thing. We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, 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.

Source: <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1964-malcolm-x-s-speech-founding-rally-organization-afro-american-unity>

Guiding Questions:

1. Why did Malcolm X want to form the Organization of Afro-American Unity?
2. What do you think Malcolm X means when he says “by any means necessary”?

Document 2: Background Text on Malcolm X – Excerpt from *The Americans*

In the 1960s riots erupted in major cities across the country as African-Americans pushed back against racial inequality. The anger that sent rioters into the streets stemmed in part from African-American leaders who urged their followers to take complete control of their communities, livelihoods, and culture. One such leader, Malcolm X, declared to a Harlem audience, “If you think we are here to tell you to love the white man, you have come to the wrong place.”

Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, went to jail at age 20 for burglary. While in prison, he studied the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the head of the Nation of Islam, or the Black Muslims. Malcolm changed his name to Malcolm X (dropping what he called his “slave name”) and, after his release from prison in 1952, became an Islamic minister. As he gained a following, the brilliant thinker and engaging speaker openly preached Elijah Muhammad’s views that whites were the cause of the black condition and that blacks should separate from white society. Malcolm’s message appealed to many African Americans and their growing racial pride. At a New York press conference in March 1964, he also advocated armed self-defense.

”Concerning nonviolence: it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks. It is legal and lawful to own a shotgun or a rifle. We believe in obeying the law. . . . [T]he time has come for the American Negro to fight back in self-defense whenever and wherever he is being unjustly and unlawfully attacked.”

The press gave a great deal of publicity to Malcolm X because his controversial statements made dramatic news stories. This had two effects. First, his call for armed self-defense frightened most whites and many moderate African Americans. Second, reports of the attention Malcolm received awakened resentment in some other members of the Nation of Islam.

In March 1964, Malcolm broke with Elijah Muhammad over differences in strategy and doctrine and formed another Muslim organization. One month later, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, a trip required of followers of orthodox Islam. In Mecca, he learned that orthodox Islam preached racial equality, and he worshiped alongside people from many countries. Wrote Malcolm, “I have [prayed] . . . 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.” When he returned to the United States, his attitude toward whites had changed radically. He explained his new slogan, “Ballots or bullets,” to a follower: “Well, if you and I don’t use the ballot, we’re going to be forced to use the bullet. So let us try the ballot.”

Because of his split with the Black Muslims, Malcolm believed his life might be in danger. “No one can get out without trouble,” he confided. On February 21, 1965, while giving a speech in Harlem, the 39-year-old Malcolm X was shot and killed.

Source: McDougal Littell, *The Americans*. 2002.

Guiding Questions:

1. What does Malcolm X say about “armed self-defense” in the third paragraph? Why do you think he uses terms and ideas like “lawful” or “unlawful” when talking about the issue?

2. According to the text, how did Malcolm X’s pilgrimage to Mecca change his viewpoint on race relations?

Document 3: Background Text on Martin Luther King, Jr. – Excerpt from *The Americans*

The success of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956 (which resulted in the desegregation of public buses in Montgomery) proved to the world that the African-American community could unite and organize a successful protest movement. It also proved the power of nonviolent resistance, the peaceful refusal to obey unjust laws. Despite threats to his life and family, Martin Luther King, Jr. (one of the boycott's organizers) urged his followers, "Don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them."

King called his brand of nonviolent resistance "soul force." He based his ideas on the teachings of several people. From Jesus, he learned to love one's enemies. From writer Henry David Thoreau he took the concept of civil disobedience—the refusal to obey an unjust law. From labor organizer A. Philip Randolph he learned to organize massive demonstrations. From Mohandas Gandhi, the leader who helped India throw off British rule, he learned to resist oppression without violence. "We will not hate you," King said to white racists, "but we cannot . . . obey your unjust laws. . . . We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom, we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process."

King's efforts to lead a nonviolent movement faced fierce resistance in Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham, a city known for its strict enforcement of total segregation in public life, also had a reputation for racial violence, including 18 bombings from 1957 to 1963. Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, head of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and secretary of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, decided something had to be done about Birmingham and that it would be the ideal place to test the power of nonviolence.

He invited Martin Luther King, Jr., and the SCLC to help desegregate the city. On April 3, 1963, King flew into Birmingham to hold a planning meeting with members of the African-American community. "This is the most segregated city in America," he said. "We have to stick together if we ever want to change its ways."

After days of demonstrations led by Shuttlesworth and others, King and a small band of marchers were finally arrested during a demonstration on April 12th. While in jail, King wrote an open letter (his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail") to white religious leaders who felt he was pushing too fast:

"I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.' But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize and even kill your black brothers and sisters; . . . when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in the air-tight cage of poverty; . . . when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking: . . . 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?' . . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

Source: McDougal Littell, *The Americans*. 2002.

Guiding Questions:

1. Why do you think Martin Luther King, Jr. called his nonviolent strategy "soul force."

2. Why does Martin Luther King, Jr. say in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" that it is "difficult to wait"?

Document 4: Malcolm X's Interview with Kenneth Clark, 1963

Clark: It has been suggested also that this movement preaches a gospel of violence, that –

Malcolm X: No, the black people in this country have been the victims of violence at the hands of the white man for 400 years. And following the ignorant Negro preachers, we have thought that it was godlike to turn the other cheek to the brute that was brutalizing us. And today, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is showing black people in this country that just as the white man and every other person on this earth has god-given rights, natural rights, civil rights, any kind of rights that you can think of, when it comes to defending himself, black people should have -- we should have the right to defend ourselves also. And, because the Honorable Elijah Muhammad makes black people brave enough, men enough, to defend ourselves no matter what the odds are...he's actually telling Negroes to defend themselves against violent people.

Clark: I see. Well, Reverend Martin Luther King preaches a doctrine of non-violent insistence upon the rights of the American Negro. What is your attitude toward this philosophy?

Malcolm X: The white man pays Reverend Martin Luther King, subsidizes Reverend Martin Luther King, so that Reverend Martin Luther King can continue to teach the Negroes to be defenseless. That's what you mean by non-violent: be defenseless. Be defenseless in the face of one of the most cruel beasts that has ever taken a people into captivity. That's this American white man. And they have proved it throughout the country by the police dogs and the police clubs.

A hundred years ago they used to put on a white sheet and use a bloodhound against Negroes. Today they've taken off the white sheet and put on police uniforms, they've traded in the bloodhounds for police dogs, and they're still doing the same thing. And just as Uncle Tom, back during slavery, used to keep the Negroes from resisting the bloodhound, or resisting the Ku Klux Klan, by teaching them to love their enemy, or pray for those who use them spitefully, today Martin Luther King is just a 20th century or modern Uncle Tom, or a religious Uncle Tom, who is doing the same thing today, to keep Negroes defenseless in the face of an attack, that Uncle Tom did on the plantation to keep those Negroes defenseless in the face of the attacks of the Klan in that day.

Source: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/sfeature/sf_video_pop_03_tr_qry.html

Guiding Questions:

1. Do you think Malcolm X would classify his movement as a movement of “violence”? Why or why not?

2. Why does Malcolm X disagree with Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy of non-violent resistance?

Document 5: Malcolm X – “Message to the Grass Roots” – October 10, 1963

...Look at the American Revolution in 1776. That revolution was for what? For land. Why did they want land? Independence. How was it carried out? Bloodshed. Number one, it was based on land, the basis of independence. And the only way they could get it was bloodshed. The French Revolution — what was it based on? The landless against the landlord. What was it for? Land. How did they get it? Bloodshed. Was no love lost; was no compromise; was no negotiation. I'm telling you, you don't know what a revolution is. 'Cause when you find out what it is, you'll get back in the alley; you'll get out of the way. The Russian Revolution — what was it based on? Land. The landless against the landlord. How did they bring it about? Bloodshed. You haven't got a revolution that doesn't involve bloodshed. And you're afraid to bleed. I said, you're afraid to bleed.

As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled. You bleed for white people. But when it comes time to seeing your own churches being bombed and little black girls be murdered, you haven't got no blood. You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true. How are you going to be nonviolent in Mississippi, as violent as you were in Korea? How can you justify being nonviolent in Mississippi and Alabama, when your churches are being bombed, and your little girls are being murdered, and at the same time you're going to violent with Hitler, and Tojo, and somebody else that you don't even know?

If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it's wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it's wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country...

So I cite these various revolutions, brothers and sisters, to show you — you don't have a peaceful revolution. You don't have a turn—the—other—cheek revolution. There's no such thing as a nonviolent revolution.

Source: <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1145>

Guiding Questions:

1. Why does Malcolm X highlight so many revolutions in this speech? What do they all have in common?

2. What is the main idea of the second paragraph? Why does Malcolm X reference Korea, Germany, and Japan?

Document 6: Malcolm X – “The Ballot or the Bullet” – April 3, 1964

1964 looks like it might be the year of the ballot or the bullet. Why does it look like it might be the year of the ballot or the bullet? Because Negroes have listened to the trickery, and the lies, and the false promises of the white man now for too long. And they're fed up.

They've become disenchanted. They've become disillusioned. They've become dissatisfied, and all of this has built up frustrations in the black community that makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent. Whenever you got a racial powder keg sitting in your lap, you're in more trouble than if you had an atomic powder keg sitting in your lap. When a racial powder keg goes off, it doesn't care who it knocks out the way. Understand this, it's dangerous...

When this country here was first being founded there were 13 colonies. The whites were colonized. They were fed up with this taxation without representation, so some of them stood up and said “liberty or death.” Though I went to a white school over here in Mason, Michigan, the white man made the mistake of letting me read his history books. He made the mistake of teaching me that Patrick Henry was a patriot, and George Washington, there wasn't nothing nonviolent about old Pat or George Washington.

Liberty or death was what brought about the freedom of whites in this country from the English. They didn't care about the odds. Why they faced the wrath of the entire British Empire. And in those days they used to say that the British Empire was so vast and so powerful when the sun -- the sun would never set on it. This is how big it was, yet these 13 little scrawny states, tired of taxation without representation, tired of being exploited and oppressed and degraded, told that big British Empire “liberty or death.”

Source: <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1964-malcolm-x-ballot-or-bullet>

Guiding Questions:

1. What does Malcolm X mean when he says that 1964 might be the year of the “ballot or the bullet”?

2. In the third paragraph, Malcolm X points out that “patriots” like Patrick Henry and George Washington were not non-violent. Why do you think Malcolm X points to these people as examples?

Document 7: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Interview with Kenneth Clark, 1963

Dr. Kenneth Clark: Malcolm X, one of the most articulate exponents of the Black Muslim philosophy, has said of your movement and your philosophy that it plays into the hands of the white oppressors. That they are happy to hear you talk about love for the oppressor because this disarms the Negro and fits in to the stereotype of the Negro as a meek, turning-the-other-cheek sort of creature. Would you care to comment on Mr. X's beliefs?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: Well, I don't think of love as, in this context, as emotional bosh (trash). I don't think of it as a weak force. But I think of love as something strong, and that organizes itself into powerful direct action. This is what I try to teach in the struggle in the South. That we are not engaged in a struggle that means we sit down and do nothing.

There's a great deal of difference between non-resistance to evil and non-violent resistance. Non-resistance leaves you in a state of stagnant passivity and dead-end complacency. Wherein non-violent resistance means you do resist in a very strong and determined manner. And I think some of the criticisms of non-violence, or some of the critics, fail to realize that we are talking about something very strong, and they confuse non-resistance with non-violent resistance.

Clark: He goes beyond that, in some of the things I've heard him say, to say that this is deliberately -- your philosophy of love of the oppressor, which he identifies completely with the non-violent movement -- he says, this philosophy and this movement are actually encouraged by whites because it makes them comfortable, makes them believe that Negroes are meek, supine creatures.

King: Well, I don't think that's true. If anyone has ever lived with a non-violent movement in the South, from Montgomery on through the Freedom Rides and through the sit-in movement and the recent Birmingham movement, and seen the reactions of many of the extremists and reactionaries in the white community, he wouldn't say that this movement makes, this philosophy makes them comfortable. I think it arouses a sense of shame within them often, in many instances, I think it does something to touch the conscience and establish a sense of guilt. Now so often people respond to guilt by engaging more in the guilt-evoking act in an attempt to drown the sense of guilt. But this approach certainly doesn't make the white man feel comfortable. I think it does the other thing. It disturbs this conscience and it disturbs this sense of contentment he's had.

Source: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/sfeature/sf_video_pop_02_tr_qry.html

Guiding Questions:

1. What does Martin Luther King, Jr. say about the difference between non-resistance and non-violent resistance?

2. According to Martin Luther King, Jr. what impact does his strategy have on white people who are confronted with his movement?

Document 8: Martin Luther King, Jr. – *Where do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967

A Black Power supporter said to me not long ago: "To hell with conscience and morality. We want power." But power and morality must go together, implementing, fulfilling and ennobling each other. In the quest for power I cannot by-pass the concern for morality... Power at its best is the right use of strength. The words of Alfred the Great are still true: "Power is never good unless he who has it is good."

Nonviolence is power, but it is the right and good use of power. Constructively it can save the white man as well as the Negro. Racial segregation is buttressed (supported) by such irrational white fears as loss of preferred economic privilege, altered social status, intermarriage and adjustment to new situations. Through sleepless nights and haggard days numerous white people struggle pitifully to combat these fears....

A guilt-ridden white minority fears that if the Negro attains power, he will without restraint or pity act to revenge the accumulated injustices and brutality of the years. The Negro must show that the white man has nothing to fear, for the Negro is willing to forgive. A mass movement exercising nonviolence and demonstrating power under discipline should convince the white community that as such a movement attained strength, its power would be used creatively and not for revenge.

In a moving letter to his nephew on the one hundredth anniversary of emancipation, James Baldwin wrote concerning white people:

"The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity. . . . But these men are your brothers--your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it..."

The problem with hatred and violence is that they intensify the fears of the white majority, and leave them less ashamed of their prejudices toward Negroes. In the guilt and confusion confronting our society, violence only adds to the chaos. It deepens the brutality of the oppressor and increases the bitterness of the oppressed. Violence is the antithesis (opposite) of creativity and wholeness. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible.

Source: <http://saf.org/pub/rkba/general/MLKing.htm>

Guiding Questions:

1. Why does Martin Luther King, Jr. believe that non-violence is the best strategy for fighting for equal rights?

2. In your own words, explain the main idea of the quote from James Baldwin.

Document 9: King and Bull Connor – Excerpt from *Martin Luther King Jr.: A Biography*, by Roger Bruns

In order to maintain pressure (during the civil rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama), Martin Luther King, Jr. and his organizers made an agonizing decision. Several of King's workers had commented on the enthusiasm and dedication shown by local college and even some high school students in the events transpiring in the city. In an unprecedented and high-stakes strategy decision, the leaders decided to encourage students to become a force for change. The word spread quickly. Hundreds of high school students streamed into workshops on nonviolence held by King's aides. In many cases, they brought their younger brothers and sisters. King saw them as freedom fighters in a cause for their own future. They felt the same way.

On May 2 over 1,000 children and teenagers gathered at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church for what protest leaders called "D-Day." By nightfall, Bull Connor (Birmingham's police commissioner) had arrested 959 of them. A thousand children missed school the next day.

That night, another thousand young people packed the church and listened to King exhort the youngsters to remain calm and courageous. The following morning, as the young protesters gathered at the Sixteenth Street Church, Connor ordered the church sealed. Half of the children were trapped inside; others made it out and gathered across the street in Kelly Ingram Park. Police charged into the park, beating numerous youngsters and some bystanders. Connor turned dogs on them. Many adult onlookers, who previously had felt afraid to protest, now began throwing bottles and bricks.

Connor then ordered up the fire hoses and city firemen obliged. With television cameras rolling, the hoses pelted hundreds of pounds of water pressure into the

crowd, knocking bricks off walls, ripping the bark off trees, and sending people sliding and falling.

Americans across the country watched the spectacle on television. This was not some foreign land; this was not a motion picture; this was a major American city. In only two days, some 1,300 black children were thrown in jail. The police beatings, water hosing, and dog attacks, rising to national headlines, increased with tremendous power the pressure on the Kennedy administration and Birmingham's civic leaders to act...

For seven days in May, the vivid contrast had been there for the world to see—helmeted policemen wielding sticks and leading attack dogs against black children. The incidents in Birmingham moved Kennedy to remark, "The civil rights movement should thank God for Bull Connor. He's helped it as much as Abraham Lincoln."

In the three months that followed the momentous days in Birmingham, there were nearly 1,000 individual boycotts, marches, and sit-ins in about 200 cities across the South. They became known as "Little Birmingham."

The dogs and the streams of water that knocked over scores of men, women, and children on the streets of Birmingham proved the efficacy of King's strategy of nonviolent confrontation. Despite the pain and injuries and overwhelming indignities suffered, the protesters prevailed. Responding to the White House's experience in dealing with the Birmingham protests, President Kennedy began to work on broad civil rights legislation to Congress, which would eventually lead to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

King and his allies had fought in the belly of the segregation beast. They had demonstrated that urgent change was necessary, just, and possible.

Source: <http://testaae.greenwood.com/default.aspx>

Guiding Questions:

1. In your own words, briefly summarize this passage and describe what happened in Birmingham.

2. Why do you think President Kennedy said that Bull Connor had helped the Civil Rights Movement as much as Abraham Lincoln?