

PREPARING to Read

from *Stride Toward Freedom*

Nonfiction
by MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Necessary to Protect Ourselves

Interview with MALCOLM X
by Les Crane



Comparing Literature

Traditions Across Time: Demands for Equal Rights

In the time of the American Revolution, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Abigail Adams, and others passionately voiced the ideas of equality and natural rights. Inspired by these ideas, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X led a crusade for racial justice in the 1950s and 1960s.

Points of Comparison As you read, compare King's and Malcolm X's views about responding to oppression with the views of the founders of this country.

Build Background

Fighting for Racial Justice Southern states in our country once had segregation laws—that is, laws that imposed social separation of races. African Americans were forced to attend separate schools and to sit in separate sections of buses and trains. Many public buildings, such as restaurants, movie theaters, and hotels, were also segregated. Through boycotts, sit-ins, and marches, African Americans and their supporters challenged segregation laws, sought better housing and jobs, and fought for voting rights in the 1950s and 1960s.

The first selection is an excerpt from *Stride Toward Freedom*, King's 1958 book about the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. The second is a transcript of a 1964 television interview with Malcolm X.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

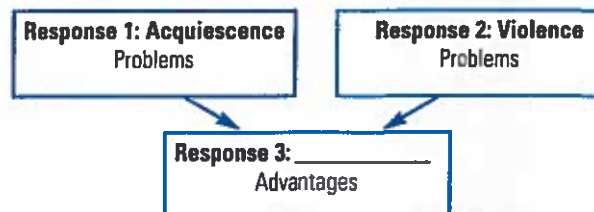
anarchy	indiscriminately	repudiate
corroding	legacy	synthesis
exploitation	oppressed	tacitly
glib		

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS HISTORICAL CONTEXT One way to increase your understanding of a literary work is to relate it to its **historical context**, or the social conditions that influenced its creation. As you read these selections, apply what you know about the crusade for racial justice.

ACTIVE READING ANALYZING THE STRUCTURE OF ARGUMENTS Analyzing the **structure** of a persuasive argument involves identifying the main ideas you are being asked to accept and the detail (facts, examples, and reasons) that support these ideas.

READER'S NOTEBOOK As you read the excerpt from *Stride Toward Freedom*, complete a diagram like the one shown, noting King's ideas about methods of responding to oppression.



from

stride toward freedom

Oppressed people deal with their oppression in three characteristic ways. One way is acquiescence: the oppressed resign themselves to their doom. They tacitly adjust themselves to oppression, and thereby become conditioned to it. In every movement toward freedom some of the oppressed prefer to remain oppressed.

Almost 2800 years ago Moses set out to lead the children of Israel from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the promised land.¹ He soon discovered that slaves do not always welcome their deliverers. They become accustomed to being slaves. They would rather bear those ills they have, as Shakespeare pointed out, than flee to others that they know not of.² They prefer the “fleshpots of Egypt” to the ordeals of emancipation.

There is such a thing as the freedom of exhaustion. Some people are so worn down by the yoke of oppression that they give up. A few years ago in the slum areas of Atlanta, a Negro guitarist used to sing almost daily: “Been down so long that down don’t bother me.” This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed.

But this is not the way out. To accept passively an unjust system is to cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed become as evil as

Martin Luther King, Jr.

the oppressor. Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. The oppressed must never allow the conscience of the oppressor to slumber. Religion reminds every man that he is his brother’s keeper.³ To accept injustice or segregation passively is to say to the oppressor that his actions are morally right. It is a way of allowing his

1. **promised land:** in general, a longed-for place where complete satisfaction and happiness will be achieved. In the Old Testament of the Bible, the Promised Land is the land of Canaan, promised by the Lord to Abraham’s descendants.

2. **bear those ills they have . . . know not of:** an allusion to a line in Act III, Scene I, of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.

3. **his brother’s keeper:** an allusion to the biblical story of the brothers Cain and Abel. After Cain murdered Abel, God asked him where his brother was. Cain replied, “I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?” In general, the saying refers to people’s reluctance to accept responsibility for the welfare of others.

WORDS TO KNOW **oppressed** (ə-prĕst') *adj.* kept down by severe and unjust use of force or authority **oppress** *v.* **tacitly** (tăs'ĭt-lĕ) *adv.* silently

conscience to fall asleep. At this moment the oppressed fails to be his brother's keeper. So acquiescence—while often the easier way—is not the moral way. It is the way of the coward. The Negro cannot win the respect of his oppressor by acquiescing; he merely increases the oppressor's arrogance and contempt. Acquiescence is interpreted as proof of the Negro's inferiority. The Negro cannot win the respect of the white people of the South or the peoples of the world if he is willing to sell the future of his children for his personal and immediate comfort and safety.

A second way that oppressed people sometimes deal with oppression is to resort to physical violence and corroding hatred. Violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.

Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. It is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. The old law of an eye for an eye⁴ leaves everybody blind. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than to convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends by defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. A voice echoes through time saying to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword."⁵ History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations that failed to follow this command.

If the American Negro and other victims of oppression succumb to the temptation of using

violence in the struggle for freedom, future generations will be the recipients of a desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to them will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Violence is not the way.

The third way open to oppressed people in their quest for freedom is the way of nonviolent resistance. Like the synthesis in Hegelian philosophy,⁶ the principle of nonviolent resistance seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites—acquiescence and violence—while avoiding the extremes and immoralities of both. The nonviolent resister agrees with the person who acquiesces that one should not be physically aggressive toward his opponent but he balances the equation by agreeing with the person of violence that evil must be resisted. He avoids the nonresistance of the former and the violent resistance of the latter. With nonviolent resistance, no individual or group need submit to any wrong, nor need anyone resort to violence in order to right a wrong.

It seems to me that this is the method that must guide the actions of the Negro in the present crisis in race relations. Through nonviolent resistance the Negro will be able to rise to the noble height of opposing the unjust system while loving the perpetrators of the system. The Negro must work passionately and unrelentingly for full stature as a citizen, but he must not use inferior methods to gain it. He

4. an eye for an eye: an allusion to Exodus 21:23–25—
"You shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."
5. Peter . . . sword: Peter, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, drew his sword to protect Jesus from the soldiers who came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus condemned Peter's use of violence.
6. Hegelian (hā-gā'lē-ŷn) philosophy: Georg Hegel (1770–1831) was a German philosopher who proposed the theory that for each idea or situation there is an opposite and that these two will eventually merge to form a unified whole.

WORDS TO KNOW	<u>corroding</u> (kə-rō'dīng) <i>adj.</i> gradually destructive <u>corrode</u> <i>v.</i>
	<u>legacy</u> (lĕg'ə-sē) <i>n.</i> something handed down from an ancestor or a predecessor or from the past
	<u>synthesis</u> (sīn'thī-sīs) <i>n.</i> the combining of separate elements or substances to form a coherent whole

**“To accept passively
an unjust system is to
cooperate with that system; thereby the oppressed
become as evil as the oppressor.”**

Martin Luther King, Jr., on the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama,
in 1965 to protest voting restrictions on African Americans.
Copyright © Bruce Davidson/Magnum Photos.



must never come to terms with falsehood, malice, hate, or destruction.

Nonviolent resistance makes it possible for the Negro to remain in the South and struggle for his rights. The Negro's problem will not be solved by running away. He cannot listen to the glib suggestion of those who would urge him to migrate *en masse*⁷ to other sections of the country. By grasping his great opportunity in the South he can make a lasting contribution to the moral strength of the nation and set a sublime example of courage for generations yet unborn.

By nonviolent resistance, the Negro can also enlist all men of good will in his struggle for equality. The problem is not a purely racial one, with Negroes set against whites. In the end, it is not a struggle between people at all, but a tension between justice and injustice. Nonviolent resistance is not aimed against oppressors but against oppression. Under its banner consciences, not racial groups, are enlisted.

If the Negro is to achieve the goal of integration, he must organize himself into a militant and nonviolent mass movement. All three elements

are indispensable. The movement for equality and justice can only be a success if it has both a mass and militant character; the barriers to be overcome require both. Nonviolence is an imperative in order to bring about ultimate community.

A mass movement of a militant quality that is not at the same time committed to nonviolence tends to generate conflict, which in turn breeds anarchy. The support of the participants and the sympathy of the uncommitted are both inhibited by the threat that bloodshed will engulf the community. This reaction in turn encourages the opposition to threaten and resort to force. When however, the mass movement repudiates violence while moving resolutely toward its goal, its opponents are revealed as the instigators and practitioners of violence if it occurs. Then public support is magnetically attracted to the advocates of nonviolence, while those who employ violence are literally disarmed by overwhelming sentiment against their stand. ❖

7. *en masse* (ɒn məs'): in one group or body; all together.

Thinking Through the Literature

1. **Comprehension Check** Which two methods of responding to oppression does King oppose, and which does he support?
2. **ACTIVE READING ANALYZING STRUCTURE** Refer to the diagram you made in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. What are King's reasons for opposing the first two methods he discusses?
3. Of the reasons King favors the third response to oppression, which reason do you find the most persuasive, and why?

WORDS TO KNOW **glib** (glɪb) *adj.* showing little thought, preparation, or concern
anarchy (əˈnɑːrki) *n.* absence of any form of political authority
repudiate (rɪˈpyʊdiˈeɪt) *v.* to reject the validity or authority of

**necessary
to**

protect ourselves

Crane: You've been a critic of some of the Negro leadership in this country—Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, Abernathy,¹ and others—have you changed in your feelings toward them of late?

Malcolm X: I think all of us should be critics of each other. Whenever you can't stand criticism you can never grow. I don't think that it serves any purpose for the leaders of our people to waste their time fighting each other needlessly. I think that we accomplish more when we sit down in private and iron out whatever differences that may exist and try and then do something constructive for the benefit of our people. But on the other hand, I don't think that we should be above criticism. I don't think that anyone should be above criticism.

Crane: Violence or the threat of violence has always surrounded you. Speeches that you've made have been interpreted as being threats. You have made statements reported in the press about how the Negroes should go out and arm themselves, form militias of their own. I read a long time ago, a statement I believe you made that every Negro should belong to the National Rifle Association—

Malcolm X: No, I said this: That in areas of this country where the government has proven itself—either its inability or its unwillingness to protect the lives and property of our people, then it's only fair to expect us to do whatever is necessary

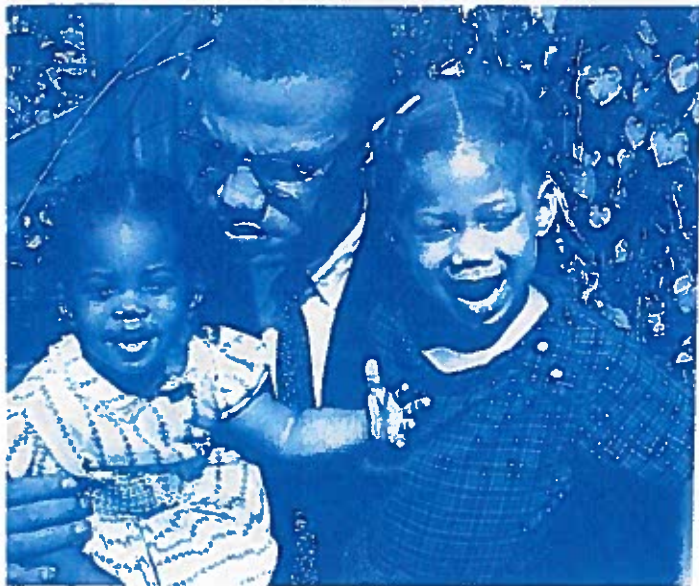
Malcolm X

Interviewed by Les Crane

to protect ourselves. And in situations like Mississippi, places like Mississippi where the government actually has proven its inability to protect us—and it has been proven that oftentimes the police officers and sheriffs themselves are involved in the murder that takes place against our people—then I feel, and I say that anywhere, that our people should start doing what is necessary to protect ourselves. This doesn't mean that we should buy rifles and go out and initiate attacks indiscriminately against whites. But it does mean that we should get whatever is necessary to protect ourselves in a country or in an area where the governmental ability to protect us has broken down—

1. **Roy Wilkins, Abernathy:** Roy Wilkins (1901–1981) was executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from 1955 to 1977. Ralph Abernathy (1926–1990) was a close friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., and helped him found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to combat racism.

“My belief in brotherhood would never restrain me in any way from protecting myself



Malcolm X with his daughters Qubilah and Attallah in 1962.
Photo by Robert L. Haggins.

Crane: Therefore you do not agree with Dr. King's Gandhian philosophy?²—

Malcolm X: My belief in brotherhood would never restrain me in any way from protecting myself in a society from a people whose disrespect for brotherhood makes them feel inclined to put my neck on a tree at the end of a rope.³ [Applause]

Crane: Well, it sounds as though you could be preaching a sort of an anarchy—

Malcolm X: No, no. I respect government and respect law. But does the government and the law respect us? If the FBI, which is what people depend upon on a national scale to protect the morale and the property and the lives of the people, can't do so when the property and lives of Negroes and whites who try and help Negroes are concerned, then I think that it's only fair to expect elements to do whatever is necessary to protect themselves.

a society from a people whose disrespect for brotherhood makes them feel inclined to put my neck on a tree at the end of

rope.

And this is no departure from normal procedure. Because right here in New York City you have vigilante committees⁴ that have been set up by groups who see where their neighborhood community is endangered and the law can't do anything about it. So—and even their lives aren't at stake. So—but the fear, Les, seems to come into existence only when someone says Negroes should form vigilante committees to protect their lives and their property.

I'm not advocating the breaking of any laws. But I say that our people will never be respected as human beings until we react as other normal, intelligent human beings do. And this country came into existence by people who were tired of tyranny and oppression and exploitation and the brutality that was being inflicted upon them by powers higher than they, and I think that it is only fair to expect us, sooner or later, to do likewise. ❖

2. **Gandhian** (gān'dē-īn) **philosophy:** Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) was an Indian nationalist and spiritual leader who developed the practice of nonviolent civil disobedience that forced Great Britain to grant independence to India in 1947.

3. **put my neck . . . rope:** an allusion to the practice of lynching. Many African Americans were executed by whites without due process of law, especially by hanging

4. **vigilante** (vīj'ə-lān'tē) **committees:** volunteer groups of citizens that without lawful authority assume powers such as pursuing and punishing suspected criminals or offenders.

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exploitation (ēk'sploi-tā'shən) *n.* use of another person or group for selfish purposes

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What is your response to the ideas Malcolm X expresses in this interview? Share your first thoughts in a small group.

Comprehension Check

- According to Malcolm X, when is violence justifiable?
- In explaining what to expect from African Americans, to what historical event does Malcolm X refer?

Think Critically

2. **ACTIVE READING ANALYZING STRUCTURE** What are the main positions Malcolm X takes in this interview, and what are his supporting reasons? Create a diagram to represent his argument.

3. Malcolm X compares the oppression of African Americans with that of American colonists under King George III. He believes that “it is only fair to expect” African Americans to react to tyranny as the revolutionaries did. Do you agree?

4. Based on these two selections, which leader do you regard as more persuasive—King or Malcolm X?

THINK ABOUT

- each leader’s intellectual arguments
- each leader’s emotional appeals
- each leader’s **tone**, or attitude

5. Which leader do you think is more revolutionary—King or Malcolm X?

THINK ABOUT

- what “revolutionary” means to you
- each leader’s arguments and results

6. In your view, are the similarities between King and Malcolm X more important, or are the differences? Explain.

tend Interpretations

7. **Connect to Life** Both King and Malcolm X fought for justice for African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. Name political, religious, or social causes that people are fighting for in the United States today. What are the most effective methods used to promote these causes?

8. **Points of Comparison** Based on “Speech in the Virginia Convention,” what do you imagine Patrick Henry might have said about King’s advocacy of nonviolent resistance?

Literary Analysis

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The **historical context** of a literary work refers to the social conditions that inspired or influenced its creation. Patrick Henry, for example, protested against the British military buildup in the colonies in his “Speech in the Virginia Convention” on page 263. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, King uses the phrase “the present crisis in race relations.” To understand this phrase, readers must apply what they know about the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. This struggle sought to overturn segregation laws in the South—laws which, as you learned in Build Background on page 300, sanctioned racial separation.


Cooperative Learning Activity

Working in a small group, reread “Necessary to Protect Ourselves.” Identify sentences in the selection that refer to events or conditions at the time of the interview or to public figures that Malcolm X is reacting to. To interpret comments in their historical context, research each of these events, conditions, or individuals. Then write a note that provides useful background information. Compile the notes in a Guide for Reading, modeled on the one that accompanies “Speech in the Virginia Convention,” on page 263.

REVIEW ALLUSION

Identify the Biblical **allusions** in the excerpt from *Stride Toward Freedom*. How do they make King’s writing more persuasive? Which one do you think is most important to the selection, and why?

Writing Options

Points of Comparison Write notes and organize them for a persuasive essay about the use of violence to achieve a goal. As you develop your views, consider the ideas of King and Malcolm X as well as those of Patrick Henry. Place this piece in your **Working Portfolio**. 

Writing Handbook
See page 1285: Persuasive Writing

Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE: WORD KNOWLEDGE For each vocabulary word, write a sentence describing a situation in which the word could be applied.

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|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. oppressed | 6. glib |
| 2. tacitly | 7. anarchy |
| 3. corroding | 8. repudiate |
| 4. legacy | 9. indiscriminately |
| 5. synthesis | 10. exploitation |

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on how to expand your vocabulary, see page 126.



Martin Luther King, Jr.

1929–1968

Other Works

"Letter from Birmingham Jail"
(See excerpt on pages 1137–1145.)
Why We Can't Wait
Where Do We Go from Here

Called to Leadership The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the pastor of a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 when a woman named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger as the local segregation law then required. Civil rights activists in Montgomery organized a boycott of buses by African Americans and selected King as their leader. A little over a year after the boycott began, the U.S. Supreme Court determined that segregated seating on public buses in Montgomery violated the Constitution.

Crusader for Justice The successful Montgomery bus boycott launched King's career in the civil rights movement. He went on to develop a reputation as a powerful leader and a brilliant orator. In his most famous speech, "I Have a Dream," he electrified more than 200,000 demonstrators gathered for the March on Washington in August 1963. The following year, Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, and King received the Nobel Peace Prize. For the rest of his life, King continued to work for justice and equality. He was killed by an assassin's bullet on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee.



Malcolm X

1925–1965

Other Works

The Autobiography of Malcolm X
Malcolm X Talks to Young People

Symbolic Name While in prison for burglary from 1946 to 1952, Malcolm Little converted to the faith of the Nation of Islam (popularly known as the Black Muslims), a militant religious and cultural community that believed in black separatism. Like many members of that group, he took the name "X" as a symbol of his lost African name.

Dynamic Speaker Malcolm X was one of the most powerful speakers of his time, and he won many converts to the Nation of Islam. However, in 1964, after a disagreement with Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X left the sect and founded his own organization. On a pilgrimage to Mecca, he saw Muslims of all races joined in common faith and soon embraced the possibility of cooperation among races.

Final Years The rivalry between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam grew, resulting in violence and threats against his life. On February 21, 1965, some members of the organization shot Malcolm X to death as he spoke at a rally in Harlem.