

Eva Spilková

M.A. Thesis Assessment

Martin L. King vs. Malcolm X: Dvě konkurující si vize boje za občanská práva ve Spojených státech amerických

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Eva Spilková has been interested in the issue of the American civil rights struggle for quite some time. Therefore, it is only natural that she selected the differing visions of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X as the theme of her M.A. dissertation. I gladly served as Eva's supervisor and I think that she has written a fine piece of work. The dissertation is divided into an introduction, four main chapters, and a conclusion. I am quite impressed with the bibliography as well as the English-language summary.

In the introduction, Eva provides some brief, but welcome, background on the history of the civil rights movement in the United States and she maps out the content of the remainder of the dissertation. The commentary on sources she utilized is likewise helpful. I feel that the introduction more than fulfills its purpose.

Chapter 1 deals solely with Martin Luther King. Besides giving a brief account of King's life and background, Eva also analyzes his influence on the civil rights movement as a whole. King's theory of nonviolence and its origins are discussed as is the general evolution of King's thinking throughout his life. I especially like Eva's observation that King's ideas took on a left-wing twist in the final years of his life, especially when he shifted his focus to the Vietnam War (his opposition to it) and poverty.

Chapter 2 represents an analytical overview of the life, ideas, and deeds of Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little). Unlike King, who was raised in an educated, happy middle class family of pastors, Malcolm X was born to a pastor (without a permanent congregation) and a mother from the Caribbean. However, the family was not a happy one and matters were complicated by the death of Malcolm X's father, which left the family struggling to make a


living. He turned to violent crime as a young adult and ended up being incarcerated for burglary. While in jail, Malcolm X became fascinated with the Nation of Islam, an organization he would later work for. The ideology embraced by Malcolm X was a far cry from the nonviolence preached by King. In fact, Malcolm X and his followers espoused separation of races and violence. In the end, the only thing Malcolm X and King had in common was that each man was murdered by a gunman

Chapter 3 compares and contrasts the opposing ideologies of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. King called for nonviolent resistance and integration, whereas Malcolm X wanted violence and black separation. The problem in the 1960s was the fact that blacks were losing patience with nonviolence and more radical ideas would begin to take hold in the civil rights movement. This was accompanied by the progressive radicalization of King's ideology.

Chapter 4 addresses the overall radicalization of the civil rights struggle in the 1960s. Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965 by some rivals in the Nation of Islam. Martin Luther King would live another three years until he too would be murdered. In the meantime, the civil rights movement would move more in the direction of "black power", largely on account of racism in northern American cities and the masses of poor blacks concentrated in urban ghettos. In the second half of the 1960s, the civil rights movement became more violent and radicalized due to black hopelessness as well as the war in Vietnam. The tragic murder of Martin Luther King in 1968 only served to heighten tensions further.

In the conclusion, Eva recapitulates her main arguments about how the differing backgrounds of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X shaped their respective ideologies. Her logic is sound and I believe her argumentation is accurate.

Eva Spilková has written a dissertation that exceeds the requirements for an M.A. dissertation. I recommend an **EXCELLENT** mark and wish Eva much success in the future.



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