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“Totally dominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” How far do you agree with this assessment in the 1960s?

Yes:

Most well-known figure

March on Washington, I Have a Dream

SCLC sit ins, boycotts were very effective

Arguably helped Kennedy get elected, which was helpful in securing a president more likely to enact legislation and speak for the movement

No:

SNCC, SDS, other youth organizations made an impact (Port Huron, sit-ins)

CORE, other members of SCLC did nonviolent things; he could never have made an impact without people willing to follow him

Arthurine Lucy 1962?

No:

JFK: James Meredith assistance, executive orders in fair housing, employment

LBJ 1964 civil rights act

Courts and NAACP

Media

Conclusion:

He was not totally dominant, but was key to the movement. The civil rights movement kind of died after his main actions; it was dominated by violence and they lost their inroads with the white community; modern republicans followed the era of LBJ and JFK. Its importance was grassroots and mobilizing people, he was extremely important because he could do that well on both sides but he cannot be said to have done everything because the acts of other organizations and individuals made it possible

The statement that the civil rights movement was “totally dominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” is true to an extent because of Dr. King’s influence and ability to reach mass amounts of people, but I cannot fully agree with it due to the important presence of other organizations, individuals, and legislation.

Initially, Dr. King can be seen to be totally dominant over the civil rights movement because of his influence over the entire nation and, to an extent, the world. As many presidents were concerned about, America’s every move was being watched by its allies and opponents overseas, and no private citizen had more eyes on him than Martin Luther King, Jr. For example, his presence at the March on Washington, attended by over 250,000 protesters and doubtlessly read about by millions more, where he gave one of the most famous speeches ever in ‘I Have a Dream’, garnered him and, more importantly, the civil rights movement a lot of attention. While he was not the only one there by any means, his eloquence and ability to impassion others was not replicable by any other figure of the time. President Kennedy was very concerned that the March on Washington would result in a riot that, as he said, made the one in Little Rock seem trivial, but it was Dr. King’s strong stance of nonviolence and sway over those gathered that made the march much more impactful than it would have been had someone else headed the march. Additionally, King’s actions in the South were revolutionary in rallying others around him and building a coalition to support the civil rights movement. The key to the civil rights movement was that it was grassroots, coming from the people, and the only way that it could gain any traction was by having a leader at its head that could appeal to a wide number of people. King did just that; from the genesis of his influence at the Bus Boycott of 1955, which lasted 11 months longer than it was supposed to, he garnered wide media attention and allies, both black and white. His civil rights campaigns, namely in Birmingham, led him being arrested over thirteen times—his Letter from Birmingham Jail, which has been called the most important document by a modern imprisoned political figure, was written in 1961 during one of these campaigns. Unlike other leaders, Dr. King stood with the people and, despite his importance, he was willing to be arrested and put in jail like anyone else. This gave a face to the movement, one that could not only be respected, but empathized with; him being central in the struggle allowed the media to cover the protests more and thus allowed people in the North to have a better and more sympathetic view. As such, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s hold on the eyes of the American people made him totally dominant over the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

An interesting point to be made is that King, in a sense, helped John F. Kennedy get elected. Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham during the election of 1960, and Nixon, who he was closer to at the time, chose not to make any comment. Kennedy and his brother, on the other hand, made several calls to get him out of prison, even going so far as to make calls to King's father and wife expressing their condolences. This earned the Kennedys King's endorsement, which mobilized many black voters in the North to vote for Kennedy. Considering how close the election was, those extra black votes may have been the reason Kennedy was elected, and that directly stemmed from the endorsement of the Kings. This was helpful to the civil rights movement because "No-Comment Nixon" may not have been as willing to attempt to pass civil rights legislation as Kennedy. His stance as a conservative Republican, juxtaposed with Kennedy's liberal Democrat opinions, show that he would be a much weaker civil rights president. The fact that Kennedy was elected and not Nixon, much in part due to King's influence, and the effect that Kennedy had on the civil rights movement shows King's dominance in the civil rights movement.

On the contrary, other influences, such as other organizations and individuals, had impacts on the civil rights movement that cannot be ignored. The youth chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. King's affiliation, which was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were instrumental in showing the world the opinions of the youth. The Greensboro sit-ins, where SNCC members would sit in white-only lunch counters despite harrowing attacks by white counter-protestors, and the Port Huron statement, which established the university students of the SDS's commitment to civil rights, were two notable actions that helped establish the need for civil rights legislation across the country. The SDS in particular was important because Dr. King never made very much headway in the North, so having Northern allies picketing and boycotting stores like F. W. Woolsworth out of his "territory" was vital, and shows that he was not the only one taking steps during this movement. Additionally, CORE and SNCC's efforts in Mississippi in 1964 during Freedom Summer, which was a massive voter registration campaign, overshadowed SCLC's relatively low participation in comparison. SNCC provided most of the funding and leadership to the very important attempt to get African Americans registered to vote and to, thus, give them a voice in the political system. Both of these examples had little to do

with Dr. King, but were nonetheless integral to the movement as a whole, so it can be drawn that Dr. King was not totally dominant over the civil rights movement.

Similarly, another reason why Dr. King was not totally dominant over the civil rights movement in the 1960s was the impact of the government on it. The federal government enacted the most civil rights legislation and other federal orders in the 1960s than in any decade since Reconstruction. John F. Kennedy, the progressive liberal from Massachusetts, may not have campaigned hard for civil rights, but was instrumental in showing activists that the federal government was on their side. James Meredith, an African American protester, attempted to enroll in segregated university 'Ole Miss'. Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, feared riots and violence, so they attempted to negotiate with Governor Barnett of Mississippi to get local law enforcement on campus to protect Meredith. However, after hours of phone calls, Barnett did not budge, which prompted Kennedy to send in federal marshals. In previous administrations, the attempt of one single man to integrate into a university may never have garnered as much federal effort and support as under the Kennedy administration; after Meredith was successfully enrolled, it was doubtlessly encouraging to those in the civil rights movement that the federal government would go to such ends to protect their right to education. Additionally, Kennedy passed several executive orders to bypass the Congress swimming with segregationist Southerners; one tried to end employment discrimination, and another protected minorities in the housing industry. Both of these ensured greater economic fairness and freedom and showed that the civil rights advocacy was not being ignored by the government. Kennedy viewed civil rights as a moral and political issue, and after seeing children marching the streets in Birmingham and hearing of the violence in the South, it was likely not just Dr. King that prompted him to make these decisions. Additionally, after Kennedy's death, Lyndon B. Johnson took his gridlocked Civil Rights Bill and used his connections in Congress to get it passed. It was the sweeping legislation that King had been searching for in the March on Washington; while King likely had a large role in getting this bill passed, the fact that it took multiple years to produce shows that it was more likely that it was due to a culmination of events. This very important bill and the legislation before that were not completely influenced by King, and even if they were, he was not the face of any of them, so it can be evaluated that King was not totally dominant over the civil rights movement.

Ultimately, Dr. King cannot be said to have been totally dominant over the civil rights movement. However, this should not discredit his extreme influence: the civil rights movement began to taper off after his role in the March on Washington (and the 6 other organizations involved, but, after all, his is the only face we remember). The movement was dominated by violence, and once King was assassinated, it almost completely lost its inroads with the white community and was seen as extremist. The election of Nixon after Lyndon B. Johnson emphasizes that, and the 70s were, politically, a conservative time. The 1960s civil rights movement's strength was mobilizing people, and Dr. King was extremely important in not only mobilizing his own, but attracting support from both sides. However, the actions of both other organizations, other individuals, and the government all contributed to the successes of the movement; King could not have achieved everything that got done without their efforts, so he cannot be said to have totally dominated the movement (though he did have a fair amount of dominance over it, just not total).