

Source-Based Question on Twentieth Century Race Relations

To what extent do you agree that integration was an answer to the question of African Americans in America in the Twentieth Century?

Here, then, is the dilemma. What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?

- Source A W.E.B. Du Bois, writing in The Conservation of Races, 1987

Unity as a people, pride in African heritage, the creation of autonomous institutions, and the search for a territory to build a nation were the central ingredients which shape the early development of the nationalist consciousness... The central claim of all black nationalists; past and present, is that black people are primarily Africans and not Americans... In place of an American dream, nationalists gave the black poor an African dream...In the teaching of Elijah Muhammad (and in Garvey's before him) rejection of white values was expressed in hostility toward integrationism. The solution to the problem of race is separation, not integration. Black nationalism thrives among poor blacks who have lost all hope in white society and its claim about freedom and justice for all. They know the difference between words about freedom in religious and political documents and their experience of being locked in the ghetto. Unable to see any good whatsoever in whites, black nationalists turn to their own cultural heritage for support of their identity as human beings in a white world that does not recognize black people as persons. Malcolm's experience in the ghetto taught him that the black masses could be neither integrationist nor non-violent. Integration and nonviolence assumed some measure of political order; a moral conscience in the society, and a religious and human sensitivity regarding the dignity and values of all persons. But that recognized their humanity or a moral conscience among white people, an appeal to integration and nonviolence sounded like a trick to delude and disarm poor blacks, so whites would not have to worry about the revenge for response to their brutality. Integration was the way of the college-educated, the professional Negro elites whose value system and preoccupation with success was similar to the whites with whom they were seeking to integrate. In the ghetto, where survival was an arduous task and violence was an everyday experience, nonviolence was not a meaningful option and most even regarded the promotion of it as a sign of weakness and lack of courage.

- Source B James Cone, a black professor of theology, in Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare, New York, 1999.

We are simply seeking to bring into full realization the American dream – a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character; the dream of a land where every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality – this is the dream.

- Source C Martin Luther King, in Washington, July 1962.

Many of you misunderstand us, and think that we are advocating continued segregation. No! We are as much against segregation as you are. We want separation, but not segregation. Segregation is when your life and liberty are controlled by someone else... Segregation is that which is forced upon inferior by superiors; but separation is that which is done voluntarily.

- Source D Malcolm X, speaking to a black audience, September 1962.

I think that it is very unfortunate that Malcolm X continues to predict violence...it would be very tragic...for the Negro to use violence in any form. Many of our opponents would be delighted...if we would take up arms, it would give them an excuse to kill up a lot of us.

- Source E Martin Luther King, speaking in New York, 1964.

No, I'm not American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are victims of Americanism. One of the...victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver – no, not I! I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare!

- Source F Malcolm X, speaking in Cleveland, Ohio, April 1964.

In 1913...in Washington, DC...I tried to talk to the nation about a dream that I had had, and I must confess...that not long after talking about that dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare...just a few weeks after I had talked about it. It was when four beautiful...Negro girls were murdered in a church in Birmingham, Alabama. I watched the dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of

material prosperity and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negros' problem of poverty. I saw that that dream turn into a nightmare as I watched my black brother and sisters in the midst of anger and understandable outrage, in the midst of their hurt, in the midst of their disappointment, turn to misguided riots to solve that problem. I saw the dream turn into a nightmare as I watched war in Vietnam escalating...Yes; I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes.

- Source G Martin Luther King, speaking in Atlanta, Georgia, December 1967.

King's...Proclamation of the 'American Dream' was just about inevitable. It was quite easy for him to think of America as a dream and to be optimistic could be realized because himself was a concrete embodiment of its realization. He was well-educated, culturally refined, and politically aware...King believed that fear was the primary reason the majority of whites had not advocated the full integration of Negroes into their society. Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other; they do not know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated... King's life represented only one side of the African-American experience, the American Side. The African side was represented in the life of Malcolm X. As King's early life shows the bright, integrationist side of the African-American struggle, Malcolm X's early life shows its dark, nationalist side.

- Source H James Cone, Martin and Malcolm, p.37.