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ENGL 3360

T&N Reaction Essay 2

### Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela

Malcolm X, who I consider to be the kind of “step-brother” to Martin Luther King Jr., was a widely-known black rights activist from the 60s whose influence was spread across America through the Nation of Islam. He started out as a sort of trouble-maker, which landed him in prison. However, looking from the outside-in, I would argue that prison was one of the things that made Malcolm X into the black hero he is known as today. Chapter 11, “Saved,” of *the Autobiography of Malcolm X* is all about this prison experience and how it transforms him. Violence and unlawfulness are what landed him in prison, but he comes out after having close correspondence with Muhammad feeling that violence is not, in fact, the answer. Words and intellectualism are. A similar leader from our modern world, who just recently died, is the well-known former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

After watching the movie *Nelson Mandela: A Long Walk to Freedom*, I see many similarities between Mandela and Malcolm X, the first being that they started out advocating for black liberation, by any means necessary, up to and including violence. Mandela started out inciting riots against the European-run government in South

Africa, rooting for the outcome of equal rights for African natives. He doesn't start out directly asking for violence, but after they are met with guns, he is not opposed to fighting back with the same force. He himself even starts carrying around a gun.

The next similarity in X and Mandela's stories are their prison experiences. X goes to prison while he's young and has both a religious and intellectual experience. Not only does he connect himself with Allah through Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, but he also starts educating himself by reading. Mandela has a different experience: he spend the majority of his time in prison thinking, and slowly tries to make his statement in the prison, eventually making his way high enough to make a difference on the outside as well. What's similar about Malcolm X and Mandela's experiences, however, is what came out of them.

When Malcolm X came out of prison, he still wanted to make change, but his studies changed his view on how that change should come about. Through reading and attending debates at the prison, X saw how powerful words could be, and how they can be used to show the injustices of American racism. So he left the Nation of Islam to pursue his own views, and was soon after assassinated. Nelson Mandela came out of prison after almost 30 years to a nation covered in violence. Seeing that violence first-hand showed him how much his people looked to him, so he used that influence to push his people in the right direction. He told them that instead of seeking

revenge and promoting violence, they should get to the polling station and elect themselves a president. He was elected that year.

As stated in the first paragraph, I personally think of Malcolm X as a kind of “step-brother” to Martin Luther King Jr. People often compare Mandela to MLKJ because of his transformation into non-violence after prison, but if X had lived, I believe he would have done the same general thing. I think he had enough influence and power over so many people that he could have easily made an even bigger change in American than he did, the way that Mandela has done in Africa.