

Cone talks on King, Malcolm X

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King and Malcolm X, and explained their approaches to the common goal of respect and recognition of black people as human beings. While Martin King's spoke to black Christians in the rural Jim Crow South, Malcolm X found his followers in a dissatisfied and "ghettoized" Northern black community that felt alienated or indifferent to Christianity.

Malcolm X approached the goal of freedom by demanding respect for African culture and stressing the importance of a strong cultural identity. Malcolm X derived his power "not from Christianity, but from the heritage that white America had taught him to hate."

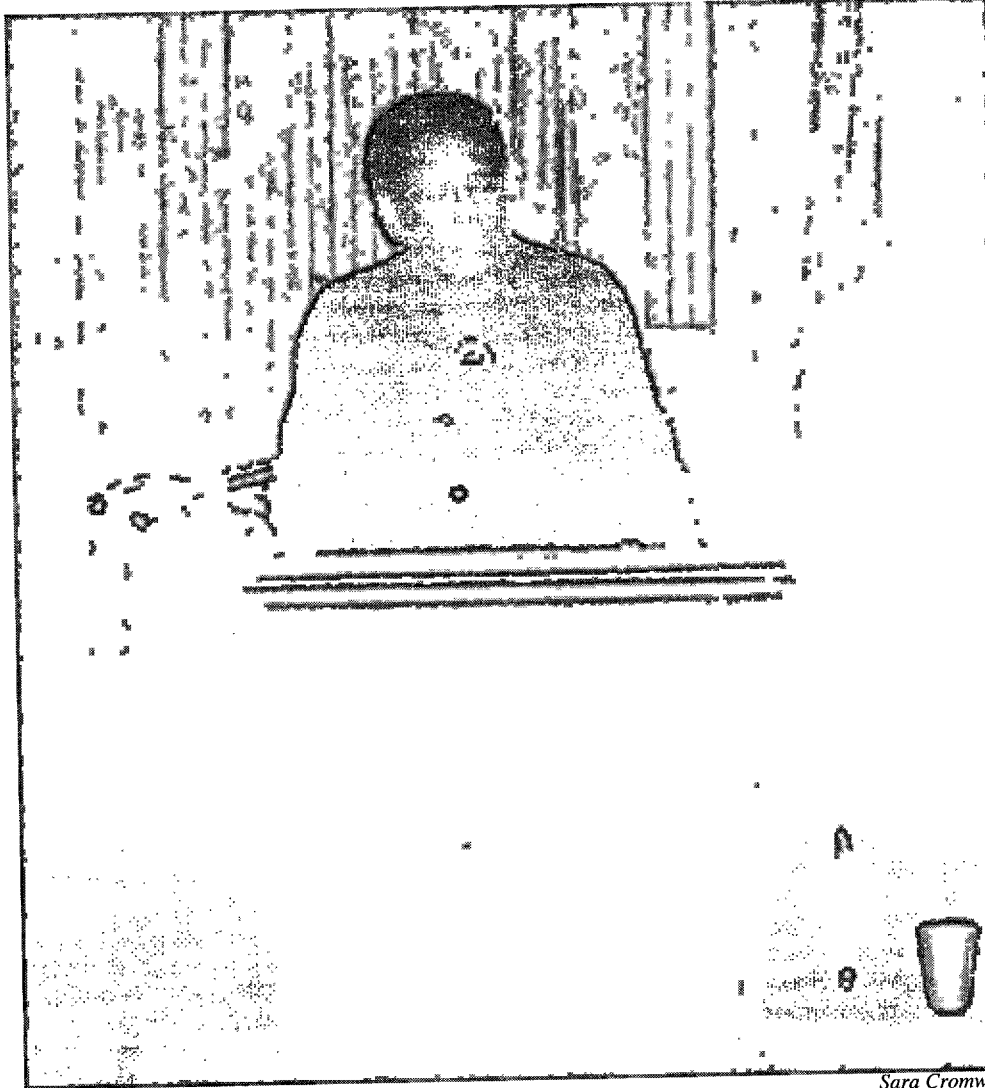
Martin King chose to work through the legal system, gaining legal rights for black Americans and ending legal segregation. "Martin King galvanized Southern blacks to take a stand for justice," said Cone, "and inspired ordinary blacks to believe in themselves as human beings and demand that the law recognize their humanity."

Likewise, Malcolm X became the Daniel for his Northern admirers, "a hot and angry and eloquently persuasive prophet," who empowered them to believe in themselves and "walk the streets with dignity."

Martin King and Malcolm X's differing approaches could be attributed to geography. In King's case, a white-controlled government and justice system made non-violent protests the only viable option.

According to Cone, "King knew that violence in the South would have given whites to kill law-abiding blacks." Meanwhile, Malcolm X's bold statements and protests exposed what Cone described as "Northern white liberal hypocrisy."

Thursday night, Cone turned the attention to the impact of both civil rights leaders on black



◆ Cone

Sara Cromwell

theology. "Martin King gave black theology its Christian identity," said Cone, "and Malcolm X gave black theology its black identity." Martin King "did theology with his life, proclaimed it through his preaching, and forced white Christians to confront their own beliefs."

For these actions, as well as his international stature and courage, Cone argued that Martin King was "the most important and influential Christian theologian in United States history." Cone sees Martin King as "an activist theologian" and stated that one "can't be a Christian without fighting for justice among people."

Malcolm X, according to Cone, is "America's most profound race critic." When Cone turned to Malcolm X in the late 1960's, he found the "identity of black Americans is inexorably linked to blackness" and knew he had to understand his heritage as a black American.

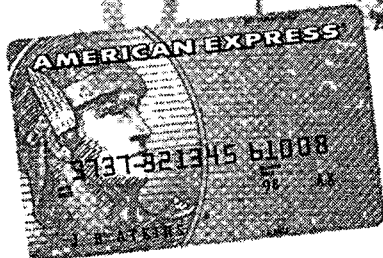
"Both Martin and Malcolm," Cone said, "challenged me to think about black truth and Christianity."

Speaking on his visit to Davidson, Cone said, "I really do mean it when I say that I am pleased to have come here to Davidson, especially to meet the students I have met. . . they have inspired me and deepened and reinforced my commitment."

Students were also appreciative to have Dr. Cone, spending well over thirty minutes each night asking him questions and purchasing his books.

Cone's presentation was part of the Otts Lecture Series. In 1893, J.M.P. Otts, D.D., LL.D., a distinguished alumnus of Davidson, donated a sum of money to the college to bring speakers with an expertise in Religious Studies.

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