

Civil Rights Leadership of King Hamer Carmichael and Malcolm X

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Civil Rights Leadership and Movement Strategy

Leadership among the black population during the civil rights movement differed in the theatrics and opinions of the leaders. There were two types of leaders: the charismatic and popular leaders like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr and the ordinary leaders who played small roles in the movement. There were differences in the delivery of motivational information, the focus of the movement, the opinions of fellow leaders and the feelings of the leaders towards the white population. Equal rights and justice for the black population were the main focus of the civil rights movement, but differences existed among the leaders in the realization of the movement's goals.

Charismatic Leaders and Ordinary Activists

The ordinary people are the stories and incitement that the charismatic leaders use in the equality campaigns. "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here."^[1] The Charismatic Martin Luther King Jr was in jail to relate with the Negroes in jail, to converse with them, and later present their story in his public rallies. He went to the jails to try and understand the pain and atrocity the men, women, and children went through because he lived in another city. Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer was the story that she narrated in her campaigns for change, "She and two others were taken to jail in Winona, Mississippi, and mercilessly beaten."^[2] She narrated her experiences of oppression to fellow blacks and to the authorities in a bid to ensure the freedom of fellow Negroes. Different from Martin's theatrics, she did not have to travel in search of the oppressed blacks but instead recounted her ordeal.

White Responsibility and Carmichael's Critique

The whites are reluctant to address their race-related problems with the African-Americans. The theory on racism is arguably not a result of the colour of the African Americans but the denial among the whites to address the cause of the hatred. Stokely Carmichael was convinced that the racism problem had nothing to do with the blacks, "Failure is due to the Whites' incapability to deal their own problems inside their own committee."^[3] Stokely proposed that the American white population had a desire to dominate the black in much the same way it wanted to dominate the world economy^[4]. Malcolm X argues that all whites were enemies and would never allow the blacks to be free, "What we have foremost in common is that enemy- the white man. He's an enemy of all of us."^[5] Malcolm X is convinced that the whites will never consider the blacks as equals especially because the African-

Americans came to America as slaves. Hence, he proposes that all African Americans unite, irrespective of their social, economic and political background^[6]. While Stokely proposed that African-Americans overlook their races to ensure the unification of all races in America, Malcolm X was calling for their division. Malcom calls for the blacks to identify with fellow blacks because the whites would never call for unification and justice for the blacks^[7]. It was unity and integration that ensured that African Americans were accorded their freedom and rights equally to whites.^[8] Although both Malcolm X and Stokely called for unification, they had different intentions.

Mobilization Through Personal and Collective Experience

The popular and charismatic civil rights leaders differed from the ordinary leaders in the methods they used to ensure that the African-Americans mobilized in the streets. By inciting the blacks through recounting tragedies that befell fellow Negroes, the charismatic leaders elicited anger and frustration from their followers. The simple, uneducated and victimized leaders like Hamer recounted personal incidences in public all-race conferences and government representatives. These leaders called for compassion and fairness from the whites while, at the same time, they reminded fellow blacks why they ought not to give up. Malcolm X reminded fellow blacks of their ill-treatment by the whites, "You represent a person who poses such a serious problem for America because you're not wanted."^[9]

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr on Resistance

Here, Malcom insights the blacks by telling them how much the white man despises the blacks. Martin Luther King Jr, on the other hand, believes that blacks are liberated enough to ignore and disobey laws they find morally incorrect, "An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice."^[10] King, therefore, incites the African Americans to publicly disobey the laws they found morally incorrect. Hamer, instead, represents the blacks in the government and even runs for a public seat, "I'm showing the people that a Negro can run for office."^[11] Hamer believed that blacks had better chances of fighting for equality while in elected government positions. While the charismatic leaders were inciting the blacks against the whites, the ordinary blacks were calling for blacks to vie for the elected government positions.

Division Unity and Leadership Conflict

The unification of the African Americans was associated with selfish deeds. Leaders openly accused each other of losing focus of the influence they had, while other leaders called for the unity of the black community. Malcolm X accuses civil rights leaders of siding with the whites, "They acted like

they cared really loved Negroes and fooled a whole lot of Negroes.”^[12] Malcolm X accuses Martin Luther King Jr and other civil rights leaders of betraying the blacks’ call for unity and equal rights. Stokely calls for the unity of blacks and excellent leadership, “We must urge you now to be the leaders of today.”^[13] Both Stokely and Malcom are right in their pointing out recommended leadership in much the same way that Hamer calls for more leaders in the government elected positions through voting.^[14] Malcom, a charismatic and popular leader, is wrong because he downplays both Stokely’s and Hamer’s calls for more leaders by inciting mistrust in the leaders. King was a notable and popular leader, and publicly addressing African Americans would introduce a rift among the blacks.

Conclusion on Competing Civil Rights Approaches

The popular and charismatic leaders differed in opinion and their theatrics in advocating for the blacks’ civil rights for the blacks, from the ordinary leaders. The Charismatic leaders depended on stories and past experiences to motivate the blacks, while the ordinary leaders depended on their personal experiences to motivate fellow blacks to advocate for equal rights. While the charismatic leaders relied on unethical incitement, the ordinary leaders diligently motivated the African-Americans to focus on the future. King incited the African Americans to disobey laws they morally thought unjust, which differed with Hamer’s theory, to get elected in the government and introduce changes from there. The civil rights movement was centred on calling for the unity of all blacks, but Malcolm X publicly incited the black population against fellow leaders. The leaders differed in their opinions, but their intent was centred on ensuring equal rights for the black population.

References

1. Martin Luther King Jr, *Peace and Brotherhood* (Pennsylvania: King, Martin Luther King Jr, 1963) p 1 Para 3 ↑
2. Fannie Lou Hamer, *Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National Convention* (New Jersey: American Public Media, 1964) p 1 Para 4 ↑
3. Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power* (California: Blackpast, 1966) p 1 Para 5 ↑
4. Ibid, 1 para 5 ↑
5. Malcolm X, *Message to Grassroots* (Ashland, Ohio: Teaching American History, 1963) p 1 para 4 ↑
6. Ibid, 1 para 6 ↑
7. Ibid, 1 para 5 ↑
8. Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power* (California: Blackpast, 1966) p 1 Para 9 ↑
9. Malcolm X, *Message to Grassroots* (Ashland, Ohio: Teaching American History, 1963) p 1 para 1 ↑
10. Martin Luther King Jr, *Peace and Brotherhood* (Pennsylvania: King, Martin Luther King Jr, 1963) p 1 Para 16 ↑
11. Fannie Lou Hamer, *Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National*

- Convention* (New Jersey: American Public Media, 1964) p 1 Para 5 ↑
12. Malcom X, *Message to grassroots* (Ashland, Ohio: Teaching American History, 1963) p 1 para last ↑
13. Stokely Carmichael, *Black Power* (California: Blackpast, 1966) p 1 Para 36 ↑
14. Fannie Lou Hamer, *Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National Convention* (New Jersey: American Public Media, 1964) p 1 Para 5 ↑