

The image features six light purple circles arranged in two rows of three. The top row has one circle with a thin purple outline and two solid circles. The bottom row has three solid circles, with the rightmost one having a thin purple outline. The text is centered horizontally across the middle of the circles.

civil rights & civil disobedience

political action for change

Civil Disobedience



- Refusal to obey a law on the grounds that it is immoral or unjust in itself, or furthers injustice. Disobedience within a framework of obedience to law.
- Appeals to the majority's sense of justice, in order to get them to reconsider and change public policy.
- Goal: to put the issue on the public's agenda, to call attention to an unjust law. Disobedience must be open and public.

Roots of the Idea

- Henry David Thoreau
 - Jailed in the 1840s for refusing to pay a poll tax. The tax supported the war with Mexico and the extension of slavery, which he strongly opposed. Thoreau did pay his other taxes.
 - Coined the term “civil disobedience” in the title of his essay arguing in favor of non-violent opposition to slavery.



Thoreau's civil disobedience

Key Arguments:

- Unjust laws require our action in order to work. He advocated resistance: "I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn."
- Normal legal channels to overturn those laws either do not exist or take too long.
- Civil disobedience effective: if abolitionists withdrew their support of government, then slavery would end in a peaceful revolution.



Thoreau's civil disobedience

- "Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; ... but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight."

Roots of the Idea

- Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi
 - Led India's struggle for independence against the British from 1915 to his death in 1948.
 - Advocated non-violent direct action which he called *Satyagraha*, meaning “clinging to the truth.”
 - Non-violence a core attribute, not just a tactic
 - Courage, discipline & strength essential
 - Recognizes the unity of all living things

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*



- Different than passive resistance, which is a weapon of the weak. Not the same level of discipline and courage needed as in Satyagraha, and therefore violence is possible. Passive resistance does not require “complete adherence to truth.”



Gandhi's *Satyagraha*

- **But if nonviolence is essential, how can the resisters prevail? What type of force do they use?**

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*



- Gandhi called it love-force or soul-force (*ahimsa*), a relentless but gentle insistence on truth in dealing with friends as well as enemies, neighbors as well as rulers.
- Not simply a weapon used selectively to achieve a particular change, but an attitude toward one's entire life.

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*

- **What does Gandhi say to those who warn of the threat of anarchy?**

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*



- Civil disobedience is an inherent right of a citizen and is never followed by anarchy, unlike criminal disobedience, which must be put down by a state using force.
- The follower of Satyagraha “obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so.” Only then is he or she able to judge what laws are just and unjust, and resist the unjust laws in “well-defined circumstances.”

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*

- The difference between criminals and the civil disobedient: “The lawbreaker breaks the law surreptitiously and tries to avoid the penalty. The civil resister ever obeys the laws of the State to which he belongs, not out of fear ... but because he considers them to be good for the welfare of society. But there come occasions, generally rare, when he considers certain laws to be so unjust as to render obedience to them a dishonor. He then openly and civilly breaks them and quietly suffers the penalty for their breach.”

Gandhi's *Satyagraha*



- Gandhi drew his doctrine from many sources, including Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, writings of Thoreau and the Russian novelist and thinker, Leo Tolstoi. He took these ideas and applied them in a practical way to have both a political and social impact. In turn, he influenced the thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Need for Civil Rights in America

- Until the 1960s, racial and ethnic minorities were sometimes refused service in restaurants and motels, denied access to city swimming pools and parks, and excluded from public schools and universities. In some states, it was even a crime to marry someone of a different race.
- This racism was not only acceptable, it was required under the law. Called *de jure* discrimination – official government policy. Violators were subject to arrest and imprisonment.

Examples of racist laws



- In 1955, a black woman named Rosa Parks was arrested for the crime of refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. This incident sparked the civil rights movement.
- Until 1967, it was a felony – punishable with 5 years in prison – for an interracial couple to marry. The Lovings married in 1958 and spent 9 years as fugitives (picture is in text, p. 6). When they were arrested, they successfully challenged the law, which finally was overturned by the Supreme Court.



U.S. Civil Rights Movement

In 1950s and 60s, responding to discriminatory laws and practices, civil rights movement emerged.

Goal: to bring the issue of racism on to the national agenda, to stir the conscience of white Americans who were largely ignorant and complacent.

Nonviolent Resistance



Strategies

- Sit-ins at segregated businesses (esp. restaurants)
- Boycotts of segregated buses & businesses
- Marches
- Lawsuits
- Voter registration drives
- Newspaper ads and articles

Activists were fired from jobs; expelled from schools. Law enforcement used dogs, fire hoses, tear gas against them. Hate groups employed beatings, bombs, house & church fires, and even murder.

Successes of Civil Rights Movement

- Legislation: Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Open Housing Act of 1968.
- Ignited other civil rights movements in the U.S.: for Latinos, women, Native Americans, people with disabilities, immigrants, prisoners, gays & lesbians, etc.
- Developed political strategies used by other groups as well.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



- As a minister in Montgomery, Alabama, helped organize the bus boycott of 1955-56, which sparked the modern civil rights movement.
- Became founder and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- Led numerous civil rights marches and activities involving nonviolent direct action.
- Assassinated in 1968, as he was beginning to build an anti-war and economic justice coalition.

Background of “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

- King had traveled to Birmingham to lead a demonstration against segregation of lunch counters and job discrimination.
- Organizers had sought and been denied a parade permit, but decided to march anyway.
- King was arrested. In jail, he wrote a letter in response to criticism by friendly local clergy that his actions were "untimely and unwise."



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he was an “outside agitator?”**

“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he was an “outside agitator?”**
 - He had ties to the community through SCLC
 - He had been invited to come
 - He went where there was injustice
 - “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he should first try to negotiate?**

“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he should first try to negotiate?**
 - The Black community had tried and failed. The city would not negotiate in good faith. No other alternative but direct action.
 - “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he and the marchers should have more patience?**

“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How did he answer their criticism that he and the marchers should have more patience?**
 - The time had come. 340 years of waiting for their rights.

“There comes a time when ... men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair.”



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- Four steps before engaging in nonviolent direct action:
 1. Collection of facts to determine whether injustices exist
 2. Negotiation
 3. Self purification
 4. Direct action



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- Difference between just and unjust laws:
 - Unjust laws are those that majorities try to impose on minorities while exempting themselves.
 - Unjust laws also are those that apply to minorities who have had no voice in passing them.
 - Finally, laws may be just on their face, but unjust in their application.



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- **How does he explain that parading without a permit involves an unjust law?**



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963


- **How does “parading without a permit” involve an unjust law?**
- He believes he was denied a permit because of his opposition to segregation. This violates his constitutional right to peaceful assembly and protest, and maintains segregation. The permit law is unjust in its application.



“Letter from Birmingham City Jail” 1963

- "I submit that 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, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law."

Similarities between ideas of Gandhi & King



1. Willingness to accept punishment

King wrote, "One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty."

2. Nonviolence essential

Moral ends can be achieved only by using moral means. It illustrates the immorality of the laws that they were opposing.

Similarities between ideas of Gandhi & King

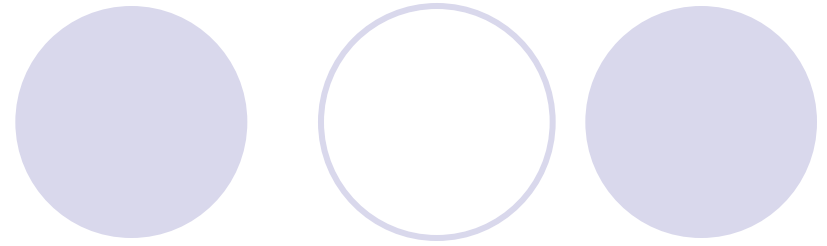
3. Self purification important

Both believed in the necessity of introspective and self-purification, to ensure that selfishness not a factor.

4. Sense of the political power of love

King wrote, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” It echoes the philosophy of Gandhi.

Civil disobedience



- Public in two ways:
 - Not done in secret but in the open
 - Intended to serve broad public interest, not individual self interest.



Current examples of civil disobedience

- Protestors at the World Trade Organization meetings who march inside areas that are restricted.
- Anti-abortion protestors who block access to clinics that provide abortions.
- NMSU graduate student in Fall 2000 arrested for distributing flyers about free speech outside of the Corbett Center, without receiving prior approval. His arrest led to a new policy to protect free speech on campus.

Lawful protests vs. civil disobedience

- Only *unlawful* non-violent protest is civil disobedience. Actions that do not break the law are not civil disobedience.
- Examples:
 - Boycotts of certain agricultural products led by the United Farm Workers in the 1960s & 70s (Cesar Chavez & Dolores Huerta).
 - Anti-war protestors outside Las Cruces City Hall every Wednesday afternoon.



Violent protests vs. civil disobedience

Only *non-violent* unlawful protest is civil disobedience. Violent actions are not civil disobedience, even when fighting against unjust or immoral laws.

Justice and violence



- Some activists argue that injustice may be so deeply imbedded in the system that the only way to challenge it is by challenging the entire system.
- Violence is seen as a weapon in the arsenal for change, not the best weapon, but one which on occasion may have to be used.

Justice and violence



- This was the view of Malcolm X and some others who advocated Black revolution. Malcolm X was a Black Nationalist leader and civil rights activist in the late 1950s and 1960s.

From the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr. to those of Malcolm X

Malcolm X broke
with King on
the utility of
non-violent civil
disobedience.





Malcolm Little becoming Malcolm X

Political views grew out of his difficult youth, which started with the family home being burned down by racist whites, his father killed in a streetcar accident and the insurance company denying the life insurance claim, his mother losing her job and being institutionalized with a nervous breakdown, his time in foster care and reform school.

Eventually, in regular school, he had academic success, but his white teacher ridiculed him when he said he wanted to study law.

Malcolm X's turning point



Got into drugs & crime. Sent to prison for burglary. Two pivotal events while there:

- a.) Inspired to study. Education brought him a higher political consciousness.
- b.) Joined Nation of Islam. Gave up drugs, cigarettes and pork, and began to study Islam and Black Nationalism.

Nation of Islam – political values

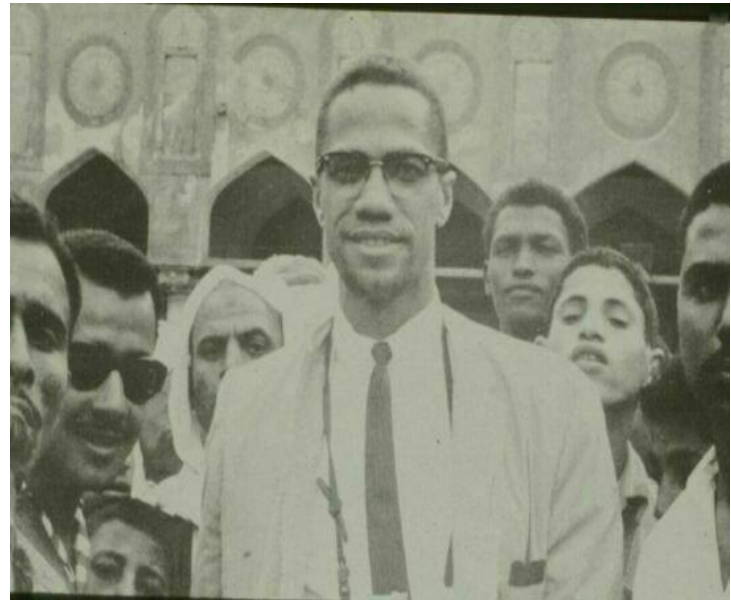
- Advocated separation from whites.
 - Exception of schools, where separation implies inferiority. They should be integrated.
- Family, community, self-discipline important.
- Leader was Elijah Muhammad. Eventually, Malcolm X disillusioned with Muhammad but not with the ideals.
- Malcolm X emerged as a charismatic young leader. Accused of being a black segregationist.

Malcolm X after his visit to Mecca

- In 1964, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca. The experience changed him, broadening his ideas about justice, less bitter & angry.

Began to advocate
human rights.

Killed in 1965,
probably by
rivals in the
Nation of Islam.



“The Ballot or the Bullet?” (1964)

- Speech preceded his visit to Mecca.
- Malcolm X's differences with King:
 - Higher degree of impatience
 - Nonviolent only if met with nonviolence, but violent if met with violence.
 - Angry & cynical tone
 - Scorns King's appeal to America's conscience.
“America's conscience is bankrupt... Uncle Sam has no conscience.”



“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Democratic mechanisms won't bring change

- U.S. is not a democracy for the black, in either the South or the North.
- Democratic party won't help; they make false promises to win black votes but will not expel powerful segregationist Democrats from Congress.
- Federal government won't help.
- People of African descent who have been here centuries are still not considered true Americans, unlike all white immigrants.

“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Strategies:

- Instead of looking within the U.S. for help, he recommends using the World Court and the UN Human Rights Convention to call the U.S. to account legally.
- Also to form alliances in the UN General Assembly with developing states in Africa, Asia and Latin America.



“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Elements of black nationalism

- 1. Political philosophy: “the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community.”

“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Elements of black nationalism

- 2. Economic philosophy: “we should control the economy of our community.”



“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Elements of black nationalism

- 3. Social philosophy: “we have to get together and remove the evils, the vices, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other evils that are destroying the moral fiber of our community. We ourselves have to lift the level of our community... to a higher level.”



“The Ballot or the Bullet?”

Views about the civil rights movement:

1. Too late to compromise or negotiate.
2. Nonviolent only if nonviolence is encountered; but violent if met with violence.
3. Goal is not to get the white to change his view of the black or the black to change his view of the white, but the black to change his view of himself.

Other speeches by Malcolm X

Press conference in New York City, 1964

<http://www.brothermalcolm.net/mxwords/whathesaid12.html>



Civil Rights Issues in U.S. Today

Equal Access a problem for:

- Jobs
- Health Care
- Car loans
- Housing
 - Rental
 - Home mortgage loans

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/13/AR2005091302070.html?referrer=email>

Civil Rights Globally



- Discrimination real and perceived in much of the world, involving race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or sex.
- Religious bias against Jewish people so entrenched it has a name: anti-Semitism.
- Countries currently experiencing civil unrest because of unequal treatment of groups:
 - Sudan, Nepal, Iraq, Ireland, Egypt, Israel, Indonesia



Civil disobedience, revolution, terrorism

- Sometimes people who engage in civil disobedience are characterized as revolutionaries or terrorists.

How they are similar:

- 1. Seeking publicity to put issues on the agenda
- 2. Seeking change

But how are they different?

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Revolution

Revolution means a fundamental change, not only politically, but socially and even economically. Violence may be used, targeted against military & police, not civilians. Effort to avoid capture, not accept the punishment.



Terrorism

Terrorism is political violence to destabilize an existing government by inducing extreme fear in civilian population through use of arbitrary violence. The arbitrariness makes it more terrifying: anyone can be hit at any time.

Terrorists operate covertly and seek to avoid capture.

Comparisons: Goals

Five circles are arranged horizontally at the top of the slide. The first, third, and fifth circles are solid light purple. The second and fourth circles are white with a light purple outline.

terrorist revolutionary civil disobedient

Destabilize
society thru
fear to achieve
political purpose

Overthrow
government

Change unjust law
or set of laws

Comparisons: Means



terrorist revolutionary civil disobedient

Target ordinary
people;

Violence seen
as necessary

Target police &
military forces;

Non-violent &
violent means

Disobey unjust
laws, not all laws;

Non-violence
necessary

Covert action;
Avoid punishment

Covert action;
Avoid capture

Open action;
Accept penalties



Comparisons: View of status quo

terrorist revolutionary civil disobedient

Evil;

Needs to be
destroyed.

Oppressive;
Needs to be
replaced
changed.

Unjust;

Elements
need to be