

LEADERS

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Some members of the University's black community gave their answers.

They agreed that there is a resurgence in interest in Malcolm X and that his message has a strong following among today's young people. But they made it clear that this interest isn't one that diminishes the accomplishments of King. Rather, it recognizes and legitimizes Malcolm X — a man who has been largely dismissed by white America as a violent fanatic.

Eric Ward, Lakeyshua Washington and Devon Russell said

they admire both men, and that while their tactics may have differed, the similarities in their messages and goals have been overlooked by many.

Malcolm X, assassinated in 1965, and King, assassinated in 1968, moved toward a common ground before they died, Ward said.

"Historically, before the two were murdered, there had been a lot of changes in both of them," he said. "Malcolm X had started to look at non-violence as a useful tactic," although not as a way of life as King did.

"Martin Luther King realized that the civil rights movement

wasn't able to organize blacks in the north and in the inner cities, that the tactics needed to be different for them," Ward said.

What were those tactics? "We'll never know," Ward said, "because they were murdered in their prime."

The 1991 MLK Conference at the University featured Atallah Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X, as the keynote speaker. She said her father and King wanted to be together more often than they were able. Authorities kept them apart, she said, because the thought of them working together was frightening.

Ward agrees with Shabazz.

"We would have seen more between the two if they had been able to get together," he said, adding that a recently published book, *Malcolm X — The FBI Files*, outlines a systematic program to destroy and discredit black organizations and individuals like King and Malcolm X.

There is a great deal to admire about both, Ward said.

"I admire Martin Luther King's strength and his patience with society, and Malcolm X for his strength to tell the truth, the condition of blacks, and for not backing down," he said. "I look at Martin Luther King as bringing the message to white America and Malcolm X to the black population."

Washington said she is also reading the new FBI book because she wants to find out more about a man she identifies with.

"Before, I didn't know much about Malcolm X, but I felt the same way he did," she said. "If someone did something to him, he wasn't going to sit back, he would fight back and I agree with that. Blacks my age in America are more militant, and some of those things tend to go along with Malcolm X."

"Since I see that I have that in common with his philosophy, I want to find out more about him," Washington said.

But Washington added that she is also a strong admirer of King — "Being black, you can't help but admire him."

"He was a persistent man. He got a lot done. He could be so patient in allowing that stuff to happen and still get his messages across. He didn't allow people to push him to violence."

"I understand what Martin Luther King was saying."

Washington said. "Back then, if you did fight back you wouldn't win."

Russell also believes that white America has focused too much attention on the differences between the two leaders.

"They are compatible to a degree," he said. "White America tends to focus on King as non-violent and X as militant, but they had the same goal in mind. They varied only because X said 'by any means necessary,' but he never said through violent means."

"Both saw what was happening to their people and what was going to happen, and wanted to raise awareness," he said. "They created this awareness that it's basic human rights, they promoted that. But American leaders have always promoted the differences, like one's a good boy and one's a bad boy."

"You'll never see a Malcolm X Day," he added. "People can barely stand Martin Luther King Day, in some places."

It is Lee, they agree, who is in part responsible for the resurgence of interest in Malcolm X. He is in the process of filming a movie about the man's life and has already popularized the black caps with a big X on the front.

The words at the end of *Do the Right Thing* are not necessarily contradictory, Russell believes, but an attempt to get people to examine the ideas of both men.

"That movie was trying to say you don't have to choose one or the other but a combination of both," Russell said. "Martin Luther King and X promoted unity for their people. They saw the need to get together for their people."



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