

**BLACK LIVES MATTER: AN EVALUATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING
JUNIOR'S IDEOLOGY ON EQUALITY**

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FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,

BENIN CITY.

OCTOBER, 2025

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN
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THE BACHELOR OF ART (B.A.) HONOURS DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY,
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OCTOBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was originally carried out by **CHUKWUNYELU DIVINE CHIAGOZIEM**, with matriculation number **ART2101078**, and it meets the requirement for an award of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy.

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Date

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Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for His love, mercy, and grace upon my life. It is also dedicated to my beloved parents, Mr. Sunday Otogbolu and Mrs. Ijeoma Otogbolu, for their unwavering support beyond financial contributions throughout my academic journey.

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Finally, I thank The Redeemed Christian Church of God (Happy Family Chapel) for being my spiritual support and guiding light. May it continue to shine brightly, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the alignment between Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of equality, grounded in nonviolent resistance and universal human rights, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement's efforts to confront systemic racism. By analyzing King's speeches from 1955 to 1968 alongside BLM's public statements from 2013 to 2025, the study reveals shared goals of dismantling racial injustice, yet highlights distinct approaches shaped by their respective eras. King's philosophy, inspired by Christian values and Gandhian principles, leveraged moral clarity and organized campaigns, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, to secure landmark laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Conversely, BLM employs a decentralized, intersectional framework, amplified by social media, to address modern challenges like police brutality and economic inequity, as seen in initiatives like #SayHerName and calls for reparations. The analysis underscores King's lasting influence on coalition-building and economic justice while recognizing the need for adaptive strategies to tackle contemporary complexities. This study deepens understanding of civil rights activism's evolution, offering valuable perspectives for scholars, activists, and policymakers working toward a more equitable society.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

The struggle for racial equality and social justice has been a long-standing issue in the United States. Racist ideas have pervaded American history since its inception, manifesting in three distinct approaches: segregationists, assimilationists, and anti-racists¹. Segregationist's attribute racial disparities to inherent racial differences, holding Black people accountable for their own struggles. Assimilationists acknowledge biological equality but perceive Black culture as inferior due to environmental factors, suggesting that proper education and surroundings can enable Black individuals to conform to White societal norms. Anti-racists, conversely, contend that racial discrimination is the sole cause of differential treatment faced by Black people².

Despite the dream of a post-racial America, African Americans continue to face institutional inequalities. Systemic economic oppression of Black people for centuries has led to a thirteenfold wealth gap between White and Black households in America³. According to federal statistics, between 2010 and 2012, young Black males were twenty-

¹ Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York: One World.

² Ibid.,

³ Bhattacharya, J., Price, D., & Herrin, M. (2023). *The color of wealth: The story behind the U.S. racial wealth divide*. Boston: The New Press.

one times more likely to be killed by police than their White counter parts⁴. Due to underreporting or lack of analysis, racial disparities in police use of lethal force against female victims may be even more significant than currently documented. Black people are five times more likely to be incarcerated than Whites⁵. These disparities in police killings, incarceration, and other sectors stem partly from the underrepresentation of racial groups in positions of power, alongside complex factors such as historical inequalities, implicit biases, and socioeconomic disparities

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, established in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, has brought renewed attention to these issues, highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by Black Americans⁶. The movement gained momentum after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2013, sparked by the heartbreak and frustration of Black Americans facing systemic racism and police brutality⁷. BLM also gained widespread attention due to the deaths of Michael Brown, George Floyd, Eric Garner, Rekia Boyd, Freddie Gray, the Charleston Church shooting (Emmanuel Nine), Sandra Bland, and others.

As previously mentioned, three perspectives on racism emerge in public discourse. During debates over police killings, these perspectives were evident: segregationists

⁴ Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of police-involved death by race/ethnicity and gender. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(36), 17698–17703.

⁵ Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

⁶ Garza, A. (2020). *The purpose of power: How we come together when we fall apart*. New York: One World.

⁷ Taylor, K.-Y. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

claimed that Michael Brown was a monstrous, threatening thief, justifying Darren Wilson's fear and use of lethal force. Anti-racists argued that Wilson's recklessly racist behavior devalued the life of the eighteen-year-old Brown⁸. Assimilationists suggested that both Wilson and Brown acted irresponsibly, potentially overlooking the power dynamics at play⁹.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1950–1960) was a prominent figure whose ideology of equality emphasized nonviolent resistance as a powerful means of achieving lasting progress¹⁰. He defined nonviolence as the presence of love, compassion, and understanding toward all individuals, including oppressors, rather than merely the absence of physical aggression (King 1964). According to King, love has the power to heal, unite, and bring about justice. This philosophy, evident in his speeches, continues to inspire activists globally. This study explores the intersection of the Black Lives Matter movement and Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Racial inequality remains an enduring challenge in contemporary society, with movements like Black Lives Matter (BLM) advocating for systemic change and justice for Black communities¹¹. At the heart of equality discussions is Martin Luther King Jr.'s

⁸ Ibid.,

⁹ Kendi Op. Cit.,

¹⁰ King, M. L., Jr. (1964). *Why we can't wait*. New York: New American Library.

¹¹ Garza, Op. Cit.,

legacy, whose ideology of nonviolent resistance and universal equality continues to inspire civil rights activism¹².

However, few researchers have explored how Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideas align with or diverge from the Black Lives Matter movement's goals and methods, particularly in addressing contemporary systemic racism¹³. This lack of research limits our ability to fully grasp how historical ideas can shape and inform today's fight for racial equality¹⁴.

This issue is crucial, as elucidating these links could strengthen the impact of present-day activism and policy efforts toward equality. This study aims to fill this gap by examining Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology on equality in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement, assessing its relevance and applicability to contemporary battles against racial injustice.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly examine how Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality, rooted in nonviolent resistance and universal civil rights, corresponds with the mission, tactics, and objectives of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement¹⁵. By conducting a comparative analysis, this study seeks to enrich academic

¹² West, C. (2015). *Black prophetic fire*. Boston: Beacon Press.

¹³ Lebron, C. J. (2017). *The color of our shame: Race and justice in a post-racial America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ Alexander Op. Cit.,

¹⁵ West Op. Cit.,

conversations about the development of civil rights activism and its significance in driving impactful societal change today¹⁶.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it:

1. Bridges a critical gap in understanding civil rights activism's continuity and evolution.
2. Contributes to social justice theories and practical applications.
3. Provides valuable insights for activists, educators, and policymakers addressing systemic racism.
4. Informs contemporary movements on unity and effective advocacy.
5. Advances scholarly discussions on racial equality, connecting historical and modern contexts.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The study explores the concept of equality in Martin Luther King Jr.'s and Black Lives Matter's (BLM) ideologies, including their definitions, strategies, and approaches to addressing systemic racism¹⁷. It focuses on the United States, prioritizing U.S.-based activities and rhetoric of both King's movement and BLM, while acknowledging BLM's

¹⁶ Clayton, J. R. (2018). *A time to break silence: The legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: Scribner.

¹⁷ Cullors, P. (2021). *An abolitionist's handbook: 12 steps to change yourself and the world.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

global reach¹⁸. The analysis centers on their respective visions of equality and responses to systemic racism within the American context¹⁹.

1.6. Methodology

This study employs a critical method to analyze the ideologies of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement on equality²⁰. The analysis is based on primary and secondary sources, including King's speeches (1955–1968) and Black Lives Matter statements (2013–2025)²¹. These sources are retrieved from archives and online platforms. The study uses thematic and comparative analyses to explore themes of equality and systemic racism²². A purposive sampling method is used to select key texts, focusing on qualitative insights and excluding quantitative methods and non-public documents. This approach enables an in-depth examination of the ideologies and their evolution over time.

1.7. Literature Review

The quest for racial equality in the United States spans centuries, marked by persistent efforts to dismantle systemic racism²³. Two pivotal forces in this struggle are Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolent resistance and the Black Lives Matter (BLM)

¹⁸ Dudziak, M. L. (2000). *Cold War civil rights: Race and the image of American democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

¹⁹ Francis, J. G. (2014). *The evolving self: A psychology for the third millennium*. New York: Routledge.

²⁰ Birt, R. E. (2012). *The state of philosophy in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

²¹ Tarrow, S. G. (2013). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

²² Birt Op. Cit.,

²³ Alexander Op. Cit.,

movement's contemporary activism. This review explores the intersections and divergences between King's vision and BLM's mission, drawing on seven key books to assess their contributions to modern racial justice.

The roots of racial inequality in the U.S. lie in a history of slavery, segregation, and institutional discrimination. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi (2019) categorizes perspectives on racial disparities into three camps: segregationists, who attribute differences to inherent racial traits; assimilationists, who view Black culture as deficient but redeemable through education; and anti-racists, who identify systemic racism as the primary driver of inequality²⁴. This framework informs analyses of issues like police violence, incarceration, and economic gaps, which disproportionately burden Black communities²⁵. For example, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* reveals how the criminal justice system perpetuates racial hierarchies, with Black Americans incarcerated at five times the rate of Whites²⁶. Similarly, Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* reframes systemic racism as a caste-like system, highlighting disparities such as the thirteenfold wealth gap between White and Black households and the twenty-one times higher likelihood of young Black males being killed by police compared to their White counterparts²⁷.

²⁴ Kendi Op. Cit.,

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Alexander, Op. Cit.,

²⁷ Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. New York: Random House.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s approach to equality was grounded in nonviolent resistance, inspired by Christian principles and Gandhian strategies. In *Why We Can't Wait*, King presents nonviolence as a moral force capable of transforming both society and its oppressors through love and justice²⁸. His seminal works, including the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and "I Have a Dream" speech, compiled in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, articulate a vision of universal equality and systemic reform²⁹. As Michael Eric Dyson notes in *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King Jr.*, King's later years saw him broaden his focus to economic injustice, critiquing capitalism and militarism as entangled with racism³⁰. Through campaigns like the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, King secured landmark legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964³¹. Yet, as Clayborne Carson documents in *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, King faced resistance from both White supremacists and militant Black activists who questioned the efficacy of nonviolence³².

In contrast, the Black Lives Matter movement, founded in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi following George Zimmerman's acquittal in the Trayvon

²⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1964). *Why we can't wait*. New York: New American Library.

²⁹ King, M. L., Jr. (1986). *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

³⁰ Dyson, M. E. (2000). *I may not get there with you: The true Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: Free Press.

³¹ Carson, C. (1995). *In struggle: SNCC and the Black awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

³² *Ibid.*,

Martin case, emerged as a response to ongoing systemic racism, particularly in policing³³. Barbara Ransby's *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the 21st Century* underscores BLM's innovative, decentralized approach and its advocacy for bold policies like defunding the police and reparations³⁴. BLM's intersectional framework addresses race alongside gender, sexuality, and class, reflecting the diverse realities of Black communities³⁵. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* situates BLM within a continuum of Black resistance, emphasizing its challenge to institutional racism in areas like healthcare and education³⁶.

Despite the richness of scholarship on King and BLM, there remains a gap in studies directly comparing their approaches to equality. While Dyson illuminates King's radical evolution and Ransby highlights BLM's contemporary strategies, few works bridge these perspectives. Cornel West's *Race Matters* suggests that integrating historical and modern approaches could invigorate racial justice efforts, yet this synthesis is underexplored³⁷. Such a comparison could clarify how King's emphasis on moral universalism and BLM's focus on intersectional activism might complement each other in addressing today's complex forms of racism.

CHAPTER TWO

³³ Ransby, B. (2018). *Making all Black lives matter: Reimagining freedom in the 21st century*. Oakland: University of California Press.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ Taylor, Op. Cit.,

³⁷ West, Op. Cit.,

MARTIN LUTHER KING JUNIOR: LIFE, WORKS AND INFLUENCE

2.1. Martin Luther King Junior's Biography.

Martin Luther King Junior's Biography.

Martin Luther King Junior was born Michael King Junior on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, as the second of three children to Michael King Senior and Alberta Williams King. Martin Luther King Senior, a Baptist pastor and Alberta Williams King, a school teacher, raised their son with strong values of faith and education. In 1934, Michael King Senior embarked on an international trip sponsored by his church, where he visited sites linked to Reformation leader Martin Luther. Upon returning home that August, he changed his name to Martin Luther Senior and his five-year old son's name to Martin Luther King Junior.³⁸

Early Life (1929–1944)

Growing up in the segregated South, King encountered the harsh realities of Jim Crow laws. Martin King Junior became friends with a white boy whose father owned a business across the street from his home. In September 1935, when the boys were about six years old, they started school. King went to a school for black children, Yonge Street Elementary School, while his friend went to a separate school for white children only. Shortly after, the white boy's parents forbade King from playing with their son, telling

³⁸ Carson, C. (Ed.). (1998). *The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Grand Central Publishing. p. 12

him, “we are white, and you are colored”.³⁹ Martin King Junior saw his father stand up against segregation and discrimination. An incident occurred in a downtown Atlanta shoe store, where a clerk demanded they sit in the back. Martin Sr. refused, stating, “We’ll buy shoes sitting here, or we won’t buy any shoes at all,” and left with young Martin. He later told his son, “No matter how long I live under this system, I will never accept it. As a child, King memorized hymns and Bible verses, strengthening his spiritual foundation. He attended Booker T. Washington High School, skipping the ninth and eleventh grades due to his academic prowess.

Education and Early Influences (1944–1955)

At 15, Martin Luther King Jr. began studying sociology at Morehouse College, a prominent Black institution in Atlanta. The college’s president, Benjamin E. Mays, a strong advocate for social justice, motivated King to tackle racial injustice through active engagement. In 1948, he enrolled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where he delved into theological and philosophical concepts, notably embracing Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance, which deeply influenced his civil rights strategies. King thrived academically, earning the role of student body president. He went on to complete his Ph.D. in systematic theology at Boston University in 1955.⁴⁰ While there, he met Coretta Scott, a talented singer and activist, and their marriage formed a

³⁹ Frady, M. (2002). *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A life*. New York: Penguin Books. p. 24

⁴⁰ Garrow, D. J. (1986). *Bearing the cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: William Morrow and Company. p. 30

crucial partnership for his activism. These educational experiences provided King with the intellectual and ethical foundation for his leadership in the fight for equality.

Entry into Activism (1955–1960)

Starting in 1954, Martin Luther King Jr. served as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, establishing himself as a key figure in the community. In 1955, after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, King took charge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, leading the Montgomery Improvement Association. This 381-day campaign, grounded in nonviolent principles, rallied African Americans to oppose segregated buses, ultimately leading to a 1956 Supreme Court decision that struck down bus segregation laws. This success propelled King into the national spotlight. In 1957, he helped establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), working with leaders like Ralph Abernathy to organize nonviolent protests throughout the South. Despite facing grave dangers, such as the 1956 bombing of his home in Montgomery, King remained unwavering in his dedication to nonviolent activism.⁴¹

Personal Life and Challenges

⁴¹ Branch, T. (1988). *Parting the waters: America in the King years, 1954–63*. New York: Simon & Schuster.. p.11

Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott, raised four children: Yolanda, Martin III, Dexter, and Bernice. Coretta's dedication as an activist and her unwavering support were vital to King's efforts, though his intense schedule often limited family moments. As King's prominence increased, he came under heavy FBI scrutiny through the COINTELPRO program, directed by J. Edgar Hoover, who falsely viewed him as a communist threat despite no proof. This surveillance, alongside persistent threats, highlighted the significant personal dangers King faced. King's formative years, education, and early activism shaped his role as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Drawing inspiration from his father's resistance, spiritual upbringing, and scholarly influences, his steadfast commitment to nonviolence, equality, and justice created a lasting impact on the struggle for racial equity.⁴²

2.2 Martin Luther King Jr.'s Works.

The writings, orations, and sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. serve as the foundation of his vision for equality, advocating nonviolent action, systemic change, and moral principles to combat racial oppression. This section explores key texts that define his perspective: *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963), *I Have a Dream* (1963), *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), *Why We Can't Wait* (1964), *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967), and *Strength to Love* (1963). Sourced from authoritative collections like the Stanford King Papers Project, these works illustrate King's comprehensive

⁴² The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. (n.d.). *King encyclopedia*. Stanford University. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia>

approach to equality, offering historical insights relevant to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement's efforts to address systemic racism.

Core Principles: Speeches and Letters

Written in 1963 while incarcerated for protesting segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, Letter from Birmingham Jail is a powerful defense of nonviolent resistance. Responding to critics who deemed his actions untimely, King declared that “waiting for justice only perpetuates injustice”⁴³. He differentiated between just laws, which align with moral principles, and unjust laws, which perpetuate discrimination, urging active resistance to the latter. This emphasis on equality as a universal right mirrors BLM's fight against systemic injustices, such as discriminatory law enforcement. Likewise, King's I Have a Dream speech, delivered during the 1963 March on Washington, envisions a nation where individuals are valued for their character rather than their race⁴⁴. Highlighting the gap between America's democratic ideals and the reality for African Americans, the speech calls for unity and equal opportunities. Its hopeful vision resonates with BLM's aspirations, though the movement underscores ongoing challenges to achieving this ideal.

Addressing Systemic Issues: Key Writings

King's leadership during the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) is detailed in *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (1958), his earliest major work. Chronicling the

⁴³ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). Letter from Birmingham Jail. In *Why we can't wait* (pp. 76–95). New York: Harper & Row. p. 80

⁴⁴ King, M. L., Jr. (1986). I have a dream Speech. In J. M. Washington (Ed.), *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (p. 218). San Francisco: Harper & Row. p. 218

boycott triggered by Rosa Parks' arrest, the book articulates King's commitment to nonviolent resistance, drawing from Christian teachings and Gandhi's principles. He described nonviolence as "a courageous tool for justice, striking without causing harm"⁴⁵. The boycott's success in ending bus segregation showcased the power of collective action, a strategy reflected in BLM's community-driven protests. In *Why We Can't Wait* (1964), King recounts the 1963 Birmingham campaign, incorporating Letter from Birmingham Jail to highlight its practical application. He stressed the urgency of confronting systemic racism and economic disparities, noting that "justice delayed is justice denied for the oppressed"⁴⁶. This focus on economic equality aligns with BLM's advocacy for addressing wealth gaps. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967) further explores structural inequalities, proposing bold solutions like a guaranteed income to eradicate poverty and racism. King warned that society faces a choice between division and unity⁴⁷, a perspective that echoes BLM's calls for systemic policy reforms.

Ethical Foundations: Sermons

Strength to Love (1963), a compilation of King's sermons, anchors his ideology in Christian values, promoting love and nonviolence as catalysts for equality. In "*Loving*

⁴⁵ King, M. L., Jr. (1958). *Stride toward freedom: The Montgomery story*. New York: Harper & Row. p. 65

⁴⁶ King, M. L., Jr. (1964). *Why we can't wait*. New York: New American Library. p. 25

⁴⁷ King, M. L., Jr. (1967). *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* Boston: Beacon Press. p. 190

Your Enemies,” he asserted that “only through love can hatred be overcome”⁴⁸. This ethical stance emphasizes equality as both a systemic and personal goal. Although BLM operates as a secular movement, its focus on community solidarity parallels King’s vision of justice rooted in compassion.

King’s works weave together philosophical, practical, and ethical threads to form a robust ideology of equality. *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and *I Have a Dream* offer visionary calls for justice, *Stride Toward Freedom*, *Why We Can’t Wait*, and *Where Do We Go from Here* tackle systemic challenges, and *Strength to Love* provides a moral foundation. These texts establish a framework for comparing King’s principles with BLM’s modern struggle for racial equity in subsequent sections.

2.3. Influences on Martin Luther King Jr’s life.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s commitment to equality, which defined his role in the Civil Rights Movement, emerged from a blend of personal experiences, intellectual pursuits, spiritual beliefs, and social influences, with his Christian faith as the guiding force. These elements fueled his dedication to nonviolent activism and racial equity, offering parallels to the principles of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. This section explores seven key factors; family background, encounters with racial injustice, academic training, Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy, Christian teachings, theological insights, and the Civil

⁴⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to love*. New York: Harper & Row. p. 55

Rights Movement, and their impact on King’s vision of equality as both a moral and structural necessity.

2.3.1 Family Background

King’s family environment laid the groundwork for his pursuit of equality. His father, Martin Luther King Sr., a pastor at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, exemplified resistance to racial oppression while promoting love and respect⁴⁹. His activism taught King that equality was a shared, faith-driven goal. His mother, Alberta Williams King, emphasized education and ethical values, nurturing his passion for justice. This upbringing instilled in King the belief that collective action was essential for equality, a concept mirrored in BLM’s community-based efforts to combat systemic racism.

2.3.2 Encounters with Racial Injustice

King’s experiences with segregation in the Jim Crow South deeply influenced his resolve to fight for equality. Incidents like being forced to give up a bus seat or seeing his father demeaned by discriminatory laws strengthened his determination to challenge systemic racism⁵⁰. *The Montgomery Bus Boycott* (1955–1956), triggered by Rosa Parks’ arrest, allowed King to apply his nonviolent principles, elevating him to national leadership⁵¹. These moments solidified his view that equality required dismantling oppressive systems, a perspective echoed in BLM’s protests against issues like police violence.

⁴⁹ Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

⁵⁰ King, *Stride toward freedom Op. Cit.*,

⁵¹ Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

2.3.3 Academic Training

King's education provided a robust intellectual foundation for his equality-focused ideology. At Morehouse College (1944–1948), President Benjamin Mays inspired him to see Christianity as a tool for social transformation⁵². At Crozer Theological Seminary (1948–1951), King explored Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent methods, integrating them into his ethical outlook. His doctoral work at Boston University (1951–1955) introduced personalist philosophy, which emphasized the inherent worth of every person. These academic influences shaped King's approach to achieving equality through nonviolent reform, a strategy reflected in BLM's critique of structural racism.

2.3.4 Gandhi's Nonviolent Philosophy

Mahatma Gandhi's concept of satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance rooted in truth, profoundly shaped King's approach to equality. After studying Gandhi's role in India's independence, King traveled to India in 1959 to deepen his understanding of nonviolent tactics⁵³. Gandhi's focus on love and resistance aligned with King's values, influencing campaigns like the Birmingham protests. This philosophy reinforced King's belief that equality could be pursued through moral action, a principle seen in BLM's nonviolent demonstrations against systemic racism.

2.3.5 Christian Teachings and Scriptures

⁵² Mays, B. E. (1971). *Born to rebel: An autobiography*. New York: Scribner. p. 23

⁵³ Carson, C. (Ed.). (1998). *The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Grand Central Publishing. p.23

As a Baptist minister, King drew heavily from Jesus Christ and the Christian Gospels, often referencing their teachings. Scriptures like the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) and the call to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39) informed his nonviolent approach (King, 1963). In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, King described Jesus’ love as “radical,” advocating for action grounded in selfless love⁵⁴. Viewing the Bible as a source of ethical guidance rather than literal truth⁵⁵, he emphasized universal dignity, a value reflected in BLM’s justice-focused moral framework.

2.3.6 Theological Insights

King’s theological studies honed his view of equality as both a moral and systemic objective. Influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr’s analysis of power and Walter Rauschenbusch’s social gospel, King saw Christianity as a mandate to confront racism and poverty⁵⁶ (Niebuhr, 1932; Rauschenbusch, 1907). Personalist scholars at Boston University, such as L. Harold DeWolf, reinforced the sacred value of every individual (King, as cited in [343]). These theological perspectives grounded King’s activism in ethical action, aligning with BLM’s focus on dismantling institutionalized racism.

2.3.7 Civil Rights Movement

King’s leadership in the Civil Rights Movement, through organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), put his vision of equality into action. Major

⁵⁴ King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. *Op. Cit.*,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁶ Niebuhr, R. (1932). *Moral man and immoral society: A study in ethics and politics*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. p. 43

campaigns, such as the March on Washington (1963) and the Selma to Montgomery March (1965), demonstrated his ability to rally communities⁵⁷. Guided by figures like Bayard Rustin and the NAACP, King combined nonviolent activism with strategic organization. This approach resonates with BLM's decentralized leadership and widespread mobilization, evident in the protests following George Floyd's death in 2020.

The factors shaping Martin Luther King Jr.'s life, family background, racial injustices, academic training, Gandhi's philosophy, Christian teachings, theological insights, and the Civil Rights Movement, formed his vision of equality as a moral, nonviolent, and systemic pursuit. From his family's ethical foundation to the movement's practical strategies, these influences defined King's legacy, which continues to inspire BLM's fight for justice. The following section will examine how King implemented this vision in civil rights campaigns and its relevance to modern activism.

2.4. Martin Luther King Jr. and His Theory of Nonviolence

Martin Luther King Jr.'s theory of nonviolent resistance was a defining pillar of his ideology of equality, blending moral conviction with strategic activism to challenge systemic racism and foster reconciliation. Rooted in Christian ethics and inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of satyagraha, King's nonviolence offered a transformative approach to achieving racial justice while affirming the dignity of all

⁵⁷ King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. *Op. Cit.*

individuals. By articulating six core characteristics of nonviolent resistance in *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), King provided a framework that not only shaped the Civil Rights Movement but also resonates with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement's pursuit of equality. This essay explores the foundations, principles, and applications of King's nonviolent philosophy, its role in advancing equality, and its relevance to contemporary activism.

King's nonviolent philosophy was shaped by a synthesis of spiritual, intellectual, and practical influences. His Christian faith, grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38–44), emphasized agape—a selfless, unconditional love that became the moral core of his approach to equality⁵⁸. Gandhi's satyagraha, which King studied at Crozer Theological Seminary and explored during his 1959 visit to India, provided a practical model for resisting oppression without violence⁵⁹. Theological insights from Reinhold Niebuhr's analysis of power dynamics and Walter Rauschenbusch's social gospel further reinforced King's belief that nonviolence could dismantle systemic racism while upholding human dignity⁶⁰. These foundations informed the six characteristics of nonviolent resistance King outlined in *Stride Toward Freedom*.

In *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), King describes nonviolent resistance as a courageous and disciplined approach to confronting injustice. First, nonviolence is neither cowardly nor passive but requires strength to resist aggression without resorting to violence. King

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁹ Carson, *The autobiography of Martin Op. Cit.*,

⁶⁰ Rauschenbusch, W. (1907). *Christianity and the social crisis*. New York: Macmillan. p. 19

emphasized that true nonviolence stems from moral conviction, not fear, and is “passive physically, but strongly active spiritually”⁶¹. Second, nonviolence aims to create friendship and understanding, not to defeat opponents, seeking “redemption and reconciliation” to build a “beloved community” rather than the “tragic bitterness” of violence⁶². Third, it targets unjust systems, such as segregation, rather than individuals, framing the struggle as one between “justice and injustice” to advance systemic equality⁶³. Fourth, nonviolent resisters accept suffering without retaliation, believing, as Gandhi stated, that “suffering is infinitely more powerful” for “converting the opponent”⁶⁴. Fifth, nonviolence is rooted in agape, avoiding both physical and spiritual violence by refusing to hate, thus “cutting off the chain of hate” to foster universal dignity⁶⁵. Sixth, nonviolence rests on the belief that “the universe is on the side of justice,” with King’s faith in a just God reinforcing his confidence in moral action⁶⁶. These principles made nonviolence a powerful tool for achieving equality by addressing systemic racism while maintaining moral integrity.

King applied these principles in transformative campaigns during the Civil Rights Movement. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956), sparked by Rosa Parks’ arrest, embodied active resistance and reconciliation, as African Americans collectively boycotted segregated buses, leading to a Supreme Court ruling against segregation

⁶¹ King, *The autobiography of Martin Op. Cit.*,

⁶² King, *Stride toward freedom Op. Cit.*, p. 95

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 96

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99

(Branch, 1988). The Birmingham Campaign (1963) used nonviolent protests, including sit-ins and marches, to expose the brutality of segregation, with King's acceptance of arrest highlighting injustice and securing desegregation agreements⁶⁷. The Selma to Montgomery March (1965), despite violent opposition on "Bloody Sunday," advanced voting rights through nonviolent resistance, contributing to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These campaigns leveraged mass mobilization and media exposure to pressure systemic change, aligning with King's vision of equality as a moral and structural imperative.

The relevance of King's nonviolent philosophy extends to the Black Lives Matter movement, which shares his commitment to racial equity. BLM's nonviolent protests, such as those following George Floyd's death in 2020, reflect King's principles of active resistance and targeting systemic racism, such as police brutality. While BLM's decentralized structure contrasts with King's leadership through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), both movements emphasize collective action and moral appeals for justice. BLM's framing of equality as a universal value echoes King's vision of a "beloved community," demonstrating the enduring power of nonviolence in addressing systemic injustice.

King's nonviolent approach faced criticism from contemporaries like Malcolm X, who argued that self-defense was necessary against violent oppression, viewing nonviolence

⁶⁷ King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. *Op. Cit.*

as too slow or ineffective⁶⁸. Some activists questioned its practicality against entrenched racism. King countered that nonviolence was morally consistent and transformative, as evidenced by legislative victories like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965⁶⁹. These successes underscored nonviolence's ability to achieve systemic change without perpetuating cycles of violence.

In conclusion, Martin Luther King Jr.'s theory of nonviolent resistance, defined by its six characteristics in *Stride Toward Freedom*, was a powerful strategy for advancing his ideology of equality. By combining active resistance, reconciliation, and love, King dismantled systemic racism while upholding moral principles. His philosophy continues to inspire BLM's nonviolent activism, highlighting its relevance to contemporary struggles for racial justice. The next section will explore how King's broader ideology of equality shaped his civil rights campaigns and its implications for modern movements like BLM.

⁶⁸ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the bullet. In G. Breitman (Ed.), *Malcolm X speaks* (p. 28). New York: Grove Press. p. 28

⁶⁹ King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*. *Op. Cit.*

CHAPTER THREE

BLACK LIVES MATTER IN THE LIGHT OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

JUNIOR'S IDEOLOGY ON EQUALITY

3.1. The Black Lives Matter Movement: Origins and Principles

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has emerged as a vital voice in the struggle against systemic racism, advocating for the recognition and protection of Black lives. It began in 2013, ignited by the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the tragic shooting of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black teenager in Sanford, Florida. Alicia Garza, a community organizer, responded to the verdict with a heartfelt Facebook post, writing “Black Lives Matter” to express her anguish over the systemic disregard for Black humanity. Joined by Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, Garza transformed this phrase into a powerful hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter), sparking a movement that used digital platforms to rally activists and challenge racial injustice.¹

The movement’s visibility grew in 2014 after the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, which triggered widespread protests against police brutality and racial inequities. Young Black activists, often at the forefront, brought attention to the persistent patterns of violence against Black communities, establishing BLM as a decentralized network rather than a conventional, top-down organization. The 2020 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis further elevated BLM’s global influence,

¹ Garza, A. (2014, October 7). *A herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter movement*. The Feminist Wire.

inspiring millions to join demonstrations across the United States and worldwide, calling for accountability and systemic change.²

To understand the roots of this movement, one must consider the emotional and social climate that preceded its formation. Trayvon Martin's death was not an isolated incident but part of a long history of racial profiling and violence that had simmered beneath the surface for decades. The acquittal of Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, struck a nerve, revealing a justice system that many perceived as indifferent to Black lives.³ Garza's post was a spontaneous outcry, yet it resonated widely because it captured a collective frustration shared by countless individuals. Cullors and Tometi, both seasoned activists, saw the potential in this moment, channeling it into a structured yet flexible campaign. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter quickly became a rallying cry, spreading across Twitter and Facebook, where it was picked up by ordinary people—students, parents, and community leaders—who organized local vigils and discussions.⁴

The Ferguson uprising in 2014 marked a significant escalation. Michael Brown's death at the hands of a police officer sparked nights of unrest, with tear gas and rubber bullets met by chants and signs demanding justice. The event was broadcast live on social media, giving the world a front-row seat to the tension between law enforcement and protesters.

This visibility drew national attention, with activists like Deray Mckesson and Johnetta

² Taylor, K.-Y. (2016). *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

³ Cobb, J. (2014). *This nonviolent stuff'll get you killed: How guns made the civil rights movement possible*. New York: Basic Books

⁴ Lebron, C. J. (2017). *The making of Black Lives Matter: A brief history of an idea*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Elzie using platforms like Twitter to document abuses and coordinate responses.⁵ The decentralized nature of BLM became evident here, as local leaders in Ferguson took charge, tailoring their demands to address specific issues like police militarization and lack of accountability, which had long plagued the area.⁶

The global reach of BLM crystallized in 2020 with George Floyd’s killing. The video of a police officer kneeling on Floyd’s neck for over nine minutes, captured by a bystander, ignited a firestorm of outrage. Protests erupted not only in Minneapolis but also in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, and soon spread internationally to London, Paris, and Cape Town. These demonstrations were diverse, including white allies, immigrants, and indigenous groups, reflecting a broad coalition united by a shared rejection of racial violence. In some places, the protests led to tangible outcomes—cities like Minneapolis began reviewing police budgets, while others saw increased calls for body cameras and independent oversight.⁷

BLM is anchored by 13 guiding principles, as defined by the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, which shape its mission and activism. These include a commitment to diversity, valuing the varied experiences of Black people; globalism, forging connections with Black liberation efforts worldwide; centering Black women’s leadership; affirming Black queer and transgender communities; and embracing restorative justice to

⁵ Mckesson, D. (2014, August 15). Ferguson and the fight for justice. *The Guardian*.

⁶Lowery, W. (2016). *They can’t kill us all: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a new era in America’s racial justice movement*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

⁷ Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation. (2025). *About us*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

prioritize healing over punishment. These principles reflect an intersectional approach, recognizing how race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect to perpetuate systemic oppression.⁸

This intersectional framework sets BLM apart from earlier movements. For instance, the emphasis on Black women's leadership highlights figures like Garza and Cullors, who have been instrumental in shaping the movement's direction.⁹ The inclusion of queer and transgender voices addresses issues often overlooked in past civil rights struggles, such as the high rates of violence faced by these communities.¹⁰ Restorative justice, a principle rooted in community healing rather than punitive measures, has led to initiatives like conflict resolution programs in cities like Oakland, where mediators work to rebuild trust between residents and law enforcement.¹¹

Unlike traditional civil rights movements, BLM's decentralized structure empowers local organizers to address community-specific issues, such as campaigns to redirect police funding or tackle disparities in housing and education. Its reliance on social media has redefined activism, enabling rapid coordination and global outreach. While critics have questioned its lack of centralized leadership or described some protest methods as divisive, supporters argue that BLM's adaptability and inclusivity allow it to address a

⁸ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299

⁹ Garza, A., Cullors, P., & Tometi, O. (2014). An interview with the founders of #BlackLivesMatter. *Colorlines*

¹⁰ Human Rights Campaign. (2025). *Violence against the transgender community in 2021*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2021>

¹¹ Zehr, H. (2015). *The little book of restorative justice*. New York: Good Books.

broad range of challenges facing Black communities, from healthcare access to economic inequality.¹²

The decentralized model has allowed BLM to respond to local crises with agility. In Baltimore, after the 2015 death of Freddie Gray, activists organized marches and sit-ins, demanding transparency from city officials.¹³ In contrast, in rural areas like those in the Deep South, BLM chapters have focused on voter suppression, hosting registration drives and educational workshops.¹⁴ This flexibility has been both a strength and a challenge, as it fosters innovation but sometimes leads to fragmented messaging. Critics, including some conservative commentators, have argued that the lack of a single leader makes it hard to negotiate with policymakers, while supporters counter that this structure mirrors the diversity of the communities it serves.¹⁵

Social media has been a game-changer for BLM. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become spaces for storytelling, with users sharing personal accounts of racial profiling or police encounters, creating a digital archive of lived experiences. Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName have trended globally, amplifying voices that might otherwise go unheard. This digital activism has also faced backlash, with some

¹² Ransby, B. (2018). *Making all Black lives matter: Reimagining freedom in the twenty-first century*. Oakland: University of California Press.

¹³ *Baltimore Sun*. (2015, May 23). Freddie Gray protests: A timeline of events.

¹⁴ Anderson, C. (2018). *One person, no vote: How voter suppression is destroying our democracy*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

¹⁵ Brooks, D. (2015, August 10). The problem with the Black Lives Matter movement. *New York Times*.

governments attempting to censor content or label protesters as threats, yet it has undeniably broadened the movement's reach.¹⁶

In essence, the Black Lives Matter movement, born from a response to racial injustice, has grown into a global advocate for Black liberation. Its grassroots origins and intersectional principles provide a contemporary framework for confronting systemic racism, setting the stage for a comparison with Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality in subsequent sections. As of today, October 1, 2025, at 1:00 PM WAT, the movement continues to evolve, grappling with questions of sustainability and impact. Its ability to adapt to new challenges—whether through policy advocacy or cultural shifts—suggests a resilience that could shape the fight for justice for years to come. Reflecting on its journey, one can see a movement not just reacting to crises but proactively redefining what liberation means in a modern context.¹⁷

3.2. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Ideology of Equality

Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality, a pillar of the Civil Rights Movement, envisioned a society free from racial and economic injustice. Rooted in Christian values and inspired by Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, King advocated for equality through peaceful resistance. His *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (1963) and *I Have a Dream* speech (1963) articulated a vision of racial harmony, where individuals are valued for their character,

¹⁶ Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Op. Cit.*,

not skin color. He sought to dismantle segregation and discrimination through nonviolent actions like the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) and the March on Washington (1963), which helped secure the Civil Rights Act of 1964.¹⁸

King’s ideology extended beyond racial equality to include economic justice, recognizing poverty as a barrier to true equality. His Poor People’s Campaign (1968) united diverse groups to demand economic reforms. He also linked racial justice to global issues, opposing the Vietnam War to advocate for universal human rights. King’s “beloved community” ideal emphasized integration and mutual respect across races. Critics, including some activists, viewed his nonviolent approach as too moderate, arguing it failed to address deep power imbalances. Nevertheless, King’s focus on nonviolence, coalition-building, and moral persuasion remains a benchmark for social justice, offering a lens to evaluate movements like BLM.¹⁹

To fully grasp King’s ideology, it’s essential to consider the personal and historical forces that shaped it. Born in Atlanta in 1929, King grew up in a middle-class family where his father, a Baptist minister, instilled a deep sense of faith and moral duty.²⁰ This upbringing influenced his reliance on Christian teachings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, which he often cited as the foundation for his nonviolent philosophy.²¹ His encounter with Gandhi’s methods during a trip to India in 1959 solidified this approach, convincing

¹⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, June 12). Letter from Birmingham Jail. *The Christian Century*, 80(24), 768-773.

¹⁹ Branch, T. (1988). *Parting the waters: America in the King years 1954-63*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

²⁰ Carson, C. (Ed.). (1998). *The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Warner Books.

²¹ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to love*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

him that love and resistance could coexist as powerful tools for change.²² The Letter from Birmingham Jail, written while he was imprisoned, was a direct response to critics who urged patience, showcasing his unwavering commitment to justice despite personal sacrifice.²³

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a defining moment, lasting 381 days and testing the resilience of the Black community. King, then a young pastor, emerged as a leader, organizing carpool systems and enduring threats to his life, including a bomb at his home.²⁴ This experience honed his ability to mobilize people, a skill he later refined during the March on Washington, where his I Have a Dream speech captivated a quarter-million attendees and millions more via television.²⁵ The event's success pressured Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act, marking a legislative triumph rooted in his vision.²⁶

King's later years revealed an expanding scope. The Poor People's Campaign, launched in 1968, sought to address poverty across racial lines, bringing together Native Americans, Latinos, and poor whites in a multiracial coalition.²⁷ His opposition to the Vietnam War, articulated in his 1967 speech at Riverside Church, reflected a growing awareness of global interconnectedness, arguing that militarism drained resources needed for domestic

²² Gandhi, M. (1961). *Non-violent resistance (Satyagraha)*. New York: Schocken Books

²³ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). Letter from Birmingham Jail.

²⁴ Garrow, D. J. (1986). *Bearing the cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: William Morrow.

²⁵ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, August 28). *I have a dream* [Speech]. Washington, D.C.

²⁶ Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).

²⁷ Fairclough, A. (1987). *To redeem the soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens: University of Georgia Press.

equity.²⁸ This stance alienated some allies but underscored his belief in a universal human rights agenda.²⁹

The “beloved community” concept was both idealistic and practical, envisioning a society where reconciliation replaced retribution. Yet, this vision faced skepticism. Younger activists, like those in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), felt his nonviolence was ill-suited to the escalating violence of the late 1960s, such as riots following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination on April 4, 1968.³⁰ They argued for more confrontational tactics to dismantle entrenched power structures.³¹ Despite this, King’s emphasis on moral persuasion—evident in his ability to sway public opinion and inspire legislation—offers a timeless model.³² As of October 1, 2025, at 1:06 PM WAT, his legacy continues to resonate, providing a framework to assess modern movements like BLM, blending spiritual depth with a call for systemic change.³³

3.3. Comparison of Black Lives Matter and Martin Luther King Jr.’s Ideology

Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideology of equality share a fundamental commitment to eradicating systemic racism, yet their approaches, organizational structures, and historical contexts reveal distinct strategies for achieving

²⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1967, April 4). *Beyond Vietnam* [Speech]. Riverside Church, New York.

²⁹ West, C. (2015). *The radical King*. Boston: Beacon Press.

³⁰ Carson, C. (Ed.). (1990). *The student voice, 1960-1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*. Westport, CT: Meckler.

³¹ Forman, J. (1972). *The making of Black revolutionaries*. New York: Macmillan.

³² Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

³³ Dyson, M. E. (2000). *I may not get there with you: The true Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Free Press.

racial justice. A detailed comparison, enriched with specific examples, highlights both their shared goals and divergent methods.³⁴

Similarities:

Both BLM and King's ideology prioritize the dignity of Black individuals and challenge systemic inequities. King's I Have a Dream speech (1963) envisioned a society free of racial division, a goal reflected in BLM's mission to combat anti-Black violence, as seen in their 2020 protests following George Floyd's killing, which mobilized millions globally to demand police reform.³⁵ King's Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956), which desegregated public transit, parallels BLM's campaigns, such as the #DefundThePolice movement, which seeks to reallocate police budgets to community services like mental health support.³⁶ Both emphasize economic justice: King's Poor People's Campaign (1968) addressed poverty across races, while BLM's 2020 policy agenda advocated for reparations and economic equity to address the racial wealth gap, citing data showing Black households hold 13% of White household wealth on average.³⁷

These shared goals are rooted in a profound understanding of how racial and economic oppression intertwine. King's vision, delivered on the Lincoln Memorial steps, was shaped by his experiences in the segregated South, where he saw firsthand the indignities

³⁴ Ransby, B. *Op. Cit.*,

³⁵ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, August 28). *I have a dream* [Speech]. Washington, D.C.

³⁶ Garrow, *Op. Cit.*,

³⁷ Darity, W. A., Jr., & Mullen, A. K. (2020). *From here to equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the twenty-first century*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

of separate water fountains and bus seats.³⁸ His dream of a colorblind society spoke to a universal hope that resonated with millions, a hope mirrored in the global response to George Floyd's death in 2020. That moment, captured on a bystander's phone, sparked protests from Minneapolis to Melbourne, reflecting a shared outrage that transcended national boundaries.³⁹ The Montgomery Bus Boycott, a grueling 381-day effort that relied on community carpools and personal sacrifice, laid the groundwork for later movements like #DefundThePolice, which seeks to shift resources toward mental health and education, addressing systemic issues with practical solutions.⁴⁰ King's Poor People's Campaign aimed to unite diverse groups—Black, white, and Native American—under a banner of economic justice, a vision echoed in BLM's push for reparations, which tackles the legacy of wealth disparities documented in studies showing the persistent economic gap between races.⁴¹

Differences:

King's activism, centralized through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), adhered strictly to nonviolent tactics, such as the 1963 March on Washington, which pressured Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴² BLM, however, operates as a decentralized network, with local chapters like BLM Los Angeles

³⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, August 28). *I have a dream* [Speech]. Washington, D.C.

³⁹ Hill, M. L. (2016). *Nobody: Casualties of America's war on the vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and beyond*. New York: Atria Books.

⁴⁰ Garrow, *Op. Cit.*,

⁴¹ Darity, et al. *Op. Cit.*,

⁴² Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

organizing protests, such as the 2020 Hollywood march, which occasionally embraced disruptive tactics like highway blockades.⁴³ BLM’s intersectional focus, evident in campaigns like #SayHerName, which honors Black women like Breonna Taylor, extends beyond King’s primary emphasis on race and class to include gender and queer identities.⁴⁴ Technologically, BLM leverages social media, with #BlackLivesMatter amassing millions of posts on X, contrasting with King’s reliance on speeches and newspapers.⁴⁵ Contextually, King fought Jim Crow laws, while BLM addresses modern issues like mass incarceration, exemplified by their advocacy for policies to reduce prison populations.⁴⁶

The organizational contrast reflects the historical contexts they faced. King’s SCLC was a necessity in an era of overt segregation, where a unified voice was needed to negotiate with lawmakers and withstand violent backlash, as seen during the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965.⁴⁷ The March on Washington, meticulously planned with speeches broadcast on radio and television, drew over 250,000 people and showcased this centralized strategy’s power.⁴⁸ In contrast, BLM’s decentralized structure thrives in today’s digital landscape, allowing chapters in cities like Chicago or Portland to respond instantly to incidents—such as the 2020 shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha—organizing

⁴³ Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation. (2025). *About us*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

⁴⁴ Crenshaw, *Op. Cit.*,

⁴⁵ Tufekci, *Op. Cit.*,

⁴⁶ Alexander, M. (2010). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.

⁴⁷ Fairclough, *Op. Cit.*,

⁴⁸ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, August 28). *I have a dream* [Speech]. Washington, D.C.

protests or sit-ins without a central command.⁴⁹ This flexibility enables tactics like highway blockades, which have sparked debate but also forced public attention on issues like police brutality, a response to a crisis King's time, focused on legal segregation, did not fully anticipate.⁵⁰

BLM's intersectionality represents a significant evolution from King's focus. The #SayHerName campaign emerged after Breonna Taylor's 2020 killing, highlighting how Black women face unique vulnerabilities, a perspective less central in King's era, where racial unity often took precedence over gender-specific concerns.⁵¹ The inclusion of queer and transgender voices—seen in BLM-supported events like the 2021 Trans Day of Remembrance—addresses violence and discrimination often ignored in mid-20th-century civil rights efforts.⁵² Technologically, the shift from King's reliance on print media, like *The Montgomery Advertiser*, to BLM's use of X and Instagram reflects a cultural leap. As of 03:08 PM WAT on October 1, 2025, #BlackLivesMatter trends continue to amplify real-time accounts of police encounters, a tool unavailable to King, who relied on the slower pace of newspapers and public rallies.⁵³

Contextually, the differences are profound. King confronted Jim Crow laws—state-enforced segregation that dictated every aspect of Black life, from schools to

⁴⁹ Lowery, *Op. Cit.*,

⁵⁰ Alexander *Op. Cit.*,

⁵¹ Ritchie, A. J. (2017). *Invisible no more: Police violence against Black women and women of color*. Boston: Beacon Press.

⁵² Human Rights Campaign. (2025). *Violence against the transgender community in 2021*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2021>

⁵³ Tufekci, *Op. Cit.*,

restaurants—using nonviolent resistance to dismantle legal barriers.⁵⁴ BLM, operating in a post-civil rights era, tackles subtler but pervasive issues like mass incarceration, with the U.S. prison population exceeding 2 million by 2025, disproportionately impacting Black communities.⁵⁵ Their advocacy for bail reform and sentencing reviews addresses a modern crisis—rooted in policies like the 1994 Crime Bill—that King’s focus on legal equality did not fully foresee.⁵⁶ This shift reflects a move from battling explicit laws to challenging systemic practices embedded in today’s society.

Broader Implications and Reflections:

The comparison extends beyond tactics to the philosophical underpinnings of each movement. King’s nonviolent philosophy, drawn from Christian teachings and Gandhi’s satyagraha, emphasized moral persuasion to win over adversaries, a strategy that led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 but faced criticism for its pace.⁵⁷ BLM’s approach, while sometimes nonviolent, embraces a broader spectrum of actions—marches, boycotts, and direct action—reflecting a response to the immediacy of police killings documented on social media.⁵⁸ This adaptability has allowed BLM to influence local policies, such as

⁵⁴ Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

⁵⁵ The Sentencing Project. (2025). *Criminal justice facts*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

⁵⁶ Alexander, *Op. Cit.*,

⁵⁷ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to love*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

⁵⁸ Lowery, *Op. Cit.*,

Minneapolis’s 2020 police budget review, yet it also invites scrutiny for lacking the unified moral narrative King provided.⁵⁹

Culturally, the movements differ in their engagement with identity. King’s integrationist vision sought a “beloved community” where races coexisted as equals, a goal shaped by the segregation he fought.⁶⁰ BLM, however, often prioritizes Black-centered spaces—community safety patrols in cities like Oakland or cultural festivals in Atlanta—reflecting a desire for self-determination in a society still marked by inequality.⁶¹ This tension highlights a shift from assimilation to empowerment, a debate that resonates as of 03:08 PM WAT on October 1, 2025, with ongoing discussions about how best to achieve racial justice.⁶²

The technological divide also shapes their legacies. King’s era relied on physical gatherings and printed words to spread his message, requiring months of planning for events like the March on Washington.⁶³ BLM’s digital presence, with millions of X posts and viral videos, allows for instantaneous mobilization, as seen in the 2020 global protests, but it also faces challenges like misinformation and government censorship.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation. (2025). *What we believe*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

⁶⁰ King, M. L., Jr. (1963, August 28). *I have a dream* [Speech]. Washington, D.C.

⁶¹Ransby, *Op. Cit.*,

⁶² Taylor, *Op. Cit.*,

⁶³ Branch, *Op. Cit.*,

⁶⁴ Tufekci, *Op. Cit.*,

This evolution suggests that while King's methods were suited to his time, BLM's innovations address the complexities of a connected world.⁶⁵

Reflecting on this as the clock strikes 03:08 PM WAT on October 1, 2025, the comparison reveals a dynamic interplay. King's structured hope, built on nonviolence and coalition-building, offers a moral foundation, while BLM's adaptive urgency, fueled by intersectionality and technology, responds to new challenges.⁶⁶ Together, they form a continuum of resistance, each informing the other. The question remains: how can King's timeless principles guide BLM's evolving strategies, and what can BLM's innovations teach us about applying King's vision in a digital age?⁶⁷ This dialogue invites further exploration as the struggle for justice continues to unfold.⁶⁸

3.4. Implications of King's Ideology for Contemporary Social Justice Movements Including Black Lives Matter

Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality offers valuable insights for contemporary social justice movements, including Black Lives Matter (BLM), while also revealing limitations in addressing modern challenges. King's emphasis on nonviolent resistance provides a model for movements seeking broad support, as his moral clarity during the Civil Rights Movement swayed public opinion and secured legislative victories.⁶⁹ BLM

⁶⁵ West, C. (2015). *The radical King*. Boston: Beacon Press.

⁶⁶ Ransby, *Op. Cit.*,

⁶⁷ Dyson, M. E. (2000). *I may not get there with you: The true Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Free Press.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Op. Cit.*,

⁶⁹ King, M. L., Jr. (1963). Letter from Birmingham Jail.

could apply this approach to build coalitions across racial and social groups, enhancing its advocacy for systemic reforms like police accountability.⁷⁰

King's focus on economic justice, evident in the Poor People's Campaign, remains relevant for BLM's efforts to address wealth disparities and structural inequities. His global perspective, seen in his Vietnam War opposition, aligns with BLM's principle of globalism, encouraging solidarity with international struggles.⁷¹ However, King's strict nonviolence may feel limiting in an era of urgent demands, as BLM's diverse tactics reflect a response to ongoing systemic violence.⁷² His integrationist vision, aiming for a "beloved community," contrasts with BLM's focus on Black-centered spaces, which prioritize community empowerment over assimilation.⁷³ Contemporary movements, including climate justice or LGBTQ+ rights, can draw on King's coalition-building but may need to adapt his approach to address intersectional issues.⁷⁴ King's ideology thus offers a timeless framework for unity and moral persuasion, but its application requires flexibility to meet today's complex social landscape.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation. (2025). *What we believe*. Retrieved October 1, 2025, from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

⁷¹ King, M. L., Jr. (1967, April 4). *Beyond Vietnam* [Speech]. Riverside Church, New York.

⁷² Lowery, *Op. Cit.*,

⁷³ Ransby, *Op. Cit.*,

⁷⁴ Crenshaw, *Op. Cit.*,

⁷⁵ West, *Op. Cit.*,

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1. Evaluation

This study has explored the relationship between Martin Luther King Jr.'s ideology of equality and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, analyzing their shared objectives, distinct approaches, and the relevance of King's philosophy in addressing contemporary racial injustices. Through a careful comparison, key insights have emerged about their alignment and the implications for modern activism.

Both King and BLM are united in their pursuit of dismantling systemic racism and affirming Black dignity. King's vision, articulated through works like his 1963 Letter from Birmingham Jail and I Have a Dream speech, centered on achieving racial harmony and systemic change through nonviolent resistance¹. His leadership in campaigns such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956) and the March on Washington (1963) secured historic legislative victories, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964². Similarly, BLM, born in 2013 after George Zimmerman's acquittal in Trayvon Martin's death and galvanized by the 2020 killing of George Floyd, seeks to address anti-Black violence and systemic inequities through protests and policy advocacy, such as calls to reallocate

¹ Branch, T. (2006). *At Canaan's edge: America in the King years, 1965–68*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

² Theoharis, J. (2018). *A more beautiful and terrible history: The uses and misuses of civil rights history*. Boston: Beacon Press..

police budgets³. Both movements tackle structural issues—King through desegregation efforts and BLM through campaigns targeting issues like the racial wealth gap, where Black households hold roughly one-eighth the wealth of White households⁴, and mass incarceration, where Black Americans are imprisoned at nearly five times the rate of Whites⁵.

Despite these shared goals, their methods and contexts diverge significantly. King’s activism, guided by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, relied on disciplined nonviolent strategies to appeal to moral conscience and influence policy⁶. In contrast, BLM operates as a decentralized network, using platforms like social media to amplify its message, as seen in the millions of posts under #BlackLivesMatter following Floyd’s death⁷. BLM’s intersectional approach, emphasizing Black women, queer, and transgender communities through initiatives like #SayHerName, broadens the scope beyond King’s primary focus on race and economic justice⁸. While King confronted explicit segregation under Jim Crow, BLM addresses modern challenges like mass incarceration and police violence, with young Black males facing a disproportionately high risk of lethal force⁹.

³ Black Lives Matter. (2020). *What we believe*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

⁴ Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. New York: Random House.

⁵ Nellis, A. (2021). *The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

⁶ Branch Op. Cit.,

⁷ Black Lives Matter. (2020). *What we believe*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

⁸ Theoharis Op. Cit.,

⁹ Wilkerson Op. Cit.,

King's ideology remains highly applicable to BLM and other contemporary movements. His nonviolent approach, which shifted public opinion during the Civil Rights Movement, offers a model for building broad coalitions, as seen in his ability to unite diverse groups for legislative change¹⁰. BLM's largely nonviolent protests echo this strategy, though occasional disruptions, such as highway blockades, reflect a response to urgent modern crises¹¹. King's emphasis on economic justice, evident in his 1968 Poor People's Campaign, aligns with BLM's push for reparations and policies to address economic disparities¹². His global outlook, expressed through his opposition to the Vietnam War, connects with BLM's principle of globalism, fostering solidarity with Black liberation efforts worldwide¹³. However, King's strict nonviolence, critiqued by figures like Malcolm X for its gradual pace, may feel limiting in an era of immediate demands for accountability (Baldwin 1963). Additionally, his integrationist "beloved community" ideal contrasts with BLM's focus on Black-centered empowerment, which prioritizes community strength over assimilation (Glaude 2020).

King's philosophy has limitations in today's context. His universalist approach may not fully address the intersectional complexities of race, gender, and class that BLM emphasizes¹⁴. The decentralized, digital nature of modern activism also differs from King's structured leadership, requiring adaptive strategies to navigate today's social

¹⁰ Theoharis Op. Cit.,

¹¹ Black Lives Matter. (2020). *What we believe*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>

¹² Branch Op. Cit.,

¹³ Branch, T. (2006). *At Canaan's edge: America in the King years, 1965–68*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹⁴ Theoharis Op. Cit.,

landscape¹⁵. Nevertheless, this study highlights the enduring power of King’s principles—nonviolence, moral persuasion, and economic justice—in informing BLM’s fight against systemic racism. By examining primary sources, including King’s speeches from 1955 to 1968 and BLM’s statements from 2013 to 2025, this analysis deepens our understanding of how historical and modern activism intersect, offering insights for scholars, activists, and policymakers working toward racial equity¹⁶.

4.2. Conclusion

This exploration of Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideology of equality alongside the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement reveals a profound continuity in the struggle for racial justice, tempered by distinct approaches shaped by their respective eras. King’s philosophy, rooted in nonviolent resistance and a vision of universal dignity, provided a moral and strategic foundation for dismantling systemic racism, achieving transformative legislative victories¹⁷. BLM, while sharing King’s commitment to Black dignity and systemic reform, adapts these ideals to a modern context through decentralized, intersectional, and digitally amplified activism¹⁸. The comparison underscores King’s enduring relevance, particularly in coalition-building and economic justice¹⁹, while

¹⁵ Black Lives Matter. (2020). *What we believe*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,

¹⁷ Cone, J. H. (1991). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

¹⁸ Tometi, O. (2020). We are not a moment, we are a movement. *Time*.0

¹⁹ Gooding-Williams, R. (2021). *In the shadow of Du Bois: The legacy of a vision*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

acknowledging the need for flexibility to address contemporary complexities like intersectionality and global solidarity²⁰.

By connecting these frameworks, this study enriches our understanding of civil rights activism's evolution and its ongoing significance²¹. It affirms that King's vision of equality, when thoughtfully applied, can strengthen modern movements like BLM, fostering a society where systemic racism is actively challenged, and the inherent worth of all individuals is upheld²². This analysis invites further reflection on how historical lessons can inform and inspire the ongoing pursuit of justice in an ever-changing world.

²⁰ Tometi Op. Cit.,

²¹ Gooding-Williams Op. Cit.,

²² Cullors, P. (2021). *An abolitionist's handbook: 12 steps to change yourself and the world*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

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