Faith in Action

How religious beliefs and communities shaped the struggle for rights

USH.C.7.1.G "Describe the influence of American religion and prominent religious leaders on civil rights and human rights activism (e.g., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Billy Graham, Malcolm X)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one religious belief or message linked to each leader, and circle an action it shaped. Number each belief-and-action pair 1, 2, or 3 to trace three paths to justice.

Three Paths to Justice

1. In 1955, Black residents of Montgomery, Alabama, stopped riding city buses to protest segregated seating. Local churches offered meeting places, money, and a network for spreading news. The young minister Martin Luther King Jr. helped lead the boycott. His Christian belief that every person had dignity supported his call for equal treatment; his teaching about loving opponents helped shape nonviolent protest. After the boycott, King helped form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which linked churches across the South. Religious communities did more than express sympathy: they helped people organize, stay committed, and press for changes in law.

2. Evangelist Billy Graham used a different kind of religious platform: revival meetings that drew huge crowds. He insisted on integrated seating at his crusades, challenging the custom of separating worshippers by race. At his 1957 New York crusade, Graham invited King to lead a prayer before the audience. That public invitation put a Black civil rights leader before a broad audience. Graham preached that all people were equal before God, yet he often favored changing hearts over joining marches or pushing specific civil rights laws. His example shows that religious leaders could oppose segregation while disagreeing about the best way to fight it.

3. Malcolm X challenged racism from another religious path. As a minister in the Nation of Islam, he argued that Black Americans should build independent institutions rather than rely on white leaders. He criticized the use of Christianity to excuse slavery and segregation. After leaving the Nation of Islam in 1964 and making a pilgrimage to Mecca, he embraced Sunni Islam and spoke more openly about working across racial lines. He also urged Americans to view racism as a human rights issue, not only a question of U.S. civil rights law. His changing beliefs shaped both whom he addressed and the scale of his demands.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did King's Christian beliefs and church networks each shape his civil rights activism?

2. How did Graham's religious message shape his stance on segregation, and how did his approach differ from joining protests?

3. How did Malcolm X's changing religious commitments affect his approach to racial justice?

4. How did King's and Graham's religious platforms help them reach people in different ways?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town in the 1960s where a public library excludes Black residents. Write four sentences predicting how two leaders in the passage might respond. Support your predictions with two details from the passage, and explain one difference in how religion shapes their actions.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one religious belief or message linked to each leader, and circle an action it shaped. Number each belief-and-action pair 1, 2, or 3 to trace three paths to justice. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did King's Christian beliefs and church networks each shape his civil rights activism?	**His beliefs supported equal treatment and nonviolent protest. Churches supplied meeting places, money, and communication networks for organizing.**
2	How did Graham's religious message shape his stance on segregation, and how did his approach differ from joining protests?	**He taught that all people were equal before God and insisted on integrated seating at his crusades. He generally favored changing hearts over joining marches.**
3	How did Malcolm X's changing religious commitments affect his approach to racial justice?	**As a Nation of Islam minister, he urged Black Americans to build independent institutions. After embracing Sunni Islam, he spoke more openly about working across racial lines and urged people to view racism as a human rights issue.**
4	How did King's and Graham's religious platforms help them reach people in different ways?	**King used church networks to organize sustained civil rights action across the South. Graham used large revival meetings to present an anti-segregation message to broad audiences.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

King might ask local churches to host meetings and organize a nonviolent protest at the library. His Christian teaching about human dignity would support a demand for equal access. Malcolm X might urge Black residents to organize independently and call attention to the exclusion as a human rights issue. Both would oppose discrimination, but King's church networks could support a local protest while Malcolm X's emphasis on self-determination could center Black-led action.

Accept other plausible predictions if students distinguish them from documented actions, use two accurate passage details, and explain a difference in religious influence.