Readings. Academic Articles. Speeches. Civil Rights

Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement “Partial” Reading List of Academic Articles
A Representative List compiled by Dr Patricia Comeaux
Copies on our Blackboard Site under the following code:
CODE is A = Assigned Readings; R = Resources

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:


• (R) The Rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Comedy and Context in Tragic Collision by Edward C. Appel; Western Journal of Communication, 61(4), Fall 1997, pp 376-402.

  Several critics of the rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have noted changes in the content and style of his address toward the end of his career. None, though, have made a systematic generic assessment of those changes, nor have they linked such generic transformations to King’s altered situation, the new type of movement he was then leading, the diminished state of his leadership as his efforts turned northward, nor the salutary and lasting effect King’s rhetoric has had on America. This study examined the changes in King’s public communication during the last year of his life by contrasting it, as drama, with public communication from his earlier reformist period. The study concluded that King moved from a mostly comic style, in 1955-1966, to a mostly tragic style, in 1967-1968, in selected major speeches. The analytical tools used were drawn from Kenneth Burke’s pentad, his terms for order, and his theory of dramatic genres, as supplemented by the work of some of his interpreters.

• (R) The “Integrative” Rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” Speech by Mark Vail; Rhetoric and Public Affairs, Vol 9, No 1, 2006, pp 51-78.

  Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech exhibits an “integrative” rhetorical style that mirrors and maintains King’s call for a racially integrated America. Employing the theoretical concepts of voice merging, dynamic spectacle, and the prophetic voice, this essay examines how text and context converge to form a rhetorical moment consonant with the goals of the speech, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the nonviolent direct-action civil rights movement.


  This essay explores the rhetorical complexity of Martin Luther King’s dual role as political and moral leader, particularly during his last years when we was attacked for his opposition to the Vietnam War. By 1) discussing and developing the theoretical value and critical possibilities associated with the term “rhetorical trajectories,” 2) tracing the trajectories present in King’s rhetoric in order to set the context for a speech he gave in 1967 at Riverside Church, and 3) analyzing the text of that speech, the essay offers insight into King’s rhetorical impact, and, as a result, into the possibilities and limitations for combining pragmatic and moralistic discourse in American society.

Speeches by MLK:

  (A) Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)
  (R) I have a Dream (1963)
  (A) Beyond Vietnam (1967)
Malcolm X

  
  To engage in parrhesia is to function as a truth-teller. While Foucault (2001) outlined different types of parrhesia identified by the Greeks, the five elements of parrhesia remain constant yet context-specific: frankness, danger, criticism, duty and truth. Foucault (2001) argued that “real parrhesia, in its positive critical sense does not exist where democracy exists” (0. 83). I claim that parrhesia can exist in democratic institutions and, in fact, is a process that members of the public should demand from public actors. To illustrate this claim, I analyze three Malcolm X speeches, “Black Man’s History,” “The Ballot or the Bullet,” and “After the Bombing" and argue that while he did not start out as a parrhesiastes, he ended his life as one who spoke the truth in a democratic society.

  
  It has been argued that perhaps the most powerful creator of rhetorical exigence is the media. While most studies on rhetorical situations focus on the response to an exigence, this essay examines the exigence that called for the responses of Spike Lee’s 1992 film X and Alex Haley’s The Autobiography of Malcolm X. In researching printed press coverage of Malcolm X from 1963 through 1965, this study argues that the media played a large and important role in consistently creating a negative public image of Malcolm X that is still connected with him. The mass media in essence created an exigence, a rhetorical defect, that demanded a response. This analysis uses Kenneth Burke’s cluster analysis.

  
  Focuses on the concept behind the rhetoric way of life taking autobiography of leader Malcolm X. Definition of rhetoric actions in life; Outline of Malcolm’s life; Establishment of his credibility and the explanation of his program by audiences; Presence of opportunisms in his debate; Difficulties faced by Malcolm in his life; Conversion of religion by Malcolm in prison.

  
  This article seeks to explore the education and public dialogue of Malcolm X, a major African American leadership figure of the 1950s and 1960s. It is the author’s intent to explore an aspect of Malcolm X’s leadership not addressed in much of the current literature, his educational attainment leading to his role as the intellectual and pedagogical antecedent to the modern Black studies movement of the 1960s. This article examines his educational and intellectual development, his role as a public activist and debater, and his contribution to curricular reform in his public rhetoric. In a review of the current literature on Malcolm X and adult education, there is evident congruence of the two areas, offering new insight into the contributions and legacy of a significant historical figure for African Americans. Malcolm X associate A. Peter Bailey has referred to him as a “master teacher” whose contributions go beyond the conventional Black leadership.

  
  This paper examines the powerful signifying force that Malcolm X continues to possess a generation after his death by assassination. The case of Malcolm X is used to explore how ideological battles are fought in the arenas of representation and claims of truth about identity. This struggle over meaning is examined through a rhetorical analysis of the dialogical relationship between Malcolm X’s autobiography and Perry’s (1991) controversial biography.

  
  In the last year of his life, Malcolm X was faced with the task of crafting a viable public voice while remaining unfettered by existing ideologies. In a speech he delivered less than a week before he died, Malcolm addresses
this task by repeatedly shifting the scene within which he asks his audience to define themselves. He explores the possibilities and the limitations of both the domestic and international scenes, and finally invites his audience to position themselves at the border between the two. There, he and his African-American audience might take advantage of the redefinitional potential of international identification without abdicating their rightful domestic position.

Speeches by Malcolm X:
(R) Black Man's History (1962)
(R) Message to the Grass Roots (1963)
(R) Ballot or the Bullet (1964)
(R) After the Bombing (1965)
(R) Not Just an American Problem but a World Problem (final speech; 1965)

Stokely Carmichael
  In the speech at Berkeley, Carmichael revealed a potential in discourse that enabled him to develop, from out of the confines of a tactical rhetoric, a strategic rhetoric of blackness. Close analysis of Carmichael's speech, grounded in Burke's paradox of purity, illuminates the internal logic of Black Power, as well as Carmichael's use of reflexivity, reversal, deconstruction and re-construction of dialectical terms and relationships. Contemporary discursive practices addressing issues of civil rights and race are then examined in light of the principles and purposes developed by Carmichael. The results challenge rhetorical scholars and critics to disrupt reliance on dialectical constructions within discourses of race.

  The unrealistic dreams of perfect social orders that permeate social movement rhetoric heighten expectations and demands that remain only dreams after years of struggle and suffering. Frustration builds within new generations of activists who become increasingly disaffected with social movement establishments which preach un-institutionalized versions of patience and gradualism. The evolution of a revolution may await leaders who can take advantage of opportunities, recreate and redefine social reality, offer new dreams, and energize a new generation of true believers. Stokely Carmichael’s rhetoric of black power can best be understood as a striving for evolutionary changes within the civil rights movement that would replace integration with black power and a passive, common ground rhetoric with a militant, confrontational rhetoric better suited to his generation, growing disaffection with the movement, and the search of black Americans for their African roots. The result would be a more perfect social order for black Americans.


Speeches by Stokley Carmichael:
(R) Power and Racism (1964)
(R) Black Power (1966)
(R) Speech at Morgan State College (1966)
Black Power


  Compares and contrasts the views of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) on the issue of Black Power during the 1966-69. The fiery rhetoric of SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael in proclaiming Black Power aroused the animosity of NAACP director Roy Wilkins who roundly condemned the slogan as counterproductive and inflammatory. However, many NAACP branches at the grassroots level found Black Power goals similar to the goals held by the NAACP. Historians who have seen the NAACP as conservative and monolithic should reexamine the complexities of the organization. Ideologically, the NAACP and SNCC were more similar than different in urging self-empowerment and equality.


  The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC and pronounced “snick”) formed in 1960 to encourage one of the most important movements in American history—civil rights. This study examines SNCC’s administrative history during the mid and late 1960s and how the group’s communications messages and public relations efforts propelled the Black Power movement and simultaneously made a lasting impression on the social ideologies of the late 1960s that continues today. The research reveals how through the unification of many blacks, SNCC workers also intimidated many whites and political leaders, leading to the demise of the organization. Despite the fact that the controversial Black Power movement signaled the downfall of the organization, it represented a determining and essential component of American public relations historiography. During this time, the organization combined community organizing with the use of traditional communications and public relations tactics and strategies to change the racial character of the country, promote cultural unity and empower black Americans.


  The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee formed in 1960 to encourage one of the most important movements in American history—civil rights. With a tremendous human rights mission facing them, the founding SNCC members included communication and publicity as part of their initial purpose. These coordinating activities expanded into a revitalization of the student movement while the initial communication efforts served as a foundational agent for propelling civil rights. This article examines SNCC’s public relations activities throughout the organization’s existance and how the organization combined community organizing with the use of traditional communications and public relations tactics and strategies’ to change the racial character for the country and to empower black Americans.
Student Sit-Ins and Activism (SNCC)


**MISC**

- **(A)** Means and Ends in the 1960’s by Jerold S. Auerbach. *Society*, September/October, 2005, pp. 9-13. This essay discusses the formation of the civil rights movement in the U.S. during the 1960’s. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. understood that disobedience, if it was to be translated into freedom and equality, must remain non-violent. Non-violent action, King conceded, seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. In the South, Stokely Carmichael, president of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, terminated the organization’s bi-racial commitment, declaring the whites’ role in the movement has ended. Dismissing white participants as colonizers and insisting that freedom of the African Americans depended on black power, Carmichael founded the Black Panther Party.


  This paper argues that communication scholars should broaden their areas of study by focusing on the community organizing tradition as well as the community mobilizing tradition. In the past scholars have focused on studies of individuals such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who epitomize the community mobilizing tradition. This study focuses on Robert Parris Moses and two movements which he has led. Moses’s leadership epitomizes the community organizing tradition. His movements and discourse are offered as alternative to the community mobilizing tradition.


  Ella Baker was a central but largely unknown figure of the American Civil Rights movement. In her grassroots organizing work, she eschewed the “charismatic orator” model of social movement leadership, seeking instead to empower ordinary people. This paper argues that Baker’s community organizing rhetoric offers a valuable contribution to feminism and rhetorical theory, revealing both the promise and limitations of invitational rhetoric, and pointing the way to a more politically viable practice of invitational principles.


  During his life Eldridge Cleaver has been a member of several very different organizations. His dramatic changes have caused confusion and even hostility among those who have followed his career. This paper argues that Cleaver is a religious individual who has remained faithful to his primary concern of improving the lives of Blacks in the United States. The paper details how Cleaver’s discourse has been religious in nature and argues that his persuasive tactics have been consistent throughout his life.


  In American memory, the March on Washington is the high-water mark of the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” oration is so central to the memory of the March that it has obscured the speeches by other civil rights activists—including John Lewis. Lewis’s prepared speech was militant, and March organizers pressured him to revise it. Inquiry into Lewis’s speech and the surrounding controversy permits the recovery of what Lewis actually said—which has not been published—and reveals a synecdochic struggle over the rhetoric of the civil rights movement and what was sayable in public on August 28, 1963.