

# **Martin and Malcolm: How Long Must We Wait?**

*By Tom Quinn*

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### **STORY**

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X are forever linked in the history of the Civil Rights movement. This play, featuring four actors playing different roles, examines the legacy of these two men and attempts to judge where we are today in terms of realizing their dreams. Utilizing the spoken words of both Dr. King and Malcolm X "How Long Must We Wait" looks both backward and forward in coming to grips with race in America. This is the last in a series of plays that includes "Freedom Riders" and "No Easy Road to Freedom" and is intended for late middle school to early high school student audiences.

"Martin and Malcolm" was first performed in January of 2003 by the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia.

### **CAST**

The original cast was comprised of four actors, 2m and 2w. All play multiple roles or you may expand it to include more.

TJ (Caucasian)  
BRANDY (African-American)  
DANA (Caucasian)  
CHRIS (African-American)

**MARTIN AND MALCOLM: HOW LONG MUST WE WAIT?**

*(Four ACTORS enter and stand with their heads facing the floor.)*

TJ: *(Singing.)* Freedom!

BRANDY: *(Singing.)* Freedom!

DANA: *(Singing.)* Free-e-e-e-dom!

CHRIS: *(Singing.)* How long must we wait?

ALL: *(Singing.)* Freedom Now!

CHRIS: *(Singing.)* How long must we wait?

ALL: *(Singing.)* Freedom Now!

CHRIS: *(Singing.)* How long must we wait?

*(DANA and TJ step center stage. The OTHER TWO ACTORS walk to opposite sides of the stage.)*

DANA: Two souls.

CHRIS: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

BRANDY: I do not know my true name. The slave master who owned my grandfather gave me the name of Little. I reject that name. I have named myself Malcolm X.

DANA: One goal.

CHRIS: Freedom and dignity.

BRANDY: Dignity and freedom.

TJ: Two different methods.

CHRIS: I have a dream today!

BRANDY: By any means necessary!

TJ: These two men were the most influential characters in the great struggle of the 1960s for Civil Rights. Dr. King said...

CHRIS: "We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice."

DANA: Dr. King may have spoken of patience but Malcolm X took a different view...

*(DANA exits.)*

BRANDY: "When a person places the proper value on freedom, there is nothing under the sun that he will not do to acquire that freedom. Whenever you hear a man saying he wants freedom, but in the next breath he is going to tell you what he won't do to get it, or what he doesn't believe in doing in order to get it, he doesn't believe in freedom. A man who believes in freedom will do anything under the sun to acquire ... or preserve his freedom."

TJ: Many of you may never truly know what it was and is like to be African-American. Particularly in the 1950s and '60s when the Civil Rights movement truly began. Perhaps the place to start is to try to figure out where these two men were coming from. These were the days of Jim Crow.

*(TJ exits and DANA comes onstage. She is now a waitress in 1950s Georgia. She is carrying a sign that reads "Earl's Eats" and places this on an easel at the side of the stage. After a moment CHRIS and BRANDY enter.)*

DANA: What do you want?

CHRIS: We'd like some service please.

DANA: Don't you see the sign?

*(SHE turns and points out to the audience. The ACTORS do not look.)*

BRANDY: We'd like some service please.

DANA: Look, why don't you leave before there's trouble? I don't think you're aware of how ugly things can get around here real fast.

CHRIS: We are aware of that.

*(TJ enters.)*

TJ: You got trouble here, Suzy?

CHRIS: We'd like some service please.

TJ: Oh, you would now.

DANA: I can handle this, Earl.

TJ: Suzy, go on back to the kitchen.

DANA: Earl, why don't we just give them something to eat?

TJ: Get on back to the kitchen now!

*(DANA exits.)*

TJ: Look here, boy. Maybe you can't read, but I think you can figure out what that sign says.

*(ALL turn and look out at the audience.)*

CHRIS: I can read just fine. Your sign says whites only.  
And we'd still like some service please.

TJ: I'm sorry, boy. But you see I'm a big believer in law and order and around here that sign is the law.

CHRIS: We'd like some service please.

TJ: I don't care what you'd like. I ain't gonna serve you.  
Not now, not ever. Now get out!

*(TJ grabs Chris around the collar. CHRIS does not resist.)*

CHRIS: *(Staring intently.)* We'd like some service please.

*(TJ and CHRIS hold the pose a moment and then Chris moves downstage as TJ exits.)*

CHRIS: *(Cont'd.)* Civil Rights means human rights and in the 1950s and '60s African-Americans had to fight for the most basic of rights. Laws that prevented them from eating in certain restaurants were called Jim Crow laws and dated all the way back a hundred years to the time right after the Civil War. We don't have this kind of obvious racism for the most part anymore. But the world Dr. King and Malcolm X were born into was very different.

*(TJ and DANA come back onstage.)*

TJ: Malcolm X was born in 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His father was a supporter of a man named Marcus Garvey who believed that blacks should separate themselves from whites. His father was killed when Malcolm was 6. His mother could not care for him and he became an orphan. He drifted into a life of crime and when he was 20 he went to jail for robbery.

DANA: In prison Malcolm discovered the religion of a group called the Black Muslims otherwise known as the Nation of Islam. They were lead by a man named Elijah Muhammad. The Black Muslims believed that blacks should separate from whites. When Malcolm left prison after 7 years he became the leading spokesman for the Nation of Islam. He began his career as a speaker for the Nation of Islam in 1952. He said...

*(BRANDY enters.)*

BRANDY: "We declare our right on this earth to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary."

*(BRANDY exits.)*

TJ: Many people felt that when Malcolm said "by any means necessary" that included violence.

DANA: Dr. King on the other hand was born in 1929 in Atlanta, GA. His father was a pastor in a church. The King family were members of the black middle class in the very segregated South. They were not rich, but compared to others they did rather well. Martin entered Morehouse College at the age of 15. He studied the ideas of Thoreau and Gandhi. Non-violence became an important point to him and he said...

*(CHRIS enters.)*

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