

Is there a Larger Message Behind Intersecting Streets Named After MLK, Malcolm X?

Stacy M. Brown   · June 9, 2021



 The intersection of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. avenues in southeast D.C. has been called "the Blackest intersection in America." (Courtesy of Amren.com)

When considering the 1960s civil rights movement, no two men were as powerful or noteworthy as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X.

Malcolm X, a Muslim minister, and activist was assassinated on Feb. 21, 1965, at 39.

A little more than three years later, on Apr. 4, 1968, an assassin's bullet cut down King, the face of the civil rights movement and co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

King also was 39.

As revered and as powerful both men were, they reportedly only met once.

However, their legacies intersect on streets named for both [in southeast D.C.](#) and Dallas, near the Fair Park.

While more than 950 streets across the nation bear King's name and dozens have been renamed after Malcolm X, it is believed that D.C. and Dallas are the only places the roads intersect.

Knoxville, Tennessee, does have the Malcolm-Martin Greenway, a small loop trail that circumvents a playground and shelter in the easternmost area of Malcolm-Martin Park – named after the two icons.

“On Mar. 26, 1964, King and Malcolm X crossed paths on Capitol Hill during the debate over the Civil Rights Act as it was being filibustered on the Senate floor,” noted Miranda Yan, a historian who founded the tech company [VinPit](#).

Yan believes the street naming — particularly the intersection in southeast D.C. and Dallas — holds great significance.

“It is perhaps essential because King and Malcolm X evolved together. They remain as relevant today as in the 1960s, even with George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and the global protests, the only way to understand these movements is to understand Malcolm and Martin,” Yan asserted.

She remarked that King remains a global political mobilizer and how he framed the idea of racial justice globally is still critical.

“On the other hand,” Yan discerned. “Malcolm was the first modern activist. He said ‘Black lives matter’ profoundly and definitively and became the avatar of the Black power moment which is still followed worldwide.”

The significance of intersecting streets named after the icon in D.C. and Dallas lies in that it represents contrasting views on creating a better future of Black America – one of peace and nonviolence, and the other by any means necessary, said Black History expert Na’ilah Amaru.

“That these two streets are often relegated to predominately Black neighborhoods and not in the economic centers of cities, reflects America’s continued practice of divestment and its denial that Black history is American history,” she reflected.

“Streets are named after important people, and local governments control the process of street naming. It’s important to note that the government still polices the legacies of Malcolm X and MLK by deciding which of them are deserving of street recognition and where they are placed in a city’s grid,” Amaru insisted.

She added that it is a symbolic gesture when the government does name streets after King and Malcolm X.

“Policies and resources are needed to improve the quality of life, more so than performative government acts like street naming,” she demanded.

Keith L. Brown, a public speaker, and consultant believe having the streets intersect helps educate individuals on its significance.

“While people may walk on MLK Jr. Blvd for some time, they must walk down Malcolm X Ave, for example, to reach their destination and vice versa,” Brown said.

“So while there is a clear distinction between the two streets bearing their names, there is a unification of the streets. Just as there’s a unification when we talk about, arguably, the two most significant and possibly complex, committed, compassionate, and passionate Civil Rights leaders of our time.”

Brown continued:

“Today, when we are in cities where streets bearing the names of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X intersect, as Black people, we must understand that while we may have differing views, we have a collective assignment of advancing our people. This begins with ensuring our children and youth receive an equitable education and an appreciation and understanding of our rich heritage. As much as possible, we must advocate for an end to voter suppression, discrimination that leads to economic disparities, and fight for social justice and much more, just as King and Malcolm X did.”

“While we are not a monolithic people, we are descendants of a people whose sacrifices placed us in positions to excel on many levels; while we may be on different levels as we walk down those intersections, we are intertwined by a shared history in America, one that should cause us to be more empathetic rather than pathetic towards one another, just as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were, as it relates to each other.”