

Reading Group Guide

The Sword and The Shield
by Peniel Joseph

We recommend discussing *The Sword and the Shield* over four sessions.

Session 1: Introduction-Chapter 2

Session 2: Chapter 3-Chapter 4

Session 3: Chapter 5-Chapter 8

Session 4: Chapter 9-Epilogue

Use the prompts listed under each session to help encourage conversation.

Before beginning the first session, read the ground rules aloud to the group. For concerns or specific questions about UT policy regarding speech or expression, refer to [Chapter 3. Speech, expression, and assembly](#).

Section 13-302 Sub-section F is particularly pertinent.

An essential part of higher education is to learn to separate substantive argument from personal offense, and to express even the deepest disagreements within standards of civility that reflect mutual respect, understanding, and sensitivity among the diverse population within the University and in the larger society. These are community norms, even though they cannot be enforced by disciplinary rules.

Remember that the prompts are just that. They should be used to help stimulate thought and conversation when needed, but allow the discussion to develop organically.

Just be sure to keep the conversation within scope. The subject of *The Sword and the Shield* is profound and touches on many other aspects of our lives, so it may be necessary at times to remind people to stay within the general parameters of the book. The prompts can help reign the conversation back in.





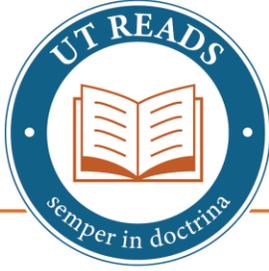
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Ground Rules

- Help to create a brave space. Work together to help each other feel safe, but willing to share thoughts and speak up.
- Do not shout people down, speak over one another, or interrupt.
- Be sure to ask questions of others, rather than only sharing your thoughts and opinions.
- Use “I” statements in expressing your own thoughts and feelings rather than making assumptions about others.
- Limit your own comments to two minutes each time you speak to ensure other people have time to share.
- Take an equal share of the talking time – if you find yourself stepping up most often then experiment with stepping back and listening, if you find yourself stepping back all the time then experiment with stepping up and speaking your truth.
- Disagreement and critical dialogue should be expected and recognized as part of a healthy dialogue, but be considerate of other people’s perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences.
- Respect one another’s voice, perspective, and time.
- Be inquisitive. Ask questions that require deep thought and spark interesting conversation.
- Be empathetic. Remember that this is a challenging subject and people have different backgrounds and educational experience.





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Session 1 Prompts (Introduction-Chapter 2)

If applicable, make introduction. Each person should introduce themselves, give some background on what they do for UT, and a little personal information if they are comfortable doing so.

Before you started reading *The Sword and the Shield*, how much did you know about the lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.? How much did you think you knew?

What has your experience been like as you at least start to read this book at this time in our history?

How did Malcolm and MLK's childhoods shape them in different yet converging ways? How did both men's different upbringings influence their motivations and strategies for confronting racial inequality.

Both Malcolm and MLK had respected reverends as fathers, yet they ended up taking different paths. On page 43, the author explains that Malcolm's sermons "indicted Christianity." MLK came to embrace the Social Gospel which interpreted the teaching of Christ as a vehicle for social justice on earth (page 59). What are your thoughts on their apparent divergent paths when it came to religion?

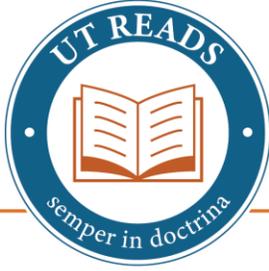
How do you think Malcolm's time in prison effected his philosophy and perspective?

What are your impressions of how Malcolm and MLK treat and interact with women? MLK is characterized as a womanizer (page 62). Malcolm broke off an engagement to "remain unencumbered (page 47), and cast blame on Black women for what he perceived as the dysfunction of the Black American family.

In the section of the book being discussed for this session, what struck you in particular? What caused you to stop and think for a while?

What other question do you have for the group or issue from this section would you like to discuss before adjourning?





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Session 2 Prompts (Chapters 3-4)

How did traveling outside the U.S. effect MLK and Malcolm? How did seeing the U.S. through the eyes of people in other countries form their philosophies? For instance, Malcolm wrote that Africans asked “why so many American Negroes suffer from unemployment, bad housing, slum conditions, and poverty (page 83).”

What were the global implications and reverberations of their political thought and activism?

In May of 1961 Bobby Kennedy, at MLK’s behest, sent 1,000 National Guard troops to protect the Freedom Riders in Montgomery Alabama (pp. 112-113). How does this compare to BLM protests that have occurred across the country this year?

In the Introduction, the author quotes Malcolm X as saying, “You can’t legislate goodwill. That comes about only by education.” In Chapter 4, page 117, the author explains that MLK believed that “racial justice required more than new laws.” This is a strong commonality, so why did they clearly differ in their approach?

This section explored the important role that student activists played in the civil rights movement of the 60s.

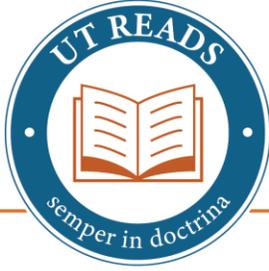
- Do you feel that student activists received the same kind of historical attention and credit given to Malcolm X and MLK? Why or why not?
- How do student activists of the 60s compare to student activists today?

On page 131, the author quotes MLK as saying (after unsuccessful attempts to desegregate Albany), “I don’t want to be a fireman anymore.” What do you think he meant by that?

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Session 3 Prompts (Chapters 5-8)

King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was a response to criticisms that the Birmingham protests were reckless, but it also explicitly laying blame at the feet of moderate white Americans. He calls out the hypocrisy of Judeo-Christian religious traditions that do not empathize with or support the fight for Black equality. What was your reaction to the claim?

What did you think of the author's comment that King's "I Have a Dream" speech was one of the most misunderstood addresses in American history? What has been largely overlooked in that 17-minute speech?

In the lead-up to the March on Washington, Malcolm said it was like "coffee lightened by cream (page 158)," and after the march claimed that it was "a picnic" under white control. "While King was having a dream," he said, "the rest of us Negroes are having a nightmare." How would you characterize Malcolm X's reaction?

What are your thoughts about MLK's and Malcolm X's reaction to JFK's assassination?

On page 177, Malcolm is quoted as saying, "This is an anti-Negro law," in reference to NYC's stop-and-frisk and no-knock laws. This is still an issue today. What are your thoughts about this?

Malcolm X was criticized for encouraging self-defense and rifle clubs among the Black community (e.g., page 180).

- What is your opinion of his stance?
- Discuss this in the context of the contemporary Second Amendment debate.

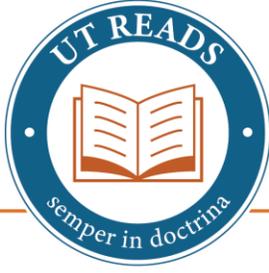
Talk about MLK's Nobel Prize and his use of that prestige to mobilize voter turnout (page 207).

Talk about Malcolm X's assassination and the resulting narrative tendency to oversimplify his life and legacy (pp. 229-234).

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Session 4 Prompts (Chapters 9-Epilogue)

With the current nationwide protests, the recent passing of Senator John Lewis, and the contemporary controversies surrounding voting in mind, discuss the passage about Bloody Sunday and the “Tuesday turnaround” (page 237).

In what ways did Malcolm X’s legacy influence the Radical and Revolutionary King?

How would you characterize the Kennedy/Johnson Administration’s response to the Civil Rights movement? In particular, how Johnson responded to the violence in Selma (page 238-239).

What were your thoughts as you read about the unrest in Watts and the police response that ensued (page 243)?

Discuss the incubation, birth, and evolution of Black Power (pp.254-on). What is its relationship to Black Lives Matter?

Compare and contrast the attempts to stigmatize the Civil Rights movements of the 60s by aligning it with communism (e.g. pp. 257, 271) with some opponents of BLM? How, if at all, do these accusations relate to MLK’s Beloved Community and LBJ’s Great Society?

The Voting Rights Act allowed federal registrars to spot-check counties that refused to comply with legislation’s elimination of poll taxes and other processes that restrict Black access (page 265). In 2013 that section of the VRA was nullified in *Shelby v. Holder*. Why do you think that happened, and what do you think the ramifications have been and will be?

“Riverside marked King’s transition from a civil rights leader into a political revolutionary (page 268).” Based on the evolution or trajectory of his philosophy, had his life not been cut tragically short, what do you think MLK’s approach to civil rights would have become? What would his stance have been today?

Why did MLK have such a strong opposition to the war in Vietnam?

What were your thoughts and feelings as you read about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. (pp. 302-306)?





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Session 4 Prompts (Chapters 9-Epilogue) continued

Is history repeating itself? Are we having the same conversations and fighting for the same issues that Malcolm X and MLK helped bring to the fore in the 60s?

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