

Civil Rights activism, from Martin Luther King to Black Lives Matter

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ARI SHAPIRO, HOST: On this day, when we remember the civil rights movement and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the U.S. is in the middle of another racial struggle, the Black Lives Matter movement. Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad has studied the parallels between these two movements. He's the director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. Welcome.

KHALIL GIBRAN MUHAMMAD: Thank you much for having me.

SHAPIRO: How much similarity really is there between Dr. King's civil rights movement and the Black Lives Matter movement of today?

MUHAMMAD: There's a lot of similarity in recognizing that there are huge disparities that exist in this nation. The notion of nonviolence is the cornerstone of the early civil rights movement. The young people of the Black Lives Matter movement are doing the same, except their audience is a national audience through social media as well (...) but I will add this. They want to suggest that the work of transforming America now means that everyone is entitled to their human dignity and their due process. And if they don't speak perfect English, if they've not graduated from high school, they still deserve respect in this nation.

SHAPIRO: You know, we're talking about these two moments in time, from the 1960s and the present day. How do we connect what's happened in the intervening half-century between these two movements?

MUHAMMAD: We didn't take Dr. King's warning about the importance of history lessons. He wanted us to learn from what had worked in the civil rights movement and the work that remained necessary to do.