MLK’s success:

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| Leadership skills. | He was fairly unknown but was elected mainly due to his **superior education**. E.D.Nixon seemed the obvious contender but he spoke in a gnarled dialect and had had little formal education.  MLK was the centre of leadership for m/c Blacks. his educated status ad his written language and style appealed to the better nature of the ruling elite. More importantly, it was style and articulation of b goals that won over B. W were more complicated to persuade.  Eg.Speech style:  His hurriedly prepared speech at Holt St Baptist Church was expressed the sentiments that would **evoke sympathy and support.**   * Historical mission * An **accomplished** preacher and orator. * Collectivist and **patriotic**, comparing it to communism. Like BTW’s Atlanta speech. * Emphasising Christianity and “justice” gave him the oral purpose and the ministers and implied moral high ground over coercive tactics of the Ctz councils and KKK. * Legislative pressure- not only the tools of persuasion but coercion. * Aware of the w/c audience he invoked the struggle of labour unions against capitalism.   The SCLC needed him- The SCLC had a loose, flexible and informal structure. After his death the SCLC divided in the leadership struggle btw Abernathy and Jesse Jackson. | MLK was not an organisation man. He was a strategist, a moving speaker and negotiator. His lack of organisation in the loose structure allowed staff to come to the fore because K was never in charge.  He got decisive **practical assistance from Bayard Rustin**, who made leaflets, suggested slogans, raised money drafted speeches and put him in touch with N liberal supporters. He was the chief organiser of the 1963 MoW. |
| Strategic vision-  Nonviolent direct action for federal intervention. | * The ND and the CW had shown the sheer power of federal intervention. It began with the *Brown* case. * Non.v was difficult to grasp at first for b given their long history of self-defence. * He must be given credit for inspiring the masses with a sense of individual and collective worth in political action, when the risks of challenging the power structure could prove fatal (eg. the trail of the 2 teenagers in Mississippi in 1955 who made ‘familiar’ remarks to a white woman). The willingness to go to jail of the masses is crucial considering that it was not until the 1960 student sit-ins that the –ve connotations of jail were abandoned for political honour. * Being **arrested**, on the receiving end of w harassment, strengthened movements, exposing the power structure and evoking sympathy. W violence allowed him to play the martyr and expose though ‘street theatre’. It embarrassed the gov. During the CW and encouraged others to join in by creating sympathy for unjust oppression. Thus, it became the moral franchise to force the gov. Into action, eg. Birmingham and Selma (Bloody Sunday) for CRA and VRA. In both they had been local failures (Selma SNCC thee for 2 years prior) but King’s tactics turned them into national victories Technically the tactic didn’t work in the bus boycott, for it was the NAACP legal fund and Supreme Court ruling. However, his presence and tactics secured a national audience and sympathy. * Of course he was a product of publicity but so was the entire CRM. If it weren’t for the conflicts and the cynicism of the media then the brutality of the power structure wouldn’t have been exposed! | **Albany**- he failed to outwit Prittchet and make negotiations with the city council.  **Non.v not his idea.** Came from 1930s and 50s. Seen in 1960s Greensboro sit-in.  Originated in **community roots**- B businessmen and fraternal organisations challenge the power structure.  Eg. Fred Shuttlesworth and Alabama Christian Movement for HR.  Eg. Randolph’s Sleeping Car Porters.  **Failure in non.v.- *Newsweek:*** His murder “could only be read as a judgement upon his nonviolent philosophy”. A wave of violence swept across America, in which 20 people died. It was ironic, given his last speech that “we, as a people, will get to the promised land”. |
| Controlled by N radicals? | **MLK did was not controlled by N radicals-**  Like most activists of their generation they had indeed been influenced by the CP but were by no means actual members.  He was not their puppet. It shows that he valued their contributions despite Rustin’s homosexual and communist background.  He knew that the claim they were controlled by these radical would damage their cause. He was a great people manager and sometimes he had to lose contacts to retain others. He insisted that Rustin be pushed to the background and then dropped him from the inner circle when Clayton Powell threatened to attack them as a red organisation. He did the same with Levison when Kennedy was convinced that he was a communist. | **He was controlled by N radicals- Rustin, Baker and Levison’s** vague links to Communism evoked the charge that MLK was manipulated by Communists.  MLK did have anti-capitalist, LW and radical strains but they were because he’d been brought up during the Great Depression and had witnessed the mass poverty and expose of private enterprise. He actually praised Marx for having exposed the weaknesses of capitalism in his book, *Stride Towards Freedom* (1958).  The New York Trio presented a generational link btw the old left of the 1930s and the CRM. |
| Loved the oppressor? | * While B could be won over by style, W were more complicated. They had to won over by exploiting the consensus of American values. MLK would castigate them for their sins, arousing their guilt, then relieve it by offering redemption and salvation through his philosophy that will allow them to live up to their democratic and Christian values. It was a verbal catharsis that made W feel comfortable. * It was the same tactic used by BTW. Both appealed t their better nature to show that they were the W’s friend and not a threat. * He achieved respectability by attracting moderates through the MoW, Selma and creating a revolution of conscience. He was careful not to let it become a danger- labour org. Had tried to gain it in the 1930s and had lost its original purpose, focusing too much on the ends not the means and being subsumed by political machines. * His symbolism, charisma and Christianity made him the “respectable” and “moderate” leader that the w leadership could align with. * SCLC received more funds etc than SNCC precisely because of MLK’s bond with the W. SNCC’s uncompromising militancy made W uncomfortable. * Compromise was achievable, pragmatic, kept channels of communication open and made nonv d/a “respectable”. | Compromsie and caution:   * Criticised for being indecisive, compromising and folding. * He served minimal jail time compared to the ordinary protestors and was hesitant to advocate violence in mass protests. Eg. in Selma he didn’t walk past the state police on the Tuesday because of caution. * He had close relationships with the power structure, esp. Democrats. * His neo-Marxist rhetoric that memorialised the Populist crusade was at odds with his fraternising with the W bourgeoisie. * He received funding from unions and individuals. SNCC did most of the work in the CRM from 1960 and yet the SCLC received all of the money and publicity for it. * He caved into the Atlantic city compromise! Where Bob Moses opposed it, MLK’s speech offered neutrality. They gained 2 seats but B Americans were disillusioned with MLK. |
| He didn’t initiate campaigns. | He did in Selma. Decisive play by him and Johnson.  F- his fame was created by the CRM but his role was decisive once there. | * **Importance of local leaders.** Shuttlesworth kept the movement going in Birmingham after the AACP was banned in 1956 via his Alabama Christian Movement for HR. He invites MILK and SCLC to Birmingham. * Selma “chose us”. Importance of local movement, Dallas County Voters League. * CORE and the 4 B students who started the S-wide sit-in trend in South Carolina in 1960. Greensboro. * Clarence Mitchell of the Washington NAACP chapter had a key role in putting pressure on Congress to pass the CRB. * Media. * Mass action is attributed to Randolph and is MoW in 1941. * Key mobilisation for the CRB and lobbying by the Church. * Freedom Summer to enc voter registration for the masses by SNCC and CORE. Emp on grassroots action. * Ella Baker. An unsung hero in scholarship today. |
| Radical ideas. | Post-1966 he moved to the L when he realised that W would not keep their promise of equality.  Vietnam, urban violence made him sympathise with BP and move towards economic rights. | He failed to get support for his radical ideas. Eg. the Poor Peoples’ campaign in 1968 was seen as too broad, unrealistic by Ristin who also thought it would exacerbate the W backlash. |
| Personality cult. | * **The symbol of non.v d/a and CRM**- he was the centre stage and the board of directors were subordinate to his sheer power. He represented the movement- Kennedy, Eisenhower, Nixon, Ghana’s Independence ceremonies and the Nobel Peace Prize. * People needed a **unifying figure to rally around**. The **‘Achilles Heel’**ofthe SCLC was also its greatest strength in the sense that his eloquence spoke to the fears of B and also to W. He was respected for his skilful leadership. * His inspiring oratory gave both B and W a sense of individual and collective worth. * **Garrow argues that his private life is irrelevant** since it was simply “standard ministerial practice”. * Religious rhetoric to evoke images of the messiah, moses and divinely chosen in a Montgomery speech. | * Pompous * Sexist * Extramarital affairs * Cheated on his PHD thesis. * He was symbolic and had no real power- after MBB he had no programme and let events unfold (eg. in Birmingham). The SCLC had no coherence, lacking in organisation and being a coalition of previously autonomous groups. * His power was curtailed by CORE in Freedom rides. |
| Christianity | **Messianic faith** not only allowed him and other ministers to **face dangers** fearlessly (eg. his revelation provided spiritual strength: **“I was ready to face anything”**) but also to exploit his position as a **persecuted Christian,** every time he was bombed arrested or jailed. The SCLC transferred the fervour of B Christians and the prestige of their ministers the CRM. |  |
| Vital centre- Ability to unify | * He operated at the **‘Vital centre’,** in between the radical L CORE and SNCC and the RW NAACP and SCLC. He unified these rather than divides. Each group worked to secure their own victories and agendas but, like a Statesman, he mediated and worked with both. * His lack of power allowed for a diversity of views and facilitated his compromise in the middle- SNCC and CORE wanted a display of power through conflict and demonstrations, whilst NAACP and Urban League wanted the moral appeal, capitalising on the consensus of values to awaken consciences to the discrepancy. * Without the radicals on his L he would have been seen as irresponsible. * NAACP had to align with him so that they would be isolated and no longer carry the image of a protest org. Joining with SNCC and CORE was not an option. Thus they, and the Urban League, supplied the crucial funding and legal defence. * Limited power allowed for rivalries and competitive stimulus, without which the movement would have slowed down. He unified that. * He held together the CRM until his death and BP. After his death the CRM decisively fragmented. |  |