

Champions of colour blind justice

During the past century, as the United States of America has wrestled with the problem of inequality between blacks and whites, two names remain paramount in the struggle – Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

Although there were some surface similarities – both started their own movements, organised rallies and gave many speeches both in America and abroad – their approaches and beliefs were radically different. King believed in peace, encouraging only a ‘passive resistance’ with the eventual aim of black and white people integrating and living together peacefully. While King tried to unite the races through peace, Malcolm X, on the other hand, adopted a more direct, aggressive approach. Unlike King, he did not support the idea of integration but separatism, encouraging his listeners to recognise the suffering whites had caused blacks and to live apart in their own communities.

These men were different not only in their approaches to the problem, but also in the religious convictions that motivated them. Martin Luther King’s philosophy of peace and positive reasoning was influenced by Christianity. He was active in the Church and was the leader of the Christian Leadership Conference. Malcolm X started many Muslim groups which practised a violent form of defence against any white oppression, real or imagined.

Despite their very different perspectives, there is one more similarity between these two men – both were assassinated. Malcolm X was shot in 1965 at a rally in Harlem, victim of former supporters who had taken his doctrine of violence to heart. On 4 April 1968 King was shot as he was organising a demonstration in Memphis, but little is known of his assassin.

In the current racial climate of America, it could be said that both men succeeded, at least to a degree. There are still racial tensions, but not to the same degree. Whether Malcolm X would have approved or King would be satisfied today is another question.

READING PASSAGE 2

As adults, how do we encourage our children to explore the rich resources of the Internet without exposing them to a steady stream of marketing messages, such as junk e-mail or sexually explicit material? This is a question that many people, especially parents, are struggling to answer. Although a solution has not yet been found, one possibility is to filter or block this objectionable material from children without interfering with the rights of adults to view and visit any website they like. When the US Supreme Court rejected the Communications Decency Act in June of 1997, industry and government officials alike looked to computer technology companies to create screening and filtering products to fill the gap left by this court decision.

Started in 1998, the Erasmus study set forth a plan for a family-friendly Internet that would include as a key element filtering, blocking and rating tools for parents, educators and other concerned adults. Much of the debate about appropriate content has focused on the spread of sexually explicit materials online, but there are other, equally insidious aspects. Now banned from an increasing number of traditional advertising markets, cigarette and alcohol companies have turned to cyberspace to reach their future market.

Virtually every major alcoholic beverage manufacturing company has an Internet website which developers claim targets adults of legal drinking age. Many alcohol companies 'card' visitors by requiring them to provide their date of birth before entering the site. Most sites also include a disclaimer on the opening screen indicating that visitors must be of legal drinking age. Many children, however, easily bypass these simple precautions by providing falsified birth date information to access these sites. Once inside, it is clear that these companies are creating an environment full of activities that can and do appeal to children and teens. On some sites, visitors are encouraged to play games, download screensavers, and enter draws to win a free T-shirt.

Social, legal and political pressures have denied tobacco companies web-based marketing, but there is no shortage of sites devoted to the consumption and glorification of smoking cigarettes and cigars. Pictures of women smoking cigarettes appear on sites which feature cool ways to smoke and offer lessons in smoking 'tricks'.

Although no one seems to know exactly the relationship between online marketing and alcohol and tobacco consumption, studies have shown advertising to be extremely effective in increasing youngsters' awareness of, and emotional responses to, products, their recognition of certain brands, and their desire to use these advertised products. This trend becomes even more alarming when the relationships are created between children and spokespersons for alcohol and tobacco products. Alcohol and tobacco advertising and marketing practices are also a cause for concern, with many focusing on the industries' successful efforts to target youth.

There is no easy solution to the problem, except to monitor online alcohol and tobacco promotions and develop any additional safeguards needed to protect youth that are already at risk. We are quickly moving into a digital age that will profoundly affect how children and youth grow and learn, what they value, and, ultimately, who they become. Helping our children and teens navigate in this digital culture presents both a challenge and an opportunity.