

Malcolm X on Black Nationalism and White Privilege Jack Stephens (2007)

This was an [interview](#) done in 1964 for the [Monthly Review](#) by A. B. Spellman that I came across while browsing through the website of the *Monthly Review*. In it Spellman writes:

The Muslims tell Negroes to be proud of their African heritage, to make a new identity for themselves by adopting an X or a Muslim surname and dropping their "slave name," thereby severing all ties with a history of subservience to whites. The Muslims have urged Negroes to be polite in their dealings with whites and to be non-violent, even if provoked. But if attacked, the Muslims say, a Negro should defend himself by any means at his disposal. The Muslim solution to the race problem in America is separation of the races, either in the allocation to Negroes of several states in the South or the repatriation of Negroes to Africa.

While I don't agree that the races should separate, the concept of separation, especially in the early 1960s, made sense to many Blacks who had been experiencing the most severe oppression one could imagine, especially since America was an apartheid state. He then goes on to write about Malcolm's split with the Nation of Islam:

There had been rumors for some months to the effect that a split was developing in the upper ranks of Muslim leadership between a conservative and highly religiously-oriented faction led by Mr. Muhammad's family (which controls all the money) and a political activist faction led by Malcolm X. The split came early this March when Malcolm left the Nation of Islam to start an all-black political party. Malcolm is an overwhelming public speaker, particularly in Harlem where his positive demagoguery is unchallengeable in the hearts and eyes of his audience, and in question and answer, or in debating situations where the stark realities of his uncompromising ghetto-eyed point of view can usually embarrass his antagonist, especially if that opponent is a black or white liberal. Malcolm is a product of the ghetto. He is the crystallization of whatever revolutionary impulse exists in the ghetto. He is an organizer and administrator of proven ability. For these reasons, he has the potential of becoming one of the really major revolutionists in America today.

With that Spellman goes on to touch on a number of issues.

On the concept of "reverse" racism Malcolm states:

No, we're not racists at all. Our brotherhood is based on the fact that we are all black, brown, red, or yellow. We don't call this racism, any more

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than you could refer to the European Common Market which consists of Europeans, which means that it consists of white-skin people—is not referred to as a racist coalition—it's referred to as the European Common Market, an economic group—while our desire for unity among black, brown, red, and yellow is for brotherhood—has nothing to do with racism, has nothing to do with Hitler, has nothing to do with the Klan—in fact, the Klan in this country was designed to perpetuate an injustice upon Negroes; whereas the Muslims are designed to eliminate the injustice that has been perpetuated upon the so-called Negro.

On white privilege and the problem of whites joining organizations and taking active roles:

Whites can't join us. Everything that whites join that Negroes have they end up out-joining the Negroes. The whites control all Negro organizations that they can join—they end up in control of those organizations. If whites want to help us financially we will accept their financial help, but we will never let them join us.

SPELLMAN: Then black leadership is necessary?

MALCOLM X: Absolutely black leadership.

On the civil rights movement:

[The]civil rights movement, it remains within the confines of American domestic policy and no African independent nations can open up their mouths on American domestic affairs, whereas if they expanded the civil rights movement to a human rights movement then they would be eligible to take the case of the Negro to the United Nations the same as the case of the Angolans is in the UN and the case of the South Africans is in the UN. Once the civil rights movement is expanded to a human rights movement our African brothers and our Asian brothers and Latin American brothers can place it on the agenda at the General Assembly that is coming up this year and Uncle Sam has no more say-so in it then...

...local civil rights leaders are usually involved right in the midst of the situation. They see it as it is and they realize that it takes a combination of groups to attack the problem most effectively and, also, most local civil rights leaders have more independence of action and usually they are more in tune and in touch with the people. But the national leaders of the civil rights movement are out of touch with the problem and usually they are paid leaders. The local leaders usually have a job and they lean against the local situation on the side, but the nationally known leaders are

paid. They are full-time leaders, they are professional leaders and whoever pays their salary has a great say-so in what they do and what they don't do, so naturally the ones who pay the salaries of these nationally known Negro leaders are the white liberals and white liberals are shocked and frightened whenever you mention anything about some X's.

...

I believe that it is a crime for anyone to teach a person who is being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself. If this is what the Christian-Gandhian philosophy teaches then it is criminal—a criminal philosophy.

Also, Malcolm touched upon how the working classes are split along racial lines and how while class is important in American society it is race that is the most pressing issue because:

The history of America is that working-class whites have been just as much against not only working-class Negroes, but *all* Negroes, period, because all Negroes are working class within the caste system. The richest Negro is treated like a working-class Negro. There never has been any good relationship between the working-class Negro and the working-class whites. I just don't go along with—there can be no worker solidarity until there's first some black solidarity. There can be no white/black solidarity until there's first some black solidarity. We have got to get our problems solved first and then if there's anything left to work on the white man's problems, good, but I think one of the mistakes Negroes make is this worker solidarity thing. There's no such thing—it didn't even work in Russia. Right now it was supposedly solved in Russia but as soon as they got their problems solved they fell out with China.