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While some civil rights leaders urged a more cautious approach to winning civil rights, Malcolm X expressed the feelings of many blacks that more uncompromising methods of struggle were needed. Like members of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Malcolm X advocated the right of armed self-defense for blacks and other oppressed groups who lived in so violently racist a society as the United States. Here is an excerpt of a speech Malcolm X delivered in Detroit, Michigan. Two years after giving this speech, on February 21, 1965, he was assassinated in New York City.

Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots" (November 10, 1963)⁶

We want to have just an off-the-cuff chat between you and me, us. We want to talk right down to earth in a language that everybody here can easily understand. We all agree tonight, all of the speakers have agreed, that America has a very serious problem. Not only does America have a very serious problem, but our people have a very serious problem. America's problem is us. We're her problem. The only reason she has a problem is she doesn't want us here. And every time you look at yourself, be you black, brown, red or yellow, a so-called Negro, you represent a person who poses such a serious problem for America because you're not wanted. Once you face this as a fact, then you can start plotting a course that will make you appear intelligent, instead of unintelligent.

What you and I need to do is learn to forget our differences. When we come together, we don't come together as Baptists or Methodists. You don't catch hell because you're a Baptist, and you don't catch hell because you're a Methodist. You don't catch hell because you're a Methodist or Baptist, you don't catch hell because you're a Democrat or a Republican, you don't catch hell because you're a Mason or an Elk, and you sure don't catch hell because you're an American; because if you were an American, you wouldn't catch hell. You catch hell because you're a black man. You catch hell, all of us catch hell, for the same reason.

So we're all black people, so-called Negroes, second-class citizens, ex-slaves. You're nothing but an ex-slave. You don't like to be told that. But what else are you? You are ex-slaves. You didn't come here on the "Mayflower." You came here on a slave ship. In chains, like a horse, or a cow, or a chicken. And you were brought here by the people who came here on the "Mayflower," you were brought here by the so-called Pilgrims, or Founding Fathers. They were the ones who brought you here.

We have a common enemy. We have this in common: We have a common oppressor, a common exploiter, and a common discriminator. But once we all realize that we have a common enemy, then we unite on the basis of what we have in common. And what we have foremost in common is that enemy—the white man. He's an enemy to all of us. I know some of you all think that some of them aren't enemies. Time will tell. . . .

I would like to make a few comments concerning the difference between the black revolution and the Negro revolution. Are they both the same? And if they're not, what is the difference? What is the difference between a black revolution and a Negro revolution? First, what is a revolution? Sometimes I'm inclined to believe that many of our people are using this word "revolution" loosely, without taking careful consideration of what this word actually means, and what its historic characteristics are. When you study the historic nature of revolutions, the motive of a revolution, the objective of a revolution, the result of a revolution, and the methods used in a revolution, you may change words. You may devise another program, you may change your goal and you may change your mind.

Look at the American Revolution in 1776. That revolution was for what? For land. Why did they want land? Independence. How was it carried out? Bloodshed. Number one, it was based on land, the basis of independence. And the only way they could get it was bloodshed. The French Revolution—what was it based on? The landless against the landlord. What was it for? Land. How did they get it? Bloodshed. Was no love lost, was no compromise, was no negotiation. I'm telling you—you don't know what a revolution is. Because when you find out what it is, you'll get back in the alley, you'll get out of the way.

The Russian Revolution—what was it based on? Land; the landless against the landlord. How did they bring it about? Bloodshed. You haven't got a revolution that doesn't involve bloodshed. And you're afraid to bleed. I said, you're afraid to bleed.

As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled. You bleed for white people, but when it comes to seeing your own churches being bombed and little black girls murdered; you haven't got any blood. You bleed when the white man says bleed; you bite when the white man says bite; and you bark when the white man says bark. I hate to say this about us, but it's true. How are you going to be nonviolent in Mississippi, as violent as you were in Korea? How can you justify being nonviolent in Mississippi and Alabama, when your churches are being bombed, and your little girls are being murdered, and at the same time you are going to get violent with Hitler, and Tojo, and somebody else you don't even know?

If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it is wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it is wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in

defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country.

...

One of the most important new organizations to come out of the civil rights movement was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), or "Snick" as it was usually called. SNCC was established in 1960, growing out of the student sit-ins in the south. In 1964, the group issued a call for young people to come to Mississippi to join in voter registration, "freedom schools," and other projects. Here is a letter from one of the volunteers, activist and author Martha Honey, then a first-year student at Oberlin College, writing to a classmate, Blake Alcott.

Martha Honey, Letter from Mississippi Freedom Summer (August 9, 1964)⁷

Mileston, August 9 [1964]

Dear Blake,

... Dave finally broke down and couldn't finish and the Chaney family was moaning and much of the audience and I were also crying. It's such an impossible thing to describe but suddenly again, as I'd first realized when I heard the three men [James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner] were missing when we were still training up at Oxford [Ohio], I felt the sacrifice the Negroes have been making for so long. How the Negro people are able to accept all the abuses of the whites—all the insults and injustices which make me ashamed to be white—and then turn around and say they want to love us, is beyond me. There are Negroes who want to kill whites and many Negroes have much bitterness but still the majority seem to have the quality of being able to look for a future in which whites will love the Negroes. Our kids talk very critically of all the whites around here and still they have a dream of freedom in which both races understand and accept each other. There is such an overpowering task ahead of these kids that sometimes I can't do anything but cry for them. I hope they are up to the task, I'm not sure I would be if I were a Mississippi Negro. As a white northerner I can get involved whenever I feel like it and run home whenever I get bored or frustrated or scared. I hate the attitude and position of the Northern whites and despise myself when I think that way.

Lately I've been feeling homesick and longing for pleasant old Westport and sailing and swimming and my friends. I don't quite know what to do because I can't

ignore my desire to go home and yet I feel I am a much weaker person than I like to think I am because I do have these emotions. I've always tried to avoid situations which aren't so nice, like arguments and dirty houses and now maybe Mississippi. I asked my father if I could stay down here for a whole year and I was almost glad when he said "no" that we couldn't afford it because it would mean supporting me this year in addition to three more years of college. I have a desire to go home and to read a lot and go to Quaker meetings and be by myself so I can think about all this rather than being in the middle of it all the time. But I know if my emotions run like they have in the past, that I can only take that pacific sort of life for a little while and then I get the desire to be active again and get involved with knowing other people.

I guess this all sounds crazy and I seem to always think out my problems as I write to you. I am angry because I have a choice as to whether or not to work in the Movement and I am playing upon that choice and leaving here. I wish I could talk with you 'cause I'd like to know if you ever felt this way about anything. I mean have you ever despised yourself for your weak conviction or something. And what is making it worse is that all those damn northerners are thinking of me as a brave hero.

...

The civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer was born in Montgomery County, Mississippi, daughter of two sharecroppers. In 1962, after attending a local meeting with James Forman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and James Bevel of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), she joined a group of eighteen blacks who traveled to the courthouse in Indianola to register to vote. At the time, fewer than seven percent of blacks were registered to vote in Mississippi. But Mississippi required that potential voters pass a literacy test before they could register, and Hamer and the others were told they had failed the test, and so could not register. Returning to Ruleville, the group was harassed and later she was arrested. Here, Hamer, who later became a field secretary for SNCC and a leader of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), describes to the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention in Washington in 1964 the treatment she received for trying to vote in Mississippi. She was part of a Mississippi delegation that asked the Convention to let black delegates, in proportion to their part of the population of Mississippi, represent the state at the Convention. The Democratic Party leaders, including Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, rejected this, and the Mississippi delegation remained all-white.

Raging fires burned out of control for blocks and blocks. Thick black smoke and cinders rained down, at times so heavily they blocked out the vision of homes 20 feet away.

Looters drove pickup trucks loaded with everything from floor mops to new furniture. Price tags still dangled from the merchandise.

Youngsters no more than eight or nine years old rode two on a bicycle with loot under their shirts and clutched in their arms.

There was agony on the faces of those who lived close to the burnings, afraid their homes would be burned, too.

Friends of ours, in and out of the area, set up telephone relay systems with us to pass on any new information. Rumors spread as fast as the flames and it was hard to know what was true.

By 5 p.m. it was necessary to close our home to keep the smoke from saturating the house.

At 6:30 p.m. the electricity went out. We couldn't use our electric fan and were forced to open the house again.

We walked to 12th street where the riots began. There we watched as arsonists touched off fires at two establishments within a one-block area.

Burglar alarms wailed out of control. They went unanswered. Negro-owned stores sported hastily printed signs that read "Soul Brother."

A 12-year-old boy flashed a diamond ring that he said he found on his lawn.

On Linwood, three blocks west of 12th, smoke was so thick it was impossible to see one block away.

Some of the families on the blocks between 12th and Linwood packed their belongings and prepared to leave during the night if it became necessary. We were one of those families.

At the height of the rampage, several homes caught fire from the burning stores.

A man, his wife and two small children stumbled along the street with a suitcase and a bedsheet filled with the few belongings they could grab. Tears streamed down the mother's face.

The acrid odor of smoke burned our lungs and as the sun set we began rummaging around for candles and flashlights. Neighbors told us they planned to sit up on their porches all night.

By the 9 p.m. curfew, the streets were relatively quiet, but fear remained etched on the faces of those of us who had to spend the night there.

Nothing stirred on the streets at 10 p.m. except an occasional police car and jeeps and trucks loaded with national guardsmen. But the residents of "this nice neighborhood" were afraid that the riot wasn't over.

And it wasn't.

...

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s eloquence as a leader of the black struggle was unparalleled. He gave dozens of speeches, and led many more actions, that defined an era. In this speech, which has received less attention than some of his others, he raises some of his most profound criticisms of U.S. society, pointing to the economic roots of racism and raising the issue of the fundamental transformation of U.S. capitalism. The speech was delivered, to rousing response, as King's Annual Report at the convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go from Here?" (August 16, 1967)¹²

[O]ver the last ten years the Negro decided to straighten his back up, realizing that a man cannot ride your back unless it is bent. We made our government write new laws to alter some of the cruelest injustices that affected us. We made an indifferent and unconcerned nation rise from lethargy and subpoenaed its conscience to appear before the judgment seat of morality on the whole question of civil rights. We gained manhood in the nation that had always called us "boy." It would be hypocritical indeed if I allowed modesty to forbid my saying that SCLC stood at the forefront of all of the watershed movements that brought these monumental changes in the South. For this, we can feel a legitimate pride. But in spite of a decade of significant progress, the problem is far from solved. The deep rumbling of discontent in our cities is indicative of the fact that the plant of freedom has grown only a bud and not yet a flower. . . .

With all the struggle and all the achievements, we must face the fact, however, that the Negro still lives in the basement of the Great Society. He is still at the bottom, despite the few who have penetrated to slightly higher levels. Even where the door has been forced partially open, mobility for the Negro is still sharply restricted. There is often no bottom at which to start, and when there is there's almost no room at the top. In consequence, Negroes are still impoverished aliens in an affluent society. They are too poor even to rise with the society, too impoverished by the ages to be able to ascend by using their own resources. And the Negro did not do this himself; it was done to him. For more than half of his American history, he was enslaved. Yet, he built the spanning bridges and the grand mansions, the sturdy docks and stout factories of the South. His unpaid labor made cotton "King" and established America as a significant nation in international commerce. Even after his release from chattel slavery, the nation grew over him,

submerging him. It became the richest, most powerful society in the history of man, but it left the Negro far behind.

And so we still have a long, long way to go before we reach the promised land of freedom. Yes, we have left the dusty soils of Egypt, and we have crossed a Red Sea that had for years been hardened by a long and piercing winter of massive resistance, but before we reach the majestic shores of the promised land, there will still be gigantic mountains of opposition ahead and prodigious hilltops of injustice; . . .

Now, in order to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" which is our theme, we must first honestly recognize where we are now. When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was sixty percent of a person. Today another curious formula seems to declare he is fifty percent of a person. Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites. Thus, half of all Negroes live in substandard housing. And Negroes have half the income of whites. When we turn to the negative experiences of life, the Negro has a double share: There are twice as many unemployed; the rate of infant mortality among Negroes is double that of whites; and there are twice as many Negroes dying in Vietnam as whites in proportion to their size in the population.

In other spheres, the figures are equally alarming. In elementary schools, Negroes lag one to three years behind whites, and their segregated schools receive substantially less money per student than the white schools. One-twentieth as many Negroes as whites attend college. Of employed Negroes, seventy-five percent hold menial jobs. This is where we are. . . .

I want to say to you as I move to my conclusion, as we talk about "Where do we go from here?" that we must honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, "Why are there forty million poor people in America?" And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised. And you see, my friends, when you deal with this you begin to ask the question, "Who owns the oil?" You begin to ask the question, "Who owns the iron ore?" You begin to ask the question, "Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water?" These are words that must be said. . . .

Now, when I say questioning the whole society, it means ultimately coming to see that the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. These are the triple evils that are interrelated.

And if you will let me be a preacher just a little bit. One day, one night, a juror came to Jesus and he wanted to know what he could do to be saved. Jesus didn't get bogged down on the kind of isolated approach of what you shouldn't do. Jesus didn't say, "Now Nicodemus, you must stop lying." He didn't say, "Nicodemus, now you must not commit adultery." He didn't say, "Now Nicodemus, you must stop cheating if you are doing that." He didn't say, "Nicodemus, you must stop drinking liquor if you are doing that excessively." He said something altogether different, because Jesus realized something basic: that if a man will lie, he will steal. And if a man will steal, he will kill. So instead of just getting bogged down on one thing, Jesus looked at him and said, "Nicodemus, you must be born again."

In other words, "Your whole structure must be changed." A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will "thingify" them and make them things. And therefore, they will exploit them and poor people generally economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and it will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together.

What I'm saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, "America, you must be born again!"

And so, I conclude by saying today that we have a task, and let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction.

Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds.

Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice.

Let us be dissatisfied until those who live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security.

Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history, and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home.

Let us be dissatisfied until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education.

Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us be dissatisfied until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not on the basis of the color of their skin. Let us be dissatisfied.

Let us be dissatisfied until every state capitol will be housed by a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy, and who will walk humbly with his God.

Let us be dissatisfied until from every city hall, justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Let us be dissatisfied until that day when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid.

Let us be dissatisfied, and men will recognize that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth.

Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, "White Power!" when nobody will shout, "Black Power!" but everybody will talk about God's power and human power.

And I must confess, my friends, that the road ahead will not always be smooth. There will still be rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. And there will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. We may again, with tear-drenched eyes, have to stand before the bier of some courageous civil rights worker whose life will be snuffed out by the dastardly acts of bloodthirsty mobs. But difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. . . .

When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I did believe we would overcome."

Vietnam and Beyond: The Historic Resistance

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, McComb, Mississippi, Petition Against the War in Vietnam (July 28, 1965)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" (April 4, 1967)

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Position Paper on Vietnam (January 6, 1966)

Bob Dylan, "Masters of War" (1963)

Muhammad Ali Speaks Out Against the Vietnam War (1966)

Jonathan Schell, *The Village of Ben Suc* (1967)

Larry Colburn, "They Were Butchering People" (2003)

Haywood T. "The Kid" Kirkland, from *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (1984)

Loung Ung, "People Just Disappeared and You Didn't Say Anything" (2003)

Tim O'Brien, "The Man I Killed" (1990)

Maria Herrera-Sobek, Two Poems on Vietnam (1999)

Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (2003)

After World War II, when the French failed to retake their colony of Indochina (which included Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam) in a long war that ended in 1954, the United States moved in to replace them. The treaty ending the war between the French and the Vietminh (the independence movement led by Ho Chi Minh, a Communist) had provided for an election in 1954 to establish a unified Vietnam. But the United States obstructed that path, and instead set up a government in South Vietnam.

Rebellion spread against the South Vietnamese government, and the United States sent more and more troops in to suppress the rebellion. In 1964, an incident was manufactured in the Gulf of Tonkin that became an excuse for the United States to initiate a full-scale war in Vietnam against the Viet Cong rebels of the South and its supporters in the Communist government of North Vietnam.