

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

ABDUL ALKALIMAT:

I have a question for both speakers. First, Professor Cone at the end you talked about “the new logic.” Now, at the same time, there is a question of “The Tradition.” Both continuity and innovation, so I wondered if you could clarify these two opposite tendencies. Also, Professor Sales, what you said, in part, was trying to deal with revolutionary nationalism and Pan African Internationalism—also recognizes tradition and seems to recognize something new. So what I’m asking is what’s new about Malcolm. ~~Can~~ we point to that?

JAMES CONE:

When I was referring to the new logic in Malcolm, I was contrasting that with the dominant logic of his time which was the logic of doing everything from within the context of the civil rights movement and within the context of the logic that emerges from allegiance to the Declaration of Independence and the idea of freedom of Blacks learning how to think and understand their problems from the vantage point of the dominant society. And Malcolm himself used that statement about the new logic at Harvard University in the context of an institution that has done more to shape the logic of how intellectuals think about a problem than anybody, and what Malcolm was saying is what we need is a logic that emerges from the bottom and not from the top within the society and certainly how we’ve understood the civil rights movement and how we’ve understood Black freedom. As I said the dominant spokespersons have been persons who’ve come from the privileged middle class and while this nation ??? tradition—the one I’ve said Malcolm was part of—is present, it certainly doesn’t receive the visibility within the education institutions and political institutions wherein thinking about a problem is shaped. And so when the question is asked what are Black people to do about their situation of oppression or their situation in this society normally there are structures and frames in which thinking is expected to emerge from that. It’s shaped within universities. What Malcolm was saying is that you need some thinking that comes from people who are outside of those institutions and Malcolm himself certainly came from the outside—that’s what I meant when I said he didn’t have a university education. **So** Malcolm’s logic is logic that is defined from the perspective of The Black Experience and from the perspective of those who are at the bottom of that experience and Malcolm’s thinking about the world comes from that context. That’s why he was not liked, that’s why the society would give such visibility to Martin King—even though they distort him they still gave a lot of visibility to him largely because the logic of his thinking even when he is radical, the logic of it, comes from two places, namely King comes from this American democratic tradition defined by the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and the Christian tradition of religion that shaped him. Those are the two traditions. It’s the radical side of those traditions but still within them. Malcolm is outside of that and thereby is defined by another way of thinking. That is what I was pointing to when I spoke of Malcolm’s new logic.

BILL SALES:

Now if I understand your question, it's what was innovative about Malcolm's Pan African Internationalism. A few observations here. As opposed to traditional pan africanism, Malcolm had a different conception of the role of Africa in the Pan African scheme. Historically, the idea was that new world intellectuals, new world Blacks had a responsibility to participate in the redemption of Africa, the ousting of imperialism in Africa. Certainly Malcolm identified with that, but Malcolm also felt in response to the tremendous upsurge of national liberation on the continent itself that Africa was now in a position to be a crucial positive force in the liberation of Afro-Americans. **So** the center of gravity of the Pan Africanist struggle shift to Africa with Malcolm which is just a reflection of Post World War II reality first glimpsed in 1945 at the Manchester (England) Pan African Conference and he developed a political theory which places Africa at the center of Afro America's redemption. That's one point. The second point is Malcolm's Pan Africanism is explicitly continental. It's not a Pan Africanism that focuses on "Black Africa." As narrow as that expression is, he's really introduced to Pan Africanism in Cairo, travels through North Africa coming back from Mecca and he is moving into the Casablanca group and he touches other countries but he is in Egypt, Algeria, Ghana and what have you. **So** he gets a continental Pan Africanism which leads very directly to Ban???, Belgrade, third world non-aligned movement which leads to an explicitly international and third world conception of the struggle for the emancipation of Africans everywhere. And so I think that that's an important innovation since previously so much of Pan Africanism has been perceived continentally but in fact focused on the situation of "Black folks." And I could **say** one last observation here is that Malcolm's Pan Africanism was a Pan Africanism that focused very much on organization. That one of the very important influences of his trip to Africa **was** that he came back with a model to use in organizing the resistance struggle of Black people here, which is something new. The previous models of Pan Africanist organization were not based on anything that one found in Africa. What were those models very basically, the Nationalist Party and its reflection in the Organization of African Unity. **So** that when we look at the OAAU, we are looking at Malcolm's attempt to formulate an analogy to the nationalist party in response to Afro American conditions so that you find all **of** the projections of their various auxiliaries and every conceivable problem confronting Black people is institutionalized within his perceived organizational structure. These are just a few of the innovations I see in his Pan African Internationalism.

A.J. WILLIAM MYERS, SUNY NEW PATTZ
Director, African American Institute (SUNY, Central)

I'm very taken by these two presentations. I'd like to make a comment based on what I see and what you've been saying about Pan Africanism, and Malcolm **as** an outsider to the Judaeo-Christian construct, and in looking at the continuity of what he was all about with respect to Marcus Garvey in many ways. Let me begin with the fact of Marcus coming to the United States and trying to get Black Americans or African-American people to realize the significance of Africa in terms of liberation and that perhaps through us we can liberate Africa. Now back to Malcolm, he said now perhaps Africa is in a position to assist us in liberating ourselves from the oppression we are receiving from white America. The point I would like to make, the question I'd like to

raise, is how do the two come together. With respect to Dr. Sale's position, Malcolm as a revolutionary and use of redemptive violence in the Tradition of ??? how do these two mesh? I mean the fact that Malcolm is outside of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition

JAMES CONE:

I was struck by Sale's phrase Pan Africanist Internationalist as well as Nationalist Revolutionary because that's how I would have seen Malcolm too if I had talked about that. There is a statement that Malcolm makes related to the same thing that we're talking about here, he said "What ever I say and do is justified." What Malcolm is saying is placing himself outside of the judgment and the criteria which people who ????? you would say and so Malcolm just wouldn't not dialogue with anyone with any value system which did not acknowledge the humanity of Black people from the very start and so in that sense that makes anything justified that's what by any means necessary means within the concept of Malcolm's thinking. Now that does not mean that Malcolm has no respect for humanity or human beings, in fact, what I see in Malcolm is deeply humanist in the sense of deep affirmation of human beings so what I see our presentations doing is accenting that dimension within Malcolm which does not allow him to be shaped and defined by intellectual structures which does not already acknowledge the humanity of Black people from the very start. That's what I would like to say about that.

BILL SALES:

Just a comment, and really an open-ended kind of comment. It seems to me that we have two different models in old and new testament religion. **An** it seems that the Christianity of the Afro-American has been very much attracted by the old testament model, even in terms of trying to remold the new testament Jesus in an old testament form. I think Lawrence Levin in his book Black Culture and Black Consciousness has something to say about this. Now if one can acknowledge an Old Testament Jesus in the tradition of The Black Church than one can see some places where the image and thought of Malcolm intersect with mainstream Black Christianity. To get subjective for a minute in terms of my own experiences, it seems to me that there is a Black concept of Christian violence. That one cannot allow people to send evil without some kind of punishment involved. This is certainly related to the upbringing of children—spare the rod and spoil the child, but it's also involved with this idea "you reap what you sow." It think that King on the other hand introduced into the whole development of The Black Church maybe something novel (and I'll have to leave it to the theologians to talk further about that, the reform ?? whether that's true or not) but one has to recognize that it wasn't only Malcolm and the sophisticates of Harlem, or the people in The Nation of Islam that couldn't deal with the Ghandian concept of nonviolence but that for the longest time King was on the defensive in his own religion to try to explain the difference between Ghandian nonviolence or what most people would see as pacifisms or not doing anything, so in that sense Malcolm is very much in the Old Testament Tradition of the Church. The same with the Nat Turners, David Walker, Bishop Henry McNeil Turner, and most of other people. If he wasn't in that tradition . . .

ABDUL ALKALIMAT:

Speaking of Malcolm in terms of the insider-outsider of the American scene, I am reminded of an ad on television now which starts out with various people, each saying something like “My parents came from Ireland and I’m going home this summer to Greece,” or “My parents come from wherever and I going home to Greece” so that you have this image of Greek and Rome as a way of reconstructing the image of Western civilization and culture in much the same way you’re describing Africa as a centerpiece in reconstructing world history, our own identity, etc. as the basis for new insights into political and cultural life today. Also, the whole point about violence and non-violence, the question of whether or not it’s American to be non-violent, or whether it’s American to be violent. And if Malcolm or maybe King is outside of the mainstream of America and Malcolm is really central. At least this view should be up for discussion. **So** there will be many analyses we have to make.

GLORIA JOSEPH:

I was just thinking. I’m not much on religion but Malcolm was a Muslim. In what way do you see his Muslim religion influencing him in terms of Malcolm being a revolutionary? I’m Gloria Joseph one of the Malcolm X Study workers.

JAMES CONE:

I think his Muslim religion Islam had a great deal to do with his revolutionary thrust and perspective in the sense that it allowed him to think about self defense, and to think about that in ways that Christianity did not allow him as it had been taught by the dominant culture in relation to Black people. White Christianity has always been as has been alluded to used as a way to justify violence **as** long as whites were doing it to protect themselves. But it’s always been interpreted in relation to the slave in a passive way. Now it is true that not all slaves, not all Blacks, internalize that and one of the reasons why they did not is because of the independent religious institutions within the Black community which allowed Black people to have a perspective on the religion that was not exclusively determined by whites. That’s where that old testament perspective comes in and it is there but it’s still a minority perspective, particularly following the reconstruction and in the period it is that passive perspective that appears to dominate and that’s why you have secular organizations like NAACP emerging that’s also why you have the religion of Islam and other Islamic religions emerging in the ghetto, in the urban center in the beginning part of the 20th century and the rise of the Nation of Islam largely because the Black Church had provided a perspective on Christianity that did not accent that old testament perspective strongly enough. And so it is that focus that I think Malcolm’s religion gave him certain possibilities that the public meaning of Christianity in the Black community as interpreted by the dominant interpreters of that were a lie. That’s why Malcolm would say “To hell with any religion that would not let me fight for my people.” **So** in Islam he is referring to **as** having the power to allow that kind of response while King’s interpretation of Christianity comes from two places: (1) his own spirituality as a Black Baptist, (2) The other is the seminary that taught him. King got a

PhD in theology, systematic theology, I know what that is I because I got one and what that is, is to interpret a perspective that does not allow that revolutionary perspective and Black Theology, which is kind of a liberation theology emerges. Without Malcolm, there would be not Black Liberation Theology. Now without King, it wouldn't be Christian. **So** both come together. The Black in Black Theology is Malcolm, while the theology in it is King. **So** it's an attempt to bring these two together, and they do belong together. **As** the Old Testament and the New Testament belong together, but it's not so easy to get them together—it's not just an easy possibility.