

Malcolm X Speaks At Harvard Law School

Editors' Note: This, the final article in the series on Malcolm X, is a speech given by Malcolm X to the Harvard Law School Forum of December 16, 1964.

I first want to thank the Harvard Law School Forum for the invitation here this evening, to speak on a very timely topic—*The African Revolution and Its Impact on the American Negro*. I probably won't use the word "American Negro," but substitute "Afro-American." And when I say Afro-American, I mean it in the same context in which you usually use the word Negro. Our people today are increasingly shying away from the use of that word. They find that when you're identified as Negro, it tends to make you "catch a whole lot of hell" that people who don't use it don't catch.

When you let yourself be influenced by images created by others, you'll find that oftentimes the one who creates those images can use them to mislead you and misuse you. A good example: a couple of weeks ago I was on a plane with a couple of Americans, a male and a female sitting to my right. We were in the same row and had a nice conversation for about thirty-five to forty minutes. Finally the lady looked at my briefcase and said, "I would like to ask you a personal question," and I knew what was coming. She said, "What kind of last name begins with X?" I said, "Malcolm." Ten minutes went by, and she turned to me and said, "You're not Malcolm X?" You see, we had a nice conversation going, just three human beings, but she was soon looking at the image created by the press. She said so: "I just wouldn't believe that you were that man," she said.

I had a similar experience last week in Oxford. The Oxford Union had arranged a debate. Before the debate I had dinner with four students. A girl student looked kind of cross-eyed, goggle-eyed and otherwise, and finally just told me she wanted to ask me a question. (I found out she was a conservative, by the way, whatever that is) She said, "I just can't get over your not being as I expected." I told her it was a case of the press carefully creating images.

Again I had a similar experience last night. At the United Nations a friend from Africa came in with a white woman who is involved with a philanthropic foundation over there. He and I were engaged in conversation. Finally I heard her whisper to someone off to the side. She didn't think I was listening. She said—she actually said this—"He doesn't look so wild, you know." Now this is a full-grown, so-called "mature" woman. It shows the extent to which the press can create images. People looking for one thing actually miss the boat because they're looking for the wrong thing. They are looking for someone with horns, someone who is a rabble-rouser, an irrational, anti-social extremist. They expect to hear me say [that Negroes] should kill all the white people—as if you kill all the white people! In fact, if I had believed what they said about the people in Britain, I never would have gone to Oxford. I would have let it slide. When I got there I didn't go by what I had read about them. I found out they were quite human and likable. Some weren't what I had expected.

Now I have taken time to discuss images because one of the sciences used and misused today is this science of [image making]. The power structure uses it at the local level, at the national level and at the international level. And oftentimes when you and I feel we've come to a conclusion on our own, the conclusion is something that someone has invented for us through the images he has created.

Despite being a Muslim, I can't overlook the fact I'm an Afro-American in a country which practices racism against black people. There is no religion under the sun that would make me forget the suffering that Negro people have undergone in this country.

"When you let yourself be influenced by images created by others, you'll find that oftentimes the one who creates those images can use them to mislead and misuse you."

--Malcolm X

Negroes have suffered for no reason than that their skins happen to be black. So whether I'm Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist or agnostic, I would still be in the front lines with Negro people fighting against the racism, segregation, and discrimination practiced in this country at all levels in the North, South, East and West.

I believe in the brotherhood of all men, but I don't believe in wasting brotherhood on anyone who doesn't want to practice it with me. Brotherhood is a two way street. I don't think brotherhood should be practiced with a man just because his skin is white. Brotherhood should hinge upon the deeds and attitudes of a man. I couldn't practice brotherhood, for example, with some of those Eastlanders or crackers in the south who are responsible for the condition of our people,

I don't think anyone would deny either that if you send chickens out of your barnyard in the morning, at nightfall those chickens will come home to roost in your backyard. Chickens that you send out always come back home. It is a law of nature. I was an old farm boy myself, and I got in trouble saying this once [about President Kennedy's assassination], but it didn't stop me from being a farm boy. Other people's chickens don't come home to roost on your doorstep, and yours don't go roost on theirs. The chickens that this country is responsible for sending out, whether the country likes it or not (and if you're mature, you look at it "like it is"), someday, and someday soon, have got to come back home to roost.

Victims of racism are created in the image of racists. When the victims struggle vigorously to protect themselves from violence of others, they are made to appear in the image of criminals; as the

criminal image is protected onto the victim. The recent situation in the Congo is one of the best examples of this. The headlines were used to mislead the public, [to create] wrong images. In the Congo, planes were bombing Congolese villages, yet Americans read that (How do they say it?) American-trained anti-Castro Cuban pilots were bombing rebel strongholds. These pilots were actually dropping bombs on villages with women and children. But because the tags "American-trained" and "anti-Castro Cubans" were applied, the bombing was legal. Anyone against Castro is all right. The press gave them a "holier than thou" image. And you let them get away with it because of the labels. The victim is made the criminal. It is really mass murder—murder of women, children and babies. And mass murder is disguised as a humanitarian project. They fool nobody but the people of America. They don't fool the people of the world, who see beyond the images.

....Europeans created and popularized the image of Africa as a jungle, a wild place where people were cannibals, naked and savage in a countryside overrun with dangerous animals. Such an image of the Africans was so hateful to Afro-Americans that they refuse to identify with Africa. We did not realize that in hating Africa and the Africans we were hating ourselves. You cannot hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree itself. Negroes certainly cannot at the same time hate Africa and love themselves. We Negroes hated the American features: the African nose, the shape of our lips, the color of our skin, the texture of our hair. We could only end up hating ourselves. Our skin became a trap, a prison; we felt inferior, inadequate, helpless. It was not an image created by Africans or by Afro-Americans, but by an enemy.

Since 1959 the image has changed. The African states have emerged and achieved independence. Black people in this country are crying out for their independence and show a desire to make a fighting stand for it. The attitude of the Afro-American can not be disconnected from the attitude of the African. The pulse beat, the voice, the very life drive that is reflected in the African is reflected today here among Afro-Americans. The only way you can really understand the black man in America and the changes in his heart and mind is to fully understand the heart and mind of the black man on the African continent; because it is the same heart and same mind, although separated by four hundred years and the Atlantic Ocean. There are those who wouldn't like us to have the same heart and the same mind for fear that the heart and mind might get together. Because when our people in this country received a new image of Africa, they automatically united through the new image of themselves. Fear left them completely. There was fear, however, among the racist elements and the State Department. Their fear was of our sympathy for Africa and for its hopes and aspirations and of this sympathy developing into a form of alliance. It is only natural to expect us today to turn and look in the direction of our homeland and of our motherland and to wonder whether we can make any contact with her.