

# In the words of Malcolm X

## Actor Darryl Van Leer brings the leader's lessons to life

Tonya Taylor  
The Pendulum

The many messages of Malcolm X rang through Whitley Auditorium on Monday night. Actor Darryl Van Leer, re-enacted two of Malcolm X's most famous and riveting speeches, "Message to the Grass Roots" and "The Ballot or the Bullet" in this Student Union Board-sponsored event.

Van Leer spoke to the Pendulum about the voice of Malcolm X and the growing need for the African-American voice in this country.

**The Pendulum:** What sparked your interest in Malcolm X?

**Van Leer:** Well, I don't know if you would say whether there is an interest in Malcolm X but an overall interest in American history, and I chose to look at this specific aspect of American history. I say it's American history because anything that has an effect on this country is American history. It's my culture, and it's your culture. But it's everybody's history, whether people want to agree with it or not.

I do a show on Martin Luther King and Frederick Douglas. I've done a show on Nat Turner, and on black inventors and the next thing was naturally Malcolm X. There are several more that I plan on working on also. So, it was the interest in my history that inspired me to let society know about him.

**The Pendulum:** What do you think of the recent increased interest in Malcolm X?

**Van Leer:** I would, without a doubt, earnestly say that a lot of it might have been the result of the power of the media or the film industry. A lot of it could also be because of the situation that is going on right now with police brutality in the country and so forth. Society is reaching back for words of wisdom other than what we've been handed from the media which was basically on Martin Luther King.

We have other people that went through this same thing and who spoke like this, Marcus Garvey and so forth. It seems like we're going further back into the past instead of going forward. I started on this show long before the film ever came out.

**The Pendulum:** How do you feel about the fad aspect of Malcolm X?

**Van Leer:** Definitely some of it was a fad. Fads come quick and fads go quick. You might not even see as many people wearing Malcolm X hats. Those who aren't wearing them right now probably didn't know what it meant anyway. So, when the excitement from the film left, there was no need to wear it because it was a fad to them anyway. The people that come here tonight, they are people who are really interested in that aspect of history. They aren't just coming because it's a fad.

[As a result of] My continuing on with my performances will let me know how much of it was a fad.

My whole future doesn't depend on this one show. I do a total of three shows and I'm working on another with a combination of seven characters from Marcus Garvey to Bojangle Roberts to the great contributions of the film industry on up to the present day figures.



**The Pendulum:** Any thoughts on *Malcolm X* the movie?

**Van Leer:** The movie was good. From doing shows from as far as Montana to Utah to Los Angeles to Miami and even opening up for Spike Lee at the University of Southern California I've heard all kind of comments, negative and positive.

**The Pendulum:** You opened for Spike Lee?

**Van Leer:** I opened for Spike Lee at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles back in December and I talked to him and I talked to John Singleton. I've heard all kinds of comments, but overall I think the whole concept, the whole idea and actual film was very good.

Hopefully, from people doing that, they would have a different concept of the contributions of the black man in this country. It may make cause them to study more about what we've done and to let our people know that we too have strong role models, not just basketball players and not just football players, track players, not just rappers and so forth.

But, also let them know that we too have alot of contributions like the great inventors like Elijah McCoy who invented the lubricating cup, who made a lot of accomplishments in the mass transportation in this country. Before his invention, the steam engine had to stop every few miles and relubricate itself, and his device made it possible for it to continue on. It's now called the oil pump in automobiles.... Louis Ladamor who invented the florescent light and the list goes on and on and on. Hopefully, (the film *Malcolm X*) would have opened some people's eyes.

**The Pendulum:** What do you think of the radical side of Malcolm X?

**Van Leer:** What do you mean by the radical side? I'm just wanting to know what is the definition of radical. Aggressive behavior?

**The Pendulum:** What is aggressive behavior? What is so controversial? Looking at Martin Luther King and looking at Malcolm X, what is the difference?

**Van Leer:** It all falls behind both of their philosophies. Martin Luther King was turn the other cheek and Malcolm X was just the opposite, an eye for an eye. If you hit me, I'll hit you back. King's philosophy was to expose the evil. He's coming straight from the Southern Baptist doctrine, expose the evil from light.

Evil can't survive the light. Most of the evil things that are done on this earth, a lot of them are done at nighttime when the lights are low... a lot of bad things happen. So, if you expose this evil to light, if we allow this entire country to see how wrong they are, basically they'll change. If we let the entire country see dogs being put on us and fire hydrants being put on us and if we all the time quote the Constitution to them, which says that we're supposed to be treated just like everybody else in this country, if we let society see that, it would prove them to be liars and also makes fools out of them.

That was basically his philosophy, exposing evil to light, turn the other cheek and quote the Constitution. Let them hear what the Constitution says. Malcolm's wasn't like that. What people may say was radical or violent definitely wasn't violent. He wasn't violent. He never hit anyone. He never killed anyone. He never beat up anyone. He never told anyone to go and beat up anyone else.

But what he did say is that if you hit me, I'll hit you back. If you touch my family I'm going to fight back. I'm going to keep you at bay. This comes from the philosophy of the nation of Islam. The nation of Islam was the first to come up with the concept that we are going to keep white society at bay. We will pick up rifles and we will protect ourselves. We're not going to attack anyone but we're going to protect ourselves.

Immediately the media puts out the idea that Malcolm X was violent, that he was a terrible man, that he was awful and spread it across the entire country. Black folks even thought that too because of that. That's not violence, that is self-defense.

**The Pendulum:** What about *A League of Their Own*?

**Van Leer:** I played the groundskeeper. I worked on it for about three weeks and yes, I met Madonna and I talked to Penny Marshall and it was a real interesting experience. It's my plan to go back to film but right now I'm using the college market to gain exposure around the country.