

Interview: Malcolm X and Young Socialist, 1965

Tuesday 7 December 2021, by [BARNES Jack](#), [Malcolm X](#), [SHEPPARD Barry](#), [Young Socialist](#) (Date first published: 18 January 1965).

A 1965 interview with Malcolm X demonstrates how his encounters in Africa had a profound impact on his thinking about the domestic struggles of Africans in the Americas.



On January, 18, 1965, Malcolm X was interviewed by Jack Barnes and Barry Sheppard, two members of the editorial board of [Young Socialist](#). Just over a year earlier, in March 1964, Malcolm had broken with Elijah Mohammed and the Nation of Islam. He converted to Sunni Islam and made the pilgrimage to [Mecca](#). He followed his visit to Saudi Arabia with a brief tour of Africa. In July, 1964 Malcolm returned to Africa, spending five months on the continent. He met with Kwame Nkrumah, Maya Angelou, and Shirley DuBois in [Ghana](#), with Abdulrahman Mohamed [Babu](#) and Julius Nyerere in [Tanzania](#), and with Oginga Odinga and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya. Malcolm spoke at the second [Organization of African Unity](#) conference in Egypt and at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. All told, he visited Egypt, Ethiopia, [Tanzania](#), Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, [Sudan](#), Senegal, Liberia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Morocco, giving radio and print interviews, while convening with many of the most significant intellectual and political figures in independent Africa.

Malcolm's encounters in Africa had a profound impact on his thinking about the domestic struggles of Africans in the Americas. His interview with *Young Socialist* reflects this impact. The interview reveals an expanding internationalist view of the struggles of Black America and an engaged re-consideration of the strategies and tactics of Black politics. The questions Barnes and Sheppard asks are straightforward and direct. Malcolm's responses are thoughtful and incisive. He reflects on questions of nationalism, electoralism, racism, and violence, on US imperialism in the Congo and Vietnam, on the role of youth and students in the social turmoil of the sixties, and on the impact of revolutionary Africa on the US Black revolution. On February 21, 1965, Malcolm was assassinated while speaking at a rally of the [Organization of Afro-American Unity](#). The interview was published soon thereafter, in *Young Socialist's* March-April 1965 edition. Like many of the [statements and speeches](#) Malcolm made toward the end of his life, the *Young Socialist* interview offers a glimpse of a politics in formation, and a revolution yet to come.

Interview with Malcolm X in *Young Socialist*

Young Socialist: What image of you has been projected by the press?

Malcolm X: Well, the press has purposely and skillfully projected me in the image of a racist, a race supremacist, and an extremist.

What's wrong with that image? What do you really stand for?

First, I'm not a racist. I'm against every form of racism and segregation, every form of discrimination. I believe in human beings, and that all human beings should be respected as such, regardless of their color.

Why did you break with the Black Muslims?

I didn't break, there was a split. The split came about primarily because they put me out, and they put me out because of my uncompromising approach to problems I thought should be solved and the movement could solve.

I felt the movement was dragging its feet in many areas. It didn't involve itself in the civil or civic or political struggles our people were confronted by. All it did was stress the importance of moral reformation - don't drink, don't smoke, don't permit fornication and adultery. When I found that the hierarchy itself wasn't practicing what it preached, it was clear that this part of its program was bankrupt.

So the only way it could function and be meaningful in the community was to take part in the political and economic facets of the Negro struggle. And the organization wouldn't do that because the stand it would have to take would have been too militant, uncompromising and activist, and the hierarchy had gotten conservative. It was motivated mainly by protecting its own self interests. I might also point out that although the Black Muslim movement professed to be a religious group, the religion they had adopted - Islam - didn't recognize them. So, religiously it was in a vacuum. And it didn't take part in politics, so it was not a political group. When you have an organization that's neither political nor religious and doesn't take part in the civil rights struggle, what can it call itself? It's in a vacuum. So, all of these factors led to my splitting from the organization.

What are the aims of your new organization?

There are two organizations. There's the Muslim Mosque, Inc., which is religious. Its aim is to create an atmosphere and facilities in which people who are interested in Islam can get a better understanding of Islam. The aim of the other organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is to use whatever means necessary to bring about a society in which the twenty-two million Afro-Americans are recognized and respected as human beings.

How do you define Black nationalism, with which you have been identified?

I used to define Black nationalism as the idea that the Black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so forth.

But when I was in Africa in May, in Ghana, I was speaking with the Algerian ambassador who is extremely militant and is a revolutionary in the true sense of the word (and has his credentials as such for having carried on a successful revolution against oppression in his country). When I told him that my political, social, and economic philosophy was Black nationalism, he asked me very frankly: Well, where did that leave him? Because he was white. He was an African, but he was Algerian, and to all appearances, he was a white man. And he said if I define my objective as the victory of Black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary.

So I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of Black nationalism. Can we sum

up the solution to the problems confronting our people as Black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the Black people in this country.

Is it true, as is often said, that you favor violence?

I don't favor violence. If we could bring about recognition and respect of our people by peaceful means, well and good. Everybody would like to reach his objectives peacefully. But I'm also a realist. The only people in this country who are asked to be nonviolent are Black people. I've never heard anybody go to the Ku Klux Klan and teach them nonviolence, or to the [John] Birch Society and other right-wing elements. Nonviolence is only preached to Black Americans, and I don't go along with anyone who wants to teach our people nonviolence until someone at the same time is teaching our enemy to be nonviolent. I believe we should protect ourselves by any means necessary when we are attacked by racists.

What do you think is responsible for race prejudice in the U.S.?

Ignorance and greed. And a skillfully designed program of miseducation that goes right along with the American system of exploitation and oppression.

If the entire American population were properly educated— by properly educated, I mean given a true picture of the history and contributions of the black man — I think many whites would be less racist in their feelings. They would have more respect for the black man as a human being. Knowing what the black man's contribution to science and civilization have been in the past, the white man's feelings of superiority would be at least partially negated. Also, the feeling of inferiority that the Black man has would be replaced by a balanced knowledge of himself. He'd feel more like a human being. He'd function more like a human being, in a society of human beings.

So it takes education to eliminate it. And just because you have colleges and universities, doesn't mean that you have education. The colleges and universities in the American educational system are skillfully used to miseducate.

What were the highlights of your trip to Africa?

I visited Egypt, Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar (now Tanzania), Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Guinea and Algeria. During that trip I had audiences with President Nasser of Egypt, President Nyere of Tanzania, President Jomo Kenyatta (who was then Prime Minister) of Kenya, Prime Minister Milton Obote of Uganda, President Azikiwe of Nigeria, and President Sekou Ture of Guinea. I think the highlights were the audiences I had with those persons because it gave me a chance to sample their thinking. I was impressed by their analysis of the problem, and many of the suggestions they gave me went a long way toward broadening my own outlook.

How much influence does revolutionary Africa have on the thinking of Black people in this country?

All the influence in the world. You can't separate the militancy that's displayed on the African continent from the militancy that's displayed right here among American Blacks. The positive image that is developing of Africans is also developing in the minds of Black Americans, and consequently they develop a more positive image of themselves. Then they take more positive steps—actions.

So you can't separate the African revolution from the mood of the Black man in America. Neither

could the colonization of Africa be separated from the menial position that the Black man in this country was satisfied to stay in for so long. Since Africa has gotten its independence through revolution, you'll notice the stepped-up cry against discrimination that has appeared in the Black community.

How do you view the role of the U.S. in the Congo?

As criminal. Probably there is no better example of criminal activity against an oppressed people than the role the U.S. has been playing in the Congo, through her ties with Tshombe and the mercenaries.¹ You can't overlook the fact that Tshombe gets his money from the U.S. The money he uses to hire these mercenaries—these paid killers imported from South Africa—comes from the United States. The pilots that fly these planes have been trained by the U.S. The bombs themselves that are blowing apart the bodies of women and children come from the U.S. So I can only view the role of the United States in the Congo as a criminal role. And I think the seeds she is sowing in the Congo she will have to harvest. The chickens that she has turned loose over there have got to come home to roost.

What about the U.S. role in South Vietnam?

The same thing. It shows the real ignorance of those who control the American power structure. If France, with all types of heavy arms, as deeply entrenched as she was in what then was called Indochina, couldn't stay there, I don't see how anybody in their right mind can think the U.S. can get in there—it's impossible. So it shows her ignorance, her blindness, her lack of foresight and hindsight; and her complete defeat in South Vietnam is only a matter of time.

How do you view the activity of white and black students who went to the South last summer and attempted to register black people to vote?

The attempt was good—I should say the objective to register black people in the South was good because the only real power a poor man in this country has is the power of the ballot. But I don't believe sending them in and telling them to be non-violent was intelligent. I go along with the effort toward registration but I think they should be permitted to use whatever means at their disposal to defend themselves from the attacks of the Klan, the White Citizens Council and other groups.

What do you think of the murder of the three civil rights workers and what's happened to their killers?

It shows that the society we live in is not actually what it tries to represent itself as to the rest of the world. This was murder and the federal government is helpless because the case involves Negroes. Even the whites involved, were involved in helping Negroes. And concerning anything in this society involved in helping Negroes, the federal government shows an inability to function. But it can function in South Vietnam, in the Congo, in Berlin and in other places where it has no business. But it can't function in Mississippi.

In a recent speech you mentioned that you met John Lewis of SNCC in Africa. Do you feel that the younger and more militant leaders in the South are broadening their views on the whole general struggle?

Sure. When I was in the Black Muslim movement I spoke on many white campus and black campuses. I knew back in 1961 and '62 that the younger generation was much different from the older, and that many students were more sincere in their analysis of the problem and their desire to see the problem solved. In foreign countries the students have helped bring about revolution—it was the

students who brought about the revolution in the Sudan, who swept Syngman Rhee out of office in Korea, swept Menderes out in Turkey. The students didn't think in terms of the odds against them, and they couldn't be bought out.

In America students have been noted for involving themselves in panty raids, goldfish, goldfish swallowing, seeing how many can get in a telephone booth—not for their revolutionary political ideas or their desire to change unjust conditions. But some students are becoming more like their brothers around the world. However, the students have been deceived somewhat in what's known as the civil rights struggle (which was never designed to solve the problem). The students were maneuvered in the direction of thinking the problem was already analyzed, so they didn't try to analyze it for themselves.

In my thinking, if the students in this country forgot the analysis that has been present to them, and they went into a huddle and began to research this problem of racism for themselves, independent of politicians and independent of all the foundations (which are part of the power structure), and did it themselves, but they would see that they would never be able to bring about a solution to racism in this country as long as they're relying on the government to do it. The federal government itself is just as racist as the government in Mississippi, and is more guilty of perpetuating the racist system. At the federal level they are more shrewd, more skillful at doing it, just like the FBI is more skillful than the state police and the state police are more skillful than the local police. The same with politicians. The politician at the federal level is more skilled than the politician at the local level, and when he wants to practice racism, he's more skilled in the practice of it than those who practice it at the local level.

What is your opinion of the Democratic Party?

The Democratic Party is responsible for the racism that exists in this country, along with the Republican Party. The leading racists in this country are Democrats. Goldwater isn't the leading racist—he's a racist but not the leading racist. The racists who have influence in Washington, D.C., are Democrats. If you check, whenever any kind of legislation is suggested to mitigate the injustices that Negroes suffer in this country, you will find that the people who line up against it are members of Lyndon B. Johnson's party. The Dixiecrats are Democrats. The Dixiecrats are only a subdivision of the Democratic Party, and the same man over the Democrats is over the Dixiecrats

What contribution can youth, especially students, who are disgusted with racism in this society, make to the black struggle for freedom?

Whites who are sincere don't accomplish anything by joining Negro organizations and making them integrated. Whites who are sincere should organize among themselves and figure out some strategy to break down the prejudice that existed in white communities. This is where they can function more intelligently and more effectively, in the white community itself, and this has never been done.

What part in the world revolution are youth playing, and what lessons may this have for American youth?

If you've studied the captives being caught by the American soldiers in South Vietnam, you'll find that these guerrillas are young people. Some of them are just children and some haven't yet reached their teens. Most are teenagers. It is the teenagers abroad, all over the world, who are actually involving themselves in the struggle to eliminate oppression and exploitation. In the Congo, the refugees point out that many of the Congolese revolutionaries are children. In fact, when they shoot captive revolutionaries, they shoot all the way down to seven years old — that's been reported in the press. Because the revolutionaries are children, young people. In these countries the young people

are the ones who most quickly identify with the struggle and the necessity to eliminate the evil conditions that exist. And here in this country, it has been my own observation that when you get into a conversation on racism and discrimination and segregation, you will find young people are more incensed over it — they feel more filled with an urge to eliminate it.

I think young people here can find a powerful example in the young *Simbas* [lions] in the Congo and the young fighters in South Vietnam.

Another point: as the dark-skinned nations of this earth become independent, as they develop and become stronger, that means that time is on the side of the American Negro. At this point the American Negro is still hospitable and friendly and forgiving. But if he is continually tricked and deceived and so on, and if there is still no solution to his problems, he will become completely disillusioned, disenchanted, and disassociate himself from the interest of America and its society. Many have done that already.

What is your opinion of the worldwide struggle now going on between capitalism and socialism?

It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck. Capitalism used to be like an eagle, but now it's more like a vulture. It used to be strong enough to go and suck anybody's blood whether they were strong or not. But now it has become more cowardly, like the vulture, and it can only suck the blood of the helpless. As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It's only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely.

What is the outlook for the Negro Struggle in 1965?

Bloody. It was bloody in 1963, it was bloody in 1964, and all of the causes that created this bloodshed still remain. The March on Washington was designed to serve as a vent or valve for the frustration that produced this explosive atmosphere. In 1964 they used the Civil rights bill as a valve. What can they use in 1965? There is no trick that the politicians can use to contain the explosiveness that exists right here in Harlem. And look at New York Police Commissioner Murphy. He's coming out in headlines trying to make it a crime now to even predict that there's going to be trouble. This shows the caliber of American thinking. There's going to be an explosion but don't talk about it. All the ingredients that produce explosions exist, but don't talk about it, he says. That's like saying 700 million Chinese don't exist. This is the same approach. The American has become so guilt ridden and filled with fear that instead of facing the reality of any situation he pretends the situation doesn't exist. You know, in this country it's almost a crime to say there's a place called Cine — unless you mean that little island called Formosa [Taiwan] By the same token, it's almost a crime to say that people in Harlem are going to explode because the social dynamite that existed last year is still here. So I think 1965 will be most explosive — more explosive than it was in '64 and '63. There's nothing they can do to contain it. The Negro leaders have lost their control over the people. So that when the people begin to explode — and their explosion is justified, not unjustified — the Negro leaders can't contain it.

Editors, The Black Agenda Review

P.S.

• Black Agenda Report 01 Dec 2021:

<https://www.blackagendareport.com/interview-malcolm-x-and-young-socialist-1965>