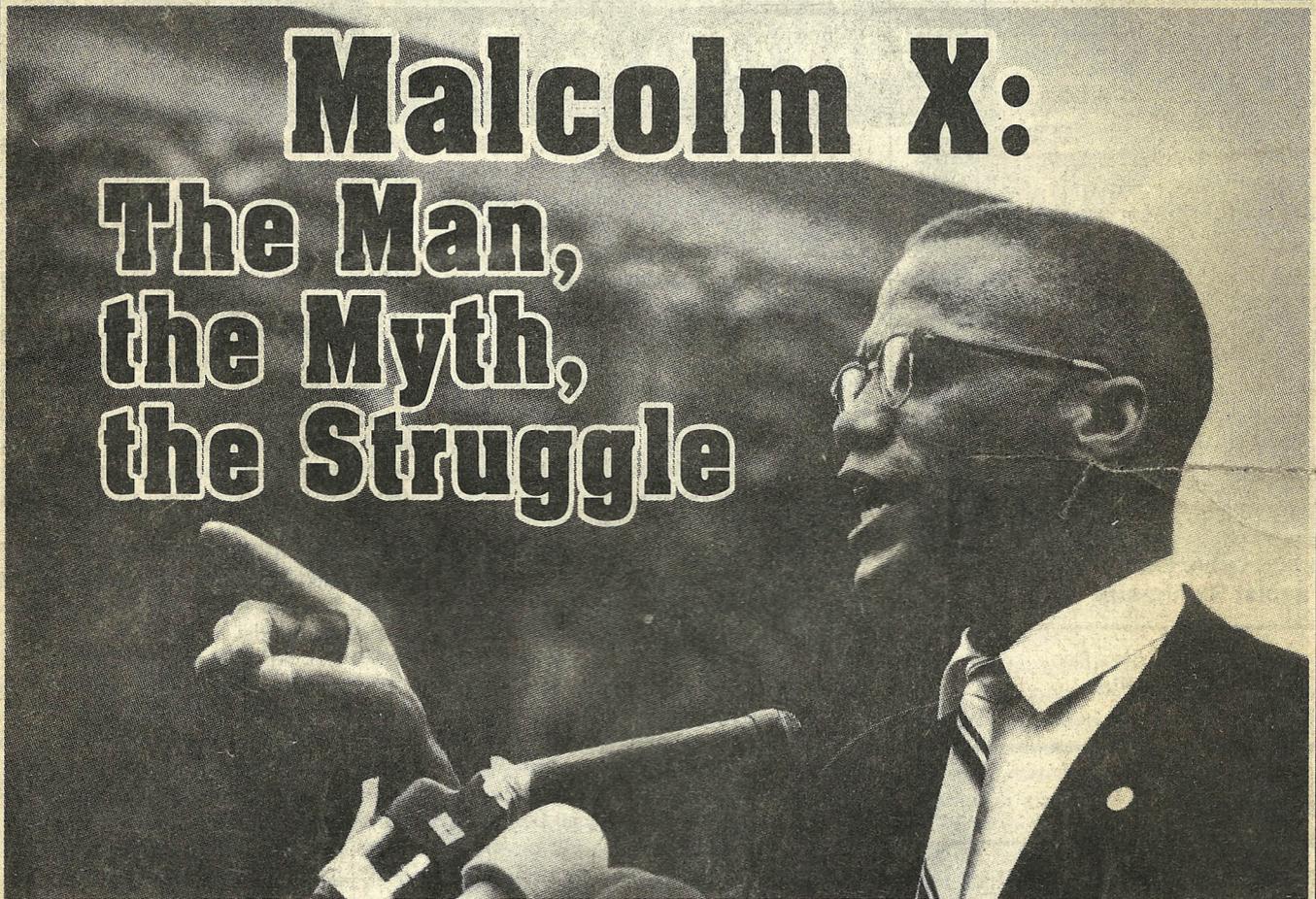


Black History and the Class Struggle

— No. 10 —

Malcolm X: The Man, the Myth, the Struggle



Adelman/Magnum

What's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie

**Activists Remember the
Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era**

"New World Order" Neocolonialism in Africa

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Introduction

As we mark Black History Month 1993, one of the most compelling figures of American black history, Malcolm X, seems to have emerged from the pages of history to claim a place in the consciousness of the youth of today. His 1964 autobiography heads the bestseller lists, in part as a result of Spike Lee's acclaimed film, which itself has both fed off and further fueled a renewal of interest in Malcolm.

Already last year, public school authorities in the South were clamping down on the proliferation of Malcolm X hats and T-shirts, apparently nervously anticipating a renewal of student activism which might again raise radical demands for freedom "by any means necessary." But even with Malcolm's name on everyone's lips, it is more a matter of style than of substance, for the young people of today have been systematically deprived of any real understanding of his scathing critique of the racist status quo. We offer this pamphlet, the tenth in our series on *Black History and the Class Struggle*, as part of an effort to restore the context in which Malcolm X emerged as the "great truth-teller for black America."

In this pamphlet we explore the history and lessons of the civil rights movement, whose activists were the audience to whom Malcolm directed his message. Abstracted from the turbulent social climate of the late 1950s and 1960s, when the demand for civil rights took form in a mass movement embracing millions of people, Spike Lee's Malcolm X has become merely a courageous individual figure whose message might be summed up as "be all that you can be." But for the real Malcolm X, his personal redemption, rising above his origins in the street life of petty crime and drug addiction, came through his commitment to seek the freedom of his people.

Today, in the schools and colleges, on television and through the news media, young people are fed a steady diet of self-congratulatory rhetoric about the "victory of the civil rights movement." Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that neither the talented film director nor those who flocked to see his film have much idea what Malcolm X's life was really all about. Because Malcolm—a contradictory figure, and one whose ideas were still evolving at the time of his murder—was one of the first black spokesmen to grasp that the broader aspirations of the millions for a life of dignity, justice and peace would not and could not be

fulfilled by a movement which looked for salvation to a section of the establishment, and in particular to the Democratic Party and the federal government. All of his passion and eloquence were directed toward indicting the system as he understood it for the pervasive brutality and degradation directed at this country's black citizens, and toward exposing the black "leaders" who sought to tie the masses of idealistic youth to the Kennedy/Johnson White House.

The failure of the civil rights movement—or rather, the *betrayal* of its revolutionary potential at the hands of those who wanted only a vehicle for advancement of the "talented tenth" through overturning the formalities of Jim Crow discrimination, in alliance with a section of the government and capitalist class—was signaled by the ghetto upheavals which swept the country, beginning with the 1964 Harlem riot, triggered by cop violence but expressing the anger and frustration of the masses at the hideous conditions of Northern ghetto existence.

The betrayal of the civil rights movement was underlined again last year, when the acquittal of the racist L.A. cops who beat Rodney King to within an inch of his life sparked another explosion of indignation against the American "injustice system" (see *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 9, "There Is No Justice in Capitalist America"). The multi-racial Los Angeles riot bore witness to the economic devastation confronting blacks, Latinos and poor white youth today and the hollowness of the promises about jobs, housing, education and the rest that were wrested from the lying rulers by the mass struggles of the 1960s. But last year's explosions, ironically, also illuminate the much-vaunted "victory of the civil rights movement": as L.A. erupted and cities all over the country were shaken by demonstrations in sympathy with the protest, there was no lack of black mayors and black police chiefs to restore "law and order."

It is the victors who write history, and if they today try to tell us how Malcolm X was moving toward accommodation with Martin Luther King, we know why that is. Today the demand for "black power" has been recast as "black empowerment," meaning black faces in high places, and black petty entrepreneurs who dream of a monopoly to exploit "their own" people. Demagogues who posture as more "anti-establishment" than the BEOs are simply playing the same

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Malcolm X

What's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie

A biographical film on Malcolm X has been more than 20 years in the making, a project almost as controversial as the man himself. Now Spike Lee has finally brought it to the big screen. Starved for black leadership, and finding in Malcolm X a legend who refused to submit to the racist white ruling class, inner-city youth are hitting the books and fueling a self-motivated literacy drive that school librarians never dreamed of. This year alone, more than a million copies of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* have been

Young Spartacus Film Review

sold—*ten times* the number sold when it was first published in the mid-'60s. It's a damn good thing youth are reading Malcolm X in his own words, because despite great sound and vibrant color, Lee's *Malcolm X* is a celluloid blank space in history—the mass struggles for black rights are missing from the movie.

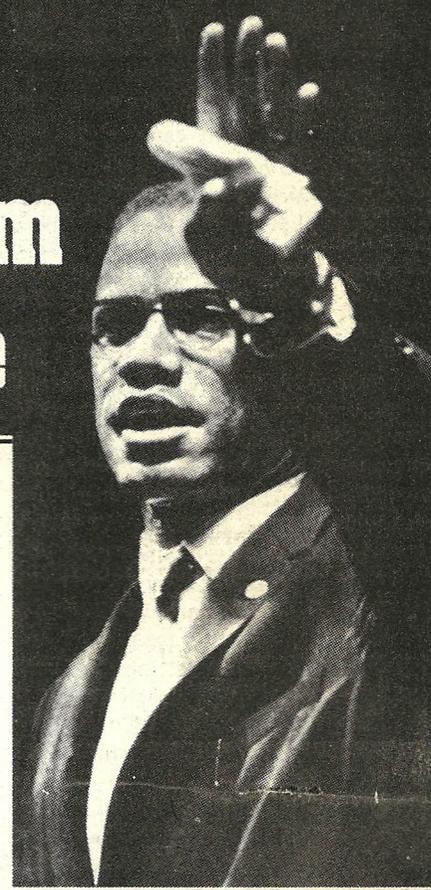
It is something, in this racist society, to make a film that gives humanity back to a black militant who the entire power structure feared, hated and demonized. But Lee's reverence for Malcolm X becomes 70 millimeter mythology. Removed from the convulsive political struggles of the times which defined him and formed the context in which he emerged as black America's uncompromising truth teller, Lee's Malcolm is a cardboard messiah. The domestic and international battles which tore this country apart and politicized an entire generation of youth, black as well as white—the Cuban Revolution, the colonial revolts in Asia and Africa, Vietnam, the civil rights movement—are *nowhere* in this film.

As the voice for self-defense for black

people, Malcolm X didn't play by the rules of bourgeois politics. He named names and denounced Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, et al., as the "Uncle Toms" who counseled the suffering black masses to "turn the other cheek" in the face of murderous racist attacks perpetrated by Dixiecrats. And he saw clearly the hypocrisy of Northern white liberal Democrats like John and Robert Kennedy who "came to the aid" of blacks by sending the FBI and federal marshals...to clamp down on their struggles. In the film, there's no conflict between black radicals and "respectable" black leaders, no names named. Yet it was precisely Malcolm's strident opposition to the entire liberal political firmament that established him as the voice of the angry black ghetto and gave him, eventually, a mass appeal and significance in history.

Stripped out of any social context, Lee's Malcolm X plays like a "Booker T." remodeled for the '90s—magnetic Denzel Washington is a Malcolm whose message is to uplift the race by pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps, living clean and emancipating yourself from the "prison in your mind." Hardly a program for revolutionary social change! Despite his intentions and pretensions to be one "bad" black filmmaker, Spike Lee has managed to turn Malcolm X into a...*liberal!* Through Lee's lens, Malcolm X emerges from Mecca as a combination of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. A generation after the defining battles of the civil rights movement, black revisionist history casts Malcolm and Martin as partners in a joint struggle for black rights. But Malcolm X's political role was defined *against* King and all the preachers of *liberal* accommodation to the racist power structure.

The present generation of black intel-



Gordon Parks

lectuals is overwhelmingly remote from mass political struggle, so that they cannot think programmatically and strategically. Nonviolent resistance vs. armed self-defense, support for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party vs. independent political action, the relation of national liberation struggles in Africa and Asia to the American black movement—these are the issues which defined Malcolm X and determined his appeal. Since Lee does not present the political climate of the '60s, the evolution of Malcolm X and the specific positions he takes in the film remain inexplicable.

Lee views Malcolm X through the perspective of the self-conscious black intelligentsia of the renovated brownstones of Bed-Stuy and Fort Greene. From his previous films produced through his 40 Acres and a Mule Productions, to Spike's Boutique at Macy's, to *Malcolm X*, Lee focuses on *personal* development and promotes "black capitalism." If he draws the line at marketing "X Air-Freshener" ("eradicate odors by any means necessary"), it is only because this product is too downscale for Lee's target audience. Ultimately this world view is not hostile to American capitalist rule. Thus it's no

accident that Lee's Malcolm emerges as no threat to the bourgeoisie: *Malcolm X* received rave reviews in the *Wall Street Journal*, among other places.

From Street Hustler to Muslim Minister

The film is best, and most faithful to the *Autobiography*, in capturing Malcolm's early years. Malcolm Little's family home is burned to the ground by robed, hooded Klansmen who later murder his father, a follower of Marcus Garvey and a proud man who refused to submit to white supremacy. His mother is then judged unfit to fend for her children, and the state takes Malcolm and all his siblings and splits them up in foster homes. Malcolm grows up with whites who call him "nigger" so routinely he doesn't even know it's a fighting word. He excels in school and hopes to become a lawyer, but is dissuaded by a patronizing white schoolteacher who reproaches Malcolm for aspiring to a station in life beyond what white society has ordained as proper for the black man.

After a series of dead-end jobs, shining shoes and slinging sandwiches while working on the railroad, Malcolm (aka "Detroit Red") finds a more lucrative hustle as a sidekick to "West Indian Archie" running a small-time numbers racket and shacks up with a blonde in Harlem. A falling-out among thieves sends Malcolm running to Boston, where he sets up his own burglary ring. A young man who has suffered the mental lashes of the white man's whip, Malcolm has internalized racist oppression. He burns his scalp with lye to "conk" his hair, then smiles and says, "looks white, don't it?" Busted for burglary, a crime which normally carried a two-year sentence, Malcolm and his buddy "Shorty" are sentenced to *ten years*. Malcolm realizes that in the eyes of the racist judge (played, in one of the movie's many in-jokes, by radical lawyer William Kunstler) his real crime was sleeping with a white woman.

Malcolm was so angry and defiant that his nickname in prison was "Satan." To break him, the guards throw Malcolm into "the hole"—solitary confinement. Ernest Dickerson—the talented cinematographer of all Spike Lee's films—brilliantly captures what a racist hellhole America's prisons are. You *feel* the unremitting terror of solitary, the fear of losing your mind as you're enveloped in darkness, filth and inchoate noise. When a broken Malcolm slumps into blinding light and mumbles his prison number for the guards, you feel *rage* for how he has been dehumanized. (This sequence ought to spur youth to check out the Partisan Defense Committee's fight on behalf of



Flax Hermes

Right to self-defense was key issue for 1960s black radicals. Many opposed Vietnam War, solidarizing with Vietnamese toilers fighting racist U.S. imperialism.



Spartacist

the many militants who still languish behind bars in this country for no crime other than running afoul of the racist American government—men like former Black Panthers Mumia Abu-Jamal and Geronimo Pratt, and West Virginia striker Bob Buck.)

In prison Malcolm becomes a convert to Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslims, a religious sect which appeals to some looking for a way out of the social pathology of America's ghettos by preaching self-respect, and forgoing drugs, crime and a host of other things from pork to sex. The Black Muslims' puritanical moral code is lathered thickly with rhetoric about "white devils" and "black empowerment"—a posture that *looks* defiant but in reality acquiesces to the racist status quo by endorsing complete and total segregation of the races. *Malcolm X* shows this in one scene: when Jackie Robinson smashed the color bar in the major leagues, black prisoners swung their bats with joy and trounced a white team in a prison yard ballgame. But Malcolm's Muslim prison mentor sneers at this; Malcolm says later, "There is only one thing I like integrated. My coffee." As to "empowerment," what

the Black Muslims seek are black-owned businesses so that a layer of "up-standing" blacks can exploit the ghetto masses themselves. Black nationalism seeks a reactionary utopian "never-never land" at a time the whole of American capitalism has been contracting and shriveling.

A Spokesman for Militant Self-Defense

After seven years in prison, Malcolm was released and quickly became the most devoted and able minister for Elijah Muhammad. To see Spike Lee tell it, you would think that Malcolm X attracted supporters to Harlem's Temple Seven and nationally by preaching the faith. *Not!* It was because he departed from Muslim mysticism and talked with razor-sharp clarity about present-day race relations and the black struggle that he attracted a personal following in Harlem and beyond. Malcolm X attacked the submissive Christian leadership of the civil rights movement and its sacred cows in a way no one else did before or since. Describing King's sellout of the 1963 March on Washington to the Kennedy administration for a tame "farce on

Washington," Malcolm X thundered:

"If you think I'm telling you wrong, you bring me Martin Luther King and A. Philip Randolph and James Farmer and those other three, and see if they'll deny it over a microphone. No, it was a sellout. It was a takeover.... They controlled it so tight, they told those Negroes what time to hit town, how to come, where to stop, what signs to carry, what song to sing, what speech they could make, and what speech they couldn't make; and then told them to get out of town by sundown. And every one of those Toms was out of town by sundown.... It was a circus, a performance that beat anything Hollywood could ever do, the performance of the year. Reuther and those other three devils should get an Academy Award for the best actors because they acted like they really loved Negroes and fooled a whole lot of Negroes. And the six Negro leaders should get an award too, for the best supporting cast."

—"Message to the Grass Roots," *Malcolm X Speaks*

Lee's movie shows the respect and support Malcolm earned from non-Muslims in Harlem for organizing the dramatic protest outside the 28th Precinct, where a Muslim brother lay bleeding after being beaten by the police. As Malcolm tells it in his *Autobiography*, "Hundreds of Harlem Negroes had seen, and hundreds of thousands of them had later heard how we had shown that almost anything could be accomplished by black men who would face the white man without fear." The government feared Malcolm (the 28th Precinct's Deputy Chief Inspector said, "No one man should have that much power") and saw to it that he remained vulnerable to attack. New York City's stringent gun control laws date directly from legislation rushed through the City Council against carrying rifles or shotguns in public—the bill was aimed at preventing Malcolm X from carrying his carbine in his car.

Still, as Malcolm himself acknowledged, the Muslims were perceived as people who "talk tough, but they never do anything, unless somebody bothers Muslims." It was true. While Malcolm preached against any kind of integration, the masses of blacks were fighting to smash Jim Crow and achieve social, political and economic integration into American society. Malcolm X was an outside critic of the movement for black equality. The young activists in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were growing weary of silently enduring racist crackers who smeared mustard into their hair at lunch counter sit-ins, or worse, fired shotgun blasts into their homes. They were fed up with King's pacifism and derisively referred to him as "De Lawd."

This army of civil rights militants was Malcolm X's real audience. Lee simply

has no comprehension of how convulsive and polarized was the period in which Malcolm came to prominence. The entire black community was politically mobilized, as well as a whole generation of white liberal/radical youth. In the film, these people do not exist for Malcolm X—but they were his real mass base, not the handful of blacks who joined the Nation of Islam. In fact, Malcolm's membership in the Nation, which abstained from social struggle, was a major *impediment* to increasing his influence—a fact which underlay his split.

As we wrote in our 1984 tribute, "Malcolm X: Courageous Fighter for Black Liberation":

"Malcolm personified to an extreme degree the fundamental contradiction of black nationalism. As a doctrine, nationalism can sometimes attract militant blacks deeply alienated from this racist society and who have no illusions that it can be reformed. But American blacks are *not* a nation. They are an *oppressed color-caste* integrated into American capitalist society while forcibly segregated at the bottom of it. Elijah Muhammad's call upon the United States government to grant several states for a separate black nation was more pie-in-the-sky than any of King's dreams. Separatism is *not* a program for social struggle in racist America."

—*Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 2

While the Black Muslims remained aloof from struggle, young black radicals were attracted to the demand for "black power" precisely because of the inability of the liberal civil rights movement to address the systematic racist oppression inherent in this capitalist system. This came to a head in the North, where it was clear despite formal legal equality blacks were still forcibly segregated at the bottom of American society, through economic factors such as jobs, education, housing. Their frustration exploded in the

'60s ghetto riots, and in their wake despair over the failure of liberal integration led to the spread of hardened black nationalism. That black militants were not introduced to the Marxist program of *revolutionary integrationism* at the critical juncture is in large part due to the capitulation of the Socialist Workers Party to black nationalism and its criminal abstention from the struggle in the South (for a fuller analysis of this period, see Spartacist pamphlet, "On the Civil Rights Movement," *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 2).

"Chickens Come Home to Roost"

While Spike Lee plays up Malcolm's moral revulsion at the discovery of Elijah Muhammad's sexual exploits with young Muslim women and ostentatious high living, an immediate cause of Malcolm X's split with the Nation of Islam was his bold and unsparing assessment of the Kennedy assassination, that it was a case of "chickens coming home to roost." The film shows the tremendous courage it took for Malcolm X to make such a statement in the midst of a national orgy of patriotic mourning (even ostensibly "socialist" groups like the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party fell over themselves offering condolences to the First Lady). And Elijah Muhammad, despite all the "white devil" rhetoric, was outraged that his disciple let loose with such an affront to the white ruling class, because it would be very, very bad for business.

But since Lee does not show the bloody terror perpetrated by the U.S. government on black marchers throughout the South, on Africans in the Congo, against the Cuban Revolution and against the people of Vietnam, *how* are youth today to understand *what* is coming home to roost?



Andrew St. George

September 1960; Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro stayed at Harlem's Hotel Theresa in solidarity with oppressed American blacks. Here he dines with hotel staff.

Muhammad Speaks

4 December 1964

UPI



Louis Farrakhan (above) wanted Malcolm X dead. *Muhammad Speaks* portrayed Malcolm as "traitor" and called for his head to roll. Respected black journalist Gil Noble challenged Farrakhan to come clean (below right).

Moreover, the film *never* indicates that Malcolm's attacks on the Kennedy/Johnson White House were *central* to his political stance and his appeal to the radicalizing youth in the black struggle. Searing speeches, like "The Ballot or the Bullet"—where Malcolm exposes the hand-in-glove workings of the Southern Dixiecrats with the Northern liberals, and declares, "A vote for a Democrat is a vote for a Dixiecrat"—have no place in Lee's film. Indeed, when interviewed about the cause of the L.A. riots, Spike Lee said, "The Democratic administration tried to help the poor, but Reagan and Bush are not concerned" (*Libération* [Paris], 5 May).

Refusing to be silenced by Elijah Muhammad for speaking out on the Kennedy assassination, and increasingly aware that the Nation was responsible for the death threats he and his family received, Malcolm split from the Nation of Islam. He formed his own organizations, Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the OAAU (Organization of Afro-American Unity), and made clear that he would engage in secular political struggles. At an OAAU meeting the next year, Malcolm read aloud a telegram he had sent to the American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell:

"This is to warn you that I am no longer held in check from fighting white supremacists by Elijah Muhammad's

By Minister Louis X
(Boston, Mass.)

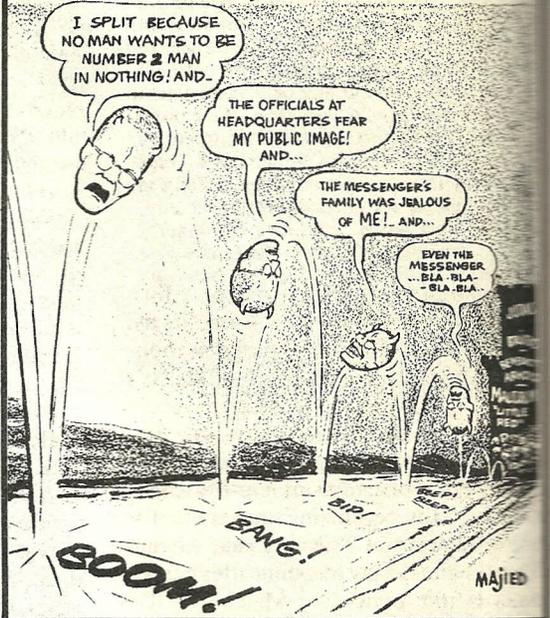
"TO FOLLOW MALCOLM IS TO BE DOOMED"

If any Muslim—whether he be an Imam or just a rich man—backed a fool like Malcolm in building a Mosque, he would be a fool himself. Only those who wish to be led to hell, or to their doom, will follow Malcolm. The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape, especially after such evil, foolish talk about his benefactor (Elijah Muhammad) in trying to rob him of the divine glory which Allah has bestowed upon him. Such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death, and would have met with death if it had not been for Muhammad's confidence in Allah for victory over the enemies.

Muhammad Speaks

10 April 1964

On My Own



separatist Black Muslim movement, and that if your present racist agitation against our people there in Alabama causes physical harm to Reverend King or any other black Americans who are only attempting to enjoy their rights as free human beings, that you and your Ku Klux Klan friends will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of nonviolence, and who believe in asserting our right of self-defense—by any means necessary."

—Malcolm X Speaks

Back from Mecca

Shortly after his split from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm made the Muslims' pilgrimage to Mecca. This trip and a subsequent lengthy tour through Africa convinced Malcolm that it was wrong to narrowly define the struggle against oppression in racial terms. In Spike Lee's movie, this fundamental break from black separatism is portrayed simply as a realization that Muslims come in all complexions, therefore not all white people can be "devils," and true "spiritualism" can forge a brotherhood of humanity. You'd think Malcolm was ready to link arms with the Kennedys and sing "We Shall Overcome"! Hardly.

A more realistic picture of the times is provided by SNCC activists John Lewis and Donald Harris, who met up with Malcolm in Ghana in 1964, and wrote home that people would tell them,

NEW YORK Amsterdam News

The new Black view

Gil Noble urges Farrakhan

Tell us about your role in Malcolm X's murder



Inmates threaten jihad



16 November 1985

"If you are to the right of Malcolm, you might as well start packing right now 'cause no one'll listen to you'.... After a day of this we found that we must, immediately on meeting people, state our own position in regard to where we stood on certain issues—Cuba, Vietnam, the Congo, Red China and the UN, and what SNCC's role, guidelines and involvement in the rights struggle was" (*Malcolm X Speaks*).

Malcolm wrote that "travel broadens." Meeting fighters from successful revolutionary wars against British, French and U.S. imperialism got him thinking about how to redefine the struggle against racist and colonial oppression. After a conversation with a man who

helped drive the French out of Algeria, Malcolm said:

"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 overthrowing the system of exploitation.... I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism.... I haven't been using the expression for several months."

—*Young Socialist Interview,*
By Any Means Necessary

But Malcolm's x-ray vision, which had never failed to see through the hypocrisy of American bourgeois politics, went myopic on him in Africa. It's almost embarrassing to read his accolades to the Saudi monarchy—the last state on the planet to practice legal chattel slavery of black Africans and women! And he had big-time illusions in the United Nations (a den of thieves and their victims) as an ostensibly independent and moral entity.

Thus Malcolm had a plan to press charges in the UN against the United States for its heinous crimes against the 20 million descendants of Africans brought to America's shores in bondage. Although the UN's composition was changing with the admittance of a host of former black African colonies, even at the time the UN was complicit in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the radical nationalist Congolese leader. And Malcolm was basically blind to the nature of the African regimes which talked of so-called "nonalignment" and even "socialism" as they exploited and repressed the workers and peasants. Now, after the U.S. slaughter of 100,000 Iraqis and the destruction of the country (carried out under the "neutral" UN flag with the active support of African and Arab states), such a perspective is grotesque.

The Legacy of Malcolm X

Malcolm X opens with a powerful sequence of images—the horrific and familiar clips of the police beating of Rodney King give way to a giant American flag that ignites and smoulders into a giant "X." It's a promise that this film will have relevance to the urgent problems plaguing black America today. It's a promise unfulfilled. By omission, this film is a *conscious* cover-up of some very sinister enemies of black rights and a perversion of Malcolm's greatest strength—the ability to see the two-party political system in America for the con game it is.

This film shows that both the FBI and

the Nation of Islam wanted Malcolm dead. Yet a cameo role is given to avowed FBI fink Al Sharpton, who wore a wire for the feds to spy on other black activists! That Spike Lee can get away with such a maneuver speaks volumes to the dearth of struggle and the low level of political consciousness today. Twenty years ago, audiences would have walked out or thrown something at the fat fink the moment he appeared on the big screen!

As to the Nation of Islam's involvement, *Malcolm X* clearly shows that Elijah Muhammad and his very disciplined followers wanted Malcolm dead and gone. But the sinister figure who replaced Malcolm as minister in Harlem's Temple Seven, and became the Nation of Islam's hatchet man for the savage hate campaign against Malcolm X, is still around. He now heads the Nation of Islam. His name is Louis Farrakhan. Spike Lee interviewed Farrakhan before making the movie and confronted him with the damning evidence—the death threats against Malcolm X—issued by Farrakhan himself in *Muhammad Speaks* and reprinted here. But when the cameras rolled, Lee pulled his punches and *Farrakhan is not mentioned in this film.*

As black historian Clayborne Carson wrote, "Some viewers may even see Farrakhan as a modern-day Malcolm" (*San Francisco Examiner*, 22 November). Carson also noted:

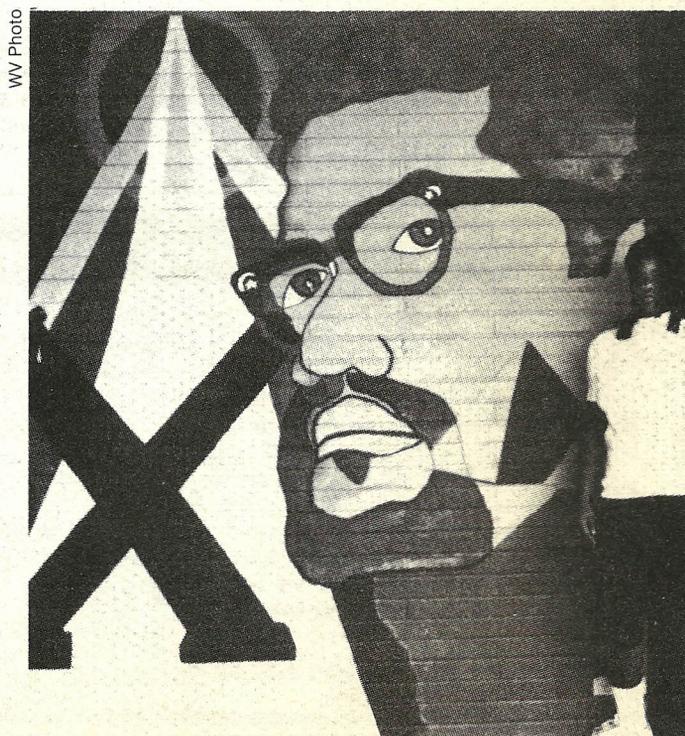
"By ignoring the political Malcolm in favor of the personal story, Lee makes

it difficult for viewers to understand why FBI and CIA surveillance of Malcolm increased rather than decreased after he abandoned the anti-white teachings of Elijah Muhammad. During his last year, Malcolm was considered a major threat by these agencies because his talents were no longer confined within a small, apolitical religious cult."

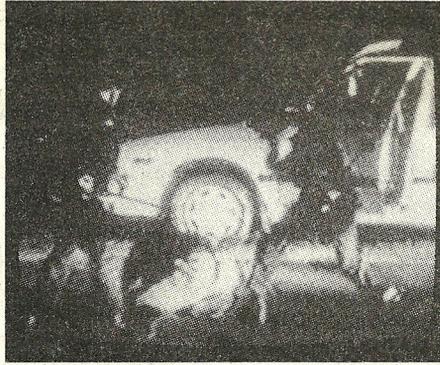
Malcolm X was a compelling figure, and everybody wants a piece of him—indeed, the most diverse political tendencies claim this remarkable man as "theirs" and assert that at the time of his death he was inexorably moving toward their own political positions. Clayborne Carson's own angle is to say that Malcolm was coming around to reconciliation with M.L. King and "nonviolence." But this remarkable man's life was tragically cut short; he was robbed of the chance to evolve politically, in what direction we do not know. As we wrote in our 1965 obituary (*Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965):

"He was the stuff of which mass leaders are made. Commencing his public life in the context of the apolitical, irrational religiosity and racial mysticism of the Muslim movement, his break toward politicalness and rationality was slow, painful, and terribly incomplete. It is useless to speculate on how far it would have gone had he lived.... In any event, at the time of his death he had not yet developed a clear, explicit, and rational social program. Nor had he led his followers in the kind of transitional struggle necessary to the creation of a successful mass movement."

Still, Malcolm's intransigent commitment to the truth and his uncompromis-



Black youth look to Malcolm X, as depicted in mural at Locke High School in South Central Los Angeles.



George Holliday Video

Amateur cameraman shows what happens all the time: L.A. cops repeatedly beating defenseless black man. Shown on TV, video of assault on Rodney King shocked millions who didn't know the truth about racism in America.

ing opposition to racist America make him a hero for Marxists like us who see the fight for black liberation as strategic to a workers revolution against the whole hideous and irrational profit system.

As the voice of the angry black ghetto, Malcolm X knew that the Southern-based civil rights struggle for *formal* equality could not achieve freedom for black people in capitalist America. No new civil rights bill could begin to address the systematic racist discrimination and dehumanizing conditions that the black population was forced to suffer in big Northern ghettos like Detroit, Roxbury and Harlem—where blacks were, of course, “equal” under the law.

The avalanche of blows by police billyclubs on a black man named Rodney King, and the outrageous acquittal of his cop tormenters, taught a lot of people that there is something *fundamentally* wrong with this society that no piecemeal reform can change. It was a clear racist atrocity. And the mass upheaval of anger against it was plebeian and *multiracial*. As young people took to the streets around the country, they were

busted by black mayors who waved their “nonviolent” civil rights credentials in one hand and waved in vicious police assaults with the other. One last speech by Malcolm X seems particularly prescient:

“In 1963, one of their devices to let off the steam of frustration was the march on Washington.... In '64, what was it? The civil-rights bill.... What will they give us in 1965? I just read where they planned to make a black cabinet member. Yes, they have a new gimmick every year. They're going to take one of their boys, black boys, and put him in the cabinet, so he can walk around Washington with a cigar—fire on one end and fool on the other.”

—“Prospects for Freedom in 1965,” *Malcolm X Speaks*

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Conditions for black youth in America today are much *worse* than in Malcolm's time. Ghettoized youth are considered by the ruling class to be a “surplus” population. There are no jobs for them and thus no need to educate them. Some two million manufacturing jobs have disappeared in this country over the past

decade, and the real incomes of black working parents under the age of 30 were driven down by a staggering 48 percent between 1973 and 1990. But while the black poor were being ravaged, a layer of black yuppies emerged, moving out of the ghettos. Currently the top 20 percent of black families account for almost *half* of all black income—a degree of inequality *greater* than among whites.

These facts alone explode the black nationalist myth of a common interest of all black people. While the overall conditions for black people have gotten much, much worse, there is a growing perception—from white Caterpillar workers in the Midwest, to Latinos in L.A., to black youth in Harlem—that the fundamental division in this country is not between black and white, but between haves and have nots. And despite the looting and deindustrialization of America by the capitalist class, black workers still play a strategic role in the American economy and organized labor movement. All those basic jobs which keep American society functioning—bus drivers, hospital workers, subway motor-men, sanitation workers, longshoremen, postal carriers—are disproportionately held by blacks. And therein lies their tremendous potential power, as *black workers*, as part of an integrated working class leading all the oppressed. As we wrote at the time of the Los Angeles riots (“L.A. Upheaval Shakes America,” WV No. 551, 15 May):

“These black proletarians can serve as a bridge between the ghetto poor and the organized labor movement. Conditions are overripe for a massive social explosion in this country extending from the ghettos and Hispanic barrios to white skilled workers, many of them one paycheck away from bankruptcy and eviction.... Decisive in the outcome will be the construction of a multiracial communist vanguard party such as Lenin and the Bolsheviks built in tsarist Russia's ‘prison house of nations,’ which led the multinational working class in a successful insurrection against the capitalist order.” ■

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The Labor Black Leagues stand for mobilizing minorities and working people in militant integrated struggle against the brutal system of racist capitalist oppression. The LBLs are fraternally allied to the Spartacist League, and are part of the revolutionary movement of the workers and oppressed against the bosses and for socialism.

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1965 Spartacist Statement on the Assassination

MALCOLM X

Of all the national Negro leaders in this country, the one who was known uniquely for his militancy, intransigence, and refusal to be the liberals' front-man has been shot down. This new political assassination is another indicator of the rising current of irrationality and individual terrorism which the decay of our society begets. Liberal reaction is predictable, and predictably disgusting. They are, of course, opposed to assassination, and some may even contribute to the fund for the education of Malcolm's children, but their mourning at the death of the head of world imperialism had a considerably greater ring of sincerity than their regret at the murder of a black militant who wouldn't play their game.

Black Muslims?

The official story is that Black Muslims killed Malcolm. But we should not hasten to accept this to date unproved hypothesis. The New York Police, for example, had good cause to be afraid of Malcolm, and with the vast resources of blackmail and coercion which are at their disposal, they also had ample opportunity, and of course would have little reason to fear exposure were they involved. At the same time, the Muslim theory cannot be discounted out of hand because the Muslims are not a political group, and in substituting religion for science, and color mysticism for rational analysis, they have a world view which could encompass the efficacy and morality of assassination. A man who has a direct pipeline to God can justify anything.

No Program

The main point, however, is not who killed Malcolm, but why could he be killed? In the literal sense, of course, any man can be killed, but why was Malcolm particularly vulnerable? The answer to this question makes of Malcolm's death tragedy of the sharpest kind, and in the literal Greek sense. Liberals and Elijah have tried to make Malcolm a victim of his own (non-existent) doctrines of violence. This is totally wrong and totally hypocritical. Malcolm was the most dynamic national leader to have appeared in America in the last decade. Compared with him the famous Kennedy personality was a flimsy cardboard creation of money, publicity, makeup, and the media. Malcolm had none of these, but a righteous cause and iron character forged by white America in the fire of discrimination, addiction, prison, and incredible calumny. He had a difficult to define but almost tangible attribute called

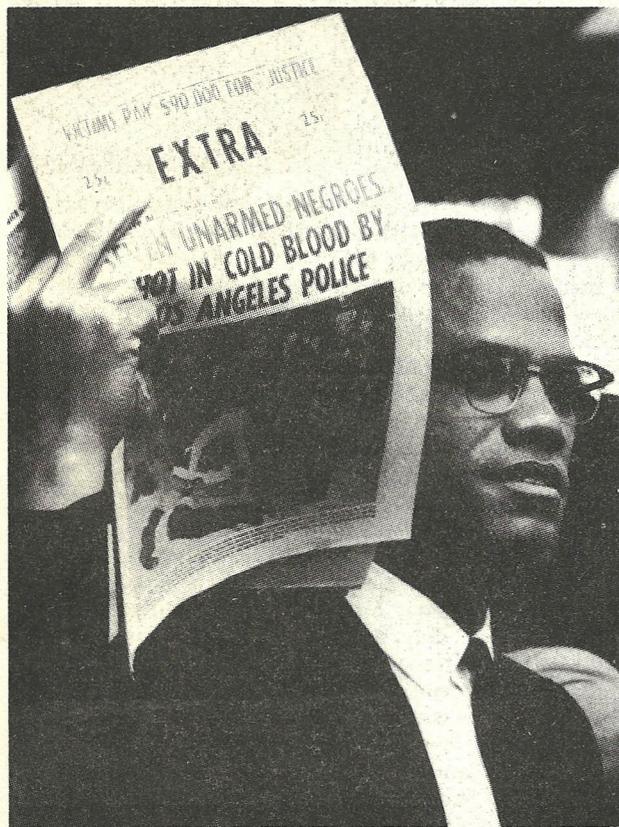
charisma. When you heard Malcolm speak, even when you heard him say things that were wrong and confusing, you wanted to believe. Malcolm could move men deeply. He was the stuff of which mass leaders are made. Commencing his public life in the context of the apolitical, irrational religiosity and racial mysticism of the Muslim movement, his break toward politicalness and rationality was slow, painful, and terribly incomplete. It is useless to speculate on how far it would have gone had he lived. He had entered prison a burglar, an addict, and a victim. He emerged a Muslim and a free man forever. Elijah Muhammed and the Lost-Found Nation of Islam were thus inextricably bound up with his personal emancipation. In any event, at the time of his death he had not yet developed a clear, explicit, and rational social program. Nor had he led his followers in the kind of transitional struggle necessary to the creation of a successful mass movement. Lacking such a program, he could not develop cadres based on program. What cadre he had was based on Malcolm X instead. Hated and feared by the power structure, and the focus of the paranoid feelings of his former colleagues, his charisma made him dangerous, and his lack of developed program and cadre made him vulnerable. His death by violence had a high order of probability, as he himself clearly felt.

Heroic and Tragic Figure

The murder of Malcolm, and the disastrous consequences flowing from that murder for Malcolm's organization and black militancy in general, does not mean that the militant black movement can always be decapitated with a shotgun. True, there is an agonizing gap in black leadership today. On the one hand there are the respectable servants of the liberal establishment; men like James Farmer whose contemptible effort to blame Malcolm's murder on "Chinese Communists" will only hasten his eclipse as a leader, and on the other hand the ranks of the militants have yet to produce a man with the leadership potential of Malcolm. But such leadership will eventually be forthcoming. This is a statistical as well as a social certainty. This leadership, building on the experience of others such as Malcolm, and emancipated from his religiosity, will build a movement in which the black masses and their allies can lead the third great American revolution. Then Malcolm X will be remembered by black and white alike as a heroic and tragic figure in a dark period of our common history. ■

Bay Area Spartacist Committee, 2 March, 1965

Activists Remember the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Era



Gordon Parks

Malcolm X: The Man, the Myth, the Struggle

Spring 1962,
protesting
shooting of
unarmed Muslims
by L.A. cops.

On 11 December 1992, a Spartacist public forum was held in Oakland, California. The speakers were three comrades who participated in the turbulent civil rights struggles which were polarizing this country at the time that Malcolm X rose to prominence. Unlike so many of the brothers and sisters who became involved in the mass movements of the 1960s only to see their dedication and sacrifices betrayed by the liberal misleaders in the service of a prettified racist status quo, or squandered by the black nationalists and New Leftists who played with the rhetoric of revolutionary change while lacking any real program for bringing it about, these comrades have remained committed fighters for black liberation and are today leaders of the Spartacist League.

Joseph Seymour

Spartacist League Central Committee, participant in the radical movement of the early 1960s

When I was nineteen years old, I was involved with a left-wing socialist group

at City College, which is located on the fringes of Harlem. We organized for Malcolm X to come and address the student body. Now, he didn't come with a big entourage, and since I was chairing the meeting, just before he spoke I found myself standing next to him in the auditorium. I felt terribly intimidated and sheepish—I mean, here I am with Malcolm X. Just to make conversation, I noted that the previous summer I had gone to Cuba where I had met some people from the Nation of Islam. Malcolm expressed real interest and sympathy for the Cuban Revolution. He said he didn't know very much about it and asked what my impressions were. He wasn't just being polite. He really wanted to know what a 19-year-old college kid thought of the Cuban Revolution.

A few minutes later he spoke to several hundred students, most of them white and generally liberal, and the main point he made was to attack support for and illusions in the Democratic Party. At that particular time, Lyndon Johnson was pushing the Civil Rights Bill and a lot of people thought that the President

of the United States had finally taken a hard line against white supremacy. Malcolm said, "Don't be fooled! Johnson's best friend in Washington is Georgia Senator Richard Russell who is an arch segregationist." He said, "When somebody says they are against racism but their best friend is Richard Russell, it's like somebody saying they are against train robbing and their best friend is Jesse James."

This incident reveals what's missing from Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X*—the momentous political struggle in this country and abroad which formed the background of Malcolm's rise to prominence. The debate that was raging among the activists. Did you support the Cuban Revolution and the Vietnamese Revolution against U.S. imperialism? Or did you support the U.S. government in trying to overthrow Castro and in trying to destroy the Viet Cong in blood in the name of anti-communism? Did you attack John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson as war criminals who oppressed and savaged the dark-skinned peoples of the world? Or did you look to them to bring democracy and civil rights and racial equality to black people in this country? Did you believe that civil rights militants had the right to defend themselves against the cracker sheriffs and the Klan and the White Citizens Councils? Or did you maintain that in fighting for their democratic rights black people could do no more than engage in non-violent protest?

These were the issues which polarized American society. These were the issues that defined Malcolm's politics and determined his appeal. Because what he was in the minds of everybody—black, white, left, right, center—he was the best known, the most powerful, the most incisive enemy of what we at the time called the "white power structure." Spike Lee doesn't understand that because he doesn't understand how convulsive and explosive American society was in the early 1960s. The civil rights movement, in the sweep of its mass support, in the aspirations for freedom and equality which it generated among black people, and in bringing into existence a whole generation of young radical activists, had a *revolutionary potential*.

In the South, the entire black community was mobilized—hundreds of thousands of people were confronting a totalitarian racist police state which they had lived under for three-quarters of a century, since Radical Reconstruction was abandoned and defeated in the aftermath of the Civil War. In the North it was different, because blacks had, legally, the formal democratic rights which the Southern civil rights movement was fighting for. They could vote, they could go into restaurants and ride buses with white people. But blacks in the North as well as in the South did not consider the civil rights movement in this narrow a way. They saw it as a movement for *general* social equality, even though there was no coherent or agreed-upon program for how to achieve that.

In Spike Lee's movie, you don't realize that at one point there were probably more civil rights militants in the town of Albany, Georgia than there were



20 October 1960: Sit-in in Atlanta to integrate whites-only lunch counter was among a wave of protests that swept the South. Civil rights militants in Northern cities picketed Woolworth's in sympathy. AP

in the entire Nation of Islam nationally. A whole generation had been standing up to the cops in the South and in the North. Like Malcolm X, they came to understand the link between racism in the United States and the oppression by the American government and the big corporations of dark-skinned people throughout the world.

Preachers' Pacifism vs. Militant Self-Defense for the Movement

That's why the question of non-violence at that moment was so decisive and so important. It wasn't about the

right of individuals to defend themselves or their families. In the movie they show Malcolm X's father (who was a black nationalist minister) warding off an attack by local Klansmen by threatening them with his pistol. But that wasn't what the debate was. We were talking about armed self-defense for a *mass movement*—a movement which embraced millions and which was confronting the capitalist state.

The question of nonviolence was basically a question of your attitude toward the system. To say that the civil rights movement had the right to defend itself against racist terror was really to say that you had the right of revolution; that you didn't accept the rules of the game. And when King pledged nonviolence, what he was really saying is he was pledging allegiance to the white power structure. He was saying that the black movement cannot go beyond the bounds set for it by the liberal wing of the ruling class represented by the Democratic Party. That's what it meant. And that's why Malcolm X called King a "20th century Uncle Tom" whose primary concern is to defend the white man.

When Malcolm said that, a lot of people in the civil rights movement, even people who were critical of King, thought that this was exaggerated and unfair. Yet a few months after Malcolm was assassinated, the black ghetto in Watts in Los Angeles rose up. Black youth ran through the streets demonstrating defiance of the ruling class. The police and the National Guard were sent



Supporters of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party hold sit-down protest outside 1964 Democratic Party National Convention in Atlantic City, hoping to unseat all-white regular state delegation. AP

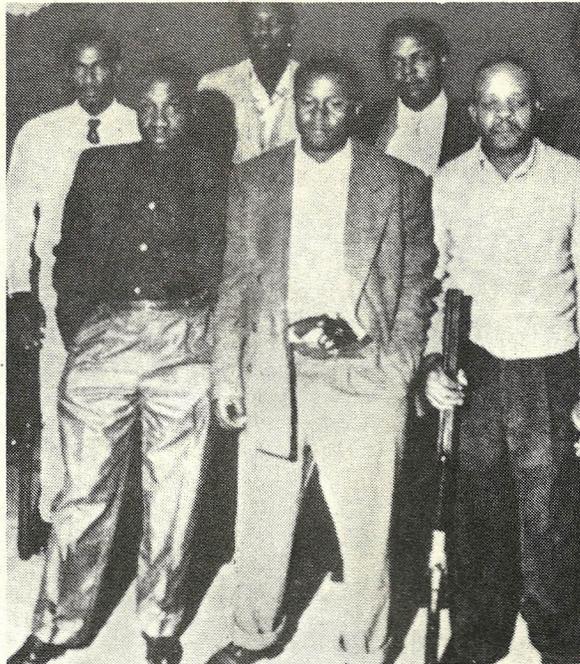
in and killed more than 30 black kids—most of them unarmed, most of them in cold blood. What did King do? Did he call upon the LAPD and the FBI and the National Guard to “turn the other cheek,” to throw away their guns and resort to “nonviolent resistance”? No! He said it was necessary that “as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them.” Malcolm X was known above all at the time as a person who said that the oppressed black masses had the right and the duty to overthrow the system which oppressed and degraded them, although he did not have a coherent program to do that.

The Myth of “Black Capitalism”

While Malcolm X was alive, he was slandered as some kind of crazed fanatic and advocate of black violence against white America. But today there is a different kind of falsification, which in its way is no less pernicious. He is now presented as a pioneer advocate of black-owned business, as a man who believed in the economic development of the segregated ghetto within the framework and under the rules set by white-dominated American capitalism. This line and lie is perpetrated not only by nationalist hustlers like Farrakhan, who when Malcolm split from the Nation of Islam said that he deserved death for defying Elijah Muhammad, but it’s also perpetrated by the house organ of international financiers. A recent issue of the London *Economist* says that Malcolm’s message was “black capitalism.”

It is true that Malcolm sought, both as a Muslim and somewhat later, to break poor blacks from the degrading pathology of ghetto life: alcoholism, drug addiction, wife-beating, prostitution. He told black people that they should stand on their own two feet and not depend on the white man. But by that he did not mean that they should take over grocery stores and dry-cleaning stores and open sweatshops in the ghetto to rip off and exploit their own people! This I will tell you, that while he was alive, *no one*, absolutely no one believed that Malcolm X was an advocate of “black capitalism” or any other kind of capitalism. Quite the contrary.

If Malcolm X did not advocate liberal integrationism like King, and he did not advocate separatist capitalism like Farrakhan, what *did* he stand for in a positive sense? The movie shows that it was his pilgrimage to Mecca which broke Malcolm from a narrow, racially defined black nationalism. That is true. But the movie does not show that Malcolm



Charlotte Observer

Ex-Marine and NAACP leader Robert F. Williams (inset) organized armed defense of civil rights workers in Monroe, North Carolina in 1957.

Marzani & Munsell

undertook a second trip to North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa which had a profound effect on his political outlook. After that trip Malcolm talked not only about opposing racial or national oppression, but “overthrowing the system of exploitation.”

Does that mean that Malcolm had become a Marxist or was moving toward Marxism? This is the position that was argued by the late George Breitman, for example, a professed Trotskyist who edited a number of Malcolm’s speeches and writings. But that too is a falsification. In the last period of his life, Malcolm X came under the influence of the new bourgeois-nationalist regimes in the Arab East and black Africa; people like Egypt’s Nasser and Jomo Kenyatta. These people denounced Western imperialism, Western racism. They talked about “African socialism” or some other kind of “socialism.” Malcolm bought this.

Malcolm X understood American society in his own way. He saw through the lies and hypocrisy of American capitalist politicians, including black Democrats like the slick Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. But he actually knew very little about the Egyptian or Algerian or Kenyan societies *at the base*. He took at face value the pretense of these new ruling elites that they were opposed to racism the world over; that they were believers in and champions of social equality. Much of Malcolm’s energy in the last period of his life was directed at getting what he called the Afro-Asian bloc to pass a resolution in the United Nations con-

demning racism in America.

To begin with, there was no way that was going to happen, because all of these regimes depended on money from Washington and London and Paris, even though they denounced Western imperialism at every opportunity. They denounced Western imperialism, they flirted with Moscow, they said they were nonaligned in the Cold War—as a ploy to get *more* money from Washington and London and Paris. But even if they had passed a resolution in the UN condemning racism in the United States, the American ruling class would have ignored it.

While Malcolm’s campaign to enlist the United Nations in the service of anti-racism was misdirected, he nonetheless understood that simply by its own resources and its own efforts, the American black community could not achieve equality, could not overcome and break the power of the American government and its ruling class. That’s why he was so desirous of finding powerful allies outside the U.S. But Malcolm X did not see that there existed a powerful force *within* the United States, potentially hostile to the white power structure, namely the racially integrated working class.

He saw American society as racially divided, but not as class divided. His view was shaped by his own personal experience. He had been a ghetto hustler, then a prisoner for several years, and then the minister of a black nationalist religious sect. Unlike millions of other American black men and women, he had never worked with whites or Hispanics.

He knew nothing of the trade-union movement. He had never been involved in a strike or defending a picket line against the cops and the scabs. He did not understand that it is the strategic role of blacks in the working class which gives them the potential leverage to overturn the racist capitalist system.

Black workers, armed with a revolutionary socialist program, and organized by a multiracial communist party, can lead backward white workers even though they have racist attitudes and prejudices, in struggle against the ruling class. Malcolm X believed and stated very forcefully that black people must fight for equality and freedom "by any means necessary." The necessary means is working-class revolution. And that revolution when it comes will rightly honor Malcolm X as a courageous fighter and a martyr for the cause of the liberation of humanity.

Diana Coleman

*Spartacist League spokesman, 1960s
Southern civil rights movement activist*

I'd like to talk a little bit about the civil rights movement of which I was a part in the '60s. In Spike Lee's movie, the only thing you see of the civil rights movement is Malcolm X looking at faded images on a television screen. But actually it convulsed this country, and Malcolm X's real audience was not the small numbers who joined the Nation of Islam but the army of civil rights activists who were in the streets.

There is also a mythology that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were

partners in the struggle for civil rights. There's a famous picture that shows Martin Luther King and Malcolm X shaking hands—as though this is what they did all the time. In fact, I think Malcolm X cornered Martin Luther King in a public place, where he couldn't get out of it, and made him shake his hand. In fact, it was Malcolm X's scathing criticism of the civil rights leadership for groveling before the white power structure, his attack on the Kennedy/Johnson Democratic Party administration, that was his real appeal.

This found a response among the civil rights activists. I was in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was the left wing of the civil rights movement. It was started by students from the black colleges and emerged out of the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960. It was originally started under the auspices of Martin Luther King's group, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Initially, it was an extension of black liberalism. The students hoped to bring formal, legal equality to the South, to "Northernize" the South and end all the gross aspects of Jim Crow segregation—the separate bathrooms, the "sit at the back of the bus" stuff.

At the outset, they shared Martin Luther King's whole liberal pacifism thing and sought to pressure the government and Northern Democrats. The strategy behind this was that you were supposed to have nonviolent demonstrations. Then these racist sheriffs would come out and beat your head

in. This would go on television and would scandalize the nation and would then force the federal government and the Northern Democrats to send in the federal troops to help black people. That was the idea. So the SNCC activists started off with big illusions that the U.S. government was on their side. But they soon learned the truth, the hard way.

As Marxists, we know that the bourgeois state is not neutral but an organ for the oppression of the working class and the black masses by the capitalist class. When you pull away the liberal façade, the bourgeois state is armed bodies of men—cops, prisons, National Guard—used by the ruling class to suppress the working class. As SNCC organizing among the black masses repeatedly brought the situation to the flash point, the government rushed in their black sellouts to cool it down, their CIA agents to co-opt it, their courts to indict it, and their troops to crush it. There is another myth too about the role of the troops—look at some of these things like *Eyes on the Prize*—actually the troops were only sent in when blacks began to defend themselves.

In 1961-62, SNCC organized black people in Albany, Georgia for a highly popular all-sided attack on segregation. It was really heating up over a period of time. Martin Luther King would come in periodically for the weekend, and take these highly publicized trips to Albany and declare a truce. This did not go over too well. It came to the boiling point when SNCC was organizing a rally outside a black church and three thousand

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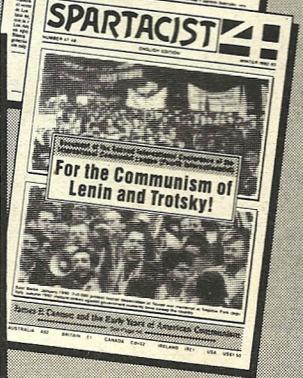
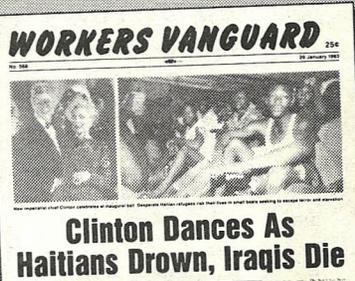
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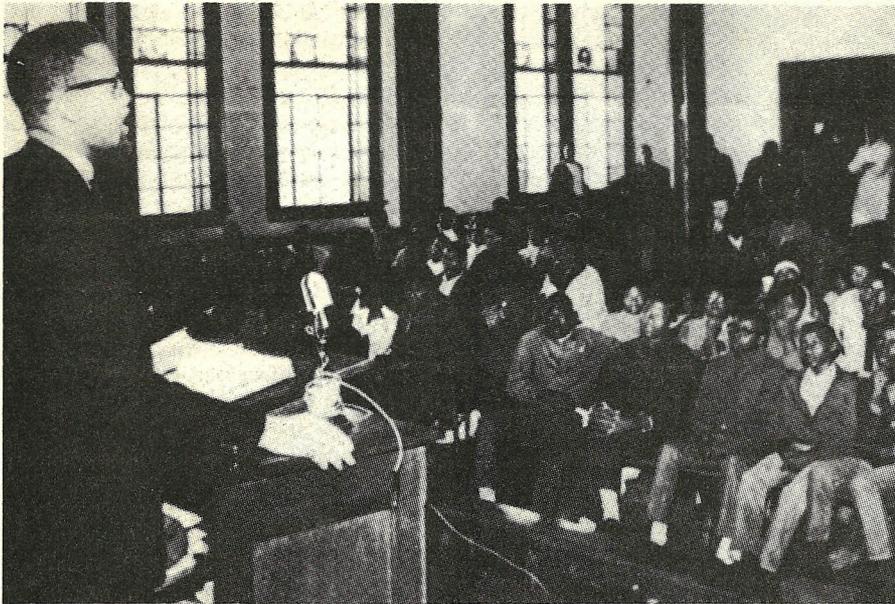
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Wide World

Malcolm X spoke to young people in Selma, Alabama in February 1965 in the midst of a campaign of violent attacks on civil rights demonstrators by local police. "King's man did not want me to talk to them," he remarked later.

KKK massed outside the town, and then the cops attacked the black rally. At this point black youth began to fight back with anything they could find, which was mostly bricks, bottles and so on, against the police violence. Martin Luther King came in and *denounced* the blacks for violence and declared a day of penance for the black peoples' *sin* of defending themselves. SNCC refused to condemn the blacks and started to refer to Martin Luther King contemptuously as "De Lawd." It was not meant as a compliment.

SNCC Gets Shafted by the Democrats

The 1963 March on Washington was originally planned to put pressure on the

Kennedy administration to stop foot-dragging on the Civil Rights Act. It was supposed to be in front of the White House. Kennedy got wind of it and called in the "Big Six" respectable black leaders—King, Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Whitney Young, James Farmer—and read them the riot act. And they backed down. They agreed to move it to the Lincoln Memorial. They agreed to censor all speeches and not allow any "subversives" to speak and only approved signs would be allowed. The bottom line was: no criticism of the Democratic Party.

Orchestrated from the White House, it became a giant liberal prayer fest to channel the masses back into the Democratic Party. John Lewis, who was one

of the leaders of SNCC, agreed under pressure to delete certain passages from his speech. Unfortunately for all concerned, he had already published some of it in the newspaper! I want to read a few lines of what they absolutely couldn't stand to have spoken.

"...the party of Kennedy is the party of Eastland.... We cannot depend on any political party for both the Democrats and Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence.... Where is our party? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to have Marches on Washington?"

That question, "where is our party" is a good question, isn't it—if anything even more urgent today. The respectable black leaders could censor John Lewis, but they couldn't censor Malcolm X. So he referred to the whole thing as the "farce on Washington." This march on Washington was where Martin Luther King made his very famous "I have a dream" speech. In response to this, Malcolm X commented acridly that the black masses were, and still are, having a nightmare.

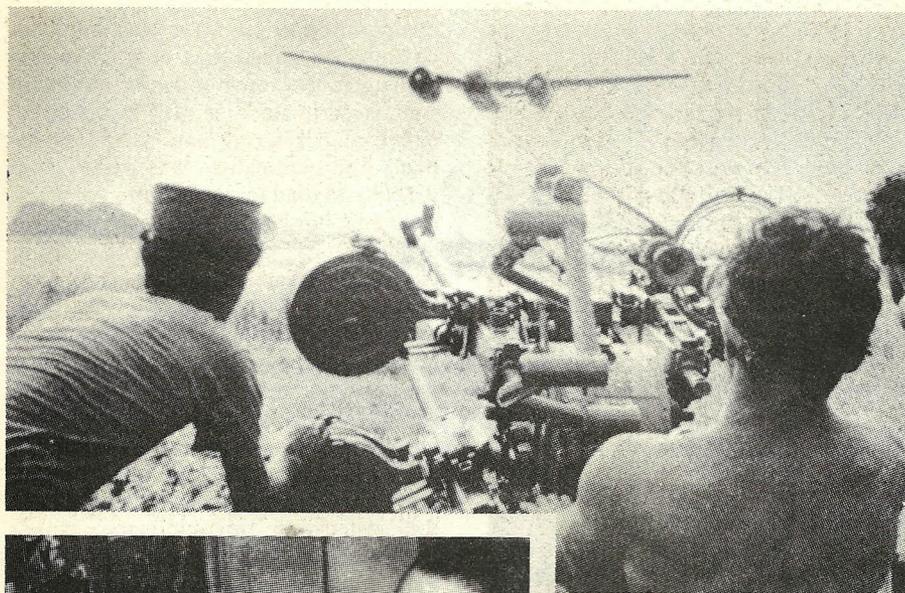
Malcolm X became the great truth-teller for black America. He said all the things that a number of people in SNCC and around the country were thinking but weren't quite up to saying yet. By the time Kennedy was assassinated, many civil rights activists did not mourn for this head of U.S. imperialism who had ordered the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and who sent the Green Berets into Vietnam. They agreed with Malcolm X, who was the one who had the guts to say that "the chickens have come home to roost."

In 1964, SNCC did a voter registration drive in Mississippi and organized 80,000 blacks who were refused the right to vote to sign protest ballots. This was



AP photos

SNCC leader John Lewis (left) speaking at 1963 March on Washington. Martin Luther King, Jr., A. Philip Randolph and other "respectable" black leaders meeting with Kennedy following the march.



Editorial Letras Cubanas



Carl Nesfield

Heroic Cuban defenders (above) defeated JFK's Bay of Pigs invasion. Malcolm X speaking with Fidel Castro in Harlem, September 1960.

dangerous work for SNCC activists and for those people who signed the protest ballots. This was the summer that Goodman, Cheney and Schwerner were killed in Mississippi. SNCC took these protest ballots and formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. With Fannie Lou Hamer at the head of it, they tried to get seated at the 1964 Democratic Party convention in Atlantic City in place of the usual all-white, Jim Crow delegation from Mississippi.

They got shafted—and not just from the Dixiecrat Southerners either, but most particularly from the Northern liberals. It was Hubert Humphrey's job in particular to see that SNCC *not* get seated. That's what he had to do to be the vice presidential candidate. Martin Luther King also showed up there and told SNCC that they should take a compromise whereby they not get seated, or get seated at-large, which they refused to do. It was a real eye-opener for SNCC activists.

Malcolm X spoke to a number of SNCC activists who had been in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and he spoke very eloquently against illusions in the Democrats. He said:

"Likewise, the Democratic Party, which black people supported recently, I think, something like 97 percent. All of these crackers—and that's what they are, crackers—they belong to the Democratic Party. That's the party they belong to—

the same one you belong to, the same one you support, the same one you say is going to get you this and get you that. Why, the base of the Democratic Party is in the South. The *foundation* of its authority is in the South. The head of the Democratic Party is sitting in the White House. He could have gotten Mrs. Hamer into Atlantic City. He could have opened up his mouth and had her seated. Hubert Humphrey could have opened his

mouth and had her seated. Wagner, the mayor right here, could have opened up his mouth and used his weight and had her seated. Don't be talking about some crackers down in Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia—all of them are playing the same game. Lyndon B. Johnson is the head of the Cracker Party."

His explicit message to black America was that "either party you align yourself with is suicide because both parties are criminal. Both parties are responsible for the criminal conditions that exist." We agree with that. We say that they are both capitalist parties and that the Democratic Party is not an instrument for change but an instrument of our oppressors.

Labor Flexed Its Muscle and the Segregationists Backed Down

Let me say a little bit about my own experiences in Gulfport, Mississippi in the summer of '65. By 1965, pacifism was wearing thin. And I don't just mean the idea of "turning the other cheek," but the whole liberal strategy of pacifism and relying on the government. Too many people had been killed. Too many people had had their heads beaten in. I was in Mississippi that whole summer of the Watts riots and I remember reading in the newspaper when Martin Luther King called for "as powerful a police force as possible." And I will tell you that at that time up and down the South SNCC activists *cursed* Martin Luther King's name. Because it was so clear that it was pacifism for us and guns for the National Guard to shoot down



D.R.V. Information Department

Members of a village "self-defense unit" of the National Liberation Front early in the Vietnam War.

blacks. And today there is upheaval in L.A. again. Which one of the black leaders has called for the troops to get out of L.A.? Not one of them!

So in 1965 in Gulfport we didn't do much voter registration. I believed then and I believe now that everyone should have the right to vote...but I didn't want to vote Democrat! The 1964 convention had proved that you couldn't work in the Democratic Party! Like many of my generation, I was radicalized in part by the fact that the Democratic Party was in power. You could see exactly what they were doing. You didn't have the same illusions. It became a lot clearer

It was quite a dangerous situation for us.

Luckily, there was a longshore union local in Gulfport. It was a segregated black local of the International Longshoremen's Association. The union president there met with the mayor and the chief of police and said that if the civil rights activists were arrested or beaten up, the longshoremen would go on strike and shut down the port. And I will tell you, *that really worked*. We weren't arrested or killed and the restaurants began to serve blacks. I was very impressed with this. We didn't know what to do with this at the time, but it taught me a lesson I never forgot, that

ment with Martin Luther King and what he stood for meant they broke with liberalism as they understood it, but many soon came to embrace the illusory alternative of despairing nationalist separatism. And nationalism was really to be a dead-end road for a generation of black militants. For blacks are not a nation but an integral part of the American working class, and separatism is not a program for struggle in racist America.

There was another road besides liberalism and black nationalism, and that was proletarian socialism. That black militants were not introduced to the proletarian Marxist program of revolutionary integrationism at this critical juncture is in large part due to the refusal of the ostensible revolutionary movement—particularly the Socialist Workers Party which had been the Trotskyist organization in this country—to fight for revolutionary leadership. The SWP capitulated to black nationalism and criminally abstained from the struggle in the South. It was the predecessor of the Spartacist League that fought inside the SWP for an active policy of intervention in SNCC. And believe me, I would have welcomed some Marxist clarity in SNCC at that time. I knew we were confused. I didn't know what the answer was, but I could tell confusion when I saw it.

Don Alexander

Spartacist League Central Committee, 1960s Black Power militant and former Black Panther

The great Bolshevik revolutionary, Lenin, once pointed out how the bourgeoisie hunts down and persecutes revolutionaries when they are alive, and when they are dead turns them into harmless icons. Certainly you can see that with Malcolm X. Various and sundry bourgeois elements and reformists and liberals are peddling the lie that Malcolm X was a liberal; that he was a latter-day Booker T. Washington; that he preached "self-help"; that he preached "black capitalism"; that he preached acquiescence to the racist status quo.

It is important to have in mind that the American ruling class was especially frightened by the recent explosion in L.A. The strategic class purpose behind their falsification of history is to prevent the emergence of any serious, militant, revolutionary-minded black leadership that could link up with the labor movement and fight for black liberation through socialist revolution. The interest of the bourgeoisie is to prevent the crystallization of a revolutionary workers party.



WV Photo

Longshoremen's union contingent marches in defense of busing, Norfolk, Virginia, May 1983.

that the problem was the capitalist system and that imperialism was an integral part of the capitalist system.

What we did more of in Gulfport, Mississippi was integrating lunch counters, trying to force them to serve blacks—which I liked much better than voter registration. It was much more activist and lively—to put it mildly. An integrated group of us would go down to the local Woolworth's and try to be served. When we were refused service, we came back the next day with a large demonstration of maybe 300, mostly black high school students. We were running this thing—at age 19 we were the adults. We were surrounded by this huge white mob screaming obscenities, waving little Confederate flags and spitting on us. Then the cops would arrive and laugh and watch. This went on for a few days, escalating all the time. Our forces became bigger but the racist forces became bigger too.

the fight for black freedom must be linked to the power of the proletariat.

The Fight for Revolutionary Leadership

It was when the civil rights movement came north to Chicago with Martin Luther King and attempted to deal with black oppression there—segregated housing, unemployment, rotten schools—that it was stopped dead in its tracks. Because the bourgeoisie might allow some of the blatant aspects of Jim Crow segregation in the South to be overturned, but the basic economic and social aspects of black oppression are an integral part of the American capitalist system. Blacks are an oppressed color caste, integrated into the capitalist system but forcibly segregated at the bottom. So the civil rights movement was just stopped dead.

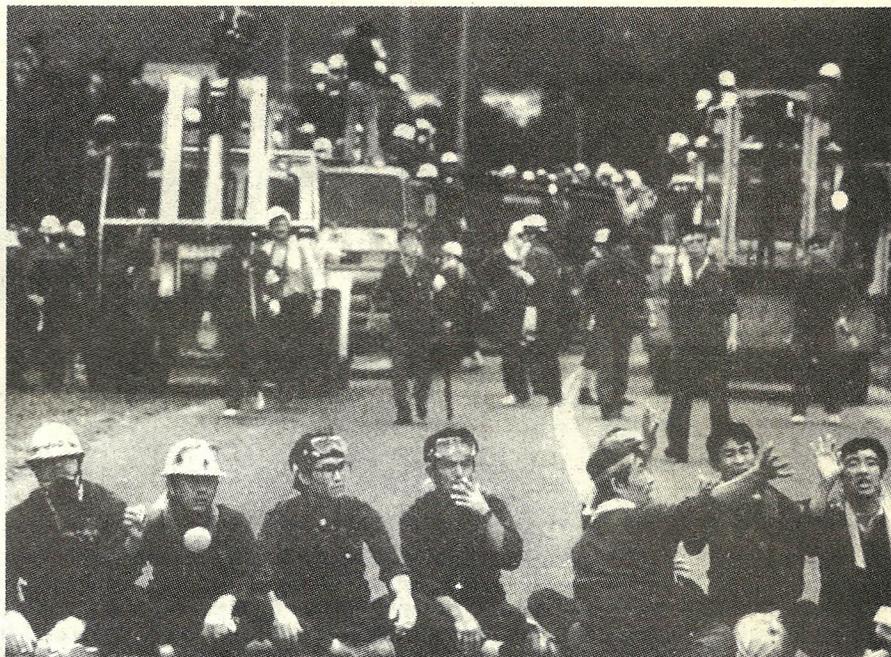
For the black militants, disillusion-

The Spartacist League is the American section of the International Communist League and the nucleus of the vanguard party of the working class. We are the memory of the working people—from the victorious October 1917 workers revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks to the counterrevolutionary reversal of the historic gains of that revolution at the hands of Yeltsin-Bush counterrevolution. Decades of Stalinist and social-democratic betrayals wiped out the memory of the Russian Revolution in the minds of the Soviet working people. We were the only revolutionary organization in the world that fought against Yeltsin-Bush counterrevolution. We fought tooth and nail in defense of the historic gains of that revolution against world imperialism and internal counterrevolution. Today the task is to fight for socialist revolution in the ex-Soviet Union. We Trotskyists proclaim that Stalinism is dead, but communism lives. It lives in the struggles of the working people, in their struggles against the vicious brutal system of capitalist exploitation, from South Korea to South Africa.

We are class-conscious revolutionary internationalists. We are Trotskyists. We remember how the bourgeoisie greeted Malcolm X's death—with undisguised malicious glee. We remember how they gloated over the murder of Huey Newton, the Black Panther Party leader. For us Trotskyist fighters for world revolution, the American workers revolution needs black leadership. In racist capitalist America, we fight to build a racially integrated workers party fighting for black liberation through socialist revolution. For us that is a strategic task confronting the American working class. Every institution of this racist bourgeoisie order exudes racist poison. As the great Bolshevik Leon Trotsky once remarked, black workers are "convoked by history" to play a leading role in burying this racist capitalist system.

As revolutionary integrationists, we base ourselves firmly upon the militant program of integrated class struggle. In this country, segregation is poison. All the talk about "separate but equal" is a diversion from the class struggle and plays into the hands of the ruling class. We hear a lot of that today in the name of "Afrocentricity" and segregated schools. We have these petty-bourgeois misleaders pushing it in order to hold back the working people and the oppressed.

Drawing upon the lessons of history, we fight to finish the Civil War. Black people were freed from chattel



South
Korean shipyard strikers in sitdown protest against Hyundai in Ulsan, Korea, November 1990.

slavery but the Northern bourgeoisie betrayed the struggle for black equality. We fight to finish the Civil War by fighting for a workers government in this country, through the instrumentality of a multiracial vanguard party. There cannot be a successful working-class seizure of power in this country unless the most class-conscious working people unite under the leadership of a communist vanguard party as the most militant and consistent champions of all the oppressed and exploited. A party that is a "tribune of the people."

Malcolm X and the Black Power Era

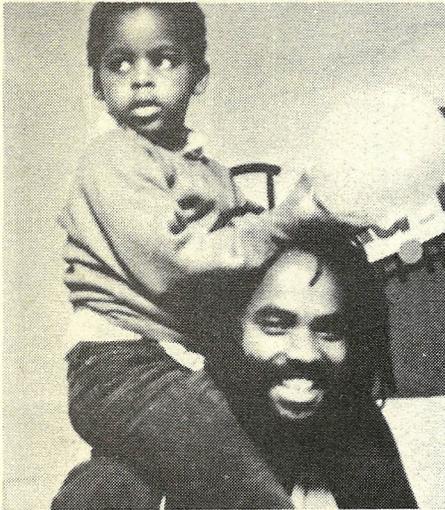
Malcolm X was cut off from the possibility of developing such a revolutionary working-class perspective. But he was not a liberal. He was a militant, courageous, intelligent and *honest* fighter for black liberation who the liberals—black and white—feared and hated. They especially hated his advocacy of armed self-defense against the racist police and Klan. And of course they hated his denunciation of the Democratic "fox" and the Republican "wolf."

Malcolm X knew you couldn't work within the system to wipe out centuries of racial oppression, fostered and maintained by a violent, racist ruling class. After Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam, the sinister, anti-Semitic, nationalist demagogue Farrakhan wanted him dead. This is hushed up by the liberals and the reformists, from Spike Lee to the Communist Party.

It's no accident that this wasn't in the movie.

The previous speakers addressed the civil rights movement. The question is, why did such a tremendous expenditure of energy yield such meager results? It's very important to understand the betrayals of the reformist Stalinist Communist Party during that time, of the social democrats and the fake-Trotskyists, who tailed behind the black preachers, the black Muslims and the labor bureaucrats. They paved the way for the collapse of that movement. There was an opportunity to win over thousands of black militants during that period to a revolutionary working-class program and perspective.

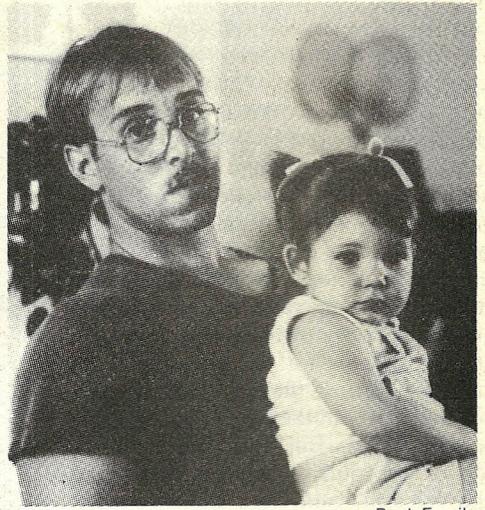
In particular, the criminal abstention from participation in the civil rights movement by the ostensibly Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party meant that these historic struggles that were to shape a whole generation took place without the intervention of a revolutionary party. Many of these courageous black militants could have been recruited to the Marxist program of revolutionary integrationism, which is the fight for integration into an egalitarian socialist society. The origins of our organization were as the revolutionary opposition that emerged in the Socialist Workers Party at that time, *fighting against this abstentionism* which reflected the Socialist Workers Party's loss of a proletarian revolutionary perspective. We were subsequently expelled in 1963 because we were fighting for a communist-led civil



no credit



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Buck Family

From left to right: Mumia Abu-Jamal, renowned black journalist and former Black Panther, death row political prisoner; Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt), former Black Panther, victim of COINTELPRO frame-up; steel worker Bob Buck, railroaded to jail for defending his union. The Partisan Defense Committee champions the cases of these and other class-war prisoners, standing unconditionally on the side of the working people and their allies in the struggle against their exploiters and oppressors. Support the work of the PDC and read *Class-Struggle Defense Notes* (see ad next page).

rights movement and for mobilizing the integrated labor movement nationwide to put its muscle behind the struggle for black equality.

Democratic Party—We Know Which Side You're On

Today the conditions for the black masses are as terrible as those of the Depression era in the 1930s. The same criminal racist rulers that killed 38 Black Panthers with their FBI COINTELPRO program, that framed and jailed Geronimo Pratt for 22 years for a crime that he did not and could not have committed, that put Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row—is the same enemy that attacked white middle-aged workers at the Caterpillar plant in Peoria, Illinois on the picket line, and that jailed Bob Buck, a white steel worker, for defending his picket line in the Ravenswood Steelworkers strike.

Now that Wall Street has replaced Bush with Clinton, the pro-capitalist labor traitors and the black misleaders are selling working people and the oppressed the lie that things are finally going to get better. They say we're going to have a "New Deal," a "new day" and some "new opportunities." Well, they're talking about opportunity *for themselves*. A few little cabinet posts and a few little bones are being thrown their way.

Clinton got elected by distancing himself from and spitting on black people. Loyal Democratic flunkey Jesse Jackson was kept at the back of the bus. Clinton presided over the execution of a brain-damaged black man during his campaign, and he singled out especially poor women, black women, for attack with the promise to "end welfare as we know it."

Clinton's election was not so much a Democratic Party triumph as it was a Republican collapse. In comparison to the '88 elections, the black voter turnout was 12 percent less. This new Democrat is itching to impose arrogant U.S. imperialism's bloody role as global cop in a so-called "one superpower world." U.S. imperialism *created* the famine in Somalia. Now in the name of "super-sovereignty" they're flexing their muscles. They have their eye on the Near East and of course they think they have a right to police the world. This is very dangerous stuff—ultimately to reverse the decay of American imperialism, it means World War III, particularly against their Japanese and German imperialist rivals. So this is a racist, colonial adventure and we say: U.S. Global Cops Out of Somalia!

The fight to build a class-struggle workers party in America will come through breaking workers, blacks and other oppressed minorities from their illusions in this two-party shell game, this electoral prison which politically disarms the working people in the face of the most violent ruling class in history. After Clinton's election, the Detroit police beat a black man to death—that is the real face of racist American capitalism. Life in the so-called "New World Order" is one of desperation, misery and hopelessness for millions of the hungry and the homeless, the old and the young in this country.

L.A. Upheaval Shook America

When Los Angeles exploded, it tore a gaping hole in the New World Order. This gave the bourgeoisie a fright. This

was a *multiracial* revolt that demonstrated that U.S. society can be polarized along *class* lines. So what happened in the aftermath? They had a so-called "weed and seed" program. The idea was to weed out the Hispanics and blacks and throw them in jail. The "seed" was all this talk about "minority enterprise"—and of course it's a bunch of bull. You hear talk about "retraining." *What jobs* to retrain for? There are no jobs! This country is a gigantic prison, and particularly the youth have no future under the capitalist private property system. The impoverishment of the masses has created a generation of minority youth who do not have anything to lose. White working-class youth in this country face increasingly bleak prospects.

During the Los Angeles revolt, we fought for labor/black defense, for the mobilization of the multiracial working class to defend black and Latino youth against the racist cops and troops. And to lead a fight not simply to seize articles of consumption (people of course need things) but to seize the *means of production*, because the wealth is created by the working people. This was not an abstract proposition. The Longshoremen *have* struck in Los Angeles against the bosses, and a couple of years ago they struck against the cops when they invaded their union hall. Had ten thousand longshoremen been out on the streets, this would have sent a powerful message that labor's power is a force to be reckoned with. Only the Spartacist League fought for that perspective while the rest of the left was pressuring the so-called liberal wing of imperialism's Democratic Party, i.e.,

Mayor Bradley to pressure Bush.

There is a general point: we have no friends in high places. You really saw it then. *All* the capitalist politicians, black and white, rallied behind the banner of racist law and order. Not one black leader publicly denounced the sending in of those troops or called for their removal, because those "leaders" are the defenders and beneficiaries of the racist capitalist system. A system that crushes workers, that crushes black people, Latinos, women, gays, and the desperately poor.

Pseudo-nationalist black capitalist hustlers, who want to have the sole right to exploit blacks, organize to divert the anger and outrage of the masses by pitting desperate black youth against Latinos and Asians. And this is very deadly stuff. In New York City, the Zionists are pushing for race war and anti-Semitic black nationalists like FBI fink Al Sharpton are organizing for the same thing. We had better fight those who serve the interests of the racist bosses by setting us up for bloody defeat while the Klan and the skinheads and the cops laugh themselves silly. Our enemy is not Jews or Koreans but the capitalist class and system. Our brothers and sisters are not those who are on the side of the racist capitalist oppressors. Their interests and ours are directly counterposed.

We can see that clearly again in terms of what happened in Los Angeles. You have a black Democrat, ex-cop Tom Bradley, who's been mayor for 19 years. He unleashed his cops and the National Guard to smash that revolt. And around the country you had black Democratic mayors, from Maynard Jackson in Atlanta to Dinkins in New York, and also their white counterparts like Jordan in San Francisco—they unleashed their bloody racist cops to brutally attack those demonstrating against the racist acquittal of the L.A. cops. This is no accident.

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Today there is a widespread illusion that all black people have the same interest. Look at the objective facts: the top 20 percent of the black population controls almost half of the total income of all blacks—an inequality greater than among whites. I always like to tell people a story about the earliest seeds of class consciousness that I developed. I remember many years ago when we were in battle for black rights and this black administrator—one of the guys who got co-opted by these poverty programs of the sixties—he was lecturing us and said,

"I might be your color, but I'm not your kind." And that drove home a really basic point, that we live in a class-divided capitalist society. That's the beginning of understanding. This society is based upon the exploitation of labor.

The upheaval in Los Angeles came in the context of over a decade and a half of massive deindustrialization of the U.S., of rampant capitalist greed, thievery and unparalleled financial parasitism. I mean, they've been stealing everything that's not nailed down! We paid for the S&L rip-off—hundreds of billions of dollars! This poses the urgent task of organizing to get rid of this racist capitalist system. For workers power and revolution, we must build that mass, fighting, integrated, revolutionary party. American workers revolution does need black leadership, a leadership that partakes of the qualities of a Malcolm X.

Malcolm X had nothing in common with the reactionary petty-bourgeois hustlers who are cashing in on the misery of the black masses. For instance, some of the leaders of L.A. gangs like the Crips and the Bloods—they're getting theirs. Farrakhan's organization got a contract from the government to police the housing projects. And there are various aspiring capitalists around who are pushing "black capitalism" as the answer to racism, unemployment, police murder and brutality—all of which is inherent

to the capitalist system. This program is a hoax. It's a fraud. It's utopian. The possibility of a significant class of black capitalists developing in the United States is as likely as racist ex-L.A. police chief Daryl Gates establishing a Rodney King scholarship fund for the families of black and Hispanic youth murdered over the years by the bloody, racist L.A. police department!

We Trotskyists of the International Communist League have a right to say that we have the only program that is in the objective interest of the working people and the poor. From Detroit in 1979, to Washington, D.C. in 1982, to Philadelphia in 1988, we have initiated and led the only successful labor/black mobilizations that have stopped provocations of the Klan and the skinhead fascists who organize for racist murder. Our exemplary actions point to the tasks of a class-struggle workers party. A party fighting for jobs for all through a shorter workweek with no cut in pay; for an end to discrimination against women and gays; for full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers and their families; for organization of the unemployed and unorganized; for free medical care and education; for the defense of the right to bear arms; for labor/black defense against racist police and fascist terror.

Those who labor must rule. We fight for the expropriation of the capitalists,

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WV Photo

Protest held in New York City on 1 May 1992 against racist acquittal of L.A. cops who brutally beat Rodney King.

without compensation. That means a working-class-led fight to seize the means of production in the struggle for socialist revolution and a workers government. That's the way we will get everything we need and deserve. You always hear, "Who's going to pay for it?" That's how it's paid for—by ripping the productive wealth away from the ruling class. The only instrument for carrying that out is the Trotskyist vanguard party leading the fight for power.

In conclusion, I'd like to say this: Malcolm X was a very serious student of

history and he once pointed out that history is our best teacher. Indeed that is the case. Every gain of the working class and the oppressed has been won in struggle against the bosses and their state. These gains are always reversible under capitalism. The one thing that is sacred for the capitalist ruling class is the accumulation of surplus value—maximum profit squeezed out of capitalist wage slaves and the poor.

We can't reform the racist capitalist system. It threatens us with total annihilation. It must be overthrown. It is

socialism or barbarism. The U.S. imperialist slaughter of over 100,000 Iraqis underlines that capitalism must be destroyed on a world scale by an internationalist revolutionary party, a tribune of the people like the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky who led the only successful workers revolution in history.

I want to end with a couple of short quotes from Malcolm X. The first one is about how you can't work within the system.

"It's impossible for a chicken to produce a duck egg—even though they both belong to the same family of fowl. A chicken just doesn't have it within its system to produce a duck egg. It can't do it. It can only produce according to what that particular system was constructed to produce. The system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system, this system, period. It's impossible for this system, as it stands, to produce freedom right now for the black man in this country. And if ever a chicken did produce a duck egg, I'm quite sure you would say it was certainly a revolutionary chicken!"

And on capitalism:

"You can't operate a capitalistic system unless you are vulturistic; you have to have someone else's blood to suck to be a capitalist. You show me a capitalist, I'll show you a bloodsucker. He cannot be anything but a bloodsucker if he's going to be a capitalist. He's got to get it from somewhere other than himself, and that's where he gets it—from somewhere or someone other than himself."

You can appreciate the spirit, his militant opposition to the racist status quo. And that's what we honor about Malcolm X. ■

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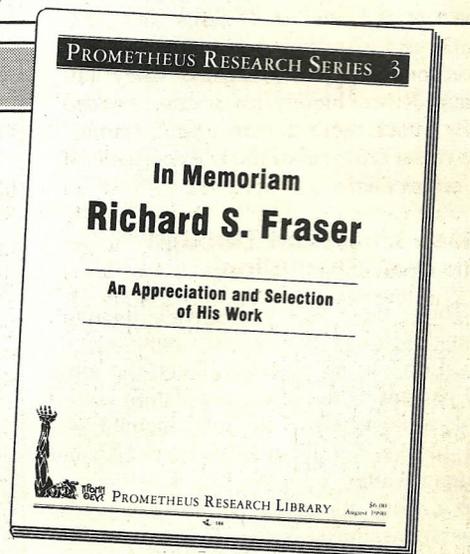
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Southern Schools Ban Malcolm X

Down With the Confederate Flag of Slavery!

Black students in the Old South have been besieged by "in your face" racists insisting on their "right" to wave the Confederate flag of slavery in public schools. In Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee, white racist students have joined forces with hooded Klansmen and swastika-tattooed skinheads in school boycotts, walkouts and racist rallies demanding the right to carry or wear this flag in public schools. Underscoring the precarious position of blacks in the so-called "New South," public school boards and principals have responded to this resurgent racism by politely labeling it "racial tension" and slapping black youth back down in their place to appease the race-haters.

In public schools across the South, black students have been *banned* from wearing the popular "X" hats or any T-shirt bearing an image or quotation from Malcolm X, the militant spokesman for black self-defense against racist attacks. At suburban Atlanta's Peachtree Jr. High (which banned Malcolm X clothing on the eve of February, Black History Month) a student who thought it was OK to wear a shirt bearing the likeness of the accommodationist Martin Luther King Jr. was harassed and humiliated by school authorities and forced to wear his clothing inside out all day. And it doesn't stop there...the principal is even on the prowl for "Black Bart"!

Dimwitted school principals argue that banning fascist regalia and Malcolm X T-shirts is just an evenhanded dress code against "message clothing." But to equate the youthful expression of black pride, by an oppressed minority in a white racist society, with the bloody banner of white supremacy is an outrage. The Confederate flag is a call to arms for murderous thugs North and South. It represents a *program* of racist terror for those who want to live in the kind of society we'd have if the South had won the Civil War. The Confederate flag has nothing to do with "freedom of expression"—it is the battle flag for fascist violence, and it is increasingly brandished as black rights are rolled back and as the fascist vermin grow in the decay of this bankrupt capitalist economy.

Last April, Ku Klux Klansmen from across Georgia targeted a suburban Atlanta school, Newton County High,

for recruitment to their fascist ranks. Alleging "bias" in favor of blacks, some 30 white students in KKK T-shirts walked out to join a Klan rally outside the school. Protected by agents of the notoriously racist Georgia Bureau of Investigation and sheriff's deputies, the Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan whipped up the white-supremacists to a racist frenzy over the selection of a black student as school valedictorian. Emboldened by the right-wing climate in this country, the KKK presented formal demands that a Klansman be included on the school panel where an NAACP member sits, and further that the Confederate flag and "Dixie" be put back in the classrooms.

Meanwhile, Main Street in Duncan, South Carolina was transformed into a sea of Confederate flags to honor the more than 100 white punks who were suspended for a few days for wearing the racist banner in school. At one rally for these junior would-be Klansmen, a white school board member was arrested carrying a .38 calibre pistol. These racist rallies spread like a virus to nearby counties, and demonstrations around the area were boosted by squads of Nazi skinhead thugs from North Carolina and beyond. With black students literally under the gun, the school principal in Duncan responded by canceling Black History Month. The school superintendent appointed a "Rebel Mascot Advisory Committee" to decide whether to continue with a Confederate soldier as the school's official emblem.

What began initially as an effort by black students and organizations like the NAACP to pressure the school boards to remove the Confederate flag from public facilities has come back with a vengeance against the black students themselves, who are now stripped of their rights and facing vile racist reaction. This example drives home the point that pleading with bourgeois politicians and state authorities to "outlaw" fascist activity and symbols simply gives the state more ammunition to restrict and regulate the rights of unionists, socialists, opponents of racist terror. If more people who wear Malcolm X *read* Malcolm X, they might not fall into the trap of asking their enemy to defend black rights. Although Malcolm did not have a pro-



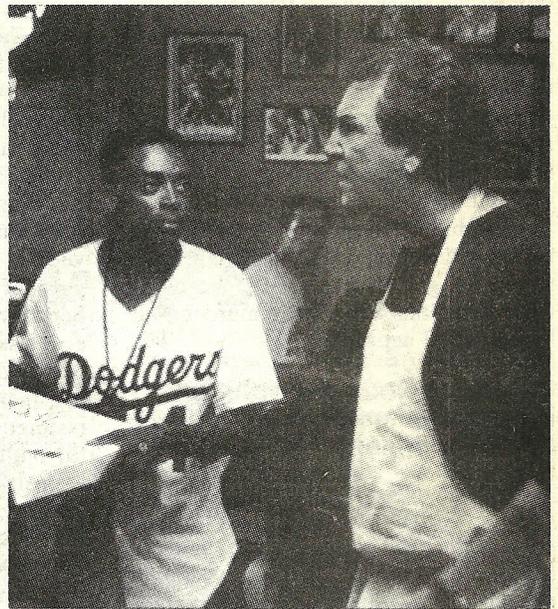
Peterson/JB Pictures

Malcolm X regalia was banned in order to appease white racists.

gram of integrated class struggle, at the time of his murder in 1965 his views were evolving from black nationalism. He was deeply hostile to U.S. imperialism's oppression of dark-skinned peoples throughout the world, and saw with x-ray vision the sham of racist American "democracy." Malcolm said, "when you vote Democrat, you vote Dixiecrat," and spoke the bitter truth about Uncle Tom black leaders who fostered illusions that the system could be made to work for black people.

Especially in the South, there should be no illusions in the supposed "neutrality" of the government or any of its institutions from the courts to the cops to the school boards. It was in open defiance of the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision outlawing segregation in public schools that the Georgia state legislature dug up the old Confederate battle flag and slapped the state seal on it in 1956. (Alabama and South Carolina immediately followed suit and Mississippi has just about *always* flown the Confederate flag.) It is to this barely modified battle flag of slavery that school principals ask students to rise and pledge allegiance each morning. It's a daily reminder that there is a lot of unfinished business to attend to in this country.

To wipe out the scourge of racism and Klan terror, and bury forever the Confederate flag of slavery, requires a thoroughgoing socialist revolution in this country to *finish the Civil War* and make good on the unfulfilled promise of black freedom. The Spartacus Youth Clubs are dedicated to winning students to build a multiracial revolutionary party to fight for this future. ■



Universal City Studios photos

Scenes from the movie: Residents outraged by police murder trash pizzeria; right, Mookie (Spike Lee) and Sal (Danny Aiello).

"Do The Right Thing"— A Review

New York City. From the Bronx to Brooklyn, people are lining up in the summertime heat to see *Do The Right Thing*, Spike Lee's new film about racism in New York. It is a riveting picture of abrasive race relations as seen in the life of one block of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Young Spartacus Film Review

by A. Stevens

Here people are locked in, compressed, brimming with pent-up frustration. Nothing comes from outside this block except the heat—the killer cops and a merciless sun. As the temperature rises, we see not the fabled American "melting pot" but a pressure cooker that serves up an American meltdown. A racial confrontation and then police terror spark an explosion. People who don't even see themselves as racists get caught up in it: there is *no way out*.

There is a genuine New York flavor

to this movie—both in the stinging rawness of race-hatred *and* the cultural mix in this city with its ethnically diverse population of minorities and foreign-born. This vibrant and often very funny film is something of a cultural breakthrough: a restoration of humanity and compassion to black people that Hollywood has all too often typecast in racist stereotypes. Lee's idea for *Do The Right Thing* arose out of the racist murder of a black man by a gang of white racists in Howard Beach, Queens. Lee says: "It was 1986 and a black man was still being hunted down like a dog. Never mind *Mississippi Burning*: Nothing has changed in America, and you don't have to go down south to have a run-in with racist rednecks. They're here in Nueva York." Although Lee has brought a charged political issue to the big screen, *Do The Right Thing* is deliberately ambiguous in its message.

Do The Right Thing is dedicated to six black men and women, a roll call of victims of lynch-mob and racist cop terror: Michael Griffith, Eleanor Bumpurs,

Michael Stewart, Edmund Perry, Yvonne Smallwood, Arthur Miller. As their names rise on the screen we remember each chilling murder and also think of the new names that must now be added and also not forgotten—Richard Luke, seized in his housing project and murdered in police custody; Trevor Francis, hurled to his death from a Harlem roof. How many more have been martyred for the "crime" of being black in a racist society? Deliberately timed for release in the midst of New York City's mayoral race, this is pretty hot stuff—too hot for some blowhards of the bourgeois press.

One reviewer hysterically accused Spike Lee of having lost the election for black Democratic hopeful David Dinkins. Others sound the alarm that this film could spark race riots at a theater near you. But did the press worry when they screamed "WILDING" all over their front pages? Did any of them fear unrest when George Bush rode to office over the image of Willie Horton? Whipping up white fear and hatred is news fit to print for those who mold "public

opinion" in order to keep things as they are. But black rage? Misdirected vengeance? It's a racist double standard. As Lee said, "Any riot this summer will be because another cop killed a black kid who's innocent."

The Euro-chic judges at the Cannes Film Festival snubbed this film, declaring a movie about American racism "irrelevant." (We suspect that North African workers in France and Asian immigrant workers in Thatcher's Britain won't think so.) The critics found "Mookie," the movie's central black character, "unheroic." It is precisely the absence of heroes and angels and feel-good-Movieland endings that give this film its complexity and its viewers something to think about. Shouting "Howard Beach!" Mookie turns his wrath at the police murder of Radio Raheem (the block's baddest, most alienated and menacing youth) on Sal, the white pizzeria owner. It's not heroic. It is a very tame screenplay of the repression and rebellion that's swept America's inner cities when black youth have been driven beyond reason by trigger-happy cops.

Cultural Nationalism: Liberal Lies

A self-proclaimed "black nationalist with a camera," Lee paints a very *idealized* portrait of ghetto life. This block of Bed-Stuy looks good; poor but rich in spirit, laughter and innocence. Even the cops are too good to be true. The choke-hold murder of Radio Raheem is horrifying and intentionally evocative of the real-life police murder of Michael Stewart, yet here it's portrayed as an accident by two overzealous pigs, one of whom pleads, "Hey, that's enough, stop it." By contrast, the murder of Michael Stewart, like so many others, was no accident. It was 14 against one



Wilford Harewood

February 1987 protest outside Bronx courthouse against police murder of black grandmother Eleanor Bumpurs.

and nobody yelled "stop!" except the anguished family and angry New Yorkers in protest of this heinous crime.

It is not this "artistic license," however, that has many critics howling. All they want to know is "where's the dope?" One can appreciate Lee's bristling at racists who believe all black people are shiftless, lazy junkies who must be held personally responsible for the degradation, disease, crime and poverty that are endemic in the ghetto. Spike Lee has created a stylized neighborhood for his movie, which is of course his right. Still, Lee purports to tell "the truth, Ruth"—and *this portrait is unreal*. Before he could even build the sets for this movie, Lee hired 20 bow-tied heavies from Louis Farrakhan's Fruit of Islam as his private security force! They boarded up two crack houses, swept up

M-16 cartridges, ran the junkies around the corner, cracked down on crime and patrolled the set round-the-clock through the entire shoot.

In this film, nobody but Mookie has a job (except for his sister, who Lee described as "in a grey area, not black or white, when it comes to politics"). Working for the white man makes Mookie the middleman between Sal's business and the black community. Mookie's unemployed friends keep reminding him to "stay black" and demand that Sal add pictures of black people to his pizzeria's "Wall of Fame." The main omission from Lee's slice of life is the black working class, a force that could lead the ghetto masses in struggle.

There is a purpose to this deceptive portrait: to construct a framework for the simultaneously liberal and reactionary politics of cultural nationalism. Certainly blacks and Hispanics caught in America's ghettos know what they've got stinks and they want out. They don't want Ed Koch's decals of flower boxes pasted over burned-out tenements, they want real housing, real jobs, real schools. So why prettify the conditions and omit the power that black people have in the working class? It's convenient if your perspective is petty-bourgeois black nationalism.

The name of Spike Lee's production company, "Forty Acres and a Mule," identifies with the aspirations of black people after the Civil War and is a reference to their freedom betrayed. It is past defeats of integrationist struggles that fuel the defiant *posture* and rhetoric



WV Photo

1980 New York City transit workers strike: integrated labor movement has the power. Unleash it in revolutionary struggle to bring down racist capitalist system!



Wide World

Malcolm X addressing Harlem rally. He opposed both racist parties of American capitalism.

of nationalists who have in fact *given up* the fight. Pork barrel politicians and black capitalist hustlers worship the accomplished fact of segregation in order to push their own ambitions: to politically control and economically exploit "their" people, "their" market. Although this nationalist mindset permeates Spike Lee's diary, production notes and interviews, his talent as a filmmaker transcends his politics. His camera records all players in the New York scene with compassion and complexity and gives us a richer picture.

New York City Raw

Do The Right Thing captures the ambivalence of the black community toward a Korean greengrocer and turns it into an argument *against* the anti-immigrant bigotry that nationalist hustlers (like Sonny Carson, or FBI fink Al Sharpton who led a march against Arab grocers) are pushing in New York City. In one scene, the three sidewalk sages argue over why they are black and unemployed while a Korean has a successful new business in the neighborhood. One hastens to remind "Coconut Sid," a Caribbean black, that he's not so long off the boat himself and ought to drop this Korean-hating nonsense; another rejects talk of a boycott with the announcement that "it's Miller time" and heads over to buy a beer. When the police murder Radio Raheem, the Korean grocer is among those chasing the cop car out of the ghetto. The crowd turns on him as another "outsider" charging "much money" in the black neighborhood. He frantically swings a broom to defend his store and pleads that he is not white

either, that he too is black. Fury turns to amusement and finally compassion; the crowd disperses.

Lee exposes the contradictions of race-hatred with humor, and at times with a startling blast of raw loathing. Sal's son Pino, a racist Italian punk who can't stand serving Pop's pizzas to black people, ties himself in knots trying to justify his bigotry while conceding that all his entertainment idols are black: "...but not really black. They're more than black. It's—it's different." A rapid-fire montage of racial slurs slung between blacks and Italians, cops and Puerto Ricans, and the Korean to the Jewish mayor, stings the audience while they laugh. These words mean blood in NYC and everybody knows it. Lee hammers home the point of how absurd it is for everybody to hate everybody...while the cops get away with murder.

Sal (Danny Aiello) is a compelling figure in the film because he seems like such a decent guy, but when menaced, the same racist filth surges out. Moreover, that scene was a genuine, unscripted eruption. Giancarlo Esposito, who plays "Buggin' Out," the mover of the boycott of Sal's in the film, says "I got the ball rolling when I called Sal a guinea bastard":

"When Danny said 'Nigger,' I freaked. It finally came up for him. I knew that at some point in his life, he'd called somebody a nigger, and I went crazy because he was someone I liked. Danny was upset with himself, I was really upset with myself, and Spike was gleaming, because he'd gotten the scene."

—Rolling Stone, 15 June

Esposito's real-life mother is black and his father is Italian. Off camera, he and

Danny Aiello chatted in Italian. On camera, they were hurling epithets at each other. Lee's art didn't imitate life, it became life.

The Fake Unity of Malcolm and Martin

To the incessant beat of Public Enemy's rap tune "Fight the Power" blasted from Radio Raheem's boom box, the recurring image in this film is a photo of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King standing together. The incoherent, stuttering "Smiley" peddles this photo up and down the block. When Sal's pizzeria is burned to the ground, "Fight the Power" still pounds away from the ashes and Smiley pins his photo on Sal's previously all-white, all-Italian "Wall of Fame."

What's the point? The photo evokes a period of militant struggle against Jim Crow segregation and racist inequality in this country. That struggle was defeated—by black misleaders who sold their souls to the Democratic Party, by brutal state repression that mowed down the most militant black fighters, and by a passive labor movement that failed to flex its muscle in a *class-struggle* fight for black freedom. But that photo (snapped in the one brief moment that these two *opposing* political leaders ever stood together) has been preserved and peddled to promote a liberal lie.

Malcolm X, who stood for militant self-defense against racist attacks and opposition to the bosses' Democratic Party, is made more "acceptable" by association with King. King, who preached "love thy oppressor," is packaged to make him acceptable for today's alienated and oppressed black youth. That photo hangs in virtually every Black Studies department in every university. Malcolm X is now marketed for the *illusion* that you can "fight the power" while just buying into it. And that message is the conclusion of the film. There is no social struggle to combat cop terror against black America, just one word from "Mister Señor Love Daddy," the neighborhood's DJ and social conscience: "VOTE!"

Fight For Power

In his epilogue to *Do The Right Thing*, Spike Lee (who thinks his character, Mookie, is "from the Malcolm X school of thought") writes: "In the end, justice will prevail one way or another. There are two paths to that. The way of King, or the way of Malcolm.... I know who I'm down with." The film ends with two quotes. Martin Luther King espouses nonviolence. Malcolm X objects to self-

defense being mislabeled as "violence"; he rightly calls it "intelligence."

It's a terrible abuse of a terrific quote from Malcolm X. Malcolm told the truth about the need for black self-defense and warned against any illusions in the bosses' police or the bosses' political parties to defend black rights. But burning down a pizzeria has nothing to do with self-defense, and the real powers that keep blacks locked at the bottom of a capitalist social system lie far from "Sal's Famous" pizzeria in Bed-Stuy. Herein lies the danger of the purposely ambiguous message of *Do The Right Thing*.

In a recent *Penthouse* (August 1989) interview Spike Lee said the way out is that "blacks have to build our own economic base, own our businesses, be self-sufficient." And, he added in a talk show on Black Educational Television, when blacks are not just consumers but owners, then they can put up the pictures they want in their shops. So in the end, what triumphs is accommodation with the racist Pino's views: blacks should stay in their own neighborhoods and Italians in theirs. What crap! In a racist society, *separate means unequal*. The myth of black capitalism is a hoax, and furthermore a naked one, which anyone can see by just looking at the racial composition of the ruling class in this country: not one black CEO in the top 1,000 corporations.

Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy, Roy Wilkins, Lyndon Johnson in 1963. King tried to channel ghetto anger into racist Democratic Party.



Yet "black capitalism" schemes such as pushed by Jesse Jackson tell black people the lie that they should look to Coca-Cola for liberation, rather than to united class struggle together with white, Hispanic and Asian working people against their common enemy.

Lee provides the wrong answer to the question of why there are no black-owned businesses in a discussion about the Korean grocer in the film. His sidewalk sage concludes: "Either dem Koreans are geniuses or we Blacks are dumb." Black people are not simply another ethnic group in this society or just the most oppressed among many. Since the victory of Northern capitalism in the Civil

War and the defeat of Reconstruction, the black population has been compacted as a *race-color caste*: last-hired, first-fired and segregated at the bottom of society. A caste system means social mobility only for some—Koreans, even light-skinned Hispanics can move up, but keeping black people down is a pillar of this capitalist system.

But society is not fundamentally divided between owners and consumers. There are *producers* of the wealth who have been systematically denied the fruits of their labor. It is the integrated working class that has the social weight and power to break the bosses' rule. To see that, Spike Lee would have to cast his camera off the microcosm of one ghetto block. But not too far. Even a glimpse of the local subway at rush hour would do. Tens of thousands of black men and women, many of them unionized hospital workers and public employees, teachers, utility employees and service workers, are a key component in what makes New York run. And getting them to work every morning are the transportation workers, who showed their power in 1980 in a big strike that left the Brooklyn Heights yuppies limping over the bridge to Wall Street.

Genuine emancipation of black people from their oppression in this racist capitalist society, making racial equality a reality rather than a dream, will begin with socialist revolution. There is no other road to black freedom. To lead that fight, we need a party—an integrated, class-struggle workers party that will mobilize labor and minorities in defense of the beleaguered ghettos. The bosses' Democratic Party is the main political means used to tie the oppressed to their exploiters. We need a workers party to lead all the oppressed in a fight for a workers government. To this we in the Spartacist League are dedicated. ■

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