

## Malcolm X's Approach: Separation and Resistance

*You don't integrate with a sinking ship." This was Malcolm X's curt explanation of why he did not favor integration of blacks with whites in the United States. As the one-time chief spokesman of the Nation of Islam, a Black Muslim organization led by Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X argued that America was too racist in its institutions and people to offer hope to blacks. The solution proposed by the Nation of Islam was a separate nation for blacks to develop themselves apart from what they considered to be a corrupt white nation destined for divine destruction.*

5 LOMAX: Minister Malcolm, we are all by now familiar with your basic philosophy; we have heard you speak, seen you on television, and read your remarks in magazines and newspapers. By now, I think, everybody knows your position that the white man is a devil, a man incapable of doing right [...].

10 MALCOLM X: Yes, sir, that is what The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us. The white devil's time is up; it has been up for almost fifty years now. It has taken us that long to get the deaf, dumb, and blind black men in the wilderness of North America to wake up and understand who they are. You see, sir, when a man understands who he is, who God is, who the devil is... then he can pick himself up out of the gutter; he can clean himself up and stand up like a man should before his God. This is why we teach that in order for a man to really understand himself he must be part of a nation; he must have some land of his own, a God of his own, a language of his own.  
15 Most of all he must have love and devotion for his own kind.

LOMAX: Wouldn't you say the Negro has a nation—America?

20 MALCOLM X: Sir, how can a Negro say America is *his* nation? He was brought here in chains; he was put in slavery and worked like a mule<sup>1</sup> for three hundred years; he was separated from his land, his culture, his God, his language! The Negro was taught to speak the white man's tongue, worship the white God, and accept the white man as his superior. This is a white man's country. And the Negro is nothing but an ex-slave who is now trying to get himself integrated into the slave master's house. And the slave master doesn't want you! [...]

25 The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us to get away from the devil as soon and as fast as we can. This is why we are demanding a separate state. Tell the slave master we will no longer beg for crumbs from his table; let him give us some land of our own so we can go for ourselves. If he doesn't give us some land, there is going to be hell to pay. As I said at Howard University and at Queens College, once the white man let the Negro get an education, the Negro began to want what the white man has [...]. And the white man is not going to give it to them!

LOMAX: But we have made some gains...

30 MALCOLM X: What gains? All you have gotten is tokenism<sup>2</sup>—one or two Negroes in a job or at a lunch counter so the rest of you will be quiet. It took the United States Army to get one Negro into the University of Mississippi; it took troops to get a few Negroes in the white schools at Little Rock and another dozen places in the South. It has been nine years since the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools, yet less than ten per cent of the Negro students in the South are in  
35 integrated schools. That isn't integration, that's tokenism! In spite of all the dogs, and fire hoses, and club-swinging policemen, I have yet to read of anybody eating an integrated hamburger in Birmingham. [...]

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<sup>1</sup> animal used for field-labor similar to a horse.

<sup>2</sup> actions that are the result of pretending to give advantage to those groups in society who are often treated unfairly, in order to give the appearance of fairness

LOMAX: This is strong gospel<sup>3</sup>, Minister Malcolm; many people, Negro and white, say what you preach amounts to hate [...]. What is your comment to that?

- 40 MALCOLM X: The white people who are guilty of white supremacy are trying to hide their own guilt by accusing The Honorable Elijah Muhammad of teaching black supremacy when he tries to uplift the mentality, the social, mental and economic condition of the black people in this country. [...] The Honorable Elijah Muhammad comes along and begins to list the historic deed—the historic attitude, the historic behavior of the white man in this country toward the black
- 45 people in this country, again, the white people are so guilty and they can't stop doing these things to make Mr. Muhammad appear to be wrong, so they hide their wrong by saying "he is teaching hatred." History is not hatred. [...]

LOMAX: It is suggested also that your movement preaches violence.

- 50 MALCOLM X: No, sir. The black people of this country have been victims of violence at the hands of the white men for four hundred years, and following the ignorant Negro preachers, we have thought that it was godlike to turn the other cheek to the brute<sup>4</sup> that was brutalizing us. Today The Honorable Elijah Muhammad is showing black people in this country that, just as the white man and every other person on this earth has God-given rights, natural rights, civil rights, any kind of rights that you can think of, when it comes to defending himself, black people—we should have
- 55 the right to defend ourselves also. [...]

LOMAX: Reverend Martin Luther King teaches a doctrine of nonviolence. What is your attitude toward this philosophy?

- MALCOLM X: The white man supports Reverend Martin Luther King, subsidizes<sup>5</sup> Reverend Martin Luther King, so that Reverend Martin Luther King can continue to teach the Negroes to be defenseless—that's what you mean by nonviolent—be defenseless in the face of one of the most cruel beasts that has ever taken people into captivity—that's this American white man, and they have proved it throughout the country by the police dogs and the police clubs. A hundred years ago they used to put on a white sheet and use a bloodhound against Negroes. Today they have taken off the white sheet and put on police uniforms and traded in the bloodhounds for police
- 60 dogs, and they're still doing the same thing. Just as Uncle Tom<sup>6</sup>, back during slavery used to keep the Negroes from resisting the bloodhound or resisting the Ku Klux Klan by teaching them to love their enemies or pray for those who use them despitefully, today Martin Luther King is just a twentieth-century or modern Uncle Tom or religious Uncle Tom, who is doing the same thing today to keep Negroes defenseless in the face of attack that Uncle Tom did on the plantation to keep
- 65 those Negroes defenseless in the face of the attack of the Klan in that day.
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- Now the goal of Dr. Martin Luther King is to give Negroes a chance to sit in a segregated restaurant beside the same white man who has brutalized them for four hundred years. The goal of Martin Luther King is to get the Negroes to forgive the people the people who have brutalized them for four hundred years, by lulling them to sleep and making them forget what those whites have done to them, but the masses of black people today don't go for what Martin Luther King is putting down. [...]
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Lomax, Louis E. (1963): "A Summing Up: Louis Lomax Interviews Malcolm X." *When the Word Is Given: a Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Black Muslim World*.

## Homework Assignment

1. Read Louis Lomax's interview with Malcolm X and highlight key passages to identify Malcolm X's position.

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<sup>3</sup> message, teaching (religious term)

<sup>4</sup> animal

<sup>5</sup> financially supports

<sup>6</sup> a black person who is considered to be too eager to agree with white people or too willing to be treated in a way that is not equal to white people

English OS

name:

datum:

2. Explain Malcolm X's approach to fighting oppression in your own words.