

Civil Rights – You Choose: To Fight, or Turn the Other Cheek

Document 1

"I've been to the mountaintop." Speech in Memphis, April 3, 1968, by Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech and transcript:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles. We don't need any Molotov cocktails. We just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say, "God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you."

And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy -- what is the other bread? -- Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike. And then they can move on town -- downtown and tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right.

Document 2

"The Power of Non-violence." Martin Luther King, Jr., June 4, 1957.

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1131>

From the very beginning there was a philosophy undergirding the Montgomery boycott, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. There was always the problem of getting this method over because it didn't make sense to most of the people in the beginning. We had to use our mass meetings to explain nonviolence to a community of people who had never heard of the philosophy and in many instances were not sympathetic with it. We had meetings twice a week on Mondays and on Thursdays, and we had an institute on nonviolence and social change. We had to make it clear that nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. It does resist. It is not a method of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually.

NOT TO HUMILIATE BUT TO WIN OVER

Another thing that we had to get over was the fact that the nonviolent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. This was always a cry that we had to set before people that our aim is not to defeat the white community, not to humiliate the white community, but to win the friendship of all of the persons who had perpetrated this system in the past. The end of violence or the aftermath

of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community. A boycott is never an end within itself. It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption.

Then we had to make it clear also that the nonviolent resister seeks to attack the evil system rather than individuals who happen to be caught up in the system. And this is why I say from time to time that the struggle in the South is not so much the tension between white people and Negro people. The struggle is rather between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory it will not be a victory merely for fifty thousand Negroes. But it will be a victory for justice, a victory for good will, a victory for democracy.

Another basic thing we had to get over is that nonviolent resistance is also an internal matter. It not only avoids external violence or external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. And so at the center of our movement stood the philosophy of love. The attitude that the only way to ultimately change humanity and make for the society that we all long for is to keep love at the center of our lives. Now people used to ask me from the beginning what do you mean by love and how is it that you can tell us to love those persons who seek to defeat us and those persons who stand against us; how can you love such persons? And I had to make it clear all along that love in its highest sense is not a sentimental sort of thing, not even an affectionate sort of thing.

Document 3

"The Ballot or the Bullet" by Malcolm X, April 3, 1964

http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html

Mr. Moderator, Brother Lomax, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies: I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend, and I don't want to leave anybody out. The question tonight, as I understand it, is "The Negro Revolt, and Where Do We Go From Here?" or "What Next?" In my little humble way of understanding it, it points toward either the ballot or the bullet.

If we don't do something real soon, I think you'll have to agree that we're going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet. It's one or the other in 1964. It isn't that time is running out -- time has run out!

1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed. The most explosive year. Why? It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises which they don't intend to keep. As they nourish these dissatisfactions, it can only lead to one thing, an explosion; and now we have the type of black man on the scene in America today -- I'm sorry, Brother Lomax -- who just doesn't intend to turn the other cheek any longer.

Don't let anybody tell you anything about the odds are against you. If they draft you, they send you to Korea and make you face 800 million Chinese. If you can be brave over there, you can be brave right here. These odds aren't as great as those odds. And if you fight here, you will at least know what you're fighting for.

I'm not a politician, not even a student of politics; in fact, I'm not a student of much of anything. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican, and I don't even consider myself an American. If you and I were Americans, there'd be no problem. Those Honkies that just got off the boat, they're already Americans; Polacks are already Americans; the Italian refugees are already Americans. Everything that came out of Europe, every blue-eyed thing, is already an American. And as long as you and I have been over here, we aren't Americans yet.

Well, I am one who doesn't believe in deluding myself. I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American. Why, if birth made you American, you wouldn't need any legislation; you wouldn't need any amendments to the Constitution; you wouldn't be faced with civil-rights filibustering in Washington, D.C., right now. They don't have to pass civil-rights legislation to make a Polack an American.

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver -- no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.

...in 1964, it's time now for you and me to become more politically mature and realize what the ballot is for; what we're supposed to get when we cast a ballot; and that if we don't cast a ballot, it's going to end up in a situation where we're going to have to cast a bullet. It's either a ballot or a bullet.

If you don't take this kind of stand, your little children will grow up and look at you and think "shame." If you don't take an uncompromising stand, I don't mean go out and get violent; but at the same time you should never be nonviolent unless you run into some nonviolence. I'm nonviolent with those who are nonviolent with me. But when you drop that violence on me, then you've made me go insane, and I'm not responsible for what I do. And that's the way every Negro should get. Any time you know you're within the law, within your legal rights, within your moral rights, in accord with justice, then die for what you believe in. But don't die alone. Let your dying be reciprocal. This is what is meant by equality. What's good for the goose is good for the gander.

Document 4

Interview with Malcolm X, A.B. Spellmand and Malcolm X, March 19, 1964.

<http://monthlyreview.org/2005/02/01/interview-with-malcolm-x>

Spellman: Please answer these charges that are often raised against you: That you are as racist as Hitler and the Klan, etc. That you are anti-Semitic. That you advocate mob violence.

Malcolm X: No, we're not racists at all. Our brotherhood is based on the fact that we are all black, brown, red, or yellow. We don't call this racism, any more than you could refer to the European Common Market which consists of Europeans, which means that it consists of white-skin people—is not referred to as a racist coalition—it's referred to as the European Common Market, an economic group—while our desire for unity among black, brown, red, and yellow is for brotherhood—has nothing to do with racism, has nothing to do with Hitler, has nothing to do with the Klan—in fact, the Klan in this country was designed to perpetuate an injustice upon Negroes; whereas the Muslims are designed to eliminate the injustice that has been perpetuated upon the so-called Negro.

We're anti-exploitation and in this country the Jews have been located in the so-called Negro community as merchants and businessmen for so long that they feel guilty when you mention that the exploiters of Negroes are Jews. This doesn't mean that we are anti-Jews or anti-Semitic—we're anti-exploitation.

No. We have never been involved in any kind of violence whatsoever. We have never initiated any violence against anyone, but we do believe that when violence is practiced against us we should be able to defend ourselves. We don't believe in turning the other cheek.

Spellman: What is your attitude toward Christian-Gandhian groups?

Malcolm X: Christian? Gandhian? I don't go for anything that's non-violent and turn-the-other-cheekish. I don't see how any revolution—I've never heard of a non-violent revolution or a revolution that was brought about by turning the other cheek, and so I believe that it is a crime for anyone to teach a person who is being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself. If this is what the Christian-Gandhian philosophy teaches then it is criminal—a criminal philosophy.

Document 5

"Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. April 16, 1963

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=100>

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: 1) collection of the facts to

determine whether injustices are alive; 2) negotiation; 3) self-purification; and 4) direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham ... Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of the country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of these conditions Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.

Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants—such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises Reverend Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstrations. As the weeks and months unfolded we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences in the past, we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through the process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, "are you able to accept the blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?"

You may well ask, "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.

My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and give up their unjust posture; but as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.

Document 6

**'The oppressed are shaking off the shackles'
Malcolm X, 3 December 1964**

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/645.html>

Excerpts from remarks at a program sponsored by the Oxford Union, a student debating society at Oxford University in the UK, 3 December 1964

The debate was televised to an audience of millions by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The proposition under debate was "Extremism in defense of liberty is no vice,

moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue," a statement made by Barry Goldwater in his 1964 speech accepting the Republican Party nomination for president of the United States.

Malcolm X was the fifth of six speakers, and the second of three who defended the above proposition. The other two speaking for it were Eric Abrahams, a student from Jamaica and president of the Oxford Union, and Hugh MacDiarmid, a Scottish poet and member of the Communist Party. Among the three opposing the proposition was Humphrey Berkeley, a Conservative Party member of Parliament, who spoke directly before Malcolm. There was no question period. The audience, which included many students originally from Africa and Asia, greeted Malcolm's remarks with enthusiastic applause. The minutes of the meeting record that in the vote held after the debate, the proposition defended by Malcolm received 137 votes to 288 against.

Mr. Chairman, tonight is the first night that I've ever had an opportunity to be as near to conservatives as I am. [Laughter] And the speaker who preceded me—First, I want to thank you for the invitation to come here to the Oxford Union. The speaker who preceded me is one of the best excuses that I know to prove our point concerning the necessity, sometimes, of extremism in the defense of liberty, why it is no vice, and why moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. I don't say that about him personally, but that type is the—[Laughter and applause]

He's right. X is not my real name. But if you study history, you'll find why no Black man in the Western Hemisphere knows his real name. Some of his ancestors kidnapped our ancestors from Africa and took us into the Western Hemisphere and sold us there, and our names were stripped from us and so today we don't know who we really are. I'm one of those who admit it, and so I just put X up there to keep from wearing his name.

And as far as this apartheid charge that he attributed to me is concerned, evidently he has been misinformed. I don't believe in any form of apartheid. I don't believe in any form of segregation. I don't believe in any form of racialism. But at the same time, I don't endorse a person as being right just because his skin is white. And oftentimes, when you find people like this—I mean that type—[Laughter] when a man whom they have been taught is below them has the nerve or firmness to question some of their philosophy or some of their conclusions, usually they put that label on us, a label that is only designed to project an image which the public will find distasteful.

I am a Muslim. If there is something wrong with that, then I stand condemned. My religion is Islam. I believe in Allah. I believe in Muhammad as the apostle of Allah. I believe in brotherhood of all men, but I don't believe in brotherhood with anybody who's not ready to practice brotherhood with our people. [Applause] I don't believe in brotherhood—I just take time to make these few things clear, because I find that one of the tricks of the West—and I imagine my good friend, or at least that type [Laughter] is from the West—one of the tricks of the West is to use or create images.

They create images of a person who doesn't go along with their views, and they make certain that this image is distasteful, and that anything that that person has to say from there on in is rejected. This is a policy that has been practiced, pretty much, by the West.

It perhaps would have been practiced by others had they been in power, but during recent centuries the West has been in power, they've created the images, and they've used these images quite skillfully and quite successfully. That's why today we need a little extremism in order to straighten a very nasty situation out. Or a very extremely nasty situation out. [Laughter]

I think the only way one can really determine whether or not extremism in defense of liberty is justified, is not to approach it as an American or a European or an African or an Asian, but as a human being. If we look upon it as different types, immediately we begin to think in terms of extremism being good for one and bad for another, or bad for one and good for another. But if we look upon it, if we look upon ourselves as human beings, I doubt that anyone will deny that extremism in defense of liberty, the liberty of any human being, is no vice. Anytime anyone is enslaved or in any way deprived of his liberty, that person, as a human being, as far as I'm concerned he is justified to resort to whatever methods necessary to bring about his liberty again. [Applause]

But most people usually think in terms of extremism as something that's relative, related to someone whom they know or something that they've heard of. I don't think they look upon extremism by itself or all alone. They apply it to something. A good example, and one of the reasons that it can't be too well understood today: many people who have been in positions of power in the past don't realize that the power—centers of power—are changing. When you're in a position of power for a long time, you get used to using your yardstick, and you take it for granted that because you've forced your yardstick upon others, that everyone is still using the same yardstick. So that your definition of extremism usually applies to everyone.

But nowadays times are changing, and the center of power is changing. People in the past who weren't in a position to have a yardstick, or use a yardstick of their own, are using their own yardstick now. And you use one and they use another. In the past, when the oppressor had one stick and the oppressed used that same stick, today the oppressed are sort of shaking the shackles and getting yardsticks of their own. So when they say extremism, they don't mean what you do. And when you say extremism, you don't mean what they do. There's entirely two different meanings. And when this is understood, I think you can better understand why those who are using methods of extremism are being driven to them.

'They turn the victim into the criminal'

A good example is the Congo.¹ When the people who are in power want to use—again, create an image to justify something that's bad, they use the press, and they'll use the press to create a humanitarian image for a devil, or a devil image for a humanitarian. They'll take a person who's the victim of the crime and make it appear he's the criminal, and they'll take the criminal and make it appear that he's the victim of the crime. And the Congo situation is one of the best examples that I can cite right now to point this out. The Congo situation is a nasty example of how a country, because it is in power, can take its press and make the world accept something that's absolutely criminal.

They take American-trained—they take pilots that they say are American-trained—and this automatically lends respectability to them, [Laughter] and then they will call them anti-Castro Cubans. And that's supposed to add to their respectability [Laughter] and eliminate

the fact that they're dropping bombs on villages where they have no defense whatsoever against such planes, blowing to bits Black women—Congoese women, Congoese children, Congoese babies. This is extremism. But it is never referred to as extremism, because it is endorsed by the West, it's financed by America, it's made respectable by America, and that kind of extremism is never labeled as extremism. Because it's not extremism in defense of liberty. And if it is extremism in defense of liberty, as this talk has just pointed out, it's extremism in defense of liberty for the wrong type of people. [Applause]

I'm not advocating that kind of extremism. That's cold-blooded murder. But the press is used to make that cold-blooded murder appear as an act of humanitarianism.

They take it one step farther and get a man named Tshombe, who is a murderer. They refer to him as the premier or the prime minister of the Congo to lend respectability to him. He's actually the murderer of the rightful prime minister of the Congo. [Applause] They never mention that this man—I'm not for extremism in defense of that kind of liberty or that kind of activity. They take this man, who's a murderer. The world recognizes him as a murderer. But they make him the prime minister. He becomes a paid murderer, a paid killer, who is propped up by American dollars. And to show the degree to which he is a paid killer, the first thing he does is go to South Africa and hire more killers and bring them into the Congo. They give them the glorious name of mercenary, which means a hired killer; not someone that's killing for some kind of patriotism, or some kind of ideal, but a man who is a paid killer, a hired killer. And one of the leaders of them is right from this country here. And he's glorified as a soldier of fortune, when he's shooting down little Black women and Black babies and Black children.

I'm not for that kind of extremism. I'm for the kind of extremism that those who are being destroyed by those bombs and destroyed by those hired killers are able to put forth to thwart it. They will risk their lives at any cost. They will sacrifice their lives at any cost against that kind of criminal activity.

I'm for the kind of extremism that the freedom fighters in the Stanleyville regime are able to display against these hired killers, who are actually using some of my tax dollars, that I have to pay up in the United States, to finance that operation over there. We're not for that kind of extremism.

And again, I think you must point out that the real criminal there is the—or rather one of the [Malcolm laughs]—one of those who are very much involved, as accessories to the crime, is the press. Not so much your press, but the American press, which has tricked your press into repeating what they have invented. [Laughter and applause]

But I was reading in one of the English papers this morning, I think it's a paper called the [Daily] Express. And it gave a very clear account of the type of criminal activity that has been carried on by the mercenaries that are being paid by United States tax dollars. And it showed where they were killing Congoese, whether they were from the central government or the Stanleyville government. It didn't make any difference to them, they just killed them. They had it fixed where those who had been processed had to wear a white bandage around their head. And any Congoese that they saw without that white bandage, they killed him. This is clearly pointed out in the English papers. If they had printed it last week, there would have been an outcry, and no one would have allowed the Belgians and the United States, and the others who are in cahoots with each other, to carry on the criminal

activity that they did in the Congo, which I doubt anybody in the world, not even here at Oxford, will accept. Not even my friend. [Laughter]

Interjection: Point of [Inaudible].

Malcolm X: Yes?

Same person: I wonder what—exactly what sort of extremism you would consider killing of missionaries to be? [From the audience: "Hear, hear!" Applause.]

Malcolm X: I'd call it the type of extremism that was involved when America dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and killed 80,000 people, or over 80,000 people, both men, women, children, everything. It was an act of war. I'd call it the same kind of extremism that happened when England dropped bombs on German cities, and Germans dropped bombs on English cities. It was an act of war. And the Congo situation is war. And when you call it war, then anybody that dies, they die a death that is justified. But those who are—[Protests from audience: "For shame!"] But those who are in the Stanleyville regime, sir, are defending their country. Those who are coming in, are invading their country, and some of the refugees that were questioned on television in this city a couple days ago pointed out that had the paratroopers not come in, they doubted that they would have been molested. They weren't being molested until the paratroopers came in. [Applause]

I don't encourage any acts of murder, nor do I glorify in anybody's death, but I do think that when the white public uses its press to magnify the fact that there are the lives of white hostages at stake—they don't say "hostages," every paper says "white hostages"—they give me the impression that they attach more importance to a white hostage and a white death than they do the death of a human being despite the color of his skin. [Applause]