



**REMEMBERING MALCOLM, RESISTING ARIZONA:
A CALL TO COMMON STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 05-20-10, p. A7

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In this month of the celebration of the birth of Min. Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (May 19, 1925—February 21, 1965), and of African Liberation Day, a mean-spirited and menacing wind is rising in Arizona, fostering and fanning racial fears and daring once again in still another way to criminalize and make suspect a whole people and to outlaw ethnic studies, ethnic solidarity and critical cultural consciousness. And if the message of Malcolm, and the meaning of African Liberation are rightly understood and applied, then we must reject and resist injustice there and any and everywhere, especially in this country which so shapes our lives and has such problematic weight in the world.

It is good, then, to remember Malcolm and his teachings and conversations concerning freedom and the right and responsibility to struggle for liberation and to always think for ourselves in liberated and liberating ways. Indeed, what I miss most about Malcolm is the audacious and incisive thrust of his teachings, his constant search for the real and the right, the depthfulness of his commitment, and his capacity and courage to walk thru fire, hold fast and not be diverted, discouraged or otherwise, defeated.

Malcolm's life and struggle were focused on and dedicated to freedom—liberation from domination, deprivation and degradation in both their savage and subtle forms. For him, "freedom is essential to life," a fundamental feature and need of life; and justice, equality, peace and other social goods are not possible in any real sense without it. Therefore, Malcolm tells us we have not only the right, but also the responsibility to fight for "freedom by any means necessary" and that to wage a righteous and unrelenting struggle for liberation is "justified by all moral criteria and even by democratic tradition."

Indeed, he rejects a morality or movement that preaches passivity in oppression and calls instead for an ethics of resistance and struggle in the interest of human good. Likewise, he denounces as oppression in disguise any democratic tradition that imposes a hierarchy of worth, wealth and status on the people and tries to outlaw struggle to change this. Furthermore, he states that being human itself requires constant struggle both "to protect our humanity and to project our humanity," i.e., to defend against violations of our dignity and rights as human beings and rightfully assert ourselves in dignity-affirming and culturally-rooted ways.

Malcolm called it criminal for White racists to make Africans and other peoples of color hate themselves and their cultural roots and to deny them a true and self-valuing conception of themselves. Thus, Malcolm would clearly condemn Arizona's HB 2281, which is a crude racist attempt to outlaw ethnic studies, and delegitimize positive ethnic solidarity and critical cultural consciousness under the pretense that the critique of White domination is racial resentment rather than an essential process of critical and ethical reasoning about life in this country. Indeed, Malcolm argued that "raw, naked truth . . . is needed in this country to clean the air of the racial mirages, clichés and lies that this country's very atmosphere has been filled with for four hundred years."

Malcolm would undoubtedly define Arizona's blame-shifting as an example of how victims of racism are made to appear as racists, especially, when they dare to protect themselves from the systemic and psychic violence imposed on them. In fact, he states, "When victims struggle vigorously to protect themselves from violence of others, they are made to appear in the image of criminals; as

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the criminal image is projected onto the victims.” Thus, there has been over a century of educational and psychological violence inflicted on children and young people of color in public schools and in universities, and now when there are corrective measures taken to create a multicultural and more accurate and informative educational process, Arizona seeks to criminalize the process and the participants. And after inviting and exploiting Latino immigrants for cheap and vulnerable labor, Arizona law SB 1070 makes all Latinos suspect and subject to arrest in a pathetic pretense of solving systemic problems.

Malcolm considers criminal what racism, racialization, and White supremacy in its multiple forms and practice have done to peoples of color and the world. Contemplating these persistent, destructive, immoral and unjustifiable practices, he says “Time and time again the Black, Brown, Red and Yellow (peoples) have witnessed and suffered the White man’s small ability to understand the simple notes of the spirit. The White man seems to be deaf to the total orchestration of humanity.” In a word, he is unable and/or unwilling to hear and respond to the collective and cooperative music and progress free humans make, the harmony that evolves from justice and peace, and the good that comes from mutually respectful and mutually beneficial relations.

But he says it is on us to wage the righteous and relentless struggle that restrains the oppressor and frees us—not only *from* domination, deprivation and degradation, but also frees us *to* fully realize ourselves in an

ever-expanding realm of human freedom and flourishing. Malcolm also teaches us the indivisibility and shared nature and importance of social goods in society and the world. He does not accept individual respect, ascension or success, divorced from the collective rights and needs of the people as a whole. Thus, he says, “no matter how much respect, no matter how much recognition Whites show towards me, as far as I’m concerned, as long as it is not shown to every one of our people in this country, it does not exist for me.” No one can doubt that for Malcolm, as a pan-Africanist, this position applied likewise to Africans everywhere and as an active advocate of Third World, unity and common struggle, it applies also to people of color.

In addition, Malcolm clearly stated his inclusive commitment to humanity saying that he was for truth and justice in the world and thus he was “for whoever and whatever benefits humanity *as a whole*.” And it is in this context that he condemned and called for common struggle against the global “vicious racist system that (Europeans) have used to continue to degrade and exploit and oppress the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America” and North America. Indeed, he welcomed and promoted the global rebellion against White supremacy and the building of a world reconceived and reconstructed in righteous revolutionary fervor, and one deeply rooted in a real freedom and justice for which he sacrificed his life and endures forever as an honored and uplifted martyr and mirror for us and the world.

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