

Malcolm X Interview with Bernice Bass
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Courtesy of www.malcolm-x.org

BERNICE BASS: And now dear hearts, I think it important that we turn to our guest of honor at this time, Minister Malcolm X, the son of a Baptist minister. Good morning.

MALCOLM X: How are you, Miss Bass?

BASS: Just fine, thank you. I suppose that's the question New York could ask you after your travels all over the African continent, Europe. We'd love to know exactly what you discovered and what you observed. Whether or not your viewpoints have changed any on the Afro-American questions.

MALCOLM X: Well, I've done a lot of traveling and, I think over all, travel does broaden one's soul. If anything at all, that's probably the most important of what's happened to me during I the past five or six months.

I was fortunate to be able to spend, I think it was, two months in the Middle East and another two months in the African countries. And I think I visited Egypt, Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, and then Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, what was then Zanzibar and Tanganyika and is now Tanzania, also Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Guinea, and Algiers, or rather Algeria. Then in Europe: Geneva, Paris, and London.

BASS: We who have not traveled have to rely solely on our communications media for the news that we get. What is disturbing and confusing, really, coming out of the African continent, is there unity among the African leaders there? Is there a cohesive effort or is it a divisive thing that has been reported so faithfully in the press, the American press.

MALCOLM X: The Western press tries to make it appear that there is a division among Africans. In any bloc or group that has a common objective, you will find disagreements. But overall there's unity. I think -- during World War II, America had her allies, and their common objective was to gain victory over a common enemy, but even within that body of allies, there were differences.

BASS: Just as there are today in NATO.

MALCOLM X: Certainly, today. But usually Western powers think that they have a priority on the right to differ among themselves. Because when blocs that are other than Western show signs of being able to differ -- or differences pop up, the Western press uses this to try and make it appear that they are savage, backward, not able to govern -- things of that sort.

BASS: That's something I wanted to ask you about. I've noticed in the last couple of weeks all of the references to the Congo crisis, when they talked about the debate in the United Nations they have talked about going back to savagery, tribal practices, this kind of thing. And yet they have in Italy the fact that they have eighteen ballots cast just this week alone trying to elect a premier. They have also -- before de Gaulle rose to power, they had a new premier of France every month. And no one considered that backward, and yet these were examples of civilization, culture, and so forth. How do the African delegates in this country and the African leaders in their own countries feel about this kind of characterization?

MALCOLM X: Well the -- I think this is one of the mistakes the West is making in its efforts to try and win the Africans on their side. The Africans, probably more so than ever before, are beginning to see the deceit and the double standard of measurement that's used when their own case is involved. And how it differs from that when the African case is involved. And this has gone a long ways toward making Africans question the motive of Western powers, including the United States.

It's not an accident that in the United Nations during this present session, for the first time during the nineteen or twenty years that the UN has been in existence, we find African foreign ministers who are openly accusing the United States of being an imperialist power and of practicing racism. In the past, these labels were always confined to the European colonial powers. But never was the United States itself singled out and labeled, identified as an imperialist power. Neither was the case of Black people in this country ever linked with what was happening to people on the African continent. And if there's any drastic departure from past procedures that have been reflected already in the present UN session, it's the tendency on the part of African representatives one after another all to link what's happening in the Congo with what's happening in Mississippi. And for the first time, too, since the UN has been in existence, we have representatives of foreign governments referring to the releasing of the twenty-one assassins of the civil rights workers. This was mentioned in the United Nations Security Council debate this week.

And so all of this is a sign, or reflects the tendency on the part of Africans to identify completely with what is happening to the Black man in this country. And they also realize that there's an increasing tendency on the part of our people in this country to identify with what's going on or happening to our people on the African continent.

And never are our people given the real picture. One thing I will say for James Farmer, with whom I was in a discussion earlier this week. He is going to Africa. One radio report -- I was riding home in my car one night, and I heard a radio newscaster say that James Farmer was going to Africa to counteract the false conceptions that I had given during my trip.

Well, I called Farmer the next day. First I was in -- I was irked, I was irritated, I was very angry. But then I began to remember what the press had done to me and done to others in trying to divide and conquer, and I called Mr. Farmer. And he said he knew absolutely nothing about what this particular newscaster had reported.

And then I had a personal conversation with him a little later on, which I found to be very intelligent and very objective on his part. And he explained then that he was going to take a fact-finding trip to Africa, and visit many of these places. And he done so under the auspices of the Big Six to find out -- they want to know for themselves the African story. And whether or not the news of Africa is being properly reported in this country. Which I think is a very progressive move on the part of those people who have been set up to lead Black people in this country.

BASS: Was this an outgrowth of -- I think they've had two meetings -- all of the Big Six in Washington (*editor's note: The "Big Six" were the "chief leaders" of the civil rights movement*), members of the State Department, and so forth, and African representatives -- in the attempt to bridge the gap.

MALCOLM X: Because those who are invited are able to see that the problem of the Black people in this country is not an isolated problem. It's not a Negro problem or an American problem. It's part of the world problem. It's a human problem.

BASS: May I ask you this -- can I interrupt you a moment to ask you this: I'm concerned over the habit that the communications media has picked up of identifying Black people in Africa as Negroes and then Black people here as Negroes....

MALCOLM X: Well, that's because at one time Africa, the word African, was used in this country in a derogatory way. But now, since Africa has gotten -- it's getting its independence and there are so many independent African states. The image of the African has changed from negative to positive. And the white man in this country does not like to give us anything positive that we can identify with. And since he can't stop the independence movement of the people on that continent, he's trying to change the label. Trying to change that which they call themselves to put them in the same category with us. But I don't think they'll be very successful at that.

BASS: Well, how do the African delegates in this country and the people, the leaders, how do they feel about it?

MALCOLM X: They don't accept the word Negro at all. No one accepts the word Negro but our people in this country, and it's only because we've been mistaught, misguided, misled, and misinformed.

BASS: We've reached a very good point at which to pause in order to identify both the program and the station. By this time you know this is "Community Corner" here in New York City and your hostess for this period as she has been for the last three-

and-a-half years is Bernice Bass and our guest here is the son of a Baptist minister, the Honorable Minister Malcolm X....

MALCOLM X: I never accept the term "honorable."

BASS: That's a beautiful title.

MALCOLM X: Well, I'll tell you. Most people I've seen really end up misusing it, and I'd rather just be your Brother Malcolm.

BASS: I've got a big family, but I can always use additional. I hope my mother will not be disturbed about it -- but I find most people are honorable, whether they wear the title or not. We have a few brothers who aren't. Getting back to what you saw when you were in Africa, how are the countries developing and how -- when you hear all this business about the tremendous amount of aid that the United States is giving all of these countries. Are they developing? What plans do they have?

MALCOLM X: Yes, one of the countries developing the most swiftly is Egypt. Egypt's development is tremendous and also Ghana. Ghana, probably, and Egypt are the forefront. Ghana is a remarkable country, a remarkably progressive country.

And I think that it might even interest you, and by the way, it might interest you to know that one of the most progressive moves Ghana has made is to start establishing, installing, a television network. And I was taken through this television studio and plant by Mrs. Du Bois, Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois's wife, who is the director of television in Ghana. She -- to my knowledge, she's the only Black director of television in Africa. I may be wrong, but the only one I know of is she. And she's a woman, and she's an Afro-American, and I think that should make Afro-American women mighty proud.

She's one of the most intelligent women I've ever met, and not only is she the director of television, but she took me on a tour of Tema, which is a new industrial city. It's a new city that has been set up by President [Kwame] Nkrumah which has the most advanced type of machinery and everything else in it. And one of the things that exists in this city is the publishing plant -- the most modern publishing plant on the African continent. The machines are tremendous, and it can reproduce any type of magazine, book, or newspaper in the best form and of the best quality. And there are many other aspects of the Ghanaian life that I found to be quite progressive.

I was saying -- if I may continue -- I was in a hotel in Cairo, the Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo, and there was a group of students that had traveled the African continent from a certain college here in this country. And Africa was their last stop before embarking for the States. I was in conversation with some of them in the lobby of the Shepherd's and they were conveying some of their impressions. And they were greatly enthused over [President Leopold] Senghor in Senegal, collectively. And they were, at the same time, disillusioned with Nkrumah in Ghana, collectively. They had

a tendency to criticize and condemn Nkrumah, but at the same time pat Senghor of Senegal on the back. Later on in the conversation, while they were pointing out the negative conditions that existed in Senegal -- how Dakar had poverty, beggars, and things of that sort -- and at the same time they were speaking of the actions of beggars and the progressiveness of the Ghanaian people and how they all looked industrious and seemed to be making a contribution to the whole overall forward movement -- progressive movement forward.

So I answered that. These were students. How could they say that Senghor was such a great president and at the same time speak of the negative conditions that his people were in and also turn around and say that they have criticisms for Nkrumah? They have to admit that the negative conditions didn't exist in Nkrumah's country. So, what I gather from this, that their yardstick of measurement for leadership was not what the leader was doing for his people and his country, but the attitude that that particular leader had toward this country and the attitude that this country had toward that leader.

They weren't using a real yardstick to measure that person's abilities. So I thought I would throw this in because to me it was quite indicative of the entire attitude of the power structure here toward the African countries and African leaders. If African leaders are manipulated -- if they can be manipulated by the power structure here, no matter how negative the conditions remain in that particular leader's country, this power structure turns its propaganda machine for the benefit, for the benefit of that African leader. But by the same token, if it's an African leader that they can't manipulate and use as a puppet, then they turn their propaganda machine upon that particular leader and make him appear as a dictator or some type of monstrosity and misinform and mislead the American public this way.

BASS: May I ask you -- one of the points that you have not yet made in regard to that problem is the fact that the Ghanaian women there seem to be emerging on the scene at all levels.

MALCOLM X: One thing I noticed in both the Middle East and Africa, in every country that was progressive, the women were progressive. In every country that was underdeveloped and backward, it was to the same degree that the women were undeveloped, or underdeveloped, and backward.

BASS: What you're saying is the women are actually playing a part there, in Africa ?

MALCOLM X: Well, no, I'm saying this: That it's noticeable that in these type of societies where they put the woman in a closet and discourage her from getting a sufficient education and don't give her the incentive by allowing her maximum participation in whatever area of the society where she's qualified, they kill her incentive. And killing her incentive, she kills the incentive in her children. And the man himself has no competition so he doesn't develop to his fullest potential. So in the African countries where they opt for mass education, whether it be female or

male, you find that they have a more valid society, a more progressive society. And Ghana is one of the best examples of this. Egypt was also another example of this.

BASS: Well, certainly. I remember when the White Paper came out issued by Kwame Nkrumah on this business of polygamy. There was a great deal of talk, discussion back and forth, and I remember I interviewed a young lady from the Ghanaian embassy here and -- is polygamy -- was it there or did you get a chance to notice it?

MALCOLM X: Well, how would you know? I didn't have any yardstick that I could use to determine--

BASS: I thought in conversation, not actual--

MALCOLM X: Well, their conversation differs from the conversation over here. They aren't so inclined to talk about their--

BASS: Personal lives--

MALCOLM X: --as is the case in this society.

BASS: Well, isn't that funny. Now, I'm thinking of [name unintelligible], I think, from here at the United Nations from Nigeria. He stirred a great deal of controversy when he came out in favor of polygamy when he was speaking before a women's group pressing for women's rights at the United Nations.

MALCOLM X: Well, he stirred up even more controversy this time by pressing for United States' right to drop bombs on defenseless African villages.

BASS: Well, I'm telling you -- you've been talking about Ghana. How does Ghana compare to Nigeria in terms of development, in terms of their handling of national affairs and that sort of thing?

MALCOLM X: Well, the Nigerian people are great. You never can find any people anywhere in Africa more hospitable and brotherly and who will welcome you more warmly than the people in Nigeria. But by the same token the United States influence in Nigeria has turned it almost into a colony. And there are conditions that exist in Nigeria that are very explosive. They're getting ready to have elections this week, which could turn Nigeria into another Congo.

Nigeria is one of the richest countries on the African continent -- one of the most beautiful of the African countries. But by the same token you'll find beggars there, you find poverty there. You don't find new cities. You find beggars and poverty in Lagos, which you don't see in Ghana.

I don't in any way condemn or criticize the Nigerian people. I think Nigeria's problems stem primarily from the over-exertion on the part of outside interests.

The United States presence in Nigeria is far beyond what it should be, and its influence is far beyond what it should be.

I might say, Miss Bass, in most of the African countries that are the most pro-American or the most inseparably interwoven into the American way of thought, you find that the conditions, economic conditions, of those countries are usually the worst.

BASS: Like Liberia.

MALCOLM X: Well name whichever you like. But you'd be surprised. The countries that are identified with America the most are the ones that are the most backward and the ones that have the most problems.

BASS: Now the ones that are the most progressive, they are most closely identified with what power?

MALCOLM X: Well, they're more closely identified with themselves. I don't think that one can -- there's a tendency here in America again, to try and project any African nation that isn't on America's apron strings as linked with some other power. But the Africans themselves want to be Africans. They don't want to be identified with any of the what's known as European philosophies or Occidental or Western philosophies. They want what's good for Africa. They want to take out of any other philosophy that which they can adopt to their own needs and to their own development. But to be identified with either the Communist bloc or the capitalist bloc, I don't think you'll find any African country or African leader who will buy that -- he's for Africa.

And during the five weeks that I was there, I took some excellent movies, by the way, which I'm going to show at the Audubon Ballroom this time Friday night. I took movies in Egypt that were -- I think no one else has them. I'll just say that they're unique -- exclusives, yes. I was at the 23rd of July independence celebration in Egypt when Haile Selassie, President Nkrumah, all of the heads of state were there. And they were watching President Nasser's display of weaponry that is unequalled on the African continent. You've got to see these films to see the massive military might that President Gamal Abdel Nasser has developed there in Egypt. Then you can see why he's in a position to openly state that he will support the Congo freedom fighters, and you can also see why it caused so much concern here in the West.

BASS: But now I'd ask you -- at the same time he announced his intention to do that, he's also stepping up his request for aid from the United States to the tune of 35 to 40 billion dollars in surplus food.

MALCOLM X: President Nasser took all of the aid that was forthcoming from Russia to build the Aswan Dam and turned around and put the Communists in jail in his country. Which shows he doesn't take aid for those countries to tell him what he can

do. If they're interested in objectively contributing to the development of his country and his people, then he takes the aid. He'll take American aid with no strings attached. But if there are strings attached, he does exactly what he says in the paper, he tells them to go jump in the lake.

BASS: Well, that's interesting. Except that -- you begin to wonder when it's done on an international level, not just with Nasser but all the others, too. Practical reality tells you, you can't get something for nothing. And when they come after you for money or aid or what have you, what are they giving in return? I can't understand--

MALCOLM X: You've got to consider that these Western powers are in the economic position of strength that exists in their countries today only because of their past exploitation of these same areas. They're not giving aid, they're only returning some of what was taken.

BASS: But in business, you don't do this. You know what I mean. What you're saying anyhow talking about a moral right and I agree--

MALCOLM X: I don't talk moral--

BASS: But I'm talking about a practical business standpoint. I have amassed so many billions of dollars. You are now struggling. You are asking for a loan. I can or cannot give--

MALCOLM X: One of the reasons I'm struggling is because you took from me the--

BASS: Ah ha.

MALCOLM X: --the billions of dollars that you have.

BASS: You know, somebody once said -- not talking about the international scene -- but they once said that if all the wealth in the world were divided equally, in a matter of years or in a specified amount of time, most of the people who had the wealth previously would have it again.

MALCOLM X: That's because most of them who have it are more shrewd at thievery and those other things that bring it about.

BASS: Now, when all these other countries begin to get as prosperous as the Western powers, will they then be accused of having gotten that way through thievery or will theirs be shrewdness and cunning?

MALCOLM X: Well, you see these people -- look at in terms of business. In business it's called profit sharing. And--

BASS: I wonder—

MALCOLM X: If you check today's New York Times, they're saying the Egyptian situation with Gamal Abdel Nasser -- in the Sunday Times it was -- Arnold Toynbee, he is supposed to be one of the brains in this era, he says, and I quote: "Dr. Toynbee regards the Middle East as an area of growing importance.

'Nasser has been tactless in his dealings with other Arab leaders, but he is the first ruler to do anything for the Egyptian peasants. The pyramids were built for the rulers of Egypt, but the Aswan High Dam for the good of the people. Nasser will continue to be a big force in the Arab world; I myself rather like and admire him. I've noticed quite a prejudice against Nasser in this country, Americans seem to assume that he is a dictator, a bad man. I don't agree with that.'" This is Toynbee.

BASS: Yes, I know. He used to say about two or three years ago, in talking about Martin Luther King -- said that in his opinion, his espousal of nonviolence was perhaps one of the savings of Christianity in the Western world.

MALCOLM X: It probably would be the savings of Christianity in the Western world, even if it wasn't the savings of the Negroes--

BASS: No, he didn't say Negroes. He said Christianity.... I'd like to know about the impact of the various American missionaries, all the religious feeling, on the African continent. I find that in other reports that have come in, that Islam, the religion of Islam, seems to be making great strides and Christianity is not doing very well there, and I wonder, why?

MALCOLM X: This is true. The religion of Islam has spread rapidly in Africa and is still spreading quite rapidly in Africa. It's a very powerful force. And the religion of Christianity has run into what you might call a stone wall. There's a tendency on the part of our people in that area to link Christianity with the European colonial powers that have dominated and exploited these past years. And Islam is a religion that's won more acceptance. It's easier to fit, it fits right in to the nature of one's everyday life. In fact it's a natural religion. It's a religion that's easier to practice.

BASS: Well! let me see -- and I'm trying to remember now -- who was it who said one of the missionaries was talking about his impressions of Africa -- I've forgotten what country it was involved at the time -- that when he got there he was surprised to find other missionaries who were teaching the natives Christianity, insisting on the natives coming through the back door while their white compatriots came through the front door. And this new white missionary to Africa found this a bit strange, since they were all reading the same Bible.

MALCOLM X: Well, this is why Islam is spreading. Islam has no color bar in it at all. Islam has no -- there's nothing in Islam that teaches one to judge a man by the color of his skin. No matter what color you are in Islam -- you're a Muslim, you're a brother

BASS: That's interesting, hearing you say that, in view of some of your former statements--

MALCOLM X: Well, notice all of my former statements were prefaced by "the Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches thus and so." They weren't my statements, they were his statements, and I was repeating them.

BASS: Parroting them. The same thing you accuse Judge Thurgood Marshall of doing once upon a time.

MALCOLM X: And now the parrot has jumped out of the cage.

BASS: Well, that's interesting, we're going to see what else he does. [Laughter] Good morning...

CALLER: I'm calling from Manhattan. I would like to ask: Why do the Arabs discriminate against the Black man? And especially I read about the Sudan where they attacked and killed Negroes just because they were black.

BASS: Perhaps Minister Malcolm X can answer that.

MALCOLM X: My own -- when I was in East Africa, I noticed that there was a strong feeling among the Africans along the East African coast against the Asians. When I went to West Africa, I noticed that there was a strong feeling among the Africans against the Arabs. And in parts of Africa where there were neither Asians or Arabs, I noticed a strong feeling among Africans -- if they were Muslim, it was against Africans who were Christian, or if they were Christian, it was against Africans who were Muslim.

And when you study the divisive forces at work on the African continent today, you'll find that these divisive forces are not indigenous to the African or the African continent, but they are coming from outside. And the powers that have ruled Africa in the past are aware that the real independence of Africa began to take its impetus from the Bandung Conference, which was a forging together of the Asian-Arab-African bloc. And this bloc, with no nuclear weapons or weapons of modern warfare, were able to gain a great deal toward independence against the European powers, because of their numerical strength, their unity.

So these powers realize that they've been pushed against the wall during recent years and the only weapon that they have against this force that has been pushing them against the wall is divide and conquer -- the tactic that they've always used. So that, if I may finish, so that in every area where you find people who have been colonized and oppressed today striving toward freedom, you find that whereas in the past they got along, today they're fighting each other. Just like in British Guyana - - it's the Asians against the Black man. And this is not indigenous trouble that stems

from the people themselves. It's instigated by outside forces. And then it's blown up to give the impression that the fight that's going on among them or between them is something other than what it actually is.

BASS: May I ask you this -- now you say this is not indigenous to the African continent and then of course, you just mentioned British Guyana. But if you look at history, don't you find that all continents or all groups of people in a wide geographical area usually come up with differences within themselves -- Canada for instance, the United States. It's not just Africa alone.

MALCOLM X: Certainly. But when these differences come up and they are normal, or natural--

BASS: Hold on just a minute.

MALCOLM X: -- you'll find that they usually take a different pattern than that which is developing on the African continent or in British Guyana. Because if the Asians and the Blacks in British Guyana could live so much in harmony together when the British were there, you tell me why now that the British are being pushed out, or they're being threatened with being pushed out, that all of a sudden the power that could push them out -- instead of pushing them out begins to fight among themselves. This is not an accident. And the same pattern is developing in different parts of the world. It's divide and conquer.

BASS: Does that answer your question, sir?

CALLER: Ma'am, for clearness' sake you should also talk about the Arabs. I think for clearness' sake you should also mention the Arab role in -- as slave traders and the hatred that would stem from that.

BASS: Did you hear that, Minister Malcolm X? Now we're going to hang up, but he's going to answer that.

MALCOLM X: I don't condone slavery, no matter who it's carried on by. And I think that -- I don't condone slavery no matter who carries it on. And I think that every power that has participated in slavery of any form on this earth, in history, has paid for it, except the limited States. All of your European powers that colonized, your -- the part that the Arabs played in the enslavement of Africans, all of them who played a part have lost their empire, lost their power, lost their position, except the United States. The United States was the recipient of the slaves, and she's the only one up till now who has yet to pay.

BASS: Do you want -- what's your prognosis for the future as regards the United States, as we get ready to leave our breathless listening audience?

MALCOLM X: The Bible, in the Book of Revelations, says he that leads into captivity shall go into captivity. This is in the thirteenth chapter, the one that the preacher thought didn't exist. It says he who leads into captivity shall go into captivity. He who kills by the sword shall be killed by the sword. This is justice. So I don't think that any power can enslave a people and not look forward to having that justice come back upon itself.

BASS: Well, Minister Malcolm X, thank you for visiting. We need to have you back time and time and time again so that we can eventually touch on some of the points of interest that intrigue our listening audience. Now we don't want our listeners to forget that you are going to be showing movies taken on your trip at the Audubon Ballroom at what time?

MALCOLM X: At eight o'clock Sunday night, the Audubon Ballroom.

BASS: At eight o'clock Sunday night, here in New York City. Minister Malcolm X himself.