Interview with Malcolm X
by A. B. Spellman and Malcolm X

Spellman: Do you intend to collaborate with such other groups as labor unions or socialist groups or any other groups?
Malcolm X: We will work with anybody who is sincerely interested in eliminating injustices that Negroes suffer at the hands of Uncle Sam.
Spellman: What is your evaluation of the civil rights movement at this point?
Malcolm X: It has run its—it’s at the end of its leash.
Spellman: What groups do you consider most promising?
Malcolm X: I know of no group that is promising unless it’s radical. If it’s not radical it is in no way involved effectively in the present struggle.
Spellman: Some local civil rights leaders have said they’d welcome your support, some national leaders have said they want nothing to do with you, what is your reaction?
Malcolm X: Well, the local civil rights leaders are usually involved right in the midst of the situation. They see it as it is and they realize that it takes a combination of groups to attack the problem most effectively and, also, most local civil rights leaders have more independence of action and usually they are in tune and in touch with the people. But the national leaders of the civil rights movement are out of touch with the problem and usually they are paid leaders. The local leaders usually have a job and they lean against the local situation on the side, but the nationally known leaders are paid. They are full-time leaders, they are professional leaders and whoever pays their salary has a great say-so in what they do and what they don’t do, so naturally the ones who pay the salaries of these nationally known Negro leaders are the white liberals and white liberals are shocked and frightened whenever you mention anything about some X’s.
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.
Spellman: Does the Muslim Mosque Inc. oppose integration and intermarriage?
Malcolm X: We don’t have to oppose integration because the white integrationists themselves oppose it. Proof of which, it doesn’t exist anywhere where white people say they are for it. There’s just no such thing as integration anywhere, but we do oppose intermarriage. We are as much against intermarriage as we are against all of the other injustices that our people have encountered.
Spellman: What is the program for achieving your goals of separation?
Malcolm X: A better word to use than separation is independence. This word separation is misused. The 13 colonies separated from England but they called it the Declaration of Independence; they don’t call it the Declaration of Separation. They call it the Declaration of Independence. When you’re independent of someone you can separate from them. If you can’t separate from them it means you’re not independent of them. So, your question was what?
Spellman: What is your program for achieving your goals of independence?
Malcolm X: When the black man in this country awakens, becomes intellectually mature and able to think for himself, you will then see that the only way he will become independent and recognized as a human being on the basis of equality with all other human beings, he has to have what they have and he has to be doing for himself what others are doing for themselves so the first step is to awaken him to this and that is where the religion of Islam makes him morally more able to rise above the evils and the vices of an immoral society and the political, economic, and social philosophy of black nationalism instills within him the racial dignity and the incentive and the confidence that he needs to stand on his own feet and take a stand for himself.
Spellman: Do you plan to employ any kind of mass action?
Malcolm X: Oh, yes.
Spellman: What kinds?
Malcolm X: We’d rather not say at this time, but we definitely plan to employ mass action.
Spellman: How about the vote—will the Muslim Mosque Inc. run its own candidates or support other candidates?
Malcolm X: Since the political structure is what has been used to exploit the so-called Negroes, we intend to gather together all of the brilliant minds of students, not the adult politicians who are part of the corruption but the students of political science, we intend to gather all of them together and get their findings, get their analyses, get their suggestions, and, out of these suggestions we will devise an approach that will enable us to attack the politicians and the political structure where it hurts the most, in order to get a change.
Spellman: If the Muslim Mosque Inc. joined in a demonstration sponsored by a non-violent organization, and whites countered with violence, how would your organization react?
Malcolm X: We are non-violent only with non-violent people—I’m non-violent as long as somebody else is non-violent—as soon as they get violent they nullify my non-violence.
Spellman: A lot of leaders of other organizations have said they would welcome your help but they qualify that by
saying "if you follow our philosophy." Would you work with them under these circumstances?

Malcolm X: We can work with all groups in anything but at no time will we give up our right to defend ourselves. We’ll never become involved in any kind of action that deprives us of our right to defend ourselves if we are attacked.

Spellman: How would the Muslim Mosque Inc. handle a Birmingham, Danville, or Cambridge—what do you think should have been done?

Malcolm X: In Birmingham, since the government has proven itself either unable or unwilling to step in and find those who are guilty and bring them to justice, it becomes necessary for the so-called Negro who was the victim to do this himself, and he would be upholding his constitutional rights by so doing, and Article 2 of the constitution—it says concerning the right to bear arms in the Bill of Rights: “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.” Negroes don’t realize this, that they are within their constitutional rights to own a rifle, to own a shotgun, and when the bigoted white supremacists realize that they are dealing with Negroes who are ready to give their lives in defense of life and property, then these bigoted whites will change their whole strategy and their whole attitude.

Spellman: You’ve said this will be the most violent year in the history of race relations in America. Elaborate.

Malcolm X: Yes. Because the Negro has already given up on non-violence. This new-thinking Negro is beginning to realize that when he demonstrates for what the government says are his rights then the law should be on his side. Anyone standing in front of him reclaiming his rights is breaking the law. Now, you’re not going to have a law-breaking element inflicting violence upon Negroes who are trying to implement the law, so that when they begin to see this, like this, they are going to strike back. In 1964 you’ll find Negroes will strike back, there never will be non-violence anymore, that has run out.

Spellman: What is your evaluation of Monroe?

Malcolm X: I’m not too up on the situation in Monroe, N.C. I do know that Robert Williams became an exile from this country simply because he was trying to get our people to defend themselves against the Klu Klux Klan and other white supremacist elements, and also May Mallory was given 20 years or something like that because she was also trying to fight the place of our people down there; so this gives you an idea of what happens in a democracy—in a so-called democracy—when people try to implement that democracy.

Spellman: You often use the word revolution, is there a revolution underway in America now?

Malcolm X: There hasn’t been. Revolution is like a forest fire. It burns everything in its path. The people who are involved in a revolution don’t become a part of the system—they destroy the system, they change the system. The genuine word for a revolution is Umwälzung which means a complete overturning and a complete change and the Negro Revolution is no revolution because it condemns the system and then asks the system that it has condemned to accept them into their system. That’s not a revolution—a revolution changes the system, it destroys the system and replaces it with a better one. It’s like a forest fire like I said—it burns everything in its path and the only way to stop a forest fire from burning down your house is to ignite a fire that you control and use it against the fire that is burning out of control. What the white man in America has done, he realizes that there is a Black Revolution all over the world—a non-white revolution all over the world—and he sees it sweeping down upon America and in order to hold it back he ignited an artificial fire which he has named the Negro Revolt and he is using the Negro Revolt against the real Black Revolution that is going on all over this earth.

Spellman: Can the race problem in America be solved under the existing political-economic system?

Malcolm X: No.

Spellman: Well then, what is the answer?

Malcolm X: It answers itself.

Spellman: Can there be any revolutionary change in America while the hostility between black and white working classes exists? Can Negroes do it alone?

Malcolm X: Yes. They’ll never do it with working-class whites. The history of America is that working-class whites have been just as much against not only working-class Negroes, but all Negroes, period, because all Negroes are working class within the caste system. The richest Negro is treated like a working-class Negro. There never has been any good relationship between the working-class Negro and the working-class whites. I just don’t go along with—there can be no worker solidarity until there’s first some black solidarity. There can be no white/black solidarity until there’s first some black solidarity. We have got to get our problems solved first and then if there’s anything left to work on the white man’s problems, good, but I think one of the mistakes Negroes make is this worker solidarity thing. There’s no such thing—it didn’t even work in Russia. Right now it was supposedly solved in Russia but as soon as they got their problems solved they fell out with China.

Spellman: Will the Muslim Mosque Inc. identify with non-white revolutionary movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America?

Malcolm X: We are all brothers of oppression and today brothers of oppression are identified with each other all over the world.

Spellman: Is there anything else you want to say?

Malcolm X: No. I’ve said enough—maybe I’ve said too much.