Notes on Martin Luther King, Jr., & Malcolm X

1. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)
    a. Though he was gunned down before he could reach forty years of age, Atlanta-born Martin Luther King, Jr., was able to establish himself as a widely known figure in the civil rights movement by his mid-twenties. After rushing through two Bachelor's degrees and a PhD, in 1955 he found himself leading the boycott against segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama. On Dec. 1 of that year, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus. Only a few days later, a young preacher new to the area—King—was elected head of the group that would lead a general boycott.
    b. Two years later, in 1957, he would have a hand in founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which would serve as the vessel for many of his civil rights campaigns in the decade to come.
    c. After helping to slowly build up momentum for the civil rights movement from 1957 onward, King rose to further prominence thanks to his leadership role in protests that rocked Albany, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama in 1962 and 1963, respectively. It was after being arrest for his role in sit-ins and protest marches in Birmingham that King wrote his 1963 letter from behind bars.
    d. Later in 1963, King would play a key role (though he was not alone) in organizing the seminal March on Washington. In August of that year, a quarter of a million people descended on the American capital to bring attention to the need for civil rights—political emancipation, economic emancipation, education—to be granted to Black Americans. On August 27, the marchers held a moment of silence for W.E.B. Du Bois, who died that day; on August 28, King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.
    e. After winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, King returned to Alabama to lead a mass march from Selma to Montgomery, the capital (as recounted in the 2014 film!). As the latter half of the sixties dawned, King began to expand his message to encompass a more global perspective on social injustice. In 1967, he became more vocal in his opposition to the war in Vietnam. In 1968, he began organizing a campaign against poverty and economic inequality more generally.
    f. On April 4 of that year, King was shot dead while standing on the balcony of his motel in Memphis, apparently by escaped convict James Earl Ray (although other theories persisted). Race riots followed, in cities from Chicago to Baltimore and beyond.
2. *The Letter from Birmingham City Jail* (April 16, 1963)
    a. Christian Non-Violence
        i. "My Dear Fellow Clergymen," begins King. (68) Though his audience would ultimately be everyone interested in questions of justice and injustice, King is most concerned in this letter to address his fellow religious leaders, especially Christians and Jews. He's reacting primarily to a 'call for unity' submitted to a newspaper by a group of White Alabama ministers, advocating an end to civil rights protests and a return to order.
            1. Right from the beginning, then, we should be asking whether or not King's approach is in line with that rapprochement between religion and politics that Du Bois called for six decades earlier. Is this the modern face of the faith of the fathers?

ii. King begins by clarifying what it is that he and the SCLC are after. Their program is known as one of "nonviolent direct action." (68) And there were two reasons they brought this program to Birmingham: (1) because they had to provide organizational support to their local allies; and (2) because, more simply, there was grave injustice at work there. (69)
iii. This program of nonviolence is, according to King, not associated with Christianity simply by accident. It is in fact motivated by the commitment King and his allies share to the socially relevant core of Christian teaching. Their model is not just earlier American social reformers, but even the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and the apostles of the New Testament. "Like Paul," King must come to the aid of his neighbors who are in need. (69)
iv. This religiously situated program of nonviolence can then be broken down into four main steps (69):
    1. Collection of facts on the ground: Is there injustice here? Who is involved? What are the contributing factors?
    2. Negotiation: Seek out the authorities and attempt to start a conversation about the unjust situation. Are they willing to negotiate?
    3. Self-Purification: If the authorities aren't willing to negotiate, the subjugated community must reflect on itself and its own situation. Are people prepared to risk injury and defamation in order to rectify the situation and pursue justice?
    4. Direct Action: If the community is ready, it can then proceed to engage in forms of nonviolent protest: sit-ins, marches, and so on. In doing so, they may face arrest and violent reprisals, but they must never use violence to fight back. They must humbly submit to the unjust actions of the authorities, so that the justness of their own action will shine through.
v. King and his allies followed these steps in Birmingham. First, they ascertained that racial injustice was indeed rampant there. Police brutality and segregation oppressed the Black populace and stole away their right to vote, among other things. The White political leaders were unwilling to negotiate. The White economic leaders were willing to negotiate, but their promises turned out to be deceptive. After a period of self-reflection and purification, then, the SCLC and their local allies organized nonviolent direct action. (70)
vi. As King puts it: "So we had not 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." (70)

b. The Purpose of Direct Action
    i. King knows that many of his critics are skeptical of any kind of direct action. They might complain: why not wait? Why risk creating a tense social situation, or making an already tense relationship worse?
    ii. But change only comes through tension, argues King: "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. … I must confess that I am not afraid of the word tension. I have

earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth." (71)

iii. Here King invokes a Socratic model. Just as Socrates, with his provocative questions, stirred up a tension in the mind of his interlocutors which led to "creative analysis," so does King seek to create "tension in society" that can transform it toward understanding and brotherhood. Nonviolent action thus aims to create dialogue—it is an active, creative, tensile force. (71)
    1. Think back all the way to the *Republic*: Socrates the gadfly was interested in philosophical questions, both metaphysical and political. Now King the gadfly is continuing in his footsteps. This letter can serve as a fitting bookend to the course, touching as it does upon Socrates, Augustine, Aquinas, and on and on and on.

iv. This nonviolent force is needed if the civil rights movement is to get anywhere. Oppressive groups do not give up their rule over society easily or without any prodding. Some action must be taken. Even if there are individual White folks or people in power who see the injustice of the situation and change their own behavior accordingly, that doesn't mean the oppressive groups as a whole will do so.

v. Writes King: "we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily." (71)

vi. His critics might also add: why now? Why stir up these tensions now, when America might not be ready for it? To this, King replies: if not now, when? Who says his calls for justice are "untimely?" He stands in opposition to any calls to 'wait' for a better time, since 'wait' often turns into 'never' once we wait too long. And in the meanwhile, a horrible psychological and even bodily toll is taken on Black America. (71-72)

c. Just and Unjust Laws

i. One of the most common complaints against King, however, is that he picks and choose which laws to follow and which to break. But what man could place himself above the law? Well, King doesn't think he himself is above the law. But he does think that the law of God overrides the law of human beings, even if those human beings happen to be Americans.
    1. Here recall Aquinas—not just because we read him, but because he's named explicitly by King himself! In this letter and elsewhere, King takes his Christian commitments—not just practical but intellectual—with a great seriousness.

ii. Writes King: "There are just and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'" (73)

iii. And as he explains more fully: "How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a manmade code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statues are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and

damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority." (73)

iv. The result is a system that, though 'legal,' reduces humans to mere things. To support an unjust hierarchy in this way is not simply unsound, it is morally wrong, even "sinful." (73) King is not at all afraid to speak with moral authority and make use of the language of Christian doctrines to indict the injustices of modern America's institutionalized racism.

v. After laying out this theo-political definition of unjust law, King then unfolds a series of examples:

1. "An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself." (74) Of course, the next question is whether or not the dominant group here counts as a majority. Numerically, that's not always the case. Yet the risk of a 'democratic tyranny' is just as present here as it was in Tocqueville's and Mill's criticisms of majoritarian despotism.
2. "An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting ore creating because they did not have the unhampered right to vote." (74) Actualizing universal suffrage is thus a goal lying at the heart of King's call for justice.
3. Furthermore, even just laws can be unjustly applied. Here King offers the example of a parade permit ordinance: yes, it's fair to have such a law, but not when it's blatantly used to undermine people's First Amendment rights to organize peacefully. (74)

vi. Of course, even if one is justified in breaking an unjust law, one should still be willing to accept the penalty. By doing so, we can show an even higher respect for the law, perhaps even for the true law. There is, as King points out, Scriptural precedent for such civil disobedience. The legal-illegal distinction pales in comparison to divinely mandated justice. (74-75)

d. Critiquing the White Moderate

i. It's all too easy to respond to calls for an end to racial injustice by flattering ourselves that 'we' are in no way part of the problem. Racists are usually 'over there'—it's someone else doing the segregating, the oppressing, and so on. But King is especially attuned to the ways that moderate voices—usually politically moderate Whites—can actually be more damaging to the civil rights movement than the blatant racists of the KKK. This is because many White moderates, despite their sympathy for oppressed Black Americans, are unwilling to participate in or even support the direct action necessary for righting all these wrongs.

ii. As King describes it: "I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed by the White moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice…" (75)

iii. For the White moderate, again, it's never quite the 'right time' for protest and action. They preach patience to the point of apathy and atrophy. But King is wary of their seductive patience. What the moderate calls for is only

'negative peace'—the stagnant stasis of the status quo. In opposition to this, King advocates not violence but rather a kind of creative tension, mobilized through nonviolent action and aimed at bringing about a positive peace rooted in full recognition of the humanity of all. (75)

iv. Of course, this creative tension does not necessarily create tension from scratch. The tension is already there, in the substructure of a racialized society that subjugates and segregates. Direct action merely exposes this tension and, by doing so, creates the possibility for change. This must happen. "Time," adds King, "is neutral." It does not make progress happen simply by happing. Social transformation must be put into play by nonviolent agents getting things done. (76)

v. So: "Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national clergy into a creative psalm of brotherhood." (77)

e. The Middle Way

i. As King sees it, Black America risks falling into one of two extremes. The first is that of abject complacency. Ravaged by centuries of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation, many Black communities just want some peace and quiet. Rather than energetically advocating for change, they want to hunker down and avoid worse forms of persecution. Though their reticence is understandable, King wants to fight against this social apathy. The history of oppression need not dictate the future. Transformation is possible.

ii. On the other end of the spectrum, King sees those who'd advocate radical change 'by any means necessary.' Black nationalists—not unlike Malcolm X—would seem to go to any length (even repudiating Christianity!) to overthrow the status quo and seize more power. Again, they have a case here; the injustice they're fighting is terrifying, violent, and deep—it can be hard to imagine marches alone bringing it to an end. Yet King refuses to advocate violence, even under these dire conditions.

iii. Instead, he characterizes his own path as a middle way: "I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need not follow the 'do-nothingism' of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. There is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest." (77)

iv. Yet the risk of violent outbursts will continue, King admits. In fact, the only hope to avoid a devolution into race riots and civil warfare across the country might be to embrace this model of non-violence. (Here we can catch a hint of how the rhetorical approaches of King and Malcolm X might strangely complement one another: each is able to counter the weaknesses of the other and provocatively work out new possibilities therefrom…)

v. Yet despite this call for a middle way, King is increasingly warming to the idea of being labeled an "extremist." Though he first balked at this, he's now come to see that many of the heroic figure of history—Jesus, to take one example close to King's own heart—were extremists in their own way. And so he writes: "the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist we will be." (78)

f. Redeeming America; or, Religion as a Way Forward for Politics

i. The need for this kind of 'extremism in love' arises not only because White moderates have fallen short, but also because the Church itself has not served its noble purpose. "I have been disappointed with the Church,"

writes King. (79) It holds within itself all of the language and the ideas and the tools for taking an active part in social transformation, and yet so many of its representatives continue to avoid taking any part whatsoever.

ii. Too many White ministers, argues King, are more concerned with legality than they are with morality. (80) But given that divinely natural justice overrides human law—and serves as its source, ultimately—these legally minded pastors and rabbis must have it wrong.

iii. By preserving the status quo, too many churches fail to realize the transformative potential religion can have within the social world. As King says, "I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and secular." (80)

iv. The Church, in short, should serve not as a thermometer measuring society's temperature, but rather as a thermostat altering its temperament. Here King invokes an idealized portrait of early Christianity: "In those days, the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society." (81)

v. But now the church stalls social progress through support of—or at least quietism regarding—the status quo: "Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are." (81)

vi. Yet here a question arises: can religion still serve the socially transformative function it once did? Or has it become too normalized, too synchronized with the timeframe of society's ruling powers to effect any change? Asks King: "Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world?" (82)

vii. King doesn't let this question throw him into despair. Instead, like Du Bois at some moments, he ends with a crescendo of eschatological hope and fervor. "I have no despair about the future," he claims, adding: "We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom." (82)

viii. And again: "We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands." (82) Here, despite the long odds facing him, we find King strangely echoing the providential inevitability we encountered already back in Tocqueville. Social justice is written up as a kind of manifest destiny.

ix. Victory won't come cheap, however. There remain forces amassed against justice and right. The police, especially, come in for criticism here. Tasked with serving law and order, all too often their actions seem mainly to uphold a 'law' that poorly resembles justice. King was all too familiar with the violent ways law enforcement officials would beat down Southern protests. And he adds that, even if the police didn't use violence, their use of nonviolence for unjust ends was just as wrong. (83)

x. Finally, King ends by calling for a redemption of both American and its religious inheritance, of "the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage…" (84)

3. Malcolm X (1925-1965)
    a. Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little but later known as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz, represented a rather different face of the Black emancipation movement in America. Whereas King was known for his Scripturally motivated ethos of non-violence, Malcolm was not afraid to skirt the line between non-violence and violence. His rhetorical approach was perhaps less careful than King's, though certainly just as stirring.
    b. Born in Nebraska, Malcolm grew up in mostly in Michigan and Boston. Since his father had died young and his mother had been institutionalized, he grew up with extended family and in foster care. By 1943, he had moved to Harlem and was engaged in a life of petty crime. This in turn led to his arrest in Boston in 1946, which put him behind bars until he was paroled in 1952.
    c. While in prison, Malcolm found support from members of the Nation of Islam, eventually converting to their movement. The Nation had begun in the 1930s as a blend of Islamic teachings and Black nationalism. While still in prison, Malcolm started up a correspondence with the leader of the Nation, Elijah Muhammad. Under the influence of the Nation, Malcolm gave up his 'slave-name' of Little and replaced it with 'X,' which served as a placeholder for the African family name he could never know.
    d. After leaving prison, Malcolm rose to become one of the leading figures in the Nation of Islam. At the same time, he was a prominent voice in the latest stage of the civil rights movement—although, as we'll see, Malcolm had some issues with the phrase 'civil rights.' By 1963, however, tensions had arisen between Malcolm and some of the Nation leadership. Accusations would eventually fly in both directions, but we can say with certainty that Malcolm had begun to move away from the Nation's teachings, toward a new synthesis between traditional Islam and Black nationalism.
    e. In March 1964, Malcolm publicly announced his split from the Nation. Shortly thereafter, he founded Muslim Mosque, Inc., in New York and delivered his speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" at a Methodist church in Cleveland. His next move was to deepen his commitment to Islam—no longer as the Nation taught it, but as Sunni Muslims practiced it. Performing the Hajj in Mecca showed him that Islam could in fact be a force for universal justice, transcending racial divides rather than exploiting them.
    f. Malcolm Shabazz then spent the next year travelling throughout Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. During that time, tensions between him and the supporters of Elijah Muhammad only worsened. When he returned to America in early 1965, he knew his life was under constant threat. Despite this knowledge, he wasn't able to evade death for long. On February 21, 1965, he was shot numerous times by three men, all apparently members of the Nation of Islam.
4. *The Ballot or the Bullet* (April 3, 1964)
    a. Religious Difference & Racial Solidarity
        i. With his 1964 speech in Cleveland, Malcolm X shows us a somewhat different way of relating religion and politics. Earlier in his career, he might've more blatantly rooted his politics in his commitments to the Nation of Islam. But now, closer to the end of his career and his life, he's come upon a subtler way of juxtaposing religious life with political action.

ii. Near the beginning of the speech, Malcolm clarifies his religious situation: "I'm still a Muslim; my religion is still Islam. That's my personal belief." (1) That might seem like a rather innocuous statement, at first, but in its context it's a bold thing for him to say. Is he saying that his religious practices have little or nothing to do with his political activities? How is he envisioning or re-envisioning the relationship between religion and politics? (Recall W.E.B. as something like the start of a conversation about this relationship…)
iii. Regardless of how we come down on that question, we'd have to admit that Malcolm is clearer when expressing his political vision: "I believe in action on all fronts by whatever means necessary." (1) Note that he does not, as King might've, clarify whether this action is direct or indirect, violent or non-violent.
iv. This commitment to action is not framed in terms of any one religious tradition. The point is no longer to exploit religious differences—as Malcolm himself had done earlier—but to overcome those differences in order to build solidarity among the Africans stranded in unjust America.
v. Says Malcolm: "I'm not here tonight to discuss my religion. … I'm not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it's time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem, a problem that will make you catch hell whether you're a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Muslim, or a nationalist." (1)
    1. Recall Du Bois again: What does it feel like to be a problem? It feels a lot like this… And it doesn't have much to do with your particular religious commitment.
vi. Every person of African descent should, in Malcolm's view, rally together to fight oppression and exploitation. Throughout the speech, the name of the one who oppresses and exploits will be this: "White Man." From the beginning, though, Malcolm explains that he's not quite as racially rigid regarding Whites as he used to be. He's not anti-White, he says; just anti-exploitation. (2)
    1. Not long after this, when he went on the Hajj, Malcolm would come to see how Islam could serve as a path to transcending racial antagonism. Bosnians and Somalis and Indonesians and Arabs could all come together in worship, regardless of their backgrounds and differences. In this way, Malcolm's evolving religious sensibility dovetails nicely with his move towards broader political solidarity.
vii. Like King, seemingly, Malcolm also emphasizes that the time for unified action and social transformation is now, not later. Whereas King expresses a fairly complex and multivalent philosophy of time, however, Malcolm is more blunt: "It isn't that time is running out—time has run out!" (2)

b. The Meaning of America
    i. Malcolm's next move in the speech would seem to set him in some opposition to King. Rather than adopting, appropriating, and redeeming the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, Malcolm levels a heavy critique against the very idea of America. Under conditions of racial exploitation, it's not even clear to him whether people of African descent count as 'true' Americans.

ii. Again, he's characteristically blunt: "I don't even consider myself an American." (2) He reminds us: "Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American." (3)
iii. America isn't the redemption of its Black inhabitants; it's the perpetrator of the crime: "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. … I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare." (3)
iv. But whereas earlier in his life Malcolm might have developed this suspicion of America into a rejection of the whole edifice of American politics—voting and all—here Malcolm is willing to advocate for active suffrage as a means to alleviating the situation. Of course, it's never as simple as voting for the Democrats or the Republicans. Voting can grant you leverage, but that doesn't mean the parties in power will actually reward you for your support. (3)
v. Regardless of who's in power, the White political structure of America is playing a con game with its Black neighbors. It's something like good cop / bad cop. One party will court Black votes by looking like a friend, at least relative to the other party. But, in the end, both parties are working to ensure that the status quo remains. Neither is truly working for the betterment of America's Black inhabitants.
vi. Says Malcolm of the con game: "One of them makes believe he's for you, and he's got it fixed where the other one is so tight against you, he never has to keep his promise." (4)
vii. The American government, then, isn't even really a democracy. Most of its senior "representatives" (Malcolm uses the term loosely) are there illegally, even by the law of the land. They've been elected unconstitutionally, in contradiction with the amendments meant to secure Black suffrage.
viii. Says Malcolm: "This is not even a government that's based on democracy. It is not a government that is made up of representatives of the people." (5)
ix. "You don't even need new legislation," he adds. (6) America need only enforce its own laws, its own constitution, its own amendments, and the situation could begin to improve. But that's not what the ruling classes actually want.

c. A New Interpretation
i. So, in keeping with the theme of the meeting at which he's speaking, Malcolm then asks: what's next? If Africans in America aren't really American and if America isn't really a functioning democracy, then what should be done? Or, at least, how should we think about what should be done?
ii. To begin with, says Malcolm, we should reflect on what the ballot is really for: "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." (6)
iii. If Blacks aren't able to make the ballot work for their own emancipation, there will be trouble, one way or another. Appealing to "white liberals" or

waiting on them to save you won't do much—here Malcolm and King would agree. (7)

iv. To reconceive the function of the ballot, then, Malcolm asks us to broaden our perspective on the situation of Africans in America. The struggle for emancipation must receive a new interpretation, a re-interpretation: "The entire civil rights struggle needs a new interpretation, a broader interpretation. We need to look at this civil rights thing from another angle—from the inside as well as from the outside. To those of us whose philosophy is black nationalism, the only way you can get involved in the civil rights struggle is to give it a new interpretation." (7)

v. The fate of the next Black generation hangs on this re-interpretation, contends Malcolm. There's no more turn-the-other-cheek, contra King. Instead, it's this: "It'll be liberty, or it will be death." (8)

vi. Africans in America have already made their contribution. It was an investment of blood, both through the centuries of free labor that constituted slavery and through the military service they undertake in the name of the powers that oppress them. (9)

vii. Because they've already paid their dues, Blacks in America should now simply claim what is owed them—claim what is theirs. In protesting for their rights and for their property, they aren't at all threatening law and order. They are enacting the law; they are the force of law. It is the segregationist that undermines the law. It is the abuse of police power that ensures the law is violated and that there will be no order. (9)

viii. So we can see Malcolm's re-interpretation taking shape. The civil rights struggle is not about 'breaking the law'—cf. King—in order to serve justice on some higher plane. It's about making the law real. The law is already on the side of Africans in America; political action need only support this true law.

ix. And such action need not be nonviolent, according to Malcolm: "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. … 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." (10)

x. In addition to this legal reinterpretation, Malcolm also re-envisions the Black struggle as a push not merely for civil rights, but for human rights. The conversation about civil rights is an American conversation; it's enclosed by the limitations of America's imperfect democracy and institutional racism. To ask for civil rights is to ask for the White Man in power to toss you a few crumbs.

xi. But to ask for human rights would be to join a chorus of postcolonial voices from around the world: African, Asian, Latin American voices, all throwing off the chains of imperialist domination. Human rights is a phrase taken form a global conversation about justice. And so, argues Malcolm, we must reimagine the struggle for Black emancipation in light of the broader world of postcolonial resistance. (10)

xii. As he puts it: "Civil rights means you're asking Uncle Sam to treat you right. Human rights are something you were born with. Human rights are your God-given rights." (11)
    1. Here we can see that, even though he doesn't want to foreground his religiosity, Malcom is still happy to make use of divine language. What might King say to the above?

d. Racial & Political Solidarity
    i. Nevertheless, Malcolm's use of religious language doesn't necessarily collapse into a religiously based politics. The goal here is for all Africans in America to unite against the hypocrisy of the ruling powers. The best way to do this is through the ballot, which is even more powerful than the dollar. (11) Economic shortcomings need not prevent political action from being effective.
    ii. Black people in America must attain such solidarity that they cease even to be limited by the deception that they are full 'Americans.' Instead, they should look to Africa as inspiration for their postcolonial future: "You're nothing but Africans," says Malcolm. (12)
    iii. Malcolm, even more so than King, is not afraid of being labelled an extremist. He's aware that many postcolonial struggles around the globe have made progress only through violence, usually through guerrilla warfare. And so he urges Blacks in America to have the heart of a guerrilla warrior, even alluding to the possibility that guerrilla action could erupt on American soil. (12-13)
    iv. Yet the motivation for action, even violent action, is not religious ideology but racial-political solidarity: "It's true we're Muslims and our religion is Islam, but we don't mix our religion with our politics and our economics and our social and civil activities—not any more. We keep our religion in our mosque. After our religious services are over, then as Muslims we become involved in political action, economic action, and social and civic action." (13)
    v. The gospel Malcolm wants to preach, at least on this occasion, is that of Black Nationalism. Its message is not only that it must be the ballot or the bullet, but also that ballots can used like bullets: "Don't be throwing out any ballots. A ballot is like a bullet. You don't throw your ballots until you see a target, and if that target is not within your reach, keep your ballot in your pocket." (14)
        1. This measured advocacy of democratic activism marks somewhat of a change for Malcolm. Earlier, he might have followed many others in the Nation of Islam who though that any involvement in the corrupt process of American politics would be defiling rather than decisive. (Recall here Goldman's comments about how women's entry into democratic politics would only be an entry into corruption.) Now, however, Malcolm seems quite open to the constructive use of the ballot—if indeed such a use can be made possible.
    vi. Black Nationalism, in theory and in practice, aims to transcend religious difference—and other non-racial distinctions—rather than exploiting them.

Politically and economically, it's simply a movement concerned with seizing control of one's own community. (14)

vii. But the gospel of Black Nationalism isn't just negative; it isn't just about stopping other people from wielding power over you. It's also showing that you can have control over yourself. Self-examination and even self-purification—is this like King's?—will be necessary: "The social philosophy of black nationalism only means that we have to get together and remove the evils, the vices, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other evils that are destroying the moral fiber of our community. … So I say, in spreading a gospel such as black nationalism, it is not designed to make the black man re-evaluate the white man—you know him already—but to make the black man re-evaluate himself." (15)

viii. So it's not about changing White minds. It's not about pleading to America's conscience. Malcolm puts little stock in either possibility. America's mores and morality are little more than hypocrisy. So, once again, it's not so much about changing others as it is about self-transformation: "We have to change our own mind. You can't change his mind about us. We've got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes. We have to see each other as brothers and sisters." (15)

ix. "Our gospel is black nationalism," he continues. It's not about starting new groups and new religious movements, but about bringing a shared message to those that already exist: Christian and Muslim, young and old, and so on. There must be a shared goal, around which a new conversation can begin. And then, concedes Malcolm, perhaps there will arise a need for new forms of political organization, forms more well-suited to what must be done (in his view): "We want to hear new ideas and new solutions and new answers. And at that time, if we see fit then to form a black nationalist party, we'll form a black nationalist party. If it's necessary to form a black nationalist army, we'll form a black nationalist army. It'll be the ballot or the bullet. It'll be liberty or it'll be death." (16)

e. Segregation & Separation

i. Malcolm concludes his speech by elaborating on his vision for the future, as well as his call to action now. Once again, the point is not petitioning the American government, but rather seizing freedom and self-determination for the community itself: "there's no white man going to tell me anything about my rights." (17)

ii. The realization of human rights for Africans in America is the goal, and it must be pursued, even if it at a dear cost: "We will work with anybody, anywhere, at any time, who is genuinely interested in tackling the problem head-on, non-violently as long as the enemy is non-violent, but violent when the enemy gets violent." (17)

iii. The society that will result once rights are realized is not necessarily one of interracial harmony. As Malcolm puts it bluntly: "I don't believe in any kind of integration." (17) And he doesn't think the offer of it is even genuine. In order to seize self-determination, it might just be enough to break away from domination by White Americans, rather than to establish a fully blended society.

iv. Yet, even if he's not quite for integration, Malcolm remains staunchly against segregation. Segregation isn't just separation; it's subjugation, domination, oppression: "Let me explain what I mean. A segregated district or community is a community in which people live, but outsiders control the politics and the economy of that community. … When you're under someone else's control, you're segregated. They'll always give you the lowest or the worst that there is to offer, but it doesn't mean you're segregated just because you have your own. You've got to control your own. Just like the white man has control of his, you need to control yours." (17)

v. And furthermore: "The white man is more afraid of separation than he is of integration. Segregation means that he puts you away from him, but not far enough for you to be out of his jurisdiction; separation means you're gone. And the white man will integrate faster than he'll let you separate." (17-18)

vi. So Malcolm is now willing to support efforts to integrate, even if it's not quite as sound and sovereign as separation might be. Integration would still mark an improvement on the alienated domination that takes place through social and educational segregation.

vii. Yet even as he announces he's willing to work with others for these moderate gains, he never loses sight of the extremes to which the community might have to go in order to attain its goals. Here he invokes the Second Amendment, adding that "it's time for Negroes to defend themselves." (18) When Black churches and homes are being bombed in the South, Malcolm thinks it becomes quite permissible to carry rifles and shotguns in self-defense.

viii. So the rhetoric of the bullet shouldn't be taken too lightly here: "if I die in the morning, I'll die saying one thing: the ballot or the bullet, the ballot or the bullet." (19)

ix. The final vision, though, isn't yet armed guerilla warfare. Before it gets to that, Malcolm would like to see a new March on Washington, a 1964 movement to rival and surpass that of 1963. But this march would have a different tenor: "They're not going singing 'We Shall Overcome.'" If the civil rights bill continues to be filibustered in congress, there remains the risk that a "non-nonviolent army" will have to join the march—it'll be the ballot or the bullet, once again. (19)