

MALCOLM X

Human Rights, Civil Rights

MALCOLM X (1925–1965), originally named Malcolm Little, was a controversial civil rights leader, a powerful organizer, and a spectacular spokesperson for human rights in America. Initially he advocated separatism and black nationalism, but as a result of his conversion to Islam and a pilgrimage he made to Mecca, he revised his political views. Shortly before he was assassinated he adopted a platform of brotherhood and equality. Here he distinguishes between human rights and civil rights.

[INTERVIEWER]

One question that I've wondered about—in several of your lectures you've stressed the idea that the struggle of your people is for human rights rather than civil rights. Can you explain a bit what you mean by that?

MALCOLM X:

Civil rights actually keeps the struggle within the domestic confines of America. It keeps it under the jurisdiction of the American government, which means that as long as our struggle for what we're seeking is labeled civil rights, we can only go to Washington, D.C., and then we rely upon either the Supreme Court, the President or the Congress or the senators. These senators—many of them are racists. Many of the congressmen are racists. Many of the judges are racists and oftentimes the president himself is a very shrewdly camouflaged racist. And so we really can't get meaningful redress for our grievances when we are depending upon these grievances being redressed just within the jurisdiction of the United States government.

On the other hand, human rights go beyond the jurisdiction of this government. Human rights are international. Human rights are something that a man has by dint of his having been born. The labeling of our struggle in this country under the title civil rights of the past 12 years has actually made it impossible for us to get outside help. Many foreign nations, many of our brothers and sisters on the African continent who have gotten their independence, have restrained themselves, have refrained from becoming vocally or actively involved in our struggle for fear that they would be violating U.S. protocol, that they would be accused of getting involved in America's domestic affairs.

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Civil Rights

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On the other hand, when we label it human rights, it internationalizes the problem and puts it at a level that makes it possible for any nation or any people anywhere on this earth to speak out in behalf of our human rights struggle.

So we feel that by calling it civil rights for the past 12 years, we've actually been barking up the wrong tree, that ours is a problem of human rights.

Plus, if we have our human rights, our civil rights are automatic. If we're respected as a human being, we'll be respected as a citizen; and in this country the black man not only is not respected as a citizen, he is not even respected as a human being.

And the proof is that you find in many instances people can come to this country from other countries—they can come to this country from behind the Iron Curtain—and despite the fact that they come here from these other places, they don't have to have civil-rights legislation passed in order for their rights to be safeguarded.

No new legislation is necessary for foreigners who come here to have their rights safeguarded. The Constitution is sufficient, but when it comes to the black men who were born here—whenever we are asking for our rights, they tell us that new legislation is necessary.

Well, we don't believe that. The Organization of Afro-American Unity feels that as long as our people in this country confine their struggle within the limitations and under the jurisdiction of the United States government, we remain within the confines of the vicious system that has done nothing but exploit and oppress us ever since we've been here. So we feel that our only real hope is to make known that our problem is not a Negro problem or an American problem but rather, it has become a human problem, a world problem, and it has to be attacked at the world level, at a level at which all segments of humanity can intervene in our behalf.



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Justice, Care, Gender Bias

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