

What Obama Did Not Like About Malcolm X

By Arnold August, October 2011

In Obama's first book, he ridicules Malcolm X's characterization of "house and field Negroes." Malcolm X addressed a meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Convention on February 4, 1965, only three weeks before he was assassinated. One can say that he offered in this speech the quintessence of opposition to African-Americans being co-opted or recuperated in order to salvage the system:

[During slavery] There was that old house Negro and the field Negro. And the house Negro always looked out for his master. When the field Negroes got too much out of hand, he held them back in check. He put 'em back on the plantation. The house Negro could afford to do that because he lived better than the field Negro. He ate better, dressed better, and lived in the house.... And he loved his master more than himself.¹

Malcolm X was a revolutionary in the making, as he went through his experiences and came into contact with different trends of thought and struggles in Africa, Europe and the U.S. While he was a firm defender of the cause of African-Americans and the African continent for its right to self-determination and sovereignty, he also began to see the movement in the U.S. in a broader perspective. On February 18, 1965, he delivered his last public speech to an audience of 1,500 students and faculty members from Barnard College and Columbia University. He said

Martin Luther King is in jail, but no one arrests any members of the Ku Klux Klan.... It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of Black against white, or a purely American problem. Rather we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter.²

Foretelling his assassination that was to come only a few days later, in an interview on the same day as the above-mentioned speech, "There is a conspiracy to kill me because the

racists know that I now believe the only way to help the Black man in this country is unity among Black people and white people.”³

In Obama’s second book, he makes many references to the liberals and the left as he rejects them in favour of Ronald Reagan in the context of his learning experience of the 1960s. In addition, many people are mentioned from that epoch, but not Malcolm X. Another clear signal was sent.

¹ Malcolm X, 2008a. “The House Negro and the Field Negro.” In Malcolm X, *The Final Speeches: February 1965*. NY: Pathfinder, p. 27.

² ———. 2008b. *A Global Rebellion of the Oppressed Against the Oppressor*. February 18, 1965. NY: Pathfinder, p. 183–84.

³ ———. 2008c. “There Is a Conspiracy to Kill Me.” Interview with New York Post. February 18, 1965, p. 188.