

suddenly become "racist" and "Uncle Tom." When I was growing up, the good people of my parents' generation all referred to them as "the colored." (I don't know what the Bad Guys, the racists, called them in those days, since I had never met one: perhaps, after all, "nigger.") But us younger progressives regarded "colored" as racist and Uncle Tom, for some reason that I've never grasped: *we* used the Good word "Negro." No sooner had "Negro" swept the boards, however, and "colored" been vanquished, when the radical blacks of the late 60s

denounced the good old word "Negro" as racist and Uncle Tom and insisted on the word "black." (Although, oddly enough, in older decades, "black" was considered terribly racist and pejorative, referring as it did to *color*.) Finally, after a sharp but short fight, "black" was triumphant, and "Negro" sent to the brig, beyond the pale of civilized people.

From the point of view of the average American, the word "black" had a great advantage: it has only one syllable. But, a couple of years ago, the black leadership put their heads together and decided that "black" was now racist and Uncle Tom, and that the only satisfactory

term is "African-American." No guys, no way. No way that a word of seven syllables "Af-ri-can A-mer-i-can" is going to replace a word of one syllable. Never. There are still some verities that the average American holds to with great firmness; and contracting syllables is one of them.

I see signs on the horizon that "African-American" might already be obsolete, and that a new phrase is coming onto the horizon. Get this, it's: "people of color." So: after a hundred years of putting us through the hoops the upshot is almost the same phrase with which we started,

oh so long ago. Except that for the two syllable "col-ored" we now have the five-syllable "people of co-lor." I suppose some would call that "progress." ■

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Their Malcolm... And Mine by M.N.R.

Why Malcolm X? Why the sudden rage, replete with baseball caps inscribed with X's, for a man assassinated nearly thirty years ago? Partly it's media hype, centered around the new hagiographic movie made by our Most Politically Correct

Movie Director, Black Division. More seriously, the nostalgia for Malcolm is part of America's permanent Jacobin Celebration Project, in which new politically correct birthdays and anniversaries are dug up and compulsorily celebrated (Earth Day, Earth Week, "Dr." Martin Luther King Day, etc.), while others are overlooked or dumped altogether (Washington's Birthday, Columbus Day—you should forgive the expression). To paraphrase LBJ, seize control of a nation's celebrations, and their hearts and minds will follow.

OK, but why specifically Malcolm? Isn't "Dr." King, for Heaven's sake, enough? Are we now to boycott any state that doesn't give a paid holiday or two in honor of Malcolm? The Authorized Version holds that Dr. King is indeed not quite enough, that restless black youth need a more militant and less "Christian" icon and "role model," someone who was at least willing to flirt with violence, someone therefore more in tune with their own proclivities.

It's true that Malcolm was more militant than King; he was a black nationalist rather than an integrationist. Yet, the emphasis on Malcolm's *ideas* in the Received Version doesn't begin to explain the Malcolm phenomenon. In the first place, Malcolm's original nationalism in the form of the Black Muslims still lingers on in the person of "Minister" Louis Farrakhan. Yet, who really cares about Farrakhan? Surely he is scarcely the figure cut by Malcolm, Farrakhan's original mentor. In

fact, Malcolm made most of his impact in the scant few months after he had broken with the Black Muslims and before his assassination. And it was then that his ideology was in a state of severe flux. Groping his way out of the Nation of Islam, he had a conversion experience toward genuine Islam when he traveled to Mecca. Furthermore, ideologically, he was courted and pulled at by groups ranging through a wide ideological spectrum, from the Trotskyites of the Socialist Workers Party, over to free market economist and *Fortune* journalist Charles Silberman, who was trying to make Malcolm into a free-marketeer. Indeed, Malcolm's Black Muslim emphasis on black self-help, his attacks on drugs and going on welfare, were an attempt to bring ghetto blacks over to a Protestant Ethic, and it had a limited success in what could have developed into an ideology of Black Capitalism. But it is impossible to say where Malcolm would have headed had he not been gunned down in Harlem's Hotel Theresa Ballroom in February 1965.

There is no question that black nationalism is a lot more libertarian than the compulsory integration pushed by King, the NAACP, and white liberals. But there are deep problems with black nationalism, which Malcolm never had a chance to explore. The most fundamental: black nationalism *in what territory?* A nation has to have territory, and blacks are only one-fifth of the American nation. "Black nationalism" within the United States is then only a phony nationalism, and begin-

ning to look like a drive for an aggravated form of coerced parasitism over the white population. The territorial question was at least faced by the Black Belt thesis of the Communist Party of the USA during the 1920s: Black Belt slave counties of the South. There were two grave problems with this doctrine: (a) what do you do with the existing usually majority white population in these areas, and (b) as time has gone on since 1865, more and more blacks have moved out of the historic Black Belt, and have taken over various inner cities in the North.

A second, and more plausible, form of black nationalism is for a separate black nation in currently existing black areas: a New Africa comprised of Harlem, Bed-Stuy, Detroit, Watts, et al. with its capital the old Washington, D.C. and President Jesse Jackson sitting in the Black House. But then more problems arise. Apart from all the problems of enclaves and access, does anyone really believe that this New Africa would be content to strike out on its own, with no massive "foreign aid" from the USA, and strictly limited migration between the two nations? In a pig's eye.

Actually, since Malcolm's preferred term was "African-

American" and since this word has now become the P.C. moniker, it would make the most sense to adopt the solution of early twentieth-century black leader, Marcus Garvey: a mass exodus, a return to West Africa, there to carve out a new black nation, as a people's exile from the Old Sod is at last redeemed. It is true that in contrast to voluntary immigration, black migration from Africa to America was coerced, and voluntary black "Zionism" or African repatriation was the preferred solution to the black problem for most groups, North and South, before the Civil War. Even now, I bet that many

Americans would cheerfully chip in to support such a crusade. But why am I convinced that such a Back to Africa solution, even though it would offer a permanent escape from the alleged horrors of White Racism, is not going to fly, especially among those who aggressively like to refer to themselves as "African-American"?

In the last analysis, then, it is not Malcolm's *ideas*, militant or not, nationalist or not, that continue to fascinate, and to attract followers. Not at all. On the contrary, it was Malcolm *as a person* who was the great attraction when alive and still is, thirty years after his death. For

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