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Malcolm X and Black Lives Matter: How Media Bias, Globalization, and Exigence affect the Messages of Rhetorical Movements

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Malcolm X and Black Lives Matter:

How Media Bias, Globalization, and Exigence affect the Messages of Rhetorical Movements

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Abstract

In order to provide insight into the effectiveness of messages about racial equality for black Americans, this project utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) to assess and juxtapose two Malcolm X speeches with rhetoric from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, through neo-Aristotelian Criticism. The messages from Malcolm X's two speeches and the rhetoric from the BLM movement were extrapolated and defined through Critical Race Theory. Themes of globalization, Black Nationalism, epistemology, white-centricity, black-affirmation, self-identification, imagery, and media bias have been touched on and explored. The speeches, the rhetoric and all of their elements were placed in their historical contexts. In accordance with neo-Aristotelian Criticism, the messages of the Malcolm X speeches and the BLM rhetoric were evaluated using the five canons of rhetoric. Finally, the messages of the speeches and the rhetoric were analyzed for effectiveness given their historical context and their use of the five canons of rhetoric.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, exigence, Malcolm X, rhetoric, white-centricity

Malcolm X and Black Lives Matter:

How Media Bias, Globalization, and Exigence affect the Messages of Rhetorical Movements

Malcolm X was a prolific speaker. His stage presence was dynamic and captivating. His rhetoric was fundamentally egalitarian. Yet, he has gone down in social memory as the radical counterpart to Martin Luther King Jr. Was he really a proponent of any radical ideas, though? Did his rhetoric really advocate for anything extreme? This essay seeks to answer these questions through comprehensive rhetorical analysis of two of his speeches. The analysis will be juxtaposed against an additional criticism of the rhetoric from the Black Lives Matter movement, an aspect of social justice activism that is also portrayed as radical. In order to answer the questions posed by this essay, the messages in two Malcolm X speeches, *The Ballot or the Bullet* and *Not Just an American Problem but a World Problem* (referred to in this essay and by other academics as *Rochester Address*), as well as the rhetoric from the Black Lives Matter movement will be analyzed through neo-Aristotelian Criticism and by Critical Race Theory (CRT); the speeches and rhetoric will be defined, placed in their historical context, evaluated against the five canons of rhetoric, and finally analyzed for effectiveness.

This essay utilizes several analyses of the rhetoric of Malcolm X and the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as an original criticism to purport that the Black Lives Matter movement has the potential to satisfy the rhetorical exigence of ideological inequality that prompted Malcolm X's speeches. This essay also contends that Malcolm's and the Black Lives Matter movement's rhetorics were and are recognized as radical because of the threat they pose to a white-centric society through black-affirming and self-definitional messages, which are

perceived as threatening because they appear to be antithetical to white-centric modes of expression about identity and race.

Definitions

Rhetoric for the non-Rhetorician Because of the interdisciplinary audience this essay seeks to speak to, it is necessary to give some introductory denotational standards for topics that would not otherwise need to be defined by a rhetorical criticism. For example, the terms *rhetoric* and *rhetorical criticism* beg specificity from those who may not have a background in the field. This essay will adhere to two related and simultaneous understandings of what *rhetoric* is. The first is the most simplistic understanding of rhetoric and is found authoritatively in Sonja Foss's "Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practices." Foss defines rhetoric as "the human use of symbols to communicate" (2009, p. 3). She wrote that "*rhetoric* is synonymous with *communication*," the choice of which word to use is personal; and, according to Foss, a social scientific perspective on symbol use usually prefers the term *communication* where those studying symbol use from a humanistic perspective would use *rhetoric* (2009, p. 5).

The second definition of the term *rhetoric* comes from an article entitled *Rhetoric and Autobiography: The Case of Malcolm X* by Thomas Benson. Benson's definition is more in-depth and its nuance aids in the analysis of this essay, while Foss's definition gives it a foundation. The definition reads, "Rhetoric is a way of knowing, a way of being, and a way of doing" Benson also wrote, "it is a way of constituting the self in a symbolic act generated in a scene composed of exigencies constraints, others, and the self" (1974, p. 1). This essay will take particular consideration of the rhetorical exigence of Malcolm X's speeches and the Black Lives Matter movement's rhetoric.

Lloyd Bitzer, the father of rhetorical situation theory defined first, a rhetorical situation as a, “complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence” he equated rhetorical situation to exigence; then he defined an exigence as, “a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (1968, p. 6). He also wrote “An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical.... Further, an exigence which can be modified only by means other than discourse is not rhetorical” (Bitzer, 1968, pp. 6-7). The exigence of the rhetoric evaluated here is ideological racial inequality; by nature of analyzing it as an exigence, this essay affirms inequality’s status as modifiable through discourse—through rhetoric.

Benson says the following about the “knowing” (knowledge) “being” (existence), and “doing” (power) aspects of his *rhetoric* definition, “Taken by itself, any one of the rhetorical modes of action is incomplete. Knowledge alone becomes decadent and effete, existence alone becomes narcissistic and self-destructive, and power alone becomes dehumanized technological manipulation” (1974, p. 1). Malcom X’s rhetoric has been criticized for its incapability at sustaining a contemporaneous social movement, after his death his rhetoric only existed in others’ knowledge of it. The Black Lives Matter movement revives the tenets of Malcolm’s rhetorical knowledge and puts them to effective activist use.

The two, previously defined understandings of what *rhetoric* means to one who studies it, make the understanding of *rhetorical criticism* come easily. Foss defines *rhetorical criticism* as “a qualitative research method that is designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (2009, p. 6). An *artifact* is the evidence that a rhetorical *act* has occurred. Malcolm X’s performance of a speech is an example of an *act* and the published transcript of that speech is an *artifact*.

Methodology and Theoretical Approach The original analysis given by this essay will use the rhetorical analysis methodology, neo-Aristotelian criticism as outlined by Sonja Foss. This essay will also utilize Critical Race Theory in order to further the understanding of Malcolm X and the Black Lives Matter movement's rhetorics. Critical Race Theory is easily defined:

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression. In adopting this approach, CRT scholars attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice. (Brizee et. al, 2015)

In the case of this essay, the "dominant cultural modes of expression" that will primarily be analyzed are language and media. In using this theory, this essay attempts to understand how black Americans were affected by racism according to the rhetoric of Malcolm X. This essay also looks to the present, to current protests of inequality to see how the racism being protested affects black Americans now, according to the rhetoric of a primary protester group, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. A large part of both of the rhetorical movements analyzed by this essay is self-definition for those who have historically been disenfranchised from it, so this essay also seeks to understand the representation of black Americans by black Americans as it relates to the rhetorics of Malcolm X and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Neo-Aristotelian criticism has a processual definition, as it is a process through which one analyzes a rhetorical artifact. When conducting neo-Aristotelean Criticism, the researcher asks this question of the rhetoric, "Did the rhetor use the available means of persuasion to evoke the intended response from the audience?" This question calls upon the researcher to use a measure of assumption of the rhetor's intentions, which makes for a variety of possible research

outcomes and interpretations of the rhetoric. This essay follows Sonja K. Foss's description of neo-Aristotelean Criticism as laid out in her book "Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice." This method prescribes the application of some or all of the five canons of rhetoric to the rhetorical artifact and to analyze its value through each canon. The five canons of rhetoric are invention, organization, style, memory, and delivery. This essay utilizes two of the five canons. The primary canon used is "invention, the location and creation of ideas and materials for the speech" also the "arguments" that a speech makes (Foss, 2009, p. 25). One supporting canon, "style, the language of the speech" is also applied to the artifacts analyzed by this essay (Foss, 2009, p. 25).

Literature Review

Malcolm X The earliest analysis of Malcolm's rhetoric evaluated by this essay argued that Malcolm X used imagery to portray white Americans as "active agents of evil" in order to stir black Americans to hatred (Flick & Powell, 1988, p. 439). Celeste Condit and John Lucaites addressed the call to hatred, the call to violence, that Malcolm X's rhetoric seemed to be. Their analysis of social reaction to Malcolm's speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* proved that white mass media (media produced by and for white Americans) interpreted this speech as an advocacy for the violent overthrow of the US Government (Condit & Lucaites, 1993, p. 292). According to another analyst, Robert Terrill, "Malcolm never explicitly advocated violence, but at the same time, this rhetoric does seem to encourage violent action" (2001, p. 38). Terrill's argument takes Malcolm X's words out of their strict communicative context and imposes meaning onto the messages that Malcolm himself may not have meant. In a very real way, Malcolm's rhetoric is an advocacy for black Americans to stand up and stand their ground, not an advocacy for unprovokedly terrorizing white communities, as some authors would have you believe.

One method Malcolm X advocated that his listeners pursue in the name of standing ground was self-definition. In addition to declaring their disdain for the perceived anti-white nature of Malcolm X, Hank Flick and Larry Powell also argued that Malcolm's rhetoric attempted to counter the self-fulfilling hegemonic prophecy which has been communicated to and about black Americans through the Eurocentric labels placed on them (1988, pp. 439-441). Similarly to Flick and Powell's argument, Terrill portrayed Malcolm X's rhetoric as a conceptual revolution—a shedding of the hegemonies that have given black Americans labels from a Eurocentric, power-dominance perspective. In other words, Terrill argues that Malcolm's speeches emphasized the importance of self-definition (2000, p. 67).

Another author, Keith Miller, also discussed the concept of self-definition, but in terms of whiteness. Whiteness, to Miller, is more than a skin color or even a constructed race; it is an epistemology, or a way of seeing and knowing the world. According to Miller, part of the epistemology of whiteness is the way in which non-white people are known by white people (2004, pp. 199-200). Miller's article argued that because black activists continued brandishing the same names white people had given to them, the overarching issue of a white epistemology was masked. Miller argues that Malcolm X fought for the self-definition of black Americans as one measure that had not previously been used to thwart the hegemonic hold the epistemology of whiteness had (2004, pp. 201-207). When a society is entrenched in a singular perspective of race, from the point of view of one racial group, that racial group becomes the center of the society. Miller says that white epistemology is inextricably bound to the culture of the United States, so it is a white-centric society (2004, pp. 200-201). A cultural shift, a new epistemology, a carefully constructed way of seeing the world that defies the current white-centric dominance, is required to alter ideological inequality in the United States.

Malcolm X advocated for a counter-movement to the white-centric culture in the United States. Terrill described Malcolm's rhetoric as prudent. Prudence in this case can be defined as the use of reason when choosing a course of action. Terrill says, "Malcolm X models this reasoning for his audience. But, more specifically, Malcolm X produces a rhetoric of oppositional prudence, demonstrating for his audience members a prudential reasoning that invites them outside the confines of the dominant culture" (2001, p. 34). Malcolm X's speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet* violated societal norms, it defied "décorum" (Terrill, 2001, p. 34). What is more, it advocated for the audience to breach social codes at the ballot; the speech challenged its listeners to represent their counter-cultures by voting against dominant American candidates, thereby breaching the white-centricity of US society.

The issues of race and racism, counter cultures versus dominant culture, and white-centric inequality are not unique to the United States. Malcolm X was a well-traveled man who had discussions with global leaders. This is reflected in his rhetoric and it does not go unnoticed by the scholarly authors represented in this essay. Malcolm's rhetoric often disregarded spatial separators, crossing the boundaries between the domestic and international racial scene. Terrill argues that Malcolm's rhetoric enforced the idea that in order to achieve liberation, the US could not work alone (2000, p. 72). Social cues would have to be taken from outside of US borders.

Terrill's argument was this type of rhetoric—advocating international and domestic issues as fundamentally part of the same system of oppression, wrought from colonization and perpetuated by racially charged power-distance relationships—was part of a rebranding campaign by Malcolm after his leave from the Nation of Islam. Terrill quotes Malcolm's speech *Rochester Address*, "The 'racism practiced by America,' he says, is the same racism that is involved in 'a war against the dark-skinned people in Asia,...a war against the dark-skinned

people in the Congo, the same as it involves a war against the dark-skinned people in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Rochester, New York” (2000, p. 71). According to Terrill, in both the domestic and international scenes, Malcolm warns, the racism of global white-centricity is manifested through “a science that's called image making” designed to make it seem as though victims, as perceived by Malcolm, are criminals and the criminals are victims (2000, p. 72).

Black Lives Matter Perceiving and “image making” black people as criminals is not antiquated to the all-too-recent 1960s. Contemporary social justice activism focuses on the inequalities in perception surrounding criminality between black and white people. News headlines frequently light up with *misperceptions* of black people as dangerous or as criminals, such as the April arrest of two black men waiting for an associate at a Starbucks in Philadelphia (Fortin, 2018). Even more recently, three black teenagers were racially profiled as criminals in a Nordstrom Rack in St. Louis (Haag, 2018). In both of these instances, employees of the businesses called the emergency line and the situations were handled well by police. In some instances, though, law enforcement personnel fall prey to societally engrained racial bias, which can have more tragic results. Deaths, perceived as unjustified, and met with injustice from the judicial system in the United States, are protested by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

The media in the United States has adhered itself to the political two-party system, and conservative media sources describe the BLM movement as radical. The National Review has described the BLM movement as “radical” and “dangerous” (French, 2016). An FBI intelligence report tied the BLM movement—specifically its protests—to some protests that turned violent, describing the attendees as “Black Identity Extremists” (Vohra, 2017). The BLM movement is controversial, viewed as radical, and fights for equality in the face of opposition.

The relative newness of the Black Lives Matter movement means there is not a lot of peer-reviewed, published literature about its rhetoric. One article *#BlackLivesMatter: Epistemic Positioning, Challenges, and Possibilities* by Dr. Catherine Langford discussed the BLM movement's social media and mass media presence and the epistemic implications and meanings the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has (2015, pp. 78-89). Her conclusions are valuable for an academic understanding of how the movement is prompting rhetorical change, or how the Black Lives Matter movement is affecting the exigence of racial inequality. Langford wrote,

In order to re-script the Black body within White consciousness, new characterizations of Black masculinity, Black femininity, and Black communities need to be offered. But before such suggestions can be accepted, however, the substance of the Black body needs to be valued—to be seen as good, desirable, and significant. Although other Black-positive movements have tried—and failed—to alter White consciousness, a recent movement known as the #BlackLivesMatter offers significant possibility for rhetorical change. (2015 p. 88)

In this, the first paragraph of her conclusion, Langford touched on the topic of white consciousness, which is a similar concept to Miller's white epistemology. She argued that in order to challenge white consciousness, a new characterization of black people needs to happen; self-identification as advocated by Malcolm X and discussed by academics through the decades would sate this need. Finally, by stating that black people—as people, as lives, as human bodies—need to be valued before new characterization, or self-identification, can be accepted by the white consciousness, by the white-centric society; and through her statement that the BLM movement presents the possibility for this change in white-centricity—Langford situates the

Black Lives Matter movement as the final piece to the rhetorical puzzle that Malcolm X helped frame.

Biography

Who was Malcolm X, the man behind the rhetoric? Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, was a Muslim civil rights activist who has gone down in social memory as a radical. The perception of radicality seems to have run in the family; during Malcolm's childhood, his family's home in Lansing, Michigan was set ablaze because of his father's radical civil rights views. When Malcolm was 16, he was sent to live with his sister in a black neighborhood of Boston, where he was soon tempted into a hustler's lifestyle; he called himself Detroit Red. The criminality of Malcolm's actions landed him in Prison in 1946, at just 21 years old. It was in prison that Malcolm Little discovered self-identified prophet, Elijah Muhammad and his Muslim brotherhood, the Nation of Islam (NOI) (Epps, 1993, pp. 64-65).

Malcolm Little almost immediately converted and joined the Nation of Islam. When he was paroled in 1952, Elijah Muhammad dubbed him Malcolm X. Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam ideologically situated Islam as a religion to promote black-power. The rhetoric of the Nation of Islam portrayed white people as demons who would eventually be overpowered and ruled by black men. Because of the belief that Allah would punish and overthrow white hegemony, Nation of Islam members were not allowed to be political activists (Condit & Lucaites, 1993, pp. 291-298) In 1963, a public statement made by Malcolm X regarding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy earned him a censorship, a silencing, from Elijah Muhammad (Epps, 1993, p. 65). This censorship triggered Malcolm to break from the NOI and establish his own Muslim ministry.

Malcolm's new ministry was much more open to political activism, which gave himself and his followers the freedom to be politically active without fear of religious repercussions. His rhetoric, much changed from that of the NOI, allowed him to speak to broader audiences. He took a universalistic stance on Islam, painting it as a religion for any person anywhere rather than one that would end with the rule of black people over white people. Malcolm separated his religious views from his political activism, a point he repeated in both *The Ballot or the Bullet* and *Rochester Address*. He also characterized white people not as demons because of their nature, but demons because of the active oppression of black people (Condit & Lucaites, 1993, pp. 291-300). In other words, Malcolm broke from the NOI perspective that white people were evil by nature and instead he asserted they were only evil because of their chosen actions, which could be changed. He iterated this point in *Rochester Address* when he said,

We don't judge a man because of the color of his skin. We don't judge you because you're white; we don't judge you because you're black; we don't judge you because you're brown. We judge you because of what you do and what you practice. And as long as you practice evil, we're against you. (X, 1965, p. 4)

Malcolm went on to say that the foremost form of evil is "the evil that's based upon judging a man because of the color of his skin" (X, 1965, p. 4). Finally he said, "So we're not against people because they're white. But we're against those who practice racism" (X, 1965, p. 5). With this declaration, Malcolm X firmly distanced himself from the NOI's perception of white people.

The Ballot or the Bullet

Historical Context Malcolm X, in his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet*, did an excellent job situating the context of the speech through his rhetoric. For example, he starts the speech by

addressing the audience. Through his address of the audience, a reader of his speech would know that there were men, women, friends and enemies present. Malcolm said, “In fact, I think we’d be fooling ourselves if we had an audience this large and didn’t realize there were some enemies present” (X, 1964, para. 1). He continued to appeal to his audience, and specifically their opinion of him, by giving a lengthy discussion of his religion. He was incredibly apt at establishing his own *ethos* or credibility as perceived by his audience. He recognized that his religious views presented a problem with his audience’s ability to relate to him on a personal level, since a vast number of black Americans and Americans in general were Christian. This speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet* was even performed in a Christian church house in Detroit.

In his effort to establish his *ethos*, Malcolm X compared himself as a politically-active, Muslim minister to well-known politically-active, Christian ministers like Martin Luther King Jr. (X, 1964, para. 2). He recognized that religious differences would have been too great of a hurdle to jump to unify black people in the struggle against inequality. To this end he said, “Were we to come out here discussing religion, we’d have too many differences from the outstart and we could never get together. So today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic, and social philosophy is Black Nationalism” (X, 1964, para 3). He cited Black Nationalism as his philosophy because as he stated later in his speech, “You can stay right in the church where you are and still take black nationalism as your philosophy” (X, 1964, para. 8). In other words, Black Nationalism is not tied to any one religion and therefore it bridges the religious gap that Malcolm, and perhaps his audience, perceived.

The timing, or the exigence, of the rhetoric purported by Malcolm X was skewed from perfection. The goal of a lot of Malcolm X’s rhetoric was ideological equality. If all people were truly viewed equally without any regard to skin color, there would be no legal inequality, there

would be no concept of race or racism. People were and are not viewed equally, though; and the millennia long unequal conceptualization of people based on racial categories primarily defined by skin color caused legal inequalities for black Americans. These legal inequalities prompted the Civil Rights movement (1954-1968), which began with nation-wide activist mobilization following the lynching of Emmett Till and ended with the Fair Housing act of 1968. It was during the Civil Rights movement that Malcolm's ideological rhetoric was oratorically performed. In a time and space where legal changes, legal action needed to be made, ideological equality was an exigential nicety for the future.

When Malcolm X gave his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* the Civil Rights movement was in full-swing and the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 was on the cusp of being made law. Up until he performed the speech in April of 1964, though, there were two marginally successful Civil Rights Acts already in place. In 1957, civil rights legislation attempted to assist black people in their voter registration efforts, which were hindered by racially discriminatory voter laws. The attempt can hardly be called successful; however the legislation did create the civil rights division in the US Justice Department (The Civil Rights Act of 1957, n.d.).

The Civil Rights act of 1960 reaffirmed the protections from 1957. Although this act was also only marginally successful, it did criminalize the prevention or the attempt at preventing anyone from voting. In 1963, more civil rights legislation was voted *against* in the House and after Kennedy's death the legislation was being blocked in the Senate through 1964. With continually rejected legislation in 1963 and 1964, black Americans grew increasingly fervent in their efforts to attain equality. One front on which the struggle for equality was fought and mentioned by Malcolm X was the protests advocating for equal employment opportunities (Taylor, 1995, pp. 4-5).

Malcolm delivered *The Ballot or the Bullet* on April 12th of 1964 in Detroit. By that time, black Americans were disillusioned with the American government because all of the civil rights legislation until then had had very little noticeable effect in their day-to-day lives. 1964 was a prime election year, and even though most of Malcolm X's rhetoric—in this speech and otherwise—advocated for ideological change, the one action-step he begged of his audience was a reclamation of black communities through the use of their voting rights. The idea behind this was Black Nationalism, essentially if white politicians had continued to fail their black constituents, Malcolm proposed black Americans help themselves through the “self-help philosophy” of Black Nationalism instituted through an educational “self-help program” (X, 1964, para. 8).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed in the summer of that year, which included some substantial voting rights protections for black Americans. According to a government article,

The Act outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, required equal access to public places and employment, and enforced desegregation of schools and the right to vote. It did not end discrimination, but it did open the door to further progress. (Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d. para. 1)

The final legal hurdle that pertained directly to Malcolm X's rhetoric culminated in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This act rid the country of any voter registration deterrent, such as literacy tests and poll taxes (The Voting Rights Act of 1965, n.d.). Unfortunately, Malcolm X did not live to see this momentous progress favoring the ballot for black people, as he took the bullet in February of 1965 and the Voting Rights Act passed in August of that year.

Rhetorical Criticism Malcolm X's use of language in *The Ballot or the Bullet* compares the American revolutionary phrase "liberty or death" to his phrase "the ballot or the bullet." In this analogy, the ballot of the 1960s is representative of American liberty from British rule in the 1770s, which was heavily based on the American colonial objection to being taxed without any official representation in the British governing body that set the taxes. The ballot was the liberty to vote and thereby have the opportunity to gain representation in government for black Americans. In the same analogy, the bullet represents the death that American colonists would rather have had than having to remain under perceived tyrannical British rule. The bullet was black people fighting and struggling and even dying for equality until the immediate need of equal voting rights was met.

Malcolm's analogy that the 1960s "ballot or the bullet" was equivalent to the 1770s "liberty or death" directly compared the black underrepresentation in government in the 1960s to the American colonial lack of representation in British government in the 1770s. The American colonists took their liberty and formed a new country to represent their needs. Malcolm X used this analogy aptly, but instead of advocating for an entirely new, black country, he was advocating for enough freedoms and liberties for black Americans to be able to vote black people to American public service positions in order to represent their unique interests. Malcolm's advocacy is especially pointed toward local governments and American governmental service positions that oversee black communities directly. This is the political aspect of black nationalism according to Malcolm X. (1964, para. 4).

While Malcolm X's ultimate argument for and goal in *The Ballot or the Bullet* was to increase black representation at the voting booths through less discriminatory voter policies, he did advocate several resonating sub-points that aid in the invention of the speech. One of these

points was an outline of exactly how ideological change through rhetoric was and should be the foundation of a social movement. Specifically, he advocated for the “philosophy” of Black Nationalism, which centered blackness and black people; the ideology of Black Nationalism is an ideology of black-affirmation. A centering of any subjective racial category other than whiteness is a threat to white epistemology and the white-centric culture in which Malcolm X performed his speeches. Black Nationalism has a reputation as a separatist ideology; in 1964, it formed a media-image dialectic with integrationist messages of the time. This truth was not lost on Malcolm X, and he presented the two as counter ideologies when he said, “You think that integration would get you freedom, I think separation would get me freedom” (1964, para. 25). It was the combination of the perceived threat to the white-centric status quo, media’s representation of Black Nationalism as separatism, and Malcolm’s previous relationship with the NOI and continued status as a member of the Islamic faith that led him to be labelled and remembered as a radical.

It is important to note, that the connotation of “separatism” i.e., that it is synonymous with “segregationism,” is not an adequate denotation for the way Malcolm X used the term; the understanding of separation as segregation is flawed. Malcolm X explained Black Nationalism in a way that is not synonymous with segregation, first politically then economically. He said, “The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community” (Malcolm X, 1964, para. 4). The advocacy for *black communities* here is what earns Black Nationalism the black separatist misnomer. Malcolm went on to say:

The political philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that if you and I are going to live in a Black community—and that’s where we’re going to live, cause as soon as you

move into one of their—soon as you move out of the Black community into their community, it's mixed for a period of time, but they're gone and you're right there all by yourself again. (1964, para. 4).

By saying this, Malcolm X described the phenomenon that was an all-too-common show of racial discrimination. When a black family accrued enough wealth to buy a home in a white neighborhood, the property value of all of the homes in that neighborhood went down drastically. No white person wanted to live with a black person in their neighborhood, so they sold their houses at to other black people, at a very low price, creating a new black neighborhood (Lipsitz, 1995, pp. 371-379). This phenomenon is what led Malcolm to claim that the idea of *black neighborhoods* and the separation that entails, was not a construct of black culture or Black Nationalism, but of white racism and the desire for *white* neighborhoods. Malcolm did not foresee integration as a possibility, so the black neighborhoods created by white prejudice were the reality that in turn created his Black Nationalist philosophy.

Malcolm X argued that the “economic philosophy of Black Nationalism” was, “that when you spend your dollar out of the community in which you live, the community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer; the community out which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer” (1964, para. 5). He said that most businesses in black communities are not owned by black people, so spending any money at any business puts that money into the pockets of someone who will do nothing to help the declining worth of black neighborhoods. To this end, Malcolm urges black people to take on a spirit of entrepreneurship in order to not only adhere to the Black Nationalist philosophy that he is trying to establish, but also to bolster the economic prosperity of black neighborhoods. He also said that black people opening stores in black neighborhoods would create jobs for black people. He alluded to the protests happening

around the country concerning hiring discrimination and explained a benefit of Black Nationalism when he said, “Once you can create some employment in the community where you live it will eliminate the necessity of you and me having to act ignorantly and disgracefully, boycotting and picketing some practice some place else trying to beg him for a job” (X, 1964, para. 6). One of the largest push-backs that protests from the Civil Rights movement had was the “extra” rights black people wanted. Logically, from a modernist perspective, black Americans were vying for *equal* not *extra* rights. Black Americans were aiming for the same rights white Americans already had. The Civil Rights movement was a black-centric movement that countered the white-centricity that white Americans had enjoyed for centuries.

Hand in hand with the political and economic philosophies of Black Nationalism is the logic or *logos* used by Malcolm X to describe what would happen if black Americans voted. He described the political atmosphere of the 1960s that led to an ultra-close presidential election in 1960,

The whites are so evenly divided that every time they vote the race is so close they have to go back and count the votes all over again. And that means that any block, any minority that has a block of votes that stick together is in a strategic position. (X, 1964, para. 13)

The idea of a minority voting block swaying an election rang true in 1964. In 1960, John Kennedy, the Democratic candidate, won 49.7% of the popular vote and Richard Nixon won 49.5% (Levy, 2014, August). In the 1964 election, black voter “turnout reached 58.5 percent for an estimated black population of 20.7 million. Data on voting by race isn’t available for years before 1964, but the N.A.A.C.P. estimated at the time that no more than 5 million African-Americans voted in the presidential election of 1960” (Flippen, 2014, para. 4). 58.5% of 20.7

million is roughly 12 million; so, an estimated seven million more black Americans cast their vote in 1964 than they did in 1960, and the winning numbers show that impact. In 1964, the Democratic candidate, Lyndon Johnson won 61% of the vote while Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate received 44% (Levy, 2014, July). If Malcolm's goal for the 1964 election was to increase black voter turnout, that goal was met—even if it was due only in part to his speaking engagements that year.

Rochester Address

In Malcolm X's speech *Rochester Address*, he made the stylistic decision to equate African international politics in the 1950s to a game of basketball. He described the grab for Congolese independence, and the general movement for African independence as “explosive from '54-'55 on up to 1959” (X, 1965, p. 10). In 1954, the Algerian War began, which gave Algeria its independence from France (Britannica, 2016). In 1959, the Belgian government, which had previously colonized the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo), began making arrangements for Congolese independence (Britannica, 2014). These two events could be what Malcolm X was referring to with his time frame of 1954-1959. However, he says that “By 1959 they [the colonizers] couldn't stay there [in Africa] any longer” (X, 1965, p. 10). It is unlikely that Malcolm was referring to the one country's colonizers in his discussion of African independence, and it is noteworthy that 1960 is regarded as “The Year of Africa” because of the seventeen nations in Africa that gained official independence that year (Schwartz, 2010). This mass garnering of independence is most likely what Malcolm X was referring to when he said the colonizing powers left Africa.

Malcolm X argued, through his basketball metaphor, that those African countries had not really gained independence, but instead the “ball” of influence had been “passed” to another

power on the team of colonialism—America (1965, p. 10). Malcolm continued on to describe the problem that this pass presented for America,

Because the Africans were not afraid, it was impossible for the European powers to stay on that continent by force. So our State Department, grabbing the ball and in their new analysis, they realized they had to use a new strategy if they were going to replace the colonial powers of Europe. (1965, p. 10)

The strategy that Malcolm said that America's State Department employed was a friendly approach towards African nations. Malcolm described the approach cynically, saying "Call it benevolent colonialism. Philanthropic imperialism. Humanitarianism backed up by dollarism." (1965, p. 11). Essentially, Malcolm X said that those African countries that had gained independence simply traded one form of colonialism for another.

Malcolm X discussed colonialism heavily in *Rochester Address*. It was a thematic approach he took when formatting his argument for the speech; it is an approach that defied the dominant cultural idea of *post*-colonialism in the United States and the Americas. One of the methods through which Malcolm said black Americans had been colonized was through implicit media bias. Malcolm began his discussion of media bias and what he calls "image making" with a discussion of the Congo Crisis. During the war that led to Congolese independence from Belgium, American planes dropped bombs on African villages (Odom, 1988). Malcolm X commented on the bombing:

When these bombs strike, they don't distinguish between enemy and friend. They don't distinguish between male and female. When these bombs are dropped on African villages in the Congo, they are dropped on Black women, Black children, Black babies. These

human beings were blown to bits. I heard no outcry, no voice of compassion for these thousands of Black people who were slaughtered by planes. (1965, p. 6)

Malcolm then discussed the way in which the media portrayed the situation so that there would be no outrage from the public. He said that the media referred to the bombed villages as “rebel held,” which in the minds of American news viewers and listeners made the destruction of those villages defensible, acceptable, even desirable (X, 1965, p. 6-7).

During the Congo Crisis, during the bombings of villages and the slaughter of many innocent bystanding Africans, the “rebels” took hostages and hid them in villages so that if the planes continued to drop bombs, the hostages would also die (Odom, 1988, pp. 20-26). Malcolm X described the way the media portrayed the situation by saying, “They said these ‘cannibals’ in the Congo had ‘white hostages’” (1965, p. 8). The point he made here, is the point that could single-handedly tie his rhetoric to that of the Black Lives Matter movement’s, because he said, “What’s the difference between a white hostage and a Black hostage? What’s the difference between a white life and a Black life? You must think there’s a difference because your press specifies whiteness” (X, 1965, p. 8). He went on to discuss that there was no grief over all of the African—all of the black—lives being lost to bombs; but when the lives at stake were embodied in melanin-deficient skin, the outcry from the white-centric US society was great, and the condemnation of the rebel forces was greater.

Just before Malcolm relates all of this discussion back to his black American audience sitting in a church in Rochester, New York, he said this of the media’s tactic to elicit an emotional response from its audience:

It's imagery. They use their ability to create images, and then they use these images that they've created to mislead the people. To confuse the people and make the people accept wrong as right and reject right as wrong. Make the people actually think that the criminal is the victim and the victim is the criminal. (X, 1965, p. 8)

Malcolm said the imagery was also used to give Africa a “negative image, a hateful image. They made us think that Africa was a land of jungles, a land of animals, a land of cannibals, and savages” (X, 1965, p. 8). He went on to say that this media portrayal of Africa led black Americans to look “upon Africa as a hateful place” and to look “upon the African as a hateful person” (X, 1965, p. 8); and that to be called an African in America was derogatory. He said that the negative image of Africa and Africans that was fed to black Americans led them to hate everything that was African about themselves (X, 1965, p. 9).

In order to inventively get his point across, he used the stylistic relationship between a root and a tree to represent Africa and those of African descent living in America, “you can't make a person hate the root without making them hate the tree” (X, 1965, p. 9). He described the hatred that that the negative image of Africa instilled in African descent as a hatred of themselves—specifically their distinctly African features (X, 1965, p. 9). The image-making, the perpetuation of implicit bias and internalized racism constituted colonialism because the African-ness of black Americans became a psychological prison (X, 1965, p. 9). Malcolm X said,

We felt trapped because our skin was black. We felt trapped because we had African blood in our veins. This is how you imprisoned us. Not just bringing us over here and making us slaves. But the image that you created of our motherland and the image that you created of our people on that continent was a trap, was a prison, was a chain. (1965, p. 9).

Not only did the media portrayal of Africa and Africans and African-ness damage the self-image of black Americans, but it led to the continued feeling of being dominated, controlled, colonized, imprisoned. The imagery of the media that perpetuated racism was contemporaneous colonialism, white epistemology, and white-centricity in action. In discussing these issues and advocating against them, Malcolm X employs black-affirming messages meant to empower black people across the globe in their blackness. Affirming blackness clashes with white-centricity and, again, leads to the label of radical.

In the tail-end of Malcolm's speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* he discussed his future trip to Africa. He said that in a recent discussion with a United States Senator, he had been told that "Africans are not interested in the American Negro" (X, 1964, para 28). Despite Malcolm's energetic denial of this point, it was true to an extent. In the mid-1800s, Marcus Garvey led a "Back to Africa" movement that contended that the only space for black people, for ethnically African people to attain freedom would be in Africa. This is how the country, Liberia, was formed—from former slaves, from black Americans sent to Africa. The black Americans who were sent to Liberia, though, discriminated against the native Africans, and in some ways became colonizers and proponents of white-centricity themselves. Already, in the mid-1800s black Americans perceived themselves as more "civilized" than native Africans, and it was proved through the "Back to Africa" movement (Duva, 2002). The image that American media and American ideology (which was white-centric from the start) had given to Africa and Africans was so negative that even ethnically African black Americans who had been enslaved believed themselves to be inherently better than the "unchristian," "uncivilized," and "uncultured" Africans who had not been enslaved in the Americas, who had not been "privileged" enough to be subjected to American—essentially European—culture.

When Malcolm X met with African leaders in the summer of 1964 during his homage to Mecca, the conversations did not revolve around a mass migration of black Americans to Africa. The internalized racism of black Americans would not be an issue brought to Africa, the discrimination that happened in Liberia would not be repeated. Instead, the conversations Malcolm had with African leaders “broadened” his understanding of the “complex” problems facing “dark-skinned people” all over the world (X, 1965, pp. 3-5). The broadening of his perspective came in the form of opening his mind from the perspective of Islam given to him by the NOI, which he calls the “Black Muslim movement,” to a perspective of global brotherhood—across religions, across continents, and across countries. Without saying so himself, Malcolm X described the Pan-African ideology that he was exposed to and began to advocate during and after his African excursion.

The Pan-Africanism Malcolm X spoke about involved the eradication of colonialism and the lasting, racist effects of colonialism in previously colonized countries. Malcolm X said that a Kenyan might call his oppressor an Englishman, as the English colonized Kenya. A Congolese man would name his oppressor a Belgian. A man from Guinea would say the same about the French. The difference in regions, the difference in languages (between both the Africans and their colonizers), the difference in geography, the difference in religions, the difference in economics, all were not as meaningful to Malcolm as the similarities. He said of the similarities between different African countries and peoples, “there was one thing all of us had in common—oppression, exploitation, suffering” he continued to describe the similarity between the oppressors of those African countries and peoples, “there’s one thing they all had in common, they were all from Europe” (1965, p. 9). Malcolm rested the fault of oppression squarely on the

shoulders of the Eurocentric, white-centric colonialism that had ravaged the world for centuries. He said that the problem of oppression should be international, and that it

Was no longer a Negro problem or an American problem but a human problem. A problem for humanity. And a problem which should be attacked by all elements of humanity. A problem that was so complex that it was impossible for Uncle Sam to solve it himself. (X, 1965, p. 16)

European imperialism had extended its reach into all corners of the globe, it had become a global phenomenon. Without it, there would be no global issue of race, there would be no globalized oppression of “dark-skinned people.” In this way, European imperialism, Eurocentric globalization, and white-centric oppression caused the pan-African ideology to emerge. Malcolm X says throughout his rhetoric that not he, nor any other black American, was responsible for the ethnically African presence in the Americas. Not he, nor any other black American was responsible for the racism they were subjected to. But he, and every other black American should join the global fight to end the oppression of black people; he and every other black American should affirm blackness and fight for self-definition that defies hegemonic white-centricity. This rhetoric is renewed in the Black Lives Matter movement; the oppression, the white-centricity, the racism has not ended. The rhetorical exigence has not been satisfied; but the BLM movement has renewed the rhetoric, expanded it, and continues to fight against ideological inequality born from white-centricity and colonialism.

Black Lives Matter

Just as the lynching of Emmett Till ignited the flame of the Civil Rights movement, an unjustified shooting of a teenager named Trayvon Martin, and more specifically the acquittal of

the police-sanctioned shooter, sparked the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 (Black Lives Matter: Herstory, n.d). Unlike the Civil Rights movement, there are no leaders or spokespersons for the Black Lives Matter movement; there is no Malcolm X equivalent. Rather than attempting to find speeches from BLM rallies or protests, the rhetoric evaluated will be that which is displayed by the movement itself on its website. The BLM website is the primary and official means through which the movement communicates en masse to its audience, so the messages there are appropriately rhetorical material. The movement's website lists its rhetorical beliefs in one section of the website. Six of these beliefs are analyzed here.

The first belief, the first rhetorical perpetuation that is reminiscent of the rhetoric of Malcolm X is, "We acknowledge, respect, and celebrate differences and commonalities" (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). This belief is a celebration of different cultures and different peoples and different countries. It is possible to celebrate differences while acknowledging all people are part of the same humanity, part of a universal culture, a global culture of human-ness—the same universality that Malcolm X advocated for. Not only does the BLM movement advocate for universal humanity, but they also advocate for pan-Africanism as well.

The belief that resonates with pan-Africanism is, "We see ourselves as part of the global Black family, and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black people who exist in different parts of the world" (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). This belief recognizes that globalist colonialism has affected various areas differently, but it iterates that every black person everywhere deserves equality and every black person everywhere should strive to lift those who are less privileged up, while striving for equality for themselves. The unification of all black people everywhere in the rhetoric of a global black family was the

international goal that ended *Rochester Address*. It is the message of black-affirmation that pushes back against white-centricity and contributes to the image of both the Black Lives Matter movement and Malcolm X as radicals.

The third existentially satisfying belief reads, “We are unapologetically Black in our positioning. In affirming that BLM, we need not qualify our position. To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others” (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). The BLM movement defines its members, its members define themselves as black and they are not ashamed of being black. Their rhetoric affirms blackness as beautiful, desirable, human. Malcolm X defined the problem, the exigence, that was internalized racism, internalized hatred of oneself for being black, internalized white-centricity. The BLM movement’s rhetoric seeks to rhetorically change that problem, that exigence, in order to create a space for self-love *because* of blackness rather than *in spite of it*.

Just as Malcolm X asked the difference between a white life and a black life, the central tenet of the BLM movement is, “We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location” (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). The message within this belief is that not only are there no differences between a black life and a white life, but there are no differences between any life regardless of the person who lives that life’s identity. This takes Malcolm’s rhetoric a step further into the territory of true egalitarianism; and it is especially important for those whose lives are not treated equally by means of the justice system or any other.

The fifth belief is a direct counter to dominant culture, “We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families

and ‘villages’ that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable” (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). This belief directly counters the dominant cultural mode of expression that is the nuclear family. This belief is especially controversial on the University of Wyoming campus because of the recent protests of the nuclear family statue that resides in Prexy’s Pasture (Anderle, 2017).

The final belief that reiterates and attempts to fill the same rhetorical situation as Malcolm X’s rhetoric reads, “We embody and practice justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another” (Black Lives Matter: What we believe, n.d.). The BLM movement is peaceful, and desires non-conflict in a space where rhetorical change can still take place. None of the rhetorical goals of this movement are inherently radical, they are only perceived that way because of the counter they present to the white-centric society that they protest.

Conclusion

Malcolm X’s rhetoric in his speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* instilled fear of black revolution into the hearts of 1964 Americans. Armed with Black Nationalism as his primary ideology; countering discrimination, inequality and white-centricity; and affirming blackness while advocating for black self-definition, Malcolm X bade his black American audience to take to the polls en masse. In Malcolm’s speech *Rochester Address*, delivered just five days before his assassination, he bade the global community to rise up and oppose oppression. Malcolm X’s Black Nationalist and pan-African ideologies, which were seen as hateful, anti-white, and anti-American, earned him the reputation of a radical. Media bias and colonialism had engrained the white-centricity of the dominant culture so far into the minds of black Americans that they hated themselves for their own blackness, and any attempt to change that—any defiance of the

dominant culture—was and is also seen as radical. In reality, none of these movements or messages are radical, they are equality-seeking and self-love promoting, and black-affirming. The Black Lives Matter movement's rhetoric echoes the same messages presented by Malcolm X in a contemporary revival of his fight against the exigence of oppression. As Langford wrote, the Black Lives Matter movement's rhetoric has the potential to create rhetorical change. That potential makes the movement worth studying before it has become a moment of history. Only time can tell if the movement will be successful in filling the rhetorical exigence that Malcolm X also sought to fill; and the potential is exhilarating for those who seek equality for humanity.

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