

Malcolm X Participates in a Debate Organized by the *Oxford Union Society* in Oxford, England (December 3, 1964)

SOURCE: [Oxford Union Debate](#)

NOTE: YouTube video of the debate is available [here](#).

Debate Remarks

Mr. Chairman, tonight is the first night that I've have ever had opportunity to be as near to conservatives as I am. And the speaker who preceded me, first I want to thank you for the invitation to come here to the Oxford Union [debating society], the speaker who preceded me is one of the best excuses that I know to prove our point concerning the necessity, sometimes, of extremism, in defense of liberty, why it is no vice, and why moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. I don't say that about him personally, but that type. He's right, X is not my real name, but if you study history you'll find why no black man in the western hemisphere knows his real name. Some of his ancestors kidnapped our ancestors from Africa, and took us into the western hemisphere and sold us there. And our names were stripped from us and so today we don't know who we really are. I am one of those who admit it and so I just put X up there to keep from wearing his name.

And as far as this apartheid charge that he attributed to me is concerned, evidently he has been misinformed. I don't believe in any form of apartheid, I don't believe in any form of segregation, I don't believe in any form of racialism. But at the same time, I don't endorse a person as being right just because his skin is white, and often times when you find people like this, I mean that type, when a man whom



they have been taught is below them has the nerve or firmness to question some of their philosophy or some of their conclusions, usually they put that label on us, a label that is only designed to project an image which the public will find distasteful. I am a Muslim, if there is

something wrong with that then I stand condemned. My religion is Islam I believe in Allah, I believe in Mohammed as the apostle of Allah, I believe in brotherhood, of all men, but I don't believe in brotherhood with anybody who's not ready to practice brotherhood with our people.

I just take time to make these few things clear because I find that one of the tricks of the west, and I imagine my good friend...or rather that type from the west...one of the tricks of the west is to use or create images, they create images of a person who doesn't go along with their views and then they make certain that this image is distasteful, and then anything that that person has to say from thereon, from thereon in, is rejected. And this is a policy that has been practiced pretty well, pretty much by the west, it perhaps would have been practiced by others had they been in power, but during recent centuries the west has been in power and they have created the images, and they've used these images quite skillfully and quite successfully, that's why today we need a little extremism in order to straighten a very nasty situation out, or very extremely nasty situation out.

I think the only way one can really determine whether extremism in the defense of liberty is justified, is not to approach it as an American or a European or an African or an Asian, but as a human being. If we look upon it as different types immediately we begin to think in terms of extremism being good for one and bad for another, or bad for one and good for another. But if we look upon it, if we look upon ourselves as human beings, I doubt that anyone will deny that extremism, in defense of liberty, the liberty of any human being, is a value. Anytime anyone is enslaved, or in any way deprived of his liberty, if that person is a human being, as far as I am concerned he is justified to resort to whatever methods necessary to bring about his liberty again.

But most people usually think, in terms of extremism, as something that is relative, related to someone they know or something that they've heard of, I don't think they look upon extremism by itself, or all alone. They apply it to something. A good example—and one of the reasons that this can't be too well understood today—many people who have been in positions of power in the past don't realize that the power, the centers of power, are changing. When you're in a position of power for a long time you get used to using your yardstick, and you take it for granted that because you've forced your yardstick on others, that everyone is still using the same yardstick. So that your definition of extremism usually applies to everyone, but nowadays times are changing, and the center of power is changing. People in the past who weren't in a position to have a yardstick or use a yardstick of their own are using their own yardstick now. You use one and they use another. In the past when the oppressor had one stick and the oppressed used that same stick, today the oppressed are sort of shaking the shackles and getting yardsticks of their own, so when they say extremism they don't mean what you do, and when you say extremism you don't mean what they do. There are entirely two different meanings. And when this is understood I think you can better understand why those who are using methods of extremism are being driven to them.

A good example is the Congo. When the people who are in power want to, again, create an image to justify something that's bad, they use the press. And they'll use the press to create a humanitarian image, for a devil, or a devil image for a humanitarian. They'll take a person whose a victim of the crime, and make it appear he's the criminal, and they'll take the criminal and make it appear that he's the victim of the crime. And the Congo situation is one of the best examples that I can cite right now to point this out. The Congo situation is a nasty example of how a country because it is in power, can take it's press and make the world accept something that's absolutely criminal. They take pilots that they say are American trained, and this automatically lends respectability to them, and then they will call them anti-Castro Cubans, and that's supposed to add to their respectability, and eliminate that fact that they're dropping bombs on villages where they have no defense whatsoever against such planes, blowing to bits black women, Congolese women, Congolese children, Congolese babies, this is extremism, but it is never referred to as extremism because it is endorsed by the west, it is financed by America, it's made respectable by America, and that kind of extremism is never labeled as extremism. Because it's not extremism in defense of liberty, and if it is extremism in defense of liberty as this type just pointed out, it is extremism in defense of liberty for the wrong type of people.

I am not advocating that kind of extremism, that's cold blooded murder. But the press is used to make that cold blooded murder appear as an act of humanitarianism. They take it one step farther and get a man named Tshombe, who is a murderer, they refer to him as the premier, or prime minister of the Congo, to lend respectability to him, he's actually the murderer of the rightful Prime Minister of the Congo, they never mention this.

I'm not for extremism in defense of that kind of liberty, or that kind of activity. They take this man, who's a murderer, and the world recognizes his as a murderer, but they make him the prime minister, he becomes a paid murderer, a paid killer, who is propped up by American dollars. And to show the degree to which he is a paid killer the first thing he does is go to South Africa and hire more killers and bring them into the Congo. They give them the glorious name of mercenary, which means a hired killer, not someone that is killing for some kind of patriotism or some kind of ideal, but a man who is a paid killer, a hired killer. And one of the leaders of them is right from this country here, and he's glorified as a soldier of fortune when he's shooting down little black women, and black babies, and black children. I'm not for that kind of extremism, I'm for the kind of extremism that those who are being destroyed by those bombs and destroyed by those hired killers, are able to put forth to thwart it. They will risk their lives at any cost, they will sacrifice their lives at any cost, against that kind of criminal activity. I am for the kind of extremism that the freedom fighters in the Stanleyville regime are able to display against these hired killers, who are actually using some of my tax dollars which I have to pay up in the united states, to finance that operation over there. We're not for that kind of extremism.

Now again I think you must point out that one of those who are very much involved as accessories to the crime is the press. Not so much your press, but the American press which has tricked your press into repeating what they have invented. But I was reading in one of the English papers this morning, I think it's a paper called *The Express*, and it gave a very clear account of the type of criminal activity that has been carried on by the mercenaries that are being paid by United States tax dollars. And it showed where they were killing Congolese, whether they were from the central government or the Stanleyville government, it didn't make any difference to them, they just killed them. And they had it fixed where those who had been processed had to wear a white bandage around their head, and any Congolese that they saw without their white bandage, they killed them. And this is clearly pointed out and at the beginning of last week there would have been an outcry and no one would have allowed Belgium and the united states and the others who are in cahoots with each other, to carry on the criminal activity that they did in the Congo, which I doubt anyone in the world, even here at Oxford, will accept, not even my friend.

Questioner 1: What exactly sort of extremism would you consider the killing of missionaries?

Malcolm X: I would call it the kind of extremism that was involved when America dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and killed 80,000, or over 80,000 people, men, women, children, everything. It was an act of war. I'd call it the same kind of extremism that happened when England dropped bombs on German cities and Germans dropped bombs on English cities. It was an act of war, and the Congo situation is war, and when you call it war, then anybody that dies, they die a death that is justified. But those who are, but those who are in the Stanleyville regime, sir, are defending their country, those who are coming in are invading their country. And some of the refugees that were questioned on television in this city a couple of days ago pointed out that had the paratroopers not come in they doubted that they would have been molested, they weren't indeed molested until the paratroopers came in.

I don't encourage any act of murder nor do I glorify in anyone's death, but I do think that when the white public uses it's press to magnify the fact that there are lives of white hostages at stake, they don't say "hostages," every paper says "white hostages." They give me the impression that they attach more importance to a white hostage and a white death, than they do the death of a human being, despite the color of his skin. I feel forced to make that point clear, that I'm not for any indiscriminate killing, nor does the death of so many people go by me without creating some kind of emotion. But I think that white people are making the mistake, and if they read their own newspapers they will have to agree that they, in clear cut language, make a distinction between the type of dying according to the color of the skin. And when you begin thinking in terms of death being death, no matter what type of human being it is, then we all will probably be able to sit down as human beings and get rid of this extremism and moderation. But as long as the situation exists as it is, we're going to need some extremism, and I think some of you will need some moderation too.

So why would such an act in the Congo, which is so clearly criminal, be condoned? It's condoned primarily because it has been glorified by the press and has been made to look beautiful, and therefore the world automatically sanctions it. And this is the role that the press plays, if you study back in history different wars, always the press, whenever a country that's in power wants to step in unjustly and invade someone else's property, they use the press to make it appear that the area that they are about to invade is filled with savages, or filled with people who have gone berserk, or they are raping white women, molesting nuns, they use the same old tactic year in and year out. Now there was a time when the dark world, people with dark skin, would believe anything that they saw in the papers that originated in Europe. But today, no matter what is put in the paper, they stop and look at it two or three times and try and figure out what is the motive of the writer. And usually they can determine what the motive of the writer is. The powers that be use the press to give the devil an angelic image and give the image of the devil to the one who's really angelic. They make oppression and exploitation and war actually look like an act of humanitarianism. This is not the kind of extremism that I support or that I go along with.

One of the reasons that I think it is necessary for me to clarify my own point, personally, I was in a conversation with a student here, on the campus, yesterday, and she, after we were, I think we had coffee or dinner or something, there were several of us, I have to add that in for those minds of yours that run astray. And she asked me, she told me that "We'll I'm surprised that you're not what I expected," and I said what do you mean. And she said "well I was looking for your horns", and so I told her I have them, but I keep them hidden, unless someone draws them out. As my friend, or that type, it takes certain types to draw them out. And this is actually true, usually when a person is looked upon as an extremist, anything that person does in your eyesight is extreme. On the other hand, if a person is looked upon as conservative, just about anything they do is conservative. And this again comes through the manipulating of images. When they want you to think of a certain area or certain group as involved in actions of extremism, the first thing they do is project that person in the image of an extremist. And then anything he does from then on is extreme, you know it doesn't make any difference whether it is right or wrong, as far as your concerned if the image is wrong, whatever they do is wrong. And this has been done by the western press, and also by the American press, and it has been picked up by the English press and the European press. Whenever any black man in America shows signs of an uncompromising attitude, against the injustices that he experiences daily, and shows no tendency whatsoever to compromise with it, then the American press characterizes him as a radical, as an extremist someone who's irresponsible, or as a rabble-rouser or someone who doesn't rationalize in dealing with the problem.

Question: I wonder if you could consider, just briefly, ah, that you have projected, rather successfully, a quite upsetting image of a "type".

Malcolm X: It depends on what angle [*booing against questioner*], no let the gentleman bring out his point. It depends on which angle you look at it sir. I never try and hide what I am.

Question: I am referring to your treatment of the previous speaker.

Malcolm X: You are referring to my treatment of the previous speaker? You make my point! That as long as a white man does it, it's alright, a black man is supposed to have no feelings . But when a black man strikes back he's an extremist, he's supposed to sit passively and have no feelings, be nonviolent, and love his enemy no matter what kind of attack, verbal or otherwise, he's supposed to take it. But if

he stands up in any way and tries to defend himself, then he's an extremist.

No, I think that the speaker who preceded me is getting exactly what he asked for. My reason for believing in extremism, intelligently directed extremism, extremism in defense of liberty, extremism in quest of justice, is because I firmly believe in my heart, that the day that the black man takes an uncompromising step, and realizes that he's within his rights, when his own freedom is being jeopardized, to use any means necessary to bring about his freedom, or put a halt to that injustice, I don't think he'll be by himself. I live in America where there are only 22 million blacks against probably 160 million whites. One of the reasons that I am in no way reluctant or hesitant to do whatever is necessary to see that black people do something to protect themselves, I honestly believe that the day that they do, many whites will have more respect for them, and there'll be more whites on their side than there are now on their side with these little wishy-washy "love thy enemy" approach that they have been using up until now. And if I am wrong than you are racist.

As I said earlier, in my conclusion, I'm a Muslim. I believe in Allah, I believe in Mohammed, I believe in all of the prophets, I believe in fasting, prayer, charity, and that which is incumbent on a Muslim to fulfill in order to be a Muslim. In April I was fortunate to make the Hajj to Mecca, and went back again in September, to try and carry out my religious functions and requirements, but at the same time that I believe in that religion, I have to point out that I am an American Negro. And I live in a society whose social system is based upon the castration of the black man, whose political system is based upon castration of the black man, and whose economy is based upon the castration of the black man.

A society which, in 1964, has more subtle, deceptive, deceitful methods to make the rest of the world think that it's cleaning up its house, while at the same time, the same things are happening to us in 1964 that happened in 1954, 1924 and 1884. They came up with a civil rights bill in 1964, supposedly to solve our problem, and after the bill was signed, three civil rights workers were murdered in cold blood. And the FBI head, Hoover, admits that they know who did it, they've known ever since it happened, and they've done nothing about it. Civil rights bill down the drain. No matter how many bills pass, black people in that country, where I'm from, still our lives are not worth two cents. And the government has shown its inability, or either its unwillingness to do whatever is necessary to protect black property where the black citizen is concerned. So my contention is that whenever a people come to the conclusion that the government, which they have supported, proves itself unwilling, or proves itself unable to protect our lives and protect our property, because we have the wrong color skin, we are not human beings unless we ourselves band together and do whatever, however, whenever, is necessary to see that our lives and our property is protected, and I doubt that any person in here would refuse to do the same thing if he were in the same position, or I should say were he in the same condition.

Just one step farther to see if I am justified in this stance, and I am speaking as a black man from America which is a racist society, no matter how much you hear it talk about democracy it's as racist as South Africa or as racist as Portugal or as racist as any other racist society on this earth. The only difference between it and South Africa, South Africa preaches separation and practices separation, America preaches integration and practices segregation. This is the only difference, they don't practice what they preach, whereas South Africa practices and preaches the same thing. I have more respect for a man who lets me know where he stands, even if he's wrong, than the one comes up like an angel and is nothing but a devil.

The system of government that America has consists of committees, there are sixteen senatorial committees that govern the country and twenty congressional committees. Ten of the sixteen senatorial committees are in the hands of southern racials, senators who are racials. Thirteen of the twenty, this is before the last election I think it is even more so now, ten of the sixteen senatorial committees are in the hands of senators who are southern racials, thirteen of the twenty congressional committees were in the hands of southern congressmen who are racials. Which means out of the thirty-six committees that govern the foreign and domestic direction of that government, twenty-three are in the hands of southern racials. Men who in no way believe in the equality of man. And men who do anything within their power to see that the black man never gets to the same seat, or to the same level that they're on. The reason that these men, from that area, have that type of power is because America has a seniority system, and these who have this seniority have been there longer than anyone else because the black people in the areas where they live, can't vote. And it is only because the black man is deprived of his vote that puts these men in positions of power that gives them such influence in the government beyond their actual intellectual or political ability, or even beyond the number of people from the areas that they represent.

So we can see, in that country, that no matter what the federal government professes to be doing, the power of the federal government lies in these committees and any time a black man or any type of legislation is proposed to benefit the black man, or give the black man his just due, we find that it is locked up in these committees right here. And when they let something through these committees, usually it is so chopped up and fixed up that by the time it becomes law, it is a law that can't be enforced.

Another example is the Supreme Court's desegregation decision that was handed down in 1954. This is a law, and they have not been able to implement this law in New York City or in Boston or in Cleveland or Chicago or the northern cities. And my contention is that any time you have a country, supposedly a democracy, supposedly the "land of the free and the home of the brave," and it can't enforce laws, even

in the northern most cosmopolitan and progressive part of it, that will benefit a black man, if those laws can't be enforced, how much heart do you think we will get when they pass some civil rights legislation which only involves more laws. If they can't enforce this law, they'll never enforce those laws.

So my contention is, we are faced with a racialistic society, a society in which they are deceitful, deceptive, and the only way we can bring about a change is speak the language that they understand. The racialists never understands a peaceful language, the racialists never understands the nonviolent language, the racist has spoken his type of language to us for over four hundred years. We have been the victim of his brutality, we are the ones who face his dogs, who tear the flesh from our limbs, only because we want to enforce the Supreme Court decision. We are the ones who have our skulls crushed, not by the Ku Klux Klan, but by policeman, all because we want to enforce what they call the Supreme Court decision. We are the ones upon whom waterhoses are turned on, practically so hard that it rips the clothes from our back, not men, but the clothes from the backs of women and children, you've seen it yourself. All because we want to enforce what they call the law. Well any time you live in a society supposedly and it doesn't enforce it's own laws, because the color of a man's skin happens to be wrong, then I say those people are justified to resort to any means necessary to bring about justice where the government can't give them justice.

I don't believe in any form of unjustified extremism. But I believe that when a man is exercising extremism, a human being is exercising extremism, in defense of liberty for human beings, it's no vice. And when one is moderate in the pursuit of justice for human beings, I say he's a sinner.

And I might add in my conclusion, in fact, America is one of the best examples, when you read its history, about extremism. Ol' Patrick Henry said "liberty or death"—that's extremism.

I read once, passingly, about a man named Shakespeare. I only read about him passingly, but I remember one thing he wrote, that kind of moved me. He put it in the mouth of Hamlet, I think it was, who said "to be or not to be". He was in doubt about something. Whether it was nobler, in the mind of man, to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune— moderation—or to take up arms against the sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them. And I go for that; if you take up arms you'll end it, but if you sit around and wait for the one who is in power to make up his mind that he should end it, you'll be waiting a long time. And in my opinion, the young generation of whites, blacks, browns, whatever else there is, you're living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there's got to be a change, people in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change. And a better world has to be built and the only way it's going to be built is with extreme methods. And I, for one, will joint in with anyone—don't care what color you are—as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth. Thank you.