
Black nationalism and the legacy of Malcolm X: An interview with Michael Dawson

Spencer A. Leonard

Last fall, editor Spencer A. Leonard interviewed Michael Dawson, Director of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture at the University of Chicago. The interview, which centered around a discussion of Manning Marable's new biography of Malcolm X, was broadcast on September 30, 2011 on the radio show Radical Minds on WHPK-FM Chicago. What follows is a revised and edited transcript of the interview.

Spencer Leonard: Like many others in recent months, you have contributed to the controversy raging around Manning Marable's book *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. In your review of the book, you argue the importance of Marable's firmly situating Malcolm X's politics within "a long, primarily 20th century tradition of black nationalism."¹ You then go on to say, "Marable ascribes the foundation of [Malcolm X's] politics within the tradition established by the influential early 20th century nationalist, Marcus Garvey (founder of the largest black urban movement ever created, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, or UNIA) and the black Muslim organizations, of which the Nation of Islam was neither the first nor initially the largest... in urban black communities." What does Marable's book capture about the deep history of black nationalism that Malcolm X tapped into in the early 1960s? After Malcolm X's death, how was his reception of it carried forward in the 1960s and 1970s?

Michael Dawson: One controversial aspect of Marable's analysis is his grounding of Malcolm X's life and politics in a relatively

unknown earlier history of black nationalism in the United States. This is an essential component of many forms of African-American political thought, including many forms of black radicalism. Marable attempts to recapture the degree to which black nationalism influenced progressive movements in the 20th century, including the New Left and the New Communist Movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Where I disagree is on the issue of whether there is anything left of the legacy of Malcolm X that might teach us something about rebuilding a black politics in the 21st century. Are we in fact beyond questions of self-determination, self-defense, and black nationalism? Are these no longer germane to today's problems and social conditions?

SL: In your review you argue that what was consistent in Malcolm X's thought was "his outstanding ability, because of his own life experiences, to identify with and articulate the anger and demands of the poor and working class... masses of black people." This distinguishes him, you argue, from other, mostly middle class civil rights leaders. You then add,

Another lasting legacy of Malcolm X was his insistence that black people as a people define themselves culturally, socially, and not least politically. Marable states that Malcolm X believed that black people constituted a 'nation within a nation.' Even as recently as early 2010, survey data inform that nearly 50 percent of African-Americans believed that they constituted a nation-within-a-nation and not just another American ethnic group.

What was most significant about Malcolm X and his ability to articulate the discontents of poor and working class blacks?

MD: Most black movements—radical movements of the New Left and the New Communist Movements included, but also earlier radical black movements—have historically been led by the middle class, sometimes with, but often without, the interests of the great majority of black working and poor people at the center of their agendas and organizing. Malcolm X took as his political starting point the interest of the person on the street, the worker, the homemaker, the small business person, in other words, the lower middle class and the working class. Certainly by the 1950s and 1960s, many were being pushed out of the American economy. Malcolm X understood that they would be central to whatever task black politics might set itself.

As to whether black people constitute a nation, Malcolm X did not originally theorize this, but he did argue that black people constitute a separate people based on their oppression and

distinctive history in the United States. What holds the two issues together is that national movements throughout the world have often been captured by the middle class usually to the detriment of the great majority of members of the nation, whether they are peasants or workers or what have you, depending on which nation we are talking about. Malcolm X insisted both on the fact that black people constituted a nation and that the political interests of poor and working people should be at the forefront of any national movement.

SL: Of those who grappled with Malcolm X and his ideas in his own lifetime, one significant figure is James Baldwin, who, in his criticism of Malcolm X, argues that his black nationalism fails to adequately reckon with history. This is from a debate in 1963:

Whether I like it or not the issue of integration is a false one, because we have been integrated here since as long as we've been here. . . The history which has produced us in this country is something that, in any case we are going to have deal with one of these days... This country has lied about the Negro situation for 100 years. Now. . . the lies are no longer viable. . . No one in this country knows any longer. . . what he means by freedom. . . [or] equality. We live in the most abysmal ignorance. . . You cannot live for 30 years with something in the closet which you know is there, but which you pretend is not there without something terrible happening. . . Silence has descended upon this country.²

Was the crisis of history and of historical consciousness Baldwin identifies addressed in the years following 1963? Does Baldwin's way of posing the issue constitute a powerful criticism of Malcolm X? In the age of Obama, have the legacies of racism and slavery been adequately addressed?

MD: Baldwin's is a strong critique of Malcolm's position in 1963, though I think he incorrectly thought that Malcolm X's claim about African-Americans constituting a separate people was incompatible with the fact of black people's integration into the American economy, first as slaves, sharecroppers, and agricultural workers in the South and, later, as industrial workers. Those facts of economic integration, along with hundreds of years of residing in the United States, do not preclude the possibility of black people's constituting a separate nation. Malcolm X in his own work never rules out the possibility of staying in the United States both as citizens and as full and equal partners. What he did argue was self-determination, that you have the right to choose what your destiny is as a people, whether that means to stay, leave, or renegotiate the terms of staying. That's why, in addition to the revolutionary nationalist groups such as the Black Panther Party, many Latino and Asian-American Marxist groups also supported the right to self-determination in the 1960s and 70s.

The second point I want to argue is empirical. When black people are asked, as they have been many times for the last 30 years, "Do you think you are black, American, neither, or both?" the answer is, overwhelmingly, "both." African-Americans have always felt

a strong attachment to and stake in this country. But they also view themselves as separate. This is due both to the common culture and history and to the ongoing oppression in civil society and from the state. As to whether that legacy still exists today, I read just yesterday about the lynching of a black autoworker in Mississippi by white teenagers.³ So, no, I don't think we live in a post-racial society. Being an African-American still leads to lesser life chances, whether we're talking about wealth, employment opportunities, health, education, the ability to live or work where one lives with the sanctity and safety in one's own person, etc. This is racial. Despite the election of Barack Obama, we do not live in a post-racial world.

What has changed considerably, and not at all to the surprise of those whose analysis is similar to the one Malcolm X once had, is the sharpening of class differences among blacks. Today there is not only a strong black middle class, one no longer based on selling services to other black people, but also a fairly well-established black upper-middle class that has risen on the neoliberal tide. Finally, there is the development of a real black bourgeoisie—or, rather, you now have black members of the bourgeoisie. Even though you still see the racial dynamics that Malcolm X, and for that manner Baldwin, recognized intuitively, you also see increasingly economic divisions among black people. The development of a black upper middle class integrated into the mainstream economy, black members of the bourgeoisie, and neoliberal ideology dominating large segments of the black middle and upper classes are conditions that did not exist at the time that Malcolm and others were attempting to build black united fronts. In short, I think Baldwin is wrong to make it an either-or: "Either black people have a stake in the United States, or they constitute a distinct people." Malcolm X took a more radical view when he said that black people were at the table, but were not diners.⁴

SL: The debate on the Left around the question of black nationalism and of self-determination has always hinged on how to cope politically with the legacy of slavery and racism, that is, the race-divided character of the working class. How does the advocacy of national self-determination for oppressed minorities relate to the project of constituting working class politics?

MD: On this topic I would recommend reading Abram Lincoln Harris, the black Marxist economist, and the work of Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore on the attempts of the Workers' Party in America (later the Communist Party) to organize workers in the context of racial division within the working class. There are several historic tendencies that demand attention. The Socialist Party insisted on segregation, and insisted that black people keep quiet about racial divisions in the working class. The Communist Party had a tremendous problem, particularly in the 1920s, before the shift in political line, in trying to achieve a unified working class movement while navigating white workers' insistence on, to be blunt, white supremacy in the Communist Party and within the working class.

Another instructive organization is not the Black Panther Party but

the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit, particularly the theoretical works of James Boggs. This was an important starting point for many black, Latino, Asian-American radicals from the 1960s and 1970s. Boggs argued that the working class was already divided; white workers within organizations and on the shop floor were not willing to give up white privilege. So long as that continued, we still would have to be able to organize black workers, Latino workers, etc., along revolutionary lines. To do this it is necessary to have organizations that are national, or as we might say today, racial, in form—while nonetheless maintaining the long term goal of being to build a unified working class movement and unified working class organizations.

SL: How does that strategy immediately relate to trade unions that already exist among the working class?

MD: In most workplaces in the late 1960s and 1970s, that strategy meant black radical workers would belong to multiple organizations. They would belong to a black workers caucus, and to the union's progressive caucus, and, of course, to the union as well. Unions in that period, such as United Autoworkers, had extraordinarily racist leadership that actively collaborated with management and police—in other words, management and the state—to oppress the rights and privileges of black workers. So black workers worked in multiple organizations, some that were exclusively black, and some that were multi-racial, with the dual goal of trying to build a unified workers movement and a movement for black liberation. This meant double shifts for black radical organizers. Black nationalist organizations grew not because of any theoretical fondness for nationalism per se, nor simply as a function of more uni-national or uni-racial organizations, but primarily because of white workers' resistance to any type of program that required the white workers to give up the privileges they had, regardless of whether these programs consisted primarily of working class demands.

SL: In his 1963 debate with Malcolm X that we just quoted, Baldwin notes a distinction between power and equality, whereby an African nation cannot hope for respect unless it is independent and thus "equal." He then goes on to argue that there is no parallel to the American context in the independence struggles of Ghana, the Congo, Kenya, and elsewhere. Malcolm X disagreed. How do we understand the concurrence of and possible relations between the anti-colonial struggles of the post-war decades and the black freedom movement in this country? Of course Malcolm X himself traveled widely in Africa and in the Middle East in 1964 precisely in order to gauge and strengthen those relations. Does Marable give his readers adequate resources to assess this activity? Or was Tariq Ali right to say by way of criticism,

The emphasis in Marable's account on the Nation of Islam is not totally misplaced, but it is accorded far too much space, at the expense of any discussion of the overall social and political contexts, both U.S. and global, within which Malcolm operated. The result is seriously unbalanced: the events that shaped his

continuing intellectual evolution—the killing of Lumumba and the ensuing crisis in Congo; the Vietnam War; the rise of a new generation of black and white activists in the U.S., of which Marable was one—are mentioned only in passing. This is a great pity, because in historical terms their significance far outweighs that of the audience sizes of various Nation of Islam meetings or the sectarian infighting which Marable discusses at length.⁵

Does the biography neglect to adequately contextualize Malcolm X in the wider struggles of his time, with the result of downplaying the significance (and political limitations) of his emerging internationalism?

MD: I generally agree with Ali's criticism. One aspect often lost in the study of African-American political leaders, whether we're talking about Malcolm X, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Martin Luther King, Jr., is the growing significance of their understanding of the world situation and where allies might be sought outside the United States, their growing feelings of solidarity with liberation movements, in Asia and Latin America as well as Africa. This was particularly true in the two strongest periods of black radicalism, the period before World War II and the 1960s and 1970s. Marable largely neglects the fact that black and other minority radicals of that generation had a totally different language available to them, a language of national liberation, anti-colonialism, Third World solidarity, and non-alignment coming out of the Bandung Conference. Moreover, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was not just one socialist state, as was the case for the pre-World War II generation. Radicals in the 1960s could turn to what at the time seemed multiple successful models. Preeminent here, of course, was China, which is why there was a significant Maoist movement from France to the United States. Marable neglects most of that.

There is a second, more theoretical question that you ask, which is to what degree are those models applicable to the U.S. I think we are still puzzling over that. There are some similarities that theoreticians such as Boggs have pointed out. If you look strictly from an economic point of view, for instance, there's super-exploitation of black workers in terms of the extraction of super-profits that allow a deal to be made with American white labor, a process that is not unlike the type of super-profits extracted from colonial labor. But there are also serious liabilities in applying those models to the U.S. One such liability that Baldwin talked about, and that most activists at the time were aware of, is that minority populations within countries are not in quite the same situation as the Africans in South Africa, the Cubans in Cuba, or the Chinese in China, in which a national liberation movement is struggling to free the majority of the population. Few organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, except for some of the more staunch black nationalist organizations, ever had a view that black liberation could be won without solidarity across racial groups, including among progressive whites. So, not only in terms of economics, but also in terms of politics and history, such models of national self-determination in former colonies do break down to a significant degree when applied to the U.S. Just as the vocabulary of the

French Revolution was misapplied, or the vocabulary of the Chinese Revolution was misapplied, you also had the vocabulary of anti-colonial struggles that was misapplied, or at least mechanically applied to the situation of blacks and other groups in the United States. That said, the international situation provided important allies in the U.N. and elsewhere that pressured the U.S. government at key points during the history of the Civil Rights and black power movements.

SL: In your review of Marable's book, you maintain that "[Malcolm X viewed] the struggle of Afro-Americans and other people of African descent [as] connected to that of the other oppressed peoples of the world, especially those who were waging national liberation struggles or who had seized victory in Third World socialist countries such as Cuba and China." But did Malcolm X in fact have any meaningful relationship to radical anti-imperialism, much less to Marxism? Isn't it a mistake to focus on Vietnam and China and to ignore his connections to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and his praise of the Saudi regime, to take the most obvious examples?

MD: Clearly, there are extraordinary shortcomings to the development of Malcolm X's theoretical vision, including his embrace of Arab nationalism and autocratic monarchies and his equation of them to the national liberation struggle in Vietnam. Malcolm X says a little bit about the Sino-Soviet dispute that would so shape the left in the 1960s and 1970s, but his comments were along racial, not ideological, lines.

SL: I believe in "*The Message to the Grassroots*" he claims that the Russian Revolution was white nationalist, and this is revealed in the souring of Khrushchev's relationship with Mao.

MD: Exactly. At the very end of his life, however, he began to emphasize that capitalism as an economic and political system is the problem. He also started to move away from the idea that white people, as a people, are evil, and came to embrace the ideal of the "John Brown" white person and the revolutionary potential of young, white Americans, in particular. But there is nothing like a coherent, systematic view in Malcolm X that one could call socialist. Part of the problem with Malcolm X's legacy is that it allows black nationalists, Justice Clarence Thomas, black Marxists, Trotskyite groups, and Maoist groups all to claim descent from him.

There were paternalistic, patriarchal elements in Malcolm X's politics that were perfectly consistent with traditional, conservative forms of nationalist politics. There were also elements that pointed in an anti-capitalist direction, but none of those had really crystallized. Rather, these contradictory elements coexisted. Consequently, part of his legacy involves different groups trying to work out the direction Malcolm X was moving in, and developing it further under new conditions. Malcolm X himself left virtually no organizational or institutional legacy. After the split with the Nation of Islam, he formed the OAAU and Muslim Mosque, Incorporated. But these organizations had just been formed.

SL: In light of what you just said, how do you see the relationship between Malcolm X and the Socialist Workers Party in New York City in 1964-65? How did the way in which that party came to adopt Malcolm X and publish his writings, most significantly in the volume *Malcolm X Speaks*, affect his legacy?

MD: *Malcolm X Speaks* profoundly shaped how Malcolm X is remembered on the Left. For many years, there was little available outside of the Autobiography, and his speeches and writings from the last two years of his life would have been far more obscure without *Malcolm X Speaks*. Of course, many of Malcolm X's speeches remain unpublished. But those collected in *Malcolm X Speaks* are undeniably significant and give credence to the view that in his last years he was moving in a more post-nationalist, pro-socialist direction, though this movement may not be as coherent and neat as once portrayed by the SWP and other organizations on the Left. Nevertheless, *Malcolm X Speaks*, along with texts by Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse Tung, and others, provided a foundation for black radical thought at that time.

SL: I want to introduce another of Malcolm X's most important contemporary critics, the labor leader Bayard Rustin, whose social democratic point of view gives occasion to discuss the accusation that Marable's book is marred by the author's own social democratic politics. Rustin, perhaps more than Marable, would have been sympathetic to a politics of revolutionary integrationism, as part of a Marxian approach.

In his book, commenting on a 1960 debate between Malcolm X and Rustin, Marable paraphrases Malcolm X to the effect that though the Nation of Islam was to be distinguished from earlier black nationalist movements, such as the movement of Marcus Garvey, they shared much in common. He then quotes Malcolm X as saying, "the difference is in method. We say that the only solution is in the religious approach, this is why we stress the importance of a moral reformation." He also noted that Elijah Muhammad was "not a politician," but a religious leader. Rustin criticized as "conservative, even passive" both Malcolm's Garveyite separatism and, of course, his religious position, arguing that since the vast majority of blacks are "seeking to become full-fledged citizens," the Nation of Islam was out of step with the black freedom movement in 1960. Opposing the traditional black nationalist demand for a separate black state and, indeed, black nationalism itself, Bayard Rustin also noted that "the great majority of negroes are feeling that things can improve here[;] until you have someplace to go, they're going to want to stay" [176].

In a second debate in 1962, Rustin pressed his criticisms of the Nation of Islam by asking, "who can limit my right of association? Who can tell me who my friends ought to be? And yet the Muslims denounce James Farmer because he's married to a white woman."⁶ Rustin went on to argue, in effect, that the Nation of Islam was ultimately a hindrance to black emancipation, which he regarded as possible only through integration. He also argued for the overriding necessity of being able to deliver real gains to

working black people. What is the legacy today of a vision like Rustin's? What were its weaknesses at the time, and what greater consequences have attended the loss of the struggle for radical and inter-racial working class socialism in the United States?

MD: Rustin's criticism of Malcolm X in 1960 was mostly on point, although I think he made at least one major mistake, which I'll get to in a second. One great tragedy of the McCarthy era was the erosion of the very strong alliance that had existed between 1900 and 1950 among the labor movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the radical movements. The Civil Rights movement went in one direction, the labor movement in another. This had very dire consequences for progressive politics in the United States.

By 1960-65, Rustin was one of the few strong social democratic voices in the Civil Rights Movement. He argued for economic equality—King wanted that and was willing to fight for it, as were others in the Civil Rights Movement—but Rustin had real ties to the labor movement. Most of the middle class civil rights leadership, many of whom, like Malcolm X, were religious leaders, remained skeptical of the labor movement's significance, particularly given the often racist practices of the labor movement's leadership. Because of Rustin's radical politics and his insistence that the civil rights and labor movements needed each other, he was viewed with suspicion by labor and civil rights leaders alike. We lost a lot due to the fact that Rustin did not play a more central role. I think Marable gets that right.

Now we are in a period in which labor is much weaker, manufacturing has moved off-shore, and labor has never been more politically vulnerable, all of which make even PATCO and the Reagan presidency seem like the good ole days for the American labor movement. It will be hard to rebuild those ties, and what that would look like is something people still have to work out. What Rustin gets wrong, and I think this is a problem of social democracy more generally, including Marable's own book and political stance, is the assumption that all nationalism is the same—an assumption shared by the Communist Party in the early 1960s. Certainly, the Nation of Islam was conservative and anti-political. It often told its own membership, as Marable documents, to stay out of political struggle, to refuse to oppose the suppression of African-Americans, despite its membership wanting to get involved in such struggles in Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere. But there are other nationalisms of a different type that are progressive, that organized black workers. Such nationalisms are not separatist, but they do insist on organizing black people, as black people, for black liberation, often in alliance with other social forces, whether it is with other people of color, the labor movement, etc. Nationalists like the Black Panthers used to say we are Marxists who believe we all have to organize as nationalists to bring about a multi-racial working class revolution in the United States.

These different nationalist frameworks may have various flaws, but they are not the same, particularly in terms of the progressive potential some exhibit. By lumping them together in the manner

of Rustin, Marable, or the Communist Party in certain phases of its history, you push all nationalism away. This neglects the potential for alliance with some of the most progressive sectors of the population. At least until the 1970s the left in the U.S. was fairly segregated, fragmented along racial lines in ways that ultimately hindered all types of mass movements and radical movements. Those on the American left who see all nationalisms as comparable and inherently reactionary create a huge problem for themselves, and repeat mistakes that go back at least to the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

SL: In a recent review of Malcolm X: A Life Reinvented, 1960s radical and black nationalist Amiri Baraka charges Marable with repeating Rustin's criticisms. As Baraka puts it,

... to say of the Nation of Islam, that it was not a radical organization, obscures the black nationalist confrontation with the white racist oppressor nation. Marable thinks that the Trotskyists of the SWP, who were members of the CP, or Committees of Correspondence, are more radical than the Nation of Islam. This means that he has not even understood Lenin's directives as pointed out in Stalin's Foundations of Leninism.⁷

Baraka then quotes Stalin's text to this effect:

The revolutionary character of a national movement under the conditions of imperialist oppression does not necessarily presuppose the existence of proletarian elements in the movement, the existence of a revolutionary or a republican program of the movement, the existence of a democratic basis of the movement.⁸

I want to repose the question of whether there is in fact a genuine continuity between Manning Marable's treatment of Malcolm X and the social democratic politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Does this opposition between the views of social democrats such as Rustin and possibly Marable, on the one hand, and Amiri Baraka and others, on the other, capture what is essential about the ambiguous legacy of Malcolm X? If not, what opposition better captures the ambiguity?

MD: The first question is straightforward. Certainly, as Baraka points out in his review, there is an ideological and even organizational continuity between the social democracy of the 1960s and 1970s and the political position Marable takes in the early 21st century in analyzing Malcolm X. It is a position that explicitly rejects the view of national liberation struggles, at least in the United States, as being revolutionary or even a primary vehicle for progressive change within this country. But, in chalking up the limitations of Marable's perspective to his background in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), I think Amiri is playing a little fast and loose with the history. The conflict is not primarily between Leninism, Stalinism, or, as he puts it, Marxism, on the one hand, and democratic socialism on the other. This is not a Third versus Second International fight. The Communist Party of the

United States had almost exactly the same view and analysis of the black revolution of the 1960s that Marable and the DSA have.

Rather than a fight between Leninism and social democracy, it is a struggle, with roots going back to the 1920s, between two strains of the American left. On one side are those who make the claim that the black struggle is revolutionary in its own right. Harry Haywood, author of *Black Bolshevik*, would be a good example of this. Like other early black members of the Communist Party or the Workers Party of America at that time, they came into the party with the ideal that the struggle of African-Americans was explosively revolutionary. They advanced a view that was rejected by most of the leadership in the Workers' Party and Communist Party and they believed in it so strongly as to prompt them to look for allies in the Third International. Eventually they found them in Moscow. Out of that came the 1928 and 1932 Comintern resolutions, which proclaim, over the objections of many members, and particularly of the leadership of the Communist Party of the United States, that the black struggle is revolutionary in its own right. That view has a long tradition in African-American radicalism.

Counterposed to this view is one with a pedigree that reaches back into the history of American Communism and also into the history of the Socialist Party, as well as organizations that developed much later, such as the DSA. This view focuses on the unity of the working class even to the point of ignoring deep racism and sexism within progressive movements. Proponents of this framework emphasize, in the history of working class revolution and the working class movement in the United States, the need for unified and multi-racial progressive movements, but do not understand or downplay the actual history of racism and oppression in America. Nor do they understand the super-exploitation of black workers. They are willing to ignore the just claims of African-Americans in such a way that it impedes the multi-racial unity from developing.

Despite my earlier, perhaps somewhat catty criticism of Baraka's commentary, I come out of a radical tradition that is much closer to his than to Marable's, which is probably reflected in my review of the book. To clarify, my main criticism of Baraka's review concerns the way he makes it sound as if there's a Marxist-Leninist position and then there is a Social Democratic position akin to Marable's. Baraka basically says that the Marxist-Leninist position is the correct one—that you go back to Lenin and Stalin to find the right position on the National Question. That is the right understanding of blacks in the United States, and it is what Malcolm X understood. Malcolm X's may not have been a Marxist-Leninist position, but it was still a revolutionist position, in that it stood against imperialism and one can mobilize around that. Then there is this other, Second International, reactionary position, which is wrong, and which Marxist-Leninism needs to defeat.

What I would say, pace Baraka, is that it is not that clean. In fact, historically Marxists-Leninists have taken the same position that Baraka is criticizing, whether it is the Communist Party or the New Communist organizations in the 1970s. There are these

two basic positions, but they do not map cleanly on divides in the international communist movement, or for that matter, in the progressive movement in the United States, in the way that Baraka suggests.

SL: What about Baraka's implication that the Nation of Islam is somehow a richer legacy for the Left than the struggle by Left and Trotskyist parties for a revolutionary, socialist, interracial project for overcoming capitalism in this country?

MD: I think Baraka did not articulate his position in this piece as well as he might have. This argument has been going on for at least 50 years. Significantly, Baraka has said that the Trotskyists and others, on paper, may be the more revolutionary groups. What Baraka had in mind, I think, and certainly what I have heard many African-American activists claim, is that we have to look at populations on the ground, many of whom voice support for groups like the Nation of Islam and other black nationalist groups, and yet these populations that support the Nation of Islam are in fact a more reliable resource for progressive change than either the Nation of Islam, as such, or various sectarian groups. They are more likely to actually go out and do something. I don't think Baraka is making a claim about whether it is desirable to have a multi-racial, progressive movement in the United States. Rather, he is claiming what many black activists would claim, which is that, in order to build such a movement, you are going to have to work with the populations and organizations on the ground. And that is a claim one can make empirically. **IP**

1. Michael Dawson, "Marable's Malcolm X Book Puts Icon in Context," posted at <www.theroot.com> 4/29/2011.

2. "1963 Debate with James Baldwin," on *Malcolm X: All Time Greatest Speeches* Vol. 2, Master Classics Records, 2008. MP3 download [Amazon].

3. Verna Gates, "FBI to Probe Mississippi Killing for Hate Crimes," August 18, 2011, available online.

4. Dawson is here quoting from a famous opening section of the speech "*The Ballot or the Bullet*." It reads as follows:

As long as you and I have been over here, we are not Americans yet. Well, I am one who doesn't believe in deluding myself. I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American. Why, if birth made you American, you wouldn't need any legislation, you wouldn't need any amendments to the Constitution, you wouldn't be faced with civil-rights filibustering in Washington, D.C., right now... No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism... I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare. [George Breitman (ed.), *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 26.]

5. "Tariq Ali, "Leaving Shabazz" *New Left Review* 69 (May-June 2011): 159.

6. "Bayard Rustin Debate," on *Malcolm X: All Time Greatest Speeches* Vol. 3, Master Classics Records, 2008. MP3 download [Amazon].

7. Amiri Baraka, "Review: Marable on Malcolm" May 13, 2011, available online at <www.seeingblack.com/article_914.shtml>.

8. Joseph Stalin, Foundations of Leninism, quoted in Baraka, "Review: Marable on Malcolm."