

Are You Mad At Us

Letter to Brother Fred Hampton

I am writing to you not just about your life but also your death. You see, I know about your life, but I immortalized you when I found out how the police slaughtered you like a dog and then foolishly left the door open for the community to see. I cannot even begin to fathom how another brother, someone who you would have given your life to protect, could turn around and provide the pigs with the blueprint to your demise. Even though it's been fifty-five years since your transition, I just wanted to let you know that the community misses you, but trying to work together has been difficult.

How you galvanized people and got them to understand that capitalism is the ultimate oppressor and how we can move toward liberation together was unprecedented. I am old enough to realize that this type of cross-racial solidarity against classism serves as the ultimate threat to white supremacy. Unfortunately, this is why the government sought to destroy you, but to me, this only occurred in physical form. Even when you spoke about jail, which is a physical and sometimes mental confinement, you said, "You can jail the revolutionary, but you cannot jail the revolution." So, more than half a century later, your spirit is still with us in death.

Today is not so unfamiliar as this new President that the nation just elected is not that different than Nixon, who was just as paranoid and dedicated to destroying any form of dissent against oppression. However, the lack of solidarity is alarming. I wish people would uplift your unique organizing style and reflect more on the original Rainbow Coalition, not the one Jesse Jackson stole. I desire for people to work to put the needs of the oppressed first, but at this moment, the people are distracted and abandoning their interests. There are many different forces to fear right now, and the wants are taking precedence over the community's needs. Despite these present challenges, I refuse to believe that your death was in vain. Still, I dread that the lack of disenfranchised communities coming together to overthrow the capitalist structure will be our downfall.

Sincerely,

An Intersectional Organizer

Letter to Brother Martin Luther King Jr.

I am writing you to tell you that your people are still waiting. There has still not been much of a national push towards true democracy for the Black community ever since you left us. One lesson I must reflect on is when you said it is hard to tell people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps when they do not have shoes. In this present time, the talk of the common person taking personal responsibility for their individual lives has taken precedence over advocating for the collective responsibility of our elected leaders. As the rich continue to prosper, profit has officially been over the welfare of the people, and the poor are being left behind.

Even though the victories from the Civil Rights Movement have sought to protect citizens from discrimination, that may be coming to an end. Did you know that this future administration is contemplating revoking the Civil Rights Act from 1964? Voting rights are also under attack from redistricting or lack of voter education, and a piece of the 1965 Voting Rights Act has been rescinded. Black people continue to fight for their right to exist as human beings and American citizens, so Dr. King, I am afraid that we are still waiting. Many people thought President Obama would have justified our generational delay, but we still have yet to arrive at the promised land you mentioned. Perhaps we were foolish to assume that this nation would want to change, but you declared that true liberation can't happen unless it costs the nation something. This notion makes me wonder if the cost of our emancipation from white supremacy is either too costly or too beneficial to relinquish.

One final thing: Dr. King, the history is being erased and rewritten to fit into a dismissive narrative. The white community is not portraying you as an anti-capitalist, anti-war, fiery Southern organizer but as an apologetic, passive troublemaker, and that is a false depiction. In Birmingham, where you sit on a statue and overlook a park where children protested segregation, across from a church where you calmed a city that was grieving the loss of four children, I fear that history is being forgotten. I do not think the community fathoms that when their souls transition, the stories will transition with them. With this nationwide erasure, I question what the younger generation will learn and if they want to know anything. Dr. King, can the soul of America be saved, or will it be a victim of its own atrocities?

Sincerely,

A Birmingham Native

Letter to Brother Malcolm X

I am writing you for the first time, but I was eight when I first wrote about you. I have always known that you were unique, but when I heard you speak on television, it would sound otherworldly, not as a person, but as this spirit serving as the physical manifestation of power. Ossie Davis called you “our living Black manhood,” you uttered pride and instilled the belief that Black people were worthy of human dignity. You served as one of the foundational bricks of the Black Power movement, one of my favorite social movements, and there is no biopic like yours. On your birthday, I take a moment to listen to your eulogy as an annual reminder of your impact and appreciate your sacrifice.

Brother Malcolm, I know you cared deeply about the Black community, but my present days are filled with worry about our future. I believe we have been led too far astray and that we continue to allow ourselves to be bamboozled. A lot of our brothers and sisters have been brainwashed and bought into the theory that they want to be equal to the oppressor. The almighty dollar has been the tempting vessel for tricking our Black men and women into capitalism and classism and then has hurt our people. Also, police brutality continues to be a rampant monster as the police execute us often without consequence. The days are much more complicated, and we stray farther away from true liberation every day because there are so many distractions.

Another thing that I would also argue is that the Black community has been satisfied with menial victories like historical quarters that will not free us in the end. One radical thought I will stand on is that in America, white people have only been on the right side of justice when it has benefitted them. Nothing for Black people has been done just because of the rights that we deserve, not only as citizens but as human beings. You are one of the first activists I heard talk about human rights for Black people, as the topic of civil rights often dominated the conversations. After harping on your words, I discovered that if we are not seen as human beings first, we will never be viewed as citizens of this nation. Brother Malcolm, you are the root of my radical thoughts, which have blossomed into my aggressive organizing style. However, I ponder whether your “by any means necessary” rhetoric has a place in this century and if the people genuinely want to be liberated or will remain neutral and content.

Sincerely,

A Student of Radical Thought