

NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM

Four Freedoms Curriculum Resource

Malcolm X

Speech to Peace Corps Workers (excerpt)

December 12, 1964

(approx 7.2 minutes)

First, I would like to point out that since it is my understanding that most of you are training to be leaders in the community, the country, and the world, some advice that I would give is that whenever you occupy a position of responsibility never accept images that have been created for you by someone else. It is always better to form the habit of learning how to see things for yourself, listen to things for yourself, and think for yourself; then you are in a better position to judge for yourself.

We are living in a time when image-making has become a science. Someone can create a certain image and then use that image to twist your mind and lead you right up a blind path.

I point these things out—especially for you and me, those of us who are trying to come from behind. If we aren't aware, we'll find that all these modern methods of trickery will be used and we will be maneuvered into thinking that we are getting freedom or thinking that we are making progress when actually we will be going backward.

So my advice to any of you who at any time think that you'll ever be placed in a position of responsibility—you owe it to others as well as to yourself to be very careful about letting others make up your mind for you. You have to learn how to see for yourself, hear for yourself, think for yourself, and then judge for yourself.

Secondly, I would like to say this: It concerns my own personal self, whose image they have projected in their own light. I am against any form of racism. We are all against racism. The only difference between you and me is that you want to fight racism and racists non-violently and lovingly and I'll fight them the way they fight me. Whatever weapon they use, that's the one I'll use. I go for talking the kind of language he talks. You can't communicate with a person unless you use the language he uses. If a man is speaking French, you can talk German all night long, he won't know what you're talking about. You have to find out what kind of language he understands and then you put it to him in the language that he understands.

You believe in treating everybody right whether they put a rope around your neck or whether they put you in the grave. Well, my belief isn't that strong. I believe in the brotherhood of man, but I think that anybody who wants to lynch a Negro is not qualified for that brotherhood and I don't put forth any effort to get them into that brotherhood. You want to save him and I don't.

So I must emphasize, we are dealing with a powerful enemy, and again, I am not anti-American or un-American. I think there are plenty of good people in America, but there are also plenty of bad people in America and the bad ones are the ones who seem to have all the power and be in these positions to block things that you and I need. Because this is the situation, you and I have to preserve the right to do what is necessary to bring an end to that situation, and it doesn't mean that I advocate violence, but at the same time I am not against using violence in self-defense. I don't even call it violence when it's self-defense, I call it intelligence.

When you find people outside America who look like you getting power, my suggestion is that you turn to them and make them your allies. Let them know that we all have the same problem, that racism is not an internal American problem, but an international problem. Racism is a human problem and a crime that is absolutely so ghastly that a person who is fighting racism is well within his rights to fight against it by any means necessary until it is eliminated.

When you and I can start thinking like that and we get involved in some kind of activity with that kind of liberty, I think we'll get some ends to some of our problems almost overnight.