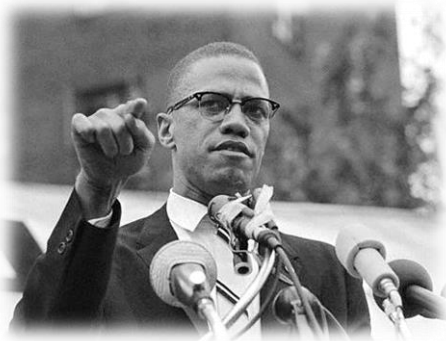


#Cutthecheck is not a movement!

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Recently we celebrated the birthday of our “shining black prince” Malcolm X. Although taken down by an assassin’s bullet in the prime of his life, the Black Liberation Movement and the global Human Rights Movement were privileged to have witnessed Malcolm’s evolving political and social development during his short but provocative life. Fifty years after his premature death, activists and organizers continue to draw solace and wisdom from Malcolm’s analysis of the system that impacts black people’s relationship with America and with one another.

Malcolm X was as razor-sharp in his critique of Africans and those of African descent who were obstructionist to our fight for dignity, freedom and equality as he was of white America. He constantly called out black folks who aligned themselves with the enemies of true democracy and equality; they suffered unrelenting lashings from Malcolm in his writings and speeches. Despite this criticism, Malcolm possessed acute clarity that love and respect were key attributes that must dominate the work by those fighting the oppressor but between the masses themselves.

Last week, a group of young(ish) people took over the offices of Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment demanding money for their involvement in the Ferguson Uprising. An existing bank account was activated to fundraise for Ferguson Uprising work with MORE and the Organization for Black Struggle as the account stewards. The funds were to cover particular expenses emerging from the work such as supplies, food, equipment, travel, etc. The hostile take-over on May 14 resulted in checks being written to seventeen people at \$2750 each totaling nearly \$50,000. (Notably, there were a few who took a principled stance and refused a check.) The shake-down pretty much cleaned out a bank account designed to support movement activities in a way that the local social justice community never had the funds to do. Poof—it was gone in a matter of minutes.

As someone who generally has no problem naming names, I am consciously choosing to focus on the *behaviors* of the individuals so that our fragile movement can draw important lessons from the situation. The names and profiles of the individuals have been exposed in other spaces and mediums. As has been asked of all the stakeholders in the Ferguson work, the Gang of 17 must also be held accountable for their actions. They must show how the monies they received, designated for movement building, was used for organizing people to action and to build community programs.

The situation reminded me of one particular speech where Malcolm questioned how we as a people can be violent, aggressive in the protection of a racist, global system but passive in the protection and advancement of our own history and culture as well as in our political and economic progress.

So, instead of targeting a small, social justice group in its one-room office, would the Gang of 17 have been just as enthusiastic in occupying the Monsanto World Headquarters in the name of human rights until it handed over all of its financial assets? I doubt it.

Here are my insights about the incident:

It was an error in judgment for the heads of OBS and MORE to write checks to a few individuals under these circumstances. There is no rationale as to why this group was entitled to the monies over the thousands of people who have been a part of the Ferguson Movement. I don't believe this was good stewardship of community resources. I would say this even if I was not a signatory on the bank account (which I was).



The movement for social, political and economic justice is not for sale or trade. People have dedicated their lives to the struggle--getting old without pensions and dying without healthcare. Gettin' paid in dollars or recognition cannot be the motivating factors as to why people are in these democratic spaces.

The movement for social justice is built upon the work and sacrifice of many before us; we stand on their shoulders as part of that continuum of struggle. As a long-time organizer, I know our movements attracts both hustlers and serious people to its mission. The majority of participants fit into the latter category but if our movement is to grow exponentially and become more sophisticated, we must find ways of quickly ferreting out those who compromise or attempt to destroy the spirit, integrity and progress of our collective agenda.

We need to do a better job of lifting up examples of productive workstyles that strengthen our organizations and movements. We must decisively and lovingly address the issues of white privilege, patriarchy and homophobia as we work together. Our movement has not been consistent or forthcoming in exposing immoral, unethical or apolitical behaviors in our midst and addressing them in a proactive and unifying way. This leaves room for provocateur actions where negative setbacks are the same whether they are unwitting or deliberate.

And what of redemption? When wrongdoing and harm has been acknowledged by those in our movement, there's rarely a healing process that takes into full account both accountability and personal salvation. Restorative justice has a vital place in our movement, not just in the corrupt courts system.

The Gang of 17 must be condemned for their despicable actions while the movement must recognize the issues, lay out remedies and move on solutions; it cannot be held hostage to the incident or its fallout. It is critical that we understand that the way we resolve issues among each other is very different from how we deal with the white, racist power structure. This seems like a no-brainer but when incidents like "cutthecheck" happen, we are forced to realize that there's more internal education that has to be done.

Our bigger challenges are to organize people and resources to take on the systems of oppression and exploitation that continue to put a chokehold on the working class. Such goals demand that we are willing to be accountable to each other and that our organizations be accountable to the movement.

The commitment is to lift up our humanity and to fight for transformational change by any means necessary. Malcolm wouldn't expect anything less from us.