

Panel Discussion

Dubois: Good afternoon, gentlemen. I was just pondering an excerpt from that speech by the great Malcolm X and his ideas about revolutions. I'm sure you've all been hearing about him. I was wondering what you thought about his ideas of bloodshed and overturning the system.

Would any of you men like to respond?

McKay: Yes, I would. First off, I would like to say that I am in total agreement with Malcolm X's quote. I believe it lives and breathes the same message as my poem, "If We Must Die." Both his quote and my poem bring up the disturbing events that occur during revolutions, bloodshed and dying. I do truly believe that a revolution is what we need for the white men to realize that we are not joking around anymore. We've played this game for long enough, and it's time to finally say "game over."

Cullen: McKay, I hate to say this, but you AND Malcolm X are wrong. In my poem "Tableau" my belief that black people and white people are not born racist is expressed. Racism is not a heritable trait, it can only be taught. Equality between blacks and whites should replace this hatred in our hearts we can't bear to part with. We don't need a revolution to discover that we are all equals. We must stop looking at the physical differences between beings and see what really matters.

Dubois: Yes, Cullen, you have a valid point, but what about right now? We've got to worry about things that are going on RIGHT NOW. Obviously, we are getting nothing out the current efforts, which is standing around doing nothing, waiting for our rights to come to us. It is our god-given rights to go after what belongs to us. We keep trying and trying but our efforts are going nowhere. It's no individual persons fault for the current wellbeing of our people. "I feel the burden belongs to our nation." (Dubois).

Hughes: "That is my dream!" (Hughes). I believe we should have rights, and a revolution may be what it takes to get there, but violence is not always the answer. I can see both sides of the argument that has been discussed. I dream of having rights, but I just don't feel fighting is the right way to get there. I mean, we've been fighting all this time and look where we are? I think we should just get over our cowardice and selfless attitudes and see what's right in front of us and take advantage of the opportunities at hand.

McKay: And what is that exactly Mr. Hughes? I'm sorry to say, but you are completely wrong. A revolution is completely necessary in getting our views across to the white folk and to let them know we aren't playing anymore. What Hughes says in "Dream Variation" about being free to run wild in the open sounds nice, but how are we supposed to get there by sitting around and doing nothing. The only way I see that we could possibly accomplish our dreams is by getting up and fighting for it.

Washington: You see, McKay. That's where you are wrong. You are a complete hypocrite. In your own poem, "America", you say "darkly I gaze into the days ahead," What exactly are you speaking about? I'm proposing that you are saying something along the lines of waiting around passively for some miracle to fall from the sky, and suddenly we'll have our rights? Maybe that will happen. I believe we should wait longer before taking any more drastic measures that might set us back even further.

McKay: Pardon me, Good Sir, but you are completely wrong about me and this subject. When you say we should sacrifice our civil rights now without a fight, instead of strengthening ourselves economically, you are practically giving up before the fight has begun. It sounds like you don't even care about what happens to the future of our people. You are just trying to protect your own behind. This is ludicrous and will never work. The only way we will achieve our dreams is by letting the white folk know that they cannot continue to walk all over us, including taking our rights, and what belongs to us.

Cullen: Excuse me gentlemen. I don't appreciate this derogatory language between equals. We should be working together for the common good of our people to better all of our futures and the futures for generations to come. Not by picking fights with each other about what we think the other person is thinking. We shouldn't be bickering, but trying to unite as one showing the white men that we aren't going to let one simple obstacle stand in our way. Washington, as you once said, "Progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result."

Dubois: Men, we must stick to the subject at hand, our rights. For how long have we been waiting around for our rights to be handed to us? This won't ever happen. The white race has become so stubborn and naïve, they won't even listen to us, the "inferior" race. We need to take action for ourselves, setting a positive example for generations to come, showing that we didn't just get our rights handed to us; we actually did something and fought for them. We need to take action for ourselves and what's going on now, or we will

watch our dreams “dry up like a raisin in the sun” (Hughes). The only real option we have left is to fight back.

Washington: Dubois, what in good heavens are you talking about?! Violence is not the answer. In fact, violence will set us back even further than we are now. We need to become more economically stable and humanly stable before we take any drastic action against a race that is more advanced than we are in every category. If we attack them and the victory is theirs, everything that we’ve worked so hard to achieve up to this point since slavery will have been in vain.

Hughes: I see both sides of this argument; however the point still stands that we need to set a GOOD example for our future generations. Dubois, I don’t know what you are talking about. How can you consider fighting to be a good example for our children and their children after them? If they see that all we did is fight and fight instead of working through the situation passively, then they are going to think that fighting is okay and what is necessary to achieve what they want in life, and that’s not it at all. If we fight now and are not victorious not only will we be looked upon as vicious, our future generations will be the ones to suffer. Is that something we want to live with?

Cullen: Hughes, I completely agree with you. Why should our future generations have to suffer through and live with the mistakes that we’ve made in our lives? It’s not their responsibility to end this vendetta when they had nothing to do with it. It’s ours. We need to end this thing once and for all, but not by violence. I propose that we sit down and talk out this situation with the white folk so they can hear our side of the story. If that fails, that’s when we take more serious action, but not before.

Dubois: But it’s a waste! The white folk have already expressed that we are invading on “their” land and “their” lives and they want nothing to do with us. We’ve got to show them they aren’t going to get rid of us that easily. I’m sick and tired of seeing my own men hanging from trees, “the ghastly body swaying in the sun” (McKay). Maybe if we’d taken more serious action sooner, many of these deaths could’ve been prevented. Look at how many of our men that have already died.

Washington: I hate to say this, but it doesn’t matter how many people have already died. They were brave individuals. We should be concerned with how many more people have to die before we get what we want? Think of how many people sacrificed their lives on the current effort we are making. Not to mention, the many more who will lose their lives if we

go to war. If we wait, and try and settle this issue passively and maturely, those lives might be spared.

Hughes: As this discussion goes on further, I'm starting to see that this revolution may not be such a bad thing. I still oppose the idea of violence to solve our problems, but some action must be taken. I don't think that we should sit around and do nothing, but I also don't think we should take such major action as waging and all out war between races. I think that compromise is the best way that we can get our rights without angering and losing anymore lives.

McKay: Compromise?! Are you crazy? What makes you think that a group of fair-skinned maniacs are going to listen to anything that we have to say? I mean, they've already started their own hate group against us, The KKK. It has to be their way, and only their way. No highway option. If we don't take action now, life as we know it is only going to get harder and harder and eventually our rights are going to slip away indefinitely. I'm not going to let that happen if I can prevent it.

Washington: That may be true, and that's how I feel too, but if we stoop so low as to attack them and kill their people, we've become no better than The KKK. Plus, the white people have lives and families just like we do. How would you like to go to bed at night knowing that you had a part in ruining and innocent child's family and classifying yourself no better than The KKK. We need to be the bigger people, like we know we are, and just walk away. I mean, who does all of the work for the whites? We do. Eventually, they will see how much they need us, and will give in.

Dubois: You're right, the children do have nothing to do with it, but how much more will WE have to suffer before the whites supposedly "give in"? I don't know how much more I can take knowing that from day to day I have to keep everything to myself, not being allowed to even look at a white female without being severely reprimanded or killed for it. I hate living my life in constant fear that my life will be taken just as fast as it was given to me. I still firmly stand by my belief that a revolution is the only way out of this dilemma.

Cullen: You're not the only one living with that constant fear. We all are, but you don't see us making such a big deal out of it. We are willing to wait, why aren't you? I mean, we've waited this long to achieve what we wanted, and we got slavery abolished. Maybe, just maybe, if we stick this out and wait a tad longer, we'll be able to have everything we've ever

wanted for ourselves. Like Washington has said, we need to make sure that we are a stable race and can support all the responsibility that comes along with the rights we want.

Hughes: I completely agree. But let's suppose that we do agree to go to war with the whites and let's just dream we won. We got our rights now. We are free to exercise them however we see fit. Do we have the right knowledge and intelligence to exercise these rights in the appropriate ways? And even if we did win, there will still be prejudices. No matter what we try and win or try and fail, there will always be prejudices and racists. If in the end they are going to be things that we are NEVER going to be able to change, what's the point in killing innocent people? I am not sure if a revolution is the right way to go. It might be, but then again it might not.

McKay: You propose a good argument, Hughes, and I see where you are coming from, but now I am asking you to see where I am coming from. I would like you and everyone else here who opposes the idea of revolution to take a chance with me and believe that our race and people can do this. I truly believe that we are capable to pull this off and to achieve everything we've ever wanted in life. Do you believe in what we are capable of? If yes, stand up with me and let's fight this. If no, give up, you don't deserve rights anyway.

Washington: Whoa now, hold it there. How can you be telling us to give up our rights, McKay? Just because we don't agree, we don't deserve our rights anymore? We've all listened to each other sides, and from what I can conclude is that we can almost all agree that we are level headed and strong willed. We can all reach a compromise. It's the only way we can achieve greatness. What we must do is reach a common ground before taking it to the white folk. Therefore, when we do, we'll be ready.

Hughes: I couldn't have said it any better myself.