

'Revolution as a New Beginning': an Interview with Grace Lee Boggs

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For over 60 years Grace Lee Boggs has been thinking about and working towards making social change. Along with her late husband, the African-American writer and activist Jimmy Boggs (1919-1993), she has been centrally involved in numerous grassroots organizations including the Johnston-Forest Tendency, Correspondence, the National Organization for an American Revolution, the Freedom Now Party and Detroit Summer. She has worked with and provided counsel to hundreds of writers and activists including Malcolm X, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya, Kwame Nkrumah and Stokely Carmichael.

The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Grace Lee Boggs was born in 1915 in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1940 she received a Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College. Refusing to settle for an academic lifestyle, she moved to Chicago to join the movement as a tenants rights activist. In subsequent years she moved to Detroit and become a leading member of socialist, Black, and Asian liberation struggles. In 1973 she co-authored with James Boggs the book *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* and in 1998, she published her autobiography *Living For Change*. Now in her 90th year she writes a weekly column for the *Michigan Citizen*, participates in the organization Detroit Summer, and otherwise remains an active member of the Detroit community. Today, Grace works with the Boggs Center, a non-profit community organization based in Detroit's Eastside which was founded in 1995 by friends and associates of Grace and Jimmy to honor and continue their legacy as movement activists and theoreticians. The webpage of the Boggs Center can be accessed at <http://www.boggscenter.org>. Grace was interviewed by Adrian Harewood and Tom Keefer on July 22, 2003 at her home in Detroit, Michigan.

Upping The Anti: In your autobiography you talk about the decimation of the working class in Detroit through automation and mass layoffs. Do you think the US working class is disappearing, or is it being re-created in the high-tech and service industry?

Grace Lee Boggs: The information industry is being increasingly exported. The computer scene is going to India. The manufacturing working class has been replaced to some degree by the information industry working class, because that work can also be exported. The work that can't be exported is the work around public utilities and services such as schools which affect the local population.

Most people think that jobs are the answer to racism, to poverty, etc. We have to understand that jobs no longer play the role they did in periods of scarcity. We need to measure the worth of a human being in very different ways, and we don't know how to do that yet. We don't have the philosophy for it yet. We are coming from a period of Cartesian concepts of the separation of body and mind to a whole new era of uncertainty. This brings with it a different concept of reality, and a new potential for change. We are at a very different place, and we have to change our whole mindset.

A beautiful place to start doing that is Detroit because Detroit is a wasteland. We are the products of rapid industrialization. In the first half of the twentieth century people came to Detroit to marvel at the Ford Rouge plant where there were 120,000 workers under a single roof during World War II. The strikes and sit-downs during the 1930s looked like they were Marx's Capital coming to life. It was just amazing! And now technological developments and the export of jobs overseas have turned the city into a wasteland. So what do we do? Do we dream of bringing back industry? Or do we recognize that, to be a human being, you have to have a different relationship with the earth, a different relationship with your fellow citizens, a different relationship between country and city. So many changes need to take place. How do we translate that into struggle? Into organizing?

UTA: But on a global scale isn't the industrial working class growing?

GLB: That is one way you can look at it. Or you can look at how globalization is affecting workers and villagers in India, for example, how it is destroying the environment and increasing inequality. They begin thinking about another way of life, another way of development that doesn't mimic the patterns of capitalist development we have gone through in the West. That is how we need to think. I don't think we can just accept globalization and its continuing expansion. We have to wonder how globalization has affected how people think. How does this experience help us organize?

UTA: Is there a distinction between the kind of grassroots organizing that you do and the more traditional revolutionary organizing which focuses on the taking of political power?

GLB: Marx thought that workers needed to take state power. He thought that capitalists were too competitive to do what was necessary to create the material conditions for communism. So he called for workers' power, state power, and Lenin did much the same thing.

If you're living in a Third World country, you see the capitalists putting their money into hotels, into bars, into all sorts of consumer things instead of into the means of production. And so the tendency is to think, "we need to start with the state." But in revolutionary struggles throughout the twentieth century, we've seen that state power, viewed as a way to empower workers, ends up disempowering them. So we have to begin thinking differently. The old concept used to be: first we make the political revolution and then the cultural revolution. Now we have to think about how the cultural revolution can empower people differently, and create forms of dual power.

Some folks call it a new civil society. As Bush's power begins to disintegrate (which it's bound to do with all the contradictions that are involved), there's a new power emerging that already has new values, that is already participatory. It is a very different scenario.

We have to think in much more cultural terms, which we didn't do in the past. For Lenin, the cultural revolution that was to come after the taking of state power had mainly to do with literacy. But we have to think about culture in a very different way because we live in this society of abundance, consumerism and materialism.

UTA: How else should we be thinking of it?

GLB: Well, for example, all of the identity movements of the 1960s and 1970s and so forth have given us a sense that culture has something to do with relationships between people. The ecology movement has taught us that culture has to do with our relations to the earth. And now the whole business of 9/11 has made us realize that culture depends on our relationship to other societies--the rest of the world. So we have a very different concept of culture and what it means to be a human being than we had in the past.

UTA: Lenin offered the model of the centralized vanguard party that stands at the forefront of the masses and seizes state power, and I think most people would agree that it's not a useful model for today. But there are also many non-Leninist revolutionary traditions, such as the traditions of Council Communism reflected in your book *Facing Reality*. Does the conception that you had of workers councils still apply today?

GLB: Let me start by saying that I don't own *Facing Reality*. In fact, I disown *Facing Reality*. *Facing Reality* was written in 1957 following the Hungarian Revolution, mainly by CLR and Selma James. CLR was ecstatic about the Hungarian Revolution, even though it was destroyed almost immediately. Just to

have it emerge for a few days to him was proof that Marx had been correct, which in my opinion is not the way to make revolutions. I think too many radicals use events to demonstrate the validity of their ideas, rather than as challenges to further our thinking.

CLR James asked me to come to London to work with him on the Hungarian Revolution and Facing Reality, and I went. But what was very much in my mind at the time were the new concepts of leadership that came out of such things as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Highlander School (where Rosa Parks went), the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Women's Council, led by Joanne Robinson, who circulated leaflets calling for the bus boycott.

Though it wasn't what you would call a vanguard party, there was leadership. And, importantly, it was emerging from the necessities of the situation and the local people. The people themselves decided that they would walk rather than ride. Out of this emerged the possibility of people being transformed through struggle. Martin Luther King was able to articulate all that. Out of the Montgomery Bus Boycott came all the other movements.

I think we have a way of looking statically at leadership and workers, of putting everything in boxes instead of looking at the complexity of living history, and at how many different forms of leadership emerge to create movements. Static ways of conceiving revolution came out of the 19th century and culminated in the Chinese Revolution of 1949, and they are now outmoded. The Montgomery Bus Boycott initiated a new era of movement-building that has become a new way of transforming society.

UTA: How does movement-building deal with the state?

GLB: There is an anarchist movement emerging among young people in the United States which is a very different kind of anarchism from European anarchism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It doesn't emerge so much from theories of the state, but is more about how to empower people. It is based upon the concept of empowerment rather than the concept of power. Power is very much a nineteenth century concept. The concept of empowerment is a movement concept. It's the way by which individuals become conscious that their experiences are social experiences and that there is power in consciousness-raising and acting together. I don't think we know everything about it yet because it's very recent. It's only been forty years. But I think we need to understand that divide between the revolutions of the first half of the 20th century and the movement-building of the second half.

UTA: Can you speak more about the rise of this anarchist movement? Are you referring to the events since Seattle and the anti-globalization movement?

GLB: The anti-globalization movement came out of the movements of the 60s and 70s. Starhawk, whose consciousness comes out of the women's movement, had a lot to do with the organizing of affinity groups. It's a very different consciousness from the Marxist-Leninist stuff, which is very patriarchal and Newtonian. After 9/11, for example, Starhawk said that when you hold big, national demonstrations, you should break them into small groups so that people can talk and relate to one another. She also has this whole idea of affinity groups doing their own decision-making. That's a much more decentralized, democratic scenario.

There's also this concept of creating a civil society. All kinds of people, including academics who don't call themselves anarchists, are talking about that sort of thing. They use the Philippine People Power I and People Power II as examples. People Power II took place in 2001 when thousands of Filipinos held a demonstration to protest against the corrupt government of President Joseph Estrada. Out of the demonstration and the different groups that had assembled, they elected a committee which started meeting monthly and then weekly. When the committee called for everyone to assemble, two million

people came together in the square and Estrada had to step down. That's very different from the way most people think about political revolution.

UTA: There seem to be a number of successful examples where mass mobilizations were organized democratically on a grassroots basis but then it seems that capital is able to absorb these efforts by making token surface changes that don't challenge property relations.

GLB: That's the hardest thing to change. I remember that when I became a radical, what made me a radical was the decision to get rid of capitalism. We never thought through what it meant to "get rid of capitalism." But our language showed that we were thinking we could rub it out the way you rub something off the blackboard and replace it with a socialism that would emerge from the working class as Marx described it in *Capital*.

UTA: In *Facing Reality*, you speak of building new institutions and creating a new society within the old one through mutual aid and solidarity. Are these methods of self-help and organization capable of transforming the system, or do they just ameliorate certain people's conditions while other people face the might of military repression or genocide?

GLB: It seems to me that like CLR James, you are asking these questions out of ideology instead of real history. In *Facing Reality*, CLR was basing himself on the concept of the invading socialist society, on Marx's "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" in *Capital*, in which there is the famous paragraph about how the proletariat is organized and disciplined by the process of capitalist production itself, so all that is necessary is for it to emerge is to bust the integument of capitalism. I don't think most people realize the degree to which that scenario, which seemed to be coming to life in 1938 when CLR arrived in the US was the basis of CLR's revolutionary thinking. I remember how he would declaim passages like, "The proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing." What is the meaning of the word "is" in that sentence? It's like defining what is real by your definitions. So if someone says "the proletariat is disappearing," or "the proletariat is reactionary" (which we know it has been; you just have to look at the US working class in relation to the Vietnam War), you deny that they're talking about the "proletariat" because Marx said "the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing."

It's that kind of circular thinking that was very much in the thinking of CLR and to some degree in Marx. Marx was writing in the British Museum; he was not experiencing all the contradictions that emerge in reality. I remember falling in love with what Marx said about the Paris Commune being "the political form at last discovered to resolve the economic conditions of the proletariat." I remember how it opened up my mind when I first read it. But since then I have thought to myself that the Paris Commune took place in 1870 in France in a war between the French and the Germans. It's not impossible that a model like that will emerge out of the Iraq war, but to think it's going to take on the same form as the Paris Commune is a kind of thinking that we should rid ourselves of. It involves taking a model that happened in historical reality, and gauging your perspectives for the future on that model when you know that history is always changing.

It's simplistic thinking which I realize is very attractive to young people. You're at a time in life when you want things to be simple, to be able to say, "Yes, that is what the world is like." But that's not the way the world is. The world is changing all the time. That's the first principle of dialectics.

CLR wrote *Notes on Dialectics*, in which he savaged Trotsky for getting stuck in the concept of nationalization as the essence of revolution because that is what happened in the Russian Revolution. Trotsky, he said, had ignored Hegel's main contribution to dialectical thinking, that you shouldn't get stuck in fixed concepts. But then CLR did the same thing! I presented a paper last year called "Beyond Scientific Socialism" at a National Labour History Conference on a panel with four people who had

worked very closely with CLR James' circle of associates. I said that CLR always criticized the fixed notions of everybody else, especially Trotsky, but never questioned his own fixed notions in regards to Marxism. He never, never, never, though he lived 100 years later, questioned Marx's paragraph about the working class in his chapter on the "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" in *Capital*. While the working class was constantly changing, CLR was still holding fast to Marx's idea of the working class organized and disciplined by the process of production itself.

Jimmy Boggs wrote a pamphlet called *But What About the Workers?* in 1974 when everybody could see the amount of competition, of bourgeoisification that was taking place among the working class, particularly in America following World War II. At the time it looked like this country could do anything its heart desired. There was all this abundance, and labour organizing was all about getting more of this abundance for the workers. CLR was no longer in the US and he wasn't wondering, as we were, whether conditions had changed to such a degree that the working class was no longer a radical force for social change, and that conditions had become more complex than Marx could have imagined in 1867.

UTA: How do you account for the fact that at this moment there are more auto-workers in South Korea than there were industrial workers in the entire world when Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto*?

GLB: I am not interested in making the Korean revolution. My task is to make the American Revolution! There are all sorts of contradictions emerging in South Korea which the Koreans have to grapple with. I have to deal with the American working class, and I have to look back at what I have thought and written about the American working class. Shortly after World War II, I contributed to a pamphlet called *The American Worker*. Under the name Ria Stone, which was my party name at the time, I wrote the theoretical section, re-stating Marx's ideas on the working class. As I look back at it now, I realize that what I wrote came completely out of books, and not out of real experience. It is true that World War II was a tremendous experience for everybody in this country. People in plants and in the military learned so much from one another. It was as if Marx's working class was coming to life as it had in the 1930s. But shortly thereafter, things began to change.

If you ask me questions about the South Korean workers, are you doing that because you are interested in making the South Korean revolution or because you feel it's necessary to continue justifying and validating Marx? I don't think revolutions should be about validating ideas that were written by somebody who was living at another time and in another place. That's too fundamentalist, and is why people talk about Marxism as a kind of religion. If you become a Marxist, you should become a Marxist for the purpose of making the revolution. You should not become a Marxist for the purpose of validating Marx!

UTA: Why do you think that you evolved and CLR James did not?

GLB: I think one of the main reasons I changed is because, after 1953, I had this experience of actually being part of the Black community, actually working in a day-to-day fashion with people in the community, with workers.

If I had lived in New York, if I had gone on living in Union Square, I probably wouldn't have changed. I came to Detroit because CLR and Raya Dunayevskaya, the real leaders of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, had decided that we had to go beyond Marx in a certain sense and identify what we saw as new social forces: women, Blacks, rank and file workers, and young people. We had already anticipated going beyond Marx's scenario. So it is possible that if CLR had remained in the United States, he might have begun functioning on that basis. But for reasons not of his own making, he lost the opportunity to have that experience. And he might never have been able to experience it anyway because he was not really native or indigenous to the movement here. Moreover, as long as he was here and didn't have citizenship,

he had to function in a very small group. It's very difficult to come from outside, and be able to appreciate the organic development of a movement. I was very lucky that I married Jimmy Boggs, very lucky that the Black Power Movement emerged around the time that I had already settled into the Black community, so I could become a very integral part of it and therefore be in a position to evaluate what I had done and what I had thought.

UTA: Along with the cultural revolution that you've talked about, particularly in your articles relating to Martin Luther King, you seem to suggest the need for a personal transformation. You suggest that we need to be constantly evaluating ourselves and that we must, first of all, come to terms with who we are as individuals. Perhaps you could expand on that?

GLB: I recently made a speech called, "We Are All Works in Progress." I love that concept of works in progress. I'm very fortunate that I have experienced sixty years of activism, and can see the progress that I have and have not made! I'm not sure why I was fortunate enough to be able to change and to keep changing as reality has changed.

During the Black Power Movement, I was what many people regarded as one of the best organizers in Detroit. I essentially organized the Michigan Freedom Now Party and helped get it on the ballot, which no other group in this country was able to do. In almost every city they tried to launch a Freedom Now Party. We were the only ones who did it, and we did it in part because I was the coordinator. I was also the main organizer of the Grassroots Leadership Conference to which Malcolm X made his famous speech. I was able to do this in part because of the skills in organizing that I had developed during the period that I was in the Marxist organizations who were very good at this sort of thing. Also, the circumstances were very ripe, and I was in contact with people who wanted to see this happen, and who were in a position to make it happen. So when the Detroit rebellion exploded in 1967, even though Jimmy and I were out of the city, we were considered among the six people responsible for it. I didn't make the rebellion happen, but some of the things that I had done in the 1960s were part of what helped people see that they needed to erupt in some way. So it gave me a lot to think about.

Up until 1967 I had never thought that you had to distinguish between a rebellion and a revolution, because in the thinking of Marxists all you had to do was get the oppressed angry and in motion, and they would sweep away the existing structures and that would bring a new society into existence.

After the rebellions, I realized I had almost transferred that concept of the working class to Black people, to the Black social force. And then I looked around me and this Black force that had exploded were the kids down the street – people I knew, with all their contradictions and weaknesses. What was going to make them revolutionary? I began to see the fundamental weaknesses in the concept of "debordement" in Marxism-Leninism, that all you need to do is mobilize people, get them angry enough to sweep away the old society and bring in the new.

It wasn't going to happen that way. It was obvious that we needed to do a lot more work, do a lot more thinking about what constitutes a revolution, and how it's distinguished from a rebellion. A rebellion does not sustain itself. People who start out as rebels, thinking that they can do everything, end up by begging those in power to give them more. I realized how far short of a revolution a rebellion is! Once we began thinking about what constitutes a revolution, there was still the question of how you bring it about. How do people begin embracing new values, creating the new infrastructure, and practicing the new relationships that are necessary for revolutionary social change?

Instead of the old binary polarization between reform and revolution, we had to grapple with what brings about transformation. Immanuel Wallerstein says that 1968 brought to an end the political thinking that had dominated Western society since the French Revolution. The French Revolution had made it clear

that the people at the bottom needed to be considered. Out of that recognition came the politics of Conservatives who decided that “we’re not going to let them push us around” and also that of the Liberals and the Socialists, both of whom wanted the state to make reforms that would ameliorate the conditions of the poor. After 1968, Wallerstein said we had to begin thinking differently. The divisions that now matter are not the old ones between reform and revolution, whether you change slowly or rapidly. We now have to begin the long, difficult job of rethinking what it is we have to do.

I don’t say that everyone has to do this rethinking. But anybody who has been serious about the Marxist-Leninist tradition needs to do it. Other people will keep doing what they find necessary depending on where they are at historically. They don’t have to get rid of all that baggage. But those of us who have been part of the movement, and who took it seriously, need to do some rethinking. And it’s not easy to do.

When you talked about South Korea, I was reminded of that kind of thinking. You’re trying to hold onto an ideology that encompasses all of reality so that everything that happens can be seen as a sort of validation for what you think. And that was very much the way we radicals thought. We were always looking for validation.

What we need to do is examine that idea very, very carefully. First of all, I think that the concept of the future as unknown and as dependent on what we do in the present is something that we have to keep very close to our hearts. We have to see revolution as a new beginning, and see ourselves as participants and as creators, as opposed to forecasters, of the future. Rebecca Solnit has written a beautiful article on this, quoting Virginia Woolf. During the very dark days of the First World War, Woolf wrote that hope must be held onto because the future is inscrutable. Not that it’s dark, necessarily, but that it is inscrutable, unknown. It’s important to think that way if you’re going to be a revolutionist. You have to believe that what you do has meaning because it creates something that previously did not exist, and was not known or even thought about. You have to be very careful that what you do does not replicate the past. There are so many historical examples of regimes, brought into being by what we consider revolutionary actions, which ended up replicating the institutions they replaced.

UTA: What was interesting about the anti-war movement that developed in response to the recent US invasion of Iraq was not only the size of the demonstrations, but also their global character. One thing some organizers talked about was that it was not really the already organized activists who were responsible for bringing out millions of people on February 15th, 2003 in what was the largest worldwide protest in history. They said that the true organizers of the event were the Bush and Blair governments.

GLB: In the old radical days, we used to argue about “what was the cause?” as if there could be only one cause, and if you deviated from naming that single cause, somehow you were betraying the movement. Now we know that the causes of the anti-war movement were extremely complex. Bush had a whole lot to do with it. If he hadn’t provoked the movement, we would be in a much more difficult position. My contribution to the anti-war movement is the column I wrote titled, “Don’t Leave It All to Dennis,” referring to Dennis Kucinich who is by far the most progressive candidate in the Democratic Party.

UTA: He’s the congressman from Ohio?

GLB: Yes. I spent a weekend with him at a retreat last year. At 31, Dennis was the “Boy Mayor” of Cleveland, Ohio. He pledged in his campaign that he would not privatize the utilities. Under pressure as Mayor to give in, he refused and was not re-elected. So he had to start all over again and build himself up through state elections to finally becoming a congressperson. He is a product of the Mid-West working class. His roots are steelworkers and miners and he’s of Eastern European ancestry. That’s one of the reasons I like him. We need someone from the working class to emerge as a national figure with a vision.

The working class has taken such damn beatings over the years. Kucinich represents the most visionary and progressive program, but we should not leave it all to him. We should begin getting as many groups together as we can to create a kind of dual power structure that ties the anti-war movement to local struggles, taking advantage of the fact that the people who are participating in today's anti-war movement are very local. Neighbours are going to national anti-war demonstrations together. They are making conscious efforts to hold local demonstrations side by side with national ones. So I'm meeting with a group of local people and we're going to talk about that. To me, politics means trying to achieve something in a fluid situation and not to be boxed in.

You probably know that the Green Party met in Washington D.C. a couple of days ago and apparently the majority of the group have determined that they are going to run a candidate. I think we should make a distinction between this period, the period that leads up to the Democratic primary, and the period after the Democratic primary. First of all, we have no idea what will happen to Bush. He's digging himself into a very deep hole. There are a whole lot of unknowns in this next period but we have to decide what to do now. I voted for Nader in the last election, partly because the Democrats were going to win Michigan anyway.

These are very concrete questions. The tendency of Marxists has been to deal with elections abstractly because we didn't really believe elections made a difference. In the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers' Party, we used to run candidates because we viewed elections as an opportunity to get out our message. But I don't think that's the way people grow - by conversion to the ideas of a few people. They have to go through their experiences and be engaged in struggles. Those are some things I have had to learn.

UTA: There's a very poignant moment in your book *Living for Change* - it seems to be an epiphany for you - when you meet James Boggs and he teaches you the importance of "loving America enough to change it." For you, at the time, the idea of even voting was anathema, it wasn't something that you did. In your most recent pamphlet you talk about how "we must be the change." Perhaps you can talk about those two ideas, "loving America enough to change it," and the notion that "we have to be the change."

GLB: Jimmy once said, "that's the narrowness of a lot of radicals; they say they hate this lousy country. I love this country not only because my ancestors' blood is in the soil but for the potential of what it can become."

When I was a radical in the Marxist-Leninist sense, I was an outsider. I really moved from place to place. I don't know how many times I moved while I was in New York. I was a student in New York, and in Philadelphia. I went to Chicago and then back to New York. I lived in California for a while. I was very transient in a way that radicals tend to be. They go, so to speak, where the action is, or where the party wants them to go. What I found when I came to Detroit was that Jimmy belonged to a community. It was a community that had been transplanted almost intact from the little town of Marion Junction, Alabama, where he was born. For him, voting was a question of citizenship. I never knew for whom he voted, but he always voted because he carried around this idea that he had a societal responsibility. It's a very different concept from that of radicals. Radicals don't take responsibility for this society because it is a capitalist society, an enemy society. They never learn what it is to practice politics and be responsible, even for their own neighbourhoods. So the way they behave in neighbourhoods is scandalous. They don't realize how this really estranges them from people in the community.

UTA: Can you elaborate on that?

GLB: I often talk about how Jimmy would go out every morning and clean the corner. He would pick up all the litter on the corner. When the gutters backed up because of heavy rain, he would be the first one

out there to clean the gutters. He felt that he was a citizen of his block, of his city, of his country. And I had never thought that way because radicals don't think that way. We're outsiders. We cherish our "outsiderness." I've come to believe that you cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it. I didn't know that until I met Jimmy. That's why I had never voted.

A couple of years ago I was at this retreat with Vincent and Rosemary Harding. Vincent has been extremely eloquent on this subject, quoting Langston Hughes; "America never was America to me, and yet I swear this oath, America will be!" And I now think that way. Suppose I only said that Detroit's devastation is the result of capitalist de-industrialization – exporting all the jobs. So what we have to do is get rid of capitalism. But meanwhile, I don't do anything about Detroit. How could I live here and not do anything about Detroit? How could I talk to young people about their lives and what they should be doing, if all I said is that we have to get rid of this monster who has de-industrialized and devastated and depopulated us. What kind of revolutionary message would that be? This is not something that most radicals understand.

UTA: What do you think about Malcolm X's comments about "Americanness," and about how he was not an American and didn't want to be considered one? Do you think that in a country built on slavery and on the genocide of indigenous people, we really need to be reclaiming "Americanness," or do we need something that's completely different?

GLB: When you say "something that's completely different," where are you going to locate it? On the moon? There are so many questions involved here. First of all, there has always been a separatist tendency in the Black struggle, which was acted out to a certain degree in the 1960s and 1970s. Counterposing separation to integration was a tremendous part of the struggle of the 1960s. People took and struggled over opposing positions, just as DuBois and Booker T. had done earlier in the century. Because we had this struggle in the 1960s, the perspective of separation was tested, and it is unlikely that we need to go through the separation versus integration struggle again.

The second thing we have to recognize is that Malcolm was changing and undergoing incredible changes. I don't know if you have seen a book by Jan Carew called *Ghosts in Our Blood*. In December of 1964 and January of 1965 Malcolm stayed at Carew's house in London, and the two had long talks. Malcolm told Carew that he didn't know where he was or where he was going politically, and that he was still searching. He knew he didn't want to be around the Communist party, but he felt that what was going on in Cuba was very important. After his break with the Nation of Islam, some people said that Malcolm should have come and spent a year with Jimmy and me to get some grounding. Here was this guy who had made this tremendous leap toward the ideas of the Nation of Islam while in prison, had spent years speaking for Elijah and organizing for the Nation, and was now on his own.

UTA: You tried to recruit him for the Freedom Now Party.

GLB: In September 1964, Milton Henry and I called him in Egypt and asked him whether he would run for U.S. Senator on the Freedom Now Party ticket. He declined. In the spring of 1964, some of us had met with him in Harlem and invited him to come work with us in Detroit. But he had a long way to go, and he wanted to be more on his own, especially after the ideological and organizational rigidities of the Nation. Malcolm was a wonderful guy, but you have to understand that he only had a very short time, only a little more than a year, between his suspension from the Nation in November of 1963 and his assassination in February 1965. During that time he made all these trips to Africa and the trip to Mecca to find out what he thought.

UTA: What do you think is his legacy? What does Malcolm X teach us today?

GLB: The test of revolutionary leadership is the ability to change with the times. Malcolm passed that test very well. I can't begin to tell you how unhappy it made me when, following his assassination, fourteen and sixteen year olds would get up at meetings and say, "Malcolm said, by all means necessary!" as if that was all Malcolm stood for. Malcolm was a person who kept growing and developing. He was a terrific organizer; he was very, very scrupulous about being on time; he was very gentle. So to limit him to the "by all means necessary" statement is very unfair to him and also limits the person who only sees this side of Malcolm.