

From the PES Confronting Racism Task Force:

**MAY 19TH and the FIGHT FOR EQUALITY**

By Erik Younge

May 19 celebrates the births of two extraordinary and influential men, both having an indelible impact on my life, and both titans in the global fight for equality, freedom, and justice for all: Malcolm X, (El-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz), and Ho Chi Minh, the father of Vietnamese independence.

Malcolm was the “shining prince” of African-Americans and the fight for freedom. His qualities – intelligence, honesty, determination, oratorical skills, vision for justice – are unmatched. His influence on me, as a young Black man in the late 1960s eager to learn and to join the civil rights struggle, was life-changing. He set the path I have embraced in the fight for freedom. Although not as well known or as widely taught, Ho Chi Minh also has a strong connection to the Black struggle. He was strongly influenced by Marcus Garvey, having attended several of the Civil Rights pioneer’s meetings and rallies. Ho Chi Minh also published a pamphlet titled *The Black Race* detailing the horrors African-Americans faced under “the false democracy of America.” In particular, he denounced the lynchings of hundreds of Black Americans and the violent racism they faced in the North and the South.

The war in Vietnam was the first war fought by the United States which featured the whole enlistment by non-white soldiers in a truly integrated manner. The number of Black deaths was disproportionate to the Black population. Blacks accounted for 14.1% of total deaths, while forming just 11.0% of America’s young male population. More than 7,262 African-American soldiers died. Edison High School in North Philly has the tragic distinction of losing 64 young men of color in the war, the highest casualty rate of any high school in the nation. Black soldiers, of course, came home to white violence, discrimination, acute racism, scorn and trauma that many could not fathom or forget.

May 19 is a reminder of the legacy of two men who were united in their lifelong struggle against all oppression, united in their commitment to bring about complete freedom for their respective peoples and the entire world.

The Vietnam War was a turning point in my life and altered the course of my vision. I was inspired by the life, writings, and actions of both of these men, and they helped to give meaning and purpose to my life. I’ve never regretted it. I never made it to the baseball big leagues, (sorry Baltimore Orioles!) but being a very small part of the freedom struggle is like winning the World Series.

May 19 is a great day for me and for millions of other African-Americans, Asians, and freedom-loving folks.