

The Life and Legacy of Malcolm X

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The world knows very few people whose life story continues to fascinate people across the globe after their assassination or death. Malcolm X is one of them whose message, even after fifty-five years of his assassination, has been taken seriously by the young Muslims to learn how to engage with the real and perceived injustices in society. The name Malcolm X is identified as a remarkable figure, revolutionary human rights activist, fiery and gifted orator, and a tradition of African American liberation with the cause of socialism, anti-imperialist solidarity, and democracy. The youth organizations based in Muslim majority and minority societies are tapping into bits and pieces of Malcolm's to celebrate his legacy and radical message that racism is the most explosive evil on the Earth^[1]. This research paper dives deep into the life of Malcolm X, his revolutionary legacy, and his contributions to liberating Black people in American society. It also explores the reason behind his assassination and the revival of Malcolm X's lifework, which was symbolic of invoking resistance against discrimination from a wide variety across the world.

Who Was Malcolm X?

Malcolm X was born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, the US state of Nebraska. He was named as Malcolm Little originally but called as Malcolm X which he changed later when he reverted into a Muslim name al-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz. Malcolm since his childhood experienced extreme racism, served in prison, and spent a significant year of his life in the foster system. While in prison, Malcolm accepted the religion of Islam and joined the organization Nation of Islam. When he was released from prison, he led countless demonstrations and became the most prominent public face of the organization Nation of Islam. He invoked people through his speeches and debates both nationally and internationally with a focus on eliminating racism from the world and the US society in particular and empowering Black people of the United States. Malcolm was a human rights activist, minister, Islamic leader, and prominent Black Nationalist leader who exhorted African Americans to cast off the shackles of racism, discrimination, oppression, and violence. He advocated violence as a necessary element to achieve equality for people of color and the separation of white and black people in America.

Due to Malcolm's efforts in the organization Nation of Islam as a spokesman, the organization grew from a mere 400 people during the 1950 and 1960s to 40,000 active members who articulated the concept of black nationalism and Islamic justice. However, Malcolm broke with the organization shortly before his assassination on February 21, 1965. He is famous for his black separatism and controversial advocacy of violence. However, in reality, he was a multi-dimensional figure who always spoke with a radical perspective against injustice and racism that made him a target of government harassment and surveillance. He was assassinated by the members of the Nation of Islam as he grew disillusioned with Elijah Muhammad who held the leadership of the Nation of Islam, on February 21,

1965, in New York City^[2].

Early Life, Family, and Education

Malcolm Little born to Louise Little, and Earl Little was the fourth of eight children. His father, Earl Little, was a follower of Marcus Garvey and a preacher who served at Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association as Omaha chapter president. Earl Little was an avid supporter of black nationalism, due to which he was subjected to frequent threats, harassment, and violence from white supremacists. Louise Little was a homemaker and served as the division secretary for years.

Malcolm X experienced racism at an early age in his life as he was expelled from school in 1938 and sent to Mason, Michigan, by a white couple who ran a juvenile detention home. He attended Mason High School there which was a decisive moment in his life as he turned to a life of crime because an English teacher at the school made him drop out of school on uncertain terms. He was well-liked by his class fellows as he excelled academically and was therefore elected as a class president. The teacher asked what he wanted to be, and Malcolm responded that he wanted to become a lawyer which infuriated the teacher as the teacher replied to Malcolm in anguish that he should realistically think of what he could be. The teacher suggested that he could become a carpenter just because he was a black child and had no right to education in the eyes of white supremacists, so he dropped out of school at the age of 15 the following year.

After quitting school, Malcolm moved to Ella, his older half-sister living in Boston, where his life in crime started as he turned to sell drugs and became acquainted with the city's criminals underground. His sister got him a job where he was assigned the duty to help in the kitchen on the Yankee Clipper train, which landed him more into selling drugs, criminal life, and dance halls just to finance his lavish style of living in Boston^[3].

Tragedy in Malcolm's Early Life

Malcolm's father, Earl Little, was an outspoken preacher of black nationalism at Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, due to which he and his family were subjected to White supremacists' harassment many times. Malcolm experienced racism, oppression, and injustice even before he could understand the ways of the world as an infant. The life of Malcolm and his family worsened when his father was brutally murdered by white supremacist groups, including the Black Legion and Ku Klux Klan. Malcolm was only 6 when he witnessed that tragedy which had a profound impact on him throughout his life. Moreover, the end of his academic career added salt to the injury, and he became a troubled teenager.

Transformation in Prison

Malcolm X spent a few years in prison on the charges of larceny in 1946 when his life took a decisive point for the well-being of African American people in the United States and his own life for the better. During his ten years in prison, he devoured books in his attempt to make up for the time he could not get education when he dropped out of school. He was also visited by his siblings in the prison who joined the Nation of Islam which was committed to the ideology of Black Nationalism along with the doctrine of Islam. The organization had a small sect of black Muslims who were struggling to establish their own state based on the ideology of black nationalism and the teachings of Islam to secure a safe, just, sovereign, free, and equal entirely separate from the white Americans. The reading habit from the prison library during his incarceration helped him make his own perspective, and he accepted Islam after his brother Philbert X wrote him a letter that all of the members of Malcolm's family had converted to Islam. In 1952, he joined the Nation of Islam before he was released from prison^[4].

A Young Minister, Radical Leader, and an Activist for the Nation of Islam

Malcolm X, released from prison, a free man with a piece of great knowledge from the books written by a pool of world's famous and ingenious writers, joined the Nation of Islam and decided to dedicate his life to religious studies and the Black Muslim movement. The organization famous for his ideology of Black Power adopted him as a young activist for African American people and human rights because the Black race was subjected to violence, oppression, discrimination, and social injustice. He became the most charismatic leader of the Nation of Islam because of his articulate, passionate, and dedicated nature to the African American liberation movement. He traveled to Detroit, Michigan, to meet Elijah, the supreme leader of the organization "Nation of Islam" and expanded the liberation movement nationwide among black Americans. He founded new temples in Philadelphia and Hartford and became the minister of Temple 11 in Boston and Temple 7 in Harlem, which helped him promote the message of the organization he worked for^[5].

Malcolm believed that black people of the United States were as unique as white Americans and, therefore, the black race did not need to integrate with the white race because white people had historically dominated their existence in the world. He made black people of the United States realize that Americans were heavily involved in the development of self-identity, due to which they had developed a lack of trust in each other and a bias against colored roots. Therefore, through his inspirational speeches and debates, Malcolm invoked people that they had their inherent right to have sovereign power as a separate state. Malcolm firmly advocated the use of violence to achieve racial equality and liberation, which made him a most visible and fiery proponent of Black Nationalism. His violent approach to racial equality set a tone for the eruption of tactical and ideological conflicts between Americans and Africans in the 1960s as he gained popularity. His mind became the most

powerful weapon against the ideologies of white supremacists as he continued his struggle to demolish the lies of white supremacy through the logic and rhetoric in his speeches^[6].

Malcolm Broke with the Nation of Islam, a Black Power

Despite Malcolm's success as a visible and prominent proponent of the organization, he publicly parted ways with the Nation of Islam in 1963 as he grew disappointed with the leader of the organization Elijah Muhammad. His deepening political consciousness made Malcolm realize that class oppression and racism are two different and inseparable things which needed to be eradicated in society. He felt that blacks were not only victims of racism and capitalism, but the white race was also subjected to these inseparable twins' injustices. Moreover, he informed the organization and the members associated with it about the hypocrisy and lack of moral uprightness of Elijah Muhammad. He found out that Elijah was not even true to his own teachings and had violated many, which led Malcolm to the feeling of being betrayed. Malcolm was fiercely honest, so he began to inform people about the illegal and unethical affairs of Elijah with the women and his illegitimate children out of wedlock. This made Malcolm infuriated, and he took the decision to part ways with the organization and its leader. Elijah was also angry with Malcolm over his inconsiderate and thoughtless comments regarding the murder of the former president of America, John F. Kennedy, which compelled him to leave the Nation of Islam and its leader.

However, he continued to practice his Black Muslim faith upon Black Nationalism and the religious aspects of Islam as he embarked on the pilgrimage to Mecca, which proved to be a spiritual twist in his life. During his stay in Saudi Arabia for Hajj (pilgrimage), he converted to traditional Islam, which made him less angry and more optimistic in his radical approach to the Black Liberation movement. He changed his name in Saudi Arabia and opted for a Muslim name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz^[7]. He embraced peaceful resolution to the problems of oppression, injustice, racism, capitalism, and non-providence of civil rights the society of United States faced at that time and till now while being influenced by the true brotherhood he witnessed during the pilgrimage. He recognized the true teachings of Islam and embarked on his ideological transformation to have a bloodless revolution to America's race problem. Tragically and dramatically, his ideological transformation led to his assassination in Harlem, New York City, where he had delivered his speech at the Audubon Ballroom.

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King JR.

By the time Malcolm broke with the Nation of Islam as the Black Nationalism movement gained popularity, Malcolm and King Luther moved closer to each other for the unified agenda of African American liberation and Black people's rights. In early 1960, Malcolm emerged as a leading voice for the Civil Rights movement, and it was the time King Martin Luther presented a philosophical alternative for the liberation of African American people. Malcolm advocated violence for the racial

equality and freedom of Black people from the shackles of white supremacy, and King Luther, on the other hand, advocated peaceful means to achieve a racially integrated society. King Luther was highly critical of Malcolm X's destructive approach to the Black Liberation movement. However, they both regarded each other for their unified agenda of African American freedom and civil rights. Their unity could have positively led to a deeper unity of the Black community if given the opportunity and Malcolm X was not assassinated. The formation of Malcolm and Luther's unity could have strengthened the African American community in its fight and struggle for liberation, rights, freedom, and justice.

Malcolm X's Human Rights Legacy: A Voice for African Americans

Malcolm was considered a violent and dangerous figure among many Black Americans because of his fiery yet inspirational speeches. His actions, speeches, and debates added fuel to the radicalization of African American people, which made him a controversial figure as well as a powerful voice for the African American community. King Luther, a contemporary of Malcolm X, advocated peaceful means including redemption, non-violent resistance, and civil disobedience to acquire Black people's rights and liberation. In contrast, Malcolm urged Blacks to defend themselves by "any means necessary", including violence. However, they both were united and cared for one resolution to bring Black people a better life across the United States and the world. Both Luther and Malcolm differ in how they went about achieving their goal of evoking the Black Consciousness movement among African American people.

Malcolm, by all means, was a rhetorical and logical person who used logical techniques to persuade his audience to accept the Black nation without any exploitation. He was provocative and unorthodox in his speeches, only with one aim to fight injustices in society and promote respect and dignity for the vulnerable Black community of the United States. His end goal was to create a sovereign, liberated, and independent state for the Blacks so that the Black race could be proud of their culture and race without being assimilated into the white American society. He was a strong advocate for self-defense and black power so that African American community would be free from white men's oppression^[8]. He preached to his followers through logical and inspirational speeches that freedom, civil rights, and democracy are the only significant methods to achieve political and national stability in any society. The recent revival of Malcolm's lifework in the form of his autobiography, despite his critics calling him a violent rabble-rouser, proves to be an inspiration for the people who are struggling for social justice across the globe. Malcolm's autobiography, "[The Autobiography of Malcolm X](#)", after his assassination, was highly regarded and remembered for his contributions to how the human race, whether white or of any color, can secure their freedom.

Bottom Lines

In a nutshell, Malcolm X and his life works remain the true hallmark of moral relevance and intellectual significance for the young Muslims and black people of the global community to overcome the institutionalized prejudices, injustices, racism, bigotry, and oppression in a wide variety. His autobiography has moral relevance for today's anti-muslim bigotry and opposition to racism all around the global history. The young community of the globe who is subjected to any form of oppression, racism, or injustice echoes Malcolm's famous teachings that every human being has individual rights. The provision of civil rights to the global community should be irrespective of color, race, or creed, and has the right to be respected and use "any means necessary" to bring his existence on this earth.

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