

“MALCOLM X: Islam, Black Culture, and the Resurgence of Militancy.”

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Introduction

Militancy in the United States has, since the 1970's shifted from the political arena into the socio-cultural sphere. This re-location of militancy into cultural sites in the world of music especially, as well as videos has yet to be understood in its historical context. Conventional misunderstanding of Islam in America views Islam as an alien religion. America's Muslims are not an aberration, rather they are the visible manifestation of a religious traditional that came over on the slave ships with Africans from West Africa, and this tradition has been hidden for fear of persecution for hundreds of years. Malcolm X and the militancy of Muslims in the 1960's made this tradition surface and become very visible, even though it has long been part of African American culture and tradition. This disconnected image of Islam and its radical representative Malcom X requires a more thoughtful analysis of Black culture and its shifting locus. Black militancy in the United States has continued to use various tools to express greivances, exert its rights, first through the construction of political-religious organizations in the 1960's and later through cultural media, such as rap music and hip hop, as well as through the production of iterary works. Variants of this music have been criticized by the African American middle class because some of its variants glorigy

violence and anti-authoritarianism. In contrast to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 70's where leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X succeeded in expressing the plight of Black citizens, the first decade of the twenty-first century has ushered in a resurgence of cultural militancy which has not translated into political action or economic reforms for the masses. In the United States and globally militancy appears to have found multiple expressions through avenues mediated by culture.¹

Neglect of minorities in the USA and the gross mistreatment of Arab youth in many countries has given credibility to radical ideologies worldwide. The marginalization of moderates caused a resurgence of interest in Malcolm X in the USA as youth feel they have no other option, but to resort to violence against each other, and against the system. Malcolm X played a major role in the 20th century in reviving the radical ideologies of Marcus Garvey and earlier leaders. Malcolm did not invent militance, rather he revived a tradition that began with Cinque aboard the ship "La Amistad." Cinque and a diverse group of African slaves killed the crew, captured their slave ship, and attempted to sail back to Africa as "free men and women." Even though he was captured off the coast of the US and put on trial for murder, he and his fellow slaves were found innocent and returned to Africa as free people. David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and W.E.B. DuBois should be included among past militant Blacks upon whose shoulders Malcolm X stood. I am arguing that Malcolm X did not invent militancy; he revived and adapted it to modern conditions. Within Black Culture there was a long militant tradition, whose genesis was the arrival of Africans in the New World.. Malcolm X was not only a militant revolutionary hero of the Civil Rights era, he was also an interlocutor for the militant section of Black political thought.

Malcolm's embrace of Islam, which is conventionally understood as the insertion of something "alien" into American culture, needs to be re-examined as an indigenous response to distress from within a little known or explored sector of African-American culture. This is a culture that has clearly been dominated by Christian and Western ideologies, as well as secularism, but which contained within itself a healthy mix of Islamic ideas, values, and norms.

An examination of Malcolm X's life reminds us that Islam came to the USA on slave ships and was clandestinely practiced until Elijah Mohammed and Malcolm X made this stream of American religion come out of the shadows and become a visible part of American life. Therefore, Malcolm's embrace of Islam was not an aberration, but a shift from *invisibility* to *visibility*. Malcolm X simply uncovered the existence of a submerged Islam in American life, just as African American migration from the South to the North transformed race from a *Southern* problem into a *national* problem..²

Malcolm's father, although a Baptist preacher, was a follower of the militant movement of Marcus Garvey. Being exposed to burning crosses and the KKK's symbolic use of the cross to project hatred, Malcolm X may have associated Christianity with oppressive white rule. At least he could say that no Muslim had ever burned an Islamic Crescent on his front lawn or burned his family home to the ground and intimidated he and his family. Thus, Malcolm's militancy can be understood as a variation of an American tradition of Islam which survived not only the inhumanity of slavery but also the forced conversion of African Muslims to the religion of their

oppressors, the white plantation owners and their slave drivers. Islam in the U.S.A. survived such horrors much as Judaism survived the Spanish Inquisition.

Today many observers of Islam worry about “jihad” or holy wars to fight those who oppress Muslims. What Malcolm stood for follows another Islamic tradition, i.e. the Islamic concept of “*itijihad*” or renewal. A re-examination of Malcolm X’s life and motivations will help us to understand that he tried to adapt Islam to the modern secular world and to give it renewed relevance.

When intolerant religious majorities attempt to force their religion upon an unwilling religious minority, that minority often responds by nominally accepting the majority’s religion while clandestinely continuing the religion of their choice. This happened when the Roman Catholic church of Spain attempted to use the Inquisition to force Jewish and Muslim Spaniards to convert to Roman Catholicism. On the surface the Jews and Muslims did, but they secretly continued to practice Judaism and Islam until it was safe to openly profess their faith again after the terror of the Inquisition had passed. The same is true for Muslim slaves forcibly brought to the United States. Many became nominal Christians while secretly meeting and continuing to practice Islam in the Carolinas’ and Georgia. This made the presence of Islam in American society *invisible* just as race problems were invisible until African Americans moved into Northern cities and both became manifest and undeniable. During the twentieth century social conditions made it possible for Black Muslims to openly profess their faith once more after centuries of suppression. (Austin,1997: 4; See also Hagy, 1993: 12-27)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, which states that Islam in American culture originated with the Nation of Islam and the Black Muslims in the 20th century, Islam should not be viewed as simply a cultural phenomenon of 20th century America. Islam's transplantation into American culture began with the transplantation of African slaves and their settlement in the New World. (Gomez 2005; Austin, 1984) In the South many African Muslim slaves were referred to as "*gelofes*" meaning Wolofs, who were usually Muslims from Senegal and Gambia. These slaves continued to practice Islam clandestinely and taught it to their children. (Gomez, 2005) On some plantations with large Muslim populations, mosques were secretly constructed facing Mecca so that this population could practice Islam far from the prying eyes of their intolerant slave masters. They chose their own spiritual leaders who were conversant with Islam. Noble Drew Ali related how he came from such a community in North Carolina, which to this day practices Islam and has remained faithful to their faith since the days of slavery. (Gomez, 2005: 203) ³

What follows here is the story of one prominent modern African American Muslim, named Malcolm X or Malik El-Shabazz Omowale. Although Malcolm X's life has been written on extensively, the focus has mainly been on his role as a revolutionary or the messenger of a modernized Islam, rather than on illustrating "*itijihad*" or his role in renewing Islam in America. Malcolm X's conversion to Islam and his subsequent emergence as an individual of faith may provide glimpses of the power of redemption through Islam. Many former African American prisoners feel that they have been redeemed by Islam and they fill the ranks of the Black Muslim community today. It can be salubrious, since many renounce a life of crime and go on to become "model citizens"

who live crime free after their conversion. Many marginalized and disillusioned individuals may need such a radical change of identity to change their behavior and life style. Many Third World youth echo this model⁴

Today some young children do not know who Malcolm X or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were. This is a poignant reminder that each generation must be taught its history so that they have a greater appreciation of the accomplishments of their people and of their own potential to excel. Young people are taught that Malcolm X was a Civil Rights leader. This narrow focus does not enable youth to enjoy a greater appreciation of the past accomplishments of their leaders or of their own potential to excel. The focus on Malcolm's revolutionary leadership is not sufficient to provide an appreciation of the role of Islam in his life or in the traditions and history of Black culture. This article retells Malcolm's life story in three phases, so that those who read it will know who he was and what he stood for, as well as provide the untold story of the invisibility of Islam in the life and culture of the United States of America. Malcolm's life history may help disillusioned urban youth to enjoy greater self-esteem and a more positive identity.

Followers and admirers of Malcolm X recently launched a major campaign to have his birthday, *May 19 th*, declared a national public holiday. While Martin Luther King Jr. championed non-violent resistance to the evils of racial prejudice, discrimination and hate, Malcolm X urged African Americans to seize and maintain their freedom "*by any means necessary.*" Malcolm X once described himself as "*the angriest black man in America.*" Malcolm's goal was the total liberation of black Americans from what he claimed was the brutality, oppression and racial hatred of a white dominated power

structure in America. Malcolm called for the destruction of this social order and its replacement with a new order where political and economic power were shared equally. Knowing that this was not likely, he urged his followers to break away from America and form a separate Black nation. He neglected the one alternative offered to descendants of ex-slaves in Africa, Liberia. Liberia's constitution for decades offered African Americans the "right of return," which means that all African Americans were guaranteed Liberian citizenship if they would simply ask for it. Mass migration to Africa would allow America to wash its hands of the race problem, without ever having solved it. Perhaps this is why Malcolm did not offer us this alternative. Instead, he and the Nation of Islam asked America to cede to them several Southern states where they planned to establish a Black nation on American shores as a solution to the race issue. Nevertheless, his demand for a "Black nation" inside the U.S.A. was a re-echoing of earlier demands by the New York Black Communist Party. (Cruse, 1967)

This made it suspect in the eyes of many African Americans, who feared that they were being used to weaken America during its struggle with the Soviet Union. Our experience with Communism in this country made many Black intellectuals feel that the communist Party saw Blacks as tools to be used and discarded as convenience dictated. Richard Wright describes dilemma in great detail in Crossman's book *The God That Failed*. (Crossman, 1959) He and many others became disillusioned with the American Communist Party because of the cynical manner in which they felt that they had been manipulated. I hasten to add that Black Republicans and Democrats feel similarly disillusioned and exploited at times. It was unlikely that this goal would ever be

achieved given that the USA fought a long and bloody Civil War to prevent just such a break up.

The demand for equality, which is rooted in African Americans identification culturally with their new homeland, the U.S.A. whether it emerged from leftist ideologies or converts to Islam was resolutely opposed by capitalists and main stream Christians, both Black and White. The only aspect of the Nation of Islam uniformly embraced by America was its embrace of capitalistic entrepreneurship. African American Christians and Muslims alike took pride in Muslim restaurants in Chicago wick maintained a high standard of excellence and good service. Muslim businesses became a symbol of Black achievement within Black culture. Stokley Carmaichael and others demanded “Black Power.” They were not interested in living next door to whites or eating ans socializing with whites because to them the issue has always been about who has power and who controls real resources. They felt that Dr. King was wrong to press for “equality” from people who were determined to never share power with them. Malcom X sided with the “Black Power” advocates.

Malcolm X’s rhetoric was fiery and he was the first black leader to call for African Americans to form “*gun clubs*” to learn how to defend themselves against attacks by white mobs. White terroristic mobs had virtually destroyed East St. Louis and parts of Chicago in the summer of 1919, known in Black culture as the “Red Summer of 1919,” because so many African American perished at the hands of white thugs who came into Black neighborhoods to injury and kill as many African Americans as they could at that time. Malcolm X was determined that such episodes would not be repeated. (Theising,

2003) For this the press called him a "*fomenter of violence*." However, he replied that when whites are threatened and form gun clubs this is labelled "self-defense" - in case of racial attacks. The press treated this as normal, but when blacks did the same thing the press was alarmed and viewed it as dangerous.

Malcolm said, "I'm for justice. When the law fails to protect Negroes from whites' attacks, then those Negroes should use arms, if necessary, to defend themselves." His caustic statements and willingness to talk about tabooed issues made him a favorite of the American press. Malcolm X represented militant black nationalism. He had special appeal to poor ghetto blacks who felt trapped and ignored. Many felt he was their spokesman and champion. They lived by a cultural code that called for an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," so Dr. King's message never resonated with the Black lower classes. In their culture if you turned the other cheek then you would end up with two sore cheeks rather than one and this made you a "punk," from their point of view. According to their value system if you turned the other cheek then you were weak and worthless.

FIRST WORLD - FIRST IDENTITY - MALCOLM LITTLE ON THE DEAD LEVEL

Malcolm X was born to an America where racial tension, symbolized by burning crosses signifying the victimization of Blacks was common place. Christian messages of love, peace, humility, and tolerance were expunged by White supremacists who

appropriated Christian symbols and used them to convey a message of racial hatred and intolerance. This was hypocritical. Islam's message of militant righteousness was attractive to Blacks who were disillusioned, tricked, bamboozled, and brutalized by the white Christian majority. White Christian leaders were either unable or unwilling to defend their fellow Black Christians. For this reason Malcolm viewed America as a ticking time bomb waiting to explode. To understand his outlook let us look at his formative years.

On May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska a child was born named *Malcolm Little*. He was the fourth child born to Earl and Louise Little. His father was from the South and his mother was from the Caribbean. They would bear eight children in all. A white supremacist group of night riders called the Ku Klux Klan had visited his family a few weeks before his birth to intimidate his father. Malcolm entered a world of violence, racial hatred, and fear.

Malcolm's father, Earl, was a follower of the militant black leader Marcus Garvey. Many Garveyites were also members of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Science Temples and as such knew of and often paid allegiance to Islam. Earl belonged to Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, but he was also a Baptist minister. He was an outspoken advocate of black power and urged blacks to stop trying to integrate with whites. He argued that they should leave America and establish an independent black nation in Africa as part of the "Back to Africa" Movement. As a Baptist minister many local blacks followed him. For undermining white power the Klan planned to lynch him. They warned his wife that he should leave town.

Malcolm's family formed part of the great migration North seeking freedom from intimidation and economic opportunity. Malcom would later say:

“We do not judge a man because of the color of his skin. We don’t judge you because you’re white; we don’t judge you because you’re black; we don’t judge you because you are brown. We judge you because of what you do and what you practice.” (Perry 1989: 122)

Shortly after Malcolm's birth his family settled in Lansing, Michigan. His father planned to continue preaching and to open a store. Earl Little was a six foot four inch tall “jet black” man and a native of Reynolds, Georgia. He was strong, so Malcolm X associated strength and intelligence with blackness even though he himself was “light skinned.” Malcolm X did not like his own light skin. He associated it with his mother whom he considered weak, because she had a nervous breakdown after his father’s death, which forced his family to split up. Malcom X once noted of color:

“When you teach a man to hate his lips, the lips God gave him, the shape of his nose that God gave him, the texture of the hair that God gave him, the skin that God gave him, you’ve committed the worst crime that a race of people can commit. And this is the crime you’ve committed . . . This is how you imprisoned us. Not just bringing us over here and making us slaves. But what you created of our people on that continent was a trap, was a prison, was a chain, was the worst form of slavery that has ever been invented by the so-called civilized race and a civilized nation since the beginning of the world.” (Malcolm X, 1992: 82)

Malcolm X explained more clearly than any other African American leader the way that mainstream society has created black “*self-hatred*.” This is what fuels “black on black crime.” Which makes black men seek out the commaraderie of other black men and their support them, but also makes them kill one another through deadly barrages of “*friendly fire*,” which has reached epidemic proporation in many inner-cities. Whites make middle class Blacks so insecure on their jobs that they will not speak out against

injustices because they fear that white men will fire them. This explains why they do not speak out against the injustices committed against lower class Blacks. Black men are now considered by many an “*endangered species*” because so many are being killed or incarcerated. But, let us get back to our main story, the life of Malcom X. Malcolm’s father, Earl Little also set about building a strong black nationalist organization. By the time that Malcolm was four the Ku Klux Klan of Lansing began attacking his home. The ugly ghost of terror raised its head in the North to haunt his family again.

“First, I don’t profess to be anybody’s leader. I’m one of 22 million Afro-Americans, all of whom have suffered the same things. And I probably cry out a little louder against the suffering than most others and therefore, perhaps, I’m better known, I don’t profess to have a political, economic, or social solution to a problem as complicated as the one which our people face in the States, but I am one of those who is willing to try *any means necessary* to bring an end to the injustices that our people suffer.” (Malcolm X, 1970: 23)

A white supremacist group called the Black Legion set fire to his home. His father rushed out with his gun and fired shots at the attackers, while calling to his family to escape the flames. Just as Malcolm's mother exited with his baby sister in her arms, the walls of their home collapsed in a flaming heap. Malcolm would always remember this seen when he thought about white America. Such incidents early in Malcolm’s life made him view whites as violent “*blue eyed Devils.*”

Blacks for long had considered whites “devils,” this explanation was a better fit for their behavior toward blacks than any other, when trying to understand why they mistreated, cheated, lied about and discriminated against black folk. The oldest known reference to whites as devils comes from David Walker’s Appeal. In this masterpiece he argued:

“The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority. We view them all over the confederacy of Greece, where they were first known to be any thing, and we see them there cutting each other’s throats - - trying to subject each other to wretchedness and misery, to effect which they used all kinds of deceitful, unfair and unmerciful means. We view them next in Rome, where the spirit of tyranny and deceit rages still higher. – We view them in Gaul, Spain and in Britain – in fine, we view them all over Europe, together with what were scattered about in Asia and Africa, as heathens, and we see them acting more like *devils* than accountable men,. But some may ask, did not the blacks of Africa, and the mulattoes of Asia (Arabs), go on in the same way as did the whites of Europe? I answer no - - they were never half as avaricious, deceitful, and unmerciful as the whites, according to their knowledge.” (Walker, 1969)

We witness another early reference to whites as “*devils*” in the works of Father Hurley., founder of the “Universal Hagar’s Spiritual Church” in 1923. This church was very popular and boasted a membership of 185,000 members spread across 95 churches nationwide. (Baer, 1984: 43-48) Hurley was worshipped as “God incarnate” and the “black God of this Age.” He taught that blacks were “the first people of this world.” He referred to whites as descendents of Cain and “cursed with a pale color because of leprosy.” He urged the Negroes or “Ethiopians” to avoid marriage with whites He taught that heaven and hell were right here on earth. This is a belief widely held in Africa. To Hurley the Caucasian race was the living embodiment of “*evil*” and they all were “devils.” Malcolm X was echoing a *cultural discourse* that can be traced back into many black churches for well over a century, i.e. the idea that whites are “devils.” This is why he argued that the mere mention of this struck a responsive cord in the minds of most African Americans. Malcolm would state:

“ You tell that to any Negro, except for those relatively few “integration” mad and so-called “intellectuals,” and those black men who are otherwise fat, happy, and deaf, dumb, and blinded, with their crumbs from the white man’s rich table, you have struck a nerve center in the American black man. He may take a day to react, a month, a year; he may never respond, openly; but of one thing you can be

sure – when he thinks about his own life, he is going to see where, to him, personally, the white man sure acted like a *devil*.” (Haley, 1965: 186))

Many blacks feel that this explains the enormity of the inhumanity with which they have been treated by whites. Elijah Muhammad expanded upon this cultural theme of “white man as devil.” Both Noble Drew Ali and W.D. Fard Mohammed had identified whites with the Biblical “rider of the pale horse” whose *rider* is *death* or to them *Satan*. Both openly called whites “*devils*.” Elijah taught Malcolm to despise white people because they used deceit and lies or “*tricknology*” to gain advantage over blacks. The Black Muslims taught that God or Allah was a being who was created “from an Atom of Life” 76 trillion years ago. “He came out of total darkness and he was dark” or black. His own color corresponds with the darkness from which he came. He chose the earth as his home. Likewise the “original man” was a “darkman” who likewise came out of darkness. They believe that blackmen are *superior to white men*. Garvey held similar beliefs, as do the Rastafarians of Jamaica.

Elijah Muhammed taught his followers that a mad scientist named *Yacob* had created whites through a series of DNA experiments by discovering that each original or natural or black man had two elements. His black part and a brown part. The black part represented *virtue* and *goodness*. The brown part represented *corruption* and *evil*. By breeding the brown part until it was totally separate Yacob discovered that the brown part could be divided into brown and white, and by cross breeding these until he bred out an exclusively white man he created pure evil or walking white “devils.” This is how Elijah explained the evil nature of white people. As Elijah’s disciple, Malcolm X accepted this explanation, but as I pointed out earlier the notion that whites are devils is deeply

embedded within black culture and Malcolm may have been predisposed to accept this idea as are many other black people who embrace black culture.

Let us return to the story of Malcolm X's life and see what fate awaited his gallant father. The police never investigated the raiders who had attacked the Little home and family and instead began interrogating Earl Little about his gun. Several searches of the Little home failed to turn up the weapon, which Earl concealed carefully. The Little family moved to East Lansing and continued an unpleasant life. A town curfew forbade blacks to be outdoors after sundown. To evade this type of oppression the Little family bought a small farm just on the outskirts of East Lansing. Their farm income helped them to survive the Great Depression of 1929. White workers lost high paying jobs and began to displace blacks in low paying jobs, forcing blacks into unemployment and desperation. Earl Little began to recruit these desperate blacks into Garvey's U.N.I.A. Malcolm accompanied his father to these meetings and learned their slogans, "One God, One Aim, One Destiny" and their songs, such as "Up You Mighty Race, You Can Accomplish What You Will!" This convinced Malcolm that blacks could improve their lives and be self-governing.

In 1931 Earl Little was found on the trolley train tracks - dead. He had been beaten and left for the train to run over him. It sliced his body in half. Everyone suspected that this was the work of the Black Legion, but it was never proven and his murderer was never discovered. The night riders may have finally destroyed Earl Little, as they had his three brothers in Georgia. The six-year-old Malcolm was scared by this senseless violence. But, what he remembered was his father's militant and fearless call

for black unity, despite the threat of death. His father's militancy informed his own. The tragedy caused to Malcolm X's family is what made him hate whites. When he thought of white people he thought of his father's murder and the people who drove his mother insane, as well as the people who burned his home to the ground.

Adrift without her main supporter, Malcolm's mother, Louise, managed to keep the family together temporarily by cashing in her husband's insurance policy. When his father's insurance was exhausted Malcolm's oldest brother, Wilfred, dropped out of school to help support the family. But, he could not find steady work, so his mother took on work as a seamstress and as a maid. Having always been a housewife, she was ill prepared to support a family on her own. Because of her light skin, white employers assumed initially that she was white. Her husband had been very dark and all of the children were dark, except Malcolm. As soon as employers learned that she was black they usually fired her. Malcolm and his brother Philbert hunted rabbits and sold the meat to white families to help out. These were difficult years for the Little family. Malcolm X later in life would note:

“It is not wrong to expect justice. It's not wrong to expect freedom. It's not wrong to expect equality. If Patrick Henry and all of the Founding Fathers of this country were willing to lay down their lives to get what you are enjoying today, then it's time for you to realize that a large, ever increasing number of Black people in this country are willing to die for what we know is due to us by birth.”
(Malcolm X, 1965)

Louise Little sank into a deep depression and found it hard to work. She was forced to apply for welfare. The social workers made Malcolm feel ashamed of being poor and he began acting out. He stole candy and fruit, and began to get into trouble with the law. The welfare agency recommended that since Malcolm was a bad influence on

his siblings he be removed from home. Shortly after he was removed, his mother was committed to a mental institution. She lived there for 26 years. The welfare authorities scattered the Little family. Malcolm was bitter about this and blamed the welfare agency for destroying his family. He also blamed his mother and light skinned people for being “weak” and after this he associated strength for the fight with dark skin. This may be why he always praised dark skinned black people and put down light skinned blacks as weak and worthless. His search for justice in an unjust land only frustrated him further.

Malcolm was a brilliant student, but he frequently disrupted his classes. This got him expelled and sent to a juvenile detention center in Mason, Michigan. From there he was sent to reform school. Here he got his own room "for the first time in my life." He seemed to settle down and began doing well in junior high. He was popular with white and black students, and ranked third in his class, He was elected vice-president of his class, as well. Everything seemed fine until one of his teachers told him that he could never reach his goal of becoming a lawyer because, "blacks are unqualified for professional positions." Though he was vice president of his seventh grade class his math teacher advised him that seeking to become a lawyer was *not* “*realistic for a nigger.*” (Gomez, 2005: 336) He internalized this advice and decided that getting ahead legitimately was not an option, so he decided to get ahead by illegal means. This is perhaps one reason why he began his life as an outlaw and criminal; stimulated by official rejection from a respected authority figure whom he trusted. The white world rejected him as an equal, so he decided to reject the white world in return.

At age 14 years, Malcolm visited his half-sister Ella. She was a successful businesswoman and lived in the Roxbury section of Boston. He fell in love with the privileged life of the black urban elite. Malcolm admired their clever conversation. Above all, he was attracted to the vibrancy of black culture, in particular the jazz clubs. There he listened to Count Bassie , Duke Ellington, and Lionel Hampton. He would never be satisfied with life in a small town again. By age 15 his sister had arranged for him to live with her. Life in the fast track began in earnest for Malcolm in 1940. He was young, gifted, and ambitious, but exceptionally materialistic.

Malcolm made it clear to his sister that he wanted to work rather than go to school. She agreed to his request. In a pool hall he made friends with a street hustler named Shorty. Shorty found Malcolm a job at the Roseland Jazz Club, shining shoes. Malcolm found that he could earn extra money by selling his clients marijuana and steering them to local prostitutes. He had no reservations about doing this, because he believed that society would never let him hold a respectable, well-paid job.

Malcolm became known as "*Detroit Red*." He was considered a "hip cat" because he conked his hair (straightened it) and dyed it red. He wore zoot suits and expensive shoes. He became the quintessential urban African American. Soon he was hooked on dancing, music, women, drinking, and drugs. Malcolm became a master of the vice world. He viewed his sister's friends as snobs and hypocrites. He decided to use his good looks and criminal cunning to get what he wanted: excitement, women, and money.

Because many men were being recruited to fight in World War II, a labor shortage developed in northern cities. Malcolm took advantage of this by lying about his

age and secured a job on the Yankee Clipper train between Boston and New York. He began visiting Harlem. The sight of so many blacks in one place mesmerized him. Harlem was the political, cultural and economic capital of the black world. There it seemed racism did not exist. Its pull was irresistible to Malcolm. He fell in love with Harlem and its people. He was especially in love with a popular club known as Small's Paradise. He said. "This world was where I belonged."

“The only person who can organize the man in the street is the one who is unacceptable to the white community. They don't trust the other kind. They don't know who controls his actions . . . The greatest mistake of the movement has been trying to organize sleeping people around specific goals. You have to wake the people up . . . to their humanity, to their own worth, and to their heritage. The biggest difference between the parallel of oppression of the Jew and the Negro is that the Jew never lost his pride in being a Jew. He never ceased to be a man. He knew he had made a significant contribution to the world., and his sense of his own value gave him the courage to fight back. It enabled him to act and think independently, unlike our people and our leaders.” (Breitman, 1965)

Perhaps because of this belief Malcolm X did not believe that Dr. King could champion or even understand the causes of poor black people. Being a man of the streets he believed that he was better suited to lead poor blacks, so he tried his best to do so. Both men loved Black people and wanted to do their best to help to elevate them in life.

Malcolm left his sister's house and moved to Harlem. He spent his leisure time at the Apollo Theater and the Savoy Ballroom. There he listened to Dizzy Gillespie and Billie Holiday. Away from his sister's restraining influence he went wild. He stayed high on marijuana. His speech became rude and outrageous toward everyone. He used profanity freely and insulted passengers on the Yankee Clipper. After repeated warnings he was fired. With luck, he found a job as a waiter at Small's Paradise. At Small's he meet Harlem's most notorious street hustlers, like "Fewclothes" the pick pocket, and

"West Indian Archie" the gambler. A group known as the "Forty Thieves" befriended Malcolm and took him into the underworld.

His belief that he would never be allowed to hold a respectable job meant he had few reservations about hustling. Malcolm argued, *"Everybody in Harlem needed some kind of hustle to survive, and they needed to stay high in some way to forget what they had to do to survive."* Malcolm became cynical, anti-religious and began saying that, *"A man should do anything that he was slick enough, or bad and bold enough, to do."* Malcolm befriended "Sammy the Pimp," and became a full-time pimp and dope dealer. To show his full acceptance into the underworld, criminals nicknamed him *"Detroit Red,"* because he was from Michigan and had red hair.

Malcolm quickly became a major dope dealer. He did so well that the police took notice of his trade. Being under constant surveillance he began to move frequently and felt like a hunted animal. Watched so closely by police that he dare not sell drugs in Harlem he turned to armed robbery. To get his courage up for these robberies he began taking cocaine and bought several guns. Since he was too hot in Harlem, he travelled out of town to commit these robberies. As things grew worse for him he tried ever more dangerous means of making money. He took on a white girl friend who would case homes, which he would later burglarize. Malcolm descended into a private hell.

“X”

“Everything we don’t understand

Is explained

In Art

The Sun
Beats inside us
The Spirit courses in and out
A circling transbluesency
Pumping Detroit Red inside, deep thru us
Like a Sea
 & who calls us bitter
 Has bitten us
 & from that wound
 Pours Malcolm
 Little
 By
 Little”

Amiri Baraka

At his lowest point he served as a numbers runner. Malcolm soon returned to Boston because the action in New York dried up after race riots in 1943 discouraged whites from frequenting Harlem and most of its theaters closed. In Boston, his white girlfriend pretended to be a door-to-door salesgirl. She actually scouted out places for Malcolm to return and rob. For a while they made a good living pawning stolen goods. But, his time and luck ran out. Malcolm was arrested. He was 20 years old and had never even shaved. Yet, his first world, his first life and his first identity as an angry street hustler suddenly ended in February 1946, when he entered Charlestown State Prison. Malcolm Little was about to bury "Detroit Red" and awaken to a new self and a new world. Malcolm was about to leave the “grave” and rise above this and his vulgarly

materialistic life as Black Muslims say and come to life reborn as a religious man.

Malcom was about to leave what Black Muslims call the “*Dead Level*” and to awaken to the teachings of Islam, which they claim bring a man to real life, not the illusive world of empty materialism. He could now leave his identity as a “*Negro*” and a dead man and become alive in the teachings of “*Allah.*” He was about to become an “*X*” Negro as his new name would imply and become a full man.

SECOND WORLD - SECOND IDENTITY - MALCOLM "X"

ISLAM AND REDEMPTION

Forced confinement in prison changes many people. In jail, Malcolm was called a "fish" or new inmate. He did not like it, nor did he like his small cell and his covered bucket toilet. The heavy metal bars on all of the windows and doors made him feel like a caged animal. He grew restless, rebellious, and defiant and was referred to a psychologist. He became so violent and uncooperative that he was placed in solitary confinement. This failed to change him. Malcolm took such pride in being stigmatized that his fellow inmates nicknamed him "*Satan.*"⁶ Malcolm hated himself and his world. He was bound for self-destruction. He resisted all reform efforts. He was a rebel with but one cause - destruction of everything.

Malcolm was forced to work in a shop that made license plates. Along side him worked an older, highly respected, prisoner named *Bimbi.*⁷ Bimbi was a professional burglar, but, he used his time in prison to study and broaden his mind on such subjects as grammar, history and philosophy. In verbal conflicts, the power of Bimbi's arguments forced other inmates to hold him in esteem. During a work break one day Malcolm

launched his usual caustic attack against religion. Bimbi easily destroyed Malcolm's argument without ever raising his voice or using profanity. Malcolm was shocked and embarrassed. However, he discovered that an intelligent argument, made by a good speaker could win over an audience. *This was a valuable lesson.*

The two men became friends. Each respected the power of the other's mind. Bimbi showed Malcolm how to use the library to improve his mind and encouraged him to take correspondence courses. Bimbi began to reform Malcolm's mind and habits. The prison authorities and Malcolm's family had both utterly failed. Black men will often take advice from peers that they would never accept from family, friends or authority figures. As an eighth grade drop out, Malcolm had a lot of catching up to do. Since he was naturally intelligent and curious, Malcolm quickly overcame his educational deficiencies. To expand his vocabulary, Malcolm acquired an English dictionary and began to memorize every word in it. Every day he wrote out one page of the dictionary by hand and memorized it. Bit by bit his mind improved. He added Latin, linguistics, politics, and history to his study list. Soon he discovered that many political and economic lessons could be drawn from his street experiences as a hustler while trying to find his place in American society. Prison school provided a turning point in his life. As Caesar said when returning from pacifying France for the Roman empire and his enemies accused him of ordering atrocities against innocent women such as gang rape and wonton murder, "*alea iacta est*" meaning the die is cast or a major decision has been made, which can change the course of human history. He began to become socially conscious and aware. Less self-centered, he began to put others first.

In 1948 Malcolm Little was transferred to Norfolk Prison in Massachusetts. There his family encouraged him to study the teachings of the *Lost Found Nation of Islam*. Malcolm used the Norfolk college lecture plan and its large library to improve his speaking skills. Rage alone could no longer sustain his spirit. Therefore, Malcolm decided to explore the *Nation of Islam*, even though he was opposed to religion. His brother, *Reginald*, had promised Malcolm that conversion to Islam would be his ticket to freedom. Reginald ended a letter to Malcolm in 1948 with an admonition, "*Don't eat any more pork, and don't smoke any more cigarettes. I'll show you how to get out of prison.*" Malcolm accepted the challenge and inmates began to gossip about the fact that "Satan" had changed, he no longer ate pork. Malcolm thought that this was a clever scheme to win an early release by tricking the authorities into believing that he had reformed. When his brother visited, he found out otherwise.

During Reginald's visit Malcolm asked him how his new behavior would win release from jail. Reginald offered him membership in the Nation of Islam. Malcolm was puzzled, so his brother told him about *Allah* or God, and how he had a full circle of 360 degrees of knowledge while the Devil only knew 33 degrees. Malcolm was baffled. Then Reginald told him that the Nation of Islam believed, "The white man is the devil and the black man is brainwashed." This statement appealed to Malcolm. He believed that it explained his experiences with white society. He remembered his father's battles with the Klan, the two white social workers who split his family up, his exploitation by white employers, his harassment by white policemen, and his incarceration by white judges and jailers. From Malcolm's perspective, white society always seemed to have either neglected or mistreated ghetto blacks. He may have remembered his mother's

admonition to “*not eat pork.*” She may have been a member of Noble Drew Ali’s Morrish Tempoe. She was a Garveyite and many Garveyites also experimented with Islam in various early forms. By embracing Islam Malcolm X found *redemption* through his own internal transformation spiritually. Malcolm became a new man, but he retained his anger at the system and channeled it through his new found religious ideals.

Other inmates, who were members of the Nation, told Malcolm that whites were the source of all corruption and evil. They believed that the Black race was chosen by God-Allah. God would use blacks to destroy the white race. To Malcolm's mind this explained the injustice that he had seen and experienced. Malcolm liked the idea that God would make whites pay for their wrong doing, so he began a serious study of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm began to refer to whites as “*blue-eyed Devils.*”

As he studied, Malcolm discovered that Black Muslims considered the *black race superior to whites.* The Black Muslim's leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, proclaimed himself the messenger of Allah(God). Like Marcus Garvey, he advised his followers *not to integrate* into “*doomed*” *American society.* This is a message that Farrakan reiterated recently at Tavis Smiley’s televised form on the “State of Black America.” Farrakan said that we should not integrate into a burning house, but, Harry Belafonte replied that Dr. King taught us that if a house was on fire we had a moral obligation to help put the fire out. Like Farrakan, Malcolm X counseled African Americans to develop a separate and autonomous society, where everything was owned, operated, and governed by blacks. Elijah Muhammad preached black pride and self-

reliance, much as Garvey had a generation earlier. Both philosophies paralleled the teachings of Malcolm's father and made conversion to Islam easy for him.

Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad preached black pride, which included knowledge of African Kingdoms and the achievements of African Americans. American popular culture portrayed Africans as savage heathens who were saved from a barbaric life by slave masters who introduced them to Christianity, virtuous living, and high culture. Only W.E.B. Du Bois, Franz Boas, and a hand full of scholars challenged the sambo version of black history by speaking of the great achievements of Africa's ancient kingdoms; including Egypt, Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem-Bornu, Zimbabwe and Axum. Slave masters destroyed all memory of African language, history, culture, and identity. This created a persistent problem of self-esteem for African Americans and an identity crisis that encouraged many to look up to, admire and emulate everything white, and to loath and despise everything black, including themselves. Self-hate and self-destructive behavior were programmed into the minds of African Americans by bombarding them with negative images of blacks which encouraged low self-esteem and negative behavior. These attitudes and values are now part and parcel of Black culture and need to be culturally expunged.

To help converts understand this process the Nation exposed them to Carter G. Woodson's thesis that ,

" When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place,' and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary."
(Woodson, 2005)

To Woodson it was easier to remove chains that enslaved a person's body than it was to remove the chains that enslave the human mind. Malcolm liked this idea.

Elijah Muhammad also promoted the teachings of W.D. Fard who mysteriously disappeared in 1937. Fard believed that African Americans were descendents of the "original race." Donald Johanson and paleoanthropologists such as Meave and Richard Leakey now use anthropological evidence to support this belief. According to these scientists humans originated in Africa. They call this the "Out of Africa" hypothesis.(Browne, 2006a) Fard argued that original man could be found in purest form in Africa and the Middle East. Fard told African Americans that they were Islam's "*lost sheep*" and he had come to help them find the road back to Islam. He said *Islam was the true religion of blacks*. By accepting it they could end racial oppression. Neither the teachings of master Fard, nor of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Temple, conform to Orthodox Islam's claims that brotherhood exist between all races of people. In Mecca, any race can convert to Islam. The Nation of Islam, under Elijah Muhammad, blended some of the beliefs of the Garvey Movement with those of Noble Drew Ali's Moorish Temple Movement and W.D. Fard's teachings. The product of such *religious syncretism* or blending was the Nation of Islam, popularly known as *the Black Muslims*. They are uniquely American. Malcolm X came to believe that African Americans suffered from some form of racial amnesia. He argued:

“It is not well to forget the past. Memory was given to man for some wise purpose. The past is . . . the mirror in which we may discern the dim outlines of the future. . . Well the nation may forget, it may shut ist eyes to the past, and frown upon any who may do otherwise, but the colored people of this country are bound to keep the past in lively memory till justice shall be done them. “
(Kammen, 1991: 121-122)

The Nation of Islam taught converts that most Negroes were "dead," though still appearing to be alive. They in other words were not conscious of their true natures or where their true interests lay, like a sleeping giant. As proof of this they kept slave names. These were Christian names, given to them after their true African names, languages, and identities were robbed and destroyed. Maintaining these names was said to perpetuate a slave-like mentality, dependence upon white society and a false consciousness that encouraged corrupt behavior, such as drinking alcohol, smoking, eating pork, being unfaithful in marriage, gambling, and a host of other evils. Converts were encouraged to take on the name "X," meaning that they were now ex-slaves and free to think for themselves; ex-alcoholics, ex-thieves, and ex-everything evil, corrupting and polluting. In this manner Malcolm Little was transformed into "*Malcolm X*." With this new identity they could now achieve the self-discipline to live as free people. The nation's message of black superiority and resistance to white rule appealed to many poor urban ghetto blacks, who felt that white society constantly beat them down. When the Honorable Elijah Muhammed sent Malcolm X to Egypt as his personal representative to Nasser, Malcolm X began to develop a serious interest in Pan-Africanist and internationalist thought. He saw parallels between the US struggle of Blacks and the ideas of Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Julius Nyerere, all of whom were committed Pan-Africanist. This pull would encourage Malcolm X to break away from the Nation of Islam and form a group known as the "Organization of Afro-American Unity," based on the "Organization of African Unity" a continent wide organization devoted to ending colonial rule and promoting the independence of all African nations. As Nkrumah once said, "No African nation can truly be free until all

African nations are free.” Bearing this in mind the leaders mentioned above all supported liberation struggles in countries other than their own at some point in their presidencies.

MALCOM “X” AND PAN AFRICANISM

Of course, no discussion of Pan-Africanism would not be complete without mention of Malcolm “X’s” contributions to the subject. (Browne, 2006b) Malcolm X saw Pan-Africanism as part and parcel of the anti-colonial struggle. He disliked Western imperialism in general and American imperialism in particular. Elijah Mohamed was ambivalent about Africa and Africans, but Malcolm X saw Africans as part of a larger international struggle against oppression. He embraced a philosophy that promoted the use of arms in defense of life. He advocated “freedom by any means necessary.” Malcolm X divided people into two types; first there are white people, next anyone who was not white was black in his view of the world. Malcom noted, “There are two kinds of people, the white and the black, so if you are not white you must be black.” (DeCaro, 1996 : 121-122) Thus, “Chinese Reds are not Communists but are black people.”(Carson, 1991:114-115) This explains why Malcolm encouraged African Americans to celebrate the rise of China, India, and Japan because they were “emerging Black nations.” Steve Biko’s “Black Consciousness” movement in Kwa Zulu Natal Province of South Africa made it possible for East Indians to consider themselves “Black” and to join the struggle for equality as Pan-Africanists. People like “Ahmed Kathrada” an East Indian militant who served as Nelson Mandela’s driver before

Mandela's arrest for treason, were sentenced along with Mandela, Mbeki, Sisulu and other freedom fighters in South Africa to 26 years in prison on Robben Island. (Kathrada, 2005 and Buntman, 2005) Everyone knows that Pinto, an East Indian from Goa, was the man who bought all of the guns used by the Mau Mau of Kenya and Kenyatta during Kenya's war of Independence. This reinforces the notion that Indians and many Arabs should be treated as "Blacks" because they were in many freedom struggles alongside Blacks. This was good, but it raised the issue, "What should we do with whites who are on our side and risk all for us?"

Malcolm "X's" prediction of a racial Armageddon was based upon growing tensions within the US as the Civil Rights struggle heated up, and internationally as the anti-colonial struggle led to the liberation of more and more independent nations of color in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In his mind this all came together at the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned Nations in 1955. In 1957 the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell invited Ahmed Sokarno, the leader of the "Bandung Conference" to visit the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. This is the largest Black church in the United States and the most powerful. By the summer of 1959 Malcolm was calling for a "Bandung Conference of Negro Leaders" in the USA and meeting with leading African Pan-Africanists that same year in New York.

The Muslim world was beginning to take an interest in Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. Egypt's government extended an official invitation to Elijah Mohamed to visit Cairo as their guest in May of 1959. Elijah could not go at that time so he sent Malcolm X. In Egypt he met with Gamal Nasser and Anwar Sadat among others. Malcolm traveled to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Ethiopia, and finally ended in Saudi Arabia

where he made the obligatory Hajj to Mecca and Medina like a good Muslim. This opened his eyes. Upon returning to the USA he denounced the Nation of Islam as racist and said that it was out of touch with the teachings of Islam and the Muslim world. Shortly after doing this he announced the formation of a new group, “The Organization of Afro-American Unity” or (OAAU) much like the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Malcolm declared that the philosophy of his OAAU would be of “alignment with Africa.” Malcolm X began to form gun clubs to teach African Americans how to use guns properly. He cited Kenya’s Mau Mau or armed struggle of the Land and Freedom Army of Kenya to justify these clubs. Membership in his OAAU would not be limited to African Americans.

“Once we saw what they {Africans and the OAU} were able to do, we determined to try and do the same thing here in America among Afro-Americans who have been divided by our enemies. So we have formed an organization known as the Organization of Afro-American Unity which has the same aim and objective --- to fight whoever gets in our way, to bring about the complete independence of people of African descent here in the Western Hemisphere, and first here in the United States, and bring about the freedom of these people, by any means necessary. That’s our motto. We want freedom by any means necessary

So the purpose of the Organization of Afro-American Unity is to unite everyone in the Western Hemisphere of African descent into one united force. And then, once we are united among ourselves in the Western Hemisphere, we will unite with our brothers on the motherland, on the continent of Africa. “ (Perry, 1965: 152)

Malcolm X had long admired Patrice Lumumba of the Congo and lamented his killing at the hands of the C.I.A. and Mobutu Sese Seko. (DeWitt and Wright, 2003)

Malcolm liked Lumumba because he was young, outspoken, and held nothing back. Malcolm loved the way that African leaders treated him as if he were a Head of State. He hated Mosihe Tshombe, the leader of a secessionist movement in Katanga and called

him a “sell-out” who aided Europeans in the quest to dominate Africa. He said in a 1964 speech,

“Also, brothers and sisters, you know Tshombe. You’ve heard of him. From what I understand, Tshome arrives in the United States on Tuesday. He has got a whole lot of nerve This is the worst African that ever was born. This is the man who in cold blood, cold blood, committed an international crime - - murdered Patrice Lumumba, murdered him in cold blood. The world knows that Tshombe murdered Lumumba. And now he is in bed with Lyndon B. Johnson. . . . It is the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, the man you voted for -- you were insane, out of your mind, out of your head, to vote for a man like that; drunk. But, I don’t blame you, you were tricked. I told you that a fox will always get business.” (Breitmann, 1964: 147-148)

Malcolm was becoming increasingly concerned about bringing African Americans closer to Africans. In one of his last speeches at the Audubon Ballroom in New York, he said:

“You waste your time involving yourselves in any kind of organization that is not directly connected with our brothers and sisters on the African continent Just as a strong China has produced a respected Chinaman, a strong Africa will produce a respected black man anywhere that black man goes on this earth. It’s only with a strong Africa, an independent Africa and a respected Africa that wherever those of African origin or African heritage or African likeness go, they will be respected.” (Brietman, 1964 :136)

Just before gunmen ended his life in 1964 Malcolm X set out for Africa for the last time. African Heads of state added a new title to his name “al-hajj Omowale,” literally “the one who has successfully completed the obligatory hajj” and “the one who has come home.” “Omowale” is a Yoruba term for the prodigal son. April 13, 1964 Malcolm X made the hajj as the official guest of the Saudi Arabian government and he was escorted by Prince Faisal. Malcolm flew to Beirut, Egypt, then Lagos, Nigeria, followed by Accra, Ghana. In both Nigeria and Ghana Malcolm appeared on TV and he addressed university students in Ibadan and Accra. After Ghana he flew to Senegal, then Morocco and Algeria. On July 9th he attended the “African Summit Conference and

patterned his OAAU after the OAU. He spoke to 600 Egyptian students in Alexandria and an equal number of students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He met with Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Milton Obote of Uganda. After spending half of the year 1964 traveling in Africa, Malcolm returned to New York to host the first meeting of his OAAU. On June 28, 1964 in New York City he addressed his followers saying, "There are more Africans in Harlem than exist in any city on the African continent. Because that is what you and I are ----Africans." (Carson, 1991: 298-299) Jessie Jackson has christened us "African-Americans," thereby giving us a group identity that Malcolm would have been delighted with for it brings us closer to identifying with Africa, which was his dream.

Let us return to our narrative of Malcolm's life and times. W.D. Fard left Elijah Muhammad a cultural legacy that included the belief that there is no heaven or hell after death. Black Muslims were taught to believe that they had been living in hell for the past 400 years in America. Salvation was near because the period of slavery and damnation was about to end. A savior called the *Madhi*, who was half god and half man, was coming to free them. Fard said that he was the Madhi.

Fard believed that human origins were in Africa. Anthropologist, like Donald Johanson and Richard Leakey, have since confirmed this. Fard argued, that the black race produced the original men. Anthropologist believe that all humans originated in Africa and that the first human families and social institutions were African. (Browne, 2006a) Biologists now believe that mitochondrial DNA points to an African origin for all modern humans. Fard preached that Africans developed extremely advanced civilizations. Their scientist populated the earth with all species of animals and plants,

and created the seas and mountains. They are even believed to have blasted a piece of the Pacific Ocean floor into space, forming the moon. These original men, it was said, lived in peace and worshipped Allah in the holy city of Mecca.

According to this theory evil entered the world when a wicked scientist, named *Yacob*, was tempted to break the laws of Islam. For this he was exiled. To seek revenge he used his knowledge of genetics to create a race of devils. These new people were immoral, liars, cheats, and vicious. They had white skin and created nothing but trouble for the original race of black men. Huddled in caves to keep warm in the cold vastness of Europe, they were backward. Therefore, Allah felt pity for them and sent the prophets Moses and Jesus to teach whites Islam and to civilize them. Unfortunately whites corrupted these teachings and created the religions of Judaism and Christianity. Christ was believed to have been a benevolent black prophet. But whites are said to have lied and told the world that he was white. This confused blacks about their true nature and greatness. Blacks were exalted but tricked into accepting a low opinion of themselves.

This theory furthermore asserts that whites, following an ancient prophesy, gained control over the earth and used their power to perpetuate every form of evil. They enslaved millions of Africans and transported them to America to work for them until the Africans died. They stripped these captives of their names, their language and culture, then brainwashed them into believing that they had no history worthy of mention. Whites made blacks hate their own beautiful black color and hate themselves, while they taught blacks to admire and copy the whites who oppressed them. To add insult to injury, blacks were taught to strive to be like whites in every way.

Corruption was about to end, according to W.D. Fard, because he had come to America on a mission to redeem the black race. The time had come to destroy the evil white race and make way for the divine rule of the noble black race, Fard claimed.

Of course, whites who heard of Fard's theories declared them absurd, even mad. Fard's mainstream black critics agreed. Yet, Fard's following grew. Some found his theories more attractive than the Bible, which many felt had been used to support claims of black inferiority. Thus, Malcolm X was socialized into the culture of the Nation of Islam whose main message was racial pride and unity in devotion to Allah, as well as the creation of a separate society free from evil white control. To many ghetto blacks, Elijah Muhammad was the man who would lead them to the Kingdom of Allah. To Malcolm Little of Norfolk Prison, he was the one person who could help Malcolm overcome his tortured past. So Malcolm shed his Christian name "Little", and he took on the last name "X." Under this name he would become a famous national leader. Thus, many consider his 1948 conversion as dramatic an event as the conversion of the apostle Paul. Malcolm the street hustler was dead. Malcolm "X", the militant Black Muslim was born. With this new identity he entered his second world. The world of struggle, liberation, and revolution.

Learning to be a faithful Muslim was not easy. Malcolm had to learn to face Mecca five times a day and pray to his new god in Arabic. This was difficult for him. He learned to go down on his knees and touch his head on the ground when praying to Allah. At first he complained that it was easier to pick a lock and rob someone than to do this, but he gradually conformed to Islamic culture. Discipline of the mind, body, and

spirit are Islam's strengths. Besides avoiding pork, Muslims must be neat and clean in dress and appearance, respectful of others, well spoken and they are forbidden from drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, or being promiscuous.

Of course, Muslims sin, just like Christians. They explain this by arguing that when a man gets drunk he does not sober immediately. The next day he has a hangover. Bad habits are, to them, like a hangover. If you persevere long enough they will vanish. Thus, although back sliding is to be expected, a sober, good life awaits converts who persist.

While still in Norfolk Prison Malcolm read every evening until 10 P.M. and continued reading by the hallway lights until they too were turned out at 3 A.M. Reading was the master key to his new life and right living. This was the antidote for back sliding and sinful ways. He stated, *"The ability to read awoke within me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive."* Islam encourages literacy because Muslims must read their holy book the "Koran," like Christians and Jews, they are people of the "book."

Throughout his reading he looked for examples of how whites had exploited native peoples and how these natives had organized themselves into revolutionary groups to regain their independence. He especially loved reading about the Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta, the *"burning spear,"* and of how Kenyans won their independence from Britain.⁷ He was also fond of the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson. Leaders of African American slave revolts, like Nat Turner, gave him powerful examples of armed struggles for freedom. The more he read the closer he became to Elijah Muhammad, who taught him that history had been whitened and distorted. Thinking

back to his school textbooks he remembered that the horrors of slavery and the accomplishments of African Americans were barely mentioned in school. Yet, the Nation of Islam stressed both in its teaching.

Malcolm was transformed from a hater of religion into a minister for Islam. His inmates were shocked. Nonetheless, due to his eloquence many came to hear the prison preacher. By mixing the glories of African civilizations with a condemnation of the evils of white society he attracted many followers. His claim that, " 'The white man is the devil', is the ...echo of the black convict's lifelong experience."

Malcolm X's new identity and new attitude convinced the authorities that he had reformed. To some, he was now a model prisoner. Prison authorities granted him an early release in 1952. He had only served 6 years of his 10 year sentence. His brother Wilfred found him a job in a Detroit furniture store. The first items he bought were symbolic of his new self. He bought eyeglasses, a watch, and a suitcase. Having ruined his eyes reading by dim light in prison, the eye glasses represented his new vision of himself and the world. Feeling that his new ministry would require lots of travel the suitcase meant that he was ready to go wherever the Nation of Islam needed him. The watch reminded him that time was running out. He vowed not waste one minute. His mission was to convert as many blacks as possible and to liberate them. The watch symbolized his need to work rapidly.

Temple Number One in Detroit became Malcolm's spiritual home.⁸ He involved himself in its work. This mosque was the first established by Fard and Elijah so it was considered sacred to Malcolm X. Here Malcolm X met his idol, Elijah Muhammad. He

believed that Elijah had saved him from degradation, crime, and corruption. Elijah acted like a father toward Malcolm. Malcolm X sought Elijah's permission to go *fishing* (recruiting) for converts among the youth. He believed that if they came to the mosque their elders would follow. Permission was granted. A new era of expansion began for the Nation.

Malcolm X preached an "independence program for the black man." This won over many skeptical ghetto youth who became avid supporters of Islam. Malcolm started a new tradition of recruiting by fishing for converts in pool halls, bars, and street corners. He used slang to get people's attention. Within a month Malcolm X tripled the attendance at Detroit's Temple Number One. Catchy statements like, "The man who tosses worms into the river is not necessarily a friend of the fish" made people laugh and accept his point. He urged them to stop straightening their hair, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, gambling, and to learn to be proud of their beautiful natural selves. He would say, "The fish who took the man with the worms for a friend, usually ended up in the frying pan." His wit was like bait which hooked many new recruits. He was appointed assistant minister at Temple Number One. His new career was launched. Muhammad saw Malcolm as his best student; was a charismatic, charming, energetic, entertaining, and spiritual superstar.

The Nation asked Malcolm to return to Boston to organize a temple. His sermons appealed to blacks who wanted to stop depending upon "the white slave master" for everything. He ignited black imaginations by telling crowds, "We never can win our freedom and justice and equality until we are doing something for ourselves." Although

Malcolm's ex-criminal friends thought that his religion was a new confidence game, his congregation was thriving only three months after arriving in Boston. The word went out on the "wire" or gossip network - Detroit Red is dead and he has been resurrected as Malcolm X. Malcolm's success impressed Elijah, who quickly sent him to Philadelphia to organize another temple. The same success story repeated itself. Malcolm was now playing a major role in building the Nation of Islam into a powerful and wealthy religion.

Elijah now decided to send this avenger of Allah on his most challenging mission, to organize a mosque in Harlem. Malcolm and his converts sought recruits from storefront churches, common in poor black neighborhoods. After church services ended he would confront the congregation with charges that their's was a slave master's religion. (Malcolm X, 1968) Many Baptist ministers, hearing him speak, converted to Islam and brought their followers with them. To some, he was like a magnet.

Malcolm was a man with enormous energy. He organized adult education classes and debates in the mosque. On top of this, he found time to help organize over two dozen other mosques in every major city from coast to coast. As membership rolls swelled and money poured in, the Muslims began to buy real estate and small businesses. Farms, bakeries, restaurants, clothing stores, even factories provided the Nation of Islam with money to build new mosques and business ventures. Some of these became the pride of the urban African American community, for Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Their meat processing plant and restarunt on Chicago's Southside provide but two examples. These assets attracted converts from the middle class, who were attracted by the trappings of wealth.

Men in the temples were organized into close, unified, cohesive, self-defense groups known as the "*Fruit of Islam*." Many were trained experts in the martial arts and were respected and feared. Moral instruction and religious training were as important as self-defense lessons. The women were organized into the Muslim Sisters groups. They were highly respected, but , expected to be subordinate to their men. In meetings men and women sat in separate areas. Men were seated in front and women in the rear.

The strict religious and moral codes of the Muslims and their self-discipline frightened many people away who might have converted. Malcolm X used this fact in his sermons by declaring that whites wanted to keep blacks disorganized, lazy, and without hope. This made them easy to control. The Nation asked for a total change in beliefs and values. They sought to create a new cultural consciuosness and new identity for blacks. Malcolm charged that without knowledge of their past it would be impossible for blacks to prepare for the future or even understand the present.

At Temple Number 7 in New York Malcolm X organized "*family life*" classes to teach husbands how to behave well and wives too. He organized healthy activities for the entire temple community such as baseball, football, and basketball games to keep everyone healthy. He gave lessons on food and diet. He organized reading circles to develop the minds of those in his temple and he encouraged them to think for themselves. Malcolm organized self-defense lessons for his "Fruit of Islam" to enable them to protect other Temple members and themselves. In short, he became a father figure for the entire Temple and they became enlightened, progressive Muslims in turn. Malcolm X truly loved Black people and did everthing within his power to make them healthy, happy, and

powerful. Malcolm's presence elevated and benefited all who knew him; there is little wonder that he was so beloved, but even Malcolm had enemies within Islam and without.

His message was catching on in urban ghettos, yet statisticians claim that at its height less than 4% of African Americans ever converted to Islam. Numbers do not tell the whole story. Malcolm appealed to many who would never consider converting.

They identified with his message, just as today's "hip Hop Generation" does. (Kitwana, 2006)

As Malcolm's fame grew so did that of a Christian minister named Martin Luther King, Jr.. Martin began organizing the Civil Rights Movement. He hoped to tear down the walls of segregation in the American South. King won praise from most of the nation except Malcolm, who did not agree with his non-violent tactics or King's goal of integration. He was one of King's first public critics. He argued that blacks did not want to sit next to whites on toilets. Instead, they wanted to rule a land of their own. He believed that when attacked by whites, blacks should defend themselves, with bullets if necessary. The only thing that Malcolm liked about King was his aggressive protest against discrimination and his confrontational style, because these boosted black pride.

Malcolm X once noted:

"I think that all of us should be critics of each other. Whenever you can't stand criticism you can never grow. I don't think that it serves any purpose for the leaders of our people to waste their time fighting each other needlessly. I think that we accomplish more when we sit down in private and iron out whatever differences that may exist and try and then do something constructive for the benefit of our people. But on the other hand, I don't think that we should be above criticism. I don't think that anyone should be above criticism." (Malcolm X, 1989)

In 1957 Malcolm X led the Fruit of Islam in a confrontation in Harlem. The police had attacked and arrested a young Muslim. Malcolm X demanded to see the man. Noting that he was injured, Malcolm ordered the police to rush him to Harlem hospital. Malcolm and a huge crowd waited outside, in complete silence until given word that the man was treated. With one wave of his hand Malcolm X dispersed this massive crowd. Frightened by Malcolm's power one policeman commented, "This is too much power for one man to wield." From that moment on Malcolm X was seen as a major African American leader and a threat to the status quo. I hasten to add, however, that Malcolm X never ordered nor participated in violent attacks against any individual or group despite his willingness to use violence in self-defense.

Malcolm sued the New York police for attacking the Nation and won. His followers loved him, and politicians feared him. Americans love winners and despise losers. As he spoke out against oppression and police brutality in the ghetto, he became a spokesman for the urban poor. He urged the poor to stop being passive and to stop putting themselves down. They were encouraged to stand up to the powers that kept them down. He argued that blacks could no longer afford to wait for whites to solve their problems for them. He called for an immediate revolt against white power. Thus, he became entangled in the growing Civil Rights struggle as a spokesman for the frustration of angry ghetto blacks.

Malcolm's prominence sky rocketed after a television documentary featured him in a program titled "The Hate That Hate Produced." Journalist, Mike Wallace, shocked America by revealing the beliefs of the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, who articulated

their position clearly. For the first time white Americans saw how deep black resentment against white injustice could become. Suddenly, many whites who had feared Martin Luther King, Jr. discovered that he was an attractive alternative. The country now feared a *race war*. Malcolm's rhetoric was provocative, some called it inflammatory.

Capitalizing on this publicity the Nation began publishing a newspaper called "Muhammad Speaks" from the basement of Malcolm's home. The paper's constant attacks against white racism made it an instant success in the ghettos. The Fruit of Islam sold it on street corners in the ghettos and its circulation climbed to 500,000 copies per week. This made it the most widely read black newspaper in America. Always dressed in a dark suit and a tie Malcolm did not look like a ghetto warrior, but that was how people viewed him, both in print and in person. He showed a deep sympathy for the homeless, the poor, and the black race in all his writing and in his speeches.

In 1958 Malcolm X married Betty "X" of the New York Temple. She was a nurse and a teacher at the temple. Malcolm respected, but did not trust most women. Betty won him over by making it clear to him that the black struggle would be foremost in their lives. They had five daughters in their East Elmhurst, Queens home. He treasured his family, but believed that there was only one solution for America's racial problems: total separation of the races. Blacks must unite and form their own nation within America, or in Africa. Why he did not respond to Marcus Garvey's call to go "Back to Africa," especially to Liberia, where Garvey attempted to buy five million acres of land remains a mystery. Until the races separated America would not have peace.

As it became clear that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's was bearing few fruits, growing numbers of blacks began sympathizing with Malcolm's position. Even today the urban underclass that was left out of the benefits of the Civil Rights Movement has rediscovered Malcolm X and embraced his philosophy once again. It speaks to their needs and desires for advancement. For some, non-violence has yielded few results. They are ready to try violence and glorify “gun culture” and the cult of the urban “Bad Man.” A Muslim song titled "White Man's Heaven; Black Man's Hell" could be heard throughout many ghettos. It was composed and sung by Louis X, later known as Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Boston Temple. Many ghetto blacks believed that they were being forced to live an American nightmare, rather than the American Dream.

Malcolm X was uncompromising. He demanded that white society give blacks one seventh of the national budget as "*reparations*" for the money and lives lost during slavery. Conservative blacks urged him to drop this claim, but he noted that Japanese Americans were planning to sue the American government on similar grounds. They did win their case and they were awarded twenty billion dollars in reparations by the U.S. Congress. (Robinson, 2001) The Japanese were later awarded billions of dollars in reparations. This subject is still considered taboo in all but the most radical black intellectual circles. Congressman John Conyers has brought up this issue every year for twenty years, but, his white colleagues will not allow Congress to even debate the issue much less pay reparations to African Americans. (Robinson, 2001; Berry, 2005) Malcolm warned, "*We do not forget, we do not forgive.*" Whites began to label Malcolm X a demagogue, an extremist, and a hatemonger who destroyed good relations between the races. In other words he was not an “Uncle Tom,” or a “sell out.”

To charges that he was an extremist, he replied, *"Yes I am an extremist. The black race here in North America is in extremely bad condition."* Malcolm X also responded that he was at war with Uncle Toms and Orios who were black on the outside, but white on the inside because they did not have the interest of blacks at heart. He called such blacks "so-called leaders and puppets." He ridiculed anyone who believed that there would be major racial reforms by the government, as a result of non-violence. *"Revolutions,"* he noted, *"are rarely bloodless."*

“And in my opinion the young generation of whites, blacks, browns, whatever else there is, you’re living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there’s got to be change. People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built, and the only way it’s going to be built is with extreme methods. I for one will join in with anyone, I don’t care what color you are, as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exist on this earth.” (Malcolm X, 1970)

In 1962, Elijah Muhammad's health was failing and he appointed Malcolm X as national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. People began to think of him as Elijah's successor. He could speak directly for Elijah. This aroused jealousy within the Nation of Islam. There is a Swahili proverb which states, “Kikulacho ni kinguoni mwako,” meaning, “it is that which is in your clothing or close to you which bites you(referring to insect bites).” Soon Malcolm X suspected other ambitious Muslim leaders of plotting to turn Elijah Muhammad against him. Malcolm's name and picture appeared less often in the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* and the editorship was taken from him. He was then told to decline all invitations to appear on television. The die was cast. His star within the Nation of Islam was fading, and falling fast.

Also, in 1962 police attacked Muslims in Los Angeles. Malcolm X wanted to attack the police to show that Muslims rights would be defended at any cost. He was told to confine his attacks to verbal ones. He did not like this and feared that Muslims would lose their reputation for being militant.

Malcolm X boycotted the 1963 Civil Rights "March on Washington." He denounced it as a waste of time. He declared, "I don't believe we're going to overcome by singing. If you're going to get yourself a .45 and start singing 'We Shall Overcome,' I'm with you." Despite his pessimism about the value of protest marches for creating change, the Congress did pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Economic Opportunity Act. But, to Malcolm X these new laws were just window dressing which would not substantially change the terrible condition of most ghetto blacks. *"You don't stick a knife in a man's back nine inches, then pull it out six inches and say you are making progress,"* Malcolm complained. He was angry, bitter and resentful. Oddly, most ghetto and poor Blacks have yet to benefit from the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960's as the debacle in New Orleans following hurricane Katrina revealed.

Power struggles within the Nation of Islam forced Malcolm to put the black revolution on hold. His supporters informed him that a rumor alleging misconduct by Elijah Muhammad had surfaced. The "Messenger" was rumored to have fathered four children by two women. These ex-secretaries of Elijah Muhammad were suing him for child support. Since adultery is a major offense within the Nation of Islam this violation of their ethical code would be deeply disturbing, if proven. Malcolm X interviewed these women. They provided him with evidence that he found convincing and also told

him that Elijah predicted that Malcolm would turn against him. Malcolm confronted Elijah with these facts and Elijah did not deny them. This turned Malcolm against Elijah. He found it hard to admire a leader whom he now considered a hypocrite. Perhaps this was naive of Malcolm since power serves as an aphrodisiac for women, many of whom find power seductive regardless of the man's vigor or looks.

Alienated, angry, and feeling betrayed Malcolm X learned on November 22, 1963 that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas, Texas. America grieved over this tragic loss. Obsessed with his own growing difficulties, Malcolm X said of Kennedy's death, "*...the chickens have come home to roost.*" (Karim, 1989) The media claimed that this meant that he was rejoicing over Kennedy's death. Malcolm disputed this. He said that what he meant was that America had created an environment so filled with hate and violence that whites were not content to just kill blacks. Their hatred was destroying them as well.⁹

Elijah Muhammad used this comment to renounce Malcolm X. He punished Malcolm X by suspending him as national spokesman for the Nation for 90 days. Elijah claimed that Muslims mourned Kennedy's death along with the rest of America. Elijah assured Lyndon Johnson that the rebellious Malcolm would be restrained. Following this announcement a rumor surfaced that Muslim assassins were plotting to kill Malcolm X. Elijah asked Malcolm to return to Chicago to face charges, from his principal rivals, that he was planning to destroy the Islamic movement. He was ordered to go back to New York and put out the fire that he had started. Many of Malcolm's Muslim brothers began

to avoid and isolate him. His second world and second identity were shaken to their very foundations. Malcolm said, "I felt like something in nature had failed...."

Malcolm X tried to keep this world from falling apart by courting a brilliant young boxer named *Cassius Clay*. He quietly converted Cassius to Islam. When Cassius won the world boxing championship he publicly announced that he had converted to Islam and changed his name to "*Mohammed Ali*." Malcolm thought that this would make Elijah happy because it gave the Nation of Islam tremendous publicity. Malcolm X hoped that Elijah would reinstate him, but his efforts failed. The United States Army tried to draft Mohammed Ali and make him a national hero. He declared himself a conscientious objector and refused induction. Ali angered the press by stating that he was opposed to the Vietnam War. He proclaimed, "*Ain't no Vietnamese ever called me a nigger.*" He urged young blacks to avoid the draft because it was asking them to kill other non-whites who were being oppressed on racial grounds, just like they were. This really angered many prominent Americans.

Ali's stand reflected Malcolm's influence. Malcolm had also refused to serve in the Armed Forces. When his Draft Board had asked Malcolm X what "Conscientious objection" meant, he replied, "When the white man asks me to go somewhere and fight and maybe die to preserve the way the white man treats the black man in America, then my conscious objects." The military gave him a deferred status. Elijah was not happy.

Malcolm was seen as a growing threat to the establishment. Instead of winning favor with Elijah for converting Mohammed Ali word was allegedly sent to Temple Seven in New York to Kill Malcolm X. Even his brother, Philbert X, denounced

Malcolm X as a traitor to his religion and a "*false prophet.*" With his world collapsing around him Malcolm X turned to the one source of strength that had never failed him - religion. It was by faith alone that he had journeyed this far.

**THIRD WORLD - THIRD IDENTITY,
EL-HAJJ MALIK EL-SHABAZZ – PAN-AFRICAN
REVOLUTIONARY**

In March of 1964, Malcolm X announced that he had quit the Nation of Islam. He formed a new organization - the *Muslim Mosque, Incorporated*, based in New York city. The goal of this organization was the elimination of, "...political oppression, economic exploitation and the social degradation suffered daily...", by millions of African Americans. Blacks from all religious persuasions and walks of life were invited to join. This was to become a revolutionary group. Malcolm planned to use it to usher in the final liberation of blacks in America. He sounded more like Jomo Kenyatta and Julius Nyerere than an African American leader.

With this new group as a base, Malcolm said that blacks must seize control of their communities and arm and train themselves. The Black Panther Party agreed with Malcolm X and began patrolling black communities with guns and bandeleros of bullets in full display. They said that they were doing this to protect youth from predatory drug dealers. They also set up school breakfast and lunch programs for free and were beginning to copy African Liberation Movements by creating free health clinics in

depressed areas of the inner city. Rather than lament problems they began solving them. They followed a model made successful by African liberation movements, such as FRELIMO in Mozambique. Malcolm became monomaniacal. He had tunnel vision and could see only one purpose, one goal, one reason for living - *revolution*. He said, "Like Samson, I am ready to pull down the white man's temple, knowing full well that I will be destroyed...." He now said that he was prepared to secure the freedom of African Americans, "...by any means necessary." (Breitman, 1965)

In a radical departure, Malcolm X announced that he would accept money from whites to support his revolution. Leaders of the Nation labeled Malcolm X a hypocrite and sued him to recover the deed to his home. Malcolm ignored this and went on preaching about Allah and political revolution. Freed from the doctrines of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm began to study Orthodox Islam through Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi. Shawarbi taught Malcolm to judge people by their faith in Islam and its principles, not by the color of their skin. Shawarbi also taught Malcolm to study the Koran. The Koran challenged many of the ideas Malcolm had learned while in the Nation. A third world was unfolding for Malcolm X.

All Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, are obligated to do so. Malcolm X borrowed money from his wealthy Boston sister, Ella and resolved to travel to the holiest city in the Islamic world - Mecca. In April of 1964, Malcolm quietly made his *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca. Another transformation would occur there and a third identity would emerge.

In Mecca Malcolm was astounded by the spirit of racial harmony and understanding that he saw. If you were a Muslim, you were a brother. He wrote, *"I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all..., irrespective of their color."* Having never been to Rome or other major religious centers, this was an impressive revelation for him. It opened his mind to new non-racial possibilities. Malcolm X began to dare to believe that all men were akin. Common faith melted the cruel barriers that bitterly divided Americans. One God had united people from every nation and race. Could this happen in America too?

New knowledge and new experiences bombarded Malcolm on this trip. He would never be the same. He now declared, *"I can get along with white people who can get along with me."* A new identity had crystallized. Malcolm X changed his name to *"El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz"* to symbolize this new self. On his return voyage home he stopped over in several African nations. Students in Nigeria bestowed another name upon him *"Omowale"* - the child who has come home - they adored him and he felt a strong bond of attachment to them. "I feel that I am at home," he said in Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah and other African leaders warmly received him and Malcolm X celebrated his 39th and last birthday in Algeria, on the African continent that he loved. Throughout this trip he told audiences that in all undeveloped countries that Third World people needed to unite to bring an end to economic exploitation and neo-imperialism that prevailed there.

When he returned he found that America too was changing. 1964 was "Freedom Summer" for supporters of racial integration, but it was the "Summer of Despair" for segregationists. The racial caste system was under assault and it was crumbling.

Malcolm decided that the time was right to form a black consciousness movement, which he called the Organization of Afro-American Unity(OAAU). This was a non-religious movement. It worked on projects such as voter registration drives, community development, drug rehabilitation programs and improving housing. Malcolm wanted the O.A.A.U. to become the foremost black nationalist organization in America, and indeed the world. His ultimate ambition was to destroy capitalism and replace it with socialism. At rallies he addressed this in coded language saying, *"Revolution is like a forest fire, it burns everything in its path."*

Lobbying efforts in the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity were used to argue that the world should condemn America because it tolerated racial discrimination. He pleaded with representatives of many nations, "Our problems are your problems." He found a responsive ear in Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, his hero.

Malcolm was by now obsessed. He said of America, *"We must make them see that we are the enemy. Let them turn the money for defense in our direction and either destroy us or cure the conditions that brought us to this point."* He was desperate. That same year J. Edgar Hoover, chief of the F.B.I. declared that African-American revolutionaries were the single greatest threat to America's internal security.¹⁰ He created Conintelpro and began assassinating many black leaders without apology or remorse.¹¹ Malcolm X in this climate sensed that for him, time was running out.

Followers of the Nation of Islam had begun assaulting his followers in mass in Boston and elsewhere. Some believe that Minister Farrakan instigated this by making certain remarks, whether this was his intention or not is not clear. Malcolm's own life was

spared only because he produced a shotgun during a confrontation. Death threats became common and the FBI kept him under constant watch. During this period he reached out to his old enemy Martin Luther King Jr. and these two leaders reconciled their past differences. An Arab proverb advises, *"The enemy of my enemy is my friend."* Malcolm X did not back down from the fight, rather he made a famous speech during which he told America that it was at a turning point in history. America could settle the race question, *"...by the ballot or the bullet."* (Breitman, 1965)

February 13, 1965, Malcolm's East Elmhurst home was firebombed. He and his family escaped, but their home was destroyed. His struggle had reached a new and dangerous level. Malcolm X believed that this was Elijah Muhammad's attempt to seek vengeance against him for challenging his leadership of the Nation of Islam. Some believed that Elijah's son should succeed his father. Malcolm even speculated that the FBI may have joined forces with the Nation to silence him.

Malcolm X was determined to continue his efforts. On February 21, 1965, he held his regular weekly meeting at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. That would be his last meeting. Talmadge Hayer, and two other Black Muslims rushed toward the stage as Malcolm X began to speak. They pumped a hail of bullets into his body until it lay lifeless on the stage. At the youthful age of 39 Malcolm X met a violent end at the hands of the people he loved and was sworn to liberate. At his funeral Ossie Davis declared, *"Our shining young black prince is dead."*

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion of the relocation and reconfiguration of black militancy in contemporary America may help us to understand the inner-relation between Islam and Black culture. Throughout the decade of the 1960's Islam seemed as if it could offer African Americans a solution to many of the worst problems facing us. By the 1980's and 90's we could see from events that unfolded in the Islamized Sudan, in Northern Nigeria, Libya, and Algeria that militant Islam had another face that would not and possibly could not solve our problems. *It was not a panacea.* The Hip Hop generation of African Americans do not look to Malcolm X as a saviour rather they view him as a cultural icon.¹⁴

The Taliban demonstrated that Islam too could lead to various forms of oppression against women, minorities, and others whom it viewed as less than equal. Like many other ideologies it can be very intolerant of differences in the wrong hands. In Darfur, Sudan. Combatants on both sides of the conflict are Sunni Muslims, yet the lighter skinned Arab Muslims oppress, enslave, and murder their darker skinned brothers in a racist war of aggression aimed at grabbing land from Africans and denying them an equal share of power and wealth in the central government. Osama bin Laden revealed himself to be a *racist* by calling for a jihad or Holy War against the Blacks who are merely defending their land against Arab racial aggression. A Northern Sudanese joke states that two Sudanese were in prison in Saudi Arabia, one was a light skinned Northern Sudanese Arab Muslim and the other was a dark skinned Muslim from Darfur. The Saudi prison guard tells the light skinned prisoner, "Hey, you slave come here." The dark skinned Muslim laughs and says, "Now I can die in peace, because I have lived to see you my light skinned brother called a slave." The Northern Sudanese Arab pauses

for a moment then replies, “Don’t be so quick to laugh my Black brother. I am called a slave for one day of my life, but you were born a slave and will always be a slave everyday of your miserable life.” This joke reveals the deep seated racism that permeates Northern Sudanese Arab culture, which views Blacks as sub-human cannibals who deserve whatever mean or foul treatment they receive. By backing this group Osama reveals the hidden racism that permeates the Arab Muslim world for the whole world to see. This should convince any thinking African American that Islam alone can not and will not solve our most deep seated racial problems. As the old saying goes, “The American government is bad! But, it is better than any other known form of government!” So like Malcolm X we seem to be destined to try to reform what we have rather than trade it for something worse.

American society is accustomed to thinking of Black culture as exclusively Christian, however, by examining Malcolm X’s life and the role of Islam in it we revealed that Islam has been a hidden dimension of Black culture in America for nearly 400 years. It is important to recognize that Islam is a legitimate part of our collective heritage in America, as is Christianity. It is time to stop being in denial. Perhaps the role of Islam and its contribution to the militant strike in Black culture need to be addressed more methodically.

Although Malcom X’s life was cut short, his mission of “Itijihad” or renewal and adaptation of Islam to the modern world and acclimatizing it to the American political system is one that we need to re-examine from a different point of view. Malcom succeeded in bringing Islam out of its subterranean existence into the seering light of

American debate and consciousness. This is why Malcom's message continues to resonate. Albeit in a cultural form, with African American and disenfranchised youth. In the twenty first century Malcom X has morphed into a cultural icon and the quintessential symbol of resistance to white supremacy and global domination by the white race.¹⁵

Malcolm X once noted:

"I don't go for anything that's non-violent and turn-the-other-cheekish. I don't see how any revolution – I've never heard of a non-violent revolution or a revolution that was brought about by turning the other cheek, and so I believe that *it is a crime for anyone to teach a person who is being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself.*" (Spellman, 1964:3)

Yet despite the prominence of his statue, the question remains of whether American Islam's moral reformation among African Americans will or even can eliminate the source of our grievances against a racist America. Will the African American struggle transform itself from a Civil Rights struggle into the Human Rights struggle that Malcolm X felt at the end of his life that we needed? Will Malcolm's struggle to reform Islam change the very soul of American culture? ¹⁶ The future of Black nationalism in America promises to be exciting as we watch it unfold in the remainder of the twenty first century.

END NOTES

1. Youth in the USA and the Islamic world are re-examing the roots of radicalism and violence . Militant nationalism is rising in favor as more moderate approaches appear to be failing globally. The failure of moderates has opened the flood gates of radicalism on the streets of New York, Bagdad, and Jeruslam and is giving birth to a renewed culture of violence that has not been seen since the anti-colonial independence struggles of the 1950's and 60's. In this environment violence is seen as a morally justifiable means of securing rights and upward mobility. Ergo, the rise of "Gangsta Rap" and other forms of music which glorify violence and anti-authoritarianism. Everywhere that peace and dialogue fail, interst in radical solutions achieves new legitimacy among disillusioned urban youth. As long as leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. were reasonably successful, radical militant ideologies were marginalized and in many places discredited.
2. This made America a more attractive place for Muslim migration from around the world and provided Black Muslims with global linkages through Islam. Malcolm X was attracted to Islam for reasons similar to those that attract disillusioned Muslim youth to Hamas and other militant Arab movements.
3. Former U.S. Senator Carol Moseley-Braun told me a story of how her great great grandfather was a Muslim slave with the name "Bey" from Senegal just before I departed for Senegal to conduct research during the

summer of 2005. Bey was also a title used by Turkish Youth, as well as by Noble Drew Ali's "Morrish Science Temple" members as an honorific title. Militant youth in the USA and the Islamic world are re-examining the roots of radicalism and violence. Militant nationalism is rising in favor as more moderate approaches appear to be failing globally. The failure of moderates has opened the flood gates of radicalism on the streets of New York, Bagdad, and Jeruslam and is giving birth to a renewed culture of violence that has not been seen since the anti-colonial independence struggles of the 1950's and 60's. In this environment violence is seen as a morally justifiable means of securing rights and upward mobility. Ergo, the rise of "Gangsta Rap" and other forms of music which glorify violence and anti-authoritarianism. Everywhere that peace and dialogue fail, interst in radical solutions achieves new legitimacy among disillusioned urban youth. As long as leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. were reasonably successful, radical militant ideologies were marginalized and in many places discredited.

The title "Bey" was also used by various Egyptian administrations for people who held some measure of power in areas such as Egypt that they controlled after Mohamed Ali established Turkish rule in that nation. Ambassador Braun is a practicing Christian, but, she has a healthy respect for Islam due to her unique family history. Islam remains embedded within the souls of many Africans Americans who now practice Christianity.

4. Through Malcolm's life we saw how many African Americans went from believing that *Black men are superior to white men* to following the five pillars of Islam, i.e., professing the Oneness of God, professing that the prophet Mohamed was God's last true prophet and His messenger, praying five times each day, giving alms to the poor, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and making a holy pilgrimage or hajj and the belief that Islam appeals to all humans equally regardless of race.
5. My wife is Tanzanian and we named our second born son La Salle officially, but within the family he took on her father's African name "Mahimbo," which means someone who can kick you to death because he is a good fighter. Her father earned this name when he served as a soldier in the "King's African Rifles" for the British during the colonial era. My son's Tanzanian cousins all refer to him lovingly as "Bimbi."
6. Inmates referred to Malcolm X as "Satan" because he was so angry that he just wanted to destroy everyone and everything around him. As the Rastafarians say, he just wanted to pull Babylon or the Western world down and humiliate it. He wanted to make the Western world suffer as he was suffering, nothing more.
7. Black businessmen in Chicago honored Kenyatta by naming popular bars, the "Burning Spear." This bar was on Garfield Boulevard 5500 south.

8. The fact that the first Black Muslim Temple or mosque is in Detroit may in part explain the large settlement of Arabs in Detroit today.
9. During the “apartheid” era South Africa used its military and police forces to brutally suppress Blacks. These white men became so accustomed to using violence that when they went home they brutalizing and often killed their own wives and children.
10. One evening while watching the “Charlie Rose” show on T.V., I was stunned to hear former Secretary of State Brezinky announce that African American radicals were the greatest threat to U.S. security not Russia, China or radicals from the Middle East. Needless to say I was disappointed by this statement. African American Culture encourages a healthy mistrust of the U.S. government, because historically Federal troops were used by slave owners as a last line of defense when slaves revolted or attempted to run away. We see government as untrustworthy and secretly suspect that they mean us no good. The *Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* in which close to 500 Black men who had syphilis were told that their disease was being treated while all the time they were being allowed to die to see how long it took for this disease to kill humans and exactly what damage it would do to the body reinforce such suspicions.
11. Such mindless violence eliminated many of the bravest, brightest, and most committed young African American. Fortunately, a few like Congressman Bobby Rush from Chicago survived. Rush is keep the faith by delivering the

social and other services that his constituents need. Congressman Rush is a former Black Panther. Congressman John Lewis, who is militantly non-violent marched to Selma with Dr. King.

12. I want to go on record as a supporter of Israel's right to exist. By pointing out that Islam is a legitimate aspect of African American culture I am in no way supporting anti-semitism and I want to be as transparent in this regard as possible. What I am discussing in this part is simply historical fact.

13. Farrakan's "Million Man March" attracted African American Christians and secular individuals as well as Muslims. His message of Black dignity, pride, and redemption resonates well throughout the African American community. Neither his message or his appeal are confined to the Muslim community.

14. We can only wonder how many black youth trapped in inner city ghettos identify with Malcolm's struggle to define his identity in American society, in the face of oppression. Each of the worlds that Malcolm X knew offered him opportunities and challenges. Each world helped him to grow. Each world revealed another facet of life in America. Each identity broadened his vision of the world and his own potential. Each forced him to return to the question of what it means to be black in white America.

Malcolm X's body was killed yet his ideas and example live on. By making him a *martyr*, his enemies made him more powerful in death than

in life. Spike Lee's movie "*Malcolm X*" is a eulogy which helps to keep that memory alive for African American militants who are still struggling for self determination and simple justice. For them Malcolm X is a role model they can admire. Whether you consider Malcolm a "sinner" or a "saint" there can be no denying that he profoundly influenced the evolution of American history. My colleague Dr. Stefan Bradley argues that Malcolm X had a less profound influence upon African American history than many other leaders because he did not leave an institution which continues to help us. He feels that Booker T. Washington had a great influence because he left Tuskegee University and the Negro Business League, which still help thousands each year. Martin Luther King Jr. was a great leader in his opinion because he left a legacy of Civil Rights Bills as a result of his protest which enable us to vote, buy homes wherever we want, and to enjoy what remains of "affirmative action."

I would argue that we draw inspiration and hope for a better future from many of our past leader who left no institutional legacy, such as Cinque, Nat Turner, Denmark Vessy, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman,

Sojourner Truth, and Malcolm X. Sometimes giving a people hope is the most important legacy one can leave to them. The idea that African Americans are a mighty nation and can do whatever they determine that they need to do collectively is a treasure beyond measure. For this reason, I rank Malcolm X in the company of Dr. King and Booker T. Washington. Malcolm X lives on in our hearts and minds. As

long as he remains in our thoughts his teachings and his influence on us
will never die. It is possible that the Hip Hop Movement's embrace of
Malcolm and the movie "Malcolm X," will inspire new research on
black leaders that will filter into American schools and remove the
ignorance that makes some children call him Malcolm "ten."

African American scholars are accustomed to thinking of Black culture being exclusively Christian historically, however, what an examination of Malcolm X's life reveals is that *Islam has been a hidden dimension of Black culture in America for nearly 400 years*. It is important to recognize that this is also a legitimate part of our collective heritage in America and that it in fact ante-dates Christianity. We have been in *denial* for too long as a culture Malcolm's life also reminds us that we have a long history of militant resistance to oppression within our culture and perhaps Islam has contributed to this tradition in ways that are yet to be documented and honored. Modern Muslims stress the *futility of integration*. They argue that there is no precedent for the absorption of African Americans in mainstream white America, as the Honorable Minister Farakan did recently on Tavis Smiley's televised "State of Black America" program. Farakan believes that whites are unwilling to ever treat African Americans as equals or allow many to earn middle class incomes regardless of education or other qualifications. He believes that they are inherently unfair and unjust. The best that African Americans

can expect from intergration is to be absorbed into a lower class disenfranchised by automation and out sourcing of jobs.

15. This reminds me of Southern literature and one of its stock characters,"*The Tragic Mulatto*," who thinks that because he has some white blood he is entitled to be equal with whites. His pursuit of this goal leads to tragedy because to maintain white supremacy, whites will lie cheat, besmirch his character and assassinate his reputation, spread rumors to get him fired from his job and basically mount a "*dirty tricks*" campaign to bring him down even if a good "*beat down*" is required. If all else failed, they would claim that you tried to rape a white woman and lynch you. They would do anything to maintain their superiority over Blacks and this led to tragedy for the mulatto. Farrakan seems to think that modern modern African Americans act like the *classic tragic mulattoes*. Perhaps we are wrong to think that whites can ever be "*fair*" or just toward Black people. I personally want to believe that they can, maybe this is why certain tragedies have occurred in my life. Muslims are now and have always been proud of their American heritage. However, they urge African Americans to be polite but distant in their current dealings with whites and to be non-violent *if provoked*. But, if attacked, Muslims say that African Americans should defend themselves by any means available to them. They still preach that the solution to America's race problem today is either to give Blacks several Southern state and allow us to develop Bantustan like states that we control or to send us back to

Africa. Yet, Farrakan himself who is a Nigerian chief has chosen to remain in the U.S.A. and organize a “*Million Man March*” to fight for black dignity and equality here. Black Muslim membership today hovers around the 250,000 member mark.¹⁰ This is a far cry for the 500 members of the Nation of Islam when Malcom X joined the group.

Malcolm was the crystallization of the “*angry Black male*,” and of the revolutionary impulse that still lives in many ghettos across America and an increasingly ghettoized world where poor people are treated as global “*niggers*” regardless of religion, or race. These are Franz Fanon’s “*Wretched of the Earth*.” Arab youth feel that in a unipolar world where America holds all of the aces in an international card game, their unemployment and misery must be caused by America, so they direct their anger and efforts to achieve relief from their suffering at the sole hegemon “*America*,” and Malcolm X becomes one of their heroes as a man whose message was designed to attract and organize alienated youth within the capitalist system.

- a. This is why Malcolm’s message continues to resonate among youth here and abroad. Malcolm is seen as their savior, a man who loved these disillusioned youth so much that he allowed himself to be martyred for them. He remains the quintessential symbol of resistance against *the “man”* worldwide and is stronger in death than he ever was in life. And each day that globalization hurts another group his statue increases and his appeal to those who want to resist this trend. His

message to eliminate exploitation and injustice is as strong as ever and the Muslim tradition in African American culture continues to inform our collective thinking and actions whether we are Muslim or not. Muslim never did believe and still do not that when assaulted you should turn the other cheek. When violence is directed at them they believe that they should strike back in self defense. To many people this “Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” philosophy is a sensible and it has echoed do through the ages since the first Muslim landed upon American shores hndreads of years ago.

16. Where Muslim slaves the first African American militants? Where is Malcolm’s “Muslim Mosque Incorporated today and what message do they have for Black culture today? Will American Islam begin a moral reformation among African Americans that will eliminate vice, corrupt, drugs, crime, and black on black violence?⁹ Will the African American struggle transform itself from a Civil Rights struggle into an international Human Rights struggle as Malcolm predicted? If so will aliented Arab youth link with youth in this country to fight a common foe? The future of Black nationalism promises to be exciting and fascinating to watch as it unfold informed by Malcolm’s energy and promise and vision.

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