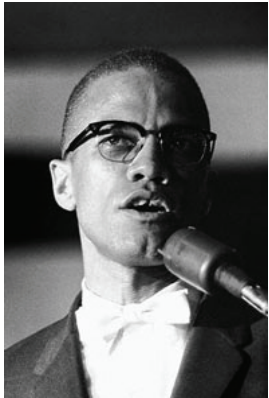


# Malcolm X: Life and Death

1925-1965



Malcolm X, originally Malcolm Little, was born in Omaha, Nebraska. After moving to the Midwest with his family at a young age, he suffered great tragedy with the alleged suicide of his father and the subsequent institutionalization of his mother. After spending his remaining childhood years in foster homes with his siblings, Malcolm dropped out of middle school, and a few years later moved to Boston and found work on the streets as a shoe-shiner, drug dealer, gambler and burglar.

It was while serving a ten year sentence in prison for burglary that Malcolm X became passionately committed to furthering his education. It was also at this time that Malcolm's brother alerted him to the teachings of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and encouraged Malcolm to convert to the Muslim faith. Intrigued

by the NOI, Malcolm began studying the work of Elijah Muhammad who preached about systemic oppression and fought for a world separate from one inhabited by White people.

By the time Malcolm X was released from prison he was a devout follower and soon after meeting Muhammad and agreeing to work for NOI, changed his surname to "X". The change was intended to symbolize the shedding of what he thought of as his slave name as well as the "x" that many slaves received as a brand on their upper arm.

Malcolm X was soon appointed as a minister and national spokesperson for Nation of Islam.

He was also charged with establishing new mosques around the country. He returned to Boston and became the Minister of the NOI's Temple # 11. He was also selected to lead the NOI's mosque #7 on Lenox Avenue in Harlem and is credited with other establishments in Detroit, Michigan and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His public speaking and media appearances also contributed to increased awareness and interest in the Nation of Islam. In fact, Malcolm X is largely credited with the increase in the NOI membership from 500 in 1952 to 30,000 in 1963.

The public nature of his work, however, led the FBI and national government to pay very close attention to Malcolm X. At certain points the NOI organizations Malcolm X was involved in were infiltrated by the FBI and the group's communications and activities were heavily monitored.

In the early 1960's Malcolm was made aware of accusations of adultery against Elijah Muhammad. The women who Muhammad was said to have extramarital affairs with were all women within the Nation of Islam organization and the shock of the news proved to be a difficult test of Malcolm X's faith. Upon confirmation of these rumors from Muhammad, Malcolm X was not only hurt by the deception of his mentor, but felt guilt for leading so many people into an organization that he now believed to be deceitful.



Soon after this discovery, Malcolm X was silenced for 90 days by none other than Elijah Muhammad for publicly criticizing John F. Kennedy directly after his assassination. While he respected the order, it was not long after that he publicly announced his separation from the Nation of Islam and founded his own religious organization, the Muslim Mosque, Inc.

After spending time on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, sharing his beliefs and visions with people of all different cultures, Malcolm X returned to the United States with a new energy and vision for his work. He began to not only direct his work towards African Americans but to people of all races and ethnicities. He preached about human rights, freedom, action, and community building. While re-establishing himself, however, the old tensions with the Nation of Islam were still festering and rumors began that Malcolm X had been targeted for assassination. Attempts were made on his life and threats were made against his wife, Betty, and four daughters. In February of 1965 his family home was firebombed, and while everyone made it out alive, no one was ever charged with the crime.

It was only one week later, on February 21, 1965, in Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom when three men rushed Malcolm X on stage during a speaking engagement and shot him 15 times at close range. He was pronounced dead upon arrival at New York's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. Later that year his wife Betty gave birth to their twin daughters.

*"Power in defense of freedom is greater than power in behalf of tyranny and oppression, because power, real power, comes from our conviction which produces action, uncompromising action."*  
-Malcolm X

Three men, Talmadge Hayer, Norman 3X Butler, and Thomas 15X Johnson, were all convicted of the murder in March of 1966.

The legacy of Malcolm X and his work have inspired and informed many others in their fight for social justice and equality. He has been immortalized not only in his work, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X", but in other books, documentaries, and movies, and remains a historical figure admired by all generations.