ABSTRACT

The Mind of Malcolm

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Typically history has remembered Malcolm X as the militant minister to the Nation of Islam. Through various media such as music and film, popular culture has memorialized Malcolm X as the American icon willing to achieve civil rights, “by any means necessary.” Each of these descriptions warrants elements of truth yet not the whole truth because they fail to delve deeper into the inner workings of Malcolm’s mind to discover how, what, when, and why he thought he could change the world. The mind of Malcolm, much like the man, was a complex creature of contradiction and intrigue. In order to understand and appreciate the worldwide ramifications and universal legacy of Malcolm’s mind, this work aims to explore and examine the ideological genesis, development, and legacy to one of America’s most misunderstood figures of the twentieth century.
The Mind of Malcolm

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of History

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To those who dare to be free
CHAPTER ONE

I Consider Myself Malcolm

May I ask you a personal question? And I said, “Yes.” Because they always do anyway.
She said, “What kind of last name do you have that begins with X?” I said, “That’s it,
X.” So she said, “X?” “Yes.” “Well, what is your first name?” I said, “Malcolm.” So
she waited for about ten minutes and then she said, “You’re not Malcolm X.” And I said,
“Yes, I’m Malcolm X. Why, what’s the matter?” And she said, “Well, you’re not what I
was looking for.”

Malcolm X, “At the Audubon,” in Malcolm X Speaks

X. Throughout history the symbol “X” has served a wide array of purposes and
has carried a diverse set of meanings, especially in the American lexicon. Scientifically
the “X” has been used to represent the unknown, concepts beyond the capacity of the
human mind to understand or define, such as the X-ray or the X-men. Socially, the term
X-factor explains an element in a situation that has been unnoticed, neglected, and yet
considered highly capable and volatile. The “X” definitely has a negative connotation
attached to it expressing a sense of danger or demise. Most labels on items containing a
poison will be marked with the scarlet “X,” or the very reference of adult entertainment
brings about the triple X, thrice the threat and risk. The “X” has also functioned as a
symbol for an intersection or a crossroads, requiring a decision and an action towards a
specific path, otherwise to remain fixated in limbo. Each of the aforementioned versions
of the “X” are dramatically displayed throughout the life and legacy of Malcolm Little,

From his fiery rhetoric to his sly yet disarming grin, Malcolm X has been the
subject of interest among friends and enemies, of all colors and all shapes, at home and
abroad. Malcolm’s life as referred to in his *Autobiography* had been a chronology of “changes.”¹ These changes in Malcolm’s life were complemented with various shades of the “X” and accompanied with distinct aliases and personas, each reflecting remarkable and dynamic life experiences, which altered Malcolm’s ideological views of himself, society, and the world. How has “His”tory and her patriots of the pen depicted the life and thought of Malcolm X? Was Malcolm the “mascot” Malcolm Little, was he the hustler “Detroit Red,” was he the militant Minister Malcolm X, was he the human rights advocate El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, or was he simply, as he most likely would have preferred, a human being? This historiographical examination of Malcolm X’s ideological development reflects a select analysis including an autobiography, biographies, ideological studies, compiled writings, speeches, and letters, respectively. This historiographical sketch does not represent a definitive study of all works on the man and his mind. The scope of this chapter explores the historical paint and pieces used to create a mosaic of one of America’s most enigmatic and provocative characters to mark his “X” in history.

“You’re another one of the white man’s tools sent to spy!”² This is how the relationship between Malcolm X and Alex Haley, later famed author and screenwriter, began in 1959. On one occasion during their collaboration on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Haley recalled a phone call from Malcolm around four in the morning as, “His voice said, ‘I trust you seventy percent’ - and then he hung up the phone.”³ Toward

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²Ibid., 389.

³Ibid., 403.
the end of their relationship, Haley was close to finishing the autobiography and presented Malcolm with a contract for the book. Malcolm apprehensively reviewed the agreement and suggested that his lawyer have a look at it first. Later on during that same day Malcolm, with an awkward sense of urgency, pulled the contract out and signed it telling Haley, “I trust you.”

After serving twenty years in the U.S. Coast Guard, Alex Haley pursued a career in journalism and found himself writing columns for The Reader’s Digest and Playboy. The Autobiography of Malcolm X was Haley’s first at bat with a major book publication. The arrangement of their working union involved Malcolm recollecting and dictating his life from birth to present as Haley took notes and typed. Over the course of several planned and unplanned meetings, casual conversations, letter and phone exchanges, Haley organized the moments of Malcolm’s life into a gripping exposé on an extraordinary figure in American history.

Often referred to and recognized as an American literary classic, The Autobiography of Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley serves as an essential primary source necessary for a basic understanding of the man called X. The autobiography has also been used as the foundational skeleton for numerous biographical and ideological works on Malcolm transcending multiple mediums of thought and communication.

Outside of being a so-called first-hand account, dictated by the man himself, The Autobiography, as any other historical work, is subject to criticism due specifically to the biases of the men involved and their intents in the project. Initially Malcolm sought to create the body of work as an example of a dumb, deaf, and blind so-called Negro, saved

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by the truth that emanated from the leader to the Nation of Islam (NOI) and final messenger of Allah, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. When Malcolm later defected from the Nation, which occurred in the midst of work on the autobiography, Malcolm became more critical of Muhammad and removed the NOI as the sole beneficiary of the project. He even considered altering the earlier manuscript written before the break but was convinced otherwise by Haley. Malcolm’s recollection of his life presents another debate, over the issue of selective memory. As most would suspect of someone telling the inner most thoughts and moments of their life, what Malcolm considered pertinent to his aims, as mentioned earlier, would be stressed while other moments that do not necessarily serve the purpose were not mentioned. Malcolm understood the significance of the project in regard to its use as a means to recruit a wider audience to the movement of the NOI and therefore initially crafted experiences to fit the mold of his intentions. As the work progressed, his intentions progressed, creating an invaluable work that carefully documents the ideological developments of Malcolm X.

As mentioned earlier, The Autobiography established the groundwork for more critical and extensive research to produce full-fledged biographical studies, such as the work of Peter Goldman entitled The Death and Life of Malcolm X. Goldman begins his treatise with an unorthodox admission, “This is a white book about Malcolm X.”

Goldman was a white American journalist, author, and editor of Newsweek, who conducted several interviews with Malcolm from 1962 to 1964. In preparing a biography on one of America’s most definitive black men of the twentieth century from the

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perspective of a white man, Goldman understood the obvious obstacles he would encounter.

Goldman’s interests in a biography on Malcolm stemmed from the self-proclaimed fact that he knew Malcolm yet did not consider himself a “friend” or “confidant” of the man, which allowed him to research and document his life objectively. Goldman presents a remarkable examination that critically peers into the recognized and mysterious aspects of Malcolm’s life and death while unearthing new and fresh material that proves of immense worth to the understanding of Malcolm’s philosophical panoramic view.

Goldman’s Malcolm was the finger pointing, Armageddon preaching minister of the NOI who shocked whites and blacks alike with his condemnation of the white man and the passive so-called Negroes, both of whom Malcolm thought perpetuated the systematic oppression of blacks. According to Goldman, Malcolm’s scorching indictment evolved to condemn not just the white man but rather the society or public that created and sanctioned the white man to commit such atrocities against the so-called Negro. Goldman paints Malcolm X as a pragmatic public moralist who sought to change THE SYSTEM by any means necessary. Due to internal and external pressures, however, Malcolm improvised the majority of his philosophical positions to predict prophetically the events and times to come. Malcolm’s ideological legacy left not “so much a single, coherent system of thought as loosely strung set of positions that were changing even as he announced them.”6 Goldman’s examination concluded that “It wasn’t so much an ideology or a strategy for change as a style of thought; it came back to

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6Ibid., 147.
us beginning that summer of 1966 codified under a new name - Black Power - and now
the sayings of Minister Malcolm have become the orthodoxies of an entire black
generation."\(^7\)

Goldman’s balanced biography contrasts sharply with the cynical yet distinct
account provided by Bruce Perry in his Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black
America. One example of Perry’s controversial narrative of Malcolm’s life begins in the
introduction as he comments on the sincerity of The Autobiography; “For personal and
political reasons, his public image was carefully contrived. His splendidly written
autobiography is a case in point. Its exaggerated portrayal of his youthful criminality
enhanced his tough image and dramatized the transformation of the pseudo-masculine,
criminal Malcolm into the manly, political Malcolm.”\(^8\)

In 1971 Perry began research on Malcolm X for an article. After obtaining prison
records, court records, and conducting some interviews with people who knew Malcolm
personally, the project transformed from article to biography. Perry’s immersion into the
life of Malcolm led him to delve deeper into the records, newspaper stacks, manuscripts,
and conduct over 420 interviews. Perry’s exhaustive scouring of sources on Malcolm
gives his work an incredible sense of validity and authenticity.

Outside Perry’s tabloid-like suggestions that Malcolm engaged in homosexual
activities, harbored responsibility for his mother’s mental breakdown, and perhaps played
a larger role in the fire that consumed his home in 1965, the author’s critical review of
Malcolm’s developing ideology is equally telling. Perry pays particular attention to the
seeds of dissention that developed early on between the desires of Malcolm X and the

\(^7\)Ibid., 387.

\(^8\)Perry, xi.
teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Perry recounts Malcolm’s increasing inability to fathom and argue logically the Dr. Yacub story, the moon creation story, or the oncoming Armageddon by way of spaceships piloted by W. D. Fard, the human incarnation of Allah. With Malcolm’s freedom of range in action and thought after his declaration of independence from the Nation, Perry contends that Malcolm “continued his effort to dissociate himself from Elijah Muhammad’s separatism without explicitly repudiating separatist support or endorsing the concept of integration. He nimbly achieved this ideological feat by taking the position that neither integration nor separation was the proper goal for the American black.” Malcolm viewed that many of those in the civil rights movement were replacing the means (separatism and integrationism) with the ends of freedom, equality, and justice. Closer to the end of his life, considerable misunderstanding of Malcolm’s thought, much of which was brought upon himself, possibly derived from his belief that neither separatism nor integration were correct paths to the desired end, as his ideological struggle was to develop a revolutionary mean to achieve the end of all ends.

Claude Andrew Clegg III’s An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad, examines from womb to tomb the man born as Elijah Poole later known as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the Messenger to the Nation of Islam. Clegg’s biography covers the details of Muhammad and Malcolm’s relationship and their influences upon each other during a pivotal period in the movement of the Nation and civil rights. Considering the primary focus of the work is about Elijah Muhammad,

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9Ibid., 273.

analysis of Malcolm’s ideological development would not seem overtly present yet surprisingly the author provides a detailed and critical assessment of Malcolm’s life and thought in respect to Muhammad’s.

The core tenets and beliefs of black nationalism and separatism were passed down from Elijah Muhammad to his street disciple Malcolm X, who appeared as the chief proponent of the two “isms” due to his prominence as national spokesperson for the Nation to the mass media. According to Clegg, there is sufficient evidence to believe that Malcolm’s departure from the Nation was not reactionary and immediate; rather the wheels were set in motion months before. As Clegg asserts, “Malcolm’s trenchant analyses of colonialism, third-world nationalisms, and the American political process in his “Ballot or the Bullet” speeches should have come as no surprise to anyone who had followed his ideological development over the past decade.”

In An Original Man, Clegg’s Malcolm was a former so-called Negro who fell before the “truth” that radiated from the “original man,” Mr. Muhammad. Taken in by the Nation and fostered by the care and wisdom of his beloved mentor, Malcolm Little was re-born Malcolm X, the militant minister of Mosque No. 7 in Harlem. Malcolm reinvented himself, breaking with the Nation of Islam and Muhammad to become more actively involved in the struggle for black liberation, to be achieved by any means necessary. In regard to the ideological legacy Malcolm left for posterity, Clegg concludes, “When he perished on February 21, 1965, he had not yet built a solid ideological framework for addressing the plight of African-Americans. However, he relentlessly investigated every major system of thought available to him, including black

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11Ibid., 215-16.
nationalism, al-Islam, and socialism, for useful facets of knowledge. Skillfully, he interpreted complex ideas in a vernacular that the man on the street could digest.”\(^\text{12}\)

C. Eric Lincoln’s *The Black Muslims in America* was the first academic exposé on the Nation of Islam.\(^\text{13}\) The Nation of Islam’s emergence as a religious and philosophical outlet for the dispossessed Negro in America sparked the interests of Lincoln who was at the time a professor of religion and philosophy. Lincoln, with the considerable cooperation of key NOI officials, including the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, was allowed to research the movement and its followers through interviews, NOI literature, and first-hand experience and encounters.

Lincoln eventually befriended Malcolm X, who was praised throughout *The Black Muslims in America* as the highly capable and outspoken minister of Mosque No. 7. According to Lincoln, black nationalism was the ideological hallmark of the NOI and its followers with Minister Malcolm X being its strongest champion. During this period of his life, Malcolm’s black nationalism, by way of Islam, was molded and governed by his spiritual father Elijah Muhammad. Lincoln concurred, “Malcolm credits his rehabilitation entirely to the ‘knowledge of self’ - and its corollary, ‘the truth about the white man’ - as taught him by Elijah Muhammad.”\(^\text{14}\) Malcolm’s black nationalism advocated for the so-called Negro, knowledge of self, defense of self, and social, economic, and political independence from the white man.

Lincoln’s analysis reached a prophetic end as he commented on the future of Malcolm X and his involvement in the movement: “At the moment, few observers doubt

\(^\text{12}\)Ibid., 233.


\(^\text{14}\)Ibid., 190.
that Malcolm X will be Muhammad’s successor and that he will bring quick intelligence and vision to the post. For Malcolm, the Movement has not yet begun to realize its potential, either as a local movement or as a unit of international Islam.”15 The previous statement is monumental in its early implications of Malcolm’s desire to internationalize the movement, under the guise of Islam as noted by the author, however later on in life it would be as human beings, or as in a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. Lincoln also foretold the fate of Malcolm with the statement, “In the long run, therefore, Malcolm must abandon either the purity of Muslim dogma or his dream of respectability and massive expansion. He must either remain a Muslim in the tradition of Muhammad or become, in the eyes of his followers, just another of the ‘Uncle Toms’ he has so long denounced.”16 Lincoln’s final assessment of Malcolm’s body and mind detailed a consuming change to his very existence, one that would be greater than any other transformation he had ever experienced.

E. U. Essien-Udom’s Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America is one of the ideological studies on black nationalism that critically examines the genesis and revelations of the movement in the United States. Essien-Udom’s perspective is quite different from most scholarly works on the movement in that for two years he immersed himself in the movement, participating in religious, social, and economic activities of the Nation.17 Sources for his study were obtained primarily through encounters and conversations with Elijah Muhammad, NOI officials, and followers.

15Ibid., 195-96.
16Ibid., 208.
Essien-Udom also had access to other nationalist organizations in New York and Chicago, which provided a wealth of sources in the history of black nationalism and its affect in the U.S.

Essien-Udom’s narrative begins by describing the conditions that created and perpetuated the “Negro Dilemma” in America and its reactionary spawn, black nationalism. Afterwards Essien-Udom pays homage to the ideological forefathers of black nationalism, such as Dr. Martin R. Delany, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Noble Drew Ali, Marcus Garvey, and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. The larger portion of Essien-Udom’s study revolves around the rise of the Nation of Islam, its eschatology, its organizational structure, its purpose and aims, and the external and internal pressures that might befall the organization that fiercely advocates black nationalism.

A core tenet of the Nation’s brand of nationalism is knowledge. The so-called Negro in America has been systematically brainwashed to not know who he truly is and therefore requires a re-education of self to understand completely his peculiar situation and recognize his true enemy. The knowledge necessary to overcome all can only be found in the Nation of Islam from teachings provided by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Once the so-called Negro is awakened with this knowledge, he will not want to integrate with his oppressor but rather separate and become independent politically, socially, and economically. Essien-Udom describes the call for black nationalism as a “desire to free themselves from the exploited image of blackness and
hence from the deep feeling of self-rejection, cultural alienation, and social estrangement which pervade and corrupt the personalities of the Negro masses.”

The ideological ties to Malcolm X throughout the book are those that represent the Nation’s version of black nationalism as espoused by Mr. Muhammad and later disseminated by the young minister of Mosque No. 7. Malcolm is described as “tall, slender, light-skinned, and an eloquent speaker . . . [who is] one of the better-known black nationalist leaders in Harlem.”

Essien-Udom recognized the prominence and abilities of Malcolm to assert that if a break were to occur between him and Mr. Muhammad the movement may not ever recover. Essien-Udom did not agree with many of the Nation’s beliefs but understood why elements of lower class Negroes would find solace in such a movement, as did Malcolm. Supplying credence in that to comprehend the ideological development of Malcolm X, one must grasp the version of black nationalism portrayed in Essien-Udom’s Black Nationalism.

William L. Van Deburg’s New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975, provides a fresh perspective on the Black Power Movement, its philosophical founders, the carriers of the cross, and the legacy that is ever present in American culture. According to the author, the power inherent in being black can be found in every aspect of existence from college campus life to sports, music, poetry, and the streets. Because Malcolm was the quintessential black man of the twentieth century his legacy thrives in almost every medium possible from literature to

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18Ibid., 123.
19Ibid., 177.
20Ibid., 82.
music, poetry, film, and people. The last item may cause confusion or prompt questioning, but as referred to in Spike Lee’s theatrical *Malcolm X*, as the movie draws to an end, children one by one stare into the camera and declare, “I am Malcolm X, I am Malcolm X, I am Malcolm X,” because he is in all of us.

Van Deburg’s Malcolm is one of prophetic father to the Black Power Movement and her disgruntled children. Van Deburg pays considerable attention to the legacy of Malcolm X, with the observation, “Following his death, Malcolm’s influence expanded in dramatic, almost logarithmic, fashion. He came to be far more than a martyr for the militant, separatist faith. He became a Black Power paradigm - the archetype, reference point, and spiritual adviser in absentia for a generation of Afro-American activists.” In specific regards to the ideological children of Malcolm X who carried the torch after his flame was physically extinguished on 21 February 1965, Van Deburg quotes Stokely Carmichael: “Malcolm knew ‘where he was going, before the rest of us did.’”

Throughout his life Malcolm was never accepted within the mainstream civil rights movement because his message was dark and foreboding. Only after Malcolm’s death, when his message became a reality, did Malcolm earn the respect he desired for all of us, as a human being. Van Deburg’s *New Day in Babylon* places Malcolm amongst and sometimes above his rightful peers in the struggle for black liberation.

One unique historical approach to Malcolm X is Eugene Victor Wolfenstein’s *The Victims of Democracy: Malcolm X and the Black Revolution*, which synthesizes the black


\[23\] Van Deburg, 2.

liberation movement in the United States, the life of Malcolm X, and the social theories of Marx and Freud.25 Wolfenstein’s analysis of Malcolm X is one that transcends the typical biography and ideological study to create a rare glimpse into the psychological and intellectual realms of Malcolm, areas glossed over by most yet carefully constructed in *Victims of Democracy*. Wolfenstein recognizes and readily admits to the reader, “this project includes an investigation of black subjectivity. And in this respect I am doubly an outsider. I am not culturally African-American; and I am not an oppressed member of American society. Rather, my consciousness had been shaped by the experience of being white in a white racist society.”26

Wolfenstein’s intellectual prowess in social theory every so often goes above and beyond the historical scope of Malcolm X in analysis, which sometimes sidetracks the flow of thought and readability. Sidestepping psychological potholes, Wolfenstein portrays Malcolm as a revolutionary internationalist who was on the verge of “unifying the militancy and commitment to self-determination of black nationalism with the political activism of the civil rights movement.”27 A couple contributions Wolfenstein adds to the history of Malcolm include his analysis of class, race, and character structure in regard to the Black Revolution and Malcolm’s hope “that he would be able to outwit if not overpower his enemies. His most important task was to find a way of describing his theoretical position that would extend black nationalism into some kind of revolutionary internationalism. He was looking for, in his words, ‘a specific definition of the over-all

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26 Ibid., xx.

27 Ibid., xvii.
philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of black people in this country.”

*The Victims of Democracy* provides a thought provoking, original perspective on the historical kaleidoscope that is Malcolm X. The majority of Wolfenstein’s ideological examination of Malcolm is viewed in respect to the legacy he left his philosophical pupils, such as Stokely Carmichael, SNCC, CORE, and the Black Panthers.

In *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity*, William W. Sales, Jr., provides a perceptive panoramic on the social and political thought of Malcolm X and the vehicle he created to organize a black united front to achieve black liberation, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Collaborating with the Malcolm X Work Group of the Cooperative Research Network in Black Studies and a wide array of historical and political scholars, Sales offers new analysis to the study of Malcolm X with primary sources including OAAU documents, interviews with key OAAU members, and FBI files.

Sales outlines three distinct phases in the development of Malcolm’s political thought. The first phase spanned from 1952 to 1962, emphasizing the re-emergence of black nationalism as promoted through the Nation of Islam. Malcolm entered his second phase as he began to recognize the limitation of the Nation’s ideology in actually solving the problems of the so-called Negro. This forced Malcolm to break with the NOI and create the religiously oriented Muslim Mosque, Inc., while paradoxically fostering a secular form of black nationalism. During his trip to Africa, Malcolm began to

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reevaluate his stance on black nationalism, crossing the frame into his third phase as a Pan-Africanist, who realized the limitations of the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and decided to create a more universal complement, the OAAU.

Sales explores the creation, function, and aims of the OAAU and its relevance to the revolutionary thought being redeveloped and redefined in the mind of Malcolm. Malcolm X sincerely hoped that the OAAU would be the organizational force to create the necessary action program to bring about black liberation in America. Taking a note from his previous organizational ventures, Malcolm wanted the OAAU to begin with the grassroots and later internationalize as a universal united black front. Malcolm also wanted his new organization to be free from autocratic rule and charismatic leaders, as experienced in the Nation, which placed definitive leadership of the organization in limbo. Vague formation resulted in vague directives as Sales noted; “What the OAAU needed at this point was more leadership from Malcolm through his direct presence and less experimentation with participatory democracy. . . . What he failed to realize was that the primary resource at that point for making the OAAU a success was Malcolm X himself. The organization’s number-one priority should have been to keep Malcolm X alive.”

*From Civil Rights to Black Liberation* is an excellent source to develop a deep and richer understanding of Malcolm’s political development and influence upon the black liberation struggle. Sales provides a critical imprint upon Malcolm X and the organizational development and demise of the OAAU, which rested solely upon the gravitational pull of Malcolm, as his death mirrored the failing of the sun, precipitating the dissolution of bodies that revolved around that charismatic star.

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30Ibid., 150, 159.
The historical dichotomy of the civil rights movement depends on the legacy of America’s two most influential and controversial African American leaders of the twentieth century, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. In *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, author James H. Cone, who worked with William W. Sales, Jr., in the Malcolm X Work Group, examines the duality of Martin and Malcolm to develop a thesis asserting that both men, each representing opposing ends of the ideological spectrum, were men who thrived off each other in a yin-yang force that provided a sense of equilibrium to the movement. Cone claims that after careful and critical analysis of both men and their ideologies, one comes to the realization that these two captivating leaders shared remarkable similarities in their theoretical developments, making both one in the same, human beings.31

“The Dream” and “The Nightmare” are two themes Cone craftily combines to represent the images of the United States held by Martin and Malcolm, respectively. Cone readily admits the environmental difference that defined the upbringing of both men and therefore influenced their outlook on America and its racist institutions. Both men were guided towards the black liberation struggle through religious means, both men championed brotherhood based on their faith, Malcolm later on as he embraced orthodox Sunni Islam. Both Malcolm and Martin gave and lost their lives to the struggle for freedom. Unfortunately and ironically, both men were assassinated, Malcolm and later Martin, as they began to challenge the systemic oppression of peoples throughout the world.

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The ideology of Malcolm in Cone’s chapter “I See A Nightmare” revolves around the black nationalist tenets of unity, self-knowledge, self-love, self-defense, and separation. Malcolm’s vision of unity was a black unity based initially on race as Cone concluded; “In Malcolm’s perspective, black people should not even think about uniting with or loving any other people until they first learn how to come together with love and respect for each other.”\textsuperscript{32} Malcolm’s vision called for black self-realization, obtained only after separating from white society. Once the black man in America realized who he was and why, he would reject and separate from not accept integration with white society. Cone argued, “He [Malcolm] saw so much black self-hate in the slums: drugs, prostitution, and blacks killing and robbing each other.”\textsuperscript{33} With this new sense of self and independence, the black man could love himself and his brothers, further cementing the bonds of unity and brotherhood. Once all of this was established, then the black man would be in a place to be brotherly towards the white man as long as he acted brotherly in return.

Cone concluded that, despite how America’s mass media and history has labeled these two revolutionary leaders, they were both men full of talent, potential, and faults. These two men, their thoughts, and their legacies transcend all labels, allowing them to be defined by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. Malcolm and Martin’s journey represented two separate yet parallel paths that eventually converged to

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 105.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 107.
reach their final destination. As succinctly noted by Malcolm, “I’m not for separation and you’re not for integration. What you and I are for is freedom.”

Michael Eric Dyson’s *Making Malcolm: The Myth & Meaning of Malcolm X* details the discovery, examination, and re-discovery of Malcolm X and his legacy. Dyson’s idiosyncratic approach is one that transcends an array of audiences with dazzling rhetorical performance, intertwining the philosophical underpinnings of black thought with current trends in black culture, shedding an insightful yet critical light on a recognized yet misunderstood figure in American history.

Dyson begins his discovery with a brief biography of Malcolm X and then proceeds with a critical examination of works about Malcolm and the various “X’s” that have spawned there from. Dyson contends that most historians and their works usually create four distinct portraits of the same man; Malcolm the hero, Malcolm the public moralist, Malcolm psychoanalyzed, and Malcolm the revolutionary. Dyson provides praise and constructive criticism to all works addressed, holding steadfast to the belief that “Malcolm X was too formidable a historic figure - the movements he led too variable and contradictory, the passion and intelligence he summoned too extraordinary and disconcerting - to be viewed through such a narrow cultural prism.” Dyson demonstrates with ease the influence of Malcolm X upon contemporary society in chapters five and six, even one upping himself as he explores the concepts of heroism and

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34Ibid., 247.


collective memory, both deeply rooted in the legacy of Malcolm X and Dyson’s search for truth and meaning for today’s black male.

Providing a charming yet critical analysis of Malcolm X, Dyson asserts, “Those who spare Malcolm from criticism do his legacy the most harm.”37 Dyson’s own analysis finds its way into the document as he speaks on numerous occasions of “radical democracy.” Dyson’s radical democracy is not necessarily the half-hearted attempts of the Democratic Party; it is not socialism; and it is definitely not republicanism. Rather it is a new political, social, and economic plan designed to achieve the ends Malcolm and his cause championed. Dyson’s conclusion demonstrates the relevancy of Malcolm X’s legacy to American culture and the current generations who wish to understand Malcolm enough to separate the man from the myth and the legend.

In a series of published primary documents, George Breitman presents two works, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* and *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X*.38 Breitman served as chief editor to both compilations, about which he noted “minimal editing” took place “to present, in his own words, the major ideas Malcolm expounded and defended during his last year.”39 *By Any Means Necessary* is a supplement to *Malcolm X Speaks* as it provides documents not available when *Malcolm X Speaks* was published; retaining the same goals and aims, to remain objective and limit editing to provide authenticity and validity to the primary sources.

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37Ibid., 152.


In regard to the ideological development of Malcolm X, one can derive a wealth of information from these two primary source projects, ranging from Malcolm’s view on American black nationalism, colonialism, American political power plays, imperialism, third-world nationalist revolution, and socialism. Due to the scope and aim of the editor, however, Breitman does not provide much historical analysis to the documents for the aforementioned purposes. He does, on the other hand, note, “Each selection in this book is prefaced by notes reporting the time and place of the speech or interview and calling attention to some of its special or unusual features.”40 One predicament that may arise from such a declaration is that it automatically suggests for the reader what is “special” and what is “unusual.”

In contrast to Breitman’s primary source presentations are, *The Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard*. Archie Epps, who once spoke in opposition to Malcolm at various forums at Harvard, did not agree with Malcolm on his political and social means to achieve a common end but respectfully addressed the content of Malcolm’s speeches and thought to provide “critical appraisals of the Black Muslims, Malcolm X, and the American Negro civil rights movement.”41

Hustler, anarchist, man in exile, and even Hamlet are just a few of the titles or images Epps associates with Malcolm and his philosophical theories on the black struggle for liberation. Epps evaluates the structural and organizational shortcomings of Malcolm X with specific regard to the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Malcolm desperately wanted to bridge the gap between his established


nationalist constituency and his hopes for a broader base, provided by his newfound sense of brotherhood and humanity, but he failed to make the necessary connections between his past and his future and placed blame on the labels imposed on him, noting that “they would not let him turn the corner.” Epps retorts to Malcolm’s complaint, “Instead of clarity of vision and moral courage, Malcolm X found someone else to blame. His ‘they’ seemed products of his own mind, not a real opposition. Malcolm X’s mood in this period of his life is in this phase from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*: ‘Men and event appear . . . as shadows that have lost their bodies.’”

Epps’s dissecting assessment of Malcolm’s philosophy presents an interesting perspective that is absolutely insightful and necessary to develop a better understanding of the troubles and limitations that plagued the last moments of Malcolm’s life. Epps poses a series of questions throughout his examination that should be considered in any respectful research of Malcolm and his mind such as, “What ‘original ideas’ did Malcolm X reclaim for the Negro group,” and “Could any practical policy be drawn from Malcolm X’s rhetoric?” Nasir Jones, a poet and lyricist who frequently infused the name and ideas of Malcolm in his own stylistic messages, would defend in rhyme that, “No idea is original, there’s nothing new under the sun, it’s never what you do but how it’s done,” which highlights the true art and beauty of Malcolm’s mind as the surge not the final product.

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43Epps, 63.

44Ibid., 46.

Regardless which phase of Malcolm’s life historians research, one element remains constant throughout, and that was his fondness for learning. He forever fed his hunger for knowledge, whether as president of his eight grade class, as a street scholar in Harlem, in the prison library or on the prison debate team, ministering to the masses as Malcolm X for the Nation of Islam, or as the revolutionary founding influence to the Black Power Movement. The Malcolm X experience attracted a swarm of critics to his many errors and a dedicated following to his sincere attempts to solve the plight of the Afro-American in the United States and blacks abroad by any means necessary. Throughout this experience Malcolm inherited many labels, from the lowly street hustler to the militant minister of black supremacy in the Nation of Islam to the revolutionary human rights advocate, who raged against the systemic machine. In the end, despite imposed labels, despite old and new scholarship, the question remains the same: who was Malcolm X? Even when Malcolm was asked if he considered himself to be militant, Malcolm flashed his signature smile and simply stated, “I consider myself Malcolm.”
CHAPTER TWO

Malcolm’s Ideological Forefathers

What makes the so-called Negro unable to stand on his own two feet? He has no self-confidence, he has no proud confidence in his own race, because the white man destroyed your and mine past, destroyed our knowledge of our culture, and by having destroyed it, now we don’t know we have any achievements, any accomplishments, and as long as you can be convinced that you never did anything you can never do anything!

Malcolm X, “Message to the Grass Roots,” in Malcolm X (1972)

Confident, empowered, and reinvigorated would be just a few words to describe the manner of Malcolm as he stressed to his audience the significance of understanding the past and of understanding black heritage, culture, and history. Malcolm’s thirst for knowledge led him to discover a common denominator of every great society, a glorious past that highlighted heroes, achievements, and triumphs over trials and tribulations. In order to achieve equality, freedom, and respect as human beings, Malcolm recognized the necessity of re-educating the so-called Negro to identify, appreciate, and utilize the true history of blacks as a foundation for the formation of their great nation. This form of black nationalism was just one of many vehicles used by Malcolm in his struggle for equality in the United States. Inside the mind of Malcolm raged a wide array of thoughts and feelings that often coalesced into coherent ideologies that governed his perception of self, others, and society. Many of Malcolm’s beliefs were often contrary to each other and usually borrowed, consciously or unconsciously, from the likes of W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad. As Malcolm looked to the past as a foundation for the future, an ideological foundation must be laid in order to understand fully the birth
and bloom of Malcolm’s mind. This chapter examines the philosophical fathers that predated, paralleled, and influenced the various ideologies Malcolm inherited and disseminated in an effort to free the mind and souls of the dispossessed in America and abroad.

One of Malcolm’s most developed ideological weapons was the use of black nationalism to mobilize a united black front for freedom. Malcolm was neither the first nor the last to call for black self-determination by way of black nationalism but would become its most revered and recognized champion. Malcolm’s indirect ideological influence begins with the father of black nationalism, Martin R. Delany.

Delany was born free in 1812 to Samuel Delany, a plantation slave, and Pati Delany, a free seamstress. At an early age Delany encountered racism when his family was forced to flee their home after violating a Virginia law, teaching Negro children how to read and write. Finally settling in Pennsylvania, Delany continued his education and eventually became a doctor. Throughout his lifetime Delany held many titles including but not limited to, newspaper founder, author, editor, abolitionist, Union Major in the Civil War, and politician to South Carolina. Constantly conscious of the Negro condition in America, Delany always asserted his blackness in each position he served, as an example of pride, strength, and uplift.¹

In 1843 Delany established The Mystery, a black operated newspaper to complement radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator. Garrison was so impressed with Delany's thought provoking work that many of his articles were later reprinted in The Liberator. Delany eventually left his newspaper in 1847 to co-edit The

North Star with famed African-American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. Delany worked with Douglass for a short period but eventually returned to medicine. Circa 1850, two pivotal events forever changed Martin Delany and his perception of whites and blacks in America: the Fugitive Slave Law and his dismissal from Harvard’s medical school.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 declared all slaves who ran away from their masters were to be considered stolen property and upon apprehension should be returned to their owners despite independent state rulings over the issue of slavery. Theoretically, the Fugitive Slave Law transformed all slaves into property and considered the sanctuary of runaway slaves in free states null and void. Also in 1850 Delany applied and was accepted into Harvard’s medical school. Soon afterwards white students expressed their discontent with a Negro receiving the same education as whites. Within a year’s time Delany was dismissed from medical school due to the color of his skin. Delany’s rejection from the supposed bastions of freedom and academia, the United States and Harvard respectively, compelled him to feel like a man without a homeland. Delany, as a representative of the black population in the United States, expressed his sorrows in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison: “I am not in favor of caste, nor separation of the brotherhood of mankind, and would willingly live among white men as black, if I had equal possession and enjoyment of privileges but [I] shall never be reconciled to live among them, subservient to their will - existing by mere sufferance, as we, the colored people, do, in this country . . . I have no hope in this country - no confidence in the American people.”

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In 1852 Delany published *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. In the treatise, Delany dismissed the nature and efforts of the predominately white American Colonization Society, organized to relocate Negroes in the United States back to Africa. Delany was disgusted and outraged at the assumptions produced by presumptuous white men in the best interests of the American Negro. Delany wanted to remind his people that, “. . . there are many good persons within our knowledge, whom we believe to be well wishers of the colored people, who may favor colonization. But the animal itself is the same ‘hydra-headed monster,’ let whomsoever may fancy to pet it. A serpent is a serpent, and none the less a viper, . . . This the colored people must bear in mind, and keep clear of the hideous thing, lest its venom may be tossed upon them.”

Malcolm X in a similar warning referred to white conservatives as “wolves” and white liberals as “foxes,” further remarking, “The wolf and the fox are both enemies of humanity, both are canine, both humiliate and mutilate their victims. Both have the same objectives, but differ only in methods.”

Delany’s nationalism reached new heights of internationalism in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, as he fused religion and numbers to prove the equality, and possible superiority, of colored people to non-colored people in the world. Delany’s use of biblical language aimed to ingrain morality into the issue of universal equality with statements such as, “God has made of one blood all the nations that dwell on the face of the earth.”

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5Delany, 36.
appealed to the strength in numbers concept, referring to the two-third’s majority of colored people in the world compared to the “erroneously termed . . . white” minority, whose “race predominates over the colored.”\(^6\) Delany’s solution to the elevation of his people involved placing “before the public in general, and the colored people of the United States in particular, great truths concerning this class of citizens, which appears to have been heretofore avoided, as well by friends as enemies to their elevation.”\(^7\)

Practicing what he preached, “Our elevation must be the result of self-efforts, and work of our own hands,”\(^8\) Delany organized and began plans to establish an African American colony in West Africa. The father of black nationalism arrived in Liberia in 1859. While in Africa, Delany created an exploratory group that published the *Official Report of The Niger Valley Exploring Party* and secured a tract of land through a legitimate treaty with native authorities of Abbeokuta.\(^9\) Plans for establishing an African American settlement in Africa were postponed due to the outbreak of the civil war in 1861 and Delany’s decision to stay and fight for the possibility of obtaining freedom in America.

Delany loved the ideal and hated the reality of America. He did not want to separate from white America, he wanted to be their equals but because he did not share in the white man’s possessions or privileges, he could never be their equal. This inequality compelled Delany to feel that he and the people he represented were not American, rather

\(^6\)Ibid., 37.

\(^7\)Ibid., 7.

\(^8\)Ibid., 45.

representative of “a nation within a nation,” forced to deny America and her culture. Malcolm X would argue the same point a century later in his reasoning for wanting to separate from America and establish a black nation.

African American thought during the nineteenth century was dominated by the dueling dichotomy of Martin R. Delany and Frederick Douglass. Shortly after their partnership in The North Star ended, Delany and Douglass became adversarial advocates for the elevation of the Negro in the United States, one for emigration and the other for assimilation, respectively. Although often depicted at ideological odds, both men at different points in their lives expressed similar means to achieve a common desire, equality. As the so-called father of black nationalism, Delany was definitely not the father, and his beloved nation turned out to be America, not Africa. As for Frederick Douglass, his evaluation of the peculiar condition that his people faced in the United States was far more complicated and broader in scope, requiring broad research and remedies to cure humanity of this ill as he expressed, “I do now and always have attached more importance to manhood than to mere kinship or identity with one variety of the human family. Race, in the popular sense, is narrow; humanity is broad. The one is special, the other is universal. The one is transient, the other permanent.” Although typically associated with Delany, Malcolm like Douglass, stressed a wider assessment of the struggle for rights beyond the American scope of “civil,” towards a more universal realm of “human.” Delany’s nationalism and Douglass’s humanism are both found fused into the mind of Malcolm, further illustrating the complexity of his ideologies.

10Delany, 12.

During the early twentieth century, the beliefs of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois dominated the ideological realm of Negro thought in America. The ultimate aim of both Washington and Du Bois was equality, but their means to achieve this end were stark in contrast, one for accommodation and the other for agitation, respectively. Regardless of their obvious ideological differences, both of these men influenced the mind of Malcolm. Washington always championed practical education as the cornerstone to African American advancement. Washington epitomized the age of self-reliance that permeated throughout the United States during his generation and was more concerned with the development of the African American community, free of white dependence, than integration. In his “Atlanta Exposition Address,” Washington stated, “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”12 Washington’s statement therefore sanctioned separation as long as the white community cooperated with the black community for mutual progress.

Malcolm promoted a similar concept that urged the twenty-two million ex-slaves of the United States to relocate to Africa, to be amongst their brothers. Malcolm then argued, if the United States government did not want to provide the means for their return to Africa, then the government must set aside land within the existing borders of the United States. This portion of land had to be compliant to the proportion of blacks in the country. For example, if blacks represented 10 percent of the population then they wanted 10 percent of the land. Malcolm’s vision for a return to Africa or a separate black nation within the United States was to be financed and supported by the American.

government for twenty to twenty-five years until they were no longer dependent.\textsuperscript{13} Often considered an accommodationist and an “Uncle Tom” by some radicals, some of Washington’s views were similar to the logic used by Malcolm decades later. Washington, in founding the Tuskegee Institute, created a self-sustaining black community that followed the self-help and self-empowerment tenets of Malcolm’s economic arm of black nationalism.

W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the original five founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), called for the active agitation of the African American community to achieve what the American Declaration of Independence championed, equality. Du Bois had a nationalistic strategy that called upon all Negroes to “strive for the rights which the world accords to men.”\textsuperscript{14} The rights the world accords to men are those of human rights, which transcend the rights of the American citizen, those of civil rights. Du Bois’s worldly outlook gives an early glimpse into his vision of Pan-Africanism and its influence upon Malcolm X, who supported such a cause, which evolved out of his black nationalism.

The most prolific African American writer of the twentieth century, Du Bois edited the NAACP’s official mouthpiece, \textit{The Crisis}, authored his own biography, and wrote a plethora of books and articles that sincerely tried every means available to uplift the condition of the American Negro. Du Bois’s concern with the plight of his people found a home in \textit{The Souls of Black Folk}, which forewarned the twentieth century of its


true problem, “the problem of the color-line.” 15 Interestingly the dedication page reads as follows, “To Burghardt and Yolande. The Lost and the Found,” which rings reminiscent to the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad, who frequently referred to the so-called Negroes in America as “lost” children and those in the Nation as “found.”

One of Du Bois’s many points established throughout the exposé was the duality of being Negro and American. As Du Bois lamented, “One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” Du Bois argued that the only way for the Negro to uplift himself in America was through the attainment of a higher education which would enable the Negro to recognize his own manhood, greatness, and gifts, and in turn harness his dueling identities into a “better a truer self.” 16 The majority of Du Bois’s remarks entailed self-help measures, calling upon blacks to solve their problems while simultaneously advocating active agitation amongst the Negroes to obtain their rights as citizens, particularly the right to vote, as Du Bois stressed, “The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defence, - else what shall save us from a second slavery?” 17 Forever an advocate of self defense, Malcolm X would soon too recognize the significance and power of the ballot as heralded in his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech.

In The Conservation of Races, Du Bois, ever so conscious of his race and her problems, defended the necessity and utility of all Negroes with declarations such as, “We believe that the Negro people, as a race, have a contribution to make to civilization

17Ibid., 7.
and humanity, which no other race can make."18 Du Bois’s call for the advancement of the Negro race was placed squarely upon the shoulders’ of the Negro people yet more significantly his message had international implications with connections made between the American Negro and his colored brethren as Du Bois remarked, “... and if the Negro is to ever be a factor in the world’s history ... then it must be placed there by black hands, fashioned by black heads and hallowed by the travail of 200,000,000 black hearts beating in one glad song of jubilee.”19 Du Bois also recognized the beauty of the Negro race and stressed its conservation. In order to conserve the Negro race Du Bois went so far as to endorse forms of segregation which ran contrary to the tenets and aims of the NAACP, which placed him at odds with the association. Du Bois questioned, “What can we do? The only thing that we not only can, but must do, is voluntarily and insistently to organize our economic and social power, no matter how much segregation it involves. Learn to associate with ourselves and to train ourselves for effective association. Organize our strength as consumers; learn to co-operate and use machines and power as producers; train ourselves in methods of democratic control within our own group. Run and support our own institutions.”20

Du Bois’s examination of the Negro and his condition in the United States led him to be honest and earnest in his bold assessments, which called upon the Negro people to be, “... united to stop the ravages of consumption among the Negro people, united to


19Ibid., 180.

keep black boys from loafing, gambling and crime; united to guard the purity of black women and to reduce the vast army of black prostitutes that is today marching to hell; and united in serious organization, to determine by careful conference and thoughtful interchange of opinion the broad lines of policy and action for the American Negro.”

Complementing the moral uplift of the Negro in *The Conservation of Races* is the economic uplift of black businesses in his *Resolutions of the Atlanta University Conference on the Negro in Business*. Du Bois, a serious student of economics, often struggled with American capitalism and its ability to perpetually disregard the Negro people, which led him to advocate the increased efforts of blacks to enter entrepreneurial enterprises for themselves. Du Bois, never the originator of “buy black,” was a strong proponent with statements such as, “The mass of the Negroes must learn to patronize business enterprises conducted by their own race, even at some slight disadvantage. We must cooperate or we are lost. Ten million people who join in intelligent self-help can never be long ignored or mistreated.”

The most obvious ideological connection that can be made between Du Bois and Malcolm was their continual efforts near the end of their lives to internationalize the struggle of the Negro in America by way of Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism was an ideology that stressed an American Negro reconnection with his roots, his history, and heritage in Africa, which was lost and or forgotten about when brought to the Americas. Pan-Africanism sought to solidify the struggles and successes of the Negro in America and abroad which provided strength in sheer numbers, considering two-thirds of the

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world was colored. Du Bois’s involvement in Pan-African ideals began as early as 1900, when he attended the first Pan-African Conference in London. Subsequently, Du Bois went on to attend at least three other Pan-African conferences and was even honored at a conference that he did not attend. Du Bois’s efforts to bring international attention to the plight of the American Negro resurfaced with his appeal to the United Nations in 1947 when he indicted the United States, arguing that her “prolonged policies of segregation and discrimination had involuntarily welded the mass almost into a nation within a nation with its own schools, churches, hospitals, newspapers, and many business enterprises … But the situation is far more serious than this: the disfranchisement of the American Negro makes the functioning of all democracy in the nation difficult; and as democracy fails to function in the leading democracy in the world, it fails in the world. . . .”

From self-reliant academic success to gradual integration, separatism, Pan-Africanism, and eventually socialism, W. E. B. Du Bois tried every means possible to achieve the justice, equality, and freedom given to whites in America. Despite the success Du Bois experienced in white America, his successes did not translate into the redemption of the whole, the not-so-fortunate masses. This troubled Du Bois and led him to experiment with positions, stances, and ideologies, regardless of the way in which they often contradicted his previous stance. As the conditions of the Negro in the United States evolved, so did the thoughts of Du Bois who retorted, “I am not worried about being inconsistent. What worries me is the Truth. I am talking about conditions in 1934

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and not in 1910. I do not care what I said in 1910 or 1810 or in B.C. 700.”

Du Bois’s ideology was the embodiment of Malcolm’s most infamous maxim, “by any means necessary.”

Individuals such as Martin R. Delany, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois provide a broad brush stroke to the canvas of Malcolm’s mind that allows one to see the general picture. But in order to appreciate the art, one must focus on the incessant details which in this case requires the examination of those direct influences Malcolm recognized and attributed to his ideological development, particularly those with nationalistic tendencies, such as Marcus Garvey, his father, Earl Little, and Elijah Muhammad.

Marcus Garvey was the most controversial black figure in America during the early part of the twentieth century; controversial because Garvey preached a message that called upon all Africans in America to uproot themselves and return to Africa, under the motto “Africa for the Africans.” Garvey was born in Jamaica on 17 August 1887. Garvey’s educational experience was diverse from private to public, from grammar school to college, which probably explains Garvey’s dictum in his Message to the People: The Course of African Philosophy, “You must never stop learning. The world’s greatest men and women were people who educated themselves outside of the university with all the knowledge that the university gives, [and] you have the opportunity of doing the same thing the university student does - read and study.”

At an early age Garvey

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became an apprentice to a printer in Jamaica and in 1912 secured a position in London at the *Africa Times and Orient Review*.\(^{27}\)

During his tenure in London, Garvey experienced an epiphany that forever changed the man and Negro thought throughout the world. After reading Booker T. Washington’s autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, Garvey asked himself, “‘Where is the black man’s Government?’ ‘Where is his King?’ ‘Where is his President, his country, and his ambassador, his army, his navy, his men of big affairs?’ I could not find them, and then I declared, ‘I will help to make them.’”\(^{28}\) From that moment forward Garvey set out to create a great nation in Africa for a great race, the Negro race, and to reestablish black pride, power, and prestige in the mind of Negroes worldwide. In order to achieve these aims and objectives, Garvey organized and created the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. With aspirations to organize Negroes around the globe, Garvey set out for the United States in 1916, where he set up the first UNIA branch in New York.\(^{29}\)

Garvey understood that the lack of racial pride was a fundamental reason why the Negro had not been able to free himself from the Herculean grip of white supremacy. Therefore the issue of pride was central in Garvey’s message, as he stated, “To be a Negro is no disgrace, but an honor, and we of the Universal Negro Improvement Association do not want to become white.”\(^{30}\) Once pride in one’s race was established, proud leaders would emerge, and then these leaders would be able to liberate their

\(^{27}\)Carlisle, 122.


\(^{29}\)Carlisle, 124.

\(^{30}\)Garvey, ed., 325-26.
people. For Garvey, Negro leadership began in the home and liberation began with the mind as he called upon every Negro parent to “teach their children Negro history, Negro pride and self-respect in their homes to counteract the elementary and high school education they get that holds up the superiority of the white race.”

Garvey’s message preached that the Negro race was just as worthy as the white race, and by that logic what the white race had and did, the Negro race should have and do. If whites have a nation, blacks should have a nation; if whites have control over their institutions and interests, then blacks should “demand complete control of [their] our social institutions without interference by any alien race or races.”

According to Garvey, in Africa the Negro would be able to do for himself and contribute more to society when given the opportunity that he has been denied everywhere else. As Garvey stressed: “Africa is the legitimate, moral, and righteous home of all Negroes, and now that the time is coming for all to assemble under their own vine and fig tree, we feel it our duty to arouse every Negro to a consciousness of himself.”

Garvey’s message of black pride, unity, and independence was nothing new, but it was his ability to successfully organize America’s first mass movement of blacks behind this message that was new and controversial. Garvey claimed that the UNIA, at its height consisted of eleven million members worldwide. One of Malcolm’s earliest recollections of Marcus Garvey was while at a UNIA meeting with his father where he happened to glance at some photographs of Garvey that were being passed around by the

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31Garvey, 23.

32Garvey, ed., 140.

33Ibid., 122.

members. As Malcolm described this experience, “The picture showed what seemed to me millions of Negroes thronged in parade behind Garvey . . . I remember hearing that he had black followers not only in the United States but all around the world.”35 The millions of Negroes in America and around the world in support of Garvey’s migration movement did not immediately move Malcolm but, as will be illustrated later, influenced him. Malcolm too, in his desire to secure human rights through the medium of black nationalism, would extend his cause beyond the Negro in the United States, to include all brothers of the Negro race.

Marcus Garvey, a dark native of Jamaica was a revolutionary with a revolutionary message and movement, for some it was the first time, for many it had been too long to remember, but the seeds were planted, that the triumphant rise of the Negro race must be dependent on the Negro and not the white man. Garvey’s ideology championed the Negro race as one of beauty whose kingdom was in Africa. Marcus Garvey’s freedom of mind and movement influenced many including, the mind of Malcolm. In an address at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), Malcolm paid his respects: “This is why Garvey was able to be more militant. Garvey didn’t ask them for help. He asked our people for help. And this is what we’re going to do. We’re going to try and follow his books.”36

Marcus Garvey’s message was not transmitted directly to Malcolm but rather through the medium of his father, Earl Little, an ardent disciple of the Garvey movement. Born in Reynolds, Georgia, Little migrated to the North in order to escape the overt

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discrimination of African Americans in the South. Despite moving north, Little still faced racial discrimination. Earl Little was a one-eyed, very dark, towering man, who stood six foot four in height. Little’s presence in town was noticed immediately, especially by northern whites who feared the message he preached. As a UNIA organizer, Little held clandestine chapter meetings throughout his community, spreading the message “that freedom, independence and self-respect could never be achieved by the Negro in America, and that therefore the Negro should leave America to the white man and return to his African land of origin.”

Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska, to Earl and his wife Louise on 19 May 1925. As a youngster, Malcolm went along with his father to UNIA meetings which he attributed as an early influence upon his character. As Malcolm stated in his autobiography, “they and my father were more intense, more intelligent and down to earth. It made me feel the same way.” Malcolm’s recollection of his father stressed a continued strive towards black independence of the white man. Malcolm remembered his father’s attempt to save money to start his own business, to establish control over his own interests, only to be harassed and discriminated against by local white racists. These racists eventually resorted to violence when they burnt down the Little’s home, forcing the family to move.

Once again, regardless of where Earl went, he could not escape the racism of the white man. Earl’s recognition that racism was not restricted to the South, that it permeated throughout the North too, further pressed him to believe in the teachings of

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38 Ibid., 6.
Marcus Garvey that there was no place for blacks in America and their exodus to Africa was the only viable solution. After the fire, Earl and his family relocated to Lansing, Michigan, where he built with his own hands a four bedroom house. Following the teachings of Garvey, Earl grew his own foods in his garden and raised various animals for his family to eat. Little’s insistence on black pride, unity, and independence aroused the fears of many white racists in the community. These fears formed into a weapon of hate, in 1931, when Malcolm was six years old, his father was found dead with one side of his skull crushed in and his body almost mangled in two. It was rumored that Earl Little was murdered by the Black Legion, a local racist organization, which placed his body on the streetcar tracks to be run over.

The violent end of Earl Little’s life forever shaped Malcolm’s view of himself and the world, as Malcolm asserted, “It has always been my belief that I, too, will die by violence. I have done all that I can to be prepared.” Though the years Malcolm shared with his father were few, the life and times of Earl Little were of great influence upon the blossoming mind of young Malcolm. After Earl’s death, the cohesiveness of the family unraveled before their eyes as the children struggled with the shame of poverty and their mother’s inability to cope with the everyday pressures of Negro duality during a period of economic uncertainty in the Great Depression. Louise Little struggled physically and mentally to raise the family of eight. She literally went mad and was admitted into a mental institution. With no adult supervision, state authorities separated the children from each other and placed them into different foster homes. The loss of his father and

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39 Ibid., 4.
40 Ibid., 10.
41 Ibid., 2.
the subsequent loss of his mother and siblings forced Malcolm to despise whites, authorities, and himself. These unfortunate circumstances led Malcolm down a path of deception and destruction eventually landing him in prison where he learned of the Nation of Islam and its leader, Elijah Muhammad.

The Nation of Islam began as a religion started by a mysterious man named Wallace D. Fard in 1930. The appeal of the Nation was that it preached a gospel of blackness; it held that Islam was the truth faith of the black man, that Allah (God) was black, and that his people were black. Elijah Poole, a Baptist minister from the South became a disciple to the Nation, and in 1934 he inherited the chief leadership position after the mysterious disappearance of Fard. Poole vindicated his leadership claiming to be the messenger of Allah, who had personified himself in the human form of Fard. Elijah’s slave name of Poole was replaced with Muhammad in order to place an Islamic emphasis on his authority as leader to the movement.42

Muhammad, as the self-proclaimed prophet and messenger of God, took his message to the masses, those not reached by the white man’s Christianity, the impoverished black victims of the United States. The Nation of Islam blamed the troubles of blacks in America on whites, who were viewed as devils, naturally inclined to do evil. Due to the fact that the white man was the devil, the black man had no business to live amongst him; therefore, the notion of integration was ludicrous. Salvation for the black man in America resided solely in the solution of separation from the white devils. As Muhammad declared, “...we believe our contributions to this land and the suffering forced upon us by white America, justifies our demand for complete separation in a state

or territory of our own.” Complete separation of the black man from the white man would save them from annihilation when Allah returned to impart his wrath on the wicked of the world. To complement the demonizing of the white race, Muhammad promoted the culture and history of the black man, emphasizing the black peoples of the world as the chosen race of Allah. As Muhammad asserted, “God has said that we are members of the original people or black nation of the earth. Original means first.”

One interesting method used by Muhammad to stress the supremacy of the black race was to emphasize blackness in all things, even in the creation story, the story of Yacub. According to the story of Yacub, God, who is black, created man in his image, a black man. The black man was the original man and rightful inheritor of the earth. A great yet deranged scientist by the name of Yacub began experimenting with the splicing of black genes and created an inferior offspring. This new offspring, the Anglo race, was deficient in all things that made the black man great. These sickly creatures had almost no pigment to their skin, their hair was thin, weak, and blonde, and their eyes were blue. These ghoulish spawns were banished from the lands of Africa and Asia to wander the caves of Europe. Such a creation story appealed to the oppressed black masses, those fed up with the hypocrisy of Christianity in a white man’s America.

Muhammad’s message empowered the so-called Negro and resuscitated the pride and awareness of the black man, who played an integral part in the liberation of his people. The establishment of black pride necessitated the re-education of the black man.

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44Elijah Muhammad, Message to the Blackman (Chicago: Muhammad Mosque of Islam No. 2 1965), 34-37, reprinted in ibid., 409.

As Elijah Muhammad proclaimed, “We believe in the resurrection of the dead - not in physical resurrection - but in mental resurrection. We believe that the so-called Negroes are most in need of mental resurrection; therefore, they will be resurrected first.”

Muhammad’s Nation held that to be a man is to respect and honor his wife and family and to provide for and protect them. The family is the cell of success for the black community, and the black man was its leader. Muhammad urged the black man to be self-reliant, to take charge of his life, his family, and his community. As long as another man whose interests do not serve yours, controls aspects of your community, he controls you. The doctrine of the Nation of Islam clearly proclaims that the white man has and never will serve the interest of the black man; therefore, the black man should control his own economic, social, and political interests. Now, because the white man will not allow black control over black interests in America, the black man should separate himself from the white man and form his own nation, which promotes black culture and interests.

Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam literally became a nation within a nation, with its own hierarchy of leadership and authority, its own educational system, its own economic enterprises, and its own religion, all organized and unified behind the message of black unity against the injustices of white supremacy. As a mass movement, Muhammad’s Nation had over 100,000 members, sixty-nine temples for worship, and a self-sustaining economic industry to support their peoples, their interests, and their cause.

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48 Ibid., 4.
Once again, not necessarily original in thought, Elijah Muhammad’s ideology runs parallel to the economic independence of Washington and Garvey, the beauty of blackness present in Du Bois and Garvey, and the declaration of independence and separation found in Delany, Washington, Garvey, and Du Bois. One difference between Muhammad and these men was that Muhammad demanded that for which what his predecessors asked. Muhammad and his Nation asserted mental and moral reformation to purge the black man of the white man’s ills, purifying their “original” black blood. Muhammad provided the unwashed masses with a message of superiority, not simply equality. Muhammad preached and practiced black ownership of self, mind, and soul, as well as, religious, commercial, and communal interests. His message reached the young so-called Negroes, such as Malcolm Little, who were at one point lost but eventually found and resurrected in the Nation.

Under the careful guidance and indoctrination of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm Little developed a deep understanding and respect for himself, his history, and his people. Elijah Muhammad’s promotion of the black man and the need for separation from the white man became strong foundations upon which Malcolm would cultivate his own ideology. Malcolm’s previous ideological encounters with the ideas and experiences of his father, Marcus Garvey, and what he learned of other cultures and their struggles through his studies in prison, are all secondary in ideological influence to the awe inspiring first hand experiences and teachings exposed to him via the Nation of Islam under his ideological father and mentor, the “honorable” Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm felt abandoned by the society of the white man, as did the twenty-two million ex-slaves of America, and believed that it was Elijah Muhammad and his message of black self-
reliance, under the guise of Islam and the Nation, that saved him. Malcolm was so grateful for the prophet that on numerous occasions he admitted that he would have sacrificed his own life for Elijah Muhammad.

Traditionally the evolution of African American thought since its genesis has been one that has rightfully focused upon the plight, struggle, and freedom of the Negro condition in America. Depth in other philosophies present in various cultures have been secondary in importance and significance to the Negro, as to finding solace in a solution to his own social, economic, and uplift in the United States. Considered an American Dilemma, a Negro dilemma, a dilemma of humanity, the enslavement and continued exploitation of the Negro race in the United States has spawned various methods and means of thought to elevate the mind and race of the Negro.

Spanning the spectrum of African American thought were the early attempts at re-colonization under the predominately white American Colonization Society, the pleas for emancipation under Douglass and Garrison, the call for nationalism and a return to Africa under Delany, the accommodation of integration under Washington, the educated agitation and eventual international application in humanism of Du Bois, the boisterous mass movement of Garvey and his bombastic message of black pride, and the mental and moral reformation of the so-called Negro lost in the wildness of America which included the ultimate separation of the races and the return to greatness of the original people found in the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad.

Each of these men, varied in social experiences, education, and ideologies, shared an ultimate similarity in championing the liberation of the black race in the world through black knowledge and practice. Strains of thought evident in Malcolm’s ideological
development are the nationalism of Delany, the humanism of Douglass, the economic
black nationalism of Washington, the political black nationalism of Pan-Africanism in Du
Bois, the social black nationalism of Garvey’s mass movement for black pride, and the
fusion of religious rhetoric with the black nationalism of Elijah Muhammad. With the
recognition of all the aforementioned information, to label Malcolm simply a radical,
nationalist, supremacist, or humanist, based on any singular influence, whether Delany,
Garvey, or Muhammad, would do an immense disservice to the ideological richness of
Malcolm’s mind, a creature of complexity and contradiction.
CHAPTER THREE

HIStory According to Malcolm

I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive. I certainly wasn’t seeking any degree, the way a college confers a status symbol upon its students. My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America. . . . my alma matter was books, a good library. . . . I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity . . .


Malcolm’s educational expedition was by no means a formal experience shared by the fortunate sons of America, but rather an intellectual awakening fused through dynamic experiences in diverse environments of his life with a sincere thirst for knowledge. Malcolm’s education and re-education stand as the ultimate testament that knowledge is power. Malcolm became a learner who constantly examined and re-examined history, which brought about the constant definition and redefinition of self. Malcolm’s itch for knowledge led him to use history as a weapon; his pen became a pistola, to deliver the “truth” to the masses denied. Malcolm used American history, world history, great texts such as the Bible and the Quran, great authors such as Aesop and Shakespeare, and any other information he found intellectually appealing, to wake the dumb, deaf, and the blind, to a knowledge of self, the enemy, and reality. As Chapter Two examined the ideological influences of black thought upon Malcolm’s mind, this chapter will analyze the ideological influences beyond the scope of the previous chapter. This chapter will examine the intellectual development and curiosity of Malcolm’s mind.
through experience and intellectual inquiry. To achieve this end one must begin by formally documenting Malcolm’s life, highlighting intellectual turning points, and then conclude with what he studied and how he used this new found knowledge to liberate the mind and soul.

Malcolm Little was born in Omaha, Nebraska to Earl and Louise Little on 19 May 1925. At the age of six, in 1931 Malcolm’s father was found dead, body mangled underneath a streetcar with his head bashed in. Throughout the community it was rumored that Earl was murdered by the Black Legion, a local racist organization, which bludgeoned him and placed his body on the streetcar tracks to be run over. Earl’s death/murder left Louise with an overwhelming responsibility to provide and raise a family during the depths of the Great Depression, which eventually drove her into madness. According to the State, Louise Little was in no condition to care for herself let alone her children, warranting an intervention, and the dissolution of the family. Around 1938 Malcolm, along with his brothers and sisters, were sent to live in different foster homes across the state of Michigan. Malcolm was eventually placed in a detention center and attended an all-white school where he excelled to the top of his class, even earning the office of class president. During an encounter with one of his teachers, Mr. Ostrowski, Malcolm expressed a desire to be a lawyer. Ostrowski cautioned Malcolm to be realistic, telling him, “A lawyer - that’s no realistic goal for a nigger.” Mr. Ostrowski’s comment singed into the heart and mind of that bright student, who later reflected in his Autobiography, “It was then that I began to change - inside.”

Overwhelmed with the feeling that “when you’re white, the sky’s the limit, when you’re black the limit’s the sky,” Malcolm entered what some artists would consider a “blue fugue period” and went to Boston to live with his half-sister Ella around 1941. Malcolm, an old country boy with country clothes and kinky red hair became enamored with the lights and sounds of Boston’s nightlife. Malcolm took up a shoe-shine “slave” to get closer to the action of the night and eventually conked his hair, bought a flamboyant zoot-suit, and as a young hustler catered to his clients’ needs of liquors, reefers, and condoms. Malcolm eventually took up a variety of “slaves,” one of which was as a porter on a train route from Boston to New York where Malcolm first touched base in Harlem. Malcolm stayed in Harlem and eventually made a name for himself as “Detroit Red,” hustling numbers, women, and drugs. A conflict of interests with a fellow hustler forced Malcolm to return to Boston where he set up a robbery ring that landed him in prison for burglary in 1946. Malcolm’s hustler mentality was quite the departure from the values and tenets espoused by Earl and Louise Little; however, Detroit Red considered himself an invincibly proud Negro, a socially and economically independent Negro. Malcolm’s slave mentality, as he commonly referred to it later on in life, taught him to hate himself, his people, and to covet the white man and his society, which systematically placed him where many of the downtrodden went, to prison.2

Wherever Malcolm went, it was almost certain that he would make a name for himself, even in confinement. He earned the honorary title of “Satan” while in prison due to his vicious outbursts against God and anything that had to do with religion. Religion, he believed, had failed his father and his mother, and he was not going to allow its path of destruction to continue unto him. Malcolm eventually met a man named

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2Ibid., 151.
“Bimbi,” who impressed the young hustler with his intelligence, quick wit, and tongue. Malcolm was equally impressed at Bimbi’s control of self to avoid swearing, smoking, drinking, and eating pork. Bimbi urged Malcolm to read all that he could to cultivate his mind and gain control of himself. Malcolm’s first intellectual inquiry led him to read word for word, from beginning to end, an entire encyclopedia. Malcolm later joined the prison debate team, which strengthened his command of speech, knowledge, and self.3

Along with Bimbi’s influence, Malcolm’s brothers and sisters also played a role in his rehabilitation. Many of Malcolm’s siblings had joined a new organization that preached black pride, black history, and black control, under the religious teachings of Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam (NOI). Initially, “Satan” wanted nothing to do with religion but when his brother Reginald promised that he knew of a way to get Malcolm out of prison, Malcolm listened. With no religious connotation, Reginald asked Malcolm to give up pork and smoking, and Malcolm followed. Later on, Malcolm’s sister Hilda informed him of the “true creation” of man, the black man, by way of the NOI’s Yacub story. Malcolm took interest in this new understanding of himself, his past, and his people, so he wrote to Elijah Muhammad. After further study of the faith and correspondence with Mr. Muhammad, Malcolm submitted to the will of Allah, accepted the Honorable Elijah Muhammad as his messenger, and joined the Nation of Islam in 1947. Malcolm’s prison experience is a pivotal and essential aspect to better understand the Malcolm to come, the Malcolm X. The changes Malcolm underwent in prison were insightfully expressed by the man himself, “I’d put prison second to college as the best

3Ibid., 183, 185.
place for a man to go if he needs to do some thinking. If he’s *motivated*, in prison he can change his life.”\(^4\)

After spending six years in prison, Malcolm was released in 1952, and it was not long before he began spreading the gospel of the Nation to the masses. Malcolm’s anxious activities earned him the privilege to meet Elijah Muhammad, quickly fostering a relationship comparable to that of a loving father and an adoring son. Muhammad took a special interest in the zest and zeal of the young follower, taking him under his wing, giving him divine guidance in his quest to wake up the deaf and dumb to the will of Allah. In a mere two years, steadfast devotion and loyalty to the Messenger earned Malcolm the honor of Minister Malcolm X to Harlem’s Temple No. 7 in 1954, the same year the Supreme Court proclaimed school segregation unconstitutional.\(^5\)

Over the next nine years, Malcolm X personally helped to establish and support temples across the United States, organize rallies and annual NOI ceremonies, create in the basement of his own home a newspaper, the mouthpiece for the NOI, *Muhammad Speaks*, and become the first National Minister for the NOI, with all praise be to Allah and his messenger the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. The devastating and vibrant character of Malcolm X, who called white people devils and black people the inheritors of the earth, shocked whites and blacks alike. Malcolm X’s blistering indictment of the white man’s systematic oppression of the black man rallied the northern Negro masses to their feet but not necessarily to his cause. With the advent of television, the image and name of Malcolm X reached audiences beyond the traditional scope of print, earning him

\(^4\)Ibid., 396.

a sense of notoriety and recognition. Malcolm garnered a lot of attention to himself, creating a personal following that was viewed by many high-ranking officials in the movement and eventually Elijah Muhammad himself, as threatening. These seeds of jealousy and hate saw fruition when Malcolm was restricted from his duties as the National Minister due to remarks he made about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. These restrictions were eventually extended to his position as minister to Temple No. 7. When it became apparent that his status with the NOI was at a crossroads, Malcolm had to make a decision; to act or remain in limbo. Malcolm was in state of “shock,” everything he came to understand by way of Mr. Muhammad and the NOI, both of which he would have given his life for, were completely baseless and therefore Malcolm thought himself to be baseless. As Malcolm later lamented, “I felt as though sometime in nature had failed, like the sun, or the stars. It was that incredible a phenomenon to me - something too stupendous to conceive.”

After twelve years of complete submission to the will of the “Honorable” Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm formally declared his independence from the Nation of Islam on 12 March 1964. After weeks of soul-searching, allegations, and threats against his life, Malcolm took it upon himself to depart from the NOI and formed the Muslim Mosque, Inc., (MMI). He envisioned his new organization to serve as the moral vehicle necessary to eliminate the evils and vices of the black community in order to promote a united black front that desired a more direct involvement in the struggle for black liberation. Black nationalism was the action program that Malcolm advocated throughout his declaration

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of independence conference, championing black control of black communities, socially, politically, and economically.\textsuperscript{7}

In an effort to reaffirm his faith along orthodox lines, Malcolm submersed himself in Sunni Islam, paving the way for him to make the privileged pilgrimage to Mecca. According to accounts in his \textit{Autobiography}, Malcolm’s experiences in Mecca and in Africa broadened his understanding of himself, his faith, and the future. During the Hajj, Malcolm shared his faith with his brothers, who were black, brown, white, red, and every color imaginable, an encounter that contradicted the teachings of Mr. Muhammad and the NOI. Malcolm was respected and treated like an ambassador from America, an ambassador of the people that he claimed to represent, the twenty-two million Afro-Americans oppressed in the United States. During his travels, Malcolm met with dignitaries, ambassadors, and revolutionaries, as Africa was removing the yoke of colonialism. Inspired by his newfound faith, the brotherhood of human beings, and revolution, Malcolm created a new organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), modeled after the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Malcolm had discovered during his trip abroad that his black nationalism action program alienated those not black, yet revolutionary, such as his Algerian brothers. Malcolm’s new organization sought to forge new bridges, bridging all gaps not covered by the MMI, specifically the mental bridge between the Africans in Africa with their long lost brothers in America, the Afro-Americans.\textsuperscript{8}


When Malcolm returned from Mecca, he donned a goatee and a new persona under the name El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Mr. Shabazz called for the recognition of human rights and threatened to bring the American government before the world court, the United Nations, if these rights were not forthcoming. Malcolm’s expanded struggle focused not so much on the racism of the white man in the United States, but rather on the white American system that created, conducted, and perpetuated oppressive elements throughout the world. Malcolm’s new battle cry against “the system” called for the restructure or overthrow of that system, “by any means necessary.” With that being said, Malcolm was for anything - socialism, separatism, nationalism - anything, as long as it produced immediate results to help bring about the ultimate end to the problem. The end Malcolm envisioned was freedom, equality, and justice; and because of this radical agenda, the end Malcolm received was death. Before Malcolm was able to create a coherent action program that encompassed his new ideological developments, he was assassinated on 21 February 1965, just shy of his fortieth birthday.

The majority of historians who analyze Malcolm have neatly divided his life into four distinct periods each pertaining to his four most commonly used aliases. The Malcolm Little period reflects an innocence of youth, yearning for approval and recognition instead encountering denial, violence, and racism, all before the age of sixteen. The Detroit Red period is a reactionary state that developed as a rejection of self and the acceptance of the so-called superior qualities of the white man’s society. Malcolm’s fall from grace into a life of crime lands him in prison where he begins his most pivotal metamorphosis in every aspect of his constitution. Malcolm’s third period produced the “X”, in a phase of redemption and revelation that renounced what he
thought he knew of himself and society for the absolute truth provided by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, leader to the Nation of Islam. Historically, Malcolm’s final period has been associated with his departure from Mr. Muhammad and the NOI. During this uncertain and turbulent time in Malcolm’s life and American history, Malcolm embarked upon an ideological free for all. Finally, as Malcolm often stated, “free to think and act for himself,” he entered a phase that has been dismissed and forgotten by the forces of history, restricting the full bloom and significance of this man’s struggle and beneficial influence upon the American masses. Malcolm became a philosophical phoenix for the latter half of the civil rights movement, a soul searching for truth, to free us all, by any means necessary, only to be consumed by the fire and ash.

Experience that transformed into knowledge constituted a great fraction of Malcolm’s mind, such as attending UNIA meetings with his father, the exchange with Mr. Ostrowski, his conversion to Islam, his departure from the NOI, and his hajj to Mecca, but it would be time spent in prison that opened his mind to a new world of knowledge as he began to critically examine and analyze information for the first time. Malcolm’s curiosities led him into the reading realms of philosophy, law, genetics, and most importantly the history of man. According to Malcolm, “History is a people’s memory, and without a memory man is demoted to the level of lower animals. When you have no knowledge of your history, you’re just another animal; in fact, you’re a Negro; something that’s nothing.”

In an attempt to learn more about himself, Malcolm read what many Americans considered to be the literary classics, such as the works of Socrates, Aesop, Shakespeare, and Mendel, only to discover that the majority of these

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indispensable texts presented the triumphs of the white man in the world with little or no reference to the deeds of the so-called Negro. Malcolm stressed this historical inequality in many of his speeches declaring, “This is why the white man . . . his little children, he tells them about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, all these white heroes, but we are never taught about any black heroes, only someone we’re shown in history is my grandfather . . . he is picking cotton . . . Cotton picking don’t move me! No. But when it comes to teaching the black people something about great black men, who stood their ground, who were scientists, who were civilizers, who were fathers of culture and civilization, the white man has shrewdly written that role out of the text book.”

Malcolm began searching high and low and eventually had to read between the lines of traditional histories to find the history of his people and people of color in general. One example of Malcolm reading between the lines began with the historical origins of Aesop, the infamous fabler. According to Samuel Richardson, editor of Aesop’s Fables 1740, “We have had the history of Aesop so many times over and over, as Sir Roger L’Estrange observes, and dressed up so many several ways, that it would but labour lost to multiply unprofitable conjectures upon a tradition of so great uncertainty.” Further into the life of Aesop, the author notes, “Aesop then (according to Planedues, Camerarius and others) was by birth of Ammorius, a town in the Greater Phrygia . . . ” Malcolm’s ability to recognize a hustle when he heard or read one noticed the white man’s tricks and their utmost certainty of knowledge when attributing

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12Ibid., xvi.
greatness to whiteness and the “great uncertainty” when recognizing the works of men of color, as further investigation leads one to understand that the Great Phrygia of antiquity is in modern day Turkey, a land dominated by men and women of color. Malcolm understood the importance of words and labels in history attributed to the actions of whites. As opposed to those blacks, as Malcolm craftily responded to a question concerning his idea of separation, “Spellman: What is the program for achieving your goals of separation? Malcolm: A better word to use than separation is independence. This word separation is misused. The thirteen colonies separated from England but they called it the Declaration of Independence; they don’t call it the Declaration of Separation, they call it the Declaration of Independence. When you’re independent of someone you can separate from them.”

When not reading between the lines of “whitened” history Malcolm read J. A. Rogers’ World’s Great Men of Color 3000 B.C. to 1946 A.D., the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois, and the works of James Baldwin. Through these writings Malcolm recognized the abilities of the so-called Negro to be bigger and better than what he had been previously trained to understand. Unearthing these historical gems led Malcolm to question, why the white man would want to hide these truths from the so-called Negro? The only answer that made sense to Malcolm was that the white man was a race of insecure and guilt-ridden individuals, fearful of revenge by the obviously superior Negro race, playing right into the dogma of the NOI.

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Malcolm rationalized this line of thought with the use of historical and genetic evidence via the NOI’s Yacub story and the findings of Mendel.\textsuperscript{14}

Exposing the weakness of the six hundred pound guerilla, Malcolm turned the white’s strength - knowledge - into his weakness. When debating his claim of Negro race superiority over the white race with scientists, Malcolm simply pointed out, “I don’t teach Negro superiority; you and your books do it for me.” The perplexed scientist dared Malcolm to explain, and Malcolm gleefully responded, “in your genetics book it is understood and accepted that brown hair and brown eyes are dominant traits and characteristic of all human beings, while blonde hair and blue eyes are considered recessive and weaker, so with your own knowledge you can accept the fact that the Negro race, with predominate brown hair and brown eyes, are dominate over the blonde haired blue eyed white race.”

Following the teachings of the honorable Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm went to great lengths to learn more about himself by studying his true history and even greater lengths to understand his enemy’s history, the history of the white man in America. As Malcolm declared, “Once you know what language he speaks in, then you can talk to him. And if you want to know what his language is, study his history. His language is blood, his language is power, his language is brutality, his language is everything that’s brutal.”\textsuperscript{15} America’s history according to Malcolm has been one of opportunity, advantage, and bloodshed. A bloody revolution established a nation, a bloody Civil War preserved a union, colonial imperialism reaffirmed America’s vampiristic sphere of

\textsuperscript{14}Malcolm X, \textit{The Autobiography}, 176.

influence, and her blood money fostered entangled alliances and interests in two world wars and spawned an atmosphere of paranoia in a cold war. Malcolm related this untold history lesson to the so-called American Negro adding, “This is our contribution - our blood. Not only did we give our free labor, we gave of our blood. Every time he had a call to arms, we were the first ones in uniform. We died on every battlefield the white man had. We have made a greater sacrifice than anybody who’s standing up in America today. We have made a greater contribution and have collected less.”

Ironically, Malcolm had to defend himself and his message against attacks from the media as being a violent subversive agent bent on disrupting the American system. Charged with fomenting violent tendencies amongst the Negro masses, Malcolm turned the spotlight away from the accused to the accuser, away from the victims of violence to the perpetrators of violence. As Malcolm explained, “If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it is wrong defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it is wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country.”

Malcolm’s ability to resonate and relate the message, “if violence is wrong in America then it is wrong abroad,” illustrates an understanding of America’s history and its impact upon the world, which requires a mind open and aware to issues and conditions at home and afar. Malcolm was an able historian who made connections between the past and the present to prophesize on the future. Malcolm forged American history with


world history - their pasts with their presents - to validate his argument of an American democracy disguised as American hypocrisy. Malcolm began to piece together history with present realities to question the true intentions of the white man in regards to the advancement of Negroes that “It’s no change of heart that makes him [the white man in America] back up. He looks across the water and sees the world looking at him. And he changes only to the degree that you [the so-called Negro] have reached world opinion. If you have reached world opinion, he changes. But you don’t change his opinion.”\(^{18}\)

Pressures such as those placed upon the United States by Great Britain during the Civil War, the beginning of the end of world colonization, pressures from communist and socialist elements seeking converts and rights for the Negro in the United States, pressures against American violence abroad in support of self-determination against communism while suppressing human rights at home, the Vietnam War, and the independence of African nations, are just a few examples of world issues that influenced policy towards the so-called Negro movement in the United States. Malcolm’s objective outlook on American history allowed him to empathize with those throughout the world who felt the wrath of the United States’ capitalistic democracy. Malcolm at times did not consider himself American, yet at the same time remarked, “But we are not anti-American. We are anti or against what America is doing wrong in other parts of the world as well as here . . . Now, you’re not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or who says it . . . ”\(^{19}\)

Malcolm did not create a new history; rather he exposed a veiled HIStory based on life experiences and homemade education. The young firebrand’s version of the truth


shocked and scared many whites and Negroes. History according to Malcolm was similar to a bullet, a sharp element that penetrated deep and lodged itself, forever changing the perceptions of the wounded. Malcolm’s weapon of choice to fire these bullets of truth was also one of his greatest gifts, the gift of speech. The ability to motivate and manipulate through speech became the ultimate arsenal in a new millennium of mass media. Malcolm’s message was no hustle; the bullets were no hustle, but the manner in which Malcolm conveyed his message was similar to a hustle. As Malcolm understood in experience and education, “everything in the world is a hustle.”

The art of hustling has usually been perceived in a negative light as a means of undermining others in order to gain profit for one’s self. Malcolm demonstrated this type of street scholarship during his Detroit Red years. From a positive perspective, hustling is seen as an act or acts to achieve a goal or aim by any means necessary. Malcolm demonstrated this type of social scholarship throughout his life as he encountered the media, the masses, and the world. Malcolm’s hustle was highly driven by his ability to communicate and command every audience he addressed. Like most hustlers Malcolm understood the importance of conveyance in communication.

You cannot speak French to someone who speaks German and vice versa; one must speak on the level of your audience so that they can understand you, and you must understand your audience before you even attempt to speak to them. The socioeconomic makeup of Malcolm’s audience was made up primarily of downtrodden Negroes, with whom Malcolm identified and related to because he was once that Negro. In an effort to reach these individuals Malcolm took a page from his readings and often spoke in fables

and parables to establish a common ground with his audience. Malcolm’s audience related to these rhetorical devices due to their familiarity with the Bible and the works of Aesop.

The intellectually agile Malcolm became keenly aware and suspicious of the American system with its pimps and tricksters, or by its more recognizable label of Republicans and Democrats. One easy hustle for Malcolm was convincing his audience to recognize these individuals for what they truly were, no friend to the so-called Negro. Malcolm’s message was that, “We won’t organize any black man to be a Democrat or a Republican because both of them have sold us out. . . . Both parties are racist, and the Democratic Party is more racist than the Republican Party.” Malcolm hustled this message by way of Aesop’s fable *The Wolf and the Sow*. As it reads, “A wolf very kindly offered to take care of the litter of a Sow that was just ready to lye down. The Sow as civilly thanked her for her love and desire she would be pleased to stand off a little, and do her the good office at a distance, the greater the better.” Its moral is, “There are no snares so dangerous as those which are laid for us under the name of good offices,” and whose reflection reads, “A wise man will keep himself upon his guard against the whole world, more especially against a known enemy; but most of all, against that enemy who appears in the shape of a friend. The lying down Sow would have made a very bad choice to have taken the wolf for her nurse.” Malcolm used a similar parable in the name of the wolf and the fox, warning the black voters of the United States to be wary of their so-called friends in their fight for justice. Malcolm referred to

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22Aesop, 18.
conservatives as wolves and liberals as foxes, both seemingly against each other but still a breed of dog nonetheless. While one (the conservative) displays his viciousness openly, the so-called Negro should be more wary of the conniving, sly, and smiling fox who plays the friend to enact the greatest threat of all in the form of treachery.

Another message Malcolm hustled was that of the “Field Negro” and the “House Negro.” As with most of Malcolm’s “hustles,” the field/house Negro fable involved historical facts to provide realism and vindication to his accusation. Usually preceding this historical re-enactment, Malcolm reminded his audience, “Back during slavery, when people like me talked to the slaves, they didn’t kill them, they sent some old house Negro along behind him to undo what he said. You have to read the history of slavery to understand this.”23 In this particular fable, Malcolm was the field Negro, the audience members were the slaves, and the mainstream preacher civil rights leaders were the house Negroes. Malcolm as a field Negro despised enslavement, hated his slave master, and was willing to separate in order to gain independence. The house Negro enjoyed the privileges awarded him, appreciated the kindness of his slave master, and wanted to maintain the status quo as not to disrupt his individual gains. Playing upon the subtleties of being black, Malcolm poked fun in his Message to the Grass Roots with remarks such as, “If the master got sick, the house Negro would say, ‘What’s the matter, boss, we sick?’ We sick! He identified himself with his master, more than his master identified with himself. And if you came to the house Negro and said, ‘Let’s run away, let’s escape, let’s separate,’ the house Negro would look at you and say, ‘Man, you crazy. What you mean separate? Where is there a better house than this?’ . . . That was that house Negro. In those days he was called a ‘house nigger.’ And that’s what we call them

today, because we’ve still got some house niggers running around here.”24 Aware of his audience, Malcolm understood that the majority of them would identify with the field Negro label as opposed to the house Negro. As Malcolm declared, “You’ve got field Negroes in America today. I’m a field Negro. The masses are field Negroes.”25

Malcolm’s fable taught the audience to be wary of white-picked Negro leaders because the past will repeat itself if you let it. As Malcolm explained, “The slave master took Tom and dressed him well, fed him well and even gave him a little education - a little education; and gave him a long coat and a top hat and made all the other slaves look up to him. Then he used Tom to control them. The same strategy that was used in those days is used today, by the same white man. He takes a Negro, a so-called Negro, and makes him prominent, builds him up, publicizes him, males him a celebrity. And then he becomes a spokesperson for Negroes - and a Negro leader.”26

While debating in Oxford, England, Malcolm combined his intellectual inquiries with current conditions to express his position. Fully aware that his audience would consist of predominately white educated men, Malcolm began his speech borrowing a line from a fairly recognizable Englishman, Shakespeare. Malcolm’s hustle humbly began, “I read once, passingly, about a man named Shakespeare. I only read about him passingly, but I remember one thing he wrote that kind of moved me. He put it in the mouth of Hamlet, I think, it was, who said, ‘To be or not to be.’ He was in doubt about something.”27 Laughter followed, typical of an audience of Malcolm’s, which let him

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25 Ibid., 11.
26 Ibid., 13.
know that he had reached a level of comfort to begin real talk. As Malcolm followed, “whether it was nobler in the mind of man to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune - moderation - or to take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them. And I go for that. If you take up arms, you’ll end it, but if you sit around and wait for the one who’s in power to make up his mind that he should end it, you’ll be waiting a long time.” Malcolm’s hustle involved the usage of Shakespeare to stress the use of extremism over moderation in defense of liberty. One aspect to the art of hustling is the act of adaptability, attempted by many, mastered by few. Malcolm was a master of adaptation; whether addressing a local gathering at a street corner in Harlem or debating amongst academic intellectuals in the halls of Oxford, Malcolm was always more than able to demonstrate his hustle.

During an interview for Make It Plain, a documentary on Malcolm X, author Alex Haley remembered a certain remark Malcolm made that left an impression upon him when Malcolm said, “I am a part of all that I have met,” which meant all that Malcolm had experienced and all that he had learned defined the Malcolm he was to that day. When Malcolm was incarcerated, his thirst for knowledge led him to an understanding of self which allowed him to identify and address his problems, his enemies, and the system that turned him against himself. As Malcolm continued to experience and learn, he redefined being Malcolm, as a progressive human being. An interesting yet underappreciated facet of Malcolm’s progressiveness was his hustler mentality. One does not have to be a hustler to have a hustler mentality. To hustle is to survive. Malcolm’s hustler days, in their traditional sense, were long gone before his work with

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the Nation of Islam, but Malcolm’s ability to survive amidst the struggle of being black, Muslim, and alive in New York City during the mid-twentieth century, all attest to his ability to hustle.

Malcolm’s message was never the hustle, which is probably why many Negroes and whites were reluctant to join him in his fight against systemic oppression. Malcolm’s hustle was himself. Malcolm’s ability to sell himself to such a diverse and wide array of audiences was a hustle. Those who heard Malcolm and those who saw Malcolm may not have agreed with all that he had said but they never questioned the sincerity he conveyed in his message. As Harlemite Peter Bailey recalled, “with him [Malcolm], once you heard him speak, you never went back to where you were before. You had to, even if you kept your position, you had to rethink it.”

Usually Malcolm’s message was a historical message because that is what he intellectually treasured so dearly, history. What Malcolm found intellectually interesting and appealing is of great importance to understanding Malcolm’s ideological development. What Malcolm learned through experience and books he used as tools to educate and elevate the mind and soul. Malcolm loved history; more so, Malcolm loved black history. When asked about the importance of educating the youth of tomorrow on historical black militant heroes, Malcolm replied, “So when you select heroes about which black children ought to be taught, let them be black heroes who have died fighting for the benefit of black people. We never were taught about Christophe or Dessalines. It was the slave revolt in Haiti when slaves, black slaves, had the soldiers of Napoleon tied

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29Peter Bailey, in ibid.
down and forced him to sell one half of the American continent to the Americans. They don’t teach us that. This is the kind of history we want to learn.”30

History according to Malcolm was not Negro, American, or African-American, it was human. History according to Malcolm was honest. Malcolm was not afraid to charge the white man with crimes against humanity and used their own history against them to corroborate it. Also, Malcolm was not afraid to charge the so-called Negro with indifference and an inability to set aside their differences to create a united front of men and women willing to fight, even die for their rights on this earth, to be respected as human beings.

So I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism?

Malcolm X, “Interview with Malcolm X,” in Malcolm X Speaks

During a debate at the Oxford Union in 1964 Malcolm made a clever yet ironic remark about the tragic life of Shakespeare’s Hamlet and his moment of doubt, “to be or not to be.”1 Malcolm’s remark was ironic because not even a year later, he mirrored Hamlet’s uncertainty over black nationalism. Was black nationalism “to be” the solution to the problem confronting the twenty-two million so-called Negroes in America or “not to be?” Despite this theoretical question that raged in the mind of Malcolm, his ideological image could not seem to escape the black hole embrace of black nationalism.

The concept of black nationalism has been utilized by many as a means to achieve various ends, and due to these various champions with their various interpretations of the concept, the definition of black nationalism has been and is very mercurial. The simple breakdown of the two words would seem the most appropriate way to define black nationalism, yet to do so would deny the concept its most alluring characteristic and that is its ability to adapt and be redefined. Convention holds nationalism to be a belief or set of beliefs held by a people who share a common adoration for their nation which promotes their culture and interests. History has taught us that when one combines

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revolution and nationalism, it traditionally denotes that the aim of the nationalist is to form his or her own nation. Now with a basic understanding of nationalism and its application in a revolutionary time, it would seem appropriate to define black nationalism during the civil rights movement as a call for the creation of a black nation that would promote the culture and interests of the African American. This rational and simple understanding of the concept of black nationalism is based upon the definition and history of a predominately white world with predominately white experiences. In the United States the culture and interests of the African American were by and large never promoted, so what one would consider as being the definition of nationalism holds little to no merit in the mind of an African American. With that being said, in order to develop a better understanding of black nationalism, one must turn to the concept’s most recognized advocate during the twentieth century, Malcolm X.

During the civil rights movement of the 1960s Malcolm X was labeled the strongest supporter of black nationalism, not only because of to his dedication to nationalistic tenets but also due to the continuance of his nationalistic program via Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Party. Malcolm X was assassinated before he was able to clarify the current position and status of black nationalism, which probably contributes to the typical and traditional view held of the ideology, focusing on its perceived extremism, the call for a migration back to Africa, and the allegations of reverse racism against whites. The aim of this chapter is to examine Malcolm’s ideological courtship, marriage, and eventual divorce from black nationalism.

On 12 March 1964, Malcolm held a formal press conference declaring his independence from the Nation of Islam and its leader Elijah Muhammad. Months before
this pivotal moment in Malcolm’s life, ideological rifts between him and Mr. Muhammad had been a brew, particularly over the Nation’s involvement and sincerity in providing the twenty-two million so-called Negroes in the United States with a solution to their troubles. With furious vitality Malcolm championed black nationalism as his new proactive solution to help alleviate some of the problems afflicting the so-called Negro in America. Malcolm’s declaration of independence speech is the ultimate record of his ideological genesis and development following his break with the Nation of Islam.

At the outset of the speech Malcolm touched base with his constituency, reaffirming his status as a Muslim whose faith was still Islam. Fully aware of the possible consequences for defecting from the Nation, Malcolm did not make any inflammatory remarks against the leaders of the NOI. Instead he continued to support Mr. Muhammad stating, “I still believe that Mr. Muhammad’s analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home, to our own African homeland…. Mr. Muhammad’s program does point us back homeward, but it also contains within it what we could and should be doing to help solve many of our problems while we are still here.”2 Paying close attention to word usage, Malcolm demonstrates a break in thought from his previously held dogmatic adherence to Mr. Muhammad’s solution as being the “only” solution and now simply the “best” solution.3

Accompanying Malcolm’s physical separation from the Nation was an ideological separation in direction. As Malcolm confessed, “Now that I have more independence of

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action, I intend to use a more flexible approach toward working with others to get a
solution to this problem.”⁴ No longer under the rigid constraints of Elijah Muhammad,
Malcolm’s newfound flexibility provided him with the opportunity to enter new realms of
the movement and address new audiences previously denied to him as a member of the
Nation. Malcolm’s new path provided him the base for his “by any means necessary”
approach in search of a solution. Malcolm may not have coined the term “black
nationalism,” but with his declaration of independence he became one of its strongest
advocates with remarks such as, “I am going to organize and head a new mosque in New
York City, known as the Muslim Mosque, Inc. This gives us a religious base, and the
spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our
community. Our political philosophy will be black nationalism. Our economic and
social philosophy will be black nationalism. Our cultural emphasis will be black
nationalism.”⁵ With the establishment of Malcolm’s version of a mosque, he also revived
the concept of black nationalism as the name for his new program, which was nothing
more than Malcolm’s adaptation of the Nation’s program.

Throughout his life, Malcolm encountered various forms of black nationalism, of
course never expressed under such a term, but nevertheless impressed and influenced by
the notion of achieving freedom through black pride and black control over black lives,
black problems, and black successes. During his tenure with the Nation of Islam, the
means and the ends were possible through their faith in Allah and his messenger Elijah
Muhammad. As Malcolm continued to be the spokesperson for the Nation, he was
consequently exposed to various elements of the civil rights movement in the United

⁵Ibid., 21.
States and liberation movements around the world, broadening his vision for freedom and the significant role of the government.

As a minister to the Nation of Islam, Malcolm advocated the complete re-evaluation and re-education of the black man to understand his purpose in society, and this aspect of black nationalism would not change for Malcolm as he placed his personal stamp on the ideology. While under the influence of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm held that only through a physical separation from the white man would the black man be able to be truly free, whether this separation called for a return to Africa or the formation of a black nation within the existing United States. Separatism was firmly rooted within the Nation’s ideology as Malcolm championed this black nationalistic tenet: “We want only an equal chance on this earth, but to have an equal chance we must have the same thing the white man himself needed before he could get this nation started . . . WE MUST HAVE SOME LAND OF OUR OWN! Why do we want some land of our own? Because land is essential to freedom.”

Complementing this precept, Malcolm inherited from the Nation their economic and social arms of black nationalism, as well. The indoctrination of social black nationalism throughout the Nation was of the utmost importance because through social and moral uplift, the Nation would develop a base for economic advancement. The teachings of Elijah Muhammad led every devout follower, especially Malcolm, to believe in the eminent demise of the white man on this earth and the return of the righteous original black people to their dominance as inheritors of Allah’s kingdom. Muhammad therefore encouraged the so-called Negro to separate from the white man in every which

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way possible to avoid annihilation. Muhammad’s message stressed integration with Allah, not with the white man, instead of trying to imitate and be white like, imitate God and try to be God-like in preparation of his return. Minister Malcolm X advocated Muhammad’s social program calling upon the so-called Negroes of America to “recognize each other as Brothers and Sisters . . . stop carrying guns and knives to harm each other, stop drinking whiskey, taking dope, reefers, and even cigarettes. No more gambling! Save your money. Stop fornication, adultery and prostitution. Elevate the Black woman; respect her and protect her. Let us rid ourselves of immoral habits and God will be with us to protect and guide us.”

The Nation of Islam established its financial empire upon the execution of economic black nationalism. The Nation went to great lengths to establish black Muslim owned and operated businesses throughout their communities such as diners, clothing stores, laundry services, farms, grocery stores, and barber shops. The economic arm of black nationalism within the Nation strongly enforced the patronage of Negro businesses by Negro consumers and sometimes violently persuaded the end of spending black dollars on white businesses and services. Rather than grovel at the feet of white employers and businesses, economic black nationalism provided the black man and woman with their own avenues of employment within the Nation. Economic black nationalism within the Nation funneled black dollars throughout the community which provided the residents with a sense of ownership and therefore responsibility for their environment and overall well-being.

The ultimate message of economic black nationalism as heralded in the Nation is the complete control of black economic interests within their community by black

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7Ibid., 415-16.
residents. Once again, black control of their economic environment rested upon black unity and solidarity, provided by a strong social black nationalist program. Black nationalistic tenets were used throughout the Nation’s program as the means to achieve a separate fully functional black nation within a nation that existed upon the tenets of brotherhood and justice. As Minister Malcolm proclaimed, “God has given Mr. Muhammad a Divine Message, Program, and Solution. WE MUST HAVE LAND! . . . We will then set up our own farms, factories, business, and schools . . . We want some land where we can create unity, harmony and brotherhood . . . and live in peace.”

Malcolm’s view on black nationalism while minister to the Nation evolved to include new shades of grey to the ever-changing face of the ideological concept by the time of his declared independence. Malcolm’s black nationalism was very similar to that of the Nation of Islam with one distinct exception, the infusion of politics. The Nation of Islam compelled every member to refrain from participating in the fraudulent American political system that denied blacks basic human rights as well as civil rights. Despite his loyalty to Mr. Muhammad, Malcolm could not disregard the powerful possibilities of politics and its role in the lives of the so-called Negro.

As to not deviate too far from Mr. Muhammad’s program, Minister Malcolm combined the Nation’s call for a united black front with his itch for political participation. As he explained: “As Black people we must unite. We must recognize and give intelligent active support to our political leaders who fight for us unselfishly, sincerely, and fearlessly. But, to prove their sincerity and their right for the support of the Black Masses, these leaders must first display fearlessness, intelligence, and unity among

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8Ibid., 420.
themselves." After his split with the Nation, Malcolm, with the freedom and range of thought and speech, returned to political rhetoric as he advocated and stressed the importance of suffrage to blacks throughout the United States. Three weeks after his declaration of independence, on 3 April 1964 in Cleveland, Ohio, Malcolm gave his infamous “Ballot or the Bullet” speech which directly spelled out his new theoretical approach to black nationalism. During this speech Malcolm placed his own personal stamp upon the amorphous concept of black nationalism. Malcolm expressed his concerns about the movement for freedom in the United States and then explained how black nationalism, as a means, could be utilized to achieve the ends of being respected as human beings, today, on this earth.

As with his declaration of independence speech, Malcolm’s first concern was again a reaffirmation of his faith and a call for black unity. Malcolm’s unity challenged brothers and sisters of black communities to forget their differences and focus on their commonality, their sorrows, and what Malcolm thought could stop the suffering, the ballot or the bullet. The “Ballot or the Bullet” speech illustrates the development of Malcolm’s ideological thought a mere three weeks after his official announcement of a black nationalist program. He did reiterate the essential elements of his black nationalist program which included black control of social, economic, and political sectors of black communities. His perspective on black nationalism in this speech, however, also showed signs of progression in thought as he placed a stronger emphasis on the political spectrum of his black nationalism triumvirate, with statements such as, “I’m not a Democrat, I’m not a Republican, and I don’t even consider myself an American. If you and I were Americans, there’d be no problem. . . . No, I’m not an American. I’m one of the 22

\footnote{Ibid., 416.}
million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy.”

Malcolm’s new perspective on black nationalism had evolved beyond the “back to Africa” call into the attainment of rights accorded to black people in the United States, who when united could become a powerful political bloc. For Malcolm, the power of black nationalism rested upon the strength in numbers maxim, a united mass of organized blacks willing to use the ballot or the bullet to obtain what rightfully belonged to them. Once again Malcolm used recent history to explain his position on politics and the power of the ballot, as he reminded his audience, “It was the black man’s vote that put the present administration in Washington, D.C. Your vote, your dumb vote, your ignorant vote . . .” Malcolm’s statement marked the beginning of his political examination of registering a bloc of black voters, revolutionary in structure, as independents to represent a non-aligned constituency. Malcolm’s new black nationalist political power play was to create a bargaining base for blacks to fight not against segregation in the United States but rather the system in America that perpetuated segregation and oppression at home and abroad. As Malcolm stressed, “So, what I’m trying to impress upon you, in essence, is this: You and I in America are faced not with a segregationist conspiracy, we’re faced with a government conspiracy.” Malcolm had identified for his audience a new enemy, the real enemy; not the white man in the South rather the entire American system of government. Malcolm’s mind at this moment in time was revolutionary and contrary to the mainstream civil rights movement in that his black nationalism did not call for

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11Ibid., 26-27.
12Ibid., 30.
integration into the American way of life. Instead, it attacked the hypocritical government that promoted and denied the ideal. Malcolm did sincerely believe in the American way of doing things which is why he demanded first, the ballot, but knowing that even this demand would never be met or upheld with sincerity by the white man, Malcolm provided an alternative, the bullet. Malcolm’s new line of thought placed African Americans at a crossroads, a change was going to come by way of the ballot or the bullet.

Malcolm understood that the existing fight for equality in the United States had been thoroughly infiltrated by so-called friends of the movement, and instead of helping they had actually handicapped the true independence and freedom of the so-called Negro in America. With this understanding, Malcolm revolutionized his political thought and internationalized the movement to include the oppressed peoples of the world, transforming the so-called American Negro minority into a world Negro majority. Malcolm’s new perspective rested upon identifying the so-called American Negroes’ struggle with those around the world who were struggling, some succeeding in removing the yoke of oppression and colonialism. To build these world bridges Malcolm required the support of his brothers and sisters at home and abroad, ultimately necessitating relationships with new friends.\(^{13}\) While Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., hoped to form coalitions with sympathetic Americans to fight for civil rights in the United States, Malcolm hoped to form coalitions with brethren across the globe in order to secure rights that transcended and trumped civil rights - human rights. In his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech, Malcolm stated: “When we begin to get in this area, we need new friends, we need new allies. We need to expand the civil-rights struggle to a higher level - to the

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 31.
level of human rights. Whenever you are in a civil-rights struggle, whether you know it or not, you are confining yourself to the jurisdiction of Uncle Sam. . . . You may wonder why all of the atrocities that have been committed in Africa and Hungary and in Asia and in Latin America are brought before the UN, and the negro problem is never brought before the UN. This is part of the conspiracy.”

Aware of struggles against white colonialism across the globe, Malcolm held that if coalitions were formed with their brethren worldwide, then African Americans would be able to garner the necessary support to combat discrimination at home and abroad to secure human rights for all. In diplomatic fashion, he even held that such grievances should be brought to the court of the world, the United Nations, to place America on trial. As Malcolm contended, “Civil rights means you’re asking Uncle Sam to treat you right. Human rights are something you are born with. Human rights are your God-given rights. Human rights are the rights that are recognized by all nations of this earth. And any time any one violates your human rights, you can take them to the world court.”

Malcolm’s international and universal outlook was not original rather reminiscent of Du Bois’s Pan-Africanism.

Malcolm’s black nationalism called upon the black man to define and redefine himself, so that he may know himself and his purpose. Now that Malcolm had redefined the aim of his movement, he had made it his own, demonstrating a key feature of black nationalism - black ownership. Malcolm’s redefinition of the issue at hand, to change the struggle from civil rights to human rights, is of extraordinary significance in that he defined the movement under his own terms and not those regulated by the white man in a white America. As the speech progressed with highflying rhetoric and charm, which

14Ibid., 34.
15Ibid., 35.
seemed to radiate from his character naturally, Malcolm mapped out the objectives of the political, economic, and social arms of black nationalism.

Malcolm explained, “The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community; no more.” Once again, championing the beliefs held by his father, Marcus Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm continued to advocate black control over black interests. Malcolm’s contribution to his forefathers’ versions of black nationalism was that he expanded the realm of black interests to include political matters. In another step delineating Malcolm’s touch on black nationalism, was his attempt to associate his movement with what was considered to be the “mainstream” civil rights movement when he concluded, “the political philosophy of black nationalism is being taught in the NAACP. It’s being taught in CORE meetings. It’s being taught in SNCC meetings.”

Malcolm’s suggestion that the concept of black nationalism was present in other “mainstream” organizations, illustrates his willingness to associate and work with those who sincerely sought to secure human rights, a character of Malcolm’s ideology that was at odds with the reclusive Nation of Islam. Unfortunately not until after Malcolm’s death did other leaders in the “mainstream” movement pay attention to the portrait titled “black nationalism” that Malcolm vividly painted for them. As James Farmer, executive secretary of CORE, later remarked, “black nationalism is the dominant mood of the Negro masses in the United States today.”

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16 Ibid., 38.
In regards to economics, Malcolm stressed, “the economic philosophy of black nationalism is pure and simple. It only means that we should control the economy of our community. Why should white people be running all the stores in our community? Why should white people be running the banks of our community? Why should the economy of our community be in the hands of the white man? Why? If a black man can’t move his store into a white community, you tell me why a white man should move his store into a black community.”

Malcolm’s economic policy bears a resemblance to the control of the African American community surrounding Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, which was carefully insulated by its administrators. One example of community insulation and black nationalism demonstrated by Washington’s Institute occurred when students complained about their inability to access facilities outside their community due to racial discrimination; the administration encouraged the students to utilize those facilities established for and within the Institute’s community.

The achievement of political and economic aims within the program was dependent upon the success of the social arm of black nationalism. Malcolm’s social arm of black nationalism was dependent upon his maxim that there could be no black and white unity until there was first some black unity. Black unity (the social philosophy of black nationalism) was essential to the success of the black community in its political and economic interests. Malcolm proposed, “The social philosophy of black nationalism only means that we have to get together and remove the evils, the vices, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other evils that are destroying the moral fiber of our community. We

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ourselves have to lift the level of our community, the standard of our community to a higher level, make our own society beautiful so that we will be satisfied in our own social circles and won’t be running around here trying to knock our way into a social circle where we’re not wanted.”

Malcolm closed his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech championing an ideal central to his vision of black nationalism that can be found in the minds of Washington, Du Bois, Little, Garvey, and Elijah Muhammad, that of knowing thyself. As Malcolm declared, “So I say, in spreading a gospel such as black nationalism, it is not designed to make the black man re-evaluate the white man - you know him already - but to make the black man re-evaluate himself.”

Ten days after Malcolm gave his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech, he left the United States to travel abroad and build the necessary bridges to internationalize his black nationalist program. During his travels, Malcolm experienced two specific events, “el Hajj” and an encounter with an Algerian revolutionary, both of which forever changed his heart and mind in regard to black nationalism.

One of the five pillars of Islam, el Hajj is the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca that is required of all fortunate and able Muslims to complete. Malcolm had always been taught that the true nature of Islam forbade whites from embracing the faith due to their natural inclination to be evil, yet during this sacred voyage Malcolm encountered Muslims from every pocket of the world, of all colors and all shapes, demonstrating sincere brotherhood and harmony through the grace of Islam. In regard to el Hajj, Malcolm expressed his amazement, “You may be shocked by these words coming from me, but I have always been a man who tries to face the facts, and to accept the reality of

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21Ibid., 39-40.
life as new experiences and knowledge unfold it. The experiences of this pilgrimage have taught me much, and each hour here in the Holy Land opens my eyes even more. If Islam can place the spirit of true brotherhood in the hearts of the ‘whites’ whom I have met here in the Land of the Prophets, then surely it can also remove the ‘cancer of racism’ from the heart of the white American. . . .”

Continuing his travels, Malcolm met with various leaders, diplomats, and ambassadors, one of them an Algerian revolutionary, in an effort to secure allies in his fight against systemic exploitation. Pressing his program of black nationalism Malcolm told the Algerian that his social, economic, and political philosophy was black nationalism, who in response simply questioned, “well, where did that leave him?” Coming from a revolutionary who had recently been successful in removing oppressive elements from his nation, the ambassador’s inquiry forced Malcolm to question the justification and legitimacy of a program whose philosophy centered upon color, due to the fact that the Algerian was not black but rather a white African. Along with el Hajj, this experience set in motion the mind of Malcolm, forcing a reappraisal of his initial means (black nationalism) and his initial vehicle (the Muslim Mosque, Inc.).

Malcolm assumed there were many individuals who believed in his program and wanted to support his efforts but felt alienated by the religious nature of the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the color-conquests of black nationalism, so he created the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Modeled after the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the OAAU was established to meet the needs of the so-called

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Negro not addressed by the MMI and the major civil rights movement. Malcolm’s new organization still maintained many of the essential elements of his black nationalist program, as to not abruptly divorce himself from the concept and his faithful constituency, but it was clear that once firmly established, Malcolm hoped the OAAU would create a new action program that would sincerely address and solve the problems of the so-called Negro in America. During the founding rally for the OAAU, Malcolm unveiled the “Basic Aims and Objectives of Afro-American Unity.”

Laced throughout the OAAU treatise were terms such as “conscious,” “unity,” and “human.” These terms were used as the basis of Malcolm’s new international outlook and approach to the problems facing the liberation of his brothers and sisters in America. Malcolm’s ideological floor began with a consciousness and knowledge of self and others, as received and disseminated throughout his tenure in the Nation of Islam. Malcolm’s new sense of consciousness involved a reconnection of blacks in America with blacks across the world, and on an even larger horizon a reconnection of oppressed in the United States with the oppressed around the world. Malcolm’s unity was a far different cry from his days and teachings under the hypnotic trance of Mr. Elijah Muhammad and his “truth,” illustrating an ideological ascent. Transcending all forms of previous thought in the civil rights movement, Malcolm placed a heavy stress upon the “human-being” and the denial of “human rights” in America to the African American. Malcolm’s encounters while traveling abroad enabled him to broaden his view of the African American struggle to realize that throughout the world their were people, who would be considered “Negro” in the United States, who were breaking the shackles of colonialism and establishing independent nations with independent voices in a new world.
order. Malcolm understood that a link, a common bond, possessed by those struggling in America could be forged with those of similar race, descent, and struggle abroad. Malcolm held that by expanding the struggle to human rights it would align Africans in the United States with those around the world and that their grievances would be pressed in the “court of the world,” the United Nations (UN). The necessary allies in the human struggle provided the so-called minority in America with the idea that they were really a majority, able to confront their oppressors due to their strength in numbers, due to their unity. To achieve all of this, Malcolm understood that the connection between those Africans in America with those around the world would require a re-education of the so-called Negro in America to be “conscious” of their brothers’ struggles abroad, bringing his means of black liberation full circle.

As Malcolm broadened his outlook and ideas, black nationalism became too small, too restrictive of a concept for the world revolution Malcolm envisioned. During an interview well after his experiences in Africa, Malcolm was asked to define black nationalism and he replied, “I used to define black nationalism as . . . ,” which illustrates the evolution of the concept in the mind of Malcolm. Once the loudest champions of black nationalism, Malcolm frankly admitted in the same interview, “And if you notice, I haven’t been using the expression [black nationalism] for several months,” further demonstrating Malcolm’s mental estrangement with the concept. During his tenure with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm courted the ideology of black nationalism. With his declaration of independence from the Nation, Malcolm expressed his deep devotion and marriage to black nationalism. As Malcolm progressed as a human being, he tried to bring along black nationalism through that same progression, altering some of its aims.

\[24\text{Ibid.}\]
and objectives, as recounted in his “Ballot or the Bullet” speech. A period of questioning and separation occurred in the mind of Malcolm over his relationship with black nationalism as he encountered life changing experiences during his travels abroad. Before Malcolm was able to clearly define his status with black nationalism he was assassinated, bringing the ideological relationship to an end within a mere year.

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate Malcolm’s significant yet short acknowledged embrace with the ideology of black nationalism. Typically historians have placed great significance and correlation upon black nationalism and Malcolm X. To label Malcolm and his mind in black nationalist terms, however, limits the broad spectrum of his thought and sincere desire to be flexible in a struggle that required such characteristics.

During the last year of his life, Malcolm’s mind was a free-falling entity grasping onto any ideology that seemed secure and sincere in saving his life and the lives of those he represented. Malcolm on black nationalism was the same as Malcolm on any other ideology that he considered a possible solution to the troubles facing his brothers and sisters across the world. With furious zeal and charisma, Malcolm’s advocacy of black nationalism led many to label and confine his ideological legacy into a simple, neat, and defined box, crippling a greater understanding of the man and his mind. To clearly spotlight Malcolm’s mind on black nationalism, less than ten months after his announcement of a black nationalist philosophy that entailed social, economic, and political spheres, Malcolm remarked at a meeting in Paris, “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 our people suffer.”

Malcolm was continually evaluating, re-evaluating, and redefining himself as he constantly defined and redefined black nationalism. Those who considered Malcolm and his movement as inconsistent and unreliable due to his constant redefining, fail to appreciate these unique attributes of a progressive human being. As each day passed leading up to Malcolm’s assassination, his views on black nationalism were in an ideological metamorphosis. Malcolm became black nationalism and vice versa, both misunderstood by those who did not know them, both definitive yet malleable in structure, and most importantly the means necessary to the liberation of the human mind.

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I wonder if anybody really understands -


One of Malcolm’s final remarks was a question, a rhetorical question that continues to haunt the ideological legacy of the man and his mind. As remembered by a young lady assistant before Malcolm was assassinated on 21 February 1965 at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City, Malcolm’s comment provides a rare glimpse into the fragile state of his mind; Malcolm not questioning the world, rather Malcolm questioning himself. Considering the moment at which Malcolm made the comment, the sentiment expressed is one of a man apart from the world, a man isolated and incomplete. Malcolm knew the end was near. He had predicted and prophesized his own downfall. When a man recognizes what Malcolm knew, one begins to recall all the events and experiences that have brought that person to their final place in this beautiful struggle called life. Staring demise in the eyes, one begins to question what their purpose or significance in life was or how it will be remembered. As Malcolm commented, “I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help to destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America - then, all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine.”

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Malcolm made numerous mistakes throughout his lifetime and paid the price for many of them, and in order to appreciate his growth it is necessary to recognize these errors and his efforts to correct them. Malcolm brilliantly battled his personal and intellectual demons from the past and present, imposed and self-imposed. The mind of Malcolm during his first and final year of intellectual freedom in thought and expression was a hurried revolution that did not have the privilege for much reflection and contemplation. Following the death of the so-called demagogic hate-monger, the ideological legacy left behind for others to decipher and carry-on was quite like the man; incomplete. This chapter will examine the ideological legacy of Malcolm found and perpetuated by friends and enemies and, ultimately, unveil and expose a lost legacy to the mind of Malcolm, to determine if anybody really understood.

Introducing Malcolm to an eager crowd at the Audubon Ballroom on 21 February 1965 was Brother Benjamin Goodman, a close associate to Malcolm X and member of the OAAU. Goodman made his introduction plain with an eerie and ironic reminder to understand that Malcolm was “a man who would give his life for you.” To an applause fit for a prince, Malcolm ascended to the speaker’s podium and addressed his brothers and sisters with the traditional Islamic greeting of peace, “As-salaam alaikum.” In the mortal moment that followed, with his pregnant wife and young daughters sitting front row, Malcolm collapsed before an enfilade of gunfire and died. Chaos followed as audience members began shouting, screaming, and scattering. Amidst the melee, OAAU

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security and close associates tried to apprehend the supposed gunmen while Malcolm’s wife, Betty Shabazz, and others tried to revive the fallen Malcolm. He was placed upon a stretcher and rushed to the nearest hospital, where emergency room surgeons recognized the cold body before them as Malcolm X. For fifteen minutes surgeons feverishly worked on Malcolm’s bullet ridden body but it was clear and present, as announced to those in worry and waiting, “The gentleman you know as Malcolm X is dead.”³

By word of mouth the assassination of Malcolm X spread like wildfire throughout Harlem. Speculation was sparked immediately over Malcolm’s murder and so-called murderers with fingers pointed at everyone, the Nation of Islam, the United States government, local law and intelligence agencies, the C.I.A., the F.B.I., international elements, and even Malcolm himself. Malcolm X was considered a threat to all of the aforementioned, but it was not because of his ability to mobilize the masses, because he never did, and it was not because he was involved in physically violent demonstrations because he never was; rather, it was Malcolm’s revolutionary ideology and ability to transform the minds of those he embraced, to think, question, and remove the veil that distorted their perception of freedom, their perception of truth.

According to Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm took his own life. Malcolm’s mind brought the sword, and his body received the sword. As Elijah Muhammad remembered, “For more than a year, Malcolm was given his freedom. He went everywhere - Asia, Europe, Africa, and even to Mecca, trying to make enemies for me. He came back preaching that we should not hate the enemy. . . .

His foolish teaching brought him to his own end.”⁴ Bayard Rustin, a seasoned African American civil rights activist who helped organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the March on Washington, made several blistering indictments against the late activist such as, “Malcolm . . . is not a hero of the movement, he is a tragic victim of the ghetto;”⁵ and “For all of his militance, Malcolm was in many respects a conservative force in the Negro community. His violent rhetoric was a ‘cop-out.’” Despite his severe criticism, Rustin did recognize the influence Malcolm’s image and message held over the African American community enough to warrant the plea, “Now that he is dead . . . we must resist the temptation to idealize Malcolm X, to elevate charisma to greatness.”⁶ Carl T. Rowan, the first African American Director of the United States Information Agency, concurred with Rustin in that Malcolm’s image, message, and influence should not be glorified because he was nothing more than “a Negro, who preached segregation and race hatred, killed by another Negro presumably from another organization that preaches segregation and race hatred, and neither of them representative of more than a tiny minority of the Negro population of America.”⁷

⁴Ibid., 447.


While these scathing critiques warrant some merit, they do not fully represent Malcolm’s complex character and evolving position and therefore fail to do justice to the man and his mind. In life Malcolm’s mind and fierce rhetoric scared many whites and blacks from aligning with his cause. However, in death Malcolm’s message seemed to gain more acceptance and advocacy from fellow activists in the struggle, especially those that became disenchanted with the results of the non-violent resistance movement. In 1967, James Forman, executive secretary of the Student Non violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), adopted a resolution declaring “that SNCC considered itself to be a human rights organization working for the liberation not only of Black people in the United States but of all oppressed peoples, especially those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”8 The majority of those involved with SNCC were eager and young students, who wanted the direct action and results Malcolm championed. Even Bayard Rustin recognized, in hindsight of course, that “Malcolm X caused many young Negroes to take a new vision of themselves.”9 Forman directly attributed SNCC’s new direction in the movement to the work and influence of Malcolm X. Although Malcolm often mocked the so-called educated Negro, that did no stop Dr. Kenneth B. Clark from expressing his “deep respect” for Malcolm, who he thought “was sincerely groping to find a place in the fight for Civil Rights, on a level where he would be respected.”10

In his time Malcolm recognized the power of the pen and print. Malcolm knew that this power could be used to educate, move, and motivate, as well as mislead,

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10Ibid.
bamboozle, and hoodwink. Malcolm prophesized that the majority of those involved in the media would label him and his ideological movement unfairly. He knew that he would not be understood, and he was correct. So how was Malcolm’s ideological legacy remembered? Did anyone really understand?

The day after his assassination an editorial in The New York Times remembered Malcolm “as an extraordinary and twisted man, turning true gifts to evil purpose.” As Malcolm predicted, he could not escape a violent end in life or in the press. Labels of “violence” and “militancy” imposed upon Malcolm yet perpetuated by Malcolm allowed the editorial to continue, “his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence . . . marked him for notoriety, and for a violent end.” The editorial blatantly blamed Malcolm’s ideology for creating an atmosphere of violence and despair from which his assassin “spawned.”

The Dallas Morning News unabashedly inked, “There has been surprisingly little pity for Malcolm X following his assassination – and no wonder.” Interestingly enough, unlike the so-called cosmopolitan New York Times, The Dallas Morning News did recognize, “In recent months, Malcolm X had a change of heart and began to denounce the doctrine of hate and destruction he had long advocated. But it was too late. The seeds of violence he had sown had already borne their harvest.”

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12“X-It Malcolm,” The Dallas Morning News, Feb 25, 1965, The Dallas Morning News Historical Archive (1885 – 1977), 2, [newspaper on-line]; available from http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iwsearch/we/HistArchive/?p_action=doc&p_queryname=2&p_docid=0FF3DD4F8ACEBEA&p_docnum=1&s_page=-1&s_ARTICLE_ID=0FF3DDD4F8ACEBEA&s_RELEASE=release_0013&s_ISSUE_ID=0FF3DDD090D36CA7&s_FORMAT=gif&s_SIZE=display&s_SEARCHED=%28+%28%28pty%253A10+%29+OR+%28pty%253A50+%29%29+OR+%28pty%253A60+%29%29+OR+%28pty%253A60+%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A40+%29+OR+%28pty%253A50+%29+OR+%28pty%253A10+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A20+%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A0%29+OR+%28pty%253A10%29+OR+%28pty%253A20%29+OR+%28pty%253A30%29+OR+%28pty%253A40%29+OR+%28pty%253A50%29+OR+%28pty%253A60%29+OR+%28pty%253A70%29+OR+%28pty%253A80%29+OR+%28pty%253A90%29+OR+%28pty%253A11%29+OR+%28pty%253A12%29+OR+%28pty%253A13%29+OR+%28pty%253A14%29+OR+%28pty%253A15%29+OR+%28pty%253A16%29+OR+%28pty%253A17%29+OR+%28pty%253A18%29+OR+%28pty%253A19%29+OR+%28pty%253A20%29+OR+%28pty%253A21%29+OR+%28pty%253A22%29+OR+%28pty%253A23%29+OR+%28pty%253A24%29+OR+%28pty%253A25%29+OR+%28pty%253A26%29+OR+%28pty%253A27%29+OR+%28pty%253A28%29+OR+%28pty%253A29%29+OR+%28pty%253A30%29+OR+%28pty%253A31%29+OR+%28pty%253A32%29+OR+%28pty%253A33%29+OR+%28pty%253A34%29+OR+%28pty%253A35%29+OR+%28pty%253A36%29+OR+%28pty%253A37%29+OR+%28pty%253A38%29+OR+%28pty%253A39%29+OR+%28pty%253A40%29+OR+%28pty%253A41%29+OR+%28pty%253A42%29+OR+%28pty%253A43%29+OR+%28pty%253A44%29+OR+%28pty%253A45%29+OR+%28pty%253A46%29+OR+%28pty%253A47%29+OR+%28pty%253A48%29+OR+%28pty%253A49%29+OR+%28pty%253A50%29+OR+%28pty%253A51%29+OR+%28pty%253A52%29+OR+%28pty%253A53%29+OR+%28pty%253A54%29+OR+%28pty%253A55%29+OR+%28pty%253A56%29+OR+%28pty%253A57%29+OR+%28pty%253A58%29+OR+%28pty%253A59%29+OR+%28pty%253A60%29+OR+%28pty%253A61%29+OR+%28pty%253A62%29+OR+%28pty%253A63%29+OR+%28pty%253A64%29+OR+%28pty%253A65%29+OR+%28pty%253A66%29+OR+%28pty%253A67%29+OR+%28pty%253A68%29+OR+%28pty%253A69%29+OR+%28pty%253A70%29+OR+%28pty%253A71%29+OR+%28pty%253A72%29+OR+%28pty%253A73%29+OR+%28pty%253A74%29+OR+%28pty%253A75%29+OR+%28pty%253A76%29+OR+%28pty%253A77%29+OR+%28pty%253A78%29+OR+%28pty%253A79%29+OR+%28pty%253A80%29+OR+%28pty%253A81%29+OR+%28pty%253A82%29+OR+%28pty%253A83%29+OR+%28pty%253A84%29+OR+%28pty%253A85%29+OR+%28pty%253A86%29+OR+%28pty%253A87%29+OR+%28pty%253A88%29+OR+%28pty%253A89%29+OR+%28pty%253A90%29+OR+%28pty%253A91%29+OR+%28pty%253A92%29+OR+%28pty%253A93%29+OR+%28pty%253A94%29+OR+%28pty%253A95%29+OR+%28pty%253A96%29+OR+%28pty%253A97%29+OR+%28pty%253A98%29+OR+%28pty%253A99%29+OR+%28pty%253A100%29+OR+%28pty%253A101%29+OR+%28pty%253A102%29+OR+%28pty%253A103%29+OR+%28pty%253A104%29+OR+%28pty%253A105%29+OR+%28pty%253A106%29+OR+%28pty%253A107%29+OR+%28pty%253A108%29+OR+%28pty%253A109%29+OR+%28pty%253A110%29+OR+%28pty%253A111%29+OR+%28pty%253A112%93
printed its editorial on Malcolm’s death, a response was offered rebuking much of what
the editor claimed, referring to Malcolm as a “truthful and sincere man of great goodwill.
He was assassinated not because he was a violent man but because he longed for peace
and believed that it could only come when men were honest with each other. He knew
that murder is spawned in the darkness of men’s minds.”

In publications abroad Malcolm’s assassination and legacy were not only
acknowledged but remembered in a different light than that offered by the American
press. The *Daily Times* of Lagos, in Nigeria, noted Malcolm’s efforts to liberate his
brothers and sisters in the United States and boldly declared that Malcolm would “have a
place in the palace of martyrs.” In both the *Pakistan Times* and China’s *People’s Daily,
Malcolm was remembered as a man who fought for the “emancipation” of the so-called
Negroes in America. When remembering Malcolm and his mind, no one honored the
man quite so eloquently than respected actor and activist, Ossie Davis, who also
delivered the eulogy at Malcolm’s funeral. Davis did not agree with many of Malcolm’s
views but respected him because Malcolm was something Ossie was not.

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As Davis remembered, “At the same time - and this is important - most of them took special pains to disagree with much or all of what Malcolm said and what he stood for. That is, with one signing exception, they all, every last, black, glory-hugging one of them, knew that Malcolm - whatever else he was or was not - *Malcolm was a man!* White folks do not need anybody to remind them that they are men. We do! This was his on incontrovertible benefit to his people.”\(^{16}\)

In retrospect, the Malcolm remembered was not necessarily the Malcolm found. Despite the revolution of Malcolm and his ideas, many of his peers simply could not or would not let him escape his past life and message as National Minister to the Nation of Islam. Malcolm’s blessing, his rebirth in the Nation, became his curse in posterity. Ideologically Malcolm could not turn the corner.\(^{17}\) Whereas the youth who carried Malcolm’s cross discovered ideologies of black nationalism and world revolution against oppression, they failed to remember the mistakes and faults in the Malcolm X experience, perpetuating another incomplete legacy.

Malcolm in almost prophetic fashion understood the need to consult the youth, to whom if freedom had not come by now, then they were to continue the struggle. As Malcolm stated, “Our accent will be upon the youth: we need new ideas, new methods, new approaches. We will call upon young students of political science throughout the nation to help us. We will encourage these young students to launch their own independent study, and then give us their analysis and their suggestions. We are completely disenchanted with the old, adult, established politicians. We want to see

\(^{16}\)Quoted in *ibid.*, 453.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 424.
some new faces - more militant faces.”18 Malcolm’s vision extended the struggle to the youth, to the masses, which he recognized as the avant-garde of the movement. Statements such as the one made in Malcolm’s declaration speech appealed to the increasingly militant activists such as Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Huey Newton, each of whom possessed flares of Malcolm in their ideological fires.

As “mainstream” organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), continued the struggle for civil rights in the United States by way of non-violent direct action, the black youths of the movement were growing impatient. The younger activists, particularly those involved in SNCC and CORE, were beginning to view the progress achieved, under the current leadership of the SCLC and the NAACP, as examples of tokenism at best to pacify the black masses. Riding in a desegregated bus, drinking water from a desegregated fountain, and sitting on a toilet next to a white person, were not the types of progress the wary young black masses viewed as essential to solve the problems faced by the millions of black people in America.

Many black youths were becoming frustrated and disenchanted with the doctrine of non-violent direct action as a means to secure their human rights. They were becoming cynical and apathetic towards the sincerity of the American government. In order for the movement to tackle the monumental task of combating institutionally engrained racism and discrimination in the United States, a new ideological approach with new leadership was necessary. Black nationalism became the siren song that opened

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the ears, eyes, and mind of the young black masses in America. The ideology found was black nationalism; their leader remembered was Malcolm X.

After the assassination of Malcolm X, his unfinished legacy remained to be deciphered and administered, and as Malcolm predicted, the youth did take control of the movement. “If we are to proceed toward true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people. We must form our own institutions, credit unions, co-ops, political parties, write our own histories,”19 such a remark would seem to belong to Malcolm, when in actuality it belongs to Stokely Carmichael, who at one time was the executive secretary of SNCC.

Since its genesis, SNCC was involved in some manner, shape, or form with the SCLC, then under the leadership of Dr. King. SNCC adopted the principles of non-violent direct action as their means to achieve the universal end. Once there seemed to be no end in sight, the members of SNCC became frustrated with the movement, which many felt was not their own. The students believed that their efforts were being subverted by the over involvement of Dr. King in their activities, resulting in further resentment towards him and his movement. By 1966, the election of Stokely Carmichael heralded a new age of militancy in the SNCC.

Stokely Carmichael, infamous for consciously advocating “Black Power,” was the new disseminator of black nationalism, drawing heavily from the ideology of Malcolm X. Carmichael championed Malcolm’s black nationalism, often using phrases by Malcolm word for word. For example, in his autobiography Malcolm stated, “The word has no real meaning. I ask you: in the racial sense in which it’s used so much today, whatever

‘integration’ is supposed to mean, can it precisely be defined,”20 while not too long after becoming chairman of SNCC, Carmichael referred to integration as irrelevant. Carmichael was also reported instructing another SNCC member that if a white man put his hands on him to break his arm, which is not too different from Malcolm’s suggestion to “send him to the cemetery.”21 Illustrating his awareness of self and the enemy, Carmichael utilized the slogan “Black Power,” which honored the tenets of Malcolm’s black nationalism, yet cunningly dissociated himself with the actual wording of black nationalism so as not to attract the forces that were believed to have assassinated their ideological leader, Malcolm X. Carmichael explained, “Black Nationalism in this country means ‘anti-white . . . that’s the trick they’re trying to put me in.”22

Malcolm’s influence of black nationalism upon the young Carmichael is most evident in his aptly titled treatise, “Black Power.” In his book, Carmichael stated, “If we succeed, we will exercise control over our lives, politically, economically, and psychically. We will also contribute to the development of a viable larger society; in terms of ultimate social benefit, there is nothing unilateral about the movement to free black people.”23 As Malcolm constantly called for the re-education and re-defining of blacks in America, Carmichael asserted, “The time is long overdue for the black community to redefine itself, set forth new values and goals, and organize around


21 Carmichael quoted in Harper, 399.


them.”24 Malcolm promoted a separated worldwide community calling for black unity, and once this was established, blacks would have the solidarity necessary to combat other evils such as racism. Carmichael claimed, “Only when black people fully develop this sense of community, of themselves, can they begin to deal effectively with the problems of racism in this country. This is what we mean by a new consciousness; this is the vital first step.”25

Malcolm’s black nationalism and Carmichael’s Black Power movement influenced later black militant organizations, most notably the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed in Oakland, California, by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966. The militant organization derived its name from Carmichael’s Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which used the black panther as its symbol. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was originally formed to combat police brutality in African American communities, but soon their organization expanded to include outreach projects and programs to promote black solidarity and unity. Such programs included a free breakfast project for needy school children, resistance to black involvement in the military (specifically the draft), free health clinics, clothing and shoe programs, and education campaigns. The Party even had a weekly newspaper called *The Black Panther*, to educate the community on the issues relevant to their interests and that of the movement.

24Ibid., 32.
25Ibid., 39.
Eldridge Cleaver, considered the third most influential Black Panther at the organization’s height, was the strongest advocate for the expansion of Black Panther operations to include communal uplift. Cleaver was heavily influenced by the life and thought of Malcolm X. As Malcolm converted to the Nation of Islam in prison, so did Cleaver. When Malcolm broke with the Nation, so did Cleaver. When Malcolm was assassinated, Cleaver organized a memorial service for him in California and it would be at this service that Cleaver encountered the Black Panther Party.26

The growing concerns of the Black Panther Party revolved around the belief that blacks in the United States could never be free under the existing system. Therefore, the Party called for a revolution to take place, which rings of Malcolm’s struggle against systemic oppression. Malcolm’s brand of revolutionary nationalism was most notably expressed in his “Message to the Grass Roots,” which represented the atmosphere of young black militants who were growing impatient with the tactics of non-violent direct action. Malcolm remarked, “You don’t have a turn-the-cheek revolution. There’s no such thing as a nonviolent revolution. The only kind of revolution that is nonviolent is the Negro revolution.”27 Even within their own name the Panthers represented the aims of Malcolm X and his unwaveringly belief in the human right to defend himself against violence, hence the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

Malcolm held that the struggle for civil rights in the United States had reached its limits, giving way to the struggle for human rights, and consequently the Negro Revolution, giving way to the Black Revolution. The Black Panther Party followed suit.

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believing a Black Revolution was necessary to free the oppressed from racism, colonialism, and capitalism. The Black Panther Party’s concept of a Black Revolution was borrowed from the views espoused by Malcolm in his “Message to the Grass Roots”: “The white man knows what a revolution is. He knows that the black revolution is world-wide in scope and in nature. The black revolution is sweeping Asia, is sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America. The Cuban Revolution - that’s a revolution. They overturned the system. Revolution is in Asia, revolution is in Africa, and the white man is screaming because he sees revolution in Latin America. How do you think he’ll react to you when you learn what a real revolution is? . . . If you are afraid of Black Nationalism, you’re afraid of revolution.”28

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, the traditional course of agitation in the civil rights movement by way of non-violent direct action failed to relate to the growing constituency of a younger more militant avant-garde. When analyzing the redefinition of black nationalism under the guidance of Stokely Carmichael’s Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense with their communal and world-wide activities, it would be erroneous to downplay the monumental influence of Malcolm’s mind upon the future ideological developments of the movement.

Only after examining what was remembered and what was found can one discover Malcolm’s ideological legacy lost. To a few, Malcolm was either a hate mongering militant minister to the cult of the Nation of Islam or the young, gallant black liberator of the Negro mind. To the masses who know or care to know about Malcolm, he was a black civil rights leader who preached violence and was assassinated by black

28Ibid., 9-10.
people. Malcolm was a man of many faults and gifts, but rarely are Malcolm’s failures and feats recognized or understood to represent his intellectual complexity and depth, and that remains the Malcolm lost.

During the last year of his life, Malcolm was excommunicated from an existence that had shaped his own, the Nation of Islam. Malcolm’s troubles compounded as he now faced a war on two fronts, one with the Nation within the nation, and then the actual nation; the United States of America. Malcolm decided to synthesize elements of the Nation’s program with his own and created the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and used the ideology of black nationalism as the means to achieve the aims of the so-called Negro in America. What is lost is that Malcolm created the MMI and advocated black nationalism as a quick response to what many wondered Malcolm X would or could do without the Nation of Islam; only to slowly downplay the organization and the ideology. Malcolm’s first venture to develop and organize his own ideological movement needs to be considered a failure to launch due to the fact that within the same year Malcolm would create another organization and admit, “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 our people suffer.”

Malcolm’s mind within the Nation of Islam and his actions and declarations immediately following his independence reflect a typically American dependence upon the issue of color, with Malcolm’s creation of the Muslim Mosque Inc., and the application of black nationalism. Malcolm’s travels abroad restructured his thought

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process, expanding his outlook on life and his people’s struggle against oppression. Malcolm was torn between two worlds, one sickly dependent and concerned with the color of one’s skin as a determinant of power and position and the other a colorblind yet conscious world of human beings fighting for human rights. Malcolm recognized the limited scope he created for himself and understood that in order to expand his base, to complement his broadening intellectual awareness, he might alienate his loyal yet small base of constituents in the United States for the possibility to transcend the confines of America, of civil rights, of Malcolm X, for a new world order, for human rights, for Malcolm redefined. This is the mind of Malcolm, lost.

Among the new elements in Malcolm’s mind, what was lost was Malcolm’s new program. While many might be quick to label black nationalism as Malcolm’s program, in an address given at the Audubon Ballroom, Malcolm admitted, “Several persons have asked me recently, since I’ve been back, ‘What is your program?’ I purposely, to this day, have not in any way mentioned what our program is, because there will come a time when we will unveil it so that everybody will understand it.” This explanation seems like a cop-out for Malcolm’s inability to specifically define or outline a program to alleviate or solve the tragedy of oppression in America. Late in the speech, however, Malcolm explained that the program was in a state of limbo because those who were to receive the program needed a preliminary essential education before such a revolutionary program could be presented. Once educated, those who accept the program could implement it with the precision and effectiveness necessary to achieve the objective, which according
to Malcolm had never changed: “Our objective is complete freedom, complete justice, complete equality, by any means necessary.”

Malcolm later posed to the tentative audience a few questions: “Number one, we want to know what are we? How did we get to be what we are? Where did we come from? How did we come from there? Who did we leave behind? Where was it that we left them behind, and what are they doing over there where we used to be? This is something that we have not been told.” Malcolm, the consummate educator, understood the importance of opening the eyes and ears of the African American so that they would accept a program that would call upon them to take every necessary action to achieve their goal. Malcolm explained, “So you see the importance of these meetings on Sunday nights during the past two or three weeks, and for a couple more weeks. It is not so much to spell out any program; you can’t give a people a program until they realize they need one, and until they realize that all existing programs [integration/separation] aren’t programs that are going to produce productive results. So what we would like to do on Sunday nights is to go into our problem, and just analyze and analyze and analyze; and question things that you don’t understand, so we can at least try and get a better picture of what faces us.”

When Malcolm was incarcerated his thirst for knowledge led to his understanding of the enemy, the type of understanding that allowed him to coherently identify and address his problems, enemies, and the system that had turned him against himself. Malcolm clarified the coming of a program for the masses by the masses: “I for one, believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what it is that confronts

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31 Ibid., 118.
them, and the basic causes that produce it, they’ll create their own program: and when the people create a program, you get action.”32

Violence, race supremacy, and black nationalism seem to be what is remembered most about Malcolm X. What remains lost is that after his conversion to Islam, Malcolm was never actually involved in any violent acts. What remains lost is that Malcolm called for and embraced a brotherhood of human beings who strived for human rights. Only after removing the preconceived labels and images associated with Malcolm X and by simply examining Malcolm the man, one can find that he did not subscribe to any one particular ideology, such as black nationalism, but rather was willing to try his hand at any method, by any means necessary, in a sincere search for a solution to solve the problems facing his brothers and sisters at home and abroad.

With all the confusion, contradictions, and ambiguities, did Malcolm really understand himself? With the fear of death looming, financial troubles surfacing, and pressure from every angle possible, was it possible that Malcolm was losing his mind? Malcolm’s two organizations were not achieving the so-called aims and objectives they were intended to accomplish; Malcolm’s ideological platform embraced simply anything that would work, and the bridges Malcolm sought to build with his so-called international allies were sluggish in development. A simple cocktail of these ingredients would send any ordinary man into a downward spiral of desperation, anxiety, and madness. Was Malcolm the man lost? Malcolm was the only man who was willing to be honest with himself. Malcolm was the only man who challenged his brothers and sisters to be honest with themselves. Malcolm was not a man lost; no, Malcolm was the only man found.

32Ibid., 118-19.
The ultimate outcome in the exploration of Malcolm’s mind is the recognition and understanding of Malcolm’s thoughts and actions as those not simply relegated to a world black and white but rather a universe created in various shades of grey. The mind of Malcolm is very similar to the big bang theory. In the big bang theory you have this entity that over time revolves, evolves, collecting and absorbing elements within its orbit, ultimately becoming a giant solid mass of energy ready to explode, creating a new universe. Likewise, Malcolm’s mind was a beautiful disaster, forever evolving, collecting information through self education and experience, receiving and disseminating knowledge to the point of combustion, creating a universe of controversy and inquiry. Malcolm’s ultimate ideological message, much like the aforementioned cosmic creation, is universal, a message of peace and brotherhood, aptly beginning “Assalaam alaikum.”
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