

Malcolm X

“WE DIDN'T LAND ON PLYMOUTH ROCK, PLYMOUTH ROCK LANDED ON US.”

Malcolm X is one of the most pivotal figures in civil rights history. His powerful words captured the attention of a country, encouraging empowerment and inspiring pride in black heritage.

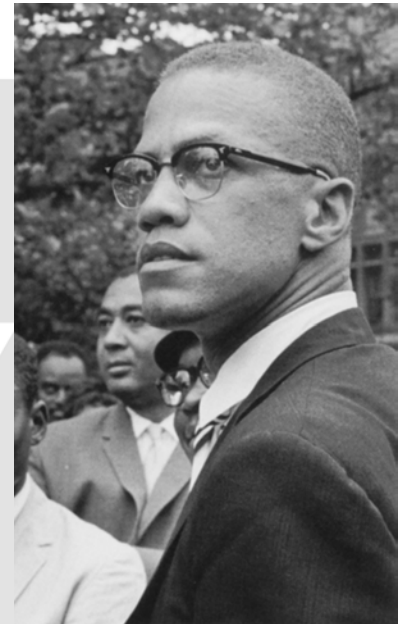
Malcolm became interested in different religious views after his brother, Reginald, talked to him about his conversion to the Muslim religious organization the Nation of Islam. Intrigued, Malcolm studied the teachings of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad taught that white society actively worked to keep African-Americans from empowering themselves and achieving political, economic and social success. Among other goals, the Nation of Islam fought for a state of their own, separate from one inhabited by white people. By the time he was paroled from a jail sentence in 1952, Malcolm was a devoted follower with the new surname “X.” He considered “Little” a slave name and chose the “X” to signify his lost tribal name.

Intelligent and articulate, Malcolm was appointed a minister and national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. Malcolm was largely credited with increasing membership in the Nation of Islam from 500 in 1952 to 30,000 in 1963. Malcolm's vivid personality captured the government's attention in addition to the media. As membership in the Nation of Islam continued to grow, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) agents infiltrated the organization (one even acted as Malcolm's bodyguard) and secretly placed bugs, wiretaps and cameras surveillance equipment to monitor the group's activities.

Malcolm's faith was dealt a crushing blow at the height of the civil rights movement in 1963. He learned that Elijah Muhammad was secretly having relations with as many as six women in the Nation of Islam, some of which had resulted in children. Since his conversion Malcolm had strictly adhered to the teachings of Muhammad, including remaining celibate until his marriage to Betty Shabazz in 1958. Malcolm refused Muhammad's request to keep the matter quiet. He was deeply hurt by the deception of Muhammad, whom he had considered a prophet, and felt guilty about the masses he had led into what he now felt was a fraudulent organization.

In 1964, Malcolm went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The trip proved life altering, as Malcolm met “blonde-haired, blue-eyed men I could call my brothers.” He returned to the United States with a new outlook on integration. This time, instead of just preaching to African-Americans, he had a message for all races.

Relations between Malcolm and the Nation of Islam had become volatile after he renounced Elijah Muhammad. At a speaking engagement in the Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965 three gunmen, all Nation of Islam members, rushed Malcolm onstage and shot him 15 times at close range. The 39-year-old was pronounced dead on arrival at New York's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital. Fifteen hundred people attended Malcolm's funeral in Harlem at the Faith Temple Church of God in Christ on February 27, 1965. After the ceremony, friends took the shovels from the gravediggers and buried Malcolm themselves.



“ I BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL ULTIMATELY BE A CLASH BETWEEN THE OPPRESSED AND THOSE THAT DO THE OPPRESSING. I BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE A CLASH BETWEEN THOSE WHO WANT FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND EQUALITY FOR EVERYONE AND THOSE WHO WANT TO CONTINUE THE SYSTEMS OF EXPLOITATION.”

