

MALCOLM X, USA (PART 1 OF 2)

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Description: The story of one of the most prominent African-American revolutionary figure's discovery of true Islam, and how it resolves the problem of racism: Part 1: The Nation of Islam and the Hajj.

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"I am and always will be a Muslim. My religion is Islam."

-Malcolm X

Early Life

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His mother, Louis Norton Little, was a homemaker occupied with the family's eight children. His father, Earl Little, was an outspoken Baptist minister and avid supporter of Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey. Earl's civil rights activism prompted death threats from the white supremacist organization Black Legion, forcing the family to relocate twice before Malcolm's fourth birthday. Regardless of the Little's efforts to elude the Legion, in 1929 their Lansing, Michigan home was burned to the ground, and two years later Earl's mutilated body was found lying across the town's trolley tracks when Malcolm was only six. Louise had an emotional breakdown several years after the death of her husband and was committed to a mental institution. Her children were split up amongst various foster homes and orphanages.

Malcolm was a smart, focused student and graduated from junior high at the top of his class. However, when a favorite teacher told Malcolm his dream of becoming a lawyer was no realistic goal for a nigger, Malcolm lost interest in school and eventually dropped out at the age of fifteen. Learning the ways of the streets, Malcolm became acquainted with hoodlums, thieves, dope peddlers, and pimps. Convicted of burglary at twenty, he remained in prison until the age of twenty-seven. During his prison stay he attempted to educate himself. In addition, during his period in prison, he learned about and joined the Nation of Islam, studying the teachings of Elijah Muhammed fully. He was released, a changed man, in 1952.

The 'Nation of Islam'

Upon his release, Malcolm went to Detroit, joined the daily activities of the sect, and was given instruction by Elijah Muhammad himself. Malcolm's personal commitment helped build the organization nation-wide, while making him an international figure. He was interviewed on major television programs and by magazines, and spoke across the country at various universities and other forums. His power was in his words, which so vividly described the plight of blacks and vehemently incriminated whites. When a white person referred to the fact that some Southern university had enrolled black freshmen without bayonets, Malcolm reacted with scorn:

When I slipped, the program host would leap on the bait: Ahhh! Indeed, Mr. Malcolm X -- you can't deny that's an advance for your race!

I'd jerk the pole then. I can't turn around without hearing about some 'civil rights advance'! White people seem to think the black man ought to be shouting 'hallelujah'! Four hundred years the white man has had his foot-long knife in the black man's back - and now the white man starts to wiggle the knife out, maybe six inches! The black man's supposed to be grateful? Why, if the white man jerked the knife out, it's still going to leave a scar!

Although Malcolm's words often stung with the injustices against blacks in America, the equally racist views of the Nation of Islam kept him from accepting any whites as sincere or capable of helping the situation. For twelve years, he preached that the white man was the devil and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad was God's messenger. Unfortunately, most images of Malcolm today focus on this period of his life, although the transformation he was about to undergo would give him a completely different, and more important, message for the American people.

The Change to True Islam

On March 12, 1964, impelled by internal jealousy within the Nation of Islam and revelations of Elijah Muhammad's sexual immorality, Malcolm left the Nation of Islam with the intention of starting his own organization:

I feel like a man who has been asleep somewhat and under someone else's control. I feel what I'm thinking and saying now is for myself. Before, it was for and by guidance of another, now I think with my own mind.

Malcolm was thirty-eight years old when he left Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Reflecting on what occurred prior to leaving, he said:

At one or another college or university, usually in the informal gatherings after I had spoken, perhaps a dozen generally white-complexioned people would come up to me, identifying themselves as Arabian, Middle Eastern or North African Muslims who happened to be visiting, studying, or living in the United States. They had said to me that, my white-indicting statements notwithstanding, they felt I was sincere in

considering myself a Muslim -- and they felt if I was exposed to what they always called true Islam, I would understand it, and embrace it. Automatically, as a follower of Elijah, I had bridled whenever this was said. But in the privacy of my own thoughts after several of these experiences, I did question myself: if one was sincere in professing a religion, why should he balk at broadening his knowledge of that religion?

Those orthodox Muslims whom I had met, one after another, had urged me to meet and talk with a Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi. . . . Then one day Dr. Shawarbi and I were introduced by a newspaperman. He was cordial. He said he had followed me in the press; I said I had been told of him, and we talked for fifteen or twenty minutes. We both had to leave to make appointments we had, when he dropped on me something whose logic never would get out of my head. He said, No man has believed perfectly until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. (a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him).

The Effect of the Pilgrimage

Malcolm further continues about the Hajj:

The pilgrimage to Mecca, known as the Hajj, is a religious obligation that every orthodox Muslim fulfills, if able, at least once in his or her lifetime.

The Holy Quran says it:

“..Pilgrimage to the House (of God built by the prophet Abraham) is a duty men owe to God; those who are able, make the journey...” (Quran 3:97)

“God said: ‘And proclaim the pilgrimage among men; they will come to you on foot and upon each lean camel, they will come from every deep ravine.’” (Quran 22:27)

Every one of the thousands at the airport, about to leave for Jeddah, was dressed this way. You could be a king or a peasant and no one would know. Some powerful personages, who were discreetly pointed out to me, had on the same thing I had on. Once thus dressed, we all had begun intermittently calling out Labbayka! (Allahumma) Labbayka! (Here I come, O Lord!) Packed in the plane were white, black, brown, red, and yellow people, blue eyes and blond hair, and my kinky red hair -- all together, brothers! All honoring the same God, all in turn giving equal honor to each other...

That is when I first began to reappraise the white man. It was when I first began to perceive that white man, as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, white man meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been. That morning was the start of a radical alteration in my whole outlook about white men.

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white... America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered white - but the white attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.

Malcolm's New Vision of America

Malcolm continues:

Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. The American Negro never can be blamed for his racial animosities - he is only reacting to four hundred years of the conscious racism of the American whites. But as racism leads America up the suicide path, I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall, and many of them will turn to the spiritual path of truth -- the only way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to.

I believe that God now is giving the world's so-called 'Christian' white society its last opportunity to repent and atone for the crimes of exploiting and enslaving the world's non-white peoples. It is exactly as when God gave Pharaoh a chance to repent. But Pharaoh persisted in his refusal to give justice to those who he oppressed. And, we know, God finally destroyed Pharaoh.

I will never forget the dinner at the Azzam home with Dr. Azzam. The more we talked, the more his vast reservoir of knowledge and its variety seemed unlimited. He spoke of the racial lineage of the descendants of Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, the Prophet, and he showed how they were both black and white. He also pointed out how color, and the problems of color which exist in the Muslim world, exist only where, and to the extent that, that area of the Muslim world has been influenced by the West. He said that if one encountered any differences based on attitude toward color, this directly reflected the degree of Western influence.

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