

THE TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE PRESENTS



THE ASSASSINATION OF
MALCOLM X
THE REAL STORY

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D E M A N D T H E T R U T H

On February 25, 1965, America's most controversial revolutionary greeted an assembly of hundreds in Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom at 2 p.m. Malcolm X stood before his wife and children, his supporters and detractors, dozens of intelligence agents and informants, and at least one team of assassins. He had told those closest to him beforehand that, because of his words and actions, he was "a dead man already." Thirty minutes later, that self-prophecy would be tragically fulfilled. Malcolm X was assassinated by gunmen positioned in the front row of the audience.

THE RISE OF A BORN LEADER

Years earlier, while Malcolm Little was languishing in Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts, he had been introduced to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad – teachings that included a ban of liquor, drugs and other vices. During his journey towards conversion to Islam, he wrote "incredible and eloquent long letters" to the head of the Nation of Islam.

Following his parole from prison in August 1952, Malcolm Little – now known as Malcolm X – officially joined the Nation. In surprisingly short time he became its foremost spokesperson, working to establish over 100 mosques across the United States and moving ceaselessly from city to city. Eventually he was installed as the Minister of Mosque No. 7 in Harlem, New York, the location he had always wanted.

In 1957, Nation of Islam member Hinton Johnson was beaten by two NYPD officers so severely that he suffered brain contusions and subdural hemorrhaging. Four African American men were arrested during the melee, including Johnson. Alerted by a witness, Malcolm and a small group of Muslims marched to the police station and demanded to see Johnson.

New York police initially denied that Muslims were being held. But when the crowd grew to 500, they allowed

Malcolm to speak to the severely beaten Johnson in police custody. Afterwards, Malcolm insisted on arranging for an ambulance to take the injured man to Harlem Hospital. By the time Johnson was returned to the police station, 4,000 had gathered there.

Malcolm X stood outside the station house and gave a hand signal to the crowd. Nation members left, and the crowd dispersed. An NYPD officer famously told the Black-owned New York Amsterdam News later, "No one man should have that much power." Within a month, the NYPD had arranged to keep Malcolm X under surveillance – and made inquiries of authorities in other cities in which he'd lived (and prisons in which he'd served time).

Two years later, TV journalists Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax introduced living rooms in America to the Nation of Islam through the documentary *The Hate That Hate Produced*, an in-depth look at the lifestyle and culture proliferating in the Nation of Islam. Black nationalism was seen as a growing threat to America.



As proof of his own growing influence, Malcolm was invited to attend the official functions of several African nations at the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. There he met with Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea and Kenneth Kaunda of the Zambian African National Congress. He began to keep offices at the UN despite holding no official position, gaining access to the African nations with whom he would seek allegiance.

Malcolm arranged for Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who attended the UN Assembly, to stay at a Harlem hotel, and Castro was sufficiently impressed with him to suggest a private meeting and extend an invitation to visit Cuba.

MALCOLM'S RIFT WITH ELIJAH MUHAMMAD

In April of 1962, two Los Angeles police officers shoved and beat several Muslims outside Temple No. 27 in South Central. Seventy backup officers raided the mosque, and officers shot seven Muslims — including one William X Rogers, who was paralyzed for life. Ronald Stokes, a Korean War veteran, was shot in the back and killed while surrendering.

An enraged Malcolm flew to Los Angeles and addressed an equally enraged audience. To Malcolm, the police violence and the desecration of the mosque demanded immediate action — action that was stymied by his mentor and leader, Elijah Muhammad, thus creating tension between the two men.

In 1963, Elijah Muhammad confirmed rumors that he'd had extramarital affairs with his secretaries, many of whom were underage and bore his children. He tried to justify his behavior by claiming that Biblical prophets had set the precedent. The scandal deepened the rift between Malcolm and his mentor — a rift further widened by poison-pen letters that intelligence agencies sent to both men.

In November 1963, Malcolm gave perhaps his most important speech, "Message to the Grassroots," delivered at the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference, which was held at King Solomon Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan.

In this speech, Malcolm cited the 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian nations as a model for Black unity in America. "Despite their religious differences," he said, "they came together. All of them were Black, Brown, Red or Yellow. The number-one thing that was not allowed to attend the Bandung Conference was the White Man."

Days later, President Kennedy was assassinated. Malcolm disobeyed a direct order from Elijah Muhammad not to comment on the death of the popular American president. Instead, he referred to Kennedy's assassination as "chickens coming home to roost," and added, "Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad."

As a result, he was portrayed in the media as being "happy" about the death of Kennedy. Elijah Muhammad immediately punished Malcolm for disobeying his direct order by sentencing him to 90 days of silence. He later extended that sentence indefinitely. Malcolm was also removed from his beloved Mosque No. 7, and thereby lost his Nation of Islam platform.

The imposition of silence had unintended consequences: It freed him to move through the world of social activism in a way that Elijah Muhammad had previously forbidden. Now Malcolm could speak for himself, free to fully engage in the supercharged and revolutionary atmosphere of his times.

NEW DIRECTIONS: MALCOLM'S PILGRIMAGE AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

In March of 1964, Malcolm X held a formal press conference at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York, where he announced the formation of Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. His goal was to support the re-education of Blacks and to assist in the creation of economic power independent of Whites. He expressed the desire of finding common ground with the mainstream Black leaders with whom he'd once quarreled.

Malcolm presented them with a plan for a radical campaign. The degraded status of Black Americans should be elevated, he said, from being considered a violation of civil rights (an issue tied to the United States) to one of human rights (a matter to be addressed by the international community). He proposed nothing less than to condemn the U.S. government in the United Nations for the negligent and abusive treatment of 22 million of its own citizens.

If Malcolm were successful in bringing human rights charges in the World Court, "it would have been a devastating propaganda blow to the United States," remarked his associate, journalist Peter Bailey. Meetings were planned with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to enlist his aid in this groundbreaking effort. The prospect of Malcolm X and Dr. King joining forces was FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover's "worst nightmare," said Bailey.

In the spring of 1964, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., met for the first and only time. It happened in Washington, D.C., as the Senate debated on the Civil Rights Act. Weeks later, Malcolm converted to the Sunni faith and traveled to Mecca to perform the sacred pilgrimage known as Hajj.

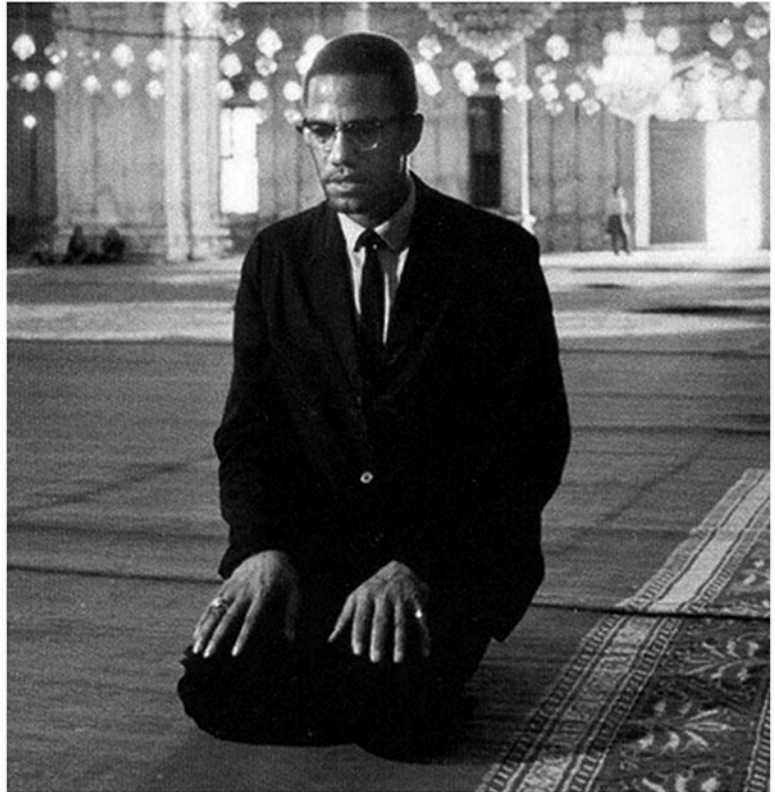
Upon completing his pilgrimage, Malcolm X now became known by his Muslim name: el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz. He went on a personal and spiritual journey through the Middle East and West Africa. By the time he returned to the U.S. on May 21, he had visited Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ghana, Morocco and Algeria.

On June 8, FBI surveillance recorded a telephone call in which Malcolm's wife, Betty, was told that her husband was "as good as dead." Four days later, an FBI informant received a tip that "Malcolm X would be bumped off." That same month, the Nation of Islam sued to reclaim Malcolm X's residence in East Elmhurst, Queens. Malcolm's family was ordered to vacate the premises.

Throughout June 1964, Malcolm X spoke, agitated, educated and worked to create a new, nonreligious movement to promote Black unity. In July, he headed for Africa. His immediate objective was to attend the so-called "African Summit" – the second meeting of the Organization of African Unity, which had been formed in 1963 to bring about joint action by the independent African governments.

The OAU Conference took place in Cairo from July 17 to 21 and was attended by nearly all of the heads of the 34 member states. The welcoming address was made by United Arab Republic president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who, while reviewing the events of the previous year, hailed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that had been enacted in the United States.

Malcolm was there, gathering support from African countries in his bid to attack the U.S. in the United Nations with charges of genocide against the African American people – an act that would have embarrassed the United States on an international stage during the Cold War. While in Cairo, Malcolm was poisoned. He recovered.



By the time he left Africa, Malcolm X had met that continent's most prominent leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser of the UAR and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria. All three invited him to serve in their governments. He also spoke at Nigeria's University of Ibadan, after which the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria bestowed upon him the honorary Yoruba name "Omowale," which means, "The son who has come home." He later called this his most treasured honor.

INTERNATIONAL PROMINENCE AND TROUBLES IN AMERICA

In November 1964, on his way home from Africa, Malcolm X stopped in Paris, where he spoke in the Salle de la Mutualité. A few weeks later, he took part in a debate at the Oxford Union Society in England. The debate's title was taken from a statement that had been made earlier that year by U.S. presidential candidate Barry Goldwater: "Extremism in the Defense of Liberty Is No Vice. Moderation in the Pursuit of Justice Is No Virtue." Malcolm X argued for the affirmative, and interest in the debate was so high that it was televised nationally by the BBC.

During the debate, Malcolm said, powerfully, that the young generation was—

—living at a time of extremism, a time of revolution, a time when there's got to be a change. People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built, and the only way it's going to be built — is with extreme methods. And I, for one, will join in with anyone — I don't care what color you are — as long as you want to change this miserable condition that exists on this earth."

The next day, Louis X (known today as Louis Farrakhan, who sits in the seat once held by Elijah Muhammad) wrote in *Muhammad Speaks* — the Nation of Islam paper that Malcolm had founded — "If any Muslim backs a fool like Malcolm ... he would be a fool himself... Only those who wish to be led to hell, or to their doom, will follow Malcolm. The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape... Such a man is worthy of death." In that same article, a cartoon depicted Malcolm X's head rolling and bouncing down a hill.

Back in New York, Malcolm X invited activists Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Singers to appear at the Organization of Afro-American Unity meeting being held at the Audubon Ballroom on December 20, 1964. Before the singers took the floor, Malcolm carried out what was one of his major assignments in the OAU: teaching, educating and patiently explaining things to his people in a language and style they understood.

In February of 1965, Malcolm X flew to Britain again, and on February 8 he addressed the first meeting of the Council of African Organizations in London. He tried to return to France the next day but was refused entry. He would later learn that this was because French President Charles de Gaulle did not want Malcolm to be assassinated on French soil. Instead of going to France, Malcolm visited Smethwick, England, where the Conservative Party had won the Parliamentary seat in the 1964 general election. He subsequently returned to Queens.

At 2:30 in the morning on Valentine's Day, 1965, persons unknown threw two Molotov cocktails into Malcolm's Queens home as he and his wife and four daughters slumbered. The terrified family escaped and were taken in by friends, but the house was destroyed in the ensuing fire.

Days after the firebombing, two members of Malcolm X's security team were arrested in a conspiracy to dynamite the Statue of Liberty. The Black undercover NYPD officer who made the arrest initially acted as a co-conspirator. With two men from his security detail sitting behind bars, Malcolm was left vulnerable to attack. That attack would come all too soon.

MALCOLM'S END

In New York City's Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965, Malcolm had just stepped to the podium before a packed house when a voice boomed across the auditorium: "Nigga, get your hand outta my pocket!" Malcolm's new cadre of young bodyguards immediately moved to the rear of the auditorium to stop the disturbance. As they did so, a man rushed forward and tossed an improvised smoke bomb, and three gunmen leapt to their feet. One pointed a sawed-off shotgun at Malcolm while two others charged the stage, firing semi-automatic handguns.

As Malcolm was being gunned down, one of his bodyguards returned fire and wounded one of the assassins, later identified as Nation of Islam member Talmadge X Hayer. Using the chaos of the screaming masses as cover, the other gunmen disappeared. Hayer, shot in the leg, was grabbed by onlookers and beaten before NYPD officers could remove him from the scene.

Malcolm X was pronounced dead at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital at 3:30 p.m.





AFTERMATH OF THE ASSASSINATION

The autopsy identified 21 gunshot wounds to Malcolm's chest, left shoulder, arms and legs, including 10 buckshot wounds from the initial shotgun blast. Two more men – Harlem-based Nation of Islam members Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson – were arrested in their homes days later and also charged with the murder of Malcolm X. They were ultimately tried and convicted along with Hayer.

In the 1970s, Hayer signed sworn affidavits naming four co-conspirators. He alleged that Butler and Johnson were innocent, but his pleas for their release went unacknowledged.

Butler and Johnson spent decades in prison for a murder they didn't commit. Then the 2020 Netflix series *Who Killed Malcolm X?* sparked new interest in their case. New York District Attorney Cyrus Vance determined that the two men hadn't gotten a fair trial because "new evidence of witness intimidation and suppression of exculpatory evidence had undermined the case against them." In 2021, their convictions were thrown out. "Their exoneration represents a remarkable acknowledgement of grave errors made in a case of towering importance," reported the *New York Times*.

Sadly, Johnson (who'd since changed his name to Khalil Islam) had already died in jail, so he never saw freedom. But Butler – now known as Muhammad Abdul Aziz – was released. In 2022, he filed suit in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, seeking \$40 million in damages related to wrongful imprisonment. A second complaint was filed on the behalf of Islam's estate at the same time.

In October 2022, the lawsuit was settled in their favor, with Aziz and Islam's estate receiving a combined total of \$36 million in compensation. The New York City law department issued a statement saying it regretted the pair's wrongful conviction, stating in part, "This settlement brings some measure of justice to individuals who spent decades in prison and bore the stigma of being falsely accused of murdering an iconic figure."

In early 2023, members of Malcolm X's family announced that they planned to file a \$100 million wrongful-death lawsuit against the CIA, the FBI, the NYPD and others for allegedly concealing evidence related to the assassination of Malcolm X. Malcolm's sister expressly voiced her belief that the CIA had killed her brother.

EPILOGUE

Malcolm's indisputable leadership abilities, his longstanding opposition to the Vietnam War, his understanding of the global plight of the poor and the oppressed, and his plan to coordinate voting drives, organize protests against police brutality and bring American racial policies before the United Nations all made him a serious threat to the establishment. The prospect that he might join forces with Martin Luther King, Jr. further terrified the ruling powers.

His murder was not the result of a personal feud with the Nation of Islam, as depicted by mainstream authorities, but a consequence of coordinated planning among the intelligence agencies that had hijacked America and were ruthless in the elimination of challenges to their subterranean power.



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