

MALCOLM X IN CYBERSPACE



As more and more information about and by Malcolm X is digitized and published on the Web, Malcolm X is being reborn. This is part of the new information revolution. Malcolm X created Muhammad Speaks, a newspaper that became a major communication tool for the Black liberation movement of its time. We assume that Malcolm would have been a cyberorganizer for the information revolution.

The memory of humanity is being relocated into a new brain, a silicon based electronic environment, a global asynchronous cluster of images, sounds, and text that represents all that is documented about his life and work. This is the main way that humanity will experience Malcolm in the future. This CyberMalcolm represents a new reality.

Cyberspace is new and different from the spaces we have occupied, so we have to distinguish how we have been living--the actual--from the new opportunities of cyberspace--the virtual. The actual has been shaped in terms of capitalist practices, the private ownership of property, the sale of goods and services for profit, and the hegemony of the power and knowledge of the capitalist class. New principles are emerging in cyberspace.

As these new principles combine and clash with the old principals and practices, cyberspace is the battleground of the information revolution. In cyberspace three principles define the greatest potential:

- ✦ cyberdemocracy: everyone has access to cyberspace;
- ✦ collective intelligence: everyone's voice can be heard;
- ✦ information freedom: information is available to all for free.

The digitization of the Black experience includes Black intellectual history. Since the 1960's, the study of Black intellectual history has included biographies, anthologies, reprints, and archives. The most important projects have been to publish the collected works of key historical figures. So far this includes Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and Martin Luther King. Each of these collected works projects began as book projects, and now all include major web sites. It is imperative that Malcolm X join the list. He needs to be remembered as much as anyone.

As of March 2000, the Web included at least 150 sites and several thousand web pages devoted to Malcolm X. Search engines returned 24,522 pages (altavista.com) and 29,800 pages (google.com). Malcolm pages are posted in the following countries: Australia, Burkina Faso, Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland, and the United States.



The two most comprehensive and inclusive digital collections of materials concerning Malcolm X are a listserv for online discussions maintained by F. Leon Wilson and a research web site maintained by the author.

The Web Site

"Malcolm X: A Research Site," (<http://www.brothermalcolm.net>) was launched May 19, 1999 and is maintained at the Africana Studies program of the University of Toledo. The introduction to this site states:

This web page is designed to be a resource for scholarship in Black Studies and the political development of activists in the Black Liberation Movement. Malcolm X: A Research Site has been developed in the spirit of Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility, intending to make a contribution toward preserving the radical Black tradition. We are interested in growing this site based on mass participation.

The site averaged 1,000 hits per day during February 2000 and averaged 600 hits per day through Spring 2000.

The site includes a family section with data on six generations. The source for the early family history is a book by Rodnell Collins, *Seventh Child: A Family Memoir of Malcolm X* (1998). Collins is the son of Ella Collins, half-sister to Malcolm X. The six generations begin with the African progenitor from Mali, a Bambara man named Ajar. Ajar's son Tony had 22 children. Tony's son John had 6 children. John's son Earl had 11 children. And Earl's son Malcolm himself had 6 children. As of April 2000, there were four web pages on Malcolm's parents and nine web pages on his brothers and sisters.

There are links to **24** web pages about Betty Shabazz, the wife of Malcolm X. These are organized into the following categories: chronology (**1** page), memories of Malcolm X (**4** pages), speeches-interviews (**3**), tributes-honors (**6**), and death (**10**). Malcolm and Betty had six daughters. Twelve pages on the site discuss three of the daughters.

The research site includes a rich chronology, a day by day accounting of the life of Malcolm X. As with all parts of the site, the number one source for this chronology was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. A second most useful source was contemporary newspapers, especially *The New York Times*. This leads us to the crisis of authenticity that arises from using official government surveillance reports acquired under the Freedom of Information Act. The material has to be considered, but it is dangerous to use it as the sole source. Overall, of the near 40 years Malcolm lived data is posted on 32 of those years.

The research site also lists books, CDs, and videos about Malcolm X. There are total of **129** links to these materials: bibliographies (**3**), biographies (**30**), words by Malcolm X (**10**), youth-oriented books (**15**), struggle (**22**), doctoral dissertations (**35**), CD's (**5**), and videos (**9**). Each link allows for online purchasing. This is vital for global distribution of these materials. While it does require a buyer to have a credit card in a hard international currency, this e-commerce system is the best commercial approach seen thus far to distributing material about Malcolm X worldwide.

Malcolm X: A Research Site links to pages that digitize the words of Malcolm X. A total of 132 texts are cited: speeches, articles, letters, interviews, and an autobiography. Fifteen links are to full text pages. Twenty-two links are to audio clips.

date	texts cited	texts online	audio clips
1941-59	19	2	0
1960-63	28	6	6
1964	47	7	13
1965	38	0	3
Total	132	15	22

The Listserv

The pioneering cyberorganizer F. Leon Wilson established the Malcolm X Listserv in **1997**. His is the definitive discussion list on Malcolm X in cyberspace. In the first post to the list on May 3, 1997, Wilson stated its purpose:

The purpose of this list is to identify, examine and separate the myths about Malcolm X from his actual philosophical beliefs and values and to develop a clearer understanding of his works. Malcolm X has come to symbolize power, solidarity and self-

empowerment within the Black community. As this millennium draws to a close, it becomes more compelling to understand the agents of change which have shaped African Americans' thought, rhetorical bases and collective actions within the confines of Western culture. The icon "X" has come to signify one man's words and ideals. It is important that Malcolm X's concepts and ideas of group empowerment, rebellion against injustice and the ultimate refusal to *assimilate*, not be overshadowed by commercial exploitation and other romantic notions of Malcolm X.

The Malcolm X Listserv is a free discussion list maintained at St. Johns University. It started out as a monitored list and is now open and unmonitored. Full logs are published on the web, searchable by month. As this list is open to the general public, it combines scholarship about Malcolm X with personal opinion. What can be considered information is mixed with ideological discussion and debate.

As of April 10, 2000, 171 people subscribed to the list. Posts to the list include at least four basic types of discussion. There are many people who continue to be newly exposed to Malcolm X and come to the list for basic introductory information. There are ideologues who participate in the list to debate and contend with other points of view. There are non-Black people from the U.S. who intervene and end up resurrecting old discussions of the role of white people in the Black movement, rather than any particular question they might have raised. And finally, there are questions from the international community that place Malcolm X in a global context.

This listserv demonstrates that the power of the Internet as global interaction is cheap, fast, and possible--certainly for those who want to discuss the life and meaning of Malcolm X.

The Future

Malcolm X in cyberspace is essential for the current organization of knowledge. This is a real way for knowledge to be democratic, as there is little likelihood that physical books can be acquired by all libraries to make up for the inequalities. The Internet is a different story. Most institutions are coming online and will have equal access to whatever is on the web. *CyberMalcolm* is available to whoever can participate in those institutions--especially schools, universities, and libraries--on an equal basis.

Yet there are several critical problems that define the limits of Malcolm in cyberspace. The first limitation is that the core texts are under copyright, in the hands of private owners. This became a major issue in the pre-cyberspace era, up to and including legal action against efforts to share the words of Malcolm. (See, for example, the supplement to the study guide on Malcolm X: A Research Site.)

The second limitation is that most of the archived materials--letters and other unpublished matter--are also in private collections. This has been essential, for without private collectors much of this material would have been lost. The best example is Preston Wilcox of Harlem, **NY**, who has maintained the newsletter-based Malcolm **X** Lovers Network for decades. Since information technology gives us the opportunity to practice collective intelligence and information freedom, we must begin to consider ways to consolidate the archives in cyberspace, by putting them online and building links between web sites. Malcolm X spoke whenever he could to every possible type of audience. We have the responsibility to making his words and deeds available to all.

The third issue is the need to establish an international commission, served by a staff of serious academics, to oversee the development of an official website for the collected words and actions of Malcolm X.

CyberMalcolm means more than just the person of Malcolm X. An official website would ~~be~~ be an anchor for the radical Black tradition as a whole. All scholars recognize that Malcolm X is a critical nodal point linking historical traditions with the contemporary diversity of ideological positions. His life, his ideas, his context are together the beginning of defining the traditions of Black liberation theology, Pan-Africanism, Black nationalism, Black Marxism, and Black feminism. Material online about and by Malcolm is essential if the great debates of Black intellectual history are to be presented in cyberspace: the emancipation debate (as expressed in the National Negro Convention movement), the self-determination debate (Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus **Garvey**), and the Black liberation debate (Malcolm X and Martin Luther King).

The purpose of an archive is to preserve material for future generations and enable people from all points of view to examine materials and make an assessment. We all learn from preserving our history. Up to the 21st century, this has been done in limited-access institutions usually reserved for formal academic scholars. **Now** cyberspace gives us the opportunity to save everything on **a** given subject and make **it** available to everyone at all times. The only requirement is being hooked up to the Internet, and in the **U.S.** this is available in almost every public library. For everyone concerned about Malcolm X, the primary focus must turn to cyberspace and the birth of CyberMalcolm.

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Malcolm **X**: A Research Site

<http://www.brothermalcolm.net>

Malcolm **X** Listserv

<http://maelstrom.stjohns.edu/archives/malcolm-x.html>

eBlack **Studies**

<http://www.eblackstudies.net>