

Lawrence Henry

Malcolm X Work Group Forms

1990: Why Remember Malcolm X?

by Abdul Alkalimat

Malcolm is a symbol and slogan of the highest order. His name is recognized in virtually every African-American household. Even though Malcolm was assassinated on February 21, 1965, the people haven't forgotten even for one day that he gave his life for us. He continues to be one of our best expressions of manhood, of excellence, and of resistance. In the fall of 1966, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* was published, and through this classic text of social transformation he was reborn for generations to come. The 25th anniversary year of his rebirth is an appropriate time to remember Malcolm by taking some time to utilize his thought and life's work, to analyze where we are today, and to better understand our historical choices as we face the 21st century.

Historical Importance of Malcolm X

There are some individuals whose lives burn deep into the psyche of the people. These are our heroes. Heroes are examples of historically specific excellence based on the lives and struggles of a class/community/society. Each generation rediscovers its heroic past as a form of ideological development, a personalized historical consciousness. Through these individuals the people can relive and relearn vital lessons for survival and achieve higher levels of resistance. Of course, there are always dangers of hero worship and overstating the role of the individual in history. However, the best of every hero or heroine is a seed that can be planted in all of us, especially the youth. The value of learning these historical lessons comes from the courage and creativity required in their contemporary application—not in mimicry.

Malcolm is a model of Black leadership, especially for brothers and sisters from poor, working people who suffer under the system as vic-

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tims of a brutal beast of prey: the homeless, the underclass, the people on "the lower end," the wretched of the earth. Malcolm is a model of leadership for everyone, especially if you are "a field Nigger." Look for an answer in Malcolm and you will find a way.

Malcolm went through four basic stages of development. He was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska in 1925. His father was murdered when he was six, and his mother was forced into a mental breakdown before he was a teenager. After reform school, he went to the East Coast and became known as Detroit Red, a street-wise criminal dealing in prostitution, drugs, and robbery. He served six years in prison where he got the nickname "Satan." After beginning his religious transformation in prison, he became Malcolm X, the national organizer for the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. Eventually in 1964, Malcolm X broke away and spent his last year building independent organizations: the Muslim Mosque Incorporated, and the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

The road travelled by Malcolm X had all of the obstacles that are supposed to stop us; the ones the sociologists use to explain why we are at the bottom. They suggest that the situation is hopeless. But, we can always REMEMBER MALCOLM! Check this out: Malcolm moved through the murder of his father by white racists; dropping out of school; all forms of juvenile delinquency, a broken home and living in a foster home; being a gang member; and criminal behavior of all types, including dealing drugs. He turned all of this around, including turning prison into school, and ghetto slum into community.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of our people share his experience. But fortunately, through him, you can find an example of how to rebuild your life for struggle, Black liberation and social transformation.

Malcolm X represented the convergence of four radical traditions: First, Black religion: Malcolm embodied a radical morality, honest, militant rhetoric and a vision of the good life based on freedom, justice, and equality; Second, Black nationalism: He was committed to the consolidation of community resources, mobilization of the masses of oppressed and exploited people for empowerment in the interest of self-determination. Third, Panafricanism: Malcolm understood that the struggle was an international struggle in which Black people participated as part of the worldwide linkage of African peoples that extends to all corners of the globe. This linkage is bonded by culture from within and imposed

by racism from outside. Malcolm reestablished Africa as the foundation for Black identity in the consciousness of the Black masses. In this regard his only peer would be Bob Marley. And finally, Socialism: Malcolm was anti-capitalist and open to dialogue and debate within and about the socialist experiments, especially in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. He embraced radical thinking wherever he found it.

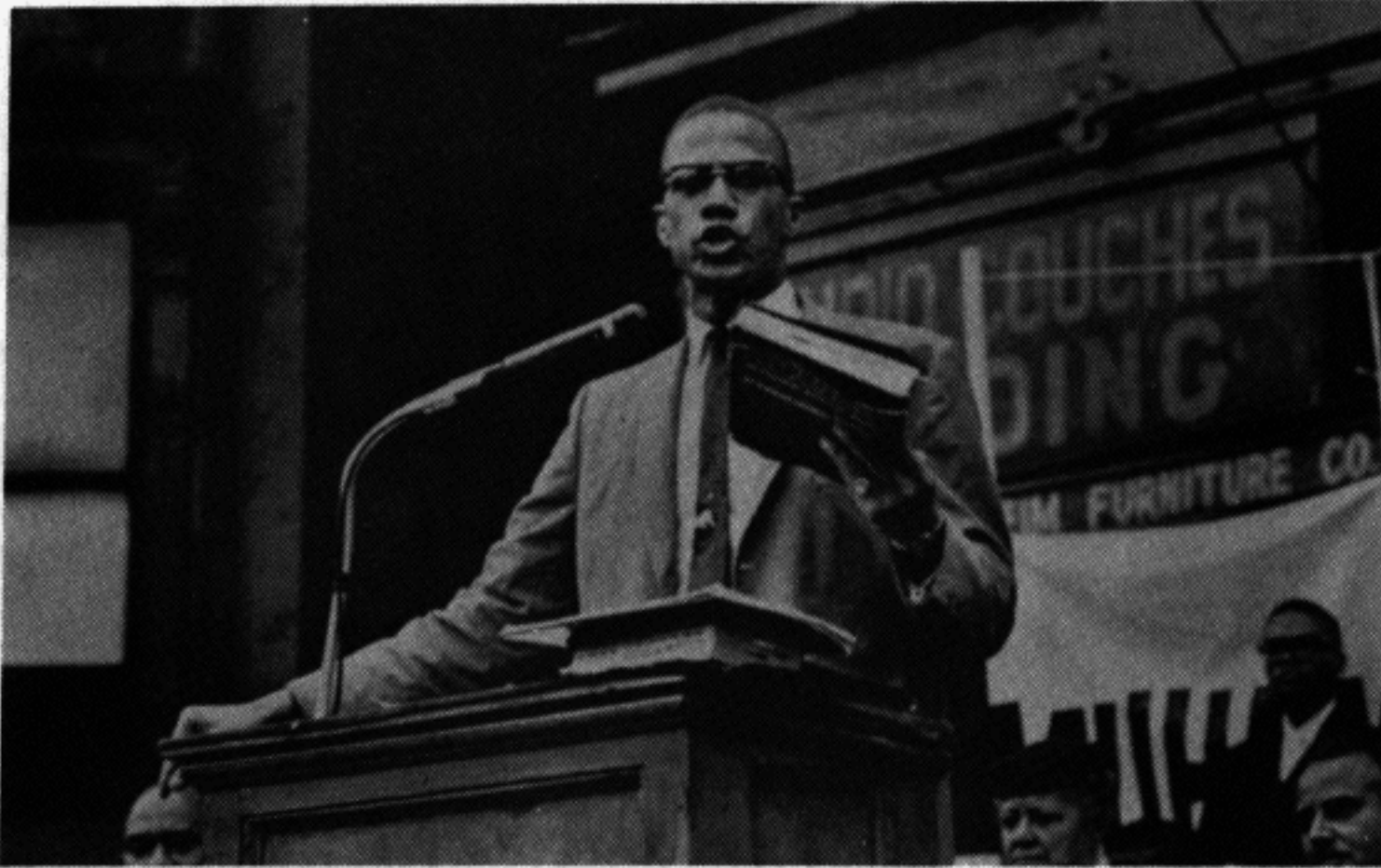
The convergence of these traditions in Malcolm X go beyond legitimating the prevailing dogma of each, and together constitute a dialectical force field of unity. What is created is the new possibility of moving past the past to a new ideological transformation. We are pointed toward a new framework for the simultaneous understanding of race, nationality, and class. Malcolm is exciting for the questions he can help us to raise for ourselves, not just the answers he can give us.

Malcolm X was the inspiration for the advanced forces of the Black liberation movement of the 1960s and his writings continued to influence their political development and their efforts to forge a vanguard in the 1970s and 1980s. This included SNCC, the Black Panther Party, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Black Workers Congress, the Congress of African People, the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, the African Peoples Party, the African Peoples Socialist Party, Malcolm X Liberation University, Student Organization for Black Unity, the National Association of Black Students, Peoples College, and the African Liberation Support Committee. Virtually every radical organization rooted in the fight for Black liberation embraced Malcolm.

A Program For 1990: REMEMBER MALCOLM

In order to deepen our understanding of Malcolm X, a collaborative study group—the Malcolm X Work Group, composed of serious activist/scholars engaged in research and writing projects on the life and activities of Malcolm X was formed. We have been meeting for four years. We are holding a research review meeting in the winter and a public symposium in New York City in the spring. This collective effort is based on the idea that it is important to rebuild Black Studies as an arm of the Black liberation movement.

We are working on a major campaign for 1990: REMEMBER MALCOLM! that will be an international conference to be held at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, November 1-4, 1990. Our approach is



Don Charles

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to combine scholarship with ideological discussion and debate. One day will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of the recent research of the Malcolm X Work Group and other Black studies scholars throughout the country. These scholars will also come from Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. A second day will feature leading activists from sectors of the overall movement to sum up the legacy of Malcolm X and chart future action. This will include mini-conferences on the struggles of workers, students, women, communities, and the church. The final day will be a cultural celebration of the Black experience, its particularity for Black people, and its universality for the world.

Our program for remembering Malcolm is contained in the following words: DECODE, RECODE, and EXPLODE. We want to DECODE: to study Malcolm's life and interpret its meaning in relation to all other ideas and actions relevant to Black liberation and social transformation. We want to RECODE: to reconstruct Malcolm's life and writings as an ideological, political, and organizational guide to action. We want to EXPLODE: to nurture and network militant activists who can move beyond fear to embrace the Malcolm road. This is a call for revolutionary Reds, Blacks, and Greens. This is a call to remember Malcolm in ideas and actions: not to memorize his words and/or mimic his actions, but to stand on his shoulders so we can see farther, and go where he was kept from going; to maximize our own historical possibilities.

There are several projects by members of the Malcolm X Work Group that are scheduled for completion

by the time of the conference. James Cone, founder of the Black liberation theology school of thought, is doing a major study comparing Malcolm X with Martin Luther King. Cone is a Christian minister who acknowledges that Malcolm X was the major inspiration for applying Black power to theology. His work will clarify the King-Malcolm contradiction as the unity-of-opposites defining the ideological development of Black people in the 1960s.

William Sales, Harlem-based activist and professor of Black studies, has researched the political activities of Malcolm X in the last year of his life, with a focus on the Organization of Afro-American Unity. This study will explore the contradictions of revolutionary Black nationalism within the advanced imperialist state of the USA. The main focus is on Malcolm's thought and practice as a basis for the Black united front.

A third project is being worked on by Preston Wilcox, founder and director of Afram Associates and the Malcolm X Lovers Network. This project will attempt to describe the legacy by tracing Malcolm through the naming process. Throughout this country, Malcolm's name has been used to remember him, for buildings, organizations, awards, annual events, and even the naming of a new child. This legacy project will reveal a deep love and respect for Malcolm X, coded rituals that affirm a mass-based consciousness for resistance.

In addition to these studies, the Malcolm X Work Group will publish reference tools to encourage and assist others in this campaign to REMEMBER MALCOLM in 1990 through serious study and militant activism.

National Study Program. We have a national study guide prepared by the Malcolm X Work Group for free distribution (although we will accept donations to reprint the guide when necessary). The main study task is to read, think about, and discuss the writings and speeches of Malcolm X. The major text is the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The major publication of speeches include *Malcolm X Speaks*, *The Last Speeches*, *By Any Means Necessary*, *Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard*, *Malcolm X on Afro-American History*, and *Malcolm Speaks to Young People*. Every educational level can utilize these works. Without a doubt, they will excite and motivate students to read, discuss and debate.

We need to explore five major questions:

1. Who are Black people and how should they think about themselves?
2. Who and what is responsible for the suffering of Black people over the last several hundred years?
3. Who are the friends and allies of Black people in this country and throughout the world?
4. What are the goals of the Black liberation movement and how should these goals be attained?
5. What is to be done now? Where to begin? How to start?

The study of Malcolm X is a useful and progressive point of departure in dealing with these questions. It should be possible to form study circles on campus, in the church, in the neighborhood, in youth groups, and in union locals.

Why Now?

Search for New Leadership: There has been a radical shift in the nature of Black leadership since the 1960s. The Civil Rights leadership was independent of the mainstream political parties and therefore, when we talked of the movement, even when dealing with the mainstream Civil Rights organizations, there was some sense of being outside of the "system." However, now the functional national leadership of Black people is the Congressional Black Caucus, a group operating within the ideological/political consensus of the US Congress, i.e., the system. Yet the majority of Black people remain

outside of the system, beaten down and oppressed by it, and they deserve—have the right!—to have their own leadership armed with ideological assumptions that fundamentally challenge the system; leaders who want to bring it down and replace it with something new and better.

Through the prism of Malcolm's thought new criteria of leadership will emerge, and, if implemented, will enable the movement to replace the House Negro, whether as a servant or elected leader (mayor, governor, or even president!) with democratic community-based leadership: of the masses, for the masses, by the masses. When this leadership ceases to be community-based or joins a ruling class party, then, in the spirit of Malcolm, they must be replaced.

Birth of A New Militant Black Movement: We are calling for the social and political reproduction of an informed militancy that can pick up and carry on from where Malcolm took us. This is an ideological statement as it reflects being able to decode, recode and explode on the Malcolm road. The necessary precondition of this is provided virtually every year in these hard times in every community, in the spontaneous fight back against attack and repression. However, a spontaneous action is necessary, but insufficient, as the Malcolm road is a conscious deliberate path of collective study and organized, disciplined action. The rebuilding of the movement must be a conscious process of restructuring relationships and nurturing the previous sparks of revolutionary spirit from the masses. This is a process that requires that intellectuals renounce their privilege and truly strive to serve the people. As Charlie Parker played, NOW IS THE TIME!

The choice of the Malcolm road is to push fear aside and dare to celebrate "the Eye of the Tiger;" to take up the warrior's oath to avenge past wrongs and fight for a new and better day. This is a time when the people of so many countries are unleashing new winds of change, especially the revolutionary winds of the Intifada and of the workers and youth of South Africa. This is a new day, a day Malcolm would have welcomed to live. Indeed, we do live it and as we do, in 1990, we REMEMBER MALCOLM! ■