

X marks the main issue



"HOW MANY COPIES DO you have?" Francine Moore was asked.

"Well, let's take a look," she replied.

She stepped from behind her desk at the Dudley Square branch of the Boston Public Library, where she is a library assistant, and went into the

back room. There, she counted the number of copies of Malcolm X's autobiography on hand yesterday morning: Fifteen.

"There are five more out front," she was saying. "Then we have 19 charged out, one missing, one considered lost, one on hold, all hardbacks. Plus the paperbacks."

"The paperbacks disappear," another librarian added. "They never come back. But that's good. At least they're reading it."

"I'll tell you something good," Francine Moore said. "Malcolm's book is more popular here than Michael Jordan's."

The story of Malcolm's life was told to Alex Haley, the author of "Roots," and now there is overwhelming interest in the book, especially within the black community, due in large measure to Spike Lee's movie, which opened yesterday. The film is surrounded by controversy, much of it nonsense, because anything that creates dialogue or debate about the dignity of a man or his ideas in neighborhoods terminally ill due to municipal indifference can only be called progress.

Malcolm X was not some rich basketball player, one of these functionally illiterate athletes whose fame and fortune come from a game and a sneaker contract. He was a man. And his life and death - by a bullet - were about real ideas and years of thought that revolved around the entirely legitimate premise that an entire class of Americans sits below deck because of the color of their skin on this big vessel where it is easier to escape steerage if you are white.

"Malcolm resurrected my mind," James Weaver said yesterday. "I met him over 30 years ago when I rented a room from his sister, Ella Collins, at 486 Mass. Ave."

Weaver is a cab driver. He came to Boston from Dayton, Ohio, more than three decades ago to attend the New England Conservatory. He was 18, didn't know a soul, saw a "Room for rent" sign in the old four-story red brick building at Mass. and Tremont and walked right up the steps.

"I was there about a week when his sister said, 'Come downstairs. I want you to meet some people,'" Weaver remembers. "It was Malcolm and Gene Walcott. He is Louis Farrakhan now. Malcolm had just gotten out of jail and I sat there on so many different days and just listened to the man. He had some powerful ideas that completely changed my life."

"Louis didn't have much to say. He was very quiet. It was mostly Malcolm. Up till then I really had no idea what life was all about. Malcolm shaped me. He resurrected my mind."

Weaver spoke while standing just inside the door of the Freddie J. Cleaners, Blue Hill Avenue, Grove Hall, U.S.A. Outside, the sidewalk was a mix of those working hard to stay even along with those walking only in order to keep warm.

Unfortunately, there are simply too many white adults in this city, country really, with absolutely no connection at all to blacks. No idea of what it is like to be black. No friends who are black. No acquaintances. Never mind whole cities being segregated by race, minds are segregated too. Whites see blacks downtown and odds are their first thought is to protect a handbag or wallet. We are a nation smoldering in resentment and you have to be a moron not to regard the issue of race as our most important obstacle.

Lee's movie is about that topic. And it is hard to describe how a film has managed to electrify so many who are normally untouched by so much of our culture, which is largely packaged by elitist or greedy whites whose intent is to make money, not make minds come alive with thought.

"You would be amazed at the number of kids who come in here who cannot even fill out a form for a library card," said Jackie Hogan, the librarian at the Grove Hall library. "So I am thrilled when anyone comes in for books on Malcolm."

"A lot of the books don't come back," Charlie Mae Wilson, an assistant, said with a laugh. "They have been liberated."

"I remember Malcolm," Bobbie Ashton, another assistant, was saying. "He had red hair and we called him 'Detroit Red.' I remember he was a flashy dresser and he was at the High Hat on Columbus Avenue a lot to hear my father play. My father was Harold Ford; 'Fordie' everyone called him. He was the drummer with the house band and Malcolm loved music. I remember Malcolm very well and I can't wait to see the movie."

Up the street from the library, Ronald Hector, 28, and Anthony Snow, 29, were getting ready to go to Dedham to see the afternoon screening of Spike Lee's film. Snow had read Haley's book several times.

"The brother could think," said Snow. "There's something to be said for that, you know."

Malcolm blazed path for others at Norfolk

By Howard Manly
GLOBE STAFF

NORFOLK - Nearly four decades ago, behind the concrete walls of Norfolk prison, a troubled young brother named Malcolm Little came to learn.

It might as well have been Harvard University.

Malcolm X later told his biographer, Alex Haley, that in prison he studied by moonlight, that he studied every word in the dictionary, and that he studied so much he needed glasses.

He had fire and thirst, entering prison as a nickel-and-dime street hustler and

leaving as one of the world's most articulate spokesmen on one of the world's most enduring problems - racism.

Faheem Najee Shabazz, 33, is behind those same walls now. Back in 1976, he said, he was busted for armed robbery and assault and battery and received a 15- to 30-year sentence. Like many other black inmates, here and in other prisons across the country, he now patterns his behavior after Malcolm's.

"One of the things that Malcolm developed inside here was discipline," he said while sitting inside the visitors' room. "He used the prison atmosphere like a womb and when he came out he was ready."

Inside Norfolk, many inmates are adhering to the tenets of the Nation of Islam, a religion which grew steadily after Malcolm X hit the streets in 1962 to preach about black love and white hate: praying five times a day, fasting, no smoking, no pork. Above all else, Shabazz said, is the relentless pursuit of knowledge.

Whether their faith is making any difference inside, or outside on the streets, is a matter of some conjecture.

Shabazz is one of 1,250 men at this institution of higher learning, and one of an estimated 100 members of the Muslim community. Many of them are part of the

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'I believe Malcolm's sincerity to search for knowledge throughout his prison term has really inspired me to reconstruct my behavior.'

JAMAAL IMAN
Norfolk inmate

Computer prodigy in prison scandal

By Brian McGrory
GLOBE STAFF

Zachary (Tex) Hildreth, the flamboyant computer wizard convicted of bilking nearly a million dollars from investors in his Braintree consulting firm, persuaded a guard to smuggle him a personal computer into prison, sparking a scandal that has rocked the Pondville Correctional Center, according to sources and a state official.

While cases of prison guards selling cigarettes, candy and even pornography to inmates are not uncommon, this marks the first known instance in Massachusetts where a guard provided a convict with a computer.

The guard, from Braintree, has resigned, and the state Department of Correction launched an internal investigation last month into troubled Pondville, according to sources and officials. Pondville is a minimum security facility and pre-release center that sits in the shadows of the state prison in Walpole.

"There is an ongoing investigation," said Robin Bavaro, the spokeswoman for the state Department of Correction. "I am unable to comment on the investigations or personnel issues."

The incident adds yet another strange twist to the unlikely criminal history of Tex Hildreth, the obese high school loner and computer junkie who shed his weight and his inhibitions and used his knowledge of computers to achieve fame and fortune.

But once he founded his computer company, Massdata Corp., with its escalating payroll and bustling offices, he became embroiled in a pattern of deception and thievery that would lead to a crash as dramatic as his rise to success. His low point may have come in 1988 in a New Hampshire hotel room, where he and his mother both attempted suicide in an apparent attempt to escape creditors.

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CLEAN SWEEP - Jon Magill clears the sidewalk outside a Columbus Avenue restaurant last night in Boston's South End. The coating of snow was expected to complicate this morning's commute for drivers.

Marder guilty on gaming charges

Revere corruption probe continuing

By Matthew Brehis
GLOBE STAFF

A federal jury deliberated just four hours yesterday before finding Arthur Marder guilty on all 17 charges against him in a trial in which Revere was painted as a town where gambling was a way of life and police and politicians were on the take.

Assistant US Attorneys Ernest DiNisco and Michael J. Tuteur, working with information gathered by Internal Revenue Service agents, showed in the six-week trial how Marder's Revere Amusement Co. put video poker machines in more than a dozen bars, social clubs and fraternal organizations.

"In my view this is a very significant case that was well presented by DiNisco and Tuteur and it represents an initial step in this office's efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption in Revere," said US Attorney A. John Pappalardo.

Government witnesses testified that bar owners would pay off those who had winning hands on the video poker machines and get reimbursed by Marder's employees, who would then evenly split the remaining proceeds with the bar owners.

To ensure that the business operated without interference, Marder instructed that payments be made each month to two Revere police officers, known as "Lenny and Squiggy" and identified as Leonard Randall and Lt. John McDonald; to Michael Sposito, who prosecutors said was a "bagman for local politicians"; and to "Italians" at Fiore's Market, including Alexander (Sonny Boy) Rizzo, a member of the Mafia, according to testimony from Revere

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More Metro News

■ **Hearing:** Plymouth youth, 15, charged with manslaughter, will face a hearing to determine whether he should be tried as an adult. Page 58.

■ **Dumping ban:** Environmental officials have agreed to a ban on the disposal of contaminated sediments near Stellwagen Bank. Page 62.

■ **School action:** Board OK's plan to improve education for bilingual students. Page 63.

■ **Cambridge:** City Council seeks probe of separate allegations of conflict of interest involving indicted City Councilor William Walsh and an associate, Sally Ackerman. Page 84.

Weld says pay raises for state employees politically motivated

By Frank Phillips
GLOBE STAFF

Gov. Weld yesterday charged that the Legislature put the interests of state workers and their Beacon Hill lobbyists ahead of private sector workers when it passed a 13 percent pay-hike plan Tuesday but ignored his economic development bill.

Just minutes after the Legislature shipped the pay-hike bill to his desk yesterday afternoon, Weld said he would send it back with a proposal for "quite a bit smaller increase" and couple it with his civil service reform plan that links raises to job performance and eliminates two state holidays.

If that is rejected by lawmakers, Weld reiterated, he pledges to veto the pay hike for the 50,000 unionized state employees that he says will eventually cost \$300 million a year, and noted that the state workers' unions have considerable clout with the Democrat-controlled Legislature.

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Baker is a quick study while sitting in hot seat

By Don Azroin
GLOBE STAFF

"Congratulations on your new job, Charlie," an acquaintance called from the doorway of Charles D. Baker's office.

Profile in the News

Something between a smile and a wince crossed Baker's face as he glanced up from his desk, where he was scanning a letter pertaining to the troublesome "Mikey" foster-care case. "Yeah, right," Baker responded. "Out of the frying pan and into the fire."

Without question, the heat

these days is on Baker, the commonwealth's new secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. At 36, the man whom Gov. Weld once described as "the soul of the Weld administration" must now try to stabilize an agency - the Department of Social Services - that has come under fire for its handling of difficult foster-care cases.

DSS is but one of 15 health, social service and juvenile correction agencies Baker must shepherd through the Weld revolution - a shift in governmental priorities including smaller budgets, more privatization and tougher

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Malcolm's path is challenging his followers at Norfolk prison

■ PRISON

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staggering 23 percent of black males between the ages of 20 and 29 who are behind bars, according to government statistics one of the fastest-growing segments of America's black population. Many more young black men skirt the perimeter of the criminal justice system.

Though Malcolm's life has become Spike Lee's latest Hollywood blockbuster and the ubiquitous X almost as American as apple pie, for many inmates only one thing stands out about the man.

He left behind a legacy, Shabazz said: a clear example of how one can turn a life around in prison through sheer will.

"Just like Malcolm developed in the womb, there are others of us being formed into that kind of discipline," he said. "The people on the outside should not think that just because somebody is incarcerated, they should be cast aside. As a matter of fact, I would say there are many of us being formed. They can look forward to another Malcolm real soon."

Another Malcolm?

Norfolk is atypical of most American prisons and, in fact, was patterned after a college campus instead of the medieval-style prison that was popular during the early 1930s, when it was built.

Its lovely, grassy courtyard in the middle of the quadrangle of dormitory-style rooms belies the seriousness of some of the crimes committed by the men serving time here. State Sen. Louis Parkhurst, whose brainchild the prison was, even donated 2,500 volumes to start one of the best jailhouse libraries in the country.

After Malcolm's conviction in 1946 on burglary and firearm charges, he began serving time in Charlestown Prison, one of the worst facilities in the country, and eventually was transferred to Norfolk, where he served two years, from 1948 to 1950.

He starred on the prison debating team, which challenged and beat

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FAHEEM NAJEE SHABAZZ
Norfolk inmate

some of those college boys on the other side of town. He stood up for his religion at a time when prison officials would not recognize the Nation of Islam as an accepted doctrine of beliefs. On religious grounds he demanded a room facing east, toward Mecca; refused to eat certain types of food and also refused to be inoculated by prison officials.

And according to recently released documents from the FBI, he mailed a letter on Jan. 29, 1950, warning, "The time has come for the devils to be destroyed."

"Young brothers, especially those that are incarcerated, should put more emphasis on what he did while he was in prison," Shabazz said. "I talked to a lot of guys when they first came to prison and they think that they can't do anything. I simply say, 'Look at Malcolm.' He came in like a lot of us, caught up in the streets."

One such brother is Edwin Carmichael, 24. A Boston native, he was busted for selling drugs and has already served six years of an 11-year sentence. Once he has completed his state time, he faces 22 years in a federal prison.

"What is inspiring to me is how Malcolm came to prison and just converted his whole lifestyle," Carmichael said, noting that he quit smoking cigarettes four years ago as part of his transformation in Islam.

Shabazz pointed out a common misperception about blacks in general and inmates in particular. "A lot of people come to prison not because we are stupid or ignorant but because of darkness," he said.

"When I say darkness, I mean

confusion. A lot of us don't come from environments that encourage us to use our minds. Our neighborhoods are fueled by concepts such as 'the only way to make it is by selling drugs.' That's why I like Malcolm. He didn't come from an ivory tower institution. Yet he was challenging people with so-called bachelor's and master degrees."

Jamaal Iman, 28, is in Norfolk until at least the year 2002. Convicted of second-degree murder, he already has served five years. His story is in some ways typical. He couldn't find a job when he came to Boston from Kingston, Jamaica.

"I came here with the intent of earning an honest dollar," he said. "But I wasn't qualified to work. So I had to go with what my friends were doing and I got caught up in the mix."

The intent was not to harm anyone, he said, but the outcome was murder.

What has kept Iman going is his belief in Allah and the unwavering principles of the institution's most renowned alumnus.

"I believe Malcolm's sincerity to search for knowledge throughout his prison term has really inspired me to reconstruct my behavior," he said.

"Malcolm had the ability to change. He had the ability after he went to Mecca, and saw all sorts of Muslims, including Caucasians, to say that his previous 'White man is the devil' teachings were wrong. That proved his sincerity, his purity of thought," Iman said.

Shabazz said he doesn't separate the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement from Malcolm and says that they were "two spirits emanating from the same African-American soul."

"One side wants to compromise and appeal to the good graces and mercy of an oppressive system," he said. "On the other side was Malcolm, who said things that a lot of blacks didn't have the courage to say."