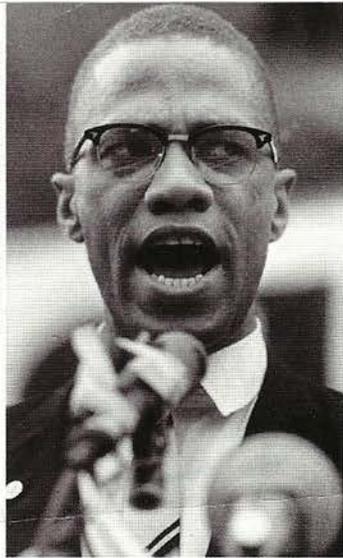


TED RUSSELL / LIFE MAGAZINE / © TIME WARNER INC.



# PRIVATE LIVES

This month, ELLE looks beyond the hype surrounding celebrity. Joan Chen, soon to star in the film adaptation of Amy Tan's novel "The Joy Luck Club," takes us on a journey in search of her roots, to Shanghai, China. So too does movie-

**SECRET STORIES  
FEATURING  
MALCOLM X,  
ELLE MACPHERSON,  
OLIVER STONE,  
AND JOAN CHEN**



ELLE MACPHERSON

maker Oliver Stone: with the help of special correspondent Elle Macpherson, the director leaves the confines of La-La Land to go on a personal homecoming to

Manhattan. And, now that "Malcolm X," Spike Lee's new film, has revived the man behind the legend, what better time to ask prominent Americans their opinion of the leader and his legacy? November, a time for secret histories and thoughtful reminiscences.

RUSSEL WONG / OUTLINE





*Send  
to Dad after you read!*

## X APPEAL IN THE NINETIES

# TALKING BACK TO MALCOLM

**T**he film event of the year, Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, has sparked a debate over the legacy of the most charismatic American leader of the past 50 years. Malcolm X, the eloquent spokesman for black empowerment who, in 1965, was gunned down at the age of 39 in New York City, continues to influence the political, social, and cultural climate of our society. Malcolm is still with us, from the almost obligatory mention of his struggle by today's critics of institutionalized racism to the ubiquitous "X" seen on the caps and T-shirts of the committed and the merely cool. To make sense of X Appeal in the nineties, we called on writer Joe Wood. As editor of *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image* (St. Martin's Press), an excellent new collection of essays by prominent African-Americans, Wood is ideally suited to help shed a penetrating light on the mystique surrounding this controversial figure. Over the past few months, he sought out opinion on the man and his powerful message; Wood listened as 10 outspoken Americans talked back to Malcolm X:

**Sister Souljah** (rapper): Malcolm was struggling for the empowerment of African people so that we could be independent—economically, socially, culturally, militarily. I know thousands of people across the country who understand him, who go to lectures and try to live their life in a particular way. Then, of course, it is popularized by the mainstream. The mainstream doesn't understand him because the mainstream does not support power for African people in America and throughout the world. We know what he said, we know what he believed in, we know how he fought, and we know that at the end of the road he still formed the Organization of African-American Unity. His goal was to empower African people in the United States and to develop links, trade, commerce, and international political pressure against white supremacy.

**Thurgood Marshall** (retired Supreme Court justice): I certainly *did* know Malcolm X. I thought he was no good for anything. I don't know of anything constructive he did other than talk. I'd prefer to forget that he ever lived. I don't know what he ever did other than talk, and that's all I've got to say about him.

**Anita Hill** (law professor): It is unfortunate that, like so many visionaries, he was not perfect, but he had a vision of society that would have been better for a lot of people who are in the underclass. When history is finally written, when we're a little more removed from the times, I think he'll be appreciated much more for the leadership that he showed. I hope that comes to pass in my lifetime. I was not one of those people who was exposed to him in the media in the way that people in the larger urban areas were. I didn't get a lot of the negative and inflammatory information, but I didn't get lot of *good* information either.... It was a tragic loss. As we go into the nineties and see the violence and the decay in the inner city among the youth, I think we are beginning to realize what a tragedy it is not to have someone with that kind of vision still among us. He was a unique individual.

**Whoopi Goldberg** (entertainer): He was a remarkable, insightful man. Like many discoverers of truth, he was taken out by people who wanted to perpetuate a lie. Who those people were, we'll never know. As for the resurgence of interest in Malcolm: it's about time!

**Bill Bradley** (U.S. senator, New Jersey): He was someone who had integrity and the courage of his convictions, who saw the world as it is and called it like he saw it. A couple of years ago I was taking the train from Washington to Newark, and a young black man came up to me and introduced himself as a substitute English teacher in the New York school system. He said that when he takes over a class, what he

**JOE WOOD**

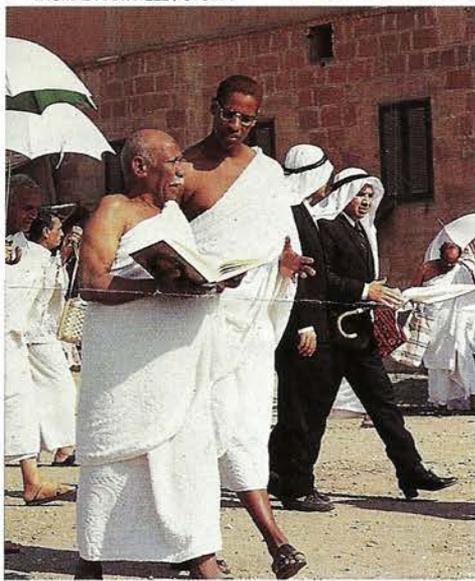


Far left, Spike Lee in "X" regalia. This page, Malcolm's daughter, Attilah Shabazz, with a memento.

# MARTYR DREAMER MUSLIM CONVICT?

usually does is assign *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, so that kids will read it, particularly those sections about reading as the fuse which lights up your whole life and brings your mind to fire. And he said that so many times these kids would come back and ask him why he assigned this book about "Malcolm Ten." They had no frame of refer-

THOMAS HARTWELL / SYGMA



A scene from "Malcolm X": Denzel Washington, center, as the title character undergoing a spiritual conversion in the Muslim holy city of Mecca.

ence. So unless there are connections made from the period of his ascendancy to the present, then his place will be locked within a particular period of time in history.

**William Kunstler** (lawyer): Malcolm was very bright. At the same time I was representing Martin Luther King, Jr., and I thought Malcolm was much closer to urban blacks, people in the ghettos, than Martin could ever hope to be. He had a constituency that was totally different, more vital. There was less of a white influence on Malcolm than on Martin. I met Malcolm at LaGuardia Airport several weeks

before he was assassinated. It was then that Malcolm told me he had a phone conversation with Martin and that they hoped to meet to discuss some possible amalgamation of their efforts. I think that was on the day before Malcolm's house was bombed, the week before his death.... As I talk to you, I'm wearing a Malcolm X sweatshirt. I was asked to play the judge in Spike Lee's movie. I had some second thoughts about whether I wanted to play a white racist judge sentencing Malcolm to 8-10 years. I decided to do it anyway, despite the controversy. I thought the film was important to get out...I think he's more alive today than he's ever been. All the "X" hats you see on young people in the streets. He has an enormous political legacy. It's the legacy of an outspoken black figure rising out of the ghetto, born in Omaha, into the Boston area, and into New York, who says, "Fight back!" We just had a big "Fight back!" in South Central L.A. I don't call those episodes riots—they're rebellions. Malcolm's legacy is very much alive, a

fight back, take a stand, understand the nature of the oppressor. Not just against the white devils, as he first said; when Malcolm came back from Mecca he was more ecumenical. He hoped everyone would join his struggle—the struggle of the inner city, where most blacks are tormented. Victims of terrible education, police marauding. It's all that which Malcolm stands for, to fight back, not only through electoral politics, but with weapons or whatever power you have at your disposal. I hope the film perpetuates his story; I hope it's controversial and powerful. I think the nineties and on into the 21st century are going to be periods of high struggle in the black community.

**Maxine Waters** (congresswoman, South Central Los Angeles): I first met Malcolm X at a mosque right in the heart of South Central L.A., where he was speaking. It was 1962, I was a young housewife at the time....Malcolm tapped into his knowledge of the black community. This impressed me greatly—my impression has not changed. The great sorrow here is the divisions among the youth....I love the way young people are wearing him on their hats. When you look around for who understands, I think Malcolm X emerges as a spokesperson for the kind of despair that is in our streets today. I think Malcolm X having gone to prison—the kids realize that Malcolm X understands what they're going through. Even for the young who want to change their lives, the system says "No!" So Malcolm, having been on the streets, having served time, he is the same as these young brothers out here. He emerged as someone who was able to transcend his situation.

**Bill T. Jones** (choreographer): When I was a teenager, I felt constantly compelled to choose between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. This was a shallow reading of what Malcolm X was about. I see now that he and Martin Luther King were, in fact, truly brothers and very, very important Americans for the second half of the 20th century. Malcolm X, for me, is the quintessential radical. He is the person who pushes, pinches, shoves at the soft squishy center of moderation. He forced us to decide how we felt, to move one way or another.... I've grown to appreciate his brand of radicalism. I've grown to appreciate his anger. Also his growth. What we begin to realize as we understand his life,