

Hales Students Feel the Power Of 'Malcolm X'

By Lee Bey
Staff Writer

For more than three hours in a darkened movie theater Wednesday, Jayson Cross was running with Malcolm X.

Cross saw Malcolm go to jail, then join the Nation of Islam. And

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he was there at the end, in 1965, when Malcolm was gunned down before an audience at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City.

"That was the sad part, that he died," said Cross, 14. "If he had lived, it would have been good. He may have been the next president."

Cross and nearly 400 other students and parents from Hales Franciscan High School took half the day to attend a private screening of Spike Lee's film "Malcolm X" at the Burnham Plaza Theatre, 818 S. Wabash Ave. Hales is an all-male, African-American high school at 4930 S. Cottage Grove Ave.

The three-hour, 21-minute movie depicts the life of Malcolm X, from his youth as a hustler on the streets in Harlem, to his religious conversion in prison, to his life in the civil rights struggle.

Hales officials had originally sought to obtain a private screening for a school fund-raiser, but Warner Bros. denied the request. The Rev. Charles Payne, Hales' principal, said he then decided to use a screening to augment the school's teachings on Malcolm X.

The film, starring Oscar-winner Denzel Washington, often drew laughs and applause from the audience.

Raphael Rush, 14, said he was riveted during a scene depicting Malcolm X and scores of Nation of Islam men winning the release from jail of a man who had been bloodied by police.

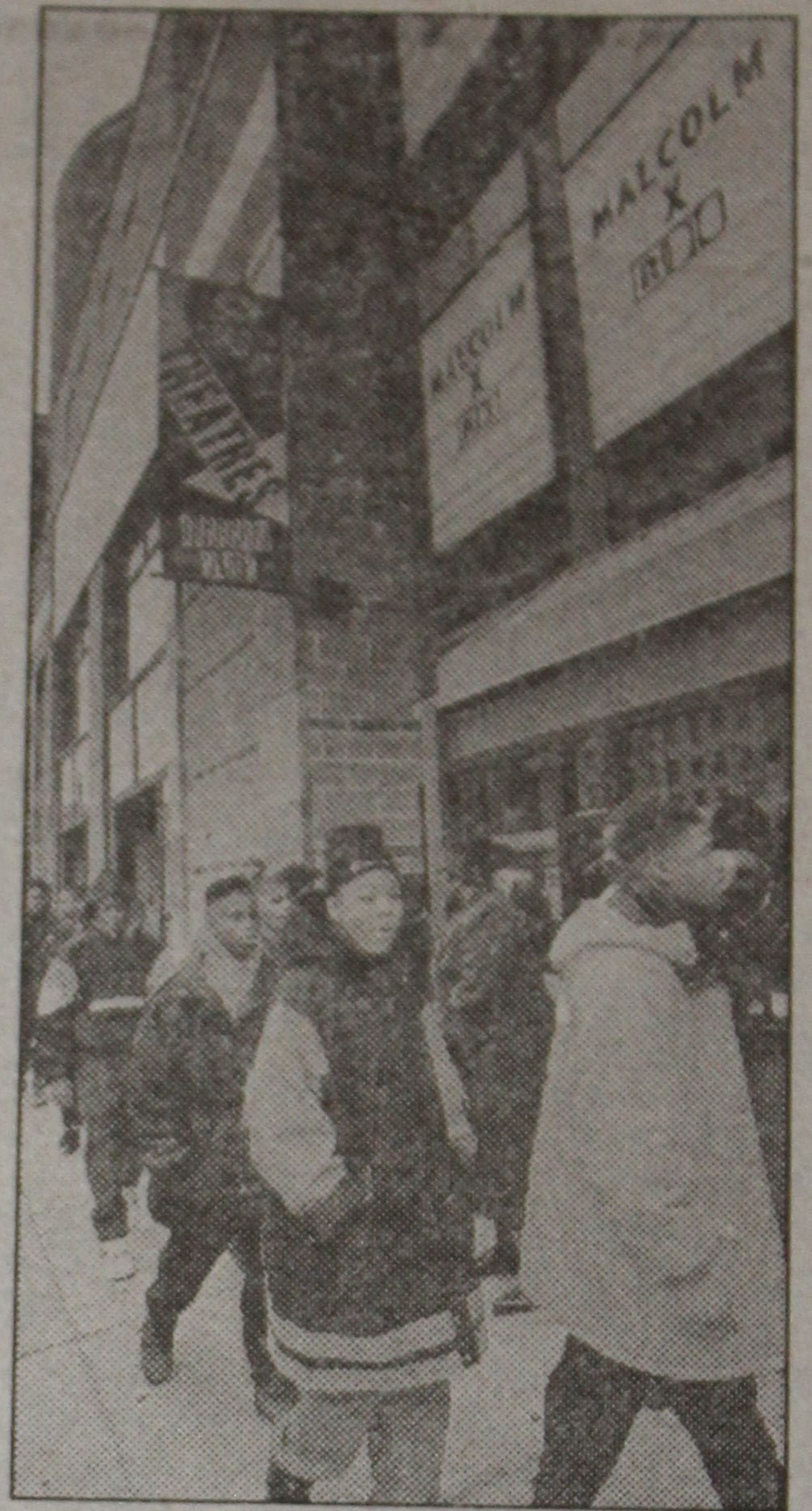
"Malcolm X had a lot of power," Rush said.

Marlow Williams, who has read Malcolm X's autobiography by Alex Haley, said the film was better than he had expected.

"It instilled in me a great sense of pride," said Williams, a high school senior. "And after seeing the movie I could identify with the characters more."

Payne said the film had a deep impact on his students.

"What Malcolm X discovered,



SUN-TIMES / Al Podgorski

Hales students head into the screening of "Malcolm X."

really, was his sense of personal power," he said. "In other parts of his life, he used other things for power—women, drugs—but when he discovered his own power, he no longer needed those things. And that's a good message for African Americans."

Former Mayor Eugene Sawyer also attended the screening. He said the portrayals would provide a complete picture for those born after Malcolm X's death.

"This film will be good for the kids," he said. "Malcolm was of the 1960s, but these are the 1990s and things are almost the same. Not a lot has changed. There needs to be a significant change and [Malcolm] provides that voice."

The West Suburban Community Coalition took 39 black suburban high school students and a contingent of senior citizens to a showing of the film at the Chestnut Station theater Wednesday.

The group's spokesman, Bill Hampton, brother of slain Chicago Black Panther Fred Hampton, said the film was a history lesson for the younger patrons and changed the views of some of the older viewers.

"I think the movie shows young people that Malcolm X's movement laid the groundwork for other movements, like the Black Panthers," he said.