

Black youth's thoughts on 'Malcolm X'

Los Angeles, Cal.—Spike Lee's "Malcolm X" is definitely the 1992 Hollywood pic which compels Americans to either address or scurry away from the question of the needed American revolution today.

As a Black revolutionary youth, I was anxious to see the movie. My first reading, in 1986, of the **Autobiography of Malcolm X**, while a college student in New York, became pivotal in my search for a full philosophy of freedom.

I was 19 years old and was inspired by the fighting spirit of my colleagues at Columbia University. In 1985, students and faculty members forced the University trustees to divest from corporations that had investments in South Africa.

After this, the mood changed into one of victory and complacency. Suddenly, it seemed that there was nothing more to fight for, even though the uptown Manhattan campus was surrounded by expanding poverty.

However, this mood was not shared by all students. Actually, the complacency of others prompted intense debate over the legacy of the 1960s generation. Students from diverse backgrounds questioned the possibility and necessity of a social revolution in this country that could rival the mass activity of two decades ago.

It was this deep questioning that led me to read the life story of Malcolm X. I was and continue to be enthralled by the many profound developments he made in his life, from street hustler to separatist Black Muslim leader to Black revolutionary spokesman for freedom in the U.S. and abroad.

Denzel Washington's portrayal of the many facets of Malcolm X was profound and heartfelt. Hearing Washington speak Malcolm's gripping words in front of crowds of African Americans conveyed a sense of Blacks in America with their eyes on freedom—an image that has since been suppressed.

Not surprisingly, at the Black community theater where I saw the film, audience interaction with the movie during the rally scenes reaffirmed the deep

emotional bond with the slain Black activist. Many young Blacks shouted, "Preach, brother!" and "We want justice!"

Undoubtedly, Spike Lee has produced a powerful motion picture that will be remembered in times to come. However, what I did not get a sense of are the changes made by Malcolm X after his split with the Nation of Islam and trip to Mecca.

What was missing was Malcolm X's concentration on changing social relations among Blacks and whites in the U.S., and how that would have an effect globally.

In his Dec. 3, 1964, speech "Any means necessary to bring about freedom," Malcolm X challenged youth to transform the miserable conditions in which we live with the goal of creating something better. "The young generation of whites, Blacks, browns—you're living in a time of revolution, a time when there's got to be a change. People in power have misused it, and now there has to be a change and a better world has to be built."

These words are no less true today than they were nearly 30 years ago.

Challenges for Black revolutionary youth today include rethinking revolutionary concepts. We speak Afro-centric and retain European political models. Instead of arguing with the capitalist oppressors about recognizing the contributions of non-white societies, is it not time for us to build a new type of organization in the context of our struggle for freedom?

The maturity of our age demands the concretization of the idea of freedom contained in the actions of the Black masses if we are to ever succeed in actualizing the American revolution. A better awareness of the attributes the movement created in Malcolm X can contribute to a greater awareness of the challenges posed by the Los Angeles rebellion, namely, his willingness to be critical of himself, his openness to change, and his desire for freedom by any means necessary.

—Maurice Miller