

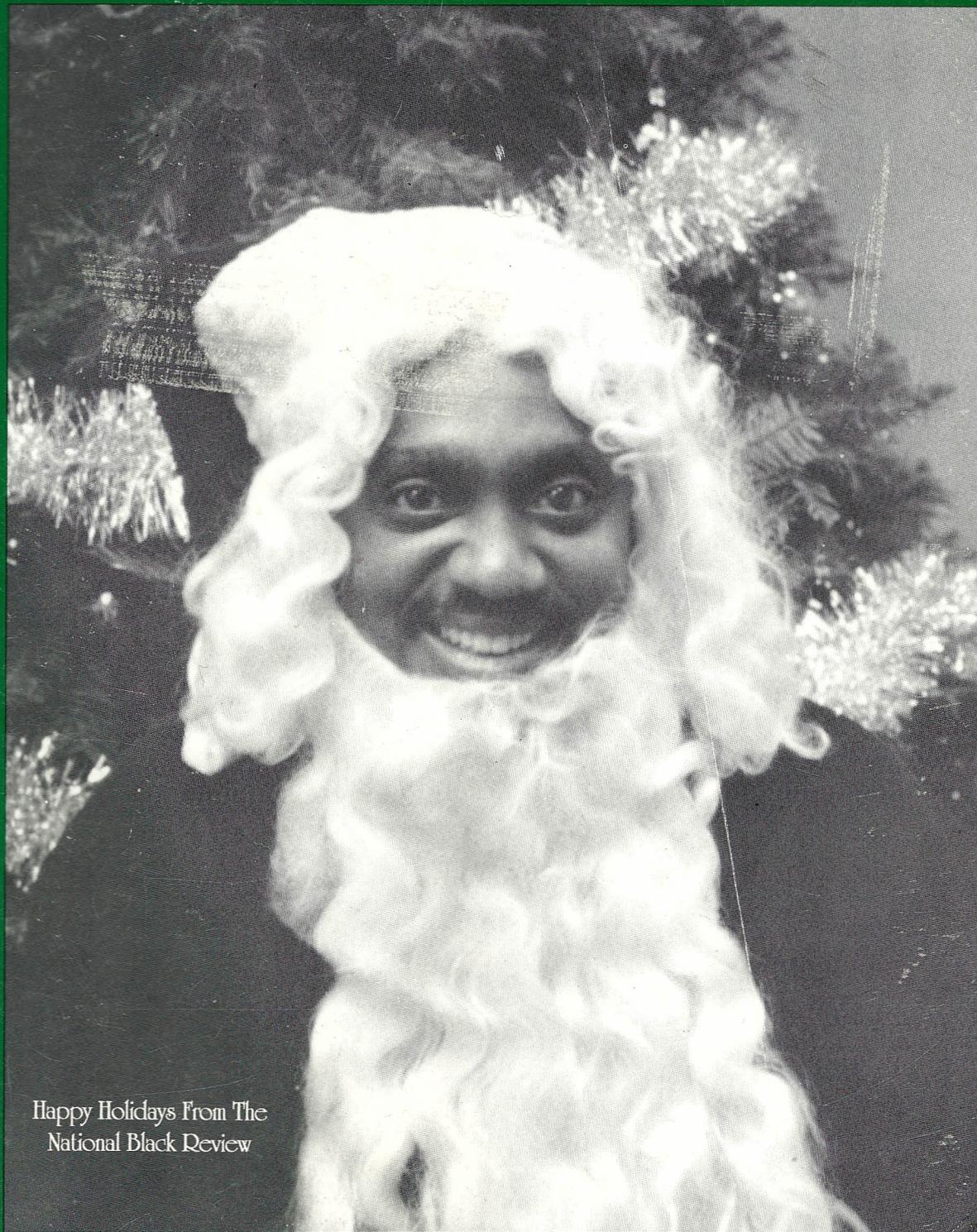
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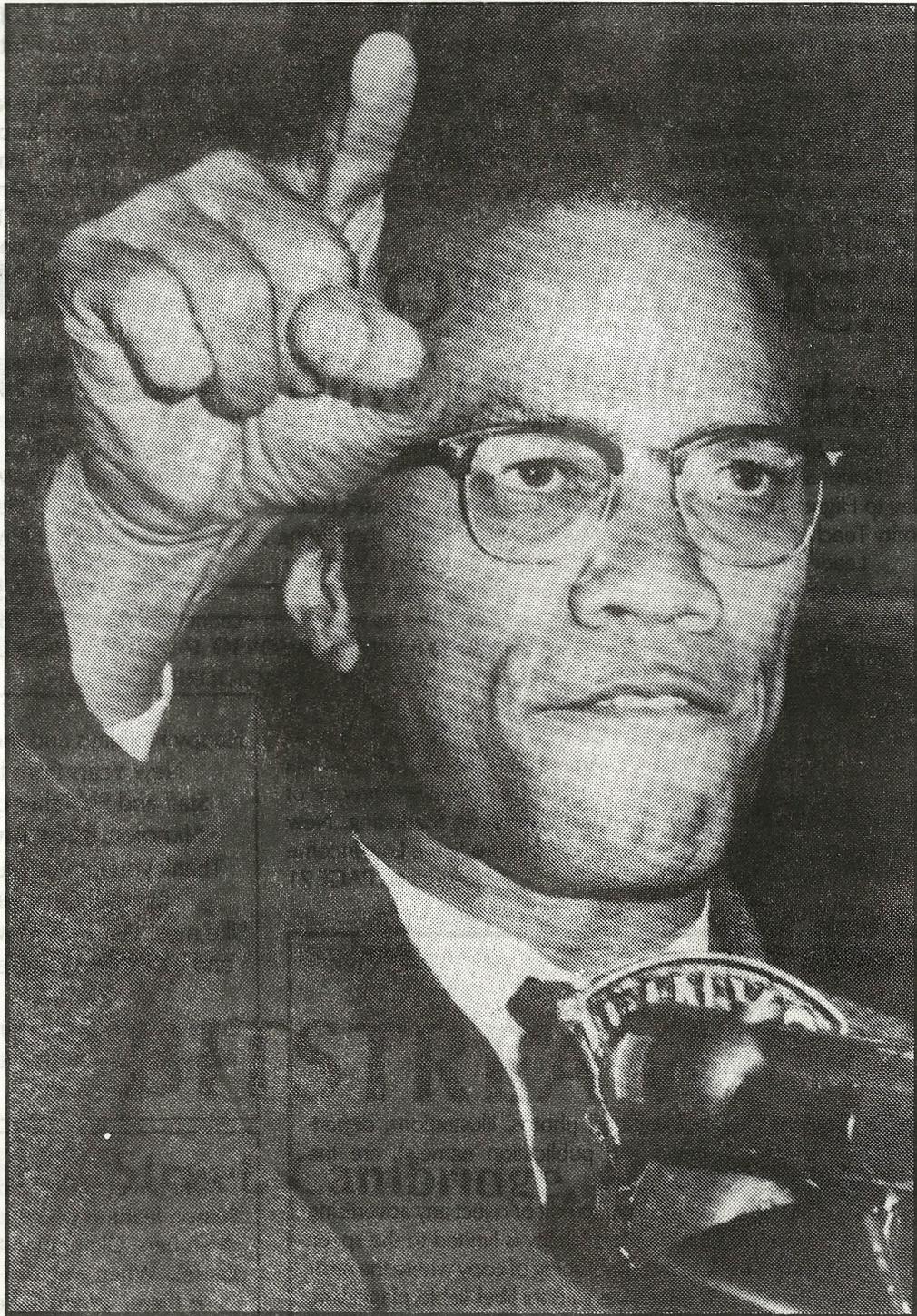
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Happy Holidays From The
National Black Review

Black History



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Malcolm X Was A Muslim

With the release of Spike Lee's new movie "Malcolm X", we are witnessing a renewed effort to deny the Islamic nature of El-Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X). Even those who praise his legacy see him as a "Black Nationalist," a humanist, an anti-imperialist firebrand, or even a Marxist; anything but what he was at the end of his life: a Muslim.

The current media term used when referring to Malcolm X is "slain Black leader." This term does not take into account the transformation Malcolm X underwent when he came in contact with true Islam, not just the pseudo-Islamic teachings of the late Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. It was in the city of Mecca that this transformation took place.

"At Makkah I saw the spirit of unity and true brotherhood displayed by tens of thousands of people from all over the world, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans. My religious pilgrimage (Haji) to Makkah has given me a new insight into the true brotherhood of Islam, which encompasses all the races of mankind."

— Article written for an Egyptian newspaper, August 1964

The Muslim community in America, numbering some 6-8 million people of all races and backgrounds, is concerned that the legacy of our slain brother has become just another commodity to be sold at a profit. Millions of "X" hats, shirts, and buttons are now worn by those who have little or no understanding of El-Hajj Malik Shabazz's deep commitment to Islam and racial justice. We are also concerned that the movie "Malcolm X" will not increase the public's knowledge of this commitment.

To paraphrase Elijah Muhammad, "X" marks the spot where treasure is buried. It is our hope that movie-goers

do not just take away the "X" and leave behind the treasure of Islam. In that treasure is a cure for the racism that afflicts this society. As El-Hajj Malik Shabazz himself said:

"America needs to understand Islam, because it is a religion that erases the race problem from its society. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and eaten with people who would have been considered 'white' in America, but the religion of Islam in their hearts has removed the 'white' from their minds. Before America allows herself to be destroyed by the 'cancer of racism' she should become better acquainted with the religious philosophy of Islam."

— Letter from Saudi Arabia, 1964

To make sure movie-goers have access to accurate information, those who went to see the movie on its release date will be offered Islamic materials as they entered theaters in selected cities around the country.

If you would like to contact Muslim leaders in this country who can describe the Islamic transformation Malcolm X underwent as he became El-Hajj Malik Shabazz, you may call the organizations and individuals listed below.

- Ruqiyah Abdus-Salam, American Muslim Council, (202) 789-2262
- Kamran Memon, Islamic Society of North America, (317) 839-8157, ext. 236 or (317) 838-0887
- Ibrahim Hooper, Islamic Information Service, (612) 721-4762
- Yaser Elmenshawy, Islamic Public Affairs Council, (908) 264-6482
- Imam Jamil Al-Amin, National Community, (404) 758-7016
- Imam Abdul Karim Hasan, Masjid Bilal, (213) 233-7274

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Walter Dean Myers on Malcolm X

Four-Time Coretta Scott King Award-Winning Author Writes Provocative Biography For Teenagers: MALCOLM X: *By Any Means Necessary*

Walter Dean Myers, author of more than thirty books for young adults, has received The Coretta Scott King Award four times and The Newbery Honor Medal. On January 1, 1993, Scholastic Inc. will publish his new biography for teenagers, **MALCOLM X: *By Any Means Necessary***.

"Malcolm's words," explains Myers, "speak to today's time, and to the young people of today, who, in many ways, are as different from the mainstream of American life in the nineties as their parents were in the fifties and sixties. The reasons might be different, but the disillusionment is the same.

"Writing **MALCOLM X** was sort of a scary project for

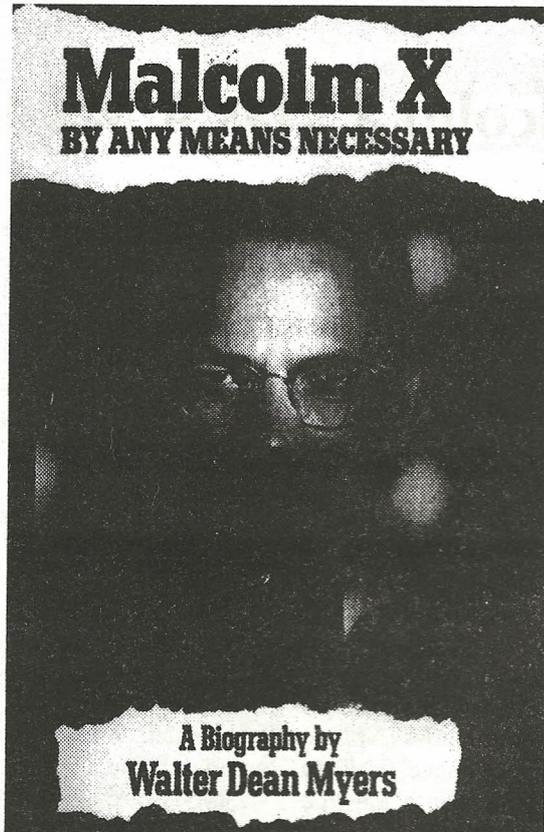


Photo: ©John Launois/Black Star

me because so much is going on in the community. There's a generation of young people who haven't the vaguest idea of who Malcolm was. I was visiting a school in Baltimore and telling kids how I work on a book, and I said Malcolm was born in 1925 and he died in 1965, and a kid said, "What? He's dead? Who designs the clothing?" I was very disturbed by this and knew I had to finish this book.

"I think kids will appreciate what Malcolm went through as a teenager. That he was bright, and that he was rejected from mainstream society and then, when he was rejected he went the same route that many teenagers do today.

"Malcolm was an exceptionally gifted man, but part of his appeal, which I try to put forth in the book, is that he was an everyday kind of guy because he lived the way that other people lived — he could

identify with them. I want to equate his life, that period of "the street dude" with teenagers today. A lot of his street hustling is romanticized. He was not as sophisticated at a young age as presented in other biographies. He was just surviving in this subculture after being rejected by the mainstream American culture. I think

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many young males, especially, will identify with Malcolm's early life. I was considered a smart kid in high school but when it became apparent that I wasn't going to have the chance to go to college, I dropped out, joined a gang and got into a lot of trouble.

"In my book, I reflect upon Malcolm's whole life, not just upon popular images. I have not seen any biography that deals in-depth with Malcolm's father, who was an activist, let alone his mother. I think it's important for teenagers to see his parents.

"There's less stability in the community today than when I grew up. In my time, if you were in junior high school and weren't doing that well, it was o.k., you could go to vocational school. Now, almost all education is geared toward college and that is more demanding. I dropped out of high school when I was sixteen, joined the army at seventeen and found various labor jobs for years. Now, even if you want a blue-collar job, there aren't any available.

"When I grew up in Harlem, you didn't have guns. You had the beginning of drugs, but you had authority figures. Segregation had a remarkably stabilizing effect upon the community. It put judges, teachers, middle class, upper middle class right there because they couldn't escape. While segregation was a dreadful situation, it's important for people today to recognize that they need to return to their community to serve as role models, to show the kids that they can succeed in life. When I write,

I try to give kids values and I try to bring them into a certain community. That search for values is what is no different between Malcolm and teenagers today.

"Malcolm scared America. The fear he generated might well have cost his life. But in scaring America, in bringing it face to face with the realities of our society in the sixties, he left it a better place."

Walter Dean Myers was born Walter Milton Myers in 1937 in Martinsburg, West Virginia. His mother died in childbirth when he was three, and a family named Dean raised him in Harlem. As a child, Myers had a severe speech impediment — a source of embarrassment and much frustration. Finding that he could communicate more easily through the written word, Myers began writing poetry in the fifth grade. "Writing for me has been many things," explains Myers. "It was a way to overcome the hindrance of a speech problem as I tried to reach out to the world. It was a way of establishing my humanity in a world that often ignores the humanity of those in less favored positions. It was a way to make a few extra dollars when they were badly needed."

Myers had his first book published when he was 32 and in his 40's, Myers got a degree from Empire State College, some 15 books into his career. An unpretentious and dedicated role model, Myers lives in Jersey City, New Jersey with his wife, his youngest son, and where he volunteers as a creative writing teacher at a nearby public school.



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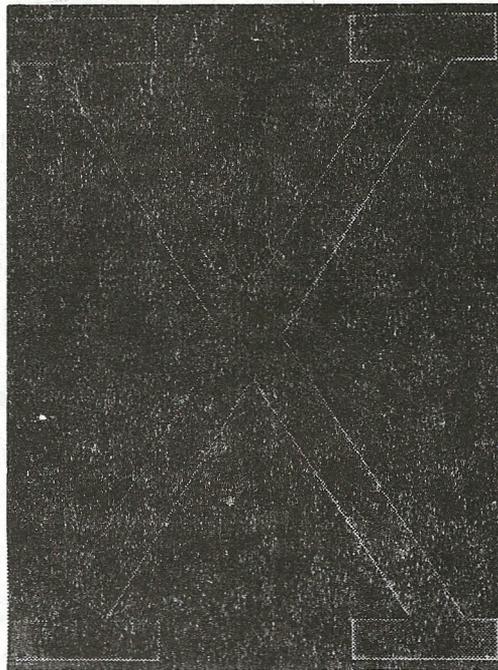
Malcolm Little — known at various times as Detroit Red, Satan, Malcolm X and El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz — was one of the most charismatic political voices in American history.

The fascinating life of this visionary leader is brought to the motion picture screen by acclaimed filmmaker Spike Lee in a sweeping epic produced by Marvin Worth and Lee and starring Academy Award-winner Denzel Washington in the title role. Filmed on location in New York, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and South Africa, "Malcolm X" is directed by Spike Lee from a screenplay by Arnold Perl and Spike Lee, based on the book *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley. Dr. Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X, was a consultant to the project.

From the moment Malcolm X burst into the public's consciousness, articulating his radical perspective on race relations and the status of African-Americans in society, the landscape of American social politics changed forever.

He turned the tables on white America's conventional assumption of its role in society, refusing to perceive himself or others of his race as second-class citizens. This stance from a black man in a time when many blacks were unable to register to vote, ride in the front of a bus, or attend school with white students, was nothing less than astounding — but it also fascinated many Americans, black and white, and Malcolm X soon became a figure of intentional regard.

Feared and revered, Malcolm X crystallized the hopes



"We declare our right on this Earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being, in this society, on this Earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary."

— Malcolm X

and dreams of blacks, demanding human rights for African-Americans during the racially tumultuous and divisive decades of the 1950s and '60s until his 1965 assassination in New York at the age of 39.

Rarely has a man who lived such a brief time made such a lasting impression on both his contemporaries and the generations which followed. From poverty to prominence, from hustler to humanist, Malcolm X and his ideologies touched the lives of millions and continue to inspire and enlighten.

Malcolm X's journey took him through as many different realities as he had names: over the nearly four decades of his life, Malcolm saw and lived amidst rural poverty, urban ghettos, criminal society, prison life, religious enclaves, a warm and supportive family, America, Europe, the newly independent nations of Africa, the Middle East and the limitless expanses of his own vision and intellect. From humble and harsh beginnings, Malcolm X soared to world renown before

his life was extinguished in mid-sentence, his words never to be forgotten.

It is this complex story that Spike Lee tells in an expansive film combining history, drama and contemporary perspective. Denzel Washington, who starred in Lee's "Mo' Better Blues" and received an Academy Award for his work in the Civil War drama "Glory," researched his role meticulously before portraying Malcolm.

The supporting cast illuminates the many people and

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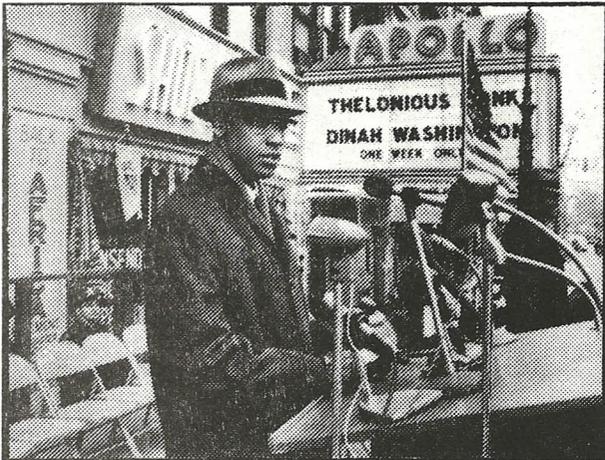


Photo Credit: Photo By David Lee/Warner Bros.

Malcolm X (Denzel Washington) addresses an audience of Harlem residents outside the legendary Apollo Theatre in "Malcolm X," an epic historical drama released by Warner Bros.

events that shaped the life of a leader and introduced him to the full spectrum of experience, from degradation to enlightenment.

Portraying Malcolm's wife, Betty Shabazz, is Angela Bassett; Al Freeman, Jr. is the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, venerable leader of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the man Malcolm X revered as second only to Allah. Delroy Lindo plays West Indian Archie, the Harlem kingpin who schools Malcolm in the tricks of the hustling trade. Albert Hall is Baines, a fellow prison inmate who introduces Malcolm to the teachings of the NOI. Theresa Randle is Laura, the naive young black woman who falls in love with Malcolm, while Kate Vernon plays Sophia, the adventurous young white woman who is his cohort and lover during his criminal years. Spike Lee plays Malcolm's pal Shorty during these same years. Shorty befriends Malcolm when Malcolm arrives in Roxbury, the black section of Boston.

The director of photography is Ernest Dickerson; the film's editor is Barry Alexander Brown; the production designer is Wynn Thomas; the costume designer is Ruth Carter; the casting director is Robi Reed; and the music is by Terence Blanchard. Warner Bros. is the domestic distributor.

Born in 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska, into a racist society that treated African-Americans as separate and unequal, young Malcolm Little lived in a series of foster families after his father's violent murder and his mother's subsequent institutionalization.

He was taught from childhood not to "aim too high" in his aspirations. When, at age 11, he told a teacher he wanted to be a lawyer one day, he was informed that he should choose something more realistic, like carpentry. Young black boys didn't grow up to become lawyers, he was told.

What he did become, after moving East to live with a

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relative, was a teen-aged hustler on the streets of Boston's Roxbury district and later Harlem, using the name Detroit Red (referring to his red hair and Michigan background) stealing, selling drugs and "steering" women until he landed in Charlestown State Prison.

There, after entering prison with a disposition so threatening that he acquired yet another name — Satan — Malcolm was transformed when he encountered and embraced the philosophies of the NOI.

The Islamic doctrine represented a complete change of lifestyle for Malcolm: no drinking, no profanity, no sloppy or casual dress, intensive study of theology and philosophy, and most important, the belief that people of color are God's chosen, the natural superiors of the "white devils" who sought to dominate them.

Malcolm learned to work for the advancement and vindication of his entire race, to assert the superiority of blacks and to demand that they assume their rightful role. In keeping with his new beliefs, he took the surname X, signifying his rejection of a "white man's slave name" and of his "unknown" African identity destroyed by slavery.

By the time he left prison in 1952 after six-and-a-half years of incarceration, Malcolm X had evolved from an uneducated criminal into a learned spokesperson for his religion. Spiritually reborn through the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the spiritual leader of the NOI, Malcolm X dedicated the rest of his life to the service of his faith and the betterment of his people.

Malcolm X's incisive mind, polished speech and sophisticated wit propelled him to the forefront of the NOI, making him a more visible spokesperson than even Elijah Muhammad.

For whites, here was a chance to see and hear a black man who did not grovel, beg or seek to placate them: Malcolm X spoke fervently and forcefully about his social vision as unsettling as it was new. He exposed racism in all aspects of American life, asserting, in no uncertain terms, the fundamen-



Photo Credit: Photo By David Lee/Warner Bros.

Betty (Angela Bassett) and Malcolm (Denzel Washington) share a tender moment after their wedding.

tal right of all men to be treated with dignity and respect.

For blacks, Malcolm's words were a revelation and an inspiration. Scores of black men and women embraced the NOI on the strength of Malcolm X's message and charisma.

Such notoriety, however, had its price. Before long, Malcolm X was at odds with his mentor, Elijah Muhammad, culminating in Malcolm's expulsion from the NOI. At this point, Malcolm, who had married and begun a family, traveled to the Middle East to investigate the roots of Islam for himself. He made the sacred hajj, or religious pilgrimage to Mecca, and, for the first time, encountered Muslims of all colors who welcomed him and shared his religious beliefs and hopes for his people.

The hajj marked yet another watershed in Malcolm's ongoing personal evolution. He returned to the United States intent on telling people of his discovery: that worthy and godly people of all races exist, and that the quality of a person's spirit is what determines his worth, not the color of his skin.

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For the first time, Malcolm X—who now earned the right to add the prefix “El-Hajj” to his Muslim name, Malik El-Shabazz—welcomed white people into his vision of a better future for mankind. He abandoned Elijah Muhammad’s teachings about the diabolical nature of whites, recognizing the importance of global unity and solidarity in his struggle towards gaining human rights for his people. Malcolm’s influence and recognition as a force for change continued to grow as his message reached an ever-widening audience. He spoke eloquently overseas, bringing his humanistic beliefs to listeners around the world.

But it was all to end before its time. In 1965, only 10 months after his return from Mecca, Malcolm X was gunned down as he spoke at the Audubon Ballroom in New York. At the age of 39, one of the most exciting and important voices in American history was silenced. Yet Malcolm X lives. Through his acclaimed, posthumously published and bestselling autobiography, his collected speeches and writings, thousands continue to be empowered and enlightened by his words.

Bringing an Icon to the Screen

Like his chosen name, Malcolm X has become an enigma: transformed into myth, he has been claimed in death even by those who rejected him in life. His legacy continues to be characterized less by a common vision than by a stubborn conviction by his followers that each person’s particular view represents the real



Photo Credit: Photo By David Lee/Warner Bros.

*Shorty (Spike Lee) and Malcolm are arrested for theft in “Malcolm X,” which is also produced and directed by Lee. Lee first read **THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X** in junior high school and was deeply affected by it.*

Malcolm. But the real Malcolm remains elusive.

Spike Lee has attempted to cinematically portray the epic and evolving life of one of America’s most charismatic public figures. In doing so, Lee hopes that people will recognize the relevance of Malcolm X’s philosophy in today’s world.

Says Lee, “Here’s a man who rose up from the dregs of society, spent time in jail, re-educated himself and, through spiritual enlightenment, rose to the top. This is an incredible story and I know that it will inspire people.”

“He was three or four or five or six different people,” observes Lee, “and

that’s what we want to show in this film.”

Lee, who first read **THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X** in junior high school and was deeply affected by it, tells onscreen the story of the many transformations of Malcolm X. “Malcolm X was a very complex man; I believe that his search for truth made him change over and over again, and it would be an injustice to his life to take any shortcuts in our film.”

Denzel Washington is acutely aware of the responsibility he carries by bringing Malcolm X to life on film. “The key for me was spirit,” he explains. “I’ve told people and I’ll continue to say that I can’t be Malcolm X,

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I'm not Malcolm X, I'm Denzel. But I know that the same spirit, the same God that moved him, can move through me. That was my desire and my prayer — to be moved by the same spirit he was moved by."

Washington continues, "I keep going back to the word 'evolution' because we all have to evolve and we all have to take a good look at where we are. It takes discipline, a lot of it. Malcolm made a lot of mistakes; but he was constantly evolving, constantly growing — and I think that's the essence of the human condition and what's important to know about this character."

Producing the film with Lee is Marvin Worth, who acquired the rights to Malcolm X's autobiography 26 years ago from Malcolm's widow, Dr. Betty Shabazz. Worth, who knew Malcolm and whose documentary on the life of Malcolm X was nominated for an Oscar in 1972, says he always knew this story would be told. "It's been a long journey getting to this point," says Worth. "It's rewarding to finally be making a film about his life."

"Malcolm X has always been largely misunderstood," he continues. "People view him in different ways depending on who they are, and everyone has his or her own view of Malcolm X."

Emphasizes Spike Lee, "It's been two years in the making (with me) and another 24 in there since Marvin bought the rights, and now it's done. I'm so relieved that the public will finally be able to see the film. After all we've been through, 'Malcolm X' is completed and now the film speaks for itself.

"Once you see this film you may think and say many things; what you won't be able to say is that the people involved in this project, that Denzel and myself, didn't love Malcolm X. We do and all that love is up there on the screen."

Telling the story of Malcolm X's life required representing America during the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s and up to the present. To meet this challenge, Spike Lee assembled a distinguished team of behind-the-scenes artists, many of whom have collaborated with him on one or more of his previous works, including director of photography Ernest Dickerson ("Jungle Fever," "Do the Right Thing" and Dickerson's own directorial debut, "Juice"); editor Barry Alexander Brown (Madonna's "Truth or Dare," "Do the Right Thing" and "Salaam Bombay"); production designer Wynn Thomas (all five of Spike Lee's previous films); costume designer Ruth Carter (all of Lee's features and Kid 'N Play's "House Party"); casting director Robi Reed (also all of Lee's films); and composer Terence Blanchard ("Mo' Better Blues," "Jungle Fever").

Production designer Wynn Thomas says the film was designed in three parts. The first covers Malcolm's early years; the second, his period of enlightenment in prison; and the third, his development as an activist. "We make the beginning phase of his life very colorful and vibrant," Thomas explains. "We've filmed several nightclub scenes during the 1940s using lots of texture and colors."

For the second phase of the film, which covers Malcolm's incarceration, the production team filmed at Wilsey Street Jail in Newark, New Jersey. "What happens to Malcolm during that period is a rebirth. We are draining the color from his life and as a result the prison is treated monochromatically. We used a lot of grays, whites and blues." In keeping with the concept of this second phase, director of photography Ernest Dickerson lit the prison scenes with cooling filters.

"In the third phase of the film" Thomas continues, "Malcolm has become a leader and he's much more serious, so we're using a lot of earth tones—browns, greens and natural tones—to reflect controlled realism."

Carter's wardrobe selection follows suit, as indicated by the clothing for Baines, the Muslim who introduces Malcolm to the Nation of Islam in prison. "When we first see Baines, he's dressed in warm brown tones to show how inviting he is," says Carter. "As Baines gets closer to the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and begins to plant the poison in his mind about Malcolm, I dressed him in grays. Finally, as Elijah Muhammad's health deteriorates and Baines becomes more powerful in the NOI, he is wearing dark doublebreasted suits."

Carter, who began working on the film in January, 1991, traveled throughout the country gathering information about Malcolm X. "I wanted to know him and understand who he was before we began the project," says Carter, who spent many hours in Harlem's historic Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

"The research has really paid off," Carter continues. "Denzel and I have discussed every detail about Malcolm's clothes—his eyeglasses, his shoes, his ties—and what was happening in his life during particular periods. Photographs and research materials about Malcolm and his era helped us a lot."

Since much of the filming took place on the streets of New York City, the locations selected and the facades of buildings had to be transformed to reflect the city during the

'40s, '50s and '60s. "This was an enormous job, bigger than it may appear on the screen," explains production designer Thomas. "In addition to the research we did on everything, from the way street signs looked in the 1940s to what the interior of a school in the Midwest might have looked like in the 1930s, we had about 300 people working over a period of about six months to construct the various buildings, sets and facades we needed."

Malcolm's early days in Nebraska were recaptured in upstate New York, where, Thomas recounts, several historically accurate buildings were built, including a farmhouse which was later burned to the ground in the portrayal of an attack by the Ku Klux Klan.

The streets of Boston were described by Thomas as the most difficult to re-create. "We needed to show a large intersection, and since camera angles gave visual access to streets on all sides, we actually had to re-create a significant section of the city, complete with railroad tracks, houses, stores and everything else you'd be able to see."

In January, Lee and his film crew traveled to Egypt to re-create the scenes of Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca. Thomas, with the assistance of the Egyptian unit's associate producer Fernando Sulichin, found locations and materials to create the setting for Malcolm's religious pilgrimage to Mecca.

"There is actually a large film community in Cairo, and it was less difficult than you might assume to make a movie there. However, it did require about three months of negotiation and planning to complete 10 days of filming, so there were quite a few challenges to overcome."

Thomas asserts that he felt that accuracy was of prime importance in bringing the setting of Malcolm's life to the screen. "The environment of the story helps make it more real for the audience, and also helped the actors interpret their parts. I felt that it was important to be as faithful as possible to the truth of Malcolm's life and his world."

Production was concluded in Soweto, South Africa, where the ending of the film was photographed.

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