

By any means  
necessary



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“ We declare our right on this earth...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.” These are the words of Malcolm X, a civil rights leader and political activist in the 1960s. Malcolm X was perhaps one of the most controversial elements in the civil rights movement. His life was full of racism and discrimination. Though his early life was full of ups and downs, he managed to “ turn his life around”. In doing this he managed to gain the upper hand of the African American culture by giving them hope that one day they would if not be apart of, what he called, “ white mans society”

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska on May 19, 1925. He was the fourth of eight children. His mother Louise Norton Little, was a homemaker. She was born to a black mother and a white father. Earl Little, his father was a Baptist minister and avid supporter of Black Nationalist leader Marcus Gravey. Death threats from the white supremacist organization, the Black Legion, and Ku Klux Klan was imminent before Malcolm X was born due to Earls civil rights activism.

While Louise Little was pregnant with Malcolm, the Ku Klux Klan threatened the family and even stormed their home because Earl was “ spreading trouble among the good Negroes.” Because of this, Earl relocated his family first to Milwaukee, in 1926, then to Lansing, Michigan, in 1928. He was told to move out and was taken to court because the land contract stated only Caucasians could live there. Before the eviction took place the house was burned to the ground, but the Little family escaped safely.

From there, Earl Little moved his family to a more segregated area in East Lansing. In 1930, though, they decided the racial segregated situation was too stressful. So, Earl Little built his family a new home two miles out of town.

In less than a year, tragedy struck. It was September 28, 1931 when Earl Little was beaten, left, and hit by a streetcar. Malcolm Little was only six years old at the time he died. Whether it was an accident or a murder is disputed. The authorities ruled it, though, as a suicide. The Little family believed the Black Legion was responsible for the murder of Earl.

Louise Little, during the height of the Great Depression, found it increasingly stressful to care for her children. The family fell into a financial hardship without being able to collect Earl's life insurance because his death certificate stated he killed himself. They eventually ended up on welfare. His mother frequently suffered emotional breakdowns for several years after the death. She gave birth to two more children. Then, when Malcolm was thirteen, she was committed to Kalamazoo Mental Institution for having a paranoia condition. Louise Little remained institutionalized for over twenty years.

It has been noted that before she was committed Malcolm had already been removed from her care by authorities for stealing. He was placed with the Gohannas, a white family who fostered him. Although he enjoyed his time there, he was split up from his brothers and sisters and missed them very much. It was not long before Malcolm was expelled from West Junior High School and placed into a detention home. He was supposed to go to a reform school but they decided to place him in Mason Junior High School, the only

regular public junior high school in town. Malcolm was successful and excelled to the top of his class despite his difficult home life and past. He was vice president of his seventh grade class and played on the basketball team. He dealt with racism when he played basketball in predominately white towns. However, it didn't affect him much and he was accepted in Mason, even though as a black person he was not on equal terms with whites.

It was in eighth grade when Malcolm Little experienced the first major turning point in his life. He was asked by an English teacher he admired, what he wanted to be when he grew up. He responded, " a lawyer." Malcolm became withdrawn after the teacher pulled him aside and told him to be " realistic" and that as a " Negro" that was an unachievable dream. His teacher suggested carpentry since Malcolm excelled in woodshop and was well liked by his white peers in that class. Malcolm finished eighth grade, but dropped out that year. He would only go back to visit mid-Michigan to visit friends and family from then on.

When Malcolm met his half sister Ella for the first time, he was ready for a change. Malcolm asked if he could live with her and she agreed. It was 1941 when he moved from Lansing to Boston. Ella helped Malcolm as much as she could. He worked a few menial jobs. Exploring the city, he met a hustler known as " Shorty" Jarvis. He was also from Lansing. Malcolm was about to be introduced to a completely different lifestyle.

" I didn't know the world contained as many Negroes as I saw thronging downtown Roxbury at night, especially on Saturdays," Malcolm X wrote in his 1964 autobiography. Malcolm X was dazzled by the fast life. For a time, he

worked at the Roseland State Ballroom shining shoes for the wealthy. It was not long before he began supplying drugs to these same customers. Malcolm, personally, liked to smoke cigarettes, drink, gamble, and do drugs. He told his sister he quit because he couldn't find time to dance and shine shoes. For about a year, Malcolm had a job working a train serving coffee and sandwiches. He had a few other jobs working on the railroads.

These railroad jobs introduced teenage Malcolm to Harlem. Malcolm was even more intrigued to the fast life in Harlem. He moved there in 1943 and began to hustle. A year later, he returned to Boston to live with "Shorty". He was first arrest in 1944 for theft. Drug dealing, gambling, racketeering, prostitution, and robbery became Malcolm's life. His life of crime ended when he went to a jewelry shop to pick up a stolen watch he had left there for repair.

Malcolm Little was arrested for burglary charges at the age of twenty. "Shorty" and Malcolm got high-bail of \$10, 000 and a long sentence. Malcolm thought this was most likely due to the fact that they were both consorted with white women. He was sent to Charlestown State Prison in Boston.

Malcolm Little's experience in prison dramatically transformed his life. While in prison he met John Bembry, a self-educated man he would later describe as, " the first man I ever seen command total respect ... with words." Malcolm himself rediscovered reading and became educated on a variety of subjects including, philosophy, religion, and history. The first book he picked up he had trouble with. He skipped over words he didn't know and ended the book with no sense of what it said. In the next few months Malcolm tediously copied the dictionary down page for page, to each punctuation. He read and

reread what he wrote until he could read, pronounce, and understand all their meanings. By the end of his prison sentence Malcolm knew more than the average person on the streets that had been educated throughout their life. He read books any free moment he had. He said, “ Months passed, without my even thinking of being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.”

“ Satan.” That was the nickname inmates gave Malcolm Little for his foul-mouthed talk and seething hatred of God, the bible, and all things religious. In late 1948, Malcolm was transferred to Norfolk, Massachusetts Prison Colony. Malcolm’s siblings wrote to him about the Nation of Islam (NOI), a relatively new movement preaching black self-reliance and ultimately the reunification of African Diaspora with Africa free from white American and European domination. The NOI was a black Muslim organization that believed blacks were superior to whites, and predicted the destruction of the white race. At first, however, he showed little interest, but then stopped smoking and eating pork as his brother Reginald suggested this would help him get out of prison. When Reginald visited Malcolm, he would explain the group’s teaching and beliefs. “ White people are devils.” Malcolm came to believe that all of his relationships with white people had been based upon dishonesty, greed, hatred, and injustice.

Malcolm delved deeper into his new found religious followings through personal visits and many letters of teachings from his siblings. He joined a debate team and continued reading books. The teachings of Elijah Muhammad inspired him. While in Norfolk Prison, Malcolm Little began writing to Elijah Muhammad. During his last year of prison Malcolm was

transferred back to Charlestown State Prison. Malcolm suspected this was most likely due to the content in the letters he was receiving from his siblings.

It was August 7, 1952 when Malcolm was paroled from prison after the six and a half years inside the Commonwealth's prisons. He then visited Elijah Muhammad in Chicago and moved to Detroit and officially joined the Nation of Islam. It was then that Malcolm adopted the NOI tradition of replacing one's last name with X. " The Muslim's 'X' symbolized the true African family name that he never could know. For me, my 'X' replaced the white slave master name of 'Little' which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears." This was how Malcolm had described the change for his last name and the anger he felt toward the white man for giving his family the last name of Little.

Malcolm X, using his compelling oratory to bring in large numbers of recruits into the group during the 1950's and early 1960's, quickly rose in the NOI and became Elijah Muhammad's most effective minister. Simultaneously, Malcolm was becoming an accomplished journalist; he wrote for many publications before he founded the NOI's paper Muhammad Speaks. Malcolm X was the assistant Minister of the Nation's Temple Number One in Detroit. Later that year, in 1953, he established Boston's Temple Number Eleven and expanded Temple Number Twelve in Philadelphia.

Two months later, he was selected to lead Temple Number Seven in Harlem where he expanded membership hastily. In 1957, he became the Nation of Islam's national representative, a position of second only to that of Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm urged blacks to separate from whites, " By any means

necessary," to win their freedom. He was harsh in criticism of the nonviolent strategy to achieve civil reforms advocated by Martin Luther King, JR. He argued, " The only revolution in which the goal is to love your enemy is the Negro revolution, revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in the way."

Malcolm was well known but not necessarily liked. His views unsettled America and whites feared X's doctrine would incite violence between whites. While blacks feared the growing effectiveness of non-violence would be destroyed. Malcolm's new found attention also attracted the FBI.

Elijah Muhammad was not only a spiritual leader for Malcolm X, but a moral example as well. When it became obvious that Muhammad had engaged in immoral behaviors, including fathering four illegitimate children, Malcolm X was devastated by his mentor's deception.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. Malcolm X claimed that the feelings of hate within American were so great that they had spilled over from the conflict between black and white. However, his comments were interpreted as support for death in the killing of a beloved president. Malcolm remarked, " The chickens have come home to roost," speaking of the president's murder. Muhammad had ordered Malcolm X to be silenced for 90 days.

It was March 1964 when Malcolm X announced he was breaking with the Nation of Islam and four days later formed his own group, Muslim Mosque, Inc. Malcolm x decided to turn to traditional Islam to form his path. Malcolm made the decision to become a Sunni Muslim. On April 13, 1964, he left for a <https://assignbuster.com/by-any-means-necessary/>



hajj, pilgrimage, to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. He returned from the Hajj on May 21, 1964.

The experience completely changed Malcolm X's world views. Gone was the belief that white people were " devils". Gone was the call for separation of blacks and whites. Malcolm couldn't believe what he saw in Mecca. Everyone together was interacting and praying as equals. He was amazed how Islam could overcome racial problems. " Throngs of people, obviously Muslims from everywhere bounds for the pilgrimage were hugging and embracing. They were of all complexions; the whole atmosphere was of warmth and friendliness. The feeling hit me that there really wasn't any color problem here. The effect was as though I had just stepped out of a prison." This is exactly how Malcolm described it as he was boarding a plane. A weight of hatred, anger, and racism carried around for years, left his chest. Malcolm began to rethink his earlier divisive positions and decided to place faith in before skin color. To symbolize this, he changed his name again to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.

Although with a new outlook, Malcolm returned to America as fiery as ever. His philosophy was taking a completely new direction. His was open to the help of " sincere whites", but under no illusion did he believe the solution for black Americans would begin with whites. It would begin and end with blacks.

In June 1964, Malcolm began his own pan-African movement, the Organization of Afro American Unity, the OAAU. He encouraged whites to teach about oppression. The OAAU called for prosecution of the US

government for their crimes against African Americans. Malcolm spoke of passions that defined him, faith and advocacy, through the MMI and OAAU.

Malcolm X had many enemies. The NOI felt especially betrayed for speaking of Muhammad's adultery. Both public and private threats were made against Malcolm X. The FBI surveillance recorded two such threats in June of 1964. Malcolm himself wondered if anyone was clear what a threat to the system he was. Malcolm X didn't let the attacks affect his scheduled speeches. He said, " Anything I do today, I regard as urgent. No man is given but so much to accomplish whatever his life's work... I am only facing facts when I know that any moment of any day, or any night, could bring me death." On February 21, 1965 Malcolm X went to his final speaking engagement in New York. He was assassinated before he was able to put his new ideas into action.

Growing up through times of segregation and racism during the civil rights movement, Malcolm X became one of the most influential African Americans in history. In his short life of forty years he went through life changing experiences. He was self-educated through the consistent reading he did during his six years in prison. From drug addiction, committing crimes, and preaching violence, Malcolm's views changed dramatically as his pilgrimage to Mecca broadened the spectrum of how he saw racial interaction. He was able to set aside all of his racist opinions to replace them with his new found faith. This stunned the world, blacks and whites, equally. Malcolm X once wrote in a letter, " It's (racism) brought bloodbaths to about every nation on earth at one time or another."

Malcolm's changes were unbelievable and extreme. He was living proof that people can change. He was someone who held hate close to his heart, an avid preacher of violence and destruction of the white race. It was during the last year of his life that his philosophy changed so dramatically. Through experience people can change.

Malcolm's violent speeches caused several hundred hate crimes and well as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Letting go of his racist composure and behaviors is why Malcolm X became such an honorable, legendary, righteous man. Racism makes for an angry person disliked person.

Malcolm was never a bad person. He was a result of the way he reacted to what happened to him as a child. Through faith, Malcolm X found what I have found in the AA program; a way to "match calamity with serenity." In the Big Book of Alcoholic Anonymous it says we should "lay aside prejudice." Malcolm, for years, held so many resentments and so much anger toward the white race. He put all of his energy into protesting against the white man. When he finally was able to lay aside his prejudice and let in faith, there was a revolutionary change in his way of living and thinking. Malcolm was free for the first time.

Like Malcolm, I too have used racist terms. I don't feel I am prejudice towards any race or religion but when I get angry I use it as a 'low blow' to hurt or affect someone. Throughout my childhood my parent spoke this way of others. This caused me to think the way I spoke when upset was okay. I've suffered consequences from my actions and have had the time to take a serious look at my behaviors. When people found out I said discriminating

comments they truly believed I was racist. I hurt people I cared about. That is what hurt me the worst. Without thinking I gave off an impression of myself that is not true to who I am, while affecting other people. I realize that isn't how I want to be perceived and I need to change my actions and become a more thoughtful, compassionate person like Malcolm X.

There is so much to learn from the change Malcolm experienced in Mecca. Letting go of his prejudice opened his mind in a way it never had been before. He could've have died a much hated man but today he is an inspiration. Through trials and tribulations he turned his life around and remained true to his words, " by any means necessary."