

# Idea of malcolm x history essay



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Malcolm X was a black civil rights leader in the 1960s in the U. S. In the U. S, blacks were segregated by the Jim Crow Laws. Black people did not have equal rights compared to white people in this era. Malcolm X was born on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, which is in the state of Nebraska. In the U. S history, people knew Malcolm X as a violent, black civil rights activist. His idea was that racial separation was the only way to help and improve African Americans' lives in the U. S because he thought that white people controlled the U. S society completely. Thus, he taught black people that they should have their own society, economy, and community. Also, he taught that white people were devils, who brainwashed black people. He did not believe the idea of whites and blacks in the U. S living together. So, even if other black civil right activists, such as Martin Luther King Jr. helped black people by using non violent resistance, Malcolm X did not participate in their nonviolent civil rights movements. Therefore, Malcolm X thought that violence or fighting against whites is the only way of helping and improving black people in the U. S. So, his idea of racial separation was shaped by his earlier life experiences and the Nation of Islam, however, Malcolm X finally realized that the whites and the blacks could live together under God, Allah, after he visited Mecca.

### **Historical Back Ground:**

African Americans in the south were segregated by the Jim Crow Laws. (Hickman, 2010) The Jim Crow Laws was “ the name of the racial caste system which operated primarily, but not exclusively in southern and border states, between 1877 and the mid to 1960s. Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti - Black laws. It was a way of life. Under the Jim Crow,

African Americans were relegated to the status of second class citizens” (Pilgrim, 2000). Black people were segregated in restaurants, public restrooms, drinking fountains, etc. In addition, “ many blacks were the victims of mob violence that ranged from being beaten to actually being killed” (Dean, 1994, pp. 9). So, black people were not protected by the law completely in this era. During the 19th century, American Civil Rights movements occurred many times, such as the sitting movement and the bus boycott in Montgomery. Black people tried to have their civil rights in this era, and black people followed famous civil rights activists. There were two famous protesters, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, who were against the Jim Crow Laws. They were black, and they were the leaders of the American Civil Rights movements. However, there were some differences between King and Malcolm. Martin Luther King Jr. was a protestant, and he used nonviolent resistance. Many black people followed his idea because nonviolent resistance was a more popular approach in the Civil Rights Movement in this era. On the other hand, Malcolm X’s idea was that black people should create their own world without white people, the rejection of King’s method of nonviolence, and the acceptance of violence as an effective means to realize his goal. So, Malcolm X did not suggest that black people should live with white people.

### **3. Malcolm X’s Childhood:**

#### **Father:**

Malcolm X’s earlier life experiences influenced why he became the most aggressive black, civil rights leader in the United States. Malcolm Earl Little was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. Later, he changed his name to

Malcolm X. Malcolm X's father, Earl Little, was a Baptist minister. Malcolm's father was a very important person for Malcolm X and helped him to become an aggressive black civil rights leader. While African American people were discriminated and segregated by white people, Earl did not like this world, so he wanted to change it. One day, Earl met Marcus Garvey who was a leader of Black Nationalism. Garvey was an African American activist, and his idea was that African Americans were too dependent on whites. So, he thought that they should create their own businesses, their own work, and their own schools if they wanted to get freedom in the world. Garvey created the U. N. I. A., Universal Negro Improvement Association. He also published a newspaper which was called the Negro World. When Malcolm's father, Earl, moved his family to Omaha, Nebraska, he took up the ideas of Marcus Garvey. Garvey wanted a good person who could help spread his message, and Earl became an organizer for Marcus Aurelius Garvey's U. N. I. A., Universal Negro Improvement Association. So, Malcolm grew up hearing his father's ideas. Earl always spoke out about black people standing up for their rights. Women were encouraged to become members of U. N. I. A. " Louise Little also joined the militant organization, reporting the activities of the Omaha chapter to the national U. N. I. A. office in New York's Harlem" (Dean, 1994, pp. 15). Earl continued to speak about his ideas to black people many times. In this way, he became a target of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization which hated black people. So, Earl moved his house from Omaha, Nebraska, to Lansing, Michigan. However, he still continued to go from town to town, and he encouraged black people to have their pride as a black, do not depend on white society. " When Malcolm was six years old, he had seen his father speak up time and time again for black people, and had seen his

mother work with his father in the U. N. I. A” (Dean, 1994, pp. 20). Also, Earl Little had taken Malcolm to U. I. N. A meetings. When Malcolm went to the meetings, he had seen his father play an active role, and he respected his father as the president of the Omaha branch of the U. N. I. A. and as an outstanding spiritual leader. After hearing his father’s speech, Malcolm realized that it was important for the black people to unite. On September 28, 1931, Earl Little died. He was beaten badly by someone, but police reported that he committed suicide. However, he was certainly murdered by a racist. “ The confining of his mother to a mental hospital, and the eventual break-up of his family by social service agents, drastically impacted Malcolm’s distrust of white people” (Jerome, 2001). This must have negatively affected his racial views.

### **School life:**

Malcolm spent his earlier school days with distrust for white people. “ Nearly all of the children who went to Pleasant Grove Elementary were white. Malcolm did not mind that as long as they were nice, and most of them were” (Dean, 1994, pp. 24). In school, Malcolm could study well, but his teacher thought that he should study more. One day at school, one of his teachers asked Malcolm what he wanted to be. Malcolm thought that the teacher liked him because Malcolm did well in his classes, and he was elected class president by others. In addition, he was one of the top students in his junior high. He said that he wanted to be a lawyer. The teacher was upset with his dream because Malcolm was a Negro. So, Malcolm noticed that black people could not get success completely. He decided that he did not want to go to high school even when his other black friends encouraged

him to go. After he lost interest in school, he moved to live in Boston. His sister, Ella, invited him to Boston to re-focus his life (Jerome, 2001). Malcolm made friends there, but his friends were not of high social class. One of Malcolm's friends was named "Shorty". He taught Malcolm about how blacks could live in Boston, and Malcolm listened and listened carefully. After he lived in Boston, he moved to live in Harlem. New York. "Malcolm's consumption of Black culture in Harlem, particularly his fascination with and immersion in Black music, dress, and language, enabled him to develop a great appreciation of and admiration for Black culture" (Jerome, 2001). His experiences in New York would become evident in his idea and lectures, which he later told about the value of Black history and culture in educational methods to many black people. However, Malcolm committed burglary and was sentenced to eight to ten years in a Charleston State Prison in 1946. That "moving" would soon change his life forever.

## **Life in Prison**

In prison, there were two important events, which were receiving a letter from his brothers and reading many kinds of books in prison. The letter was from his brothers, Reginald and Philbert. Reginald was a minister in the Nation of Islam, and he told Malcolm about the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Then, Malcolm eventually decided to join the Nation of Islam. According to the Book, *Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary*, the author, Walter Dean Myers, wrote that there was a problem with Christianity because the images of Jesus Christ were created by white people. In many blacks' homes, there were pictures of a white, blue eyed Jesus with long brown hair. In addition, Christianity had color images, such as white was

thought of as good, and black was thought of as bad, as in the spiritual “Open Your Heart”. It means that if black people become Christians, they rely on white people. Christianity was created by white people, so black people who are Christians automatically praise white people. So, Marcus Garvey recommended black people to have a different religion which was Islam. “Marcus Garvey, in his paper “Negro World”, had given a great deal of space to news about the Islamic world and had acknowledged that much of the African American world was Islamic. The paper had even printed poetry in praise of Islam” (Dean, 1994, pp. 66). Reginald was affected by Marcus’s idea, and then he joined the Nation of Islam. While Malcolm was staying in prison, Reginald visited the prison and met with Malcolm. Then, Reginald said “You do not know your true family name, you would not recognize your true language if you heard it” (Dean, 1994, pp. 67). Malcolm heard his brother’s passionate message about the Nation of Islam, and about how there were a lot of devils in the world, who were the white people. Malcolm strongly believed his brother’s message in the prison.

The second important event was that Malcolm read many kinds of books, such as history, politics, philosophy, and science. “For Malcolm, reading had changed forever the course of his life and gave more significance to the meaning of living” (Jerome E, 2001). He did not lose any opportunity to gain an education in the prison. When Elijah replied to Malcolm’s message, Elijah told Malcolm that he was not a criminal; the criminals were the whites whose racism forced you into the acts you have committed. His earlier experiences, such as the impact of his father, school life, and life in prison strongly

influenced him to become the most aggressive black civil rights leader in the U. S.

#### **4. The Influence of the Nation of Islam**

##### **Name Malcolm X:**

“ The Nation of Islam, founded by Elijah Muhammad, arguably was the most powerful influence in Malcolm’s life immediately after his release from prison” (Jerome E, 2001). In 1952, Malcolm was released from prison, and went to Chicago, Illinois, to meet and talk with Elijah Muhammad. Later, he got his new name, Malcolm X. He joined the Nation of Islam and it was necessary to focus on the meetings and listen to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. To become a full member, this included the right to lose one’s slave name and the right to use the last name of “ X”. The name Little came from the white man who had held Malcolm’s relatives during the period of black enslavement. “ X” means the loss of an African name. “ X was a symbol of that which was lost, and that which is sought” (Dean, 1994, pp. 83). Malcolm’s parents gave him the name “ Malcolm”. Eventually, Malcolm threw out his name “ Little” which symbolized his freedom from slavery. “ He had taken an X which represented his unknown African name and symbolized the heritage that had been stolen from him” (Dean, 1994, pp. 85). He gave up the name given by his important parents. It shows how strongly Malcolm was committed to the Nation of Islam, and he respected Elijah Muhammad.

##### **Critique of Black Education:**

Malcolm’s understanding of race relationships in the U. S and his critique of black education were shaped by his earlier life and schooling experiences, <https://assignbuster.com/idea-of-malcolm-x-history-essay/>



and the Nation of Islam. “ The Nation’s philosophy stressed the importance of Black racial as well as historical pride, and identified white people as the “ devils” who created the abyss that Black people were experiencing in America” (Jerome, 2001). Malcolm X regretted that he could not receive a formal education, and then, he said:

“ So my understanding of a segregated school system, or a segregated community, or a segregated school, is a school that’s controlled by people other than those that go there... On the other hand, if we can get an all black school, that we can control, staff it ourselves with the type of teachers that have our good at heart, with the type of books that have in them many of the missing ingredients that have produced this inferiority complex in our people, then we don’t feel that an all black school is necessarily a segregated school” (Jerome, 2001).

While he was a minister in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm encouraged black people to have pride in themselves and their history, to believe in their abilities, and to be independent. Malcolm X soon became the most visible national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. As the voice of the organization, he was a philosopher and a stirred speaker who often got media attention. His beliefs were against whites, and black opponents helped spread the movement’s message. The Nation of Islam always said that black people should control their own economics, education, social situation, and politics of their communities. The reason was because the Nation of Islam viewed that black people always relied on white people like a drug addiction. Many black people thought that whites were more intelligent, better looking, and more skilled than blacks. However, it is not true. So, the Nation of Islam tried

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to solve the “ drug addiction” by using the six point program of the Nation of Islam. The six point program taught black people to recognize that they rely too much on white people like a drug. Then, the Nation encouraged black people to become independent from the white society. So, the six point program was the base of education for the Nation of Islam. Also, Malcolm X encouraged black people to have economic independence. “ Economic independence would take place by the building of black businesses, and by blacks spending their money within their own community. Blacks would then create jobs for other blacks and relieve the hopelessness that existed in some inner cities” (Dean, 1994, pp. 104). Malcolm X really suggested that blacks should have their own society, community, and education. Thus, his goal was to separate white and black people completely.

In this era, 1969, in the United States, there was a famous movement, a civil rights movement for racial assimilation, or to bring the races, whites and blacks, together in peace. However, Malcolm X was calling and recommending racial separation to black people in the Northern areas. So, he was compared to other black activists of this period. He believed that the civil rights movement did not make any difference because he thought that even if blacks and whites lived together, white people would eventually control American society. Blacks’ social positions would not change. It means that blacks were still second-class if blacks would continue to live with the whites in the white dominated system. Malcolm X criticized those African Americans, such as Martin Luther King Jr. who used nonviolent ideas for achieving integration in the U. S. The goal of Martin Luther King was to completely end the system of segregation in every aspect of public life and

in job discrimination (Chew, 1995). He was a Christian, and he worked in the Southern states, while Malcolm worked in the Northern states. Their ideas were based on their different religions. Malcolm believed in Islam, and Martin Luther believed in Christianity. “ Both men were involved with their respective religious” practices (Dean, 1994, pp. 116). Martin Luther King Jr. said that “ the nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is non aggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957). In addition, Martin Luther King Jr. taught Black Americans to love their enemies. Their target was not white people; their target was to abolish the Jim Crow Laws. Actually, he prompted black people to do the Montgomery bus boycott, or other nonviolent resistances (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957). King’s approach towards the civil rights movements were much more positive in attitude than Malcolm X. King believed that peaceful demonstrations and arguments were a good way for black people to have equality with whites in the future. (Socialpc, 2000)

Of course, Malcolm X knew that there were some American Civil Rights activists in this era. However, Malcolm’s approach was different from those Civil Rights activists because he thought that if black people wanted to get equal rights like the whites, then black people had to fight against the “ devils”. Malcolm said this famous phrase “ by any means necessary”. It means that “ Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way” (Dean, 1994, pp. 107). Thus, Malcolm X viewed that to get freedom in the U. S, it was necessary to fight against white people for black people’

rights, and he thought that black people should build an only black country to have their own society, community, and economy.

## **5. Malcolm stopped calling racial separation when he went to Mecca.**

Malcolm X noticed that the person he respected, Elijah Muhammad, raped women, so he lost interest in being a member of the Nation of Islam. He was really disappointed with the Nation of Islam. On March 8, 1964, Malcolm X announced that he gave up the Nation of Islam. Then, he started to travel internationally because he thought that he needed to see and talk more with people with a wider view. This experience helped him abandon his idea of racial separation, and also, the experience changed Malcolm X's world view. From April 13, 1964 to May 21, 1964, he visited Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Morocco, and Algeria. In Saudi Arabia, when he accomplished the Hajj, which was the religious journey to Mecca which all Muslims try to make at least once in their lives, the experience removed his idea of the belief that whites were the devils and his call for black separatism. " His voyage to Mecca helped him discover the atoning power of Islam as a means to unity as well as self-respect (Pierre).

" First in Cairo, the Egyptian capital, then in Jeddah, the Saudi city, Malcolm witnessed what he claims he never saw in the United States: men of all color and nationalities treating each other equally" (Pierre). Jeddah is very close to the city of Mecca, so Jeddah is an important city for Muslims because when Muslims go to Mecca, they visit Jeddah once as a way station. (Ministry of Hajj Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) Malcolm met about a thousand people who were Muslims from everywhere in Jeddah. While there, Malcolm X noticed

that he was the same color, or lighter than most of the people. At the airport terminal, he saw that many people hugged and embraced each other. They were very warm and friendly. This sight hit Malcolm X, that there was no racial or color barrier here. In addition, Muslims had to wear Ihram before they went to Mecca. Ihram is a white cloth which Muslims have to wear before they start the Hajj. (BBC) Malcolm X had to take off his trademark black suit and dark tie and drape white clothes over his own clothes. This helps so that nobody knows who you are. There are both rich and poor people there, but they all had to drape themselves with the same white clothes. It symbolizes the equality of men before God.

After he arrived in Mecca, his idea was drastically changed by meeting and talking with people of different colors. Malcolm X actually said while he was traveling to Mecca, " You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions" (Haley, 1992, pp371). Such change of thought was not so unnatural to him because he always searched for the true answer to solve problems between whites and blacks in the U. S. So, he kept an open mind, which is very important in the search for truth. There were tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Malcolm X said, " But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a sprit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had let me to believe never could exist between the white and non-white"( Haley, 1992, pp. 371). In Mecca, he talked and ate with people who were white. However, these whites' attitudes were not like the whites' who

lived in the U. S. Their attitude was deadened from their minds by their own religion, Islam. Malcolm X also said, “ I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color” (Haley, 1992, pp. 371). Furthermore, Malcolm X ate food from the same plate, drank from the same glass, and slept in the same bed while they were praying to the same God with fellow whites who were Muslim. After he did the same things, such as drinking from the same glass with white people, he thought that “ We were truly all the same (brothers) because their belief in one God had removed the white from their minds, the white from their behavior, and the white from their attitude” (Haley, 1992, pp. 372). Thus, through these experiences in Mecca, he thought that “ if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the Oneness of Man-and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their differences in color” (Haley, 1992, pp. 372). Through Malcolm X’s experience in Mecca, Hajj promoted him to throw his idea of whites, devils, away.

After Malcolm X went back to the U. S., he explained his new idea to black people. Two days after he arrived at Kennedy Airport he talked with journalist, Louis Lomax. Malcolm explained to him that he changed his mind about white people. Later, in Chicago, Malcolm X started to work with whites if he thought that they were serious in helping African Americans gain freedom. Then, he established the Organization African American Unity on June 24, 1964 in Harlem, New York.

“ The OAAU was a secular institution that sought to unify 22 million non-Muslim African Americans with the people of the African Continent. The

OAAU was modeled after the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a coalition of 53 African nations working to provide a unified political voice for the continent. In the coalition spirit of the OAU, Malcolm X sought to reconnect Africans Americans with their African heritage, establish economic independence, and promote African American self-determination”.

Therefore, Malcolm X established the OAAU, and he worked with other black groups to build up the organization. Malcolm X tried to make people from all over the world to know American’s racial discrimination, and Malcolm X encouraged African Americans to go back to Africa because he knew that there was an equal world for African Americans, especially Africa. Actually, after he visited Mecca, he went to other African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria. In Ghana he talked with the Prime Minister of Ghana, Nkrumah, and he told to Malcolm X “ the world’s course will change the day the African-heritage peoples come together as brothers!” (Haley, 1992, pp. 383) So, in the OAAU, Malcolm X cooperated with people from all over the world to solve the problems of American racial discrimination. In the OAAU, he also tried to get human rights for black people finally. The important thing Malcolm X did was to try and expand from the problems of racism to human rights in the U. S. So, he not only helped the civil rights movements, but he also focused on doing human rights movements. A new phase of his struggle for African American’s freedom and justice seemed to have started.

### **In conclusion:**

I wrote about Malcolm X, especially his idea of racial separation. From 1877 to the mid of 1960, there was the Jim Crow Laws which was the unfair laws for black people. They were segregated in the public such as restaurants,

public restrooms, drinking fountains, etc. Malcolm X's earlier life experiences, such as the impact of his father, school life, and life in prison strongly influenced him to become the most aggressive black civil rights leader in the U. S. His father always spoke out about American racial discrimination, so Malcolm X got racial view from him. His school life was a key him to move to the Boston. That moving really changed his life forever. Life in prison is the most influential his early experience for becoming an aggressive civil rights activist. He got letter from his brother, and he knew the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X read a lot of books in the prison, so he got education in here. Malcolm X hated He hated white people until he visited Mecca. He called whites devils, and he taught black people that they should have pride as blacks, and blacks should have their own community, society by using his powerful words. He wanted black people to rise up, and he also wanted black people to fight against white people. However, after he went to Mecca, he noticed that there are so many people in the world, and they did not discriminate him. For example, he drank the same water, ate the same food, and slept with whites and colored people. Through his international travels, his world view was changed by meeting, talking, and communicating with many people. After he went back to the U. S, he established a new organization, the OAAU. Then, he tried to communicate with other civil rights activist groups. On July 2, 1964, the Civil Right Acts was established by the president of the U. S, Lyndon Baines Johnson. This is a Civil Rights Act “

“ Title II: All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without



discrimination or segregation on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.

Title VII: It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."

(Ourdocuments, 1964).

However, black people were still discriminated by white people even though the Civil Rights Acts was established in 1964. So, Malcolm continued to fight for African Americans.

But, in February 21, 1965, while Malcolm X began to speak at the meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom, he was assassinated by Talmadge Hayer, Norman 3X Butler, and Thomas 15X Johnson. They were actually members of the Nation of Islam. The reason why they killed him was that after Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X became a dangerous person in threatening the position of the Nation of Islam. When he was a member of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X became a very popular person. Gradually, the mass media focused on Malcolm X more than the leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad. So, after he left the group, Malcolm X became an obstacle for the Nation of Islam. Therefore, after his assassination, Malcolm X could not tell his new ideas about whites to black people, but he moved black people to get their

equal right like whites, so he was a one of the successful people as a civil rights activist.

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