
REWRITING BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: MALCOLM X

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Abstract: Malcolm X was born in Omaha, Nebraska. By the time he was 13, his father had died and his mother had been committed to a mental hospital. Later Malcolm X became involved in the criminal world. In 1945 he was sentenced to prison for 8 to 10 years. While in prison, Malcolm X became a member of the Nation of Islam. For nearly a dozen years, he was the public face of the Nation of Islam.

The man best known as Malcolm X lived under three distinct and interrelated lives under the respective names of Malcolm Little, Malcolm X and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He had the greatest leadership potential of any person to emerge directly from the black proletariat in the century. He was the public figure most identified with the movement and most sought after as its spokesman. As an influential African-American Leader since 1950's Malcolm X was an outspoken national minister of the Nation of Islam. In his autobiography and in speeches he opposed the main stream civil rights movement. He pleaded for black Separatism and rejected nonviolence and integration. He was outspoken in combating racism. His efforts were controversial and in 1960's he embraced conventional Islam. All these are documented in his *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Alex Haley the American writer helped in compiling those experiences. This was published after his assassination. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is the story of a man killed on his way to becoming a revolutionary and a liberator of Black people. He adopts the name Malcolm X to avoid being called Slave man or Little. He does not die because of self-betrayal or inner weakness but a fall from heights of promise. He was killed by assassins and he knew that five of his father's brothers were lynched and killed by the police and Harlem. The white press always accused him as an imitator of violence. Malcolm was organizing Black Nationalist or civil right gatherings and collected men from these ghettos. He raised many questions and made about 400 Muslim blacks in the beginning. The strength grew to 40,000/- over a period of time. A TV programme called 'The Hate' that produced 'Hate' covered all these aspects. The strength of Malcolm's missionary became visible all over America. Other programmes brought the public reaction alleging that these Muslims are a potential source of violence. The civil Rights movement gave a new experience to the black. Blacks and whites worked politically in what is called as populist era. Negroes got protection from violence and the whites because of Political patronage got economic advantages in restructuring of the society. The twelve year period from 1865 to 1877 witnessed former slaves becoming independent farmers, voters and delegates in the south. Some blacks become Judges and state

legislatures. This period was called as the beginning of the Reconstruction Era. The blacks have gained the legal base for equality and the fourteenth amendment defined the rights of the citizens. The black experience from the close of the civil war to later years was embittering. The status of the Negro was represented by the Hollywood Negro with comic inferiority and isolation from changes in American life. The concept of Negro inferiority, social theories, Darwinian concepts were popular with conservative Americans. Many traced their lineage to Northern and western Europe and considered themselves to be superior. These racial attitudes of late 19th and 20th century created troubles all over America. During the Reconstruction Era, the blacks achieved equality before law. Several political associations including the communist party of America could only preach violence, boycott and struggle. Freedom was given and the freedmen acquired schooling and black teachers taught their children. All these developments till the world wars, achieved only notions of equality but did not give any political freedom or civil rights. Black historical experience in America begins with the organized Negroes and their many associations, but having lost patience these associations indulged in revenge and violence. Race conflicts and racial imperialism was the context into which Malcolm X finds himself in. Black historians were propagandists and did not record any social values cultivated by them as a result of schooling and church reforms. They only speak about the old fashioned integration group which included the liberal and radical whites until 1950s. Malcolm X did not believe that he and his black Muslim separatists had access to open society which the conservative blacks believed. The intellectual genealogy of Malcolm X could be traced to his academy and particularly to W.B. DuBois. Talking about the conservation of Races he says: The American Negro always felt an intense personal interest in discussions as to the origins and destinies of races. Primarily because back of most discussions of race with which he is familiar, have lurked certain assumptions as to his political, intellectual and moral status, which he felt were wrong. (DuBois speaks, 189) Malcolm insisted that the question of social regeneration raised by W.B. DuBois was important. It should be

their own responsibility and hence they should be given political power. He condemned that the efforts of Washington was mockery and farce. He attacked the Americans as in sincere and not anxious about the Negro Welfare. Malcolm did not believe in DuBois faith in 'the spread of independent thought', expanding the consciousness of manhood etc. He was frustrated at this phase of black consciousness and experience. Malcolm X's life is a crusade for the freedom of the American blacks. As a civil rights activist, he is an example of a life described in elegies and historical tragedies. In the elegiac tradition his life is a struggle for the blacks and mourning him is like the mourning the blacks who were victims of white imperialism. Malcolm the child, in Lansing, in Michigan State, transforms himself to EL - Malik - Shabar. He experiences the harms of white discrimination which his race has faced over several generations. The growth and manifestation of black consciousness from the predecessors of W.B. DuBois for a decade until the World War I indicates that African Americans had definite economic traits of the erstwhile slaves. The slave narrators described them but had no pride in those idiosyncrasies which the eccentric Americans called as primitive. Malcolm, under various identities, takes pride in his height at 6' 5", his jolly way of Walking and talking with people. The consumptions term Nigger was replaced with Negro, black and now to coloured people. Malcolm's activism was to make contrasts between black and white culture. He spread the statement that white Christianity corrupted black culture. Later he said that Martin Luther King used black females for the purpose and that he was the symbol of this corruption. Several segments of Civil Rights movement were attacked by him and there was violence among the blacks. Malcolm's speeches and autobiography reveal the social criticism and political philosophy of blacks. They are examples of black liberation and some scholars link it with human rights for all suffering peoples. The impact of Malcolm has been summed up by M.E Dyson. "As I have matured journeying from factory worker to professor, it is the Malcolm who valued truth over habit who has appealed most to me. His ability to be self critical and to change his direction an unfailing sign of integrity and courage. But these two Malcolm's need not be in ultimate, final conflict, need not be fractured by the choice between seeking an empowering racial identity and linking ourselves to the truth no matter what it looks like, regardless of color, class, gender, sex or age. They are both legitimate quests and Malcolm's career and memory are enabling agents for both pursuits. His complexity is our gift The legacy he wanted was made in the last speeches: Malcolm's ideas were

legitimate bastles of black muslim separatists. It also is an expression of minorities who want to fight. His blackness and background from ghettos gave new identification for their brand of intellectuals. He was also unyielding and inspired black male students for racial struggle. His activism and recorded statements have created a personal narrative. He's tone indicates, in his own words, "because I'm black, poor, male and angry I understand him better than you". This is a different tone and narrative voice in literature of variety. Is intellectual genealogy and activism represents a new variety of autobiography that represents ideological justifications of racial practices. His lifelong struggle and writings express colonial dilemma. The messages of Black intellectuals and their statements were summed up by Web Dubois. He stated that the central problem of the twentieth country was the problem of colour. Malcolm rephrased the same in his speeches and punches against the whites. This form of activism made the whites to face their guilty conscience and compelled them to give their civil rights. His father took him to the Garvey meeting and Malcolm realized the consequences of racial inequality. He was opposed to Ostrowski, his English Lecturer. He noticed Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam and started supporting the Black Muslim movement. Black Militancy under Malcolm's leadership achieved a sense of group identity and defined it in history. In American autobiographical Literature, his work is filled with many accounts of remarkable men,

"Who pulled themselves to the summit by their boot strips" (Handler, 1965).

In other words, Malcolm's members are Poignant about great black men 'as testimony in the power of redemption and the force of human personality, the autobiography of Malcolm X is a revelation" (Hamdler, 1965). The Autobiography also tells about the nature of religious conversion because Malcolm is in search of his identity. It also tells about Malcolm's relationship to his people, his country and the world. The protest of Malcolm is about the systematic description of self - respect of black people. It also records the consequences of following the teaching of Marcus Garvey. He established Muslim Mosque love and a non- religious organization called the organization of Afro - American unity. A radical perspective of democracy is also present in his activism. It is against capitalism and its evil consequences of the society. Malcolm's speeches and writings contain the metaphors of predicament due to policies that have kept the poorest Americans unhappy. About 37 millions of black Americans at that time were uninsured. In this way his works are a demand for black racial and economic justice. It

could be a literature of propaganda for Black Muslim separatism. In also is a record against the Civil Rights movement of king who used the language of human rights. Though he did not agree Malcolm was speaking and warning about divine retribution for racial injustice. The major impact of Malcolm efforts was that the majority of the blacks felt that their condition was degenerating. He proved and concluded and made black Muslims feel that the whites were hypocrites and procrastinated on all matters. This was his main literary and political agenda to fight Kennedy and Martin Luther King. He started predicting that king was also not right in peaceful ways and integration. This created a breed of new optimistic black leaders who decided not to follow Kennedy or Martin Luther King. Only at Harvard when he criticized Jews the students attacked him for his anti-Semitic views of Hitler. But Malcolm answered their questions with a message, that America was beset with race problems before Hitler had been. He said that internal problems of America was due to racism of the whites. The impact of Malcolm's writings or his intellectual legacy to his heirs and contenders is many fold. First he is represented in black popular culture and in black ghettocentric films. He is presented as the symbol of ghetto masculinity, to degrade Christianity and encourage Muslim separatism. He is also presented as the enemy of Martin Luther King Jr and as a proclaimer of black supremacy ending the white supremacy all over the world. The Legacy of Malcolm is in respect of his Black Muslim separatism achieved through speeches and writings. His autobiography, as told to Alex Hally and other speeches documented by Benjamin Goodman are the two primary efforts that mobilized twenty two million Negroes during 1960s. His own amounts of black man's history, his effort to create black revolution through cultural Institutions exclusively for black are the main activist efforts of Malcolm. His joining Elijah Muhammad under Nation of Islam and the writings as a warrior, diplomat, minister, apostle of manhood dignity and

freedom led to Black Muslim separatism that threatened the integration movement of Martin Luther King. His doctrine of Negro supremacy and the end of white supremacy in Africa and Asia were mainly achieved through literary and ethnic writings. His autobiography reveals the skill of narration, life and times in America and also a pattern of moral regeneration. He combined paradoxes. He used facts and fiction for verbal manipulation. This is because the works were meant to be didactic and give a programme of action to Black Muslim separatists. They show that he was a hero capable of suffering for his beliefs and worthy of leadership in a crisis. Malcolm fought endlessly and swam across the tide. The committee of Racial Equality called him a "simple man". Elijah Poole, better known as Elijah Muhammad called him a "star gone astray". Because of the family history of insanity he was accused of "messianic delusions" and as Robert Penn Warren stated preached "brotherly hatred", racial fanaticism made all the government agents to condemn him and cite his family background. His works are personal testimony to the facts that have happened. They explain the circumstances he faced and his social and psychological opposition. His literary aim was to spread Black Muslim separatist goal within the reach of the Negro lower class. The success was because of his rhetoric and the message was clear. Malcolm's original ideas are certainly a legacy for Black Muslim separatist and Negro audiences. The main theme is about racial discrimination in America. He is quotable always about the living conditions of Negro minority in rural south. He believed that they all lived in a state of violence and cruelty, in flicted by the whites. His language was violent, bestial, hateful and of hustler tradition against the whites. He used the language of the lower class Negro folk to attract his audiences and mainly create Negro riots in Harlem and other places. His description of the Negro predicament and the Yoke of slavery established him as a lowest black voice of twentieth century. A Nigerian editor called him a "martyr".

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