

## 27 years and X marks the spot!

by Liam O'Mahony  
*The Collegian*

Yesterday was the nation-wide release of the long-awaited release of *Malcolm X*, the epic film based on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told by Alex Haley. Twenty-seven and a half years after the assassination of Malcolm X, his life and ideas are finally brought to the big screen.

The script has been in the making ever since his death, but apprehensions, funds, and controversies have delayed its production and release. Director Spike Lee has stood his ground throughout the production of *Malcolm X*. This is his greatest project, and has said this movie tops all five of his previous films.

He fought with Warner Brothers for filming locations and over-budgeting. He eventually was able to film on-location in Africa, Mecca, and South Africa. He also gained more funds through donations from Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Bill Cosby, and Oprah Winfrey.

The movie, which should help to change much of white America's view of Malcolm X being a "racist, hate monger", is receiving criticism from certain organizations for "trashing Malcolm's life". Nonetheless, the 3 hour and 21 minute film will definitely have an effect on how we all view and treat each other as human beings.

This film should instill a sense of tragedy, pride, and hope for a positive outlook on the future; as well as the prospect of the destruction of racism in America.

Malcolm X, also known by his muslim name El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were America's most courageous leaders and eloquent spokesmen for the rights and pride of African-Americans. Despite how the media and many history teachers have depicted Malcolm X in the past, he was also a true hero and a martyr for civil rights, and more importantly *human* rights.

The movie, and the widely-attached publicity that has come with it, will begin to change how white history has portrayed Malcolm's life. There have been many new books written in the past few years regarding his life and speeches.

Clayborne Carson, a professor at Stanford University, has written a book called, *Malcolm X: The FBI File*. However, most of the files will never be known to the public; just as in the cases of John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

These books will begin to work their way into high school curriculums across America. It's a

shame it has taken so long for our country to wake up from its ignorance and still prejudicial views towards African-Americans and other minorities.

Malcolm X was born Malcolm K. Little, the son of a Baptist minister, Earl Little. Little was also a follower of Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement in the late 1920's. Racists murdered Earl when Malcolm was five, and his mother suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized for 26 years. All eight of her children were split up into various homes to be cared for.



Malcolm lived in a couple of homes before moving to Boston to live with his half-sister Ella. He had dreams of being a lawyer, but was told by his favorite teacher, "That's no realistic goal for a nigger." This act of oppression greatly affected him and it stayed with him the rest of his life. Despite having great grades, playing basketball, and being voted 8th grade class president; he would never return to school.

He spent his teen years learning the streets of Boston and Harlem. He held menial jobs, shining shoes, washing dishes, and working on a railroad. He became a hustler, pushed dope, played the numbers, and peddled bootleg whiskey.

His petty-crimes eventually caught up to him when he was arrested for burglary and larceny. He received a six year sentence, and while in prison he educated himself. He read any book he could get his hands on, and participated in prison debates on religion and history. A fellow inmate converted him to the

Nation of Islam (NOI) and the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

After being paroled from prison, Malcolm received his "X" from the NOI. The "X" stood for their unknown last names, and took the place of the "slave" names. In a span of two years he had become the NOI's most prominent spokesman and the minister of New York City's Temple No. 7.

He and his wife, Betty, were married in 1958. Despite Malcolm's busy schedule and traveling around the nation and Africa, they still had a tight family unit with six daughters. He appreciated his family's understanding and sacrifices which allowed him to do his work.

As a result of his experiences with Malcolm X, Alex Haley was inspired to research and write the classic saga, *Roots*.

Malcolm X was often outspoken and very critical of the civil rights movement, but he was always sincere. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm only met once, but they shook hands, smiled, and had a high respect for each other's work; despite their different views.

"By Any Means Necessary" was the maxim Malcolm X often embraced. It must be realized he didn't mean violence was the only solution. In a 1964 interview he stated, "Even I prefer ballots, but I can't discount bullets. I'm not interested in ballots or bullets; I'm interested in freedom."

Malcolm X is played by Denzel Washington, who has also appeared in *Glory*, *Mo' Better Blues*, and *Ricochet*. Betty Shabazz is played by Angela Bassett. Nelson Mandela delivers Malcolm's most famous speech for racial equality at the end of the movie.

It is never too late to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, especially for those who decide to see the movie first. It is an important piece of literature in America's history depicting the rise of a criminal to a courageous leader of pride.

As more people begin to learn what Malcolm stood for, hopefully all humans will understand and treat each other better. There will be no need for violence amongst moviegoers, and the media has already begun to feed on that. Malcolm once said, "The most frightening thing in action is ignorance."

In regard to all humans he said, "I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being, neither white, black, brown, nor red. When you are dealing with humanity as one family, there is no question of integration or intermarriage..." Peace out everybody.

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