

“Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors...”



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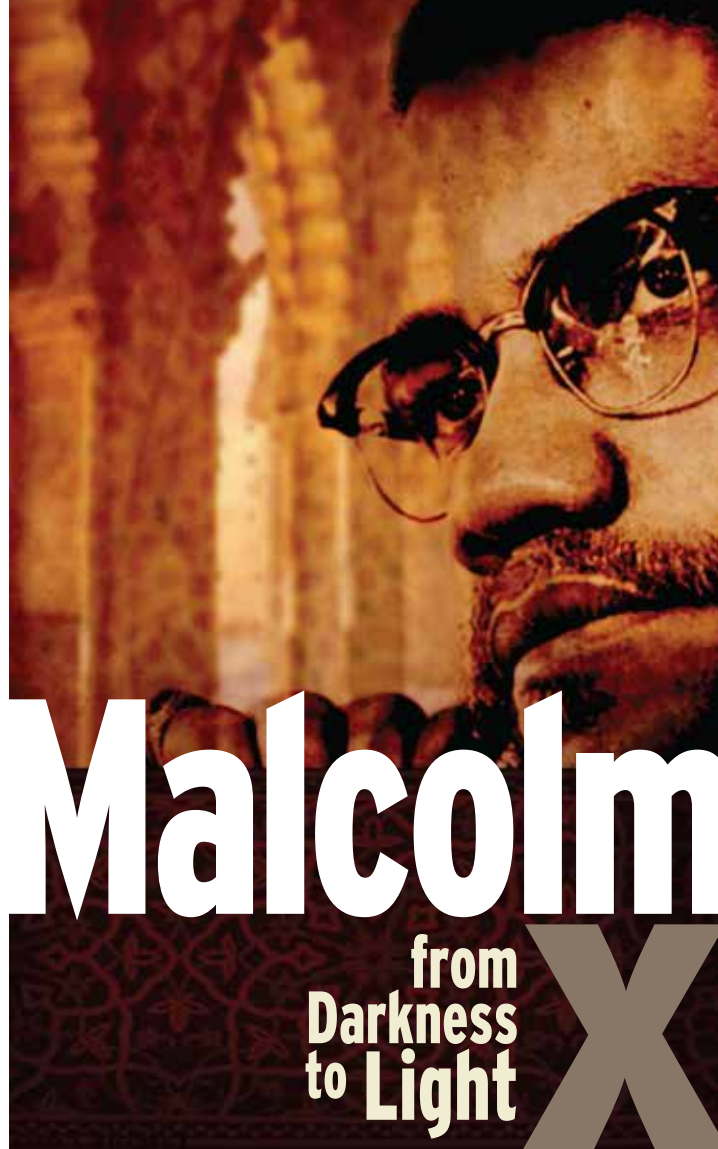
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AN ICNA PROJECT

In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Malcolm X was one of the most influential and dynamic leaders of the civil rights movement in America. His persona continues to be honored in American history and his message remains relevant as racial disparities persist in American society. This brochure attempts to explore the different phases of his life and highlights his acceptance of true Islam, which enabled him to visualize an inclusive solution to racism.

Malcolm X's struggles through life propelled him on a quest for a better world. From a troubled childhood to an incarcerated youth, from upholding black pride to advocating black supremacy, from blind trust to disenchantment, he experienced many significant life events which evolved his worldviews. His pursuit finally led him to authentic Islam which revolutionized his beliefs and enabled him to embrace a holistic approach to race relations. By the end of his remarkable life, Malcolm X was convinced that Islam's emphasis and application of equality in all aspects of life offered the ideal solution to racism in America.

Born Malcolm Little on May 19th, 1925, Malcolm was raised in a family that valued its black heritage and actively participated in the civil rights movement. Growing up in a society of institutionalized racism, Malcolm X felt the sting of unequal rights and lack of opportunities from his earliest years. His family routinely received threats by white supremacists, eventually resulting in the burning down of their home and the alleged accidental death of his father. After his mother was committed to an asylum, he and his siblings were distributed among foster homes and orphanages. Malcolm excelled in his studies despite his tumultuous upbringing. However, he became demotivated and left school because his professional aspirations were ridiculed by one of his teachers in a racist comment.

Without the possibility of upward social mobility, a life

of crime was practically inevitable for young Malcolm. In 1946, he began serving a prison sentence spanning several years. Malcolm utilized this time to reflect on the oppressive condition of blacks in America and broadened his knowledge through reading a variety of books. Religion, race and world history were among his favorite subjects. The scar of racial discrimination combined with his years of contemplation and education in prison laid a strong foundation for his activism in the years to come.

A DECADE OF HATE

While imprisoned, Malcolm was influenced by the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of a Black Nationalist group called the Nation of Islam. He was instantly drawn to Elijah Muhammad's message of black empowerment and separation from the white race. By the time he left prison in 1952, he had already joined this group and adopted a new surname, X, referring to his descent from an unknown African tribe.

Although some principles of the Nation of Islam may have been positive, they were often mixed with a racist anti-white ideology. For instance, the movement went so far as to say that the white man was of the devil. In his speeches, Malcolm X encouraged Black Americans to reject oppression and take action to demand equality and justice. He stressed the need to abandon self-hate, ignorance and substance abuse, all of which enabled social

The Spiritual Journey of Malcolm X

injustice to persist in America. In accordance with the Nation of Islam's central theme, his speeches during this period reflected strong anti-white sentiments.

As a charismatic personality, Malcolm X quickly rose through the ranks of the organization and was recognized as its main spokesperson. He was tasked with opening chapters in many cities and was instrumental in expanding its membership from 500 to 30,000 within a decade. Due to his zeal, activism and eloquence, he became the face of Black Nationalism in America in the Civil Rights era.

Although the Nation of Islam seemingly resembled Islam in that the term "Islam" was part of its title, and its members were called "Muslims," while chapters were referred to as "mosques," its beliefs were a far cry from the universal religion of Islam. One of the most obvious differences is that Islam embraces all races and considers them to be equal in the sight of God (Allah in Arabic).

TRUE ISLAM, TRUE UNITY

Ultimately, the true face of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam as a religious cult became apparent to Malcolm after a decade of his involvement with the group. He left the Nation of Islam in 1964. As Malcolm X discovered true Islam, he rejected the racist teachings of the Nation of Islam and regretted attracting masses of people to the Nation of Islam and their ideology. Subsequently, he undertook the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, known as *Hajj*. This journey enabled him to truly experience the authentic and pure religion of Islam, transforming Malcolm's approach to race issues.

During the pilgrimage, he performed various rituals with millions of other believers from different parts of

the world; everyone was focused solely on worshipping God. Through this event, Malcolm encountered something that seemed to be a farfetched reality in his lifetime – the true equality of all men and women, irrespective of race and ethnicity. His experience exposed him to the beauty of Islam, where believers of all races and social ranks interact and struggle together to worship God.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Alex Haley references a letter written by Malcolm X in which he discusses this life-altering experience:

Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad^p, and all the other prophets of the Holy Scriptures. For the past week I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of *all colors*. I have been blessed to visit the Holy City of Mecca. ... There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and the non-white. America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white' – but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen such *sincere* and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color. ... [O]n this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to

re-arrange much of the thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions. ... [P]erhaps 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. (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1965; pp. 390-92)

Malcolm's words are a testament to the unifying power of Islam, a comprehensive way of life 1.6 billion Muslims

all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware" (Quran 49:13).

During his pilgrimage, Malcolm experienced how people of all races and ethnicities could live together in peace once they accepted that they were equal in the sight of God. After this momentous journey, he became known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz – although he continues to be popularly identified as Malcolm X.

“People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware” (Quran 49:13).

strive to follow worldwide. He believed in the authentic and pure Islam because he realized that it was true guidance from God, which could establish justice and harmony on earth. Indeed, there are many examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad^p which show how Islam unified people who had previously been blinded by tribal loyalties and elitist mindsets. For instance, when an Arab Muslim uttered a racial slur against an African Muslim, calling him the “son of a black woman,” Prophet Muhammad^p rebuked the man and told him, “You are a man who still has traces of ignorance in him.” The Arab was so remorseful that he laid his face on the ground and asked the African to step on his cheek to humiliate him.

As is evident from the teachings of Prophet Muhammad^p, Islam has the power to completely transform people's perceptions so that they view every person as an equal. Acknowledging the nobility of all human beings as a birthright, Islam rejects the ideas of inherent racial or nationalistic superiority. This Islamic concept of diversity and pluralism is beautifully captured in the following verse of the Quran, the holy book of Islam: “*People, We created you*

Islam won Malcolm's heart and gave his spirited self a renewed purpose. He traveled through the Middle East and Africa, establishing an international network and envisioning an expanded mission based on inclusive human rights, as advocated in Islam. Upon his return, Malcolm X reflected his new beliefs by declaring, “I am not a racist. I am against every form of racism and segregation, every form of discrimination. I believe in human beings, and that all human beings should be respected as such, regardless of their color.”

February 21, 1965, marks a dark day in American history. After receiving numerous threats, Malcolm X was assassinated at the young age of 39. He had tirelessly devoted his life to the pursuit of justice while expressing deep humility and sincerity in his search for the truth. Indeed, these characteristics capture the greatness of this man and endear him to us as a worthy role model for all times.

Note: The superscript “^p” next to Prophet Muhammad^p represents the invocation Muslims say with his name:
May God's peace and blessings be upon him.