

Malcolm X: Revolutionary Voice of Struggle and Liberation

Five decades since his martyrdom the struggle continues by any means necessary

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This commemorative event today is one of the most significant that we have held this year. Some fifty years ago Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, was gunned down at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem before a crowd of over 400 people attending a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

Our organization has consistently upheld the legacy of Malcom X and many other heroic fighters, organizers and theoreticians of the African American Liberation Movement in the United States. This is our duty as a revolutionary party based inside the U.S. where institutional racism, national oppression and class exploitation is still very much the order of the day.

We have seen much over the last six months across the country which provides hope for the strength and viability of the people's struggle. In response to the blatant killing of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African American youth in Ferguson, Missouri on Aug. 9, an upsurge in anti-racist demonstrations and rebellions spread throughout the empire.

The killing of Brown—who was unarmed and minding his own business—followed another outrageous police operation in Staten Island, New York, when Eric Garner was choked to death on July 17. Although there were demonstrations initially in reaction to Garner's killing, which was captured in full on a cell phone video camera, the rapid, militant and broad response to the Brown killing in Ferguson provided impetus to the African American people and their allies not only in the St. Louis area but around the U.S.

It was not a unique occurrence that an African American was killed in public by the police. These incidents take place on a weekly and sometime daily basis. What distinguished the killing of Brown was the mass outbreak of discontent that shook the corridors of the ruling class.

The U.S. state and ruling class promotes the notion that America is a democratic country. That racism and national oppression have largely been overcome.

There, of course, is a president of African descent in the White House. This president appointed an African American attorney general, the first also in the history of the country.

Nonetheless, the fundamental nature of the system of racial capitalism has not changed and in many ways the structures of exploitation and oppression have been reinforced as a result of the overall trajectory of the economic character of the U.S. We see this very clearly in

Detroit where people have and are still being driven out of the city through the loss of jobs, low wages, foreclosures and evictions, the theft of pensions and healthcare benefits as well as the indifference to the plight of the majority by the imposed political leadership downtown.

A recent study by a human services organization, Bread for the World, reveals through data what we already know based on our experience and current outreach among the workers and oppressed in Detroit and across the country, that African Americans are facing near-starvation conditions in 2015. The cuts in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), the increasing impoverishment of the working class, the rise in food prices and lack of availability of quality foods and mass incarceration are creating conditions that are not conducive to the health and well-being of a people.

As a result of these conditions of austerity in the U.S. the situation will only get worse. Those who claim to represent us in local, state and federal structures of supposed authority never raise these fundamental questions related to the access to food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, income and housing.

These conditions prevail despite the fact that President Barack Obama went before the people of the U.S. and world last month claiming that the economy has improved tremendously and that "America is back." The issue is: back for whom? Passing references to income inequality absent of a program of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the workers and poor, rings hollow indeed.

The situation involving food is critical and very basic just like water. In Detroit we have been subjected to massive water shut-offs over the last year. When this was brought to the attention of the country and the world, the rulers of the city were condemned for their failure to provide access to this essential need for all human beings. Without water we cannot live. Therefore, we raise the slogan that water is a human right and that no ruling class politician has a right to deny people access to it. Nor do they have a right to deny people food considering the fact that warehouses and distribution centers are filled with food, a lot of which will be thrown out due to the lack of a political will to deliver it to people who need it.

Therefore, we need to once again look at the revival of a "Food is a Right Campaign" as was done over thirty years ago during the Reagan era. We must re-emphasize that food belongs to the people and no one should be going hungry or suffering from malnutrition because the capitalist system cannot make a profit in distributing these fundamental needs.

These projects are related to our work in the area of political education. We have to change the character of the discussion and debate about the current economic crisis in the U.S. and around the world.

This is why we have expressed our solidarity with the workers in Greece. The situation in Greece mirrors the crisis of capitalism in Detroit and the state of Michigan. We need a government that puts the interests of the people before the profits of the corporations and banks.

Consequently, this is why we need a revolutionary party to fuel the mass struggle of the people with socialist ideology and analysis. To point to the fact that under this exploitative system the people cannot be genuinely free and therefore we have to seek solutions outside

the present social order.

Our newspaper is important in this entire process. We have to provide an alternative view of the global landscape that is based on the interest of the workers and oppressed.

Malcolm X's Contribution to the World Revolutionary Movement Past and Present

Of course Malcolm X is an example of what needs to be done. Malcolm X was an organizer.

What is often overlooked is that Malcolm came from a political family. His parents were active members of the Universal Negro Improvement Association—African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) founded by Marcus Garvey and Amy Ashwood Garvey in 1914 in Jamaica.

When Garvey moved the organization to the U.S. in 1916, the country was undergoing a profound shift in industrial production and mass migration into the urban areas. Malcolm's parent Earl and Louise Little met at a UNIA Convention in 1919 in Montreal.

Therefore from his earliest memories he knew the importance of organization in the struggle for African liberation. He also knew from direct experience the repressive character of the U.S. state through attacks on his family by the Ku Klux Klan and other racist organizations who eventually killed his father in 1931 in Lansing, Michigan.

After his mother Louise was broken psychologically due to the pressure emanating from the white power structure and the social conditions prevailing at the time of the Great Depression, the family was disbanded and many were sent to live under foster care. Although Malcolm excelled in school under such circumstances he was eventually discouraged from pursuing education by a white teacher who told him that he should not aspire to be lawyer but to do something with his hands, a carpenter maybe, because a legal field was not practical for a N-word.

He would later move to Boston to live with his older sister Ella Collins. Working menial jobs and falling into petty criminal activity, Malcolm was convicted in 1946 for burglary and sentenced to eight to ten years in state prison. He served six-and-a-half years and was paroled in 1952.

During his time in prison he began to read and reflect upon his life and the conditions in the U.S. and the world. By 1948 he was recruited into the Nation of Islam by his siblings who had joined the organization.

The Nation of Islam was formed in 1930 in Detroit by W.D. Fard (Master Fard Muhammad). It taught a form of Islam that was not necessarily recognized by the Muslim communities in the East. After 1934 when Fard left Detroit under disputed circumstances, there was a power struggle inside the organization over succession. Elijah Muhammad wound up setting up headquarters in Chicago, later known as Temple or Mosque No. 2.

However, the organization had many positive characteristics including refusal to serve in the military; it did not recognize the U.S. government as the legitimate representatives of the African American people; and it sought to instill pride and self-respect into African Americans who had been inculcated with notions of inferiority and self-hate stemming from slavery and Jim Crow.

After Malcolm was paroled from prison he came to live in Inkster and Detroit. After working for several months at a furniture store with his older brother Wilfred and taking up several industrial jobs even, it is reported, at Ford Motor Company for a brief period, he began organizing for the NOI full-time.

He rose rapidly within the ranks of the NOI which was not a large organization at the time. Elijah Muhammad appointed him as deputy minister over the Detroit Temple No. 1 and later sent him as the chief minister to Philadelphia and Boston. By 1954, Malcolm was the minister in New York City at Temple No. 7.

He noted in his autobiography that New York at the time was the most difficult assignment he had taken since being paroled two years earlier. There were several nationalist organizations in Harlem that they had to compete with and the people were not quick to join a new group.

In one section describing this in his autobiography he recounted that oftentimes after making a serious effort to win people over during his sermons, and when he would announce that the group was open for new membership, initially only one or two would come forward.

Nonetheless, after a few years things began to change. The broader movements for national independence, socialism and civil rights were taking hold in the U.S. and across the world.

The 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia set the stage for the Non-Aligned Movement that was formed by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Sukarno of Indonesia later in 1961. There was the Korean Revolution under Kim Il Sung in 1945, the Vietnamese Revolution beginning in 1945, the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the defeat of French imperialism at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the so-called Korean War of 1950-53 and the intervention of China as well as the rising tide of national independence movements in India, Algeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa.

All of these developments were followed closely by Malcolm X and he brought these current events into his sermon style in the mosques. Even as early as 1950 while he was still in prison in Massachusetts at the beginning of the Korean War, he was placed in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files after he wrote a letter to the-then President Harry S. Truman opposing the war saying that "I have always been a communist." He went on to say that he had supported Japan during the Second World War and people have said all along that he was crazy.

Malcolm had been considered unsuitable for military service during WWII when at the selective service induction interview he told the officials that he couldn't wait to get his hands on a weapon so he could shoot the first cracker he saw. He was immediately declared psychotic and exempted from the draft.

Later in New York after more people began to join the NOI there and across the country, he was designated as the national spokesman for Elijah Muhammad. He maintained this position until 1963 when he was suspended from the organization and later resigned.

Malcolm X's constant study, organizing and travel on behalf of the NOI heightened the national profile of the organization and brought it to the attention of the corporate media. In

1959, Mike Wallace at the aegis of African American journalist Louis Lomax, did a five part news series on the NOI called "The Hate That Hate Produced." The program brought the Muslims to the attention of millions across New York City and the U.S.

That same year Malcolm traveled abroad as an emissary of Elijah Muhammad to several countries in Africa and the Middle East including Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt. He was increasingly receiving invitations to speak to major audiences at community gatherings, universities and in the radio and television media.

In 1960 Malcolm worked on founding a newspaper, The Muhammad Speaks, which gained national and global notoriety, for pioneering reporting. By 1961, the newspaper was being widely distributed as a weekly in African American communities across the country.

Malcolm X challenged the Civil Rights Movement over the issues of nonviolent direct action, the need for self-defense and integration. The program of the NOI that was published every week on the back page of the newspaper called for a separate state for Africans in the U.S. or outside the country.

His message was so powerful that many mainstream Civil Rights leaders would refuse to debate him publically. Nonetheless, some did take him on in public forums that were widely publicized by the media over radio and television.

Some of the leaders who did debate him were Bayard Rustin, a longtime pacifist and labor organizer, who believed in the theory of nonviolent direct action to achieve social change. Others included the novelist and essayist James Baldwin, who he debated on numerous occasions. Also James Farmer, the-then director of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE).

However, by 1963, Malcolm had run into many obstacles inside the NOI that restricted his development. Despite the organization's strident rhetoric and program of self-determination, it did not directly engage in the burgeoning Civil Rights struggle sweeping the South and the North of the country.

When in April 1962, Mosque No. 27 in Los Angeles was attacked by the police and secretary Ronald Stokes was killed in cold blood, Malcolm went immediately to California to build a case against the cops and city authorities. He called for a rally in the city to galvanize the people to wage a struggle to win justice for Stokes and six other Muslims who were either wounded or charged with assaulting the police.

After the coroner's inquest exonerated the police saying the killing of Stokes was justifiable, Malcolm sought to bring civil action against the authorities in Los Angeles. However, Elijah Muhammad withdrew him from Los Angeles sending him back to New York. It was during this period that Malcolm undoubtedly began to question the sincerity and viability of the NOI.

The failure to pursue a political struggle in Los Angeles-despite the fact that the entire African American community had condemned the police action-coupled with the revelations surrounding the personal life of Elijah Muhammad, brought him into conflict with the leader and members of his family. Over the period of ten years, and largely as a result of the work of Malcolm X, the NOI had become a fairly wealthy organization.

Elijah Muhammad was also suffering from serious health problems during 1961-63. At rallies

across the country where Muhammad had been billed as the major attraction, Malcolm X would often have to speak in his absence. Questions of succession within the NOI rose to the surface.

With Malcolm having the highest profile both inside and outside the organization, the question became whether he was the heir apparent to Elijah Muhammad. This was potentially problematic for members of Muhammad's family, other leading officials in the NOI as well as the federal government.

The corporate media had for years designated and described Malcolm as the number two man in the organization. His militancy, articulate speech and dedication to the cause won him admiration not only among the members and followers of the NOI but among broader segments of the Civil Rights, Black Nationalist and Left Movements in the U.S.

Malcolm was a principled leader and lived a modest life at a home that was owned by the NOI in Elmhurst Long Island in Queens. He spent enormous amounts of time on the road working for the organization. His own family life was sacrificed for the cause of the NOI.

Of course many within the family of Elijah Muhammad were concerned that if Malcolm took over, their privileged positions could be jeopardized. The property accumulated by Muhammad and the organization was quite substantial including a mansion in Chicago's Hyde Park and a luxurious home in Phoenix, Arizona.

Therefore in December 1963, Malcolm X was suspended from speaking by Elijah Muhammad allegedly over statements made by him during a question and answer period at a rally held in the Manhattan Center in New York City. The statements were in response to a question about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Malcolm said that the U.S. government had assassinated leaders of other countries including Patrice Lumumba of Congo and that the killing of Kennedy was a case of the "Chickens Coming Home to Roost." This was a phrase often used in the African American community meaning that if someone committed bad acts that they would come back upon them.

Supporters of Malcolm X felt that this was a pretext to have his authority curtailed and eventually silenced. Malcolm was suspended for ninety days and after that expired, the silencing was made indefinite.

Later in early March 1964, he announced that he was leaving the organization to establish another group in New York City called the Muslim Mosque, Inc. The following month he went on the Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage required of all devotees, which was not required by the NOI.

In doing this Malcolm X authenticated himself as an orthodox Muslim in the eyes of those in Middle East, Asia and Africa. After making Hajj he traveled to several African states including Ghana and Egypt which were citadels of the African Revolution during the 1960s.

After returning to the U.S. in May 1964, he set out to establish another organization, this one secular and overtly political. The Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) was actually conceived in Ghana during Malcolm's visit there in May. While in Ghana, then under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP), Malcolm met with Shirley Graham Du Bois, Julian Mayfield, Maya Angelou and other prominent

African Americans living in Ghana at the time.

After the formation of the OAAU officially on June 28, 1964 at the Audubon Ballroom, within three weeks Malcolm had left the country again for Cairo, Egypt to attend the Second Annual Summit of the recently-formed Organization of African Unity (OAU), the continental agency formed the year before in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Malcolm summited an eight-page memorandum on behalf of the OAAU requesting support from 32 independent African states for the liberation struggle of African Americans in the U.S.

Malcolm stressed to the leaders that as the OAU was taking up the questions of colonialism fostered by the Portuguese in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, settler colonialism in Southern Africa and other issues of independence and sovereignty, they must also address the plight of the-then 22 million Africans in the U.S. who were also suffering under colonialism and apartheid in the form of second class citizenship and Jim Crow.

He pointed out that African states after overturning classical colonialism must not fall victim to what he termed "American Dollarism." Progressive states in Africa at the time such as Algeria, Egypt, Ghana and Guinea took notice of his request and opened up their doors to him.

Malcolm during this period in Cairo spent time with some of the leading African liberation movement leaders such as Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, who founded in 1956 the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). His efforts made monumental contributions to the understanding and propagation of the aims and objectives of the African American Freedom Movement throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Malcolm X as the OAAU leader spent the next four months in Africa and the Middle East where he studied and held talks with various leaders and organizations. President Nasser met with him extensively and opened up avenues of Islamic educational resources for his usage.

When Malcolm returned to the U.S. after stopping over in Western Europe where he spoke in England and France, he became a much greater threat to his enemies. Threats against his life intensified despite his absence for large periods during the year.

The Federal Government's Role in the Assassination of Malcolm X

In examining the assassination of Malcolm X fifty years ago we have to examine it within the broader context of the system of national oppression which routinely attacks, contains and liquidates those among the exploited in order to preserve the system of capitalism and imperialism. Although the official line of the ruling class in the U.S. is that Malcolm died as a result of a conflict between him and the NOI, other key factors must be taken into consideration.

First it is important to acknowledge that Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam were subjected to intense surveillance and destabilization tactics by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and other local law-enforcement agencies. As we mentioned earlier, a file was opened by the FBI on Malcolm in 1950 after he wrote a letter to President Truman opposing the Korean War.

There have been tens of thousands of pages of declassified files released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which provides a sharp picture into the role of the federal government in undermining the African American mass organizations during the 1950s and 1960s. Detailed reports on the activities, speeches, associations, travels and family life of Malcolm X and other Muslim members and leaders, are chronicled in these files.

The FBI and other agencies were well aware of the internal working of the NOI. They had access to the intimate family affairs of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X.

In 1955 Malcolm was approached by at least two FBI agents who attempted to interrogate him about the NOI and its structures. In a detailed report on this confrontation the FBI described his attitude as “uncooperative.”

According to the FBI report dated Jan. 10, 1955, it says that “He refused to furnish any information concerning the officers, names of members, to furnish doctrines or beliefs of the MCI (Muslim Cult of Islam) or family background data on himself.... Subject considered the ‘Nation of Islam’ higher and greater than the United States Government.”

The final page of the report provides a description of Malcolm X’s name and aliases from the past. His date of birth, race, sex, height, weight, eye color, hair, complexion, employment and facial marks are recorded. He was described from his 1943 selective service record as having a “Psychopathic Personality Inadequate—sexual perversion” and that he was rejected for military service for psychiatric reasons. They had his social security number, finger prints and a photograph. In others words, the government was on his case.

This surveillance continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s up until the time of his assassination. After leaving the NOI in 1964, the FBI recorded and transcribed his radio and television broadcasts and public speeches. There are facsimile copies of newspaper articles and leaflets reporting on his activities in the files.

A detailed analysis of the assassination is not possible within the framework of our meeting today. I would like to say that tremendous work has been done in this area over the last several decades and even more since the 1990s.

Talmadge Hayer, or Thomas Hagin, confessed to being one of the gunmen during the trial in 1966. The other two men sentenced in the assassination maintained their innocence and Hayer backed up their claims. Hayer, when asked on the stand, refused to divulge the names of the other gunmen who carried out the assassination.

Over a decade afterwards in the late 1970s, Hayer submitted an affidavit naming his accomplices. These individuals have been tracked down by independent researchers and journalists. Today on You Tube there are numerous reports on these individuals and other aspects of the assassination.

The OAAU was infiltrated by the Bureau of Special Services (BOSS), the intelligence arm of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Gene Roberts was discovered during 1971 when he testified in the New York Panther 21 trial. Lawyers questioned him about his presence at the Audubon Ballroom as a guard for Malcolm X and he admitted he was there working on behalf of BOSS.

Two other key individuals are worthy of note. John Ali, the former national secretary of the

NOI, who made the initial announcement about the suspension of Malcolm X in Dec. 1963, was written about by Louis Lomax in the book "When the Word Is Given" on the Muslims published that same year. Lomax said in the book that John Ali was a former FBI agent. Whether he was an agent or an informant does not really matter.

The-then FBI director J. Edgar Hoover sent a directive to Lomax to change the allegation that Ali had been an FBI agent. Lomax never changed the assertion and some seven years later while working on a documentary on the assassination of Malcolm X, he was killed in a car accident.

Finally, recent attention has focused on William Bradley of Newark, New Jersey. Hayer in his affidavit claimed that Bradley was a part of the assassination team. Bradley was supposed to have been the one who fired the most deadly shots through a sawed-off shotgun recovered at the scene of the killing.

An article published last Sunday, Feb. 15, in the New York Daily News examined the history and present lifestyle of Bradley who lives well in Newark today. He refused to answer questions and referred all inquiries to his lawyer. He has claimed that he was not at the Audubon that day but analyses of archival film footage from outside the Ballroom appear to show Bradley.

How could these individuals escape law-enforcement scrutiny all of these years? With the degree of infiltration and monitoring of the NOI and the OAAU coupled with the identification of a New York police intelligence officer at the scene of the killing, there is no way that the authorities were not aware of the plot to assassinate Malcolm X.

When President Barack Obama took office in 2009, requests were made to Attorney General Eric Holder to reopen a federal investigation of the case since the actual shooters had been identified by the confessed killer who was captured at the scene of the crime. Of course, this was never done by Holder or the Obama administration.

This is not surprising since the police killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and Aiyana Jones in Detroit have not resulted in any Justice Department indictments, arrests and prosecutions. It will be up to the independently organized force of the masses to win justice for Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the recent victims of police violence and all others who died as a result of racism and national oppression.

The above address was delivered at the annual African American History Month Forum in Detroit on Sat. Feb. 21, 2015 which was sponsored by the Detroit branches of Workers World Party and Fight Imperialism Stand Together (FIST) youth organization. This event was a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz. Attended by a standing-room-only audience, the event was chaired by Chae Davis of FIST and other speakers included Debbie Johnson of Workers World Party, Joe Mchahwar of FIST as well as community activist Marcina Cole who reported on the current effort to free Michigan political prisoner Rev. Edward Pinkney.

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