

The Impact and Significance of the Assassination of Malcolm X

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A strong force for the liberation of Africans, African Americans and oppressed people throughout the world was gunned down on Feb. 21, 1965.

At the Audubon Ballroom in the Washington Heights section of Harlem, New York, Malcolm X, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, was preparing to address an audience of some 400 people at a weekly meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) at 3:15 p.m. when he was interrupted by an apparent diversionary tactic. Then several men stood up and began firing shotguns and pistols at Malcolm X striking him at least six times in the face, chest and other parts of his body.

This act of public premeditated murder deriving from a conspiracy was not surprising to many people. Just one week before, the home of Malcolm X was firebombed in Elmhurst, Queens Long Island where he lived with his pregnant wife and four children.

Malcolm had received countless threats since his departure from the Nation of Islam 11 months before. Members of the NOI security force, the Fruit of Islam, had made attempts to attack him on several occasions since early 1964.

In the aftermath of his assassination the corporate media proclaimed that his death was a direct result of political struggle between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam led at the time by Elijah Muhammad who was based in the city of Chicago. However, what is often overlooked and not thoroughly examined is the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in conducting surveillance and other counter-insurgency operations against the NOI as well as two other organizations Malcolm X formed during the last year of his life, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the OAAU.

What the FBI Files Reveal

The FBI kept extensive files on Malcolm X and the NOI over a period of years. Malcolm joined the NOI at the aegis of his family members who had been recruited while he was in prison.

Even prior to Malcolm's conversion, he had read extensively on numerous topics including history and philosophy while incarcerated in the Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts. By the time he joined the NOI in 1948 he was well versed in logic, historical studies and politics.

Some of the earliest FBI files which have been released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) contain a letter written by him to the-then United States President Harry S. Truman at the beginning of the U.S. intervention in Korea where he stated that "I have always been a communist." Malcolm expressed his opposition to the invasion of Korea and

said during the last war he had attempted to enlist in the Japanese army.

This letter was written even after he had joined the NOI. Malcolm spent over six years in prison for petty crimes such as burglary and larceny during 1946-1952. He had been scheduled for parole in 1951 but was denied.

After his parole he came to live in Inkster and Detroit, Michigan where he had family members. After working in a retail outlet and a factory in Inkster and Wayne, he would soon become a full-time organizer for the NOI.

The files reveal that the FBI in conjunction with the Detroit police monitored his activities thoroughly. They noted in the files that he resided on Williams Street in Inkster and Keystone in Detroit.

Meetings taking place at Temple No. 1 in Detroit on Frederick Street where Malcolm was in attendance and spoke were recorded in the files. It was noted when he travelled to Chicago to meet with Elijah Muhammad and when Malcolm was sent to Philadelphia and Boston to takeover operations there.

In 1954 it is shown that he became the minister at No. 7 in Harlem. The content of his sermons were recorded in the files as well. Efforts were underway to determine whether he was in violation of his parole so that he could possibly be locked up again by the authorities in Michigan or other states.

An office memorandum from the Detroit Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the FBI to the-then Director J. Edgar Hoover, dated May 10, 1954, says "On May 7, 1954 SA (presumably Special Agent whose name is redacted), contacted the Michigan parole authorities, at which time (redacted) advised that captioned subject was discharged from his parole by the Michigan parole authorities on May 18, 1953 and thus is not currently in violation of his parole."

By 1955 it is noted in the FBI files that Malcolm was approached and interrogated by at least two government agents. According to the report on the Jan. 10, 1955 "Interview of Malcolm Little", it says that "The subject was very uncooperative in this interview. He refused to furnish any information concerning the officers, names and members, to furnish doctrines or beliefs of the MCI (Muslim Cult of Islam, the NOI as described and labelled by the FBI) or family background data on himself."

Malcolm maintained as reported by the agents that "he believes in all the teachings of Elijah Mohammed of Chicago, Illinois, and that Elijah Mohammed was his leader and that he considered Elijah Mohammed superior to all. Subject considered the 'Nation of Islam' higher and greater than the United States Government. He claimed that Allah is God, the supreme being, and that Elijah Mohammed is the greatest prophet of all, being the last and greatest Apostle." (NY 105-8999)

The report went on to describe the physical characteristics, names and aliases of Malcolm X. Little or Malachi Shabazz. It also recorded that in 1943 Malcolm had been turned down by the draft board for induction in the military saying that he had a "Psychopathic Personality and sexual perversion."

Malcolm X Splits With the NOI and is Assassinated Within One Year

Surveillance of Malcolm X and the NOI continued throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. At the time of the suspension of Malcolm X by Elijah Muhammad, his departure to form two other organizations, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. and the OAAU, the FBI files indicate that close monitoring of both organizations intensified.

One year prior to the departure of Malcolm X from the NOI it was stated in a book by African American journalist Louis Lomax that John Ali, National Secretary of the NOI based in Chicago, was a former FBI agent. The book entitled "When the Word is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World" focuses heavily on the role of Malcolm X inside the organization.

Later FBI director Hoover approved a directive to Lomax saying that Ali had never been an agent. However, it did not categorically deny that Ali worked for the Bureau as an informant or operative. Lomax never refuted the claim and repeated it in a subsequent book entitled "To Kill a Black Man" written after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968.

The federal government was concerned that Malcolm's advocacy of armed self-defense would prompt violent activity on the part of African Americans. In one memorandum from the New York field office it details an investigation by the bureau and the city police surrounding the purchase of arms by a suspected member of the MMI.

The files from April-June 1964 contain copies of newspaper articles written about Malcolm X's activities as well as a transcript from a radio interview in Cleveland. Later during a visit to Boston and Chicago, the full text of interviews or summations aired over several radio stations were transcribed by FBI agents.

In a memorandum from the SAC in New York to FBI Director Hoover dated July 2, 1964, it states "Basically, Malcolm X as chairman of the OAAU espouses the same line that he follows as leader and spokesman of the MMI. He continues to have an overtone of black nationalism; continues to criticize non-violence in the civil rights field and urges a policy of self defense; and desires to internationalize the racial movement and affiliate with African nations."

This same document goes on to note that "The third confidential source used is (redacted). The LHM (letter head memorandum) is classified 'Confidential' to protect this source since revelation of information therefore might reveal this source which could have an adverse effect on the national defense interests.... The NYO (New York Office) will continue to closely follow the activities of Malcolm X, the MMI and the OAAU. Close liaison in this regard is being maintained with BSS (Bureau of Security Services), NYCPD (New York City Police Department)."

It then goes on to say "Any information coming to the attention of the NYO indicating that Malcolm X or his MMI/OAAU are planning any racial type demonstration or activities anywhere will be promptly furnished to the Bureau and interested offices."

At the time of Malcolm X's assassination at least one BSS or BOSS agent was present in the person of Gene Roberts, an undercover police officer. Roberts had been told by his superiors to go down to the OAAU headquarters and get to know the members, then win their confidence and apply for membership.

Roberts was eventually placed on security and was assigned on numerous occasions to

protect Malcolm X. He admitted in several interviews that he saw what he thought was a “dry run” of the assassination on Feb. 15, the day after Malcolm’s home was bombed in Queens. During a meeting and later press conference at the Audubon Ballroom, Roberts says two men got into an argument during the meeting.

The BOSS agent said that he reported this to his superiors but does not reveal their response. On the day of the assassination when a similar argument erupted, Roberts left the stage at the Audubon and headed towards the area where the two men were supposedly arguing when one ran down the aisle firing while two or three others close to the front stood up and fired several shots into Malcolm’s body, wounding him mortally.

Roberts is then seen supposedly applying mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to Malcolm on the stage. He reportedly told Betty Shabazz, his wife, that Malcolm was dead.

After the shooting it took uniformed police a considerable amount of time to arrive inside the ballroom. One of the assassins, who later plead guilty, Talmadge Hayer or Thomas Hagin, was caught by Malcolm’s supporters and was being beaten outside the location of the assassination. Hayer had been wounded in the leg reportedly by one of Malcolm’s bodyguards.

There were subsequent newspaper reports and eyewitness accounts that at least one other man, possibly two, were taken away from the scene as suspects by the New York City police. They later vanished without being charged in the assassination.

Later during the late 1970s, Hayer in an affidavit and interview with journalist Tony Brown gave up the names of four other individuals who were a part of the assassination squad. He had refused to reveal these facts during his trial in 1966, although he stated that Thomas 15X Johnson and Norman 3X Butler, also convicted in the assassination, were not accomplices.

One of the assailants named by Hayer was William Bradley, a resident of Newark, New Jersey. In fact Hayer said that all of the members of the assassination squad were from the Newark mosque.

Bradley is reportedly seen in a film clip outside the Audubon the day of the assassination involved in the brawl surrounding the rescue of Hayer by the New York City police. He is then seen walking away from the scene.

Reports have also surfaced that NOI National Secretary John Ali met with Hayer and members of the assassination team the night prior to the murder of Malcolm X. Johnson, who spent over twenty years in prison for a crime he and Hayer both said he did not commit, reported in a filmed interview that John Ali had come to New York days before the assassination to admonish the mosque there for not taking decisive action against Malcolm X.

A recent article published in the New York Daily News stated that “In the late 1970s, Hagan provided some tantalizing clues. In two affidavits filed in 1977 and 1978, he provided partial names for his four accomplices.” (Feb. 15)

Continuing, the article says “Hagan identified the shotgun-toting man who was the first to open fire on Malcolm as Willie X. Hagan’s lawyer, the famed William Kunstler, determined that Willie X was a man named William Bradley. But the case quickly went cold. More than

three decades passed before Bradley was identified as the towering Newark man living under the name Al-Mustafa Shabazz.”

How could these assassins avoid law-enforcement scrutiny and prosecution for five decades? It was well known that both the FBI and the NYPD hated Malcolm X and his organizational work.

In addition, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) closely monitored Malcolm’s travels in Africa, the Middle East and Europe during the last year of his life. Yet the official version of the assassination promoted by the authorities and the corporate media is that his death was exclusively the result of a dispute between Malcolm and members of the NOI.

Bradley refused to make any comments to the New York Daily News and referred inquiries to his attorney. He maintains that he was not at the Audubon on the day of the assassination even though numerous researchers have identified him as being both inside and outside the ballroom.

Continuing Implications of the Assassination of Malcolm X

During the course of the 1960s numerous leading public figures and officials in the U.S. were assassinated including President John F. Kennedy, Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., former Attorney General and Senator Robert Kennedy, Illinois Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark as well as others. Researchers and journalists examining these murders have expressed dismay over the failure of law-enforcement and the U.S. Congress to fully investigate and pursue those involved.

The assassinations of African American liberation leaders and organizers coupled with police frame-ups, imprisonment, psychological warfare campaigns and other forms of counter-insurgency had a devastating impact on the struggle against racism and national oppression. Even today this same pattern continues with the mass incarceration along with widespread brutality and murder of African Americans.

During 2014, unrest swept the country in response to the police killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice and others. Nonetheless, none of the law-enforcement agents responsible in these incidents have been prosecuted by local authorities or the U.S. Justice Department.

When Barack Obama took office in 2009, there were efforts made to have his Attorney General Eric Holder re-open the investigation into the assassination of Malcolm X. This was never done as the Justice Department has neither pursued federal charges against the police and other racists for the killing of African Americans across the country.

These developments reveal clearly that the U.S. is still a racist state where the lives of African Americans do not matter. From the killings of pioneering leaders in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements to working class and poor youth, the actions of the government on all levels speak to the need for a fundamental transformation of the capitalist system of exploitation and national oppression.

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