

BOOKS

Malcolm X: History as Hope

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X, with the assistance of Alex Haley. 460 pages. Grove. \$1.25 (paperback).

THE SPEECHES OF MALCOLM X AT HARVARD, edited by Archie Epps. 191 pages. Morrow. \$1.95 (paperback).

MALCOLM X, THE MAN AND HIS TIMES, edited by John Henrik Clarke. 360 pages. Macmillan. \$7.95.

He was assassinated five years ago this week. Since then, assorted parks, streets and ghetto playgrounds have been named after him. His bespectacled face, ballooned to twice life-size, gazes owlishly from the walls of innumerable schools and youth clubs. Though he is sometimes described as an apostate and a monster, these days he is more often invoked, especially by young whites and blacks, as a martyr in the cause of brotherhood, and even a kind of saint.

To whites, the apotheosis at first seems unsettling. Many Americans recall Malcolm X only as a bad guy, known mainly for preaching racism. Is the continuing Malcolm X cult just one more outrageous byproduct of the rage and rhetoric that afflict race politics and U.S. culture in general? The answer is, no. And the best way of learning why is to examine yet another post-Malcolm X phenomenon, the spate of books by or about the former Black Muslim leader that have made him a minor industry in the publishing business.

Savage Skepticism. Some of the best are listed above. *The Autobiography* is his will and testament. The speeches and *The Man and His Times*, a gathering of recollections by people who knew Malcolm X, add subtlety and substance to it. Read in retrospect, they reveal Malcolm X as the most fascinating, convincing and, in some ways, the most measured speaker and thinker that the black militant movement has yet produced.

His incitements to revolution drew a disproportionate amount of attention during his lifetime. But the angry and occasionally outrageous things that he said seemed wilder then than they do today. Malcolm X's characteristic tone was not flailing rage. It was a kind of savage, pragmatic skepticism about American liberal institutions and a sense that in the U.S., whites, collectively and historically, have been and still are a disaster for blacks. He refused to be grateful for empty favors. "I'm not going to sit at your table," he once said, "and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner." In retrospect, what seems most remarkable was the range of his intellectual change and growth. The final phase of that growth—marked by his separation from the Black Muslim movement and the founding of the Organization of Afro-American Unity—had only begun when he was shot down. Yet his last plan to

start working with all civil rights and human rights groups in the U.S. shows how far beyond raw appeals to violence and references to "blue-eyed white devils" Malcolm X actually went.

Though he changed his views, he absolutely refused ever to believe that substantial change in black conditions would come about through turning the other cheek. Or through integration. Or through anything short of a relentless effort by black people themselves to take political power in their own communities, to work their own social revolution and to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. His prolonged misgivings about the possibilities of real integration in the U.S. still seem convincing. *The Autobiography* illustrates how well-equipped X was to be successfully folded into the white man's world. One is explicitly left with the feeling that if he found integration a fraud, it was one: "You can sometimes be 'with' whites," Malcolm X concluded, "but never 'of' them." His early life was blighted by the murder of his father and poverty that eventually forced his mother to yield her children to welfare workers in Lansing, Mich., and drove her to a mental institution. Still, young Malcolm, tall, light-complexioned and smart, was elected president of his all-white junior high school class, and became a star basketball player.

His autobiography is excruciating when he recalls going to dances in the 1930s, learning to sip punch and stand around as if he did not want to dance. The devastating need of blacks to restore pride in their color and race still

MARVIN LICHTNER



MALCOLM X IN 1964

More than promises and paper shuffling.

flames forth in Malcolm X's comment on the tragic folly of doting black parents who favored whichever child in the family was the palest. When, at age 14, Malcolm was told—like many other gifted blacks—that he should think of carpentry instead of law, he turned his back on the whole white world.

Dramatic Conversion. First in Boston, then in New York as a teen-ager in the early 1940s, he donned a zoot suit and painfully "conked" his hair. He graduated from show-stopping Lindy Hopper to pimp to taker and pusher of marijuana and dope. Malcolm X's scorn for authority, black or white, 30 years ago, presents remarkable parallels to youthful attitudes today. It was not merely that everyone he knew used marijuana and bitterly resented the white cops who tried to deprive them of it. They also regarded World War II as a white establishment disaster, like Viet Nam, to be avoided at all costs.

At 19, Malcolm X became a successful burglar who used two white middle-class girls as advance scouts. In 1946 he was caught and sentenced to ten years in jail. It was there, in a dramatic conversion, that he reformed his life, began copying the dictionary to improve his reading and writing, and became a disciple of Black Muslim Leader Elijah Muhammad.

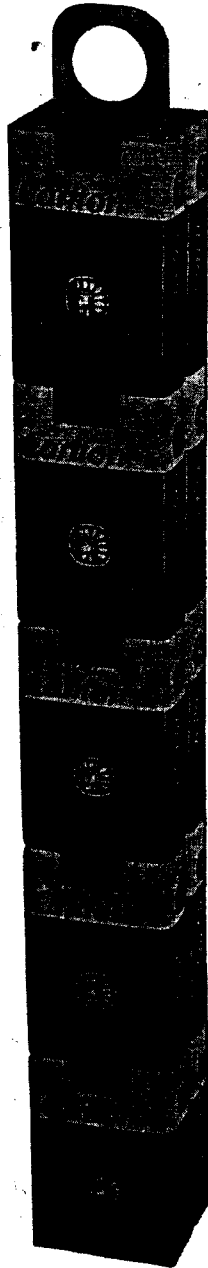
Malcolm X worked twelve tireless years for the Black Muslims. It would take great cynicism to doubt that he passionately believed in and practiced what he preached—monogamy, abstinence from drugs, extramarital sex and drink, ceaseless work for the black community. But the mythology, the religion, the re-examination of history that buttressed the Black Muslim resolve, may still strain the credulity of new readers—even as they troubled a number of white and black men who otherwise admired Malcolm X during his life.

Today whites may still disagree with, but nevertheless understand more easily than five years ago, the Muslim's somewhat Nietzschean contention that Christianity was a white man's device that unmanned blacks by forcing them to worship a white God and taught them to be patient with any ignominy. One can disagree with but nevertheless understand the need to modify African history so that, for example, slavery appears as a unique white invention.

But what is one to make of such a personage as the prophet, W. D. Fard? According to Black Muslim dogma, Fard came from Allah to Elijah Muhammad in Detroit in the year 1931. He soon mysteriously disappeared, but only after he had explained that the white race was a cruel joke played on the black world by a satanic black named Mr. Yacub. After generations of breeding blacks for light skin on the Island of Patmos, Yacub succeeded in creating the fiendish white race, which was eventually turned loose in the desolate wastes of prehistoric Europe.

The rest, Black Muslims preached,

**A whole carton
of Carlton
has less "tar"
than three packs
of the largest
selling
filter king.***



***4.5 MG vs 20.9 MG PER CIGARETTE**
Source latest U. S. Government figures.

is history: commerce, capitalism, expansion, colonialism, slavery. That cycle, they (and Fard) consolingly insisted, would soon come to an end. The black world, overcoming the white demons, would restore civilization to its pre-white peace and harmony. In a fond and perceptive preface to the autobiography, *New York Times* Correspondent M. S. Handler, who admired Malcolm X, called this kind of thing "sheer absurdity." Hostile critics have assumed that Malcolm X either didn't believe it, or if he did he was slightly cracked.

To take so literal a view is to miss one overwhelming characteristic of Malcolm X's thought, his integration of history, religion and mythology, and his profound and necessary sense of history's possibilities as a man-created aid to faith and policy. Browbeaten by the delusions of science and scholarship, white society has lately and perhaps foolishly begun to discard such conceptions. But it takes shortness of memory or lack of imagination or both not to see that W. D. Fard's cyclical vision is hardly more farfetched than the mythology of Marxism, which also explains past horrors, justifies present conflict and assumes that the story will end in peaceful victory—when the state shall wither away. The millennial curve of Christianity from the Old Testament Genesis to a vaguely predicted Judgment Day offers similar encouragements.

Human Rights. When Malcolm X broke with the Black Muslim movement in 1964 and then made his famous voyage to Mecca, he simply broadened his concept of history to include the real world of Islam with its possibilities of world brotherhood. Then he was shot.

As a man and a personality, Malcolm X seems likely to endure in literature as the subject of a classic American autobiography. The book has already sold 1.2 million copies and is used in schools and colleges all over the U.S. As a practical ideologue of black revolution and human rights, he has already been outstripped by events. The much harried Black Panthers, often the victims of their own inflammatory language, are trying to carry out a program of education, self-defense and a self-help that in some ways resembles Malcolm X's final program. Their thought, however, is tinged with a Marxian notion of solidarity, not merely of race but of economic oppression.

Perhaps Malcolm X's most enduring legacy to black militancy was his lynx-eyed criticism of the hand-wringing but hapless efforts made by black and white liberals to wrest from the machinery of American democracy anything more than promises and paper shuffling. Extremist in many ways, Malcolm X was most effectively extreme in sheer impatience. In his view, as one of his "blue-eyed" fellow citizens once remarked in another connection, "Extremism in the cause of justice is no vice."

**North and South,
East and West,
Young and Old,
Rich and Poor,
Jew and Gentile,
Black and White and Brown
and Yellow and Red,
This town, this city,
this state, this country
bleeds a little every day.**

**Open your heart.
Empty your hands.
And roll up your sleeves.
With The
American Red Cross.**



(a)

Invest in Your Own
BAHAMA ISLAND "HIDEAWAY"
on the lovely island of Eleuthera



*How often
have you dreamed*

*of someday having your own "hideaway
homesite" on a peaceful tropical island...
where you can relax, unwind and escape
the hustle and bustle of today's busy life?*

For You, That "Someday" Can be Now!

Here on Eleuthera, one of the most beautiful islands in the Bahamas, you can have your own tropical island homesite overlooking the sea in Rainbow Bay, a delightful oceanfront homesite development where lush green hills and pink sand beaches slope gently to a sun-warmed sea... for vacations, retirement, investment too! Only three miles to stores, yacht club, harbour. Direct air service from New York, Washington, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Nassau. Mail the coupon for details. You'll find them exciting.

OCEAN-VIEW HOMESITES ONLY \$2,700 (80 by 120 ft.)
\$40 DOWN, \$40 PER MO

No Interest - 10% Cash Discount

RAINBOW BAY

P. O. Box 4476, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33304

Send FREE color brochure. (No salesman will call)

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

AD 1153 T-1 ZIP.....

TIME, FEBRUARY 23, 1970