

Malcolm X

Malcolm X was born with the name Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. He was destined to become one of the greatest African American leaders of all time.

When he was in his twenties, Malcolm was sent to jail and sentenced to ten years for burglary, a much longer sentence than a white person would have gotten. While in jail, another inmate told him of a religious organization he was in. It was called the Nation of Islam. Malcolm got in touch with Elijah Muhammad, the leader of this organization. They sent letters back and forth almost every day, and eventually Malcolm converted to Islam.

Malcolm gave many speeches and helped to unify the black community. He got thousands of people to join the Nation of Islam. He explained that many black men were in jail because the white man put them there, and that white men hid the black man's real history. Malcolm X taught black men to respect themselves and their bodies; not to steal, take drugs, or drink, or go with white women, and that to be black was beautiful. He said that the white man was the devil, and responsible for four hundred years of slavery and oppression of Afro-Americans, which is what he called black people. He changed his name from Little, which he said was the name a white slave master had given his ancestors, to X, which stood for his African name, which he would never know.

A long time after joining the Nation of Islam Malcolm found out that his leader, Elijah Muhammad, whom he had admired and loved, was secretly having relations with about six women from the Nation of Islam, some of the relations resulting in children. Malcolm left the Nation of Islam because he realized Elijah Muhammad was a fraud, and that many leaders of the Nation of Islam were spending money they raised on fancy cars, clothes, and furniture.

Malcolm then traveled to Mecca to find the true meaning of Islam. While he was there he prayed alongside white people. Then he realized that the religion was not about hatred. This changed his message because he used to believe that African Americans should use violence to get their message across. After his trip to Mecca, Malcolm believed that violence was not a part of Islam. In 1965, he was assassinated at the age of 39, in front of a crowd of people, including his wife and daughters. In America, the black nation mourned his loss. Members of the Nation of Islam killed him, but people suspected that the government was involved, since he had been followed by the FBI.

As I read about Malcolm X, I got more and more interested in the ways his thinking changed as he got older. Although I did not completely agree with what he thought at the beginning – that blacks and whites should be separated – I liked the way his ideas changed and developed until the day he was killed. After coming back from Mecca, he began to call for equality for everyone.

Today in the African American community Malcolm X is considered a hero and a role model because he lived what he believed in. He wanted to bring dignity to his people and help build bridges between blacks and whites. Unfortunately, he was killed before any of this could happen.