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| http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/images/spacer.gif | **Malcolm X (1925-1965)** | | | http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/images/spacer.gif | http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/images/spacer.gif |
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| http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/images/spacer.gif | http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/images/spacer.gif | While [Martin Luther King, Jr.](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/index.htm) rose to national prominence professing [nonviolent direct action](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/nonviolent.resist.html) and interracial organizing in the late 1950s and 1960s, Malcolm X became a leader in the Nation of Islam, advocating armed self-defense and the rejection of white allies. Upon leaving the Nation of Islam in 1964, however, Malcolm's ideology shifted to a unified, coalition-oriented struggle for black advancement. While King and Malcolm continued to be at odds over the role of nonviolence in the movement, Malcolm met with other civil rights organizations in the South and repeatedly tried to establish a relationship with King. Although King and Malcolm X never worked together, Malcolm's ideology directly influenced the southern civil rights movement after his 1965 death with the emergence of [Black Power.](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/black_power.html)  Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on 19 May 1925. Both his parents were activists in the Universal Negro Improvement Association established by Marcus Garvey. Malcolm’s father, a Georgia-born itinerant Baptist preacher, encountered considerable racial harassment because of his black nationalist views. He moved the family several times before settling in East Lansing, Michigan, where Malcolm spent his childhood. In 1931 Malcolm's father was run over by a streetcar and died. Police concluded that the death was accidental, but Malcolm suspected that he had been murdered by a local white supremacist group. In January 1939, when Malcolm was thirteen, his mother was declared legally insane and committed to a Michigan mental asylum. Malcolm spent the rest of his childhood in foster homes and reform schools.  In 1941, Malcolm left Michigan to live in Boston. While there, he held a variety of jobs and became increasingly involved in criminal activities. He was arrested in 1946 for larceny and breaking and entering and was sent to prison. While in jail, Malcolm responded to the urgings of his brother Reginald and became a fol lower of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Temple of Islam, a small black nationalist Islamic sect. (Later named the Nation of Islam, the sect is often called the black Muslims.) Drawn to the religious group's racial doctrines, which categorized whites as "devils," Malcolm began reading extensively about world history and politics, particularly concerning African slavery and the oppression of black people in America. After he was paroled from prison in August 1952, he became Minister Malcolm X, using the surname assigned to him in place of the African name that had been taken from his slave ancestors.  Malcolm X quickly became Elijah Muhammad's most effective minister, using his forceful oratory to bring large numbers of new recruits into the group during the 1950s and early 1960s. By 1954, he had become minister of New York Temple No. 7; and in 1957, he became the Nation of Islam's national representative, a position of influence second only to that of Elijah Muhammad. In his speeches, Malcolm X urged black people to separate from whites and win their freedom "by any means necessary."  Malcolm X was particularly harsh in his criticisms of the nonviolent strategy to achieve civil rights reforms advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr. During a November 1963 address at the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference in Detroit, Malcolm derided the notion that African Americans could achieve freedom nonviolently. "The only revolution in which the goal is loving your enemy is the Negro revolution," he announced. "Revolution is b loody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in the way." Malcolm also charged that King and other leaders of the [March on Washington](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/march_washington.html) had taken over the event, with the help of white liberals, in order to subvert its militancy. "And as they took it over, it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry, it ceased to be hot, it ceased to be uncompromising," he insisted. Malcolm also disagreed with King's promotion of integration, arguing that "No sane black man really wants integration! No sane white man really wants integration. . . . The honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches that for the black man in America the only solution is complete separation from the white man!"  King rejected Malcolm's rhetoric because of its premise on violence. "I have often wished that he would talk less of violence, because violence is not going to solve our problem," King noted about Malcolm. "And, in his litany of articulating the despair of the Negro without offering any positive, creative alternative, I feel that Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice. Fiery, demagogic oratory in the black ghettos, urging Negroes to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence, as he has done, can reap nothing but grief."  Despite his caustic criticisms of King, however, Malcolm nevertheless identified himself with the grass-roots leaders of the southern civil rights protest movement. Malcolm sought King's participation in public forums, but King generally ignored Malcolm’s letters, relegating them to his secretary for reply. Malcolm's desire to move from rhetoric to political militancy led him to become increasingly dissatisfied with Elijah Muhammad's apolitical stance. As he later explained in his autobiography, "It could be heard increasingly in the Negro communities: 'Those Muslims talk tough, but they never do anything, unless somebody bothers Muslims.'"  Malcolm's disillusionment with Elijah Muhammad resulted not only from political differences but also from his personal dismay when he discovered that the religious leader had fathered illegitimate children. Other members of the Nation of Islam began to resent Malcolm's growing prominence and to suspect that he intended to lay claim to leadership of the group. When Malcolm X remarked that [President John F. Kennedy](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/enc_JFK.htm)'s assassination in November 1963 was a case of the "chickens coming home to roost,” Elijah Muhammad used the opportunity to ban his increasingly popular minister from speaking in public.  In March 1964, Malcolm announced that he was breaking with the Nation of Islam to form his own group, Muslim Mosque, Inc. The theo logical and ideo logical gulf between Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad further widened during Malcolm’s month- long trip to Africa and the Middle East. During a pilgrimage to Mecca on 20 April 1964, Malcolm reported that seeing Muslims of all co lors worshiping together caused him to reject the view that all whites were devils. Repudiating the racial theo logy of the Nation of Islam, he moved toward orthodox Islam as practiced outside the group. After returning to the United States on 21 May, Malcolm announced that he had adopted a Muslim name, el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz, and that he was forming a new political group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), to bring together all elements of the African-American freedom struggle.  Determined to unify African Americans, Malcolm sought to strengthen his ties with the more militant factions of the civil rights movement. At a Cleveland symposium sponsored by the [Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/core.htm) in April 1964, Malcolm delivered one of his most notable speeches, "The Bal lot or the Bullet," in which he urged black people to "submerge their differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem—a problem that will make you catch hell whether you're a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Muslim, or a nationalist."  Although Malcolm continued to reject King's nonviolent, integrationist approach, he and King had a brief, cordial encounter on 26 March 1964 as King left a press conference at the U.S. Capitol. Soon thereafter, Malcolm wired King to offer his support of King's campaign in St. Augustine, F lorida. Malcolm offered to organize "self-defense units" to give the Klan a "taste of their own medicine to demonstrate that the day of turning the other cheek to those brute beasts is long over." King declined the offer, calling Malcolm's suggestion "a grave error" and "an immoral approach." In early 1965, while King was jailed in Selma, Alabama, Malcolm met with [Coretta Scott King](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/king_coretta_scott.htm). He told her he did not come to Selma to make things more difficult for King, explaining, "If white people realize what the alternative is, perhaps they will be more willing to hear Dr. King."  On 21 February 1965, less than three weeks after his meeting in Selma, Malcolm was fatally shot while giving a speech in New York City. After his death, his views reached an even larger audience with the publication of The Autobiography of Malcolm X. His phi losophy of armed self-defense was advocated by the Black Power movement that emerged in 1966. | | |  |  |