

The International Malcolm X

By Lynn Burnett

During the last year of his life, Malcolm X spent five months in Africa and the Middle East, and almost another month in Europe. In Africa, he built powerful relationships with anti-colonial resistance leaders and the presidents of new nations emerging from colonialism. In the Middle East, presidents and kings recognized Malcolm as the emerging leader of Islam in the United States, and gave him lavish support. In Europe, Malcolm X built relationships with the younger generations of African, Asian, and Middle Eastern leaders who were preparing for their future leadership roles through their studies at Oxford and other elite universities.

The story of the international Malcolm X culminates with Malcolm's activities abroad during the last year of his life, and explores why Malcolm thought these travels were necessary for the black liberation struggle in the United States. However, the roots of Malcolm's internationalism began before his birth: the roots lie in his mother's heritage, with the political organization his parents dedicated their lives to, and with the values and visions Malcolm's parents raised their children with.

Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association

Malcolm's mother, Louise Langdon, was a light skinned Afro-Caribbean woman from the small island of Grenada. At the age of seventeen she moved to Montreal, Canada, during World War I. Montreal was a day's drive from Harlem, New York, where tens of thousands of other Afro-Caribbeans migrated at this time. In Harlem, they contributed to the formation of a politically radical community that soon became known as the black capital of the United States.

Afro-Caribbean men and women often experienced serious racism in the United States for the first time in their lives. Such treatment stunned and infuriated them. Many of the most militant black voices from this period came from Afro-Caribbeans, most famously, from Marcus Garvey. Garvey preached that African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and other members of the African diaspora needed to stop thinking of themselves as a small minority surrounded by overpowering white forces. Instead, they needed to think of themselves as members of the massive African and African diasporic population, which, if united, could gain complete freedom from white domination. Because Asia also suffered from European colonialism, Garvey went even further, advocating a united Asia working alongside a united Africa in the global battle against white supremacy.

Achieving complete freedom, Garvey taught, required the total separation of blacks from whites. This required self-sufficiency. Ideally, no people of African ancestry would rely on whites for anything. They needed to create their own businesses, farms, banks, schools, and all other institutions. Over time, they would grow strong enough to begin building a new nation for themselves back in Africa, making their

separation complete. In an era when the Ku Klux Klan would soon boast four million members, this vision of absolute separation seemed necessary to many African Americans. To turn the vision into a reality, Garvey founded the United Negro Improvement Association, which quickly created chapters in cities across the United States and throughout the African diaspora.

This was the vision that Malcolm X's mother had dedicated her heart and soul to when she moved to Montreal. It was through the United Negro Improvement Association that she met Earl Little, who became her husband and Malcolm's father.

A Beautiful and Tragic Family

Earl Little was a skilled carpenter from Georgia, where more blacks were lynched than any state except Mississippi. His skills placed him in economic competition with whites, placing him in constant danger. Tall, dark, muscular, and proud, Earl Little was not the kind of man who allowed himself to be intimidated, no matter what the risks. However, after receiving a number of violent threats, he headed north... to Montreal, where he embraced the vision of Marcus Garvey and began working alongside Louise Langdon to make Garvey's vision a reality.

Louise Langdon and Earl Little, drawn together by a shared vision, were married two years later. It was 1919, the year of the Red Summer, when race riots in dozens of cities killed hundreds of black people and many African Americans created the type of self-defense societies Malcolm X would later advocate. Louise and Earl's fierce dedication to Garvey's vision, combined with Louise's excellent writing skills and Earl's ability to speak fearlessly and eloquently, made them excellent candidates for spreading Garvey's message to more dangerous parts of the country where the movement was still unknown. The young couple was asked to start a chapter of Garvey's movement in Nebraska – a state with forty-five thousand Ku Klux Klan members. The goal was to support a black community that faced constant terror, but because of that terror, few black people in Nebraska were willing to join Garvey's movement. Many feared that Malcolm's parents would do nothing but bring violence to their communities.

While Louise was pregnant with Malcolm in the winter of 1925, the Ku Klux Klan visited their house to ask for her husband. Luckily, he was away, travelling on speaking engagements as his son would later do. The Klan shattered the windows of their house and left. As Malcolm later wrote, "they rode off, their torches flaring, as suddenly as they had come." The family moved to Indiana, but the Ku Klux Klan soon forced them to move on. Moving to Michigan, their house was bombed. The fire department never arrived, and detectives refused to investigate the case. Malcolm was five years old.

Far from crushing their spirits, the terror they faced inspired Louise and Earl Little to work even harder for black liberation. By the time of the bombing, Malcolm's father had begun taking his son to United Negro Improvement Association meetings.

These meetings made a great impression on the young Malcolm, who later wrote that “The meeting always closed with my father saying several times and the people chanting after him, ‘Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!’”

Marcus Garvey’s visions of black freedom governed the household. The children learned how to care for themselves so that they would not learn to rely on the unreliable white world, and would grow up to be able to contribute to black independence. Malcolm’s older brother Wilfred recalled that “Our mother used to take us out into the woods and show us different herbs and tell us what they could cure.” Each child was given a plot of garden to care for and learned to grow their own food. The household was filled with a variety of black American and Caribbean newspapers, and the children were regularly tutored about current events and the history of Africa and the African diaspora.

This resilient family, however, was soon broken. One night, Malcolm’s father “slipped” on the trolley tracks and was crushed by a train. His death was almost certainly a murder. Wilfred, the oldest son, began hunting in order to feed the family that had grown to eight children, and Hilda, Malcolm’s ten-year-old sister and the oldest daughter, began taking care of the younger children while their mother worked. However, no amount of hard work was enough to cover their basic needs, and the children sometimes became dizzy from malnourishment.

Louise continued to gather the hungry children around the stove each evening, teaching them French and telling them stories of their ancestry. But within a few years the single mother with eight hungry children was pushed past her breaking point. She began talking to herself. One day the police found her walking barefoot through the snow, unsure of who she was. She was declared insane and was institutionalized for the next twenty-four years. Welfare officials placed the children in different homes. The once strong family had been broken.

The Nation of Islam

At Malcolm’s new school, he excelled academically, emerging at the top of his class. But when he told his teacher he’d like to become a lawyer to help his mom, the teacher said, “A lawyer – that’s no realistic goal for a nigger.” Malcolm lost his interest in school and was expelled at the age of fourteen. Drawn to big city life, jazz music, and dancing, he soon made his way to Harlem, and quickly entered the criminal underworld to make ends meet. At the age of twenty, Malcolm was arrested for burglary. He would spend six years in prison, and emerge a transformed man.

While he was in prison, Malcolm’s brothers and sisters began following a religious organization called the Nation of Islam. The Nation was founded by a mysterious figure named W.D. Fard, who arrived in the black communities of Detroit in 1930. Claiming to be an Arabic man, Fard travelled from door to door in the African American community selling silks and other items. Fard explained to his customers

that the silks he sold were the same fabrics they would have worn in their original homeland, where he was from: the Islamic holy land of Mecca.

African Americans began to gather around Fard to hear more about their original homeland. Many of these African Americans had recently left the South during the Great Migration, leaving behind their communities, churches, and professions with high hopes of a better life in the North. Instead, they found themselves forced into ghettos filled with a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Fard arrived during the especially difficult times of the Great Depression, and his stories helped hopeless African Americans reinvent themselves and discover a sense of pride.

He told them that their language had been Arabic, and that their true religion was Islam. He explained that white people had invented the term “Negro” to hide the true sacred identity of African Americans, who were descendants of the black Tribe of Shabazz, which had been enslaved and taken from Mecca. Because the Tribe of Shabazz was both black and from Mecca – which, as a part of the Middle East, was part of Asia – Fard taught that African Americans were the descendants of Afro-Asians.

Soon, many African Americans in Detroit were taking Fard’s advice, abandoning what Fard told them were their slave names, eating in the way he said their ancestors ate, and practicing their original religion of Islam. As Fard’s popularity grew, he began speaking to audiences of Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association – the same organization that Malcolm’s parents had dedicated their lives to. The U.S. government had recently deported Garvey, and his organization was struggling to survive without him. As Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association fell apart, many of its members found hope in the organization founded by W.D. Fard: The Nation of Islam.

Like Garvey, the Nation preached the separation of blacks and whites. Like Garvey, the Nation believed that this separation required African Americans to be self-sufficient and eventually to not rely on whites in any way. Like Garvey, who talked about Afro-Asian unity against white supremacy, the Nation also taught a strong Afro-Asian connection, built into the very ancestry of African Americans. However, there were also major differences between the two groups: whereas Garvey taught that whites and blacks should separate because they were simply too different to ever get along, the Nation of Islam taught that white people were actually devils. And whereas Garvey taught that political action was necessary for black liberation, the Nation of Islam taught that African Americans should totally separate themselves from the political system, which, having been created by white devils, would never support them.

Despite the differences between Marcus Garvey and the Nation of Islam, Malcolm’s brothers and sisters were drawn to the new organization, which seemed similar to the values they were raised with. They tried to convert Malcolm to the Nation while he was in prison. When they told him that the Nation of Islam taught that white

people possessed an evil, devil nature, Malcolm thought the idea was ridiculous. But when he reflected on his family's own experiences, and when he thought of the history of how Europeans colonized and enslaved people wherever they went, Malcolm came to believe that what at first seemed ridiculous might actually be accurate. In prison, Malcolm was seriously studying history, and the more he studied, the more he started to believe that the Nation of Islam might be correct.

Malcolm wanted to learn more. W.D. Fard had mysteriously disappeared long before the conversion of Malcolm's family, and the Nation of Islam was now led by Fard's top disciple, Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad claimed that Fard had been a human incarnation of Allah, and that he, Muhammad, continued to receive messages directly from God. From prison, Malcolm was soon writing to Elijah Muhammad on a daily basis, and came to believe that Elijah possessed such great wisdom that he truly was a divine being in direct communication with Allah. When Malcolm was released from jail, Muhammad began to personally train him, and Malcolm quickly emerged as a major leader in the Nation of Islam.

The Afro-Asian Conference

By the time the Montgomery Bus Boycott turned Martin Luther King into a major civil rights leader in 1955, Malcolm had already founded dozens of temples for the Nation of Islam and was the leader of the Nation's temple in Harlem. During that year, an event overseas captured his attention, inspired him to think more internationally, and began the long process that led him to finally break with the Nation of Islam nine years later.

In 1955 twenty-nine emerging African and Asian nations gathered to discuss unifying with one another at the Bandung Conference – also known as the Afro-Asian Conference - held in Indonesia. Many of these nations were currently at war with their colonial rulers. Some had recently gained independence, but although free, realized how easy it would be for powerful countries and corporations to continue to control their resources and to use their populations as cheap labor. The nations gathered at the Afro-Asian Conference met to discuss how, although individually weak, they could gain strength through unifying and supporting one another.

As the great Malcolm X scholar Manning Marable writes, "Malcolm closely monitored these events, which to him fulfilled the divine prophecy foretelling the decline and fall of European and U.S. power." The Afro-Asian Conference may have reminded Malcolm of Garvey's teaching that Afro-Asian unity could overcome global white supremacy. The event caused him to seriously consider the potential for African American participation in international alliances. Marable writes that after the Afro-Asian Conference, Malcolm's "sermons made increased references to events in Asia, Africa, and other Third World regions, and he emphasized the kinship black Americans had with non-Western dark humanity." However, because the

Nation of Islam taught that African Americans should not concern themselves with politics, Malcolm had to be careful about expressing these ideas.

The First Journey Abroad, and the First Doubts

In 1958, Elijah Muhammad sent Malcolm on a trip to the Middle East to build ties between the Nation of Islam and the Muslim world. Although Malcolm was treated with respect, Islamic leaders in the Middle East gave the Nation of Islam only lukewarm support. Plans were made for Elijah Muhammad to visit the holy city of Mecca and take the hajj, and a full scholarship was later given to one of Elijah's sons to study at a major Islamic university. However, these were merely respectful gestures. The Islamic world was not inclined to build strong connections with the Nation of Islam.

The trip forced Malcolm to realize that many of the teachings of the Nation of Islam were seen as incorrect or even sacrilegious by the rest of the Islamic world. Malcolm was told that teaching that white people were devils was blasphemy, and that Islam was a religion of universal brotherhood that did not believe in racial differences. On this trip, Malcolm also realized that, according to traditional Islam, it was heretical for Elijah Muhammad to claim that he was Allah's messenger.

Malcolm said nothing of these doubts when he returned to the United States. He wrote nothing of them in his *Autobiography*. He remained a completely humble servant to Elijah Muhammad for another half a decade. But Malcolm slowly made changes. Instead of saying that white people literally *were* devils, he began to say that they *acted* like devils. Malcolm now felt it was important to speak not only to black people, but to all people. He began speaking at colleges, and by 1960 had emerged as a popular speaker amongst college students of all races.

It was during this time that members of the Nation of Islam began criticizing Malcolm. Five years before the Nation assassinated him, many followers of Elijah Muhammad were already concerned that Malcolm was moving away from Elijah's teachings. By the time Malcolm began writing his *Autobiography* in 1963, these tensions had grown worse. Malcolm was deeply troubled by the fact that important figures in the Nation of Islam doubted his loyalty, and originally hoped to use the *Autobiography* to prove his loyalty. The first chapters, written during this time, portray Malcolm as an uneducated, hardened criminal, which was untrue. Scholars now believe that Malcolm X exaggerated his ignorance and his criminal past in order to emphasize the power that the Nation of Islam had to save even the lowliest of peoples.

Although Malcolm's *Autobiography* began with this gesture of loyalty, it would not end that way. His loyalty was about to be pushed past its limit.

Leaving the Nation of Islam

In 1964 Malcolm discovered that Elijah Muhammad had been sleeping with and impregnating his young secretaries. Malcolm had heard these rumors for a long time, but as someone who believed that Elijah Muhammad was a divine being, he simply couldn't believe this was true. As the rumors spread, however, Malcolm knew that people would begin to ask him questions, and he needed to know how to respond. This caused him to investigate the rumors personally. When he found them to be true, Malcolm's faith in Elijah Muhammad was shattered.

Malcolm officially left the Nation of Islam on March 8, 1964. He did not criticize the Nation or expose the sexual misconduct of Elijah Muhammad. Instead, he told the press that as a minister with the Nation, he was not allowed to become involved in the civil rights movement in the way that he wished to. "It's going to be different now," he said. "I'm going to join in the fight wherever Negroes ask for my help." However, powerful figures within the Nation believed that Malcolm had spread the rumors about Elijah Muhammad himself, so that he could split the Nation apart, form his own group, and elevate himself as a leader. Although they considered retaliation, the threat to Malcolm's life at this point was not nearly as serious as it would soon become.

Malcolm's departure from the Nation of Islam left him confused and depressed. Luckily, he knew exactly what his new path would be. He had doubted the Nation's teachings for years and was ready to embrace traditional Islam. Malcolm immediately founded a new Islamic organization, called Muslim Mosque Incorporated, which would teach traditional Islam to black Americans and allow them to become part of the global Islamic community. In order to spiritually renew himself and gain recognition as a leader of traditional Islam, Malcolm X travelled to the Middle East for the second time. He would visit the holy city of Mecca, and take the hajj.

The Hajj

When Malcolm arrived in Saudi Arabia, he discovered that he would not be allowed to enter the holy city of Mecca before he attended the Hajj Court. Because the teachings of the Nation of Islam were considered heretical, Malcolm had to prove to the court that he had abandoned the Nation and embraced traditional Islam. Malcolm was prepared: he had begun studying traditional Islamic teachings with the leading scholar of Islam in the United States, Dr. Mahmoud Shawarbi. Shawarbi believed that Malcolm had the potential to emerge as a great leader of Islam in the United States, and believing this, provided Malcolm with contacts to the royal family of Saudi Arabia. With the backing of the royal family, the judge quickly recorded Malcolm's name in the Holy Register of True Muslims, giving Malcolm access to Mecca. He had now been formally acknowledged as a member of the global Islamic community. Before leaving, the judge told Malcolm, "I hope you will become a great preacher of Islam in America."

During Malcolm's first visit to the Middle East in 1958, he had been told that Islam viewed all of humanity as one family, with no racial divisions. Now, as he participated in the hajj in 1964, he witnessed this single human family with his own eyes, and experienced it with his own heart. In Malcolm's words, he met whites on the hajj who "were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been [to me.]" He wrote to Alex Hayley, who was helping him write the *Autobiography*, that "I began to perceive that 'white man,' as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it describes attitudes and actions." Islam, Malcolm wrote, had the power to remove that negative "white" attitude from the person with white skin color.

From Mecca, Malcolm wrote home to his followers at the newly established Muslim Mosque Incorporated, telling them that what he had witnessed was so profound that it had "forced me to rearrange much of my own thought pattern, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions." He told them, "I have eaten from the same plate, drank from the same glass, slept on the same bed or rug, while praying to the same God... with fellow Muslims whose skins was the whitest of white, whose eyes the bluest of blue...[for] the first time in my life... I didn't see them as 'white' men."

Malcolm now envisioned spreading Islam to Americans of all races. He wrote to his followers that he could imagine the next generation of white youth adopting Islam and overcoming the long legacy of white racism. People of color in particular would benefit from becoming part of a global community of 750 million Islamic people, many of who had also suffered from white supremacy, and could be potential allies.

Among the Expatriates in Ghana

Before returning to the United States, Malcolm X visited Ghana. In 1957, Ghana had become the first sub-Saharan, black African nation to gain its independence. Many African Americans grew hopeful that Africa, free from colonial rule, would once again become a proud land. The president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, invited black Americans to journey to Ghana to help build the new Africa. Over three hundred joined, including Maya Angelou and Richard Wright, two of the greatest African American novelists; Pauli Murray, one of the first black American activists to put Gandhi's teachings into action; and Julian Mayfield, who had been forced into exile after creating armed self-defense societies to fight the Ku Klux Klan.

The most important African American expatriate to Ghana was W.E.B. Du Bois himself – the greatest black intellectual of the era. Although scorned in the United States as a communist, Du Bois was an international hero, known as the Father of Pan-Africanism and hailed as the leader of global unity against white supremacy. President Kwame Nkrumah was a great admirer of Du Bois, and was so close to Du Bois's wife, Shirley Graham, that he called her "mother." Although Du Bois had died shortly before Malcolm arrived in Ghana, Shirley Graham took Malcolm under her wing, and introduced him to President Nkrumah. Like W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham, the president of Ghana believed that any single African nation, emerging

from colonialism, would be weak and easily exploited. African unity was necessary for African success. While Malcolm had been raised with a vision of African unity, these leaders in Ghana provided Malcolm with a new idea of what Africa needed to unify *against*: the economic system of capitalism.

In Ghana, Malcolm found himself in a community of anti-capitalist revolutionaries who believed that the nature of capitalism was to exploit helpless individuals, communities, and even entire nations in order to make an economic profit and gain power. They believed that without a combination of unity and socialist laws to prevent the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few, it would be easy for large corporations to gain control of the resources of Africa. If this happened, the continent would simply move from an old colonialism, in which Africa was controlled by European governments and military forces, to a new colonialism, in which Africa was controlled by massive foreign corporations, often with the unspoken support of Europe or the United States. The revolutionaries in Ghana believed that just as racism had justified the old colonialism, that it would justify what they now called neocolonialism: the capitalist exploitation of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans.

In the words of historian Manning Marable, when Malcolm returned to the United States, “For the first time, he publicly made the connection between racial oppression and capitalism, saying, ‘It’s impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism.’” What Malcolm meant was that because capitalism relied on exploitation, and because exploitation often relied on racism, that whoever promoted capitalism also promoted racism... whether they did so consciously or not.

This new perspective led Malcolm to claim, in his own words, that “The [capitalist] system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American.” This was exactly the opposite of what he had previously believed: influenced by Marcus Garvey’s and Elijah Muhammad’s teachings, Malcolm had believed that black liberation *depended on* black capitalism – on the development of black businesses and institutions. In Ghana, Malcolm began to think that people of color could not gain their freedom through participating more effectively in an economic system that, in Malcolm’s view, literally depended on racial exploitation.

While in Ghana, Malcolm’s perspectives on race also continued to change. In Ghana, African revolutionaries worked alongside European, Asian, and Latin American revolutionaries, all fighting against neocolonialism and for a united Africa. Some of Kwame Nkrumah’s most trusted advisors were white people. The revolutionaries who Malcolm so admired considered his previous anti-white beliefs to be politically immature. What mattered to them was not race but a shared vision and a willingness to fight for it. Whereas in Mecca, Malcolm had witnessed the racially unifying power of religion, in Ghana, he witnessed the racially unifying power of shared political beliefs. In Mecca he had prayed with whites; in Ghana, he saw the possibility of fighting for freedom alongside them.

Malcolm's time in Ghana also helped him evolve his understanding of gender. For his entire adult life, he had believed in the Nation of Islam's teaching that women were subordinate to men, and that their role was primarily to raise children and take care of the home. In Ghana, Malcolm found himself in an environment where some of the most respected leadership figures were revolutionary women, such as Shirley Graham, who was regularly visited by revolutionaries and dignitaries from across the world, and who made an effort to mentor Malcolm. When he returned to the United States, Malcolm made sure that women had leadership positions in the political organization he founded. He would write to his expatriate friend in Ghana, Maya Angelou, asking her if she would join his cause. She accepted... but Malcolm's life would not last long enough for Angelou to work alongside him.

The Organization of Afro-American Unity

Malcolm returned from his month abroad on May 21st, 1964. With eight months left to live, he went to work creating a new image for himself as a major leader both of civil rights and of Islam. To accomplish this, he downplayed his controversial anti-capitalist perspectives, and elevated the story of how his journey to Mecca had changed his views on whites and provided him with a vision of universal brotherhood.

Before departing for his month abroad, Malcolm had already established his own religious organization, Muslim Mosque Incorporated. He now went to work building a new political organization: the Organization of Afro-American Unity. The name was inspired by the thirty-two African nations that had founded the Organization of African Unity a year earlier to prevent the spread of neocolonialism. The purpose of Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity was to unify the many civil rights groups engaged in the black liberation struggle in the United States – to build what Malcolm called a black united front. Malcolm then planned to link the black united front in the United States, to the united front of African nations against neocolonialism.

Before going public with his new organization, Malcolm gathered with representatives from the major civil rights groups to discuss building the black united front. Martin Luther King was in jail, but a representative was sent to speak on his behalf. Malcolm proposed that it was time to internationalize the black American freedom struggle and to bring human rights abuses against black people in the United States to the United Nations. The group, including King's representative, agreed.

Their agreement was likely based on the fact that civil rights laws were often passed but not enforced, which caused these leaders to increasingly doubt the sincerity of the U.S. government. Some were starting to agree with Malcolm that the passage of laws with no enforcement mechanisms was a purposefully deceitful strategy to fool the world into thinking the U.S. was taking action when it wasn't. By the time

Malcolm gathered these leaders together, the groundbreaking Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* had existed largely unenforced for an entire decade. During that time, black poverty had worsened, and it appeared that the fight against poverty that lay ahead would be far more difficult than the fight against desegregation. For these reasons, as historian Manning Marable writes, civil rights leaders gave Malcolm the task “of contacting those governments in Africa and the Middle East that might be expected to endorse the initiative [of bringing U.S. human rights abuses before the UN.] His subsequent activities abroad in the second half of 1964 were an attempt to implement this strategy.”

Before returning to Africa and the Middle East, Malcolm made a fateful decision. He had come to believe that the Nation of Islam was harming African Americans and preventing the spread of true Islam in the United States. Malcolm now sought to destroy the Nation of Islam. Aware that he was placing his life in danger, he made several major talk show appearances and told the story of the sexual misconduct of Elijah Muhammad. He then returned to Africa and the Middle East – this time, not for one month, but for five. His five months abroad probably allowed him to live five months longer.

Malcolm’s Five Months Abroad

Malcolm’s epiphany at Mecca and his commitment to the struggle against neocolonialism made him a hero in Africa and the Middle East. Arriving in Cairo, the Egyptian government placed him in a luxury suite as a guest of the state. His travel expenses for the entire five months were paid for by the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs, which held a massive reception for Malcolm, and awarded his new organization twenty scholarships to Al-Azhar University – one of the greatest centers of Islamic learning in the world. With the twenty scholarships, Malcolm could provide the leaders of his new Muslim Mosque Incorporated with the best Islamic education possible. Perhaps even more importantly, these scholarships would mean that Malcolm would have twenty of his most trusted people living deep in the heart of the Middle East, where they could build diplomatic ties and strong connections to the world of Islam. The message was clear: the Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs wanted to establish Malcolm X as the leader of Islam in the United States.

From Egypt, Malcolm travelled to Saudi Arabia. As in Egypt, he was a guest of the state with all expenses paid for. Here, Malcolm X was named the World Islamic League’s representative in the United States. The League granted Malcolm’s Muslim Mosque Incorporated fifteen scholarships to the Islamic University of Medina, the second holiest city in Islam. Malcolm also met with Saudi officials to discuss the funding of a mosque to be built in Harlem.

In Cairo, Malcolm attended the Organization of African Unity conference and urged African leaders to go to the United Nations and accuse the U.S. of human rights abuses. Malcolm argued that if they were willing to go before the United Nations

and describe the racist practices of whites in South Africa as human rights abuses, they should be willing to do the same for the United States. While many African leaders privately agreed, the Organization of African Unity rejected Malcolm's proposal. Condemning South Africa was one thing; condemning the most powerful nation on the planet was another. The emerging African nations could not risk turning the United States into an enemy.

Of course, Malcolm didn't give up easily. Believing that he could convince African leaders if he could talk with them in more private settings, Malcolm spent months travelling across Africa. In mid-October, he finally found success: following a speech before the Kenyan parliament, the parliament voted to support Malcolm's human rights proposal. This was all Malcolm needed. If only one leader from one nation accused the United States of human rights abuses at the United Nations, the United Nations as a whole could be forced to take up the debate. Malcolm had taken a major step towards internationalizing the civil rights movement.

Each step Malcolm took, however, placed his life in greater danger. His steps forward as an Islamic leader caused the Nation of Islam to believe that Malcolm was now truly in a position to destroy them. His steps forward in accusing the United States of human rights abuses made the U.S. government view Malcolm as an enemy of the state. When members of the Nation of Islam assassinated Malcolm, police forces knew in advance. When that day came, the police who were usually stationed at Malcolm's events were absent.

In England

In December of 1964, Malcolm X was in England, speaking before the most prestigious debating society in the world: the Oxford Union. He had chosen to speak to an English audience for specific reasons. Despite the changes Malcolm had gone through, the media in the United States continued to portray him as a violent, racist extremist, which made it difficult for Malcolm to recruit members and raise money for his new organizations. In the words of historian Stephen Tuck, the Oxford Union debate appealed to Malcolm "for the prestige and legitimacy it would confer on him and his cause." Unlike the U.S. media, which aired only the most controversial portions of Malcolm's speeches, the BBC promised to air the entire speech live.

Remaking his image was only part of Malcolm's reason for going to England. The future leaders of England's ex-colonies were trained at elite universities such as Oxford, and Malcolm sought to build relationships with these future leaders of Africa and Asia, who could potentially become future allies in the struggle against neocolonialism. Malcolm also sought to build relationships with the common people who had moved to England from the old colonies. Whereas Malcolm viewed the future leaders studying at Oxford as potential allies fighting neocolonialism back in their homelands, he viewed the ex-colonized people living within England – and France as well – as a potential "internal resistance force" that could fight neocolonialism from the inside.

Malcolm admired the way that Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Asians worked together in England to solve the common problem of racism. Returning home, he told his followers that they could accomplish much more if all people of color worked together. Although Malcolm did not allow whites to join his Organization of Afro-American Unity out of his belief that whites often came to dominate the organizations they joined, the organization welcomed all people of color. Malcolm would die in the arms of one of its Japanese members, Yuri Kochiyama, whose family had been forced into internment camps during World War II and who worked with atomic bomb survivors.

Less than two weeks before his death, Malcolm returned to England. Days before speaking at the London School of Economics, he fell sick with the flu. The sickness, however, was a blessing in disguise. Malcolm had been through many changes in the past year, and the sickness gave him much needed space for reflection. He had recently secured the release of his mother, who had been institutionalized for twenty-four years. When his Afro-Caribbean friend Jan Carew came to visit him, it became an opportunity for Malcolm to reflect on his own Afro-Caribbean ancestry.

Malcolm told Jan, "After my father was murdered, she had nine mouths to feed, and she had to do it all by herself. It's only now that I can understand what a terrible life she lived. We all had to pitch in, but she did most of the toiling...night and day, day and night... I used to daydream that when I grew up I'd become a lawyer and give her all the things she never had. And now I realize, too, that seeing her slaving day after day, I began to hate the system that made her life one of endless drudgery."

Jan asked Malcolm if it was true that he had in fact changed, and Malcolm replied, "No. I'm one and the same person, the son of a mother and father who were devoted Garveyites all their lives. The son of a father who was murdered and a mother who was mentally crucified by racists. I'm carrying on the work they started, just as my children will carry on my work when I'm gone. Before they carted my mother off to a mental hospital and tore our family apart, she kept telling us that without an education we'd be like people blindfolded in a forest pockmarked with quicksand. I strayed from those teachings of hers for years, but I came back, didn't I?"

Malcolm had come back to his mother's teachings. In a way. He no longer believed in Marcus Garvey's black separatism. He no longer believed in Garvey's notion that that the development of black capitalism would lead to black liberation. But at the time of his death Malcolm was beginning to build the sort of black united front his parents had raised him to believe in. He was beginning to build a bridge between a unified black America and a unified Africa, as his parents had dreamed of. And through Islam, Malcolm was even laying the hopeful foundations for the Afro-Asian solidarity that Marcus Garvey taught would overcome global white supremacy, and the colonialism and neocolonialism it supported. Malcolm's parents would have been very proud of their son.

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Questions

Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association

1. *Thinking About Movement and Migration:* Why did the Afro-Caribbeans who migrated to Harlem become some of the most radical members of Harlem's black community?
2. *Thinking About Strategy:* How did Marcus Garvey think that people of African ancestry could gain freedom from white domination? Why did he believe that people of African and Asian ancestry should unite?
3. *Thinking About the National Context:* What was going on in the United States during Marcus Garvey's time that led many African Americans to believe that freedom would only come when blacks totally separated from whites?

A Beautiful and Tragic Family

4. *Imagine You Were There:* Imagine you were present at a United Negro Improvement Association meeting with Malcolm's father and mother, Earl Little and Louise Langdon. You are all discussing the possible difficulties with carrying through Marcus Garvey's plans. What difficulties would you mention, and how would you suggest overcoming them?
5. *Thinking About Strategy:* Why did Malcolm's parents teach their children to grow their own food and to learn about the healing powers of different plants? What did this have to do with black liberation?

The Nation of Islam

6. *Thinking About Similarity and Difference:* In what ways were the ideas of Marcus Garvey and the Nation of Islam similar? In what ways were they different?
7. *Thinking About Changing Perspectives:* How did Malcolm first react to the Nation of Islam's belief that white people were "devils," and why did his thoughts change?

The Afro-Asian Conference

8. *Thinking About Global Connections:* Why was Malcolm X inspired by the Afro-Asian Conference? Why did he feel that this event on the other side of the world was relevant to African Americans?

The First Journey Abroad, and the First Doubts

9. *Thinking About Changing Perspectives:* How and why did Malcolm X's views begin to change after his first journey to the Middle East?
10. *Thinking About Public Presentation:* How did Malcolm portray himself in the first chapters of his *Autobiography*, and why? What can this teach us about the challenges of using sources in history?

The Hajj

11. *Thinking About Changing Perspectives:* How, and why, did Malcolm's views on whites change when he took the Hajj?

Among The Expatriates in Ghana

12. *Thinking About Multiple Perspectives:* Describe the different perspectives on capitalism held by Marcus Garvey on the one hand, and the anti-capitalist revolutionaries in Ghana who Malcolm X came to agree with.
13. *Thinking About Changing Perspectives:* How, and why, did Malcolm's views on race continue to change while in Ghana?
14. *Thinking About Changing Perspectives:* How, and why, did Malcolm's views on women change while in Ghana?

The Organization of Afro-American Unity

15. *Thinking About Public Presentation:* When Malcolm returned from Ghana, how did he portray himself to the American public, and why? Why did he choose to downplay certain parts of his thinking, while highlighting others?
16. *Thinking About Strategy:* Describe the strategy of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity.
17. *Thinking About Strategy:* Why did many civil rights leaders agree with Malcolm X that it was time for African Americans to turn to the United Nations for help?

Malcolm's Five Months Abroad

18. *Thinking About Strategy:* Why did Malcolm X think it was important to build ties to Islamic leaders in the Middle East, on the one hand; and African leaders, on the other?

19. *Thinking About Repercussions:* How did Malcolm X's activities abroad place him in danger, and why?

In England

20. *Thinking About Public Presentation:* Why was Malcolm X struggling to portray himself to the American public, and why did he think that debating at the Oxford Union would help?

21. *Thinking About Strategy:* Why did Malcolm X think it was important to build relationships with colonized people living *within* countries like England and France?