**MALCOLM X – excerpt from History.com**

**With a partner, read this article, complete question prompts and fill in definitions where indicated.**

Malcolm X, the activist and outspoken public voice of the Black Muslim faith, challenged the mainstream civil rights movement and the nonviolent pursuit of integration championed by Martin Luther King Jr. He urged followers to defend themselves against white aggression “by any means necessary.”

*What does it mean to be “outspoken”?*

*What does “integration” mean (as it relates to the Civil Rights Movement)?*

*Martin Luther King, Jr. was a proponent (supporter) of non-violence. Malcolm X “challenged the nonviolent pursuit of integration.” What might “nonviolent integration” look like?*

Born Malcolm Little, he changed his last name to “X” to signify his rejection of his “slave” name. Charismatic (charming) and eloquent (persuasive in speech), Malcolm became an influential leader of the Nation of Islam, which combined Islam with black nationalism and sought to encourage and enfranchise (free, liberate) disadvantaged young blacks searching for confidence in segregated (def. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_) America. After Malcolm X’s death in 1965, his bestselling book *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* popularized his ideas, particularly among black youth, and laid the foundation for the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Born Malcolm Little in 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm was the son of a Baptist preacher. After the Ku Klux Klan made threats against his father, the family moved to Lansing, Michigan.

After the eighth grade, Malcolm dropped out of school, headed for a life of crime. When twenty-one, he was sentenced to prison for burglary. In prison he encountered the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, popularly known as the Black Muslims. Muhammad’s belief, that the white man is the devil with whom blacks cannot live, had a strong impact on Malcolm. Turning to an ascetic (very disciplined) way of life and reading widely, he began to overcome the degradation (humiliation, shame) he had known.

*To “read widely” means to read books on a broad range of topics, such as literature, history, philosophy etc. How might “reading widely” expose Malcolm to topics that would help him to overcome degradation?*

The argument that only blacks can cure the ills that afflict them confirmed for Malcolm the power of Muhammad’s faith. He became a loyal disciple and adopted “X” as his last name.

*This use of the word “ills” does not refer to a physical sickness. What kind of sickness might it mean?*

After six years Malcolm was released from prison. Later, he became the minister of Temple No. 7 in Harlem. His indictment (accusation of serious crime) of racism and his advocacy (support) of self-defense elicited (drew out a response of) admiration, as well as fear, far beyond the New York black community. Whites were especially fearful, recoiling (quickly pulling back) from his sustained pronouncements of crimes against his people.

*Why might someone during the Civil Rights Era have admired Malcom X?*

*In what ways might fear have been a useful tool in effecting change during the Civil Rights Movement?*

While most contrasted (showed him to be the opposite) Malcolm with Martin Luther King, Jr., with whose philosophy they were much more at ease, white college students found ugly truths in his searing rhetoric (effective, persuasive speech) of condemnation (strong disapproval).

*Why might white college students be more likely to identify truth in Malcom X’s “rhetoric of condemnation”?*

In 1964, Malcolm left the Black Muslims, traveled to Mecca, and discovered that orthodox Muslims preached equality of the races, which led him to abandon the argument that whites are devils. Malcolm continued to believe, however, that only blacks could free themselves.

In June 1964, he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity and moved increasingly in the direction of socialism. More sophisticated than in his Black Muslim days and of growing moral (*concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character*) stature, he was assassinated by a Black Muslim at a rally of his organization in New York on February 21, 1965.

Malcolm X had predicted that, though he had but little time to live, he would be more important in death than in life. Influenced largely by Malcolm, in the summer of 1966 members of SNCC (pronounced “snick”), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee called for black power for black people.

MLK is known for nonviolent methods while Malcolm X is remembered as someone willing to shed blood for the fight against racism. How then is SNCC a blending of both of these important men?

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/malcolm-x/print>

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