The Life of Malcolm X: Part 1

As a boy

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. His father, a Baptist minister, was an outspoken follower of Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), the Black Nationalist leader. Garvey supported a "back-to-Africa" movement for African Americans. During Malcolm's early years, his family moved several times because of racism. They moved from Omaha, Nebraska, after being threatened by the Ku Klux Klan. While living in an all-white neighborhood in Michigan their house was burned. When Malcolm was six years old, his father was mysteriously murdered. The black community was convinced that white people had committed the crime. White people also murdered three of Malcolm’s four uncles.

By the 1930s the nation had fallen into the Great Depression, a decade-long period of great economic hardship. Work was scarce, and Malcolm's family struggled. For a time his mother and her eight children lived on public welfare. When his mother became mentally ill, Malcolm was sent to a foster home. His mother remained in a mental institution for about twenty-six years. The children were divided among several families, and Malcolm lived in various state institutions and boardinghouses. At thirteen Malcolm was charged with delinquency and was sent to a juvenile detention home. He dropped out of school at the age of fifteen.

A criminal life

Living with his sister in Boston, Massachusetts, Malcolm worked as a shoeshine boy, a busboy, and a waiter. In Boston Malcolm began visiting the black ghetto of Roxbury. There, he was drawn to the neighborhood's street life. He began wearing flashy clothing and jumped into a criminal life that included gambling, selling drugs, and burglary.

In 1942 Malcolm moved to New York City's Harlem neighborhood where he continued his unlawful lifestyle. He adapted well to the New York City street life and rose quickly in the criminal world; where Malcolm became known as Detroit Red. When the police uncovered his criminal activities, Malcolm returned to Boston.

Reformed in prison

In 1946, at the age of twenty, Malcolm was sentenced to ten years in prison for burglary. While in prison he began to transform his life. He began reading books on history, philosophy, and religion. In prison his brother Reginald visited him and told Malcolm about the Black Muslims. The Black Muslims were an Islamic religious organization whose official name was the Lost-Found Nation of Islam. The leader of the group was Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975).

Malcolm began to study Muhammad's teachings and to practice the religion faithfully. These teachings taught that the white man is evil and doomed by Allah to destruction. Also, the teachings stressed that the best course for black people is to separate themselves from Western, white civilization—culturally, politically, physically, and psychologically. The Black Muslim teachings also prohibited personal habits such as smoking, drinking, and the eating of pork. In addition to finding his new religion while in prison, Malcolm began copying words from the dictionary and developed the vocabulary that would help him become a passionate and effective public speaker.

In 1952 Malcolm was released from prison, and he went to Chicago, Illinois, to meet Elijah Muhammad. There he was accepted into the movement and given the name of Malcolm X. Malcolm believed the "X" represented his "slave" name that was forever lost after being raised in a mainly white nation. Malcolm X became assistant minister of the Detroit Mosque Number One. The following year he returned to Chicago to study personally under Muhammad, and shortly thereafter was sent to organize a mosque in Philadelphia, Number 12, Pennsylvania. In 1954 he went to lead the mosque in Harlem, Number 7.

Works Cited

Put this citation at end of the fourth sentence of the second paragraph. Reference the web page “The Life of Malcolm X”.

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