

## Malcolm X champion of equal rights

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Article

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Many Malaysian, especially the younger generation, may not know who Malcolm X is. Some, perhaps, could be excused for thinking that he is a new pop star who just came on the scene. Though a star in his own right, he is not from the entertainment industry.

Malcolm was a revolutionary of the '50s and '60s, an African-American with a social cause fighting what he saw as injustice against his people.

Born as Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925 in the state of Nebraska, US, Malcolm dropped his surname in preference of the alphabet X. This was a symbolic gesture that cut him off from his slavery past and he became a new voice to be heard.

No matter how controversial it was, he preached messages of black pride and independence and championed civil rights. He was uneasy as an African-American as seen in one of his quotes:

"Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner. Being here in American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American."

Malcolm's early experiences were tragic ones. His father, a Baptist minister was killed after receiving threats from the Ku Klux Klan, the white supremacist group. Malcolm became a school drop-out at the age of 15, learning the ways of the streets.

He lost interest in school after being told by a teacher that his ambition to be a lawyer was "no realistic goal for a nigger. Instead, he ended up being convicted of burglary at 20.

He remained in prison for seven years. In prison, he attempted to educate himself. On his release, however, his involvement with Islam gave him a new identity and a different experience.

This led him to perform the haj, which is obligatory for all Muslims. It was an eye opener for Malcolm. When he worshipped alongside Muslims of all colours, he realised that people of different races could be on equal footing.

Thereafter he assumed the name El-Shabazz and denounced his racial stance.

Malcolm was quoted as saying: "I am and always will be a Muslim. My religion is Islam. I am not a racist in any form whatsoever. I don't believe in any form of discrimination or segregation. I believe in Islam. I am a Muslim and there is nothing wrong with being a Muslim. Nothing wrong with the religion of Islam.

"It just teaches us to believe in Allah as the God. Those of you who are Christians probably believe in the same God, because I think you believe in the God Who created the universe.

"That's the One we believe in, the One Who created the universe - the only difference being you call Him God and we call Him Allah. The Jews call Him Jehovah. If you could understand Hebrew, you would probably call Him Jehovah too.

"If you could understand Arabic, you would probably call Him Allah...."

This is a message so relevant to today's America.

Like the other black civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Malcolm was gunned down. It happened four decades ago last week, on Feb 21, 1965.

Malcolm has earned more than his place in history, being right up there together with King and Nelson Mandela "in the pantheon of leaders of 20th century black history".

His legacy will continue to move through generations as the subject of numerous discussions, research, documentaries, books and movies.

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