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Publisher’s foreword

Having long been an uncompromising fighter for Black rights and foe of Washington’s imperialist policies abroad, Malcolm X went through a rapid political evolution to carefully thought-out anticapitalist and, then, prosocialist positions during the last year of his life. That process was cut short by his brutal assassination on February 21, 1965.

This political evolution places the works of Malcolm X on Pathfinder’s list of published writings and speeches alongside those of Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, Maurice Bishop, Nelson Mandela, Thomas Sankara, and Carlos Fonseca. These leaders, too, each in their particular way, traveled the road through hard-fought national liberation struggles to broader internationalist perspectives and revolutionary action. In doing so, they led millions of workers and farmers in changing the world.

This has been a clear pattern of the world revolution since World War II. Malcolm X is thus far the outstanding representative of this pattern to emerge from the working class in the United States.

Because of the importance of Malcolm X’s ideas and activity to the renewal of revolutionary leadership on a world scale, Pathfinder moved quickly following his assassination in February 1965 to publish the writings and speeches in which he presented his rapidly evolving views. This publishing effort
produced Two Speeches by Malcolm X (1965), Malcolm X Talks to Young People (1965), Malcolm X Speaks (1965), Malcolm X on Afro-American History (1967), By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews and a Letter by Malcolm X (1970), and more recently the Spanish-language Habla Malcolm X (1984). These books largely exhausted the pool of writings and speeches by Malcolm from this period that were known to be available for publication.

Understandably, then, Pathfinder was pleased to be approached by Dr. Bruce Perry to publish several speeches and interviews that he had tracked down (by efforts described in his introduction to this volume) while writing a biography of Malcolm X that is scheduled to be published in 1990. Some of these items were transcribed from tape recordings obtained from James Shabazz. Shabazz was a co-leader with Malcolm X of the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

There are no startling revelations in these new materials.* They do not appreciably alter the political legacy left by Malcolm X, nor could they. Like other great modern revolutionists, Malcolm sought a wide variety of platforms from which to explain his ideas to the widest possible public. And he sought to collaborate with and learn from others who were thinking and acting as revolutionists. Malcolm X’s views can be read and studied in the collections cited above.

At the same time, the new materials collected here are not just “more speeches” by Malcolm X. This volume includes two of his last public speeches, given during the final week of his

* The one partial exception is the important new information presented by Malcolm X in a February 15, 1965, speech about the secret negotiations he entered into at the initiative of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad with leaders of the racist and ultrarightist Ku Klux Klan. While these matters had been noted in passing in press coverage at the time, and are referred to in Peter Goldman’s The Death and Life of Malcolm X (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), what Malcolm X himself — from the standpoint of a direct participant in these talks — actually said about them on the only occasion that he publicly discussed this matter has never before been in print.
life. One was delivered in Harlem on February 15 to a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity; the other the following night to an audience in Rochester, New York. Two other items are important interviews from December 1964 that shed light on how Malcolm X began to articulate the evolution of his thinking in light of experiences during his second extended trip to the Middle East and Africa from July through November of that year.

It is easier to understand the development of Malcolm X's political perspectives during his final months by knowing something about the far-reaching conclusions he had already come to prior to his public break with the Nation of Islam in March 1964. Both the continuity and change are illuminated in two speeches, from early and late 1963, that are published here for the first time.

Many views that Malcolm X maintained to his dying day are presented powerfully in these 1963 speeches: steadfast opposition to Jim Crow segregation; fierce pride in the African roots of Black people; refusal to speak about himself as an “American” or about the U.S. government and armed forces as “our” government and “our” army; emphasis on the need to look at all events “in the international context”; recognition of the Democratic and Republican parties as organizations of the racist and imperialist oppressors; support for the right of self-defense against racist terror, including armed self-defense where necessary; identification with national liberation struggles throughout Africa, Asia, and the Americas; repudiation of the illusion that justice can ever be advanced by relying on the good-heartedness of the oppressors and exploiters, or some common humanity shared with them.

At the same time, reading these 1963 speeches in conjunction with the 1964 interviews and the two 1965 public talks serves to underline the changes that his political views had undergone in the months prior to the assassination. The reader will learn firsthand about Malcolm X’s political evolution on a broad range of questions:
1. **Who are the racist oppressors.** In 1963 Malcolm X expressed the view that the “black, brown, red, and yellow” peoples of the earth “had an oppressor in common, an exploiter in common — the European,” that is, whites, regardless of their deeds. In his Rochester speech, on February 16, 1965, he presented a different view:

“We don’t judge a man because of the color of his skin. We don’t judge you because you’re white; we don’t judge you because you’re black; we don’t judge you because you’re brown. We judge you because of what you do and what you practice. . . . So we’re not against people because they’re white. But we’re against those who practice racism. We’re against those who drop bombs on people because their color happens to be of a different shade than yours.”

2. **Anti-imperialism.** During his final months, Malcolm X began to present a clear explanation of who he had in mind in speaking of “those who practice racism” and “those who drop bombs on people because [of] their color.”

   In his December 27, 1964, radio interview, Malcolm X hailed those United Nations representatives who were “openly accusing the United States,” as well as the European colonial powers, “of being an imperialist power and of practicing racism.” In his Harlem speech on February 15, 1965, he expanded on this theme. “There’s a worldwide revolution going on,” Malcolm said. “[W]hat is it revolting against? The power structure. . . . An international power structure consisting of American interests, French interests, English interests, Belgian interests, European interests. . . . A structure, a house that has ruled the world up until now.”

3. **Internationalism and Black liberation.** The evolution in Malcolm X’s views on these matters led him to new political conclusions about the road forward for Black liberation. In his Rochester speech he summarized the position he had come to during the previous several months:

   “Any kind of movement for freedom of Black people based solely within the confines of America is absolutely doomed to
fail. . . . So one of the first steps that we became involved in, those of us who got into the Organization of Afro-American Unity, was to come up with a program that would make our grievances international and make the world see that our problem was no longer a Negro problem or an American problem but a human problem. A problem for humanity. And a problem that should be attacked by all elements of humanity.”

(Malcolm X’s views on marriages between Blacks and whites were another reflection of his evolving internationalism and changing outlook on who is responsible for racist oppression. In the January 23, 1963, speech published here and in others given during that earlier period, Malcolm put substantial emphasis on the Nation of Islam’s opposition to such marriages. During the last months of his life Malcolm publicly changed his opinion. In a January 1965 interview cited in Malcolm X Speaks (p. 197), he explained: “I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being — neither white, black, brown, or red; and when you are dealing with humanity as a family there’s no question of integration or intermarriage. It’s just one human being marrying another human being, or one human being living around and with another human being. I may say, though, that . . . I don’t think the burden to defend any position should ever be put upon the black man, because it is the white man collectively who has shown that he is hostile toward integration and toward intermarriage and toward these other strides toward oneness.”)

4. Political action. Those who had split away from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm explained in the Rochester speech, “were the real activists of the movement who were intelligent enough to want some kind of program that would enable us to fight for the rights of all Black people here in the Western Hemisphere.” In the Nation, he said, “[B]ecause we were never permitted to take part in politics, we were in a vacuum politically. We were in a religious vacuum; we were in a political vacuum. We were actually alienated, cut off from all type of activity with even the world that we were fighting against. We became sort of a
religious-political hybrid, all to ourselves. Not involved in anything but just standing on the sidelines condemning everything. But in no position to correct anything because we couldn’t take action.

“Yet at the same time, the nature of the movement was such that it attracted the activists,” Malcolm X explained. “Those who wanted action. Those who wanted to do something about the evils that confronted all Black people.”

5. Civil rights struggles. This shift toward political action changed the approach taken by Malcolm X to the mass civil rights movement that, through a decade of hard-fought and bloody battles, succeeded in battering down the Jim Crow system of segregation by the mid-1960s. In his October 1963 speech he was still referring to this movement in largely derisive terms. For example, he spoke of the mass August 1963 civil rights mobilization of 250,000 people in the U.S. capital as “the recent ridiculous march on Washington.”

In his February 15, 1965, speech, however, Malcolm X explained that the U.S. government was so upset about his break from the Nation of Islam because “all those militants who formerly were in it and were held in check would immediately become involved in the civil rights struggle, and they would add the same kinds of energy to the civil rights struggle that they gave to the Black Muslim movement.”

Malcolm X himself had just returned from the civil rights encampment in Selma, Alabama. As he told the audience in his Harlem speech to the OAAU, “I promised the brothers and sisters in Alabama when I was there that we’d be back. I’ll be back, you’ll be back, we’ll be back.”

6. Religion and political organization. These conclusions convinced Malcolm X that — while he himself remained a devout and practicing Muslim and continued his work in the Muslim Mosque, Inc. — a new kind of independent and secular political organization had to be constructed. This organization had to be open to all Blacks, regardless of religious or other secular beliefs, who agreed on the need to organize a fight around
common political goals. Even while still in the Nation of Islam, he said in the Rochester speech, those who shared his dissatisfaction had become less and less “concerned with the religion of the Black man. Because whether he was a Methodist or a Baptist or an atheist or an agnostic, he caught the same hell.”

With this in mind, the Organization of Afro-American Unity was launched in June 1964. The OAAU, as Malcolm X explained in the Rochester speech, “is a nonreligious organization . . . structured organizationally to allow for active participation of any Afro-American, any Black American, in a program that is designed to eliminate the negative political, economic, and social evils that our people are confronted by in this society.”

7. Women’s political and social advancement. Just as Malcolm X’s evolving perspective necessitated reaching out to fellow fighters on a political basis regardless of their views on religious matters, it also meant recognizing the need to involve women on an equal footing in the battles. In his 1963 speeches, Malcolm X was still presenting a view of women as subordinate to men, with their place restricted to hearth and home. By December 1964, however, he had this to say:

“One thing I noticed in both the Middle East and Africa, in every country that was progressive, the women were progressive. In every country that was underdeveloped and backward, it was to the same degree that the women were undeveloped, or underdeveloped, and backward. . . . [I]t’s noticeable that in these type of societies where they put the woman in a closet and discourage her from getting a sufficient education and don’t give her the incentive by allowing her maximum participation in whatever area of the society where she’s qualified, they kill her incentive. . . . So in the African countries where they opt for mass education, whether it be male or female, you find that they have a more valid society, a more progressive society.”

Many other examples of Malcolm X’s political evolution can be traced through these pages. Readers will also need to go to other collections of his writings and speeches to learn about
the development of his views on a number of additional important matters: his growing anticapitalism, his decision in the last months of his life to no longer define his viewpoint as “Black nationalism,” the question of alliances between political organizations of Blacks such as the OAAU and other organizations of the oppressed and exploited.

The speeches collected for this volume by Bruce Perry, then, make an important addition to our knowledge of the political ideas of Malcolm X and the experiences that shaped their development. The importance of making this material available was well explained some twenty-three years ago at a March 1965 memorial meeting for Malcolm X sponsored by the Militant Labor Forum in New York City. Appropriately, the speaker was James 67X Shabazz, who provided a number of the speeches published here.* Shabazz said:

“Malcolm’s body lies in a grave. His words lie neatly couched on papers and mysteriously captured on recording tapes, but Malcolm’s thoughts, like invisible seeds, have been planted in the minds of oppressed peoples in America, in Africa, in the Middle East, and in Europe. And many men in different places, at different times, and in different languages will clothe these thoughts in the garments that are necessary for them to fit the different conditions. Malcolm’s thoughts will only die when all people — especially of African origin — are free as Malcolm wanted us to be.”

Steve Clark
February 1989

* Shabazz’s speech was printed in the March 15, 1965, issue of the Militant newsweekly published in New York. Excerpts from a speech by Jack Barnes given at the same meeting are available in Malcolm X Talks to Young People, published by Pathfinder.
Chronology

May 19, 1925 – Malcolm Little born in Omaha, Nebraska
February 1946 – Sentenced in Massachusetts to 8–10 years imprisonment for burglary; serves 6½ years
1948–1949 – Conversion to Islam
August 1952 – Paroled from prison
1953 – Having renamed himself “Malcolm X,” he becomes an assistant minister of the Nation of Islam’s Temple Number 1, located in Detroit
June 1954 – Becomes minister of Harlem, New York, temple
1959 – First trip to the Middle East and Africa
April 1963 – Confronts Elijah Muhammad about his adultery
December 1963–February 1964 – Elijah Muhammad orders Malcolm to remain silent, allegedly because of his barbed, unauthorized remarks about President Kennedy’s assassination. Malcolm becomes isolated within his own movement
March 1964 – Announces founding of Muslim Mosque, Inc.
April-May 1964 – Second trip to Africa and the Middle East
June 1964 – First public meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity
July-November 1964 – Third trip to Africa
February 14, 1965 – A firebomb lays waste to Malcolm’s home
February 21, 1965 – Assassinated in New York City