Introduction

If one had to select one historical personality within the period 1940 to 1975 who best represented and reflected black urban life, politics, and culture in the United States, it would be extremely difficult to find someone more central than the charismatic figure of Malcolm X/El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1925, and growing up in the Midwest, young Malcolm Little was the child of political activists who supported the militant black nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey. After his father’s violent death and his mother’s subsequent institutionalization due to mental illness, Little was placed in foster care and for a time in a youth detention facility. At age sixteen he left school, relocating to Boston upon the invitation of his older half-sister, Ella Little. During World War II, the zoot-suited “Detroit Red” became a small-time hustler, burglar, and narcotics dealer in Harlem and Roxbury. In January 1946, Little was arrested for burglary and weapons possession charges, and received a ten-year sentence in the Massachusetts prison system. While incarcerated, Little’s siblings introduced him to the Nation of Islam, a tiny black nationalist-oriented religious movement led by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Converting to the NOI’s version of Islam, Little experienced a spiritual and intellectual epiphany behind bars. Emerging from prison in August 1952, as Malcolm X, the talented and articulate young convert was soon the assistant minister of the NOI’s Detroit Temple No. 1.

The actual public career of Minister Malcolm X was, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, remarkably and tragically short. In 1954, Malcolm X was named minister of Harlem’s Temple No. 7, which he led for just short of a decade. As an itinerant spokesman for black nationalism, Malcolm X traveled constantly across the country, winning thousands of new converts to the NOI. Between 1955 and 1961, Malcolm X was personally responsible for establishing more than one hundred Muslim temples or mosques throughout the U.S. As the chief public spokesperson for Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm built the NOI from a marginal sect
to a spiritual organization of over one hundred thousand. By the early 1960s, Malcolm X was a widely celebrated (and feared) public speaker and debater at universities and in the national media. The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s efforts to discredit the Nation and its leaders led the agency to engage in illegal acts of wiretapping, surveillance, disruption, and harassment.

In 1960 Malcolm X established the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks*, which by the end of the decade would have a national circulation of 600,000, the most widely-read black-owned newspaper in the country. However, by this time, serious divisions developed between Malcolm X and the NOI’s patriarch, Elijah Muhammad, and his coterie of organizational leaders based in Chicago, over a number of issues. Malcolm X was personally dismayed when it was publicly revealed that Muhammad had fathered a number of children out of wedlock. He also chafed under the NOI’s political conservatism and its refusal to support civil rights protests. In March, 1964, Malcolm X announced publicly his break from the NOI. He soon created two new organizations, the Muslim Mosque, Inc., designed for former NOI members as a spiritually-based group, and the secular-oriented Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). Now reaching out to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., James Farmer, and other civil rights leaders, Malcolm X proposed a broad coalition of black activist organizations, working in concert to achieve social justice.

Converting to orthodox Islam, Malcolm X completed his spiritual hajj to Mecca in April, 1964, and returned to the United States the next month as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. During his two extended journeys through Africa and the Middle East in 1964, Malcolm X gained new insights into the problem of racism. In his *Autobiography*, he later wrote: “I was no less angry than I had been, but at the same time the true brotherhood I had seen had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision.” He now believed that race war was not inevitable, and felt that “America is the first country ... that can actually have a bloodless revolution.”

Malcolm X’s new political strategy called for building black community empowerment, through tools such as voter registration and education, economic self-sufficiency, and the development of independent politics. He called upon African Americans to transform the civil rights movement into a struggle for international human rights. Malcolm X emphasized the parallels between the African-American struggle for equality and the Asian, Latino, and African campaigns against European colonialism. Malcolm X also drew attention for criticizing the growing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

Upon Malcolm X’s return to the United States in November 1964, death threats escalated against him and his family. In the early morning hours of February 14, 1965, his home in Elmhurst, Queens, was firebombed. On Sunday afternoon,
February 21, 1965, just before delivering an address at the Audubon Ballroom, Malcolm X/El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz was assassinated before a crowd of hundreds of people, including his pregnant wife Betty Shabazz and children.

The profound religious and political sojourn of Malcolm X was hardly noticed in the immediate aftermath of his assassination. The New York Times editorialized that Malcolm was “an irresponsible demagogue” and “an extraordinary and twisted man,” who had utilized his “true gifts to evil purpose.” Time magazine declared that the dead leader was “an unashamed demagogue” whose “gospel was hatred.” But others saw Malcolm X more clearly. President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana sent a telegram of condolence to Malcolm’s widow, saying that “your husband lived a life of dedication for human equality and dignity so that the Afro-American and people of color everywhere may live as man. His work in the cause of freedom will not be in vain ...”

Today, over forty years after his assassination, the world largely views Malcolm X as a champion of human rights. His Autobiography of Malcolm X, co-authored with Alex Haley, has sold millions of copies worldwide, and in 1999 was judged by Time magazine as one of the ten “most important non-fiction works of the twentieth century.”

In 2000, the Malcolm X Project at Columbia University was established primarily to accomplish two goals: (1) to construct a web-based, multimedia version of The Autobiography of Malcolm X, embedding more than one thousand pieces of data – e.g., videotaped interviews, FBI documents, personal correspondence by Malcolm X, audiotaped sermons and speeches – into the text; and the completion of a full-length, detailed biography of the subject. The multimedia version of the Autobiography was constructed between 2001 and 2004 with the support of Columbia University’s Office of the Provost. The biographical research on Malcolm X has, to date, produced a chapter on the subject in Living Black History (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), and a book-in-progress, to be published by Viking/Penguin Books in 2009. In the process, we have also constructed a significant “Malcolm X Archive” of thousands of articles, FBI documents, rare audiotape recordings of speeches and interviews related to Malcolm X.

This seminar on the life and times of Malcolm X provides an original and challenging reinterpretation of one of the most prominent American leaders of the twentieth century. By the end of the seminar, I hope you will come to appreciate the meaning of literary scholar Edward Said’s remark, when he suggested in his book, Representations of the Intellectual that the goal of non-Western intellectuals “cannot be to replace a white policeman with his native counterpart, but rather ... the invention of new souls.” Malcolm Little invented and re-invented himself many times, as “Detroit Red,” “Jack Carlton” (in 1944, when Malcolm worked briefly as a bar entertainer and drummer at Manhattan’s
Lobster Pond nightclub), “Satan” (during Malcolm’s first year in prison), “Malcolm X,” and “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.” But in a larger political context, Malcolm strove to motivate the construction of “new souls.” Oppressed people, Malcolm X had learned, could not become free unless they were first made to feel themselves to be “new souls.”

**SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS**

There are several essential components which are required for the successful completion of this seminar:

1. Class participation and attendance: Students are expected to read the required readings before each class. All students are expected to participate in class discussions, and to miss a minimum number of classes. All students must regularly post comments on Blackboard at least once every two weeks (6 times) – either about the required readings, or about issues discussed in previous classes – throughout the course, beginning in Week II. The class participation grade includes the quality of our CourseWorks postings, regular attendance, individual visits with the professors, and most of all, willingness to raise thoughtful questions and to engage in discussion with other students. Class participation and attendance constitute **20 percent of the total course grade**.

2. Class short paper and oral presentation of the required week’s readings. All students in the seminar will present a brief overview or synopsis of the main themes and topics discussed in one of the weekly required readings, covering Weeks III through Week XII. Each weekly presentation includes: (1) a two-page summary of the major points of themes that the authors discuss in their papers, which must be posted on our course webpage no later than Friday by 12:00 noon prior to the date of the Monday seminar meeting; (2) a brief, ten-minute oral presentation to the seminar on the key ideas and themes in the readings; and (3) answering questions about the readings, and leading the seminar in a discussion on the readings for forty-five minutes. All three components – the two-page paper posted on Friday, the oral presentation, and the quality of your discussion – constitute **20 percent of your total course grade**.

If there are two or more students who are assigned to present during a particular week, all students must review all of the readings in their respective individual summaries. During their brief oral presentations, student may choose to focus their remarks on specific texts, dividing materials with other presenters. However, all presenters are expected to be able to answer any questions pertaining to all of the readings.

3. A brief bibliography, written summary, and brief oral presentation or research papers-in-progress. At the EXTRA seminar meeting of Week VII (Tuesday,
November 6 from 4:15-6), all students will give a brief, five-minute overview of their research paper which includes a list of books, journal articles, archival materials (if relevant), newspaper articles, and other important sources about their subject, plus a 150 to 250 word description of the key themes or issues they want to examine about the subject. These bibliographies and short papers must be posted on our Blackboard webpage no later than Friday, November 2, by 12:00 noon prior to the Tuesday afternoon seminar meeting. Both components – the two-page bibliography and written summary, and your oral presentation – constitute **10 percent of your total course grade**. (Students who cannot attend class on November 6 will present on Monday, November 5.)

4. Present research papers-in-progress to the class for discussion and evaluation during Week XI (December 3). All students will give a five-minute oral presentation of their research paper, followed by questions from the seminar students and Professor Marable about their papers. The papers-in-progress must be posted on our Blackboard website no later than Friday, November 30 by 5:00 p.m.. Both components – the paper-in-progress, and your oral presentation and ability to answer questions pertaining to your topic – constitute **10 percent of your total course grade**.

5. Final seminar research paper. Each student must write a 20-page-paper excluding a bibliography and footnotes. Research papers should be at least 20 typed, double-spaced pages, plus footnotes and a one-page bibliography of sources used in the preparation of the paper. The papers are due **Thursday, December 6, 2007, not later than 5:00 p.m.** You will submit your paper electronically, via email.

You may utilize the texts in the required readings as part of the materials in the construction of your papers. The seminar paper is **40 percent of the total course grade**.

Late papers will be accepted up to and including **December 13, 2007**, but will be penalized by two points, plus one additional point for every day that they are late. Please be aware of my late grade policy. I do not grant incompletes or extensions for unfinished work. It is far better to turn in a paper that is “not quite finished” than to turn it in eight days late. The exceptions made to the incomplete policy are for reasons of medical and/or family emergencies. These exceptions must be required in writing prior to the final day of class, December 3. 
COURSE EVALUATION AND GRADING

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<tr>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Class attendance, biweekly Blackboard postings, and participation in class discussions:</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
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<td>2) Class short paper (2 pages on course webpage posted by Friday, 12:00 noon), and oral presentation (10 minutes length) of the required week’s readings, and 40 minute class discussions:</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
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<td>3) A brief bibliography, written summary and oral presentation of research papers-in-progress, on Tuesday, November 6:</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Presentation of research papers-in-progress and class discussion, on December 3 (posted by Nov. 30):</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Final seminar research paper due Thursday, Dec. 6:</td>
<td>40 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL COURSE GRADE:</td>
<td>100 percent</td>
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REQUIRED READINGS:


4) Marable, Manning, ed., Malcolm X Sourcebook (2007). (All of the readings in the Sourcebook have been digitized and are available on the Blackboard.)

5) Multimedia Study Environment (MSE), The Autobiography of Malcolm X.


8) www.malcolmxproject.net. The website contains short interviews and materials that should be read for the seminar.

A number of required readings for the course are on Blackboard, and are indicated in the syllabus under the specific weeks that they are assigned.
RECOMMENDED VIEWING:
E-course, “Malcolm X: Life After Death.”
wwwapp.cc.Columbia.edu/ccnmtl/app/portfolio/results_zx.jsp.

OPTIONAL READING:
Some of these texts should be available at the Williams College Library:


SEMinar Calendar: “Malcolm X: A Life of reinvention”
Seminar – Fall 2007 – At A Glance:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Sept. 10</td>
<td>Introduction to the seminar’s requirements; introduction to MSE; and background on Malcolm X; biography, <em>Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention</em>.</td>
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<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>[Fall Reading Period: No Class.]</td>
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<td>VI</td>
<td>Oct. 22</td>
<td>Malcolm X, M. L. King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement.</td>
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<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>[Class Canceled]</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>The Silencing, Muhammad Ali, and Out: December, 1963 – April 1964.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Nov. 6</td>
<td>Extra class meeting, 4:15 – 6:00 p.m. Students Report on Papers in Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Nov. 19</td>
<td>1965: The Final Months.</td>
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<td>XII</td>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>Presentation of Research Papers, posted Nov. 30.</td>
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<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>Final Research papers are due, 5 p.m. electronically</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 13</td>
<td>Final date for submitting research papers with late penalty.</td>
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Course Schedule and Reading Assignments


Introduction to the seminar; review of seminar requirements; introduction to website, www.malcolmxproject.net; introduction to the “Multimedia Study Environment (MSE) Autobiography; and a lecture about my biography, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.

Readings:
3. MSE: Chapter 1.
II. September 17: “Malcolm’s Childhood, the Legend of ‘Detroit Red,’ and Background on Islam in Black America.”

Readings:
2. MSE: Chapters 2-9.
5. Blackboard readings:
   (3) Rodnell Collins, *Seventh Child*, Chapter 4, pp. 38-47.
6. [www.malcolmxproject.net](http://www.malcolmxproject.net). Required viewing of interviews in section, “Malcolm X’s Childhood, ‘Detroit Red,’ and Islam in Black America.” Include commentaries by scholars Robin D.G. Kelley, Louis DeCaro, Jr., and Farah Jasmine Griffin, as well as Peter Bailey, a member of Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).


Readings:
4. Blackboard readings:
   (1) Rodnell Collins, *Seventh Child*, Chapter 6, pp. 70-82.
   (2) C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, Chapters 1, 4-5, pp. 31, 63-129.


Readings:
2. MSE: Chapter 14.
4. Blackboard readings:

5. Sourcebook readings (available on Blackboard):
   (14) “Malcolm X Explains Wee-Hour Visit to Castro at Theresa,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 1, 1960, p. 3.


Readings:
3. MSE:
   (1) Chapters 15-16.
   (2) Multimedia Index: Malcolm X, *Message to the Grass Roots*, November 10, 1963 (to be listened to in conjunction with the readings in Breitman)
4. Blackboard readings:
5. Sourcebook readings (available on Blackboard):
   (5) “In Los Angeles Riot: Charge Muslim was ‘Murdered’,” *Amsterdam News*, May 5, 1962, pp. 1, 40.


VI. October 22: “Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Politics of Civil Rights, 1962-1963.”

Readings:
2. Blackboard readings:
3. Sourcebook readings (available on Blackboard):
   (2) ”X Marks the Spot,” *Newsweek*, May 6, 1963, p. 28.
5. George Breitman, ed., Malcolm X Speaks, pp. 3-17.


Readings:
2. Blackboard readings:
3. Sourcebook readings:


VIII. EXTRA CLASS MEETING NOVEMBER 6: Student Short Papers and Seminar Presentations.

All students present a brief, two-page bibliography and written summary (250 to 500 words) of their prospective research paper topics. Bibliographies and summaries must be posted on Blackboard not later than Friday, November 2, 12:00 noon. Each student must also give a five-minute oral presentation of his/her topic to the seminar.


Readings:
4. MSE: Chapters 17-18.
5. Blackboard readings:

6. Sourcebook readings (available on Blackboard):

X. November 19: “1965: The Final Months.”

Readings:
3. MSE:
   (1) Chapter 19.
   (2) Multimedia Index: Malcolm X, “Zanzibar,” OAAU rally at the Audubon Ballroom, Harlem, December 13, 1964 (to be listened to in conjunction with “At the Audubon” in Breitman).
7. Sourcebook readings (available on Blackboard):


Readings:

2. Blackboard readings:

3. Sourcebook readings:


**XII. December 3: Presentation of Research Papers.**

Students post on Blackboard their research papers-in-progress. Students each must give 5-minute oral presentations about their papers, and answer questions at the seminar meeting.

**XIII. Thursday, December 6:** All final research papers must be submitted to me electronically (at mm247@columbia.edu) by 5:00 p.m. Papers submitted after this date/time will be considered late.

**Thursday, December 13:** Final date for the submission of late research papers, with late penalty.