

Malcolm X

Malcolm X was one of the most famous civil rights activist from America; his ideas laid the foundations for the black power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Early Years

He was born on the 19th May, 1925, as Malcolm Little, in Omaha, Nebraska. His mother, Louise, was mother to eight children, whom she protected from attacks by white racists organisations. His father, Earl Little, was a Baptist minister and a supporter of the Black Nationalists civil rights group for which he received death threats. In 1929, after they had moved to Lansing in Michigan due to these threats, their house was burned to the ground. Two years later, his father was killed by the Black Legion, who were a white racist organisation.



Prison

Malcolm's family fell apart after his father's death as his mother could not cope. Malcolm and his siblings ended up in care. Eventually, Malcolm and a friend moved back to Boston, but he was arrested for burglary and was given a ten-year prison sentence (he eventually served seven of those years). During his time in prison, he spent time furthering his education and visits from his brother inspired him to learn about the Muslim religion and the Nation of Islam (NOI), who supported African-Americans working to have equal rights within America.

The Next Step

By the time Malcolm left prison in 1952, he was a spokesperson for the NOI. He also changed his name to Malcolm X. He said that 'Little' was his slave name and that 'X' signified what his real, tribal name should be.

He was very successful in the NOI and helped their membership rise from 500 to 30 000 people in just one year. However as he was getting more popular, he was coming to the attention of the government and they started to survey him as they saw him as a threat. In 1964, he left the NOI after some disagreement and he set up his own organisation, the Muslim Mosque Inc.

Family

By 1958, he had married a nurse, Betty Shabazz (AKA as Betty X), and they went on to have six daughters. However, family life was not easy due to Malcolm's high profile and there were several attempts on his life. On 14th February, 1965, their home in New York was fire-bombed, but thankfully no one was harmed.

Death

On 21st February, 1965, just a week after their house was fire-bombed, Malcolm was assassinated by three men as he spoke to a crowd of people in Manhattan. He was just 39-years-old. Over 1500 people came to his funeral in Harlem where friends even took over to dig his grave. Later that year, his twin girls Malaak and Malikah were born and were named after him. Even though he died in 1965, his memory and work lives on through books, the Internet and films, and his quotes are still as important as ever...

“Without education, you're not going anywhere in this world.”

Malcolm X

Malcolm X Questions

1. What did the 'X' in his name stand for and why did he change it?

2. If Malcolm X was a civil rights activist, what were his main beliefs?

3. How old was Malcolm when his father was killed?

4. Find a fronted adverbial in the prison paragraph.

5. How did Malcolm's brother inspire him?

6. In the family paragraph, the author writes '(AKA Betty X)' - what does AKA stand for?

7. In the family paragraph, the author writes that Malcolm had a 'high profile', what does this mean?

8. What evidence for Malcolm's high profile can you find in The Next Step paragraph?

9. Reading the story of Malcolm X and his high profile, do you think having a low profile might have saved his life? If so, why do you think that he chose not to keep a low profile?

10. What do you think the final quote means and do you agree? Explain your reasons.
