

MALCOLM X: A MAN AHEAD OF HIS TIME

MALCOLM X  
A MAN AHEAD OF HIS TIME

By  
JOHN NIGEL BLACKMORE B.A. Hons.

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AUTHOR: John Nigel Blackmore B.A. Hons. (University of Warwick, 1968)

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For the freedom of my 22 million black brothers and sisters here in America, I do believe that I have fought the best that I know how, and the best that I could, with the shortcomings that I have had. I know that my shortcomings are many.

Malcolm X. Autobiography, 1965.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to analyse the political ideas of Malcolm X as they developed during the last year of his life. Attention will be focussed primarily on Malcolm's last year as it was during this period that Malcolm X began to develop and expound independent ideas of his own, whereas previously he had been the chief national spokesman for the Nation of Islam which was headed and closely controlled by Elijah Muhammad.

The thesis is undertaken in the belief that Malcolm's ideas continue to be subject to misinterpretation. Individuals of differing political persuasions have abstracted in isolation various ideas which Malcolm X advocated at different stages of his development and have represented them as Malcolm's final position. The aim of this thesis is thus to examine how Malcolm's ideas developed after his split from the Nation of Islam so that his overall position at the time of his assassination can be understood. In order to allow a clearer understanding of the evolution of Malcolm's ideas, an attempt will be made to place Malcolm X in the context of his time. To this end the thesis is organised into four chapters.

Chapter I is an analysis of the pattern of Negro protest during the period 1954-1964. The purpose of this chapter is to allow Malcolm X to be considered in relation to the main trend of black protest in his time. Chapter II is a brief examination of the form of protest represented

by the Nation of Islam, of which Malcolm was a member for twelve years. This is necessary so that a clearer understanding may be possible of the evolution of Malcolm's ideas in the period following his split from the organisation.

Chapter III is the main body of the thesis, and is concerned with an analysis of the development of Malcolm's ideas in the last year of his life. The chapter is split into two sections for reasons which are explained in the preface to Section One. Section One deals with an analysis of Malcolm's ideas in the period immediately following the split from the Nation of Islam. Section Two is an examination of Malcolm's ideas as they developed during the final ten months of his life. It will be argued in this chapter that the development of Malcolm's ideas was conditioned by his analysis of the race problem in America. Chapter IV is an attempt to examine briefly whether or not the ideas which Malcolm X advocated continued to be of importance in the context of the black freedom struggle since Malcolm's death.

## I

### THE PATTERN OF NEGRO PROTEST 1954-1964.

The purpose of this chapter is to place Malcolm X in the context of the Negro protest movement of his time. The wave of Negro unrest and dissatisfaction which has swept America in the 1960s has been variously termed the Negro 'Protest', 'Revolt', 'Revolution' and, more recently, the black liberation struggle. The struggle for black freedom in America in the latter half of the twentieth century has passed through various phases since the landmark Supreme Court ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education case of 1954<sup>1</sup>. This chapter will thus be concerned with a brief account of the development of the black freedom struggle and an analysis of the goals and methods which characterised its leadership up until early 1964, when Malcolm X announced his departure from the Nation of Islam. By indicating the broad pattern of the Negro protest movement and the ideas and methods advocated by its leadership, a clearer understanding will then be possible of the development of Malcolm X's ideas during the last year of his life.

The Supreme Court school desegregation decision of May 17<sup>th</sup> 1954 gave many Negroes hope that the path now lay open for eventual full

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<sup>1</sup> Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

participation in the mainstream of American life<sup>2</sup>. However, this cautious early optimism was not borne out by the realities of white Southern reaction to the desegregation decision. The Brown v. Board of Education decision was the result of many years of painstaking and complicated legal research by the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, an offshoot of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). The NAACP had borne the brunt of the struggle for Negro equality in the previous fifty years. Thus the Brown decision was a day of triumph for Thurgood Marshall and other leaders of the NAACP:

"They had proved their right to claim the leadership of the millions of Negroes in the United States, even though the actual membership of the association included less than two per cent of that number... The NAACP's days of glory were numbered, however. A perennial problem, the fact that it had never been a mass organization, continued to plague the organization."<sup>3</sup>

The major part of the two years following May 17<sup>th</sup> 1954 was marked by legal manouevering on both sides, the NAACP and the white South<sup>4</sup>. However, in December 1955 the celebrated Montgomery bus boycott

<sup>2</sup> Research conducted during the summer of 1954 among Negro leaders in communities throughout the State of Florida shows that great optimism existed concerning the speed and facility by which public schools would be desegregated. The majority thought that the transition would be effected within ten years or less. See Appendix A, Amicus curiae brief of the Attorney General of Florida, in the case of Oliver Brown, et al., v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in the Supreme Court of the United States, October term 1954.

<sup>3</sup> L. M. Killian. The Impossible Revolution? New York: Random House, 1963. p.42.

<sup>4</sup> See L. M. Killian. Op. cit. pp.48-50; Anthony Lewis. Portrait of a Decade. New York: Bantam Books, 1965. Chapter 3.

took place when Negroes organised a mass boycott of the bus system to protest against Jim Crow seating practices.<sup>5</sup> The most significant result of the boycott was the emergence of a new style of leadership and a new strategy in the Negro struggle. Out of the first mass action by Negroes in the South had emerged the charismatic leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., together with a strategy of non-violent action as a means of securing Negro aims. The Montgomery bus boycott and King's leadership caught the imagination of the Negro community, sparked off similar movements in Southern cities, and was largely responsible for the rising use of direct action techniques in the late 1950s.

"Events in Montgomery, Tallahassee, Birmingham and Tuskegee were widely heralded as indicating the emergence of a 'New Negro' in the South - militant, no longer fearful of white hoodlums, police, or jails, and ready to use his collective weight to achieve his ends."<sup>6</sup>

Although the legal manoueverings of the NAACP were to continue and remain very important during this period, this new approach enabled and encouraged larger numbers of Negroes to become involved in the struggle, and gave them hope that by their own actions they would be able to help win their freedom.

Up to 1956, the white South, by its skillful use of legal strategems and tactics, had been extremely successful in minimising the impact of the desegregation decisions of the federal courts without

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<sup>5</sup> See Martin Luther King, Jr. Stride Toward Freedom. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

<sup>6</sup> August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick. From Plantation to Ghetto. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966. p.225.

arousing the indignation of white America<sup>7</sup>. However, the crisis which erupted in Little Rock in 1956 over the desegregation of Central High School forced the federal government into using its power to enforce the desegregation decisions of federal courts. Wide exposure, by the national and international mass media, of the extremist actions of white mobs towards the attempt by nine Negro children to enroll at Central High awakened the American public to the reality of racism in the South. More importantly, as James W. Vander Zanden has pointed out:

"The issue posed by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus was whether or not a governor could use the National Guard, the ultimate coercive instrumentality of the state, to enforce segregation."<sup>8</sup>

The crisis created at Little Rock through the persistence of Negro children to enjoy their legal rights, thus resulted in the direct involvement of a hitherto uncommitted president and federal administration in the school question. Thus, by 1957 two fundamental premises had emerged for the beginnings of a significant shift in the strategy of the freedom movement, away from the historic reliance of the NAACP on the normal legal and political processes. From the Montgomery boycott had emerged Martin Luther King, Jr., and the philosophy and strategy of non-violent direct action, and from Little Rock had emerged the awareness that by the creation of a crisis, social change had been effected in spite of

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<sup>7</sup>See L. M. Killian. Op. cit. pp.67-71; A. Lewis. Op. cit. pp.37-39; Alphonso Pinkney. Black Americans. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969. p.186.

<sup>8</sup>James W. Vander Zanden. Race Relations in Transition. New York: Random House, 1965. p.91.

opposition at the local level, because the federal government had been forced into taking a stand.

It is important to note that direct action techniques eventually became popular during the late 1950s, not only because of the charismatic qualities of King's leadership, but also because the older techniques of legal and legislative action had proved themselves to be of limited use. Although many advances had been made in reducing the legal barriers to desegregation, implementation of desegregation decisions was still largely ignored in the South<sup>9</sup>. At the same time that legalism was proving to be of limited usefulness, other factors were also working to bring about a change in Negro attitudes. The rise to independence of many of the black nations in Africa made American Negroes aware of the power black people could wield and hence fostered feelings of pride among them.<sup>10</sup> Also, the increase in sympathy for Negro aspirations amongst American whites, which had been developing since the New Deal era<sup>11</sup>, and the favourable international climate, together with the successes, however limited, of the NAACP and non-violent direct action techniques in the South, created what has been commonly referred to as a 'revolution in expectations' among American Negroes.<sup>12</sup> Negroes began to feel that the

<sup>9</sup> See J. H. Franklin and I. Starr. The Negro in Twentieth Century America New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1967. pp.302-305. for statistics on School Desegregation in the Southern states.

<sup>10</sup> See James W. Vander Zanden. Op. cit. pp.60-61; Rupert Emerson and Martin Kilson. The Rise of Africa and the Negro American in The Negro American. Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark, eds. pp.629-659.

<sup>11</sup> See Paul B. Sheatsley. White Attitudes Toward the Negro. in Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark, eds. Ibid. pp.303-324.

<sup>12</sup> See W. L. Killian. Op. cit. pp.58-64; A. Meier and E. Rudwick. Op. cit. pp.225-227.

time was ripe for securing rapid advances in their struggle, and past successes, far from satisfying them, only made Negroes more impatient and spurred them on to greater efforts in their struggle for equality.

As Meier and Rudwick have noted:

"This increasing impatience accounted for the rising tempo of non-violent direct action in the late 1950s, culminating in the student sit-ins of 1960 and the inauguration of what is popularly known as the 'Civil Rights Revolution' or the 'Negro Revolt'.<sup>13</sup>"

In the early 1960s two developments in Negro protest became headline news throughout America - the integrationist-aimed sit-ins and freedom rides of organisations within the civil rights movement, and the separatist and black supremacist doctrine of the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam cannot be classified as a civil rights organisation, primarily because it has stood aloof from active participation in attempts to destroy the barriers to integration, and indeed, officially professes its ultimate goal to be complete separation from white America. Nevertheless, it did have an impact upon Negroes in America, and because Malcolm X was for a period its chief national spokesman, further reference will be made to the movement later in this paper. For now it will suffice to note that it did exert an influence upon the nature of the civil rights movement. A major factor leading to the radicalisation of the civil rights movement was unemployment and poverty and the meteoric rise of the Nation of Islam to national prominence was an

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<sup>13</sup>A. Meier and E. Rudwick. Op. cit. p.226.

important force in awakening the civil rights organisation to this problem. The Nation of Islam constantly criticised civil rights leaders for being out of touch with the problems of the Negro masses and, although other factors played a part, did help force the civil rights movement into a more militant approach.

The other development in the early 1960s - the sit-ins and freedom rides - exerted an extremely significant impact upon the black freedom movement. The widespread use of direct action techniques in this period, conducted largely by Negro college students with support from many whites, heralded the entry of youth as an important and dynamic force in the civil rights movement.

"Many believe that the Montgomery boycott ushered in this Negro Revolt, and the importance of that event in projecting the images of both King and nonviolent direct action cannot be overestimated. But the really decisive break with the pre-eminence of legalistic techniques came with the college student sit-ins that swept the South in the Spring of 1960."<sup>14</sup>

Thus the Negro Revolt erupted as a new generation of Negroes became more and more aware that persuasion on its own would not bring them 'Freedom Now'. As the movement became more radicalised, activists began to talk more in terms of power:

"They thought less of convincing the white man of the moral righteousness of their aspirations and more of forcing him to change his policies through the power of black bodies to create social dislocation."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp.226-227.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.234.

Although the focus of the civil rights struggle up to 1963 had been the South, with the problem viewed primarily as a Southern one, demonstrations had also broken out in the North, sometimes in sympathy with protests in the South but more often aimed at the de facto segregation which was a product of Northern experience. From 1963 on, protests against de facto segregation grew in intensity with school boycotts and demonstrations aimed at discrimination in employment and housing<sup>16</sup>. The problem was no longer merely a Southern one, and the biggest target of coercive public protest, in both the North and South, soon came to be the federal government itself. The optimism which had been engendered by the election of Kennedy in 1960 soon began to fade. Martin Luther King, writing in 1963, expressed the growing disillusionment in the federal government commitment:

"Then 1961 and 1962 arrived, with both parties marking time in the cause of justice... President Kennedy, if not backing down, had backed away from the key pledge of his campaign - to wipe out housing discrimination 'with the stroke of a pen'."<sup>17</sup>

The sacrifices performed by non-violent demonstrators appeared to have had only minor results, and the problems of unemployment, slum housing and slum schools were demanding more and more attention.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a series of demonstrations were carried out at construction sites in New York City and New Jersey in 1963; demonstrations aimed at de facto educational segregation in Chicago continued in 1963. See Lester A. Sobel, ed. Civil Rights 1960-1966. New York: Facts on File, 1967. pp.208-214.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. Why We Can't Wait. New York: Harper and Row, 1963. p.7.

As the movement faltered King decided, against the advice of white liberal allies, to seek an issue which would again push the Negro protest to the forefront of American priorities. He decided to attack segregation in the very seat of Jim Crow territory - Birmingham, Alabama. In a series of massive demonstrations in April and early May of 1963, King challenged the whole white power structure of the city of Birmingham. Wide exposure by the American and international mass media of the brutal treatment of Negro demonstrators by local police and whites in Birmingham created a public outcry and led to proposals for a civil rights bill by the Kennedy administration<sup>18</sup>. The Birmingham crisis sparked off over forty demonstrations in other cities, and King later wrote

"The sound of the explosion in Birmingham reached all the way to Washington where the administration, which had firmly declared that civil rights legislation would have to be shelved for 1963, hastily reorganised its priorities and placed a strong civil rights bill at the top of the Congressional calendar."<sup>19</sup>

President Kennedy appeared on television, calling the crisis a 'moral issue' and stating the necessity for Congress to enact a sweeping civil rights programme, and for the nation to adjust not only its actions

<sup>18</sup> There is evidence that even before Birmingham, President Kennedy had developed a strong personal commitment in favour of civil rights legislation. See Theodore Sorensen. Kennedy. New York: Harper and Row, 1965. Chapter 18.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. Op. cit. p.128.

but its attitudes as well.<sup>20</sup> While Kennedy's proposals were being discussed and debated by Congress and the press, Negro demonstrations continued and spread to more cities in the North and the South.

In this atmosphere the prospect of a crowning mass march on Washington by Negro demonstrators, to force the attention of the nation on the urgency of passing the Civil Rights Bill, was viewed with concern by government officials and Northern whites in general. President Kennedy at first questioned the wisdom of such a mammoth demonstration in the nation's capital, but eventually gave the March his blessing stating that it was "'in the great tradition' of peaceable assembly 'for a redress of grievances'."<sup>21</sup> As it was, the March on Washington on August 28<sup>th</sup> 1963 was a show-piece on interracial cooperation and non-violent demonstration. The 200,000 marchers from all over America walked and sang in harmony and peace and dispersed quietly after the speeches at the Lincoln memorial. However, the March was castigated by Malcolm X, at that time still a Black Muslim, who accused it of being taken over by white liberals:

"And as they (white liberals) took it over,  
it lost its militancy. It ceased to be angry,  
it ceased to be hot, it ceased to be  
uncompromising... It became a picnic, a  
circus."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Sorenson points out that President Kennedy had already been thinking of such proposals. However, public interest in civil rights legislation in the post-Birmingham atmosphere made passage by Congress at least possible. Thus Kennedy seized the opportunity to propose a sweeping civil rights bill to the nation. See Sorenson. Ibid. pp.438-496.

<sup>21</sup> Lester A. Sobel, ed. Op. cit. p.170.

<sup>22</sup> Malcolm X in George Breitman, ed. Malcolm X Speaks. New York: Grove Press, Evergreen Black Cat edition, 1966. p.16.

Despite the spirit of racial harmony which had characterised the peaceful March on Washington, it was only eighteen days later that Birmingham again caught the national eye when a Negro church was bombed and four Negro children were killed. Birmingham Negroes took to the streets and rioted, providing an inkling of what was to come in the long hot summers of future years. The unrest of the summer and fall of 1963 was unlike anything America had experienced before. The doctrine of non-violent direct action reached its peak in this year and the Southern Regional Council estimated that in the South alone, during 1963, there were over 930 public demonstrations with more than 20,083 arrests and at least thirty-five known bombings directed against Negroes.<sup>23</sup> De facto segregation in the North had also become a burning issue, particularly in the area of education.

Whilst it appeared that during this period there was at least majority support amongst whites for Negro goals, whites were less inclined to support the methods which Negroes used to achieve these goals. In a survey conducted in 1963, Louis Harris found that there was majority white support, at least superficially, for such Negro goals as the right to vote, to decent housing and to equal educational and employment opportunities.<sup>24</sup> However, support for the methods employed by

<sup>23</sup> See Benjamin Muse. The American Negro Revolution. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968. p.35.

<sup>24</sup> See William Brink and Louis Harris. The Negro Revolution in America. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964.

Negroes to achieve these goals was quite a different matter. Amongst whites Harris found two to one opposition to lunch counter sit-ins, five to three against picketing of stores and over ten to one opposition to 'liens' in front of bulldozers at construction sites. Thus, while there was apparently much sympathy among whites for the goals of the movement, the general feeling appeared to be that Negroes were pushing too hard, too fast. However, the emphasis of the freedom movement in this period was still on a reliance on white liberal support and financial assistance. A brief analysis of the major civil rights organisations at the end of 1963 will help to clarify the goals, methods and broad trend of the movement at this period.

The major organisations in the civil rights movement were popularly known as the 'Big Five', and consisted of the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Students' Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). All these organisations were directed by Negroes but each professed the principle of interracial cooperation and received substantial white financial support. The NAACP and the Urban League were established largely on white initiative in 1909 and 1911 respectively, whilst CORE originated in 1942<sup>25</sup>, and the SCLC and SNCC derived directly from the Negro upsurge of the late 1950s and early 1960s. All five organisations differ in approach and there has been little continuous

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<sup>25</sup>CORE originated from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Quaker social-action organisation.

coordination amongst them apart from the 1963 Washington March, and, more importantly, in lobbying activities at the federal government level<sup>26</sup>.

As already mentioned, the NAACP has borne the brunt of the struggle for Negro rights in the twentieth century, and has undoubtedly achieved much in breaking down the legal barriers to desegregation. Historically the NAACP has sought to improve the Negro's lot through litigation, legislation and education.<sup>27</sup> It employs a highly skilled staff of professional legal experts to engage in litigation on behalf of the rights and status of American Negroes, lobbies at the local, state and national level for legislation to guard against racial discrimination, and carries out an educational programme aimed at creating a climate of opinion favourable to legal and social change. The NAACP has always worked in very close cooperation with its white liberal allies but, in spite of its extensive membership<sup>28</sup>, it has had little real rapport with the Negro masses. Its stated purpose is

"To promote equality of rights and eradicate caste or race prejudice... to advance the interests of colored citizens; to secure for

<sup>26</sup>The Civil Rights Leadership Conference consisting of many Negro and interracial organisations interested in promoting civil rights legislation, maintained a highly effective lobby at the national capital, and played a large part in the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. See A. Meier and E. Rudwick. Op. cit. p.240.

<sup>27</sup>C. Eric Lincoln. "The American Protest Movement for Negro Rights." in John P. Davis, ed. The American Negro Reference Book. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966. p.466.

<sup>28</sup>Approximately 535,000 dues-paying members in 1963, although the number has declined in recent years. See Benjamin Muse. Op. cit. p.18.

them impartial sufferage; and to increase their opportunities for securing justice in the courts, education for their children, employment according to their ability, and complete equality before the law."<sup>29</sup>

Although militant Negroes have often criticised the NAACP for being wedded to a programme of legal action and gradualism, this is not strictly true:

"Actually in the 1960s the NAACP's programme became the most highly varied of all the civil rights organisations. It has retained a strong emphasis on court litigation. Acting in part through the Civil Rights Leadership Conference, consisting of many Negroes and interracial organisations interested in promoting civil rights legislation, it has maintained an extraordinarily effective lobby at the national capital. And it has also engaged in many direct action campaigns."<sup>30</sup>

Further, the NAACP's legal approach has complemented, rather than conflicted with, the direct action techniques of other civil rights organisations.

The National Urban League was formed to assist Negro migrants from the South in the transition from a rural to an urban way of life. Its activities covered almost every social problem the unskilled and uneducated Negro migrant was likely to face in the cities of the North, but its main emphasis was on providing Negroes with jobs:

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<sup>29</sup>C. Eric Lincoln. Op. cit. p.466.

<sup>30</sup>A. Meier and E. Rudwick. Op. cit. p.230.

"A social organisation rather than a voice of protest, it had leaned heavily upon the good will of the white community."<sup>31</sup>

Thus, unlike the NAACP it does not employ litigation as its method, but instead relies heavily upon negotiation and conciliation to win new and better jobs for Negroes, better housing and improved education. The Urban League is regarded as even more conservative than the NAACP and has an even greater middle class emphasis. It was the civil rights organisation least involved in the struggle in the streets, although its behind the scenes negotiating activities often tended to complement the militant, direct action techniques of other organisations. It classifies itself as

"a voluntary community service agency of civic, professional, business, labor and religious leaders... dedicated to the removal of all forms of segregation and discrimination based on creed or color."<sup>32</sup>

and thus it must necessarily rely heavily on white financial support and the goodwill of white business interests and employers.

SNCC, CORE and the SCLC were the most militant of the organisations in the freedom movement. CORE is the oldest of the non-violent direct action protest groups, maintaining that its direct action techniques are in the Gandhian tradition 'adapted to American race relations.'<sup>33</sup> CORE originated in the North, in Chicago, and from its earliest days

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Muse. Op. cit. p.21.

<sup>32</sup> C. Eric Lincoln. Op. cit. p.469.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.473.

displayed a profound mistrust of the willingness of white Americans to obey or enforce civil rights laws unless forced to do so. Unlike Martin Luther King, its national leader, James Farmer, stated in 1963 that he viewed non-violence not as 'an inviolable spiritual commitment' but as a tactic which might be abandoned if proved ineffective<sup>34</sup>. Non-violence was viewed as the most effective tactic for mobilising wide public support for the cause, and also for winning the respect of the opposition. CORE was broadly interracial at every level of its composition and, like SNCC, had broad student appeal and effectively mobilised youth in both the North and South.

SNCC, organised in 1960, was the newest and most militant of the civil rights organisations.<sup>35</sup> It had no stable membership but drew upon almost all Negro colleges and a large number of predominantly white colleges and universities for its membership. It was intended as an 'umbrella' type of organisation for student groups engaged in civil rights protest, and was endorsed by white liberals and church groups<sup>36</sup>. Its first target was segregated lunch counters in the South and it was largely responsible for the wave of sit-ins which developed in the early 1960s. It bore the brunt of direct action protest across the South and gradually shifted its main objective to organising Southern Negroes to register

<sup>34</sup> See L. M. Killian. Op. cit. p.5.

<sup>35</sup> See Howard Zinn. SNCC: The New Abolitionists. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964 for a detailed analysis of the organisation.

<sup>36</sup> C. Eric Lincoln. Op. cit. p.471.

themselves for the vote. As with CORE, non-violence was viewed solely as a technique and, indeed, critics maintained that by their fearless and provocative actions SNCC workers invited violence. From its inception, the techniques employed by SNCC often brought it into conflict with the more conservative trend of the freedom movement and in the March on Washington Executive Director John Lewis had been forced to moderate the tone of the speech he delivered.<sup>37</sup>

The SCLC was established in 1957 in the aftermath of the Montgomery bus boycott and with the aim of coordinating direct action activities in Southern cities. Although the SCLC was renowned more for its President - Martin Luther King, Jr. - than for anything else, it did contribute the important techniques of the mass demonstration and the selective boycott to the repertoire of methods employed by the civil rights movement. Its main aim was to achieve "full citizen rights and total integration of the Negro into American life" through non-violent direct mass action under a philosophy following "the basic tenets of the Hebraic-Christian concept of Satyagraha - truth force...".<sup>38</sup> The organisation is interracial and non-sectarian, although its board members are almost all Negro ministers. The main function of its staff was to raise funds, organise campaigns and make all the arrangements for King's

<sup>37</sup> Archbishop O'Boyle threatened to withdraw his support from the March unless John Lewis deleted a bitter criticism of the federal government from his speech. For an account of the March on Washington see Benjamin Muse. Op. cit. Chapter 1.

<sup>38</sup> C. Eric Lincoln. Op. cit. p.471.

personal appearances. It would not be an exaggeration to say that King was the SCLC, and indeed he exerted a great influence over the civil rights movement in general<sup>39</sup>. His charismatic qualities and the way the mass media exposed both him and his doctrine of non-violent civil disobedience, resulted in King being identified by both Negroes and whites as the leader of the civil rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. King saw non-violence as a philosophy of interpersonal relations, as well as an effective technique to be utilised in the struggle. However, although he constantly spoke of winning over the enemy by love and persuasion, he was well aware of the power of non-violent techniques. Louis Lomax has called the operative phrase in King's philosophy 'creative tension' whereby, once convinced of the "justness of the cause, a situation of tension is created between demonstrators and the local authority until the latter resorts to violence to subdue the protestors who then refuse to retaliate"<sup>40</sup>. The subsequent brutal and violent suppression by local authority of local demonstrators would then stir the conscience of the rest of white America and rally public opinion and demands for change on the side of the morally justified and non-violent protestors. In a letter written from an Alabama jail, King himself defined what the concept of direct action meant to him:

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<sup>39</sup>For an analysis of King's role in the civil rights movement see August Meier, "On the Role of Martin Luther King." in August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, eds. The Making of Black America. Vol.2. New York: Atheneum, 1969. pp.353-361.

<sup>40</sup>Louis Lomax. To Kill a Black Man. Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1963. p.85.

"Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; <sup>41</sup> it must be demanded by the oppressed..."

This was how the technique of non-violent direct mass action was utilised by activists in SNCC, CORE and the SCLC, and which characterised the freedom movement of the early 1960s.

Thus, use of the technique of non-violent direct mass action to achieve the goals of the Negro struggle was the main characteristic of the civil rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although there were differences in emphasis between the five major civil rights organisations and between ad hoc groups which sprang up at the local level, it is still possible to give a broad analysis of the general pattern of the freedom movement in this period.

Charles E. Silberman has pointed out that the civil rights movement was in general based on two important assumptions <sup>42</sup>: First, that the 'Negro Problem' is predominantly a white man's problem; and second, that the problem would be solved by giving Negroes full civil rights. The

<sup>41</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter From a Birmingham City Jail." in J. H. Franklin and I. Starr. The Negro in Twentieth Century America. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1967. pp.156-157.

<sup>42</sup> Charles E. Silberman. Crisis in Black and White. New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1964. pp.123-124.

first assumption led to the failure of the civil rights movement to attack the 'Negro Problem' - the conditioning of many Negroes in America to despise their blackness and to accept the myth of white superiority. The second assumption resulted in the failure of the civil rights movement - at least in the 1950s - to come to grips with the prejudice that is unsupported by legal discrimination - the de facto segregation created by Northern practice. In general, the civil rights organisations hoped that racial discrimination in the United States might be eliminated if a strong enough appeal were made to the collective American conscience. Thus, the emphasis of the freedom movement was primarily on persuasion rather than power.

However, the wide discrepancy between Negro expectations and the realities of tokenism led to an increase in militancy in the movement towards the end of the 1950s resulting in a wave of direct action protests characterised by the sit-ins of 1960 and the freedom rides of 1961. From 1960 on, increasing concern was shown with the de facto segregation of the North and by the end of 1963 direct action protests were as common in Northern cities as they were in the South. However, despite the increase in militancy, non-violence was still the governing code of the struggle. It is important to note also that not one of the civil rights leaders, or organisations, viewed the struggle for Negro freedom as anything other than a domestic one. There was no attempt by civil rights leaders to link their struggle with that of other non-white peoples of the world.

A major characteristic of the civil rights organisations during

this period was that they all worked in cooperation with white liberal allies; and depended upon them for support, particularly in the financial sphere. However, as the movement progressed and grew more militant, and as more and more Negroes participated in its direct action programmes and became more confident of their own ability to effect change, white participation in the movement came under increasing criticism:

"Because they were wedded to compromise as a political device and were committed to many causes not related to the Negro, white liberals often lacked the single minded militance that was now demanded for active participation in the movement. In fact, whites came increasingly under attack."<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, white labour leaders were increasingly criticised for the discrimination which existed in their unions against Negro membership. Nonetheless, many of the major civil rights leaders continued to believe that because Negroes were an underprivileged minority, they would never be able to gain their goals entirely on their own and thus must depend on the support of their white allies - liberals, trade unionists and such white moderates as church leaders. In the political sphere, civil rights leaders regarded the Democratic party as the natural ally of the Negro people. Finally, it is important to note that the principal thrust of all the organisations, whatever their differences in strategy and techniques, was for equality for Negroes within American society. Their ultimate goal was not to change the basic social structure, but to ensure that Negroes were

<sup>43</sup> F. L. Broderick and A. Meier, eds. Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965. Introduction p. xxxii.

included within it.

Although the brevity of the preceding analysis of the civil rights movement and the basic goals and methods which characterised its leadership necessarily permits only a very general indication of the position the movement had reached at the end of 1963, it is hoped that the ideas which Malcolm X advocated during the last year of his life can more clearly be considered in the light of the discussion given in this chapter.

## II

### THE NATION OF ISLAM AND MALCOLM X.

The first chapter was primarily an analysis of the development of the civil rights movement and its leadership up to approximately the end of 1963. As such, its main emphasis was upon those organisations which were recognised by themselves, and others, as dedicated to the goal of full achievement of civil rights for Negroes and their integration into the mainstream of American life as equal citizens. However, brief mention was made of an organisation - The Nation of Islam<sup>1</sup> - whose goals and methods differed drastically from the civil rights organisations and who rose to national prominence as the 'Negro Revolt' caught the attention of white America. Before analysing in detail the development of Malcolm X's ideas during the last years of his life, it will be helpful to briefly examine the basic aims of the Nation of Islam. This is necessary primarily because an examination of the type of ideas which Malcolm X advocated during his twelve year association with the Black Muslims will further help toward placing Malcolm X in the context of his time and will enable a clearer understanding of how his ideas developed during his last year. Further, a brief analysis of the causes of Malcolm X's split from the Black Muslims will help illustrate why Malcolm felt it necessary to

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<sup>1</sup>The Nation of Islam is popularly known and widely referred to as the 'Black Muslims', although Elijah Muhammad did not encourage this usage.

leave the Nation of Islam and form a new organisation in the struggle for black freedom.

Although the origins of the Nation of Islam can be traced back to the beginning of the 1930s, it was not until 1959 that the movement first became nationally known. A television documentary titled The Hate that Hate Produced<sup>2</sup> confronted the American public with a new force in the freedom struggle - a movement which not only openly castigated the white man for his oppression and subjugation of black people in America, but which actually rejected white America and the whole concept of integration completely and called for the establishment of a separate black nation. From 1959 on, the Black Muslims were widely publicised by the American mass media and consequently knowledge of their beliefs were able to reach a very wide audience.

The organisation is headed and closely controlled by the Honourable Elijah Muhammad, the 'Messenger of Allah'. It differed strikingly from the civil rights movement both in its approach to the problems of black people in America and in its proposed solutions. Unlike the civil rights organisations, the main energies of which were directed at changing white attitudes of discrimination toward Negroes<sup>3</sup>, the Nation of Islam focussed primarily on the Negro's attitude toward himself. The movement attempts to give American Negroes a new conception of themselves and

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<sup>2</sup> Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax. "The Hate that Hate Produced". Newsbeat: WNTA-TV. New York, June 10<sup>th</sup> 1959.

<sup>3</sup> The N.A.A.C.P.'s main emphasis was directed toward securing legal rights for Negroes.

pride in their collective identity as black people in America, and, to this end, Elijah Muhammad has constructed an elaborate mythical structure at the base of the movement which turns the myth of white superiority on its head and installs that of black supremacy in its place. Muhammad maintains that the inequality of conditions between black and white in America results largely from the Negroes' educational and cultural backwardness, the breakdown in their moral standards, and the fact that American society has conditioned Negroes to believe in the myth of white superiority and hence to regard themselves as inferior beings. He attempts to destroy the Negro's belief in his own inferiority by asserting the 'originality' of the black race and emphasising the superiority of black history, black civilisation and black culture.

The movement's main appeal is aimed at the black masses trapped in the urban ghettos of America and its emphasis is directed primarily at the psychological, social and economic reformation of the American Negro. The movement is organised as a 'nation within a nation'<sup>4</sup>, and all Muslims are forced to abide by a strict code of moral values. Membership within the Nation of Islam is all-inclusive and a Muslim's whole life revolves around the movement. The Muslims call upon American Negroes to reject white society completely and to rely upon their own efforts to improve their position. Consequently great stress is laid upon the movement's

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<sup>4</sup>The Nation of Islam has its own flag, police force (The Fruit of Islam), titles of office, and religious and political head (Elijah Muhammad).

programme of economic self-help for Negroes, The Nation of Islam is basically a religious body<sup>5</sup> which rejects Christianity as the white man's tool of oppression and which holds that Islam is the true religion of the American Negro.

Elijah Muhammad teaches that the white man is by his very nature a 'devil', and thus incapable of acting morally. Thus the Black Muslims reject integration as a goal, partly because they believe that white America would never grant meaningful integration between the races. However, Muhammad also teaches that the end of white domination is fast approaching and that it would thus be foolish to integrate with a race which is doomed to imminent destruction.<sup>6</sup> Whilst awaiting the eventual rise of the Black Nation (all the non-white races of the world), the Muslims place emphasis on the 'here and now' with their programme of moral, economic and social reform. However, because the establishment of the Black Nation will come about by divine intervention and according to the will of Allah, the Muslims have not felt it necessary to develop any political programme for the achievement of their goal of separation. Although in 1963 Muhammad for the first time gave Muslims official permission to vote, this appears to have been for propaganda purposes only, and there is little evidence to suggest that the Black Muslims

<sup>5</sup>E. U. Essien-Udom in his study of the movement (Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962.) found that Muslim members regarded the organisation primarily as a religious body. See also C. Eric Lincoln The Black Muslims in America. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.

<sup>6</sup>Elijah Muhammad maintains that it is written that the Battle of Armageddon is imminent from which the Black Nation will emerge victorious and rulers of the world.

have become at all politically active?<sup>7</sup>

With their rejection of both integration and of the white race in America, the Black Muslims necessarily remained on the outskirts of the Negro protest movement. Elijah Muhammad's concept of Negro unity appears to be unity under his leadership and his terms, and he rejected any cooperation whatsoever with the leadership of the civil rights movement. As well as rejecting the goals of the civil rights organisations, the Black Muslims also criticised their techniques of non-violence, asserting instead the right of Muslims to self-defence. As well as attacking the civil rights movement in general, the Black Muslims also criticised its leadership personally, although this was often in retaliation to the attacks which civil rights leaders periodically launched upon the Black Muslims whom they categorised as 'racists in reverse'. Elijah Muhammad refused to allow members of his organisation to participate in any civil rights activities although there is evidence that in 1963 various civil rights leaders at the local level did seek the Muslims' cooperation.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, with the increasing militancy of Negro protest action in both the North and South from 1960 on, the Muslims began to be attacked for their inactivity. W. Haywood Burns

<sup>7</sup> When the all black 'Freedom Now' political party was formed shortly after Elijah Muhammad's giving the Muslims permission to vote, Muhammad ignored the issue and gave no encouragement to the new party.

<sup>8</sup> See George Breitman. The Last Year of Malcolm X. New York: Merit Publishers, 1967. p.15.

pointed out in 1963,

"The Muslims have organised for power and now refuse to use it... Their real concern seems to be the unity and uplift of the American black man"<sup>9</sup>

and Malcolm himself writes of this period that

"It could be heard increasingly in the Negro community: 'Those Muslims talk tough, but they never do anything, unless somebody bothers Muslims.'"<sup>10</sup>

It was in this decision by Elijah Muhammad to keep the Black Muslims effectively aloof from active participation in the black freedom struggle that the real roots of Malcolm X's split with the movement lay, although other factors also played a part.<sup>11</sup> Even whilst he was still a Muslim Minister, Malcolm X wrote in his Autobiography about the movement

"If I harbored any personal disappointment, whatsoever, it was that privately I was convinced that our Nation of Islam could be an even greater force in the American black man's overall struggle - if we engaged in more action. By that I mean I thought privately that we should have amended or relaxed, our general non-engagement policy."<sup>12</sup>

Malcolm X was undoubtedly the real dynamic force behind the Black Muslim's rise to public prominence, and it is now apparent that he represented the activist, more political tendency of the movement, while Muhammad and

<sup>9</sup> W. Haywood Burns. "The Black Muslims in America: A Reinterpretation." Race vol. 5. July 1963. p.31.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm X. (with the assistance of Alex Haley) The Autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Grove Press, 1966. p.289.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed account of the factors involved in Malcolm X's split from the Black Muslims see George Breitman. Op. cit. pp.6-21.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.289.

other highly placed Muslims represented the more conservative and religious trend. The existence of these two conflicting trends in the movement led to Muhammad's suspension of Malcolm ostensibly for his intemperate remarks over President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. In an interview with Louis Lomax during his suspension, Malcolm gave voice to his dissatisfaction with the political inactivity of the Nation of Islam and in doing so surprised Lomax by deviating from Muhammad's line for the first time ever:

"...I will tell you this. The Messenger (Muhammad) has seen God. He was with Allah and was given divine patience with the devil. Well, sir, the rest of us Black Muslims have not seen God, we don't have this gift of divine patience with the devil. The younger Black Muslims want to see some action."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Malcolm was already preparing to make the decision which was to radically alter his life. In his Autobiography, he describes the great spiritual and mental dilemma he underwent before making his decision to split from the Muslims. He states that he realised that his life was inseparably committed to the black man's struggle for freedom and that this, in effect, made his decision for him:

"In the end, I reasoned that the decision already had been made for me. The ghetto masses already had entrusted me with an image of leadership among them. I knew the ghetto instinctively extends that trust only to one who had demonstrated that he would never sell them out to the white man. I not only had no such

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm X quoted in Louis Lomax. When the Word is Given. New York: The New American Library, 1963. p.179.

intention - to sell out was not even in my nature. I felt a challenge to plan, and build, an organization that could help to cure the black man in North America of the sickness which has kept him under the white man's heel.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Malcolm X's commitment to help his people in their struggle for freedom made the decision inevitable. However, despite his awareness of the many limitations of the Nation of Islam Malcolm still spoke with pride of how, as a Black Muslim minister, he had helped contribute towards destroying the myth of Negro inferiority:

"I had helped Mr. Muhammad and his other ministers to revolutionize the American black man's thinking, opening his eyes until he would never again look in the same fearful, worshipful way at the white man. I had participated in spreading the truths that had done so much to help the American black man rid himself of the mirage that the white race was made up of 'superior beings'.<sup>15</sup>"

But Malcolm wished to go further than this. As a Black Muslim Malcolm had rejected white American society. Now, freed from the constrictions of Black Muslim doctrine, he moved towards action to change that society.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.312.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.293.

### III

#### THE INDEPENDENT IDEAS OF MALCOLM X.

This chapter is concerned with an analysis of the ideas of Malcolm X as they developed during the period between his split with the Nation of Islam in March 1964 and his assassination in 1965. In any discussion of Malcolm X's ideas it is vital to keep in mind that, on the whole, they underwent a considerable change from those he advocated as a Minister for the Nation of Islam. Unfortunately, some commentators on Malcolm X, either deliberately or inadvertently, have neglected to keep in mind the stages of development which Malcolm's ideas underwent. Consequently, by mingling together or abstracting in isolation the various ideas which Malcolm held at different periods of his life, they have tended to give a confused and distorted picture of Malcolm's overall position at the time of his death. In order to avoid such confusion, this chapter is split into two sections relating to two distinct time periods in the last year of Malcolm X's life.

The reason for dividing Malcolm X's last year into two periods is that Malcolm's analysis of the racial problem in America changed after his first trip abroad. In the first period Malcolm continued to adhere very much to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem, even though he gradually began to reject his proposed solutions. However, Malcolm's visit to Mecca in April 1964 resulted in a religious reconversion which drastically altered his views on the relationship between the black and white races. This forced Malcolm to reconsider, and in some cases reject, his

earlier ideas and opened the way for the adoption of a new analysis of America's racial problem. The change in Malcolm's analysis of the racial situation necessarily affected the development and direction of his ideas. Thus, by splitting the last year of Malcolm's life into two periods, much confusion over the development of his ideas can be avoided.

The first section of this chapter will deal with an analysis of Malcolm's ideas during the period immediately following his split from the Black Muslims up to his first independent trip abroad in April 1964. This period was one in which Malcolm X was in the process of casting off various ideological attachments to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam whilst at the same time searching for an independent direction of his own in which to move. Consequently, it will be shown in this section that Malcolm initially remained very attached to both Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem in America and his proposed solutions, but gradually began to reject this attachment and to emphasise ideas of his own. The basic theme of this period, around which Malcolm's ideas developed, was Malcolm's belief in the need to become more politically involved in the struggle for black freedom. This period is thus characterised by the increasingly political orientation of Malcolm X's ideas.

The second section of this chapter deals with an analysis of Malcolm's ideas as they developed during the final ten months of his life. This was a period in which Malcolm began to develop new ideas and fresh insights into the nature of the black freedom struggle and in which Malcolm's ideas took on a definite independence of their own. The theme

which helped determine the direction and formulation of Malcolm's ideas during this period was the emphasis which Malcolm placed on the need to internationalise the struggle for black freedom in America. Malcolm's two visits to Africa and the Middle East exerted a profound influence over his attitude towards the nature of the race problem in America and significantly affected his political thinking. The period of Malcolm's life dealt with in this second section is thus characterised by the increasingly international view which Malcolm adopted toward the struggle for black freedom.

Throughout this chapter it will be necessary to keep in mind that Malcolm X had not evolved an overall programme at the time of his assassination. Many of his ideas were still being rapidly developed and formulated and he had not had the time or opportunity to present them in a coherently related form. Thus, this chapter will essentially attempt an explanation and analysis of the development of particular aspects and ideas in his philosophy, all of which are closely related and which often intermingle. To this end each section will be organised into a number of subheadings corresponding to particular aspects of Malcolm's ideas. An account of the subheadings will be given at the beginning of each section. However, it is important to note that although Malcolm's ideas were still in a state of flux at the time of his assassination, there is one central idea from which he never deviated and which provided the foundation about which his ideas developed. This was Malcolm's conviction that if black Americans were ever to win their struggle for freedom they must first unite and build their own organisations which should remain under their control and leadership at all times.

#### SECTION ONE: THE IMMEDIATE POST-INDEPENDENCE PHASE.

The analysis of Malcolm X's ideas during this period will be organised into three major subheadings which relate to the development of particular aspects of Malcolm's thought. This is for organisational purposes only and it must be kept in mind that the various aspects of Malcolm's thought necessarily developed in close relationship to one another.

The three main categories are as follows: the Black Muslim legacy; 'Violence'; and Politics. The first category will examine the extent to which Malcolm X remained influenced by the ideas of Elijah Muhammad during this period and will show how he gradually broke away from this influence. The second category will consider accusations that Malcolm X was an advocate of violence in relation to Malcolm's views on self-defense. The third category will be a detailed examination of the politicisation of Malcolm X's ideas. Because this was such an important part of Malcolm's thinking in this period, this category will be divided into three subsections - conventional political activity and radicalism; black nationalism and Negro unity; and allies and alliances.

#### THE BLACK MUSLIM LEGACY.

On March 8<sup>th</sup> 1964 Malcolm X publicly announced that he was leaving the Black Muslims to form an independent black nationalist party. He stated that the Nation of Islam, because of its narrow sectarianism and political inactivity, had gone as far as it could in the struggle for

black freedom, although he emphasised that he was not setting himself up in opposition to Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm emphasised from the very beginning the part which politics would now play in his thinking:

"I remain a Muslim, but the main emphasis of the new movement will be black nationalism as a political concept and form of social action against the oppressors."<sup>1</sup>

However, although the significance of Malcolm X's split from the Black Muslims was the injection of politics into his thought, the influence of his years as a Black Muslim Minister weighed heavily upon him during the initial independent phase in other areas.

A few days after his announcement, Malcolm held a press conference in which he stated his position in more detail. Although Malcolm announced in the press statement that his new independence would allow him more flexibility in his approach to the struggle to secure the human rights of Negroes, his attachment to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem remained apparent:

"I still believe that Mr. Muhammad's analysis of the problem is the most realistic, and that his solution is the best one. This means that I too believe the best solution is complete separation, with our people going back home, to our own African homeland."<sup>2</sup>

Although Malcolm continued to believe at this time that separation was the only solution to the problems of American Negroes, he pointed out

<sup>1</sup> M. S. Handler. "Malcolm X Splits with Muhammad." New York Times, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm X. Malcolm X Speaks (edited by George Breitman). New York: Merit Publishers, 1965. p.20.

that he regarded separation as a 'long-range programme' and that

"while it is yet to materialize, 22 million of our people who are still here in America need better food, clothing, housing, education and jobs right now..."<sup>3</sup>

Malcolm thus emphasised his concern with the immediate needs of the Negro masses and, although he deviated from the Black Muslim line on the question of political involvement, he again turned to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the racial situation as a guideline for attacking their problems.

"Mr. Muhammad's programme does point us back homeward, but it also contains within it what we could and should be doing to solve many of our own problems while we are still here."<sup>4</sup>

During the period up to the first trip abroad, Malcolm was to place great stress on the need to adopt the political, social and economic philosophy of black nationalism as a means for solving the problems of black Americans. Although black nationalism will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, it should be noted here that the ideas that Malcolm advocated under his definition of the economic and social philosophy of black nationalism were very similar to those he had advocated whilst a Black Muslim minister, and reflect that aspect of Elijah Muhammad's programme which stresses improving the Negro's position in the 'here and now'. In this immediate post-independence period, Malcolm thus remained

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

very much attached to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem and continued to be influenced by his economic and social ideas. However, as Malcolm searched for a new direction in which to move, the growing independence of his ideas soon became apparent.

In the two weeks following his split with the Muslims, Malcolm continued to maintain that separation was the only solution to the racial problem in America<sup>5</sup>. However, as Malcolm began to assert his independence, he gradually began to move away from this position altogether. After an interview with U.S. News and World Report published on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1964, Malcolm never again stated his belief in separation as a solution, even as a long-range programme. The swiftness with which Malcolm began to develop his ideas is illustrated by the following statement made at a New York meeting only four weeks after his split with the Muslims:

"All of our people have the same goals, the same objective. That objective is freedom, justice, equality... We have to keep in mind at all times that we are not fighting for integration, nor are we fighting for separation. We are fighting for recognition as human beings. We are fighting for the right to live as free humans in this society."<sup>6</sup>

By this time Malcolm no longer believed in separation as a viable solution although this of course does not mean that he had become a

<sup>5</sup> See A. B. Spellman. "Interview with Malcolm X: March 19<sup>th</sup> 1964." Monthly Review, May 1964; Malcolm X Harvard speech of March 18<sup>th</sup> 1964 in The Speeches of Malcolm X at Harvard (edited by Archie Epps). New York: William Morrow, Apollo Editions, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.51. Emphasis added.

supporter of integration which in fact he believed white America would never permit:

"The word 'integration' was invented by a Northern liberal. The word has no real meaning... the truth is that 'integration' is an image, it's a foxy Northern Liberal's smoke screen that confuses the true wants of the American black man."<sup>7</sup>

The legacy of Malcolm X's twelve years as a Black Muslim can also be seen in the type of organisation which Malcolm established immediately after the split. Malcolm felt it necessary to provide his new organisation - the Muslim Mosque Incorporated - with a religious base if it was to be successful in the struggle for black freedom. Malcolm believed that the Muslim Mosque would provide "a religious base, and the spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our community."<sup>8</sup> The religious puritanism of the Nation of Islam is evidenced here in Malcolm's belief in religion as the instrument for purging the Negro subculture of its moral and social vices. However, Malcolm also realised that the religious sectarianism of the Black Muslims and the stringent moral code which all Muslims were forced to follow had alienated many potential members who otherwise might have been sympathetic to general Black Muslim aims. Thus, Malcolm was careful to emphasise that the Muslim Mosque Inc. was intended to actively involve all American

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. (with the assistance of Alex Haley). New York: Grove Press, 1964. p.272.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.21.

Negroes whatever their religious or non-religious beliefs.

"Many of our people aren't religiously inclined, so the Muslim Mosque Inc. will be organised in such a manner to provide for the active participation of all Negroes in our political, economic and social programmes despite their religious or non-religious beliefs."<sup>9</sup>

In the speeches which Malcolm gave during this period he also pointed out that, unlike the Black Muslims, his organisation viewed religion as a purely personal issue which should not be allowed to interfere in the black freedom struggle:

"It's true we're Muslims and our religion is Islam, but we don't mix our religion with our politics and our economics and our social and civil activities - not any more. We keep our religion in our mosque."<sup>10</sup>

The way in which Malcolm wanted his organisation to be structured also differed strikingly from the Nation of Islam. The Black Muslims had been built around the mystique of divine leadership and had always been under the authoritarian and unquestioned control of Elijah Muhammad. In contrast, Malcolm stressed that his new organisation welcomed and encouraged new ideas and new approaches from all quarters, and particularly from young people, including whites.

The legacy of the Black Muslims during this period was thus apparent although it by no means dominated the development of Malcolm's ideas. Immediately following the split, Malcolm remained attached to Elijah

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.38.

Muhammad's solution and to some aspects of his programme. However, his determination to become more politically active in the struggle for black freedom and to adopt a more flexible approach soon led to rejection of separation as the only solution for black America. Despite the religious base of his new organisation, Malcolm stressed that religion would not interfere in his political, economic and social activities. The most important legacy of the Black Muslims was Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem which continued to influence Malcolm's thinking during this period.

#### VIOLENCE.

Of all the stances which Malcolm X took on various issues, none was more misrepresented and perverted by the press and by his opponents than his attitude toward violence. Malcolm was consistently portrayed by the mass media as an advocate of violence and criticised by his opponents on the same grounds. His position on this issue was susceptible to such misrepresentation primarily for the following reasons: he refused to compromise in his attitude toward the right of the Negroes to self-defence; he constantly warned of the inevitability of black violence in America; he rejected the principle of non-violence; and his militant rhetoric provided sensationalistic news-copy. However, Malcolm X was never at any time an advocate of indiscriminate violence.

As a Black Muslim Malcolm had justified the right to self-defence on religious grounds. After the split Malcolm asserted the right of all Negroes to self-defence and validated it on political, constitutional and

moral grounds. In his first press statement Malcolm clearly defined his position on non-violence:

"Concerning non-violence: it is criminal to teach a man not to defend himself when he is the constant victim of brutal attacks. It is legal and lawful to own a shotgun or a rifle. We believe in obeying the law... We should be peaceful, law-abiding - but the time has come for the American Negro to fight back in self-defence whenever and wherever he is being unjustly and unlawfully attacked. If the government thinks I am wrong for saying this, then let the government start doing its job."<sup>11</sup>

Malcolm never deviated from this position on self-defence for the rest of his life. Although Malcolm emphasised during this period that he would cooperate with any group sincerely interested in attacking the problems of black Americans, he made it clear that he would only be non-violent as long as his opponents were, and he stated categorically that he would never relinquish the right of Negroes to self-defence: "We can work with all groups in anything, but at no time will we give up our right to defend ourselves."<sup>12</sup> Malcolm constantly spoke out against the inconsistencies of a non-violent philosophy and he believed that to allow oneself to be brutalised continuously without protest was destructive to one's self-respect and human dignity. However, he did not reject non-violence per se - he merely asserted that Negroes should only remain non-violent in their struggle to the extent that their opponents did. When the opposition

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.22.

<sup>12</sup> A. B. Spellman. Op. cit. p.22.

resorted to the use of violence then Negroes were justified in using their right to self defence.

Malcolm was also portrayed as a violent agitator who urged Negroes to take up arms against white Americans. This was because he constantly warned that the mood of bitter disillusionment and frustration amongst the Negro community was developing to the point where 1964 would be the most explosive and violent year of racial strife yet. During this period Malcolm believed that if the racial situation in America were to explode into full scale violence it could very well spark off a global race war<sup>13</sup>. He pointed out that although many white Americans regarded militant black nationalists as a small minority amongst the Negro community, this was because the Negroes they most frequently came into contact with were moderates who espoused the philosophy of non-violence. However, Malcolm warned that the black nationalists were only the fuse to a much larger powder-keg of potential violence which, if it exploded, could set off a chain reaction amongst the other non-white peoples of the world.

Malcolm emphasised that by warning of the great potential for violence which existed amongst the Negro community he was not attempting to incite violence, but was only trying to shake white America out of its complacency and its belief that Negroes would remain non-violent for ever:

"The seriousness of this situation must be faced up to. You should not feel that I am inciting someone to violence. I'm only warning of a powder keg situation."

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<sup>13</sup>See particularly Malcolm X's speech "The Black Revolution," April 8th 1964 in Malcolm X Speaks. pp.45-57.

You can take it or leave it. If you take the warning, perhaps you can still save yourself. But if you ignore it, or ridicule it, well, death is already at your doorstep."<sup>14</sup>

The long, hot summers in Harlem, Watts, Newark and Detroit which were yet to come would provide abundant evidence to justify this warning.

## POLITICS.

### Conventional Political Activity and Radicalism.

The development of Malcolm's thought during this period was characterised by the increasingly political orientation of his ideas. His belief that the Black Muslims were not sufficiently active in the political sphere of the black freedom struggle had resulted in his split from the movement<sup>15</sup>. It was in fact Malcolm who had injected the political concept of black nationalism into the movement which had been essentially religious in nature when he joined it.<sup>16</sup> Malcolm summarised his political philosophy as black nationalism and the following definition he gave of it characterised his attitude towards politics during this period:

"The political philosophy of black nationalism means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community; no

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.49.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm later wrote in his Autobiography of his split with Elijah Muhammad that "our disagreement had been in terms of political direction and involvement in the extra-religious struggle for human rights." p.354.

<sup>16</sup> See M. S. Handler. "Malcolm's Plans Irk Muslims." New York Times, November 8<sup>th</sup> 1964.

more. The black man in the black community has to be re-educated into the science of politics so he will know what politics is supposed to bring him in return."<sup>17</sup>

Malcolm maintained that the Negro masses were completely disillusioned with the adult established politicians who were not responsive to the needs of the black community and he stated that his aim was to "organize and sweep out of office all Negro politicians who are puppets for the outside forces."<sup>18</sup>

It is important to note here that in urging Negroes to adopt the political philosophy of black nationalism Malcolm was not calling on them to merely replace the white faces in office with black ones, but to ensure that the black representatives they elected were responsive to the needs and demands of the Negro community and not to the control of the white politicians who dominated the two traditional American parties. Malcolm also made the interesting point that elements of the political philosophy of black nationalism were noticeable, and were growing in many of the civil rights organisations (such as the NAACP, SNCC and CORE) who by no means regarded themselves as black nationalist in orientation. However, Malcolm's political ideas concerning the two major political parties in America differed strikingly from those of contemporary Negro leaders.

Malcolm X was the first Negro leader in the twentieth century to openly condemn the two major political parties in America. At a time when

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<sup>17</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.38.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.21.

almost all the established Negro leaders (such as King, Wilkins, Young and Farmer) based their policy on alliance with liberals in the Democratic party, and in a year when the Negro community was to give over ninety per cent of its vote to the Democratic presidential candidate, Malcolm was castigating black people for placing their faith in the Democratic party and for helping elect them to office year after year when the Democrats had made no real attempt to solve the economic problems of the black masses:

"It was the black man's vote that put the present administration in Washington D.C. Your vote, your dumb vote, your ignorant vote, your wasted vote put an administration in Washington D.C., that has seen fit to pass every kind of legislation imaginable, saving you till last, and then filibustering on top of that."<sup>19</sup>

Malcolm pointed out to the black community that the Democrats who professed support for the Negro cause and whom they helped elect into office in the North, were members of the same party whose Southern representatives were elected from areas where Negroes were prevented from voting. Although Malcolm was often guilty of over-generalisations of some of the points he made, this did not make them any less effective to his audiences. He bluntly told Negroes that by keeping the Democrats in power they were keeping their Southern wing - the Dixiecrats - in power: "A vote for a Democrat is a vote for a Dixiecrat."<sup>20</sup> Malcolm refused to endorse a political party which contained such an openly racist wing as the Southern

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. pp.26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.30.

Democrats and which compromised with them to gain administrative power. However, this did not mean that he favoured the Republican party whom he regarded as even less sympathetic to the Negro cause. Malcolm just hoped to make black Americans aware of the mistake they were making in placing their faith in the Democratic party.

Unlike many of the civil rights leaders, Malcolm X maintained that Negroes could never win their freedom by appealing to the moral conscience of the American government, because America's conscience had become bankrupt long ago. To Malcolm, it was not a minority of die-hard Southern segregationists who were responsible for the opposition to the Negro cause - it was the entire federal government. For Malcolm 'the South' consisted of that entire area south of the Canadian border, and he constantly emphasised to black Americans the complicity of the federal government in the maintainence of racism in American society. In his speeches of this period, Malcolm never failed to indict the federal government for its failure to take a firm stand in favour of the Negro cause:

"So what I'm trying to impress upon you, in essence, is this. You and I in America are faced not with a segregationist conspiracy, we're faced with a government conspiracy... You don't need to go to the employer alone, it is the government itself, the government of America, that is responsible for the oppression and exploitation and degradation of black people in this country... This government has failed the Negro. This so-called democracy has failed the Negro. And all these white liberals have definitely failed the Negro."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp.30-31.

Even in this early stage of his independence, the growing radicalism of some of Malcolm's ideas was becoming apparent. In the announcement of his split Malcolm had criticised use of the term 'the Negro Revolution' and stated that he would tell American Negroes what a real revolution meant:

"There can be no revolution without bloodshed, and it is nonsense to describe the civil rights movement in America as a revolution."<sup>22</sup>

In an interview with A. B. Spellman on March 19<sup>th</sup> Malcolm explained his position on this issue in more detail. Malcolm maintained that white America had fooled the Negro into thinking that all the civil rights activity of recent years had been a revolution so that Negroes would become confused over what a real revolution meant and so that Negroes would not identify themselves with the non-white revolution which had been sweeping the world since the Second World War. Malcolm stated what the term 'revolution' signified to him:

"The people who are involved in a revolution don't become a part of the system, they change the system. The genuine word for a revolution is *Umwälzung* which means a complete overturning and a complete change and the Negro Revolution is no revolution because it condemns the system and then asks the system that it has condemned to accept them into their system. That's not a revolution - a revolution changes the system, it destroys the system and replaces it with a better one."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> M. S. Handler. "Malcolm X Splits with Muhammad." Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> A. B. Spellman. Op. cit. p.23.

Malcolm also stated his belief that the race problem in America could never be solved under the existing political-economic system, and when Spellman asked him what groups he considered most promising in their ability to help in the black freedom struggle he replied "I know of no group that is promising unless it is radical. If it's not radical it is in no way involved in the present struggle."<sup>24</sup>

Malcolm thus believed in the necessity for radical change in American society if the black man were ever to win his freedom. However, his ideas in this area appear a little confused in this period. In a speech given three weeks after the Spellman interview, Malcolm stated that America was the first country in history who was in a position to bring about a bloodless revolution, although he did not believe that she would do so, Malcolm stated that America could bring about a revolution without violence:

"Because the Negro in this country holds the balance of power, and if the Negro were given what the Constitution says he is supposed to have, the added power of the Negro in this country would sweep all the racists and segregationists out of office. It would change the entire political structure of the country. It would wipe out the Southern segregationism that now controls American foreign policy, as well as America's domestic policy. And the only way without bloodshed that this can be brought about is that the black man has to be given full use of the ballot in every one of the fifty states."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>25</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.57.

During the immediate post-independence phase, it thus appears that Malcolm held a rather inordinate belief in the power of the ballot. Because the white vote in national elections was so evenly divided, Malcolm believed that if Negroes could be made aware of the potential political power which they would be able to wield by voting as a bloc, then they would be able to use their position as an effective weapon for bargaining with white politicians. Malcolm seems to be expressing this belief when he writes in his Autobiography that

"...if the Mississippi black man voted in a bloc, Eastland would pretend to be more liberal than Jacob Javits - or Eastland would not survive in his office."<sup>26</sup>

Malcolm urged control of politicians at the local level by the black community and a form of black bloc voting at the national level to secure the greatest possible benefits. His political position during this period thus emerges as a rather confusing one. At one point Malcolm had suggested the formation of a black political party<sup>27</sup> but failed to be any more explicit, although he did encourage (but would not endorse) the all black Freedom Now Party<sup>28</sup>. At first Malcolm roundly condemned both the Republican and Democratic parties and rejected them as vehicles for achieving Negro freedom, but then he implied that Negroes should manipulate them to their own ends. By his own admission he states that a real revolution must

<sup>26</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. pp.313-314.

<sup>27</sup> See "How it's a Negro Drive for Segregation." U.S. News and World Report, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1964.

<sup>28</sup> In a recent interview in New York in July 1969, George Breitman suggested that Malcolm could not openly endorse the Freedom Now Party at this stage because Malcolm wished to establish his organisation on a firm basis first.

necessarily involve an overthrow of the existing political system by violent means, yet he also maintained that if every American Negro were given full use of the ballot this would result in a bloodless revolution in America. Although much of what Malcolm says contains germs of truth, his approach to politics during this period emerges as a somewhat naive one, primarily because he appears to place inordinate emphasis on the power of the ballot.

#### Black Nationalism and Negro Unity:

Malcolm placed great emphasis during this period on the need for Negro leaders and organisations to submerge their superficial differences and to unify - not necessarily into one single organisation but at least into a united front in the struggle. He did not expect Negroes to give up their various ideological, political or religious beliefs but urged them to recognise that "the problem facing our people here in America is bigger than all other personal or organisational differences," and to work towards finding "a common approach, a common solution, to a common problem."<sup>29</sup> Malcolm maintained that American Negroes had fallen into the trap of confusing their methods with their objectives. He emphasised that 'separation' or 'integration' was just the name that individuals used to describe their methods and should not be confused with the goals of freedom, justice and equality which all Negroes shared in common. Malcolm

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<sup>29</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.20.

felt that if Negroes could be made to realise this, then their differences over methods could to a large extent be overcome and a united front established in the fight for the common goal.

As a means for bringing about this Negro unity Malcolm stressed the highly important role which the philosophy of black nationalism could play. Malcolm stated that his organisation functioned under the political, economic and social philosophy of black nationalism. The definition that Malcolm gave to the political aspect of black nationalism has already been noted, together with Malcolm's assertion that its elements could be discerned among civil rights organisations. Malcolm defined the economic and social philosophy of black nationalism in the following way:

"The economic philosophy of black nationalism is pure and simple. It only means that we should control the economy of our community... The philosophy of black nationalism involves a re-education program in the black community in regards to economics ... The social philosophy of black nationalism only means that we have to get together and remove the evils... that are destroying the moral fiber of our community. We ourselves have to lift the level of our community... make our own society beautiful so that we will be satisfied in our own social circles..."<sup>30</sup>

As a Black Muslim Malcolm had equated black nationalism with separation, but it has already been noted that within a few weeks of the split he no longer referred to separation as the solution to the problems of American

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. pp.38-39.

Negroes. Malcolm's definition of black nationalism given in this period was thus clearly no more than a call for black people to submerge their superficial differences and to unite and work together to improve their political, economic and social position through their own efforts. It was a call for Negroes to take pride in their own community and in their collective identity as black people in America.

Although Malcolm stressed the need for Negroes to understand and use the philosophy of black nationalism in their struggle for freedom, he emphasised that his new organisation did not aim to compete with established Negro organisations or would try to attract members away from them. He stated that he merely wished to preach the doctrine of black nationalism in a similar manner to the way in which Billy Graham managed to spread the gospel of Christianity without competing with established churches. Malcolm urged Negroes to join, or remain in, any organisation which was spreading and practicing the philosophy of black nationalism. Then, at some future date, if the need was felt for the formation of a national black nationalist party, one would be formed. However, the optimism with which Malcolm regarded black nationalism as a unifying force was not borne out by the response of the established civil rights leaders who regarded Malcolm X as more of a threat to their interests than as a welcome ally.

#### Allies: Domestic and International.

With the split with the Black Muslims and the establishment of his own organisation, Malcolm was faced with the problem of considering

the formation of possible alliances with other forces in the freedom struggle. Obvious sources of potential allies were the established civil rights organisations and white Americans. However, Malcolm introduced an entirely new concept to the freedom struggle when he stated his intentions of elevating the Negro cause to the international arena and thereby seeking alliances from abroad as well as from America.

Malcolm was determined to bring a more flexible approach to the black freedom struggle now that he had broken out of the constrictions of Black Muslim dogma. He expressed the willingness of himself and his new organisation to participate in any activities that were designed to improve the conditions of Negroes in America. He emphasised that his organisation was willing to work with any of the established civil rights organisations in any area and for any objective "that doesn't conflict with our own political, economic and social philosophy which is black nationalism."<sup>31</sup> However, Malcolm stated that he would at no time relinquish the Negro's right to self-defence:

"We will work with anybody, anywhere, at any time, who is genuinely interested in tackling the problem head-on, nonviolently as long as the enemy is nonviolent, but violent when the enemy gets violent."<sup>32</sup>

Malcolm stated that he would willingly join in any fight against segregation because he believed it to be an evil system. However, Malcolm's concept of segregation differed somewhat from popular use of the term.

<sup>31</sup>A. B. Spellman. Op. cit. p.18.

<sup>32</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. p.42.

For example, to Malcolm a segregated school was not necessarily one composed entirely of white or of black children - it was a school which was controlled by people who had no interest in the activities of the children who attended it:

"A school system in an all white neighbourhood is not a segregated school system. The only time it's segregated is when it is in a community that is other than white, but at the same time is controlled by whites. So my understanding of a segregated school system, or a segregated community, or a segregated school is a school that's controlled by people other than those who go there."<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, Malcolm's willingness to participate in civil rights activities<sup>34</sup> did not mean that he was a supporter of integration which he in fact believed was a word which had no meaning.

The other obvious source of potential allies on the domestic front were those white Americans who were concerned with the Negro cause. Although one of the most significant respects in which Malcolm demonstrated his independence from the rigidity of Black Muslim doctrine was in his attitude towards white Americans, his continued attachment to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem in this period made Malcolm's statements on white allies very vague. Nevertheless, even at Malcolm's first press conference he refused to reject white assistance completely.

<sup>33</sup> Malcolm X from Question and Answer period after the speech "The Black Revolution." in New York, April 8th 1964. Printed in Young Socialist, February 1969. p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm participated in a school boycott with Reverend Hilton Galamison in April 1964.

Although Malcolm believed that white people could help in the struggle he was unsure and uncommitted in this period on the possibility of a black-white working unity in the future. However, despite his strong doubts concerning the sincerity of white Americans, he was not prepared to reject their help completely:

"The Muslim Mosque Inc. will remain wide open for ideas and financial aid from all quarters. Whites can help us, but they can't join us. There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity. There can be no workers' solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others, until we have first united among ourselves. We cannot think of being acceptable to others until we have first proven acceptable to ourselves."<sup>35</sup>

Malcolm was thus quite emphatic on the necessity for black leadership and black control of their own organisations. This was the central theme and foundation of his political thinking. He insisted that before there could be any possibility of black-white unity there must necessarily be black unity first. In this he reflected his mistrust of the interracial structure of the major civil rights organisations, together with his belief that Negroes could only gain their self-respect and lost manhood if they depended on their own efforts and struggles to improve their position.

One of the most significant developments in the nature of the freedom struggle in America in 1964 was Malcolm X's attempt to

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<sup>35</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. pp.21-22.

internationalise it. Although Malcolm expressed his willingness to cooperate with civil rights organisations in the North and South, he made it clear that he did not believe the civil rights activity of recent years had done anything to improve the lot of the Negro masses. Malcolm believed the civil rights movement had run its course and stated that he wished to elevate the struggle to one of human rights thereby laying the way open for support from the non-white countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Malcolm emphasised to black Americans that they should link their struggle with that of non-white people in the rest of the world. He pointed out that by viewing their problem as a domestic one, Negroes were forced to regard themselves as a minority which must consequently seek allies among the white majority and struggle to a large extent according to the framework of rules laid down by them. Malcolm castigated white liberals for insisting that Negroes struggle nonviolently for their freedom, and maintained that if they sincerely wished to help they could do so by urging Negroes to view their struggle as one for human rights, thereby giving it an international perspective. He likened the position of black America to that of a colony struggling to break loose from the chains of Imperialism:

"America is a colonial power. She has colonised twenty-two million Afro-Americans by depriving us of first class citizenship, by depriving us of civil rights, actually by depriving us of human rights. She has not only deprived us of the right to be a citizen, she has deprived us of the right to be human beings, the right to be recognised and

respected as men and women. In this country the black can be fifty years old and he is still a 'boy'.<sup>36</sup>

Malcolm maintained that Negroes would never win their freedom if they kept their struggle confined to the American context, and insisted that Negroes must seek the support of non-white countries in the world so that outside pressure could be exerted on the American government. Thus he urged American Negroes to organise to take their case before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights so that the whole world could be confronted with America's racism:

"Take him (Uncle Sam) to court and charge him with genocide, the mass murder of millions of black people in this country - political murder, economic murder, social murder, mental murder. This is the crime that this government has committed."<sup>37</sup>

Malcolm was to place great stress in future months on the need for the American Negro to internationalise his struggle and to seek allies from the independent countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. His visits to Africa and the Middle East were to convince him even more that American Negroes should identify with oppressed non-white people abroad. It was partly with this in mind, though primarily with the need to visit Mecca, that Malcolm left for his first independent trip abroad in April 1964.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. pp.50-51.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.55.

## SECTION TWO: THE FINAL TEN MONTHS.

The main categories of analysis which will be used in this section are as follows: Internationalism; Politics; Approach; and Organisation and Programme. The first category will examine two aspects of the increasingly internationalist orientation of Malcolm X's ideas - his belief that American Negroes must identify closely with their African origins, and his commitment to urging Negroes to identify their struggle with that of other oppressed non-white peoples in the world. The second category will be a detailed examination of the continued politicisation of Malcolm X's ideas. This category will be sub-divided into the same three sub-sections used in Section One. The third category will examine Malcolm X's overall approach to the struggle for black freedom and will hopefully bring together the various strands of the ideas examined. The final category will examine Malcolm's ideas on the form of organisation to be used in the freedom struggle, together with his views on the significance of advocating a specific programme.

Before analysing the development of Malcolm's ideas during this final period, it must be noted that Malcolm made two visits to Africa and the Middle East during the final ten months of his life. The first visit (from April 13<sup>th</sup> to May 21<sup>st</sup> 1964) was particularly important for the change which it brought about in Malcolm's views on race and in his analysis of the race problem in America. The second visit (from July 9<sup>th</sup> to November 24<sup>th</sup> 1964) was of much importance for strengthening aspects of Malcolm's political ideas which he had begun to develop during his

first trip abroad. At relevant points throughout this section, the importance of these two visits abroad will be noted in more detail.

#### INTERNATIONALISM.

Although Malcolm X urged American Negroes to identify with the struggles of all non-white people in the world, he believed that a special relationship existed between Negroes and Africa. One of Malcolm's most basic beliefs was that black Americans could never begin to feel free until they had first regained their self-respect and sense of pride in their collective identity as black people in America. Malcolm believed that this could only occur if American Negroes learned to take pride in their African origins. Thus, during the final ten months of his life, he worked ceaselessly to bring about a closer communication between Negroes and their African brothers.

The warmth with which African leaders welcomed him during his two visits to Africa and the sympathy they expressed for the Negro cause convinced Malcolm of the necessity of establishing close ties with the African continent. In a letter written from Accra, on his first trip abroad, Malcolm wrote

"...it is time for all African-Americans to become an integral part of the world's Pan-Africanists, and even though we might remain in America physically while fighting for the benefits the Constitution guarantees us, we must 'return' to Africa philosophically and culturally and develop a working unity in the framework of Pan Africanism."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. p.63.

Thus Malcolm quite clearly believed in a spiritual and not a physical 'Back-to-Africanism' and he maintained that if American Negroes could learn to identify culturally and psychologically with their African origins this would

"...give us the spiritual strength and the incentive to strengthen our political and social and economic position right here in America."<sup>2</sup>

The new organisation which Malcolm established in June 1964 - the Organisation of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) - was patterned after the Organisation of African Unity and emphasised the need for American Negroes to rediscover their lost identity if they were ever to regain their self-respect:

"We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people."<sup>3</sup>

Malcolm never failed to point out to the black community in America that only by studying and analysing what had happened to them in the past could they understand the causes of their present condition and be able to plan intelligently for the future. It is important to realise that Malcolm did not wish to create a mystique out of the past. He merely believed that by taking pride in their African origins black

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm X, in an interview with Robert Penn Warren in Who Speaks for the Negro? New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1965. p.259.

<sup>3</sup>"Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the OAAU." Printed in George Breitman. The Last Year of Malcolm X. New York: Merit Publishers, 1967. Appendix A. p.111.

Americans could use this pride as a basis for a course of action in the present and in the future. He felt that a proud people would fight more readily for control of their destiny and not wait for others to give them their freedom. In an interview with Marlene Nadle shortly before his assassination Malcolm stated:

"The greatest mistake of the(civil rights) Movement has been trying to organise a sleeping people around specific goals. You have to wake the people up first then you'll get action."<sup>4</sup>

Miss Nadle then asked Malcolm if he meant that the people should be woken up to their exploitation and he replied

"No, to their humanity, to their own worth, and to their heritage. The biggest difference between the parallel oppression of the Jew and the Negro is that the Jew never lost his pride in being a Jew. He never ceased to be a man... and his sense of his own value gave him the courage to fight back. It enabled him to think and act independently, unlike our people and our leaders."<sup>5</sup>

Thus Malcolm pointed out to Afro-Americans that it was impossible for them to hate Africa and at the same time not hate themselves. Both the Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives and the Basic Unity Programme of the OAAU (released shortly after Malcolm's assassination) stressed the importance of a black educational and cultural revolution in America to destroy the Negro's sense of inherent inferiority developed from four

<sup>4</sup> Marlene Nadle. "Malcolm X: The Complexity of a Man in the Jungle." Village Voice, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1965.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

hundred years of subordination to white America. Malcolm believed the fostering of a sense of racial group pride was the first step in the struggle for black freedom. As John Henrik Clarke has pointed out:

"More so than any other Afro-American leader, Malcolm X realised that there must be a concomitant cultural and educational revolution if the physical revolution is to be successful. No revolution has ever sustained itself on emotion."<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm's two visits abroad and his discussions with government leaders in Africa and the Middle East also served to convince him even further of the need for American Negroes to link their struggle for freedom to that of other oppressed non-white peoples. As well as their politicisation, Malcolm's ideas during this period were characterised by their increasingly internationalist orientation. Malcolm's religious reconversion in Mecca forced him to change his attitudes towards the white race and thereby reshaped his analysis of the race problem in America. In a letter written shortly after his experiences in Mecca, Malcolm stated:

"...on this pilgrimage, what I have seen and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions."<sup>7</sup>

Prior to his visit to Mecca, Malcolm had remained attached to Elijah Muhammad's analysis of the race problem. However, Malcolm's new belief

<sup>6</sup> John Henrik Clarke. "Malcolm X: The Man and his Time." Unpublished article. New York, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.340.

that all whites were not inherently evil left the way open for the adoption of a changed analysis of the cause of the oppression of American Negroes. In an interview conducted a few days before his assassination, Malcolm pointed out that his experiences abroad had caused him to reconsider his earlier belief that racism was simply a black-white problem:

"Strangely enough, listening to leaders like Nasser, Ben Bella and Nkrumah awakened me to the dangers of racism. I realised racism isn't just a black and white problem. It's brought bloodbaths to about every nation on earth at one time or another."<sup>8</sup>

During the final ten months of his life Malcolm became increasingly convinced that it was the American political, economic and social system which was the cause of racial oppression in America.

Malcolm thus came to regard one of his most important tasks as explaining to American Negroes that their struggle must not be viewed solely in a domestic context, but in relation to the struggles for freedom of other oppressed peoples throughout the world. He emphasised to Afro-Americans that they could never fully understand their own struggles unless they became aware of the struggles against oppression which were taking place with non-white people abroad. Malcolm regarded the exploitation of the American Negro as being part of an international system of oppression conducted by what he called the 'international power structure' of whom the chief agent was the United States:

"This society is controlled primarily by the racists and segregationists in

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<sup>8</sup>Gordon Parks. "The Violent End of the Man Called Malcolm X," Life, March 5<sup>th</sup> 1965.

Washington D.C., in positions of power. And from Washington D.C. they exercise the same forms of brutal oppression against dark-skinned people in the South and North Vietnam, or in the Congo or in Cuba or any other place on this earth where they are trying to exploit and oppress.<sup>9</sup>

Malcolm was a constant critic of Western imperialism which he narrowed down to "...that which is headquartered in the United States, in the State Department"<sup>10</sup>, and he castigated American involvement in the Congo and in Vietnam. However, he always pointed out that just because he opposed American intervention abroad, this did not mean that he was anti-American:

"We are anti or against what America is doing wrong in other parts of the world as well as here. What she did in the Congo in 1964 is wrong... What she's doing in South Vietnam is criminal... Now, you're not supposed to be so blind with patriotism that you can't face reality."<sup>11</sup>

Malcolm thus urged American Negroes to relate their struggle to the colonial revolution in Africa and Asia as this would enable black Americans to understand the factors and causes which help bring about their oppression. It would thus point the way to a new approach in the struggle for black freedom. As Malcolm constantly emphasised to his black audiences "You don't know where you stand in America until you know where America stands in the world."<sup>12</sup> Malcolm argued that once American Negroes

<sup>9</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. p.163.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p.149.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p.117.

realised that the same interests were at stake in the exploitation of black people in the Congo as in the exploitation of black Americans, then they would be able to understand what type of approach was necessary to win their freedom:

"Once we see the strategy that they use at the international level, then we can better understand the strategy that they use at the national and at the local level."<sup>13</sup>

Malcolm maintained that if American Negroes could be shown that they must analyse their position in this way, then this would open the way to the formation of alliances with other oppressed peoples of the world.

Malcolm was highly critical of the failure of Negro leaders to view their struggle for freedom from anything but a domestic angle. His experiences abroad convinced him that an essential prerequisite for Negro leadership in America should be extensive travelling and contact with government leaders throughout the non-white countries of the world:

"The American black 'leader's' most critical problem is lack of imagination. His thinking, his strategies, if any, are always limited, at least basically, to only that which is either advised or approved by the white man. And the first thing the American power structure doesn't want any Negroes to start is thinking internationally."<sup>14</sup>

Malcolm's belief in the necessity of internationalising the black freedom struggle became one of his most important ideas during this period, and

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.131.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.347.

his attempts to put this idea into practice will be discussed later in this chapter in the section on allies.

## POLITICS.

### Conventional Political Activity and Radicalism.

Malcolm's rejection of both the Democratic and Republican parties as vehicles for articulating and responding to the political aspirations and needs of black Americans, and his indictment of the federal government for its complicity in the continued racism which permeated American society have already been discussed in Section One of this chapter. Malcolm never deviated from this position for the rest of his life. When questioned during his second visit abroad on his opinion of the two candidates then running for office of President, Malcolm replied that for American Negroes the choice of Barry Goldwater or Lyndon Johnson was merely a choice between a wolf or a fox. Malcolm's attitude was that whilst Goldwater was relatively open about his racial prejudices, Johnson attempted to disguise them under the cloak of 'liberalism'. As Malcolm wrote in his Autobiography:

"'Conservatism' in America's politics means 'Let's keep the niggers in their place.' And 'liberalism' means 'Let's keep the knee-grows in their place - but tell them we'll treat them a little better; let's fool them more, with more promises."<sup>15</sup>

Malcolm never failed to attack the illusion that Negroes in the

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<sup>15</sup>Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.373.

United States were making great progress merely because a Civil Rights Act had recently been passed. Malcolm regarded the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 as nothing more than a safety-valve designed to dissipate Negro frustrations without attempting to abolish the conditions which gave rise to Negro discontent. Malcolm argued that the approach used by the administration was skillfully designed to make it appear that they were trying to solve the problem when in fact all they wanted to do was to keep Negroes quiet by telling them how much progress they were making. He constantly pointed out to the black community the duplicity of the federal administration:

"They would deal with the conditions but never the cause. They only gave us tokenism. Tokenism benefits only a few. It never benefits the masses, and the masses are the ones who have the problem not the few."<sup>16</sup>

Malcolm was above all concerned with the needs of the black masses and never failed to use his position to cut through the hypocrisy of white American society, by exposing its failure to come to grips with the real problems of black people.

Malcolm recognised the necessity of organising constantly and purposively among Negro communities to make them more fully aware of their economic exploitation and of the potential political power they held. Thus, one of the stated aims of the OAAU was to register Negro voters block-by-block, run independent black candidates for political

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<sup>16</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.173.

office, and support any Negro already in office who was responsive to the needs of the Afro-American community. Although Malcolm no longer believed during this period that American Negroes would gain their freedom simply by being guaranteed the right to vote, he still placed great emphasis on the power of the ballot. He stressed his willingness to support any attempts at registering Negroes for the vote in the South because "...the only real power a poor man in this country has is the power of the ballot."<sup>17</sup> Malcolm had also revised his earlier conception that Negroes always held the crucial balance of power in American politics and no longer argued this during this period. However, he still maintained that Negroes must first register as independents, and then decide according to the particular circumstances which way they should employ their political power. Malcolm maintained that it was not enough to get Negroes to register, only to have them vote blindly for a candidate whom they knew nothing about, except perhaps his party affiliation. Thus Malcolm advocated the need for voter education along with voter registration.

Malcolm never actively came out in favour of an independent black party as the vehicle for harnessing the combined political strength of American Negroes, although he did participate in a Harlem conference on independent political action two months before his death. When asked,

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<sup>17</sup>"Interview with Malcolm X." Young Socialist, February 1965. Printed in Malcolm X Talks to Young People. New York: Young Socialist Alliance, 1968. p.20.

shortly before his assassination, on whether he felt an all-black political party like the Michigan Freedom Now Party was needed Malcolm replied:

"Yes, in some cases you have to create new machinery. Either way, we're going to be involved in all levels of politics from '65 on."<sup>18</sup>

Malcolm stated that his organisation would run militant black candidates at the local level who would appeal to the apolitical Negroes in the ghettos who could then express their discontent politically. Asked if he would consider running for political office Malcolm replied:

"I don't know at this point. I think I am more effective attacking the establishment. You can't do that as well once you're inside it."<sup>19</sup>

Whether or not Malcolm would have run for political office had he not been assassinated is debatable.<sup>20</sup> But his main emphasis during this period was placed squarely on the need for American Negroes to organise politically, to ensure that the politicians they elected were responsive to the needs of the black community, and to use their political power in the way which would benefit them most.

<sup>18</sup> Marlene Nadle. Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> George Breitman, who has had discussions with many of Malcolm X's associates, believes that Malcolm was considering running for political office. (Interview in New York, July 1969.) However, had he done so, the question arises of whether this would have lessened his effectiveness with the black masses. It has been argued that much of Malcolm's attraction to the black community was the result of his very independence from the white power structure, and his refusal to compromise with it. For a good analysis of this point of view see Calvin C. Hernton. White Papers for White Americans. New York: Doubleday, 1966. Chapter 3.

Although Malcolm placed great stress upon the importance of such conventional forms of political activity as voter registration and political education, he also began to develop increasingly radical and revolutionary ideas during the final ten months of his life. His experiences abroad had broadened his views on race, but had in no way altered his militancy against racial oppression and had, in addition, introduced new elements into his thinking about capitalism and socialism, as well as deepening his identification with the colonial revolution.

Malcolm writes in his Autobiography that one particular conversation with the American ambassador in an African country had given him a refreshing insight into the nature of the race problem in America. The ambassador explained to Malcolm that he never felt any sense of racial prejudice until he returned to America. He agreed when Malcolm pointed out that:

"What you are telling me is that it isn't the American white man who is a racist, but it's the American political, economic and social atmosphere that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man."<sup>21</sup>

After his first trip abroad, Malcolm began to adopt an increasingly anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and, to a lesser extent, pro-socialist position, and he eventually became convinced that only by revolutionising American society could the black man ever win his freedom.

In a talk given in May, shortly after his first trip abroad,

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<sup>21</sup>Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.371.

Malcolm expressed his radical views on the nature of the American capitalist system:

"The system in this country cannot produce freedom for an Afro-American. It is impossible for this system, this economic system, this political system, this social system, this system period. It's impossible for this system, as it stands, to produce freedom right now for the black man in this country."<sup>22</sup>

The position expressed here differs strikingly to that which Malcolm had held before his first visit abroad. Then, he had stated that America was in the unique position where it could be the first nation in history to experience a bloodless revolution simply by guaranteeing effectively the right of all Negroes to vote.

Malcolm's experiences in Mecca, and his discussions with government leaders in Africa and the Middle East, had drastically altered his analysis of the cause of the race problem in America. In an interview published shortly after his death, Malcolm was asked what he thought was responsible for race prejudice in the United States and he had replied:

"Ignorance and greed. And a skillfully designed program of miseducation that goes along with the American system of exploitation and oppression."<sup>23</sup>

A study of the speeches and interviews of Malcolm X during the final ten months of his life leaves no doubt that he had become a convinced opponent of the capitalist system and had come to believe that the struggle for

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<sup>22</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. p.69.

<sup>23</sup>"Interview" Young Socialist. Op. cit. p.17.

black freedom in America was not simply a racial one:

"It is incorrect to classify the revolt of the Negro as simply a racial conflict of black against white, or as a purely American problem. Rather, we are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter."<sup>24</sup>

In an interview taped for the Pierre Barton Show in January 1965, Malcolm explained this position in more detail and it will be worth while quoting it in full. In response to Barton's question of whether he still believed in an ultimate confrontation between the races as taught by Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm stated:

"...I think that an objective analysis of events that are taking place on this earth today point toward some type of ultimate showdown. You can call it a political showdown or even a showdown between the economic systems that exist on this earth which almost boil down along racial lines. I do believe that there will be a clash between the oppressed and those that do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash but I don't think that it will be based upon the colour of the skin as Elijah Muhammad has taught it. However, I do think that you'll find that the European powers which are the former colonial powers, if they're not able to readjust their thinking of superiority toward the darker skinned people whom they have made to think are inferior then these

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<sup>24</sup>Malcolm X Speaks. p.217.

lines can easily be drawn - they can easily be lumped into racial groups and it will be a racial war."<sup>25</sup>

Malcolm's position here illustrates how far he had progressed in his analysis of the race problem since his warnings in April 1964 of a global race war.

It is evident that along with his anti-capitalist viewpoint Malcolm also developed increasingly pro-socialist sympathies. Malcolm believed that the destruction of the capitalist system was ultimately inevitable:

"It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck... As the nations of the world free themselves, then capitalism has less victims, less to suck, and it becomes weaker and weaker. It is only a matter of time in my opinion before it will collapse completely."<sup>26</sup>

Because of his uncompromising opposition to capitalism, it was perhaps natural that Malcolm should at least consider socialist solutions to the problems of American Negroes. There is evidence that even before his visits abroad, Malcolm had considered socialism in one form or another.<sup>27</sup> However, it was his two visits to Africa and the Middle East which stimulated his interest in socialism and it was not until his return from

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Berton Show. January 1965. Unpublished transcript. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> "Interview." Young Socialist. Op. cit. p.23.

<sup>27</sup> See Carlos E. Russell. "Exclusive Interview with Brother Malcolm X." Liberator, May 1964.

his first trip abroad that Malcolm first mentioned socialism in his speeches.

Malcolm was never an open advocate of socialism and only mentioned it in his speeches infrequently. Thus, in analysis of Malcolm X's ideas it is difficult to be precise about his attitude towards socialism as a political ideology. One thing is certain - Malcolm had by no means developed into a Marxist at the time of his assassination. However, his favourable attitude towards socialism in the last ten months of his life is indisputable, and it is necessary to examine briefly his views on socialism so that the general trend of his thought can be more clearly understood.

In a speech given in May 1964, shortly after his first visit to Africa, Malcolm pointed out that his experiences abroad had stimulated his interest in the socialist philosophy. When a questioner asked him what political and economic system he favoured, Malcolm replied:

"I don't know. But I'm flexible... As was stated earlier, all of the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning toward socialism. I don't think it's an accident. Most of the countries that were colonial powers were capitalist countries and the last bulwark of capitalism today is America. It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism. And if you find one and you happen to get that person into a conversation and they have a philosophy that makes you sure they don't have this racism in their outlook, usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is socialism."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.62.

Although Malcolm was not at all hesitant about expressing his anti-capitalist ideas, he was more reticent about introducing the concept of socialism to the black community. Nevertheless he did at times mention it. In a speech at an OMAU rally in December 1964 Malcolm pointed out how the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia were rejecting capitalism in favour of socialism and he urged his followers to consider why this was so:

"None of them are adopting the capitalistic system because they realise they can't... you have to have someone else's blood to suck to be a capitalist... So when we look at the African continent... we find that the nations in Africa are developing socialistic systems to solve their problems... what they are using to solve their problem in Africa and Asia is not capitalism. So what you and I should do is find out what they are using to get rid of poverty and all the other negative characteristics of a rundown society."<sup>29</sup>

However, although it is evident that Malcolm shared socialist sympathies, he was never very specific about socialism as a political concept.

George Breitman has pointed out that Malcolm often discussed socialist methods as possible solutions to the problems of the American Negro in private, and often indicated that he was searching for ways in which he could present these views to black people without becoming alienated from them.<sup>30</sup> Harry King, who interviewed Malcolm X in January 1965 has also pointed out some of the problems Malcolm came up against in his attitude towards socialism:

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.121-122.

<sup>30</sup> George Breitman. Interview, New York, July 1969.

"... Malcolm expressed his views on some of the problems facing a leader in the mass movement - how to raise the consciousness and understanding of the members without presenting ideas that seemed so far in advance that they would not be acceptable to many in the movement, and how to avoid being labelled in such a way as to become isolated from the ranks.

Malcolm felt it necessary for his people to consider socialist solutions to their problems. But as the leader of a movement, he said, it was necessary to present this concept in a way that would be understandable to his people and would not isolate him from them."<sup>31</sup>

Malcolm's position on socialism was thus not a specific one.

Although he indicated pro-socialist sympathies there is no evidence that he had formed any conclusive ideas on socialism or advocated socialism as the solution for the American Negroes' problems. Malcolm refused to allow his political ideas to be categorised. When he was once asked if he would run for the office of Mayor of New York, under 'leftist' sponsorship, he replied:

"I... don't believe that groups should refer to themselves as 'leftist', 'rightist', or 'middle-ist'. I think they should just be whatever they are and don't let people put labels on them - and don't ever put them on yourself. Sometimes a label can kill you."<sup>32</sup>

The question of whether Malcolm would have developed into a socialist, had he not been assassinated, can never be resolved<sup>33</sup>. The point which must

<sup>31</sup> Harry Ring, quoted in George Breitman. The Last Year of Malcolm X. p.35.

<sup>32</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. pp.203-204.

<sup>33</sup> It has been argued that Malcolm X was on the way to developing a synthesis of black nationalism and socialism that would be fitting for the American scene and acceptable to the black masses. See George Breitman. The Last Year of Malcolm X. Chapter 5.

be remembered is that he had not adopted a socialist position at the time of his death.

#### Black Nationalism and Negro Unity.

Malcolm placed great stress, in the immediate post-independence period, on the need for American Negroes to adopt the political, economic and social philosophy of black nationalism in the struggle for black freedom. However, although people continued to refer to Malcolm X as a black nationalist right up to his death, Malcolm himself deliberately used the phrase only occasionally in the final ten months of his life. In order to understand why, it is necessary to consider a statement which Malcolm made in an interview shortly before his death.

Malcolm had begun to reconsider whether the solutions to the problems of black Americans could be summed up under the philosophy of black nationalism, as a result of a conversation he had had on his first trip to Africa. Malcolm did not reveal this until an interview a few days before his death.<sup>34</sup> In the interview, Malcolm was asked how he defined black nationalism, with which he was identified. Malcolm replied that he used to define it as "...the idea that the black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community and so forth."<sup>35</sup> However, Malcolm stated that when he was in Ghana in May 1964, the Algerian ambassador, who was white, had asked him that if he defined his objective

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<sup>34</sup>"Interview." Young Socialist. Op. cit.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. p.16.

as the victory of black nationalism, then what room did that leave for white revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt and Iraq who were opposed to the capitalist system:

"So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries, dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary. So, I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the over-all philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the black people in this country."<sup>36</sup>

Malcolm thus was not rejecting black nationalism. He was merely reconsidering whether his overall philosophy should be defined as black nationalism or whether he should now apply some other, perhaps broader, definition to it. He was reconsidering whether the solution to the problems of black Americans could be summed up as black nationalism as he had defined it in the immediate post-independence period. The key to the difficulty is that Malcolm changed his analysis of the race problem after his first trip abroad. His experiences in Africa and the Middle East had introduced new elements into his thinking about capitalism and socialism, as well as deepening his identification with the colonial revolution and broadening his views on race. As Malcolm rapidly developed his ideas during

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid. p.17.

the final months of his life, it is not unnatural that he should begin to reconsider whether he should still define his philosophy under the phrase 'black nationalism'. Malcolm remained a black nationalist up to his death. He continued to advocate black control of the black community, black controlled organisations, and black political control of politicians elected by the black community. He never deviated from his belief that black nationalism was the most effective means of guiding black Americans in their struggle for freedom. However, he also realised that if black people were ever to win their freedom, the economic, political and social system of American society must be drastically changed. Malcolm was beginning to realise that black nationalism was an important means, but not necessarily an end in itself.

As a Black Muslim Malcolm had equated black nationalism with separatism; after the split he gradually moved away from this equation; and after his first trip abroad he increasingly realised more fully that it was possible to be a black nationalist and still be concerned not only with the black community but with American society as a whole. Malcolm was not only a black nationalist. He was a black nationalist who was developing into a convinced revolutionary.

Malcolm was fully aware of the enormities of the problems which American Negroes faced and he realised the need for the cooperation of all Negroes: "The problem is so broad that it's going to take... a united front of all the organisations - to come up with a solution."<sup>37</sup> During this

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Robert Penn Warren. Who Speaks for the Negro? p.263.

period Malcolm stressed the importance of all black Americans to submerge their superficial differences and to present a united front in the struggle. When he established the OAAU in June 1964, Malcolm invited civil rights leaders to attend the opening rally, and emphasised that the organisation was not intended to be competitive with already established Negro organisations. However, despite Malcolm's stress on black unity, certain aspects of Malcolm's ideas made the formation of alliances between the OAAU and the civil rights organisations highly unlikely.

Allies: Domestic and International.

The emphasis which Malcolm X placed on black solidarity is illustrated throughout the Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the OAAU. However, this did not mean that Malcolm necessarily believed that Negroes should unite into one single organisation. Rather, he believed that because they all shared the same objective it was not being unrealistic to advocate a coordinated front of all Negro organisations. Malcolm accepted the fact that different individuals preferred to work according to their own methods. However, this did not alter his belief that an uncompromising and militant approach was the quickest and most likely method of achieving results. In an interview with Harry Ring, three weeks before his assassination, Malcolm was asked about his attitude towards the established civil rights organisations. He replied:

"I'm for whatever gets results. I don't go for any organisation - be it civil rights or any other kind - that has to compromise with the power structure and has to rely on certain elements within the power structure for their financing..."

I'm for anything that they're involved in that gets meaningful results for the masses of our people - but not for the benefit of a few hand-picked Negroes at the top who get prestige and credit, and all the while the masses' problems remain unsolved."<sup>38</sup>

However, when pressed by Ring as to whether he would support concrete actions by the civil rights organisations if he felt they were aimed in the right direction, Malcolm unequivocally replied:

"Yes. The Organisation of Afro-American Unity will support fully and without compromise any action by any group that is designed to get meaningful immediate results."<sup>39</sup>

Despite Malcolm's willingness to participate in civil rights activities, it was his position on another issue which, at this stage of the freedom struggle, prevented the formation of any meaningful alliances with civil rights organisations. It was over the tactics of violence versus nonviolence or, as Malcolm put it, "self-defence versus masochism", that he and the civil rights leaders disagreed most basically. In an interview with Marlene Nadle, a few days before his death, Malcolm agreed that the issue of self-defence had prevented close cooperation with civil rights organisations:

"It's not that there's no desire for unity, or that it's impossible, or that they might not agree with me behind closed doors. It's because most of the organisations are dependent on white money and they are afraid to lose it. I spent almost a year not attacking them, saying

<sup>38</sup>"Interview by Harry Ring over Station WBAI-FM in New York, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1965." Two Speeches by Malcolm X. New York: Merit Publishers, 1969. pp.30-31.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. p.31.

let's get together, let's do something. But they're too scared. I guess I will have to go to the people first and let the leaders fall in behind them."<sup>40</sup>

Malcolm's radical ideas made cooperation with such civil rights leaders as King, Wilkins and Young highly unlikely at this stage of the freedom struggle and Malcolm was beginning to feel that he should instead appeal directly to those black Americans who desired their freedom now.

Malcolm's visit to Mecca in May 1964 had drastically altered his analysis of the relationship between the black and white races. Mecca had shown Malcolm that there was no inherent barrier to racial cooperation, and when he returned to America he admitted that in the past he had been wrong in his blanket condemnation of all whites. However, what Malcolm also noticed in Mecca, and what other commentators have failed to point out, was that there was a colour pattern in the Moslem crowds where people who looked alike voluntarily drew together and often stayed together:

"I tucked it into my mind that when I returned home I would tell Americans this observation: that where true brotherhood existed among all colors, where no one felt segregated, where there was no 'superiority' complex, no 'inferiority' complex - then voluntarily, naturally, people of the same kind felt drawn together by that which they had in common."<sup>41</sup>

This observation served to strengthen Malcolm's belief that black unity, on which he placed so much emphasis, did not necessarily imply black racism.

<sup>40</sup> Marlene Nadle. Op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.334.

Malcolm's position on racism can be summarised in the following few words from his Autobiography:

"... to me the earth's most explosive and pernicious evil is racism, the inability of God's creatures to live as One, especially in the Western World."<sup>42</sup>

Although Malcolm's religious reconversion had led him to believe in the brotherhood of men, it had in no way lessened his opposition to those whites who continued to uphold racism in American society:

"I care about all people but especially about black people. I'm a Muslim. My religion teaches me brotherhood but doesn't make me a fool."<sup>43</sup>

Malcolm believed that a person should be judged by his deeds, not by his skin colour, and consequently he did not believe in practicing brotherhood with a man just because his skin was white.

In the immediate post-independence phase, Malcolm had stated that whites could help in the struggle for black freedom, but he had not been very specific about how, and under what conditions, they could help. However, Malcolm revealed that during his first trip abroad it had been impressed upon him "... the importance of having a working unity among all peoples, black as well as white."<sup>44</sup> During the final ten months of his life, Malcolm began to consider in more detail the possibilities and conditions under which potential black-white working alliances might be formed.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.358.

<sup>43</sup> Marlene Nadle. Op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.70.

Malcolm at no time deviated from his most basic belief - that there must first be black unity before black-white unity could become a possibility. Malcolm welcomed the support of all sincere whites, as long as they were militant and uncompromising, but he never gave up his belief that they should not be permitted to join black organisations. Malcolm believed that white allies were necessary in the struggle but only under certain conditions. In an interview with Harlene Nadle, Malcolm stated some of the qualifications under which the support of militant whites, and particularly white students, would be welcomed:

"If we are going to work together, the blacks must take the lead in their own fight. In phase one, the whites led. We're going into phase two now. This phase will be full of rebellion and hostility. Black will fight whites for the right to make decisions that affect the struggle in order to arrive at their manhood and self-respect."<sup>45</sup>

Malcolm thus believed that only by leading and controlling their own struggle for freedom could black people in America develop a sense of self-respect and regain their manhood.

However, although perhaps the most important, this was not the only reason why Malcolm insisted that whites could not join black organisations:

"I have these very deep feelings that white people who want to join black organizations are really just taking the escapist way to salve their consciences. By visibly hovering near us, they are 'proving' that they are 'with us'. But the hard truth is this isn't helping to solve America's racist problem.

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<sup>45</sup> Harlene Nadle. Op. cit.

The Negroes aren't the racists... America's racism is among their own fellow whites. That's where the sincere whites who really mean to accomplish something have got to work.<sup>46</sup>

Further, Malcolm believed that even the very presence of whites in a black organisation would lessen its effectiveness, simply because they would slow down the Negroes' discovery of what they need to do, and particularly what they can do, by organising by themselves and working for themselves together in their own communities.

Malcolm's conditions for white support were thus: first, whites could not join black organisations; second, whites should work among their own community to abolish racism; and third, future alliances between black and white must be formed on a basis of equality. Malcolm emphasised that in this way black people would respect and welcome support from white allies who were sincere in their desire to abolish racism in American society:

"We will completely respect our white co-workers. They will deserve every credit. We will give them every credit. We will meanwhile be working among our own kind, in our own black communities - showing and teaching black men in ways that only other black men can - that the black man has got to help himself. Working separately, the sincere white people and sincere black people actually will be working together."<sup>47</sup>

Malcolm believed that if black and white Americans could learn to work

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.376.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.377.

together in this way, then the possibility existed for the beginnings of a resolution to the race problem:

"In our mutual sincerity we might be able to show a road to the salvation of America's very soul. It can only be salvaged if human rights and dignity, in full, are extended to black men."<sup>48</sup>

However, realising the enormity of the problems which black Americans faced in their struggle for freedom, Malcolm also looked outside America for allies and potential support.

Unlike the civil rights leadership, Malcolm believed that black Americans should seek allies abroad, as well as at home. The emphasis which Malcolm placed on pointing out to American Negroes that they must link their struggle to that of other non-white peoples of the world has already been discussed in this chapter. However, Malcolm's ideas on the formation of international alliances and the steps he took to implement these ideas have not.

Malcolm regarded the most important potential source of allies for black Americans to be international. An indication of the emphasis which Malcolm placed on obtaining international support for the Negro is the fact that he spent over half of his last year abroad. Malcolm's experiences and discussions with political leaders in Africa confirmed his belief that:

"... the African leaders only had to be convinced that if they took an open

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

stand at the governmental level and showed interest in the problem of black people in this country, they wouldn't be rebuffed."<sup>49</sup>

Malcolm undertook his second trip abroad specifically to seek support for the Negro cause among political leaders in Africa and the Middle East.

One important aspect of Malcolm's policy of internationalising the freedom struggle was his attempt to take the Negro cause before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Malcolm was admitted to the July 1964 Conference of the Organisation of African Unity as an observer and in this capacity submitted a memorandum to the delegates urging their support of the Negro struggle in the United States and their help in bringing the Negroes' plight before the United Nations. Malcolm maintained that the Negro problem was not a domestic issue but an international one:

"Our problem is your problem. It is not a Negro problem, not an American problem. This is a world problem; a problem for humanity. It is not a problem of civil rights but a problem of human rights."<sup>50</sup>

Malcolm realised that some delegates at the Conference had implied that they had enough problems of their own without becoming involved in the Negro struggle, and he was also fully aware of the pervasive influence of American finance over African affairs. Thus he did not hesitate to bring this up before the delegates:

"We pray that our African brothers have not freed themselves of European colonialism only to be overcome and held in check now by American Dollarism.

<sup>49</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.143.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.75.

Don't let American racism be 'legalized'  
by American dollarism.<sup>51</sup>

Although Malcolm may have originally been over-optimistic concerning the benefits which might be gained by bringing the case of the American Negro before the United Nations, he did not believe that even if this were achieved it would automatically solve the problems of black Americans. His main aim was thus to establish effective communication between American Negroes and Africans so that each could work towards the interests of the other. To this end, Malcolm organised branches of the OAAU amongst black Americans living in the countries he visited abroad. An illustration of the type of communication Malcolm was beginning to establish was the appearance and speech by Muhammed Babu, a member of the Tanzanian government, at one of Malcolm's Harlem rallies, together with the reading of a message of solidarity and support sent to Malcolm by Che Guevara.<sup>52</sup>

Malcolm regarded one of his main tasks to be that of dispelling the confusion which he believed American information agencies had created among Africans concerning both the American Negro's identification with Africa and the extent of progress they were making in their struggle for freedom. He regarded this as vital if Negroes were ever to win international support. The most important aspect of Malcolm's search for allies abroad was his attempts to persuade African leaders to use the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See speech by Malcolm X at the Audubon, New York, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1964 in Malcolm X Speaks. pp.89-104.

racial situation in America as a means for attacking United States foreign policy. H. S. Handler, reporting Malcolm's activities during his second visit to Africa, noted in the New York Times that Malcolm had been urging the African nations to employ the racial situation in the United States as an instrument of attack in discussing international problems, because:

"... such a strategy would give the African states more leverage in dealing with the United States and would in turn give American Negroes more leverage in American society."<sup>53</sup>

Malcolm apparently had some measure of success in this attempt, as Handler's report then continued:

"The spokesmen of some African states acted precisely within the framework of these recommendations last month in the Congo debate at the United Nations. They accused the United States of being indifferent to the fate of the blacks and cited as evidence the attitude of the United States government toward the civil rights struggle in Mississippi. The African move profoundly disturbed the American authorities, who gave the impression that they had been caught off guard."<sup>54</sup>

This was how Malcolm hoped to use international support in the struggle for black freedom.

Malcolm thus constantly emphasised to black Americans the importance of forming close communication and alliances with countries

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<sup>53</sup>H. S. Handler. "Malcolm X Cites Role in U.N. Fight." New York Times, January 2nd 1965.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

outside America. As he pointed out to the black community: "Today, power is international, real power is international, today real power is not local."<sup>55</sup> In this period Malcolm placed his main emphasis on attempting to bring some of this power to bear in the black freedom struggle. In an interview with Harry Ring, Malcolm stated that the problem in the Congo, Vietnam, Mississippi and New York was all one problem of the oppressed and the oppressor and that the oppressed were beginning to realise this:

"The oppressed people all over the world have the same problems and it is only now that they're becoming sufficiently sophisticated to see that all they have to do to get the oppressor off their back is to unite and realize that it is one problem - that our problems are inseparable. And then our action will be inseparable. Our action will be one of unity and in the unity of oppressed people is actually the strength, and the best strength of the oppressed people."<sup>56</sup>

Malcolm's attempt to internationalise the freedom struggle was one of the most significant developments in Negro protest for many years. The extent of Malcolm X's impact upon Africa was attested to by John Lewis and Donald Harris who toured several African countries as representatives of SNCC during the same period as Malcolm<sup>57</sup>. The importance which Malcolm

<sup>55</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.129.

<sup>56</sup> Harry Ring interview. Op. cit. p.30.

<sup>57</sup> In the report of their visit, John Lewis and Donald Harris wrote: "Malcolm's impact on Africa was just fantastic. In every country he was known and served as the main criteria for categorizing other Afro-Americans and their political views." See "All Africa was for Malcolm X." in Malcolm X Talks to Young People. Op. cit. pp.26-28.

attached to seeking international support in the struggle for black freedom cannot be over-emphasised. As he stated in one of his speeches:

"In my opinion, the greatest accomplishment that was made in the struggle of the black man in America in 1964 toward some kind of real progress was the successful linking together of our problem with the African problem, or making our problem a world problem."<sup>58</sup>

#### APPROACH.

A significant difference between Malcolm X and his contemporaries in the civil rights movement lay in his uncompromising approach to the struggle for black freedom. Malcolm refused to accept the argument that implicitly governed the whole approach of the civil rights movement - that because Negroes are a minority in America they must depend on support from the white majority if they are to make any progress, and thus must not adopt tactics unacceptable to their white allies and which might alienate their support. Malcolm argued that Negroes would never win their freedom by functioning within the framework of rules laid down by white America:

"Whenever our people are ready to take any kind of action necessary to get results, they'll get results. They'll never get results as long as they play by the ground rules laid down by the power structure."<sup>59</sup>

Instead, the slogan which characterised Malcolm's approach during the last year of his life was 'freedom by any means necessary.'

<sup>58</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.143.

<sup>59</sup> Harry Ring interview. Op. cit. p.50.

Malcolm pointed out to the black community that the Negroes' approach in the past has always been based on the assumption that they were a minority. Consequently, this resulted in a compromising type of approach which depended upon appeals to the white conscience for progress. However, Malcolm argued that if Negroes viewed themselves as part of a non-white world majority, this would strengthen their approach and make them demand their freedom rather than beg for it. Malcolm believed that an international perspective of the Negro struggle was valuable both for its psychological benefits and for the potential source of allies and support which it opened up.

Malcolm urged black Americans to remove any of their leaders who were hindering them in their struggle for freedom. Although Malcolm never attacked the civil rights leadership to the extent that he had when a member of the Black Muslims, he had not lost his scorn for those leaders whom he believed to be more concerned with keeping the favour of white Americans than with the needs of the black masses. In his view, this type of 'Uncle Tom' leadership would never win the black masses their freedom:

"They want to be looked upon by the white man as responsible. They don't want to be classified by him as extremist, or violent, or, you know, irresponsible. They want their good image. And nobody who's looking for a good image will ever be free."<sup>60</sup>

To Malcolm, there was only one kind of approach to the struggle for black freedom which was likely to get meaningful results, and that was an

<sup>60</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.134.

uncompromising, militant and radical approach. He constantly emphasised the need for black Americans to become aware of this basic fact:

"You get freedom by letting your enemy know that you'll do anything to get your freedom; then you'll get it. It's the only way you'll get it. When you get that kind of attitude... they'll call you an extremist or a subversive, or seditious, or a red or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough, and get enough people to be like you, you'll get your freedom."<sup>61</sup>

Because Malcolm insisted on adopting this type of approach, he was constantly portrayed as an advocate of indiscriminate violence.

Malcolm's position on violence has already been discussed in the first section of this chapter. In the final ten months of his life his position remained basically the same. Malcolm remained an uncompromising advocate of Negro self-defence up to his death. He constantly warned of the inevitability of black violence in America, and maintained that as Negroes began to define freedom in their own terms, they would become increasingly aware that it did not exist for them, and consequently would become more willing to use violent means to gain it. To accusations that he encouraged violence, Malcolm replied "I don't encourage it, but I'm not going to sit here and pretend that it doesn't exist."<sup>62</sup> Malcolm was particularly bitter about such accusations in view of white America's refusal to face up to the real causes of black violence - the economic and social conditions in the Negro ghettos. As Malcolm constantly pointed out to white Americans:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.145.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 191.

"It takes no-one to stir up the sociological dynamite that stems from the unemployment, bad housing, and inferior education already in the ghettos. This explosively criminal condition has existed for so long, it needs no fuse; it fuses itself; it spontaneously combusts from within..."<sup>63</sup>

Malcolm often predicted violence but did not advocate it. In fact he believed that the advocacy of self-defence was the only way in which acts of violence directed against Negroes could be halted:

"I don't believe in violence - that's why I want to stop it. And you can't stop it with love... So we only mean vigorous action in self defence, and that vigorous action we feel we're justified in initiating by any means necessary."<sup>64</sup>

However, although Malcolm's strategy of violence was primarily defensive he was not necessarily totally opposed to violent means if this would help Negroes win their freedom. As he reveals in his Autobiography:

"I am for violence if non-violence means we continue postponing a solution to the American black man's problem - just to avoid violence. I don't go for non-violence if it also means a delayed solution. To me, a delayed solution is a non-solution."<sup>65</sup>

Malcolm's life was committed to the black masses and he was well aware of the urgency of their need for freedom.

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One hugely significant aspect of Malcolm's approach - which he was developing increasingly in the final few months of his life - was the

<sup>63</sup> Malcolm X Autobiography. p.336.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. pp.164-165.

<sup>65</sup> Malcolm X Autobiography. p.367.

emphasis he placed upon power. Malcolm never actually used the phrase 'Black Power' when advocating his ideas, but during the last three months of his life he did increasingly emphasise the need for black Americans to develop their own bases of power in the struggle for freedom. Malcolm constantly argued that power would only bow to power and to nothing else. This is why he had developed such an uncompromising approach. Malcolm maintained that whilst American Negroes had won only tokens in their struggle during 1964, the countries in Africa and Asia had been able to make real gains because they had realised that power was the magic word. Thus, Malcolm argued that the use of power was the only way through which black Americans could begin to win their freedom:

"Power in defense of freedom is greater than power in behalf of tyranny and oppression, because power, real power, comes from conviction which produces action, uncompromising action. It also produces insurrection against oppression. This is the only way you'll end oppression - with power."<sup>66</sup>

Malcolm emphasised that power only bowed to power and not to smiles or threats or pleadings. He thus urged American Negroes to get down to the difficult task of organising to build political and economic bases of power of their own, and he forecast that when they did, their uncompromising approach would produce plenty of action:

"It takes power to make power respect you. It takes madness almost to deal with a power structure that's so corrupt, so corrupt. So in 1965 we should see a lot of action. Since the old methods haven't worked they'll be forced to try new methods..."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.150.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.156.

Such an approach inevitably led to accusations of extremism. To such accusations Malcolm replied in characteristic fashion:

"... if we are extremists we're not ashamed of it. In fact, the conditions that our people suffer are extreme and an extreme illness cannot be cured with a moderate medicine."<sup>68</sup>

#### ORGANISATION AND PROGRAMME.

The formation of Malcolm's first organisation - the Muslim Mosque Inc. - had been an important tactical mistake. Although Malcolm had emphasised that it would be organised so that all Negroes could participate in its activities, the religious base of the movement was not likely to appeal to those unsympathetic to the Moslem religion, or not religiously orientated. Malcolm eventually began to realise this and, following his first trip abroad, he established the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) with the stated aim of working towards a united front of all Afro-Americans and their organisations "... around a non-religious and non-sectarian constructive purpose for human rights."<sup>69</sup>

Malcolm did not want to establish a leadership cult. He intended his organisation to be moulded and shaped by its members. The Basic Unity Program of the OAAU<sup>70</sup> which Malcolm was to deliver at the meeting at which he was assassinated, reflects the democratic nature and collective

<sup>68</sup> Malcolm X. "The Black Struggle in the United States." Présence Africaine 2 English edition, 1965. p.20.

<sup>69</sup> Malcolm X in George Breitman. The Last Year of Malcolm X. p.77.

<sup>70</sup> Printed as Appendix B in Ibid.

form of leadership which the organisation encouraged:

"The basic program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity... can and will be modified by the membership, taking into consideration national, regional and local conditions that require flexible treatment. The Organization of Afro-American Unity encourages active participation of each member since we feel that each and every Afro-American has something to contribute to our freedom."<sup>71</sup>

Malcolm always referred to himself as the 'representative' of the OAAU and never as its leader. Nor did he ever represent himself as a leader of the Negro people:

"I don't profess to be anybody's leader. I'm one of twenty-two million Afro-Americans, all of whom have suffered the same things. And I probably cry out a little louder against the suffering than most others and therefore, perhaps, I'm better known."<sup>72</sup>

Malcolm intended his organisation to be responsive to the needs of its members and the black masses throughout America. He welcomed advice from all quarters, and particularly from black and white youth. Malcolm constantly urged Afro-Americans never to passively accept what they had heard or read from others, but to form the habit of learning to think for themselves. Malcolm's major role in the organisation was that of teacher. As George Breitman has pointed out, Malcolm's major function at the rallies and meetings he organised for black Americans was that of "... teaching, educating, patiently explaining things to his people in language and style they understood."<sup>73</sup> In this, Malcolm could not be equalled by any

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.114

<sup>72</sup> Malcolm X. "The Black Struggle in the United States." Op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. p.115.

contemporary Negro leader.

Along with the mass participation base and collective leadership form of structure of the OAAU went Malcolm's desire for a programme that would be truly responsive to the needs of the black masses. Malcolm never developed a comprehensive programme to be used in the black freedom struggle although the Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the OAAU which Malcolm presented on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1964, manifests most of his basic ideas - the assertion of the Negro's right to self-defence; the need to restore close communication with Africa; the emphasis on the Negroes' political potential; and the necessity for black unity and solidarity. Although many of the basic ideas which Malcolm was developing in the period up to his first trip abroad are also evident here, it is significant that he no longer chooses to use the label 'black nationalism' to designate his political philosophy.

The Statement reflects Malcolm's fundamental belief that, if black Americans were to regain their self-respect and sense of racial pride, they must organise for themselves and by themselves in their struggle for freedom. Malcolm believed that an important step in this direction was the regeneration of the ghettos, through the efforts of black people, into communities which could become a source of pride to all black Americans: "We must take pride in the Afro-American community, for it is home and it is power."<sup>74</sup> Thus the Statement also stressed the importance

<sup>74</sup> Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the OAAU. in George Breitman Op. cit. p.110.

of education to the black community and called for control of black schools by the Afro-American community:

"Education is an important element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and people rediscover their identity and thereby increase self-respect. Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."<sup>75</sup>

The Basic Unity Program of the OAAU, which Malcolm was to have presented on February 21st 1965, contained the same basic themes only with more emphasis on the need to internationalise the freedom struggle.

Much criticism has been levelled at Malcolm X for his failure to present a comprehensive programme of what he believed was necessary in the struggle for black freedom. Such criticism tends to miss the point. Malcolm was cut off whilst in the process of developing his ideas and consequently did not have the time or opportunity to mould them into a coherent whole. It must not be forgotten that Malcolm was forced to adopt the roles of teacher, organiser and administrator all at the same time, whilst the resources (financial and otherwise) of his organisation were virtually non-existent. Further, there was a valid and significant reason why Malcolm X did not feel it was necessary to advocate a specific programme at the stage of development he had reached. The reason was that Malcolm believed no programme could be successful amongst the Negro masses until black people had first been made aware of the necessity of a

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.107.

programme. It has already been noted that Malcolm remarked that the biggest mistake of the freedom movement had been "trying to organise a sleeping people around specific goals". Malcolm thus aimed to first wake up black people to their humanity, and then help them develop a programme which would be truly responsive to their needs.

Malcolm used his weekly rallies to dissect and analyse the problems of black Americans to try and give them a clearer understanding of the tasks which they faced in their struggle for freedom. The following quote is perhaps the crux of Malcolm's position on this issue:

"I, for one, believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what it is that confronts them, and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program; and when the people create a program you get action. When these 'leaders' create programs you get no action..."

This is the type of philosophy that we want to express among our people. We don't need to give them a program, not yet. First, give them something to think about."<sup>76</sup>

This was the approach which Malcolm thus adopted. To first stir the masses of black people in America into awareness of their humanity, and then their exploitation and oppression, and then to develop a programme responsive to their needs. His assassination on February 21st 1965 cut off this evolution.

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<sup>76</sup> Malcolm X Speaks. pp.118-119.

#### IV

#### THE LEGACY OF MALCOLM X.

The development of Malcolm X's ideas during the last year of his life has been analysed in detail in the previous chapter. The purpose of this concluding chapter is to give a general indication of whether or not the ideas which Malcolm X advocated continue to be proposed and discussed in the context of the black freedom movement. The important point to remember is that Malcolm's ideas were not fully developed at the time of his assassination. Consequently, it is the direction in which Malcolm's ideas pointed, rather than specific individual ideas, which is important. No attempt will be made to assess the importance of Malcolm X, or to establish whether or not specific developments in the black freedom struggle were a result of Malcolm's influence. This would provide the subject of further research.

The climate of black protest has changed drastically from that which was prevalent during the last year of Malcolm's life. In almost five years which have passed since Malcolm's death, old techniques and styles of leadership in Negro protest have been pushed into the background by new forms of protest and leadership which have arisen to take their place. Although the strategy of nonviolent protest remained dominant during 1965, the fury and destruction of the Watts riot of August 1965 made it clear that black protest was no longer synonymous with nonviolence. Watts marked a turning point in the freedom struggle. Coming only a week after President

Johnson had triumphantly signed the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the riots sounded the death-knell of the civil rights movement. The black masses had begun to articulate the urgency of their needs by the most effective means at their disposal. After Watts, James Farmer of CORE commented "Civil rights organisations have failed. No one had any roots in the ghetto."<sup>1</sup> The focus of the mass media on the new form of protest gave the more radical black leaders, such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rapp Brown, an opportunity to upstage the civil rights leadership of Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins and Martin Luther King. Conflict between the NAACP, the Urban League and SCILC, and the more radical groups such as SNCC and CORE grew in subsequent months, and Carmichael's cry for 'Black Power' in the Meredith March of 1966 split the movement. The debate over the dangers and usefulness of the concept of Black Power continues today.

The focus of the civil rights movement is now placed squarely upon the needs of the black masses in the urban ghettos of the North and South. Bayard Rustin has noted that the civil rights movement is evolving from a protest movement into a full-fledged social movement, and consequently is becoming more politically and economically orientated.<sup>2</sup> It is progressing from removing the barriers to opportunity to achieving the goal of equality. In the light of such developments in the struggle for black freedom, an attempt can be made to consider the basic themes of Malcolm X's ideas and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in L. M. Killian. The Impossible Revolution? p.107.

<sup>2</sup> Bayard Rustin. "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement." Commentary Magazine, 1966.

to examine whether they have relevance today.

One of Malcolm's basic beliefs was that black Americans must be awakened to a sense of their own worth and dignity if they were ever to liberate themselves from the myth of white supremacy. His central idea was the need for a policy of group solidarity in the struggle, and as a means of achieving this solidarity he stressed the importance of a positive identification with blackness. There is no doubt that in recent years Negroes have developed a new consciousness - a new pride in their collective identity as black people in America and a new sense of their own worth. A study made public by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, July 1968, found that:

"As in the case of religious and ethnic groups in America, there seems to be wide support (among Negroes) for cultural individuality within a larger inter-racial social sphere."<sup>3</sup>

Negroes are learning to take pride in their black identity, and this new cultural assertiveness can be seen in the growing popularity of African clothing and 'natural' hairstyles among young black Americans.

Black Americans are beginning to realise the importance of rediscovering their origins and lost history. This is reflected in the demands of black students at universities and colleges throughout America for an education meaningful to the black community and not one defined in terms of white, middle class America. Students have demanded (often

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted from Richard L. Worshop. "Black Pride." Editorial Research Reports, September 11<sup>th</sup> 1968.

successfully) courses in Afro-American studies, African languages and African culture, together with 'unwhitened' histories of the Negro's experience in America<sup>4</sup>. Many Negroes are beginning to realise that they have a heritage and history of their own within the American context. The conflict over identity is beginning to be resolved although much still remains to be done. The importance of this new consciousness among black Americans should not be under-estimated. As Richard L. Worsnop has noted:

"Establishment of a distinct black cultural identity within white society is a key element in the movement to enhance the power of black people generally."<sup>5</sup>

Along with this new black consciousness has developed an increased awareness of the need for black solidarity - the fundamental premise of Malcolm X's thinking. Although integration remains the goal of the vast majority of American Negroes<sup>6</sup>, black control of black ghettos has replaced integration as the immediate goal of most Negro leaders. Black control of the black community - particularly with respect to schools - has become the issue for local black leaders in cities throughout America<sup>7</sup>. Virtually all the black leaders have come to believe in the need for Negroes to build economic and political bases of power of their own. Whilst militant Black Power advocates assert bluntly that power bends only to power and to nothing else, even Whitney Young of the Urban League has stated that his organisation supports:

<sup>4</sup> See Peter Schrag. "The New Black Myths." Harpers, May 1969.

<sup>5</sup> R. L. Worsnop. Op. cit. p664.

<sup>6</sup> See "Report from Black America." Newsweek, June 30th 1969.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

"as legitimate and historically consistent a minority's mobilization of the economic and political power to reward its friends and punish its enemies..."

and urged Negroes to build "the power that America respects."<sup>8</sup>

The stress on the need for black Americans to build up political bases of power continues increasingly today. A 1969 Newsweek survey found that Negroes overwhelmingly agreed that their interests could best be furthered within the American two-party system and not by the formation of a separate black caucus<sup>9</sup>. Negroes still retain their attachment to the Democratic party although 24% of those interviewed believed that it made little difference which political party was in office<sup>10</sup>. However, although the majority of black Americans continue to place their faith in the two major parties, a militant minority does not. Stokely Carmichael has stated that to ask Negroes to join the Democratic party is like asking Jews to join the Nazi party. From 1966 on, SNCC and CORE moved increasingly away from the two-party system and toward independent political action. The Black Panther Party was formed as an independent black political party although actual political achievements in this area have not yet become apparent. The main emphasis of the freedom movement in the political sphere is thus still a reliance upon the Democratic party as the vehicle for the political aspirations of black Americans, together with a stress upon the need to make elected politicians responsive to the demands of the

<sup>8</sup> At CORE annual convention, Columbus, Ohio. July 6<sup>th</sup> 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Newsweek. Op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

community.

In his Autobiography Malcolm wrote in 1965 that:

"... it will probably take longer than I live before the Negro sees that the struggle of the American black man is international."<sup>11</sup>

Although militant Black Power advocates such as Stokely Carmichael, SNCC, CORE and the Black Panther Party view the freedom struggle as part of the international struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the majority of black Americans have not yet made this radical commitment. However, many black leaders in America have recognised the need to establish communication with other non-white peoples in the world. Writing in November 1967 William Worthy noted that:

"In no previous twelve- or fifteen-month period has the black freedom movement seen the establishment of so many international links at the leadership level."<sup>12</sup>

He then went on to give a detailed account of black leaders who had made visits abroad, including representatives of SNCC and CORE to North Vietnam and Fannie Lou Hamer, leader of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to Africa. In 1966 SNCC, CORE and King's SCLC entered the agitation against the United States' war effort in Vietnam, and from that year on Martin Luther King developed a growing commitment to the peace movement. Although Malcolm X had not lived long enough to leave behind effective and established lines of communication between international heads of state

<sup>11</sup>Malcolm X. Autobiography. p.364.

<sup>12</sup>William Worthy. "The American Negro is Dead." Esquire, November 1967.

and black Americans, the international orientation of the most militant organisations in the black freedom movement is apparent. In August 1967, in an address to the Organization of Latin American Solidarity in Cuba, Stokely Carmichael had stated:

"Black Power means that we see ourselves as part of the Third World; that we see our struggle as closely related to liberation struggles around the world. We must hook up with these struggles."<sup>13</sup>

Although the majority of Negroes do not yet view their struggle as an international one, growing opposition to the Vietnam war, amongst black, (as well as many white) Americans provides fertile ground on which more militant black leaders can work.

It is among this minority of militant black Americans that the legacy of Malcolm X can be most readily discerned. A New York Times report on the growing Black Power mood among black Americans noted in 1967 that, "Black Power leaders conceded that their new mood was in part the result of Malcolm X's influence..."<sup>14</sup> SNCC had enthusiastically adopted the concept of Black Power from the slogan's first use, and CORE, in its July 1966 annual convention, adopted resolutions calling for withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam, rejection of nonviolence as a technique, and the setting up of Black Power instead of integration as its goal.<sup>15</sup> As defined by such organisations, the concept of Black Power involves

<sup>13</sup> Stokely Carmichael. "Black Power and the Third World." Published by Third World Information Service. Ontario, 1967.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Eric Norden. "The Murder of Malcolm X." The South End, 1969

<sup>15</sup> See Benjamin Mause. The Negro Revolution. p.241.

virtually all of the basic ideas which Malcolm X had been advocating during the final ten months of his life. Stokely Carmichael has stated that "When you talk of Black Power, you talk of picking up where Malcolm X left off..."<sup>16</sup> and in his book on Black Power, written jointly with Charles V. Hamilton, it is defined in the following manner:

"It is a call for black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support these organizations.... The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks."<sup>17</sup>

Such definitions of Black Power assert that white Americans cannot join black organisations but should work among their own community to eliminate racism. Alliances can only be formed on a basis of equality and black unity must of necessity precede a working black-white unity. However, as the 1969 Newsweek survey found, such sentiments are not shared at present by the majority of black Americans. The concept of Black Power as defined by such organisations as SNCC, CORE and the Black Panther Party, also asserts unequivocally the Negro's right to self-defence. A Southern based organisation - the Deacons for Defense and Justice - was formed in 1965 around the belief in self-defence to counter anti-Negro violence, and apparently has been successful in stemming white violence.<sup>18</sup> Again, the

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Hause. Ibid. p.224.

<sup>17</sup> Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America. p.44.

<sup>18</sup> See George Thayer. The Farther Shores of Politics. pp.324-327.

Newsweek survey shows that the majority of black Americans have not yet given up their belief in nonviolence and by 63 per cent to 21 per cent feel they can win equality without violence.<sup>19</sup> The militant Black Power advocates thus have not yet won majority support among black Americans for their radical ideas.

Whether the militant and increasingly radical aspects of the concept of Black Power will find increasing support in future years will depend to a large extent upon the reaction of white American society to Negro demands. However, what is likely to be of increasing significance in future years is the youthful composition of the black community in America. The most recent major Census Bureau survey of the United States population found that the median age for whites was twenty-nine, but for Negroes was only twenty-one.<sup>20</sup> The Newsweek survey which has been frequently quoted in this chapter, also pointed out the increasing radicalisation of blacks under thirty years of age in the ghettos of the North. Amongst this group, the survey found that only 49 per cent felt that they could win their freedom peaceably whilst 36 per cent did not. Almost 25 per cent felt that Negroes should give up working with white Americans completely, and 20 per cent felt Negroes should form their own political party. Of particular significance for this paper, the survey also found that whilst Martin Luther King remained the most important leader in the freedom struggle for young Northerners, he was followed in second position by Malcolm X who received

<sup>19</sup> Newsweek. Op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

a favourable rating by 40 per cent of those interviewed. It is the young black Americans who will shape the form of their struggle for freedom in future years.

In conclusion it may be stated that many of the ideas which Malcolm X was developing during the last year of his life continue to be discussed in the freedom struggle today. In some cases the legacy of Malcolm X is clear. The militant advocates of Black Power have developed positions very similar to that indicated by Malcolm X at the time of his assassination. However, such ideas are by no means shared by the majority of black Americans, but then radical ideas seldom are held by majorities. Malcolm's legacy involves not only his ideas. The progression of his life from ghetto hustler to Black Muslim to a figure of international prominence provides inspiration for all those involved in the struggle for black freedom today.

As the two black psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price L. Cobbs have noted:

"History may well show that of all the men who lived during our fateful century none illustrated the breadth or the grand potential of man so magnificently as did Malcolm X. If, in future chronicles, America is regarded as the major nation of our day, and the rise of darker people from bondage as the major event, then no figure has appeared thus far who captures the spirit of our times as does Malcolm."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>W. H. Grier and P. M. Cobbs. Black Rage. p.163.

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