

Malcolm X's Leadership at the Crossroads of Race, Politics and Economics for African Americans in the 1960s

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Abstract

This essay explores Malcolm X's leadership through his political and economic examinations and proscriptions for African Americans via his public statements and writings. This work builds on previous scholarly work about Malcolm X as a major historical figure of the late 20th century at the nexus of his unique role as organizational leader to uncover his political and economic ideas as he sought to address the negative conditions facing African Americans in their communities during the Civil Right era.

Keywords: African American Leadership, Black Community, Black Economic Organization, Black Education, Black Power, Black Nationalism, Civil Rights, Community Activist, Pan-Africanism, Community Activism, Black Political Organization

1. Introduction

Over the course of many centuries Africans have attempted to assert their humanity often facing inhumane circumstances manifest in the social conditions of slavery and racial segregation. In the United States many African Americans have looked to the importance of leaders whose vision and commitment for individual and collective improvement would shine a light of hope in a world often ravaged with various socio-economic problems. It is in this context that a few Black leaders expressed the anguish of their constituents with both a critical and constructive public discourse to combat the racial stereotypes and discuss the positive contributions of Africa and African people to world civilization. It is in this tradition that Malcolm X a.k.a. El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (1925-1965) rose from the depths of despair to become a national and international figure.

This essay builds on previous scholarly work about Malcolm X to raise the following query: first, as a major historical figure of the late 20th century what his proscription and vision for the present and future of Black America? Second, how would this vision of political and economic organization apply to African Americans? Finally, what changes did he believe were needed in the 1960s and beyond to bring about a vision for Black advancement for the future? To answer some of these questions it is necessary to study his ideas and actions in order to understand his legacy more broadly.

I will examine and interpret the data collected on Malcolm X's vision in his public statement to address political and economic issues as outlined in Kawaida Theory (Karenga, 1980, pp. 37 and 153).

The Mid-20th century witnessed the rise of Africana Social Movements both domestically and internationally. An Africana Social Movement includes the pursuit of social equality and social sovereignty of people of African descent throughout the diaspora. Pan-African/Black sovereignty includes political, economic, and cultural dimensions expressed in collective behavior and in resistance to institutional racism and cultural discrimination, while witnessing leaders working toward collective social action. The legacy of Malcolm X's leadership can be found in several Africana Social Movements: the African Independence Movements of the middle Twentieth

century; the Civil Rights, Black Power, Black Nationalist (1950s and 1960s), Black Studies, and Black Arts Movements (late 1960s and early 1970s); and the Hip-Hop Movement of the 1980s and 1990s. (Smallwood, 2008, pp. 5-6) Members of each movement became familiar with and reflective of Malcolm X's leadership in the NOI (from 1953-1963) and were attracted to his uncompromising public criticism of systematic social oppression and European Colonialism as well as his advocacy of cultural pride and unity in a way that went beyond other NOI representatives. Various organizations would later focus on self-determination, social empowerment, cultural celebration, and community uplift, as evidenced in the Black Panther Party, the US organization, the Republic of New Africa, the Revolutionary Action Movement, and various local grassroots organizations throughout the United States.

Scholars, researchers, and students of Malcolm X are likely aware that from an ideological standpoint he draws more directly on the influences of Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism. Malcolm X clearly engaged in discourse around social change in Black America in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a leader within the NOI, he tells organizational members and supporters that integration is not the solution to the ongoing problems of structural inequality, yet he clearly identifies with beginnings of post-colonial independence movements internationally while embracing the concept of Pan-African solidarity. Malcolm X further challenged leaders of the Civil Rights organizations in the form of critical statements and debates while also engaging and inspiring the generation of young college age students that would identify with him and break with the Civil Rights ideologies and strategies in the mid-to-late 1960s. It is from this period of 1964-65 that I will focus this examination of his vision for African Americans.

2.1 Political Ideology of Black Liberation and the search for Black empowerment

The desire for African American independence and self-determination goes back to the eighteenth century with the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church by Richard Allen. The roots of Black Nationalism in the 1800s can be found in the colonization movement, which addressed Black emigration from the United States to Africa and Latin America. John T. McCartney (1992) suggests that African American's desire for emigration was to gain political freedom and independence not possible for them as a minority group:

[Martin] Delaney sums up the major theme in the [Black] Nationalist credo when he says that 'every people should be the originators of their own schemes, and creators of the events that lead to their destiny.' Delaney continues that since African-Americans are a minority in the United States, where many and almost insurmountable obstacles present themselves a separate Black Nation is necessary in the march to self-determination. (p. 16).

2.2 A Community Activist in the Making: Malcolm's Road to Black Power

A Community Activist as defined here refers to a person who advocates for social change, in the context of local group issues, by organizing people around common values and concerns. In the context of African Social Movements, Malcolm X's leadership represents the catalyst for community organizing in the 1950s and 1960s exploring the possibility of Black social and economic uplift. Malcolm X as an organizational and community leader used his role to act against social inequality. In his role as a community leader/activist, Malcolm X publicly condemned racism leading to social inequality as his actions led him to fight for social justice. (Conyers & Smallwood, 2008, pp. 5-6)

The scope of Malcolm X's leadership can be deemed as either alternative or non-traditional expressions of empowerment similar to those demonstrated by American educator Myles Horton (1905-1990) and the Highlander Folk school in Monteagle, Tennessee in the 1940s and 1950s as well as Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) in South America, Europe and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Freire's emphasis on Critical Consciousness meant that he witnessed the traditional systems of education as tools to reinforce socio-economic inequality between the poor and rich of a society's upper social strata. According to Freire, this inequality resulted in a "culture of silence and thus poor people would internalize the low opinion that society had of them." Freire advocated critical reflection leading to political action and government accountability. (Ewert, 1990, pp. 89) Horton's emphasis on Popular Education through the Highlander School in Tennessee would focus on political empowerment for poor people through grass roots movements. (Ewert, 1990, pp. 89-91) This places Malcolm as a non-formal community activist/educator utilizing both the tradition of the Critical Consciousness advocated by Freire using his leadership for social change and the popular education of Myles Horton addressing group problems at the community level.

The operative question here is: how did Malcolm X's ideology and public statements translate into action leading to social change in African American community settings? The beginning of Malcolm X's activism occurred while in the Norfolk State Prison Colony (1948-1950). During this time he participated in the prison education debate program in conjunction with a program of self-directed study including his exploration of history and religion that would serve as a catalyst for Malcolm X's intellectual growth and development and would shape his early activism. At debates involving college teams, with up to 300 visitors that came to watch how these inmates would fare against the best and highly accomplished college students (Branham, 1995, p. 121).

During this time Malcolm used the public forum of debating to discuss information he obtained from his self-directed learning (Branham, 1995, pp. 121-122). Malcolm X's public debates while in prison led him to introduce Islam to African Americans inmates and paved the way for their religious conversion emphasizing racial pride and individual self-worth with the goal that they would have a better way of life than they had previously known. It is at this point that he fused historical and cultural knowledge along with his emerging organizing skills that he would begin his journey teaching African American adults to actively liberate themselves from the negative social forces with the goal that they become empowered individually and collectively through various means.

2.3 Malcolm X and Political Organization: establishing independent leadership and ideology, 1964-1965

When exploring Malcolm X's community activism in a political and historical context it is apparent that he offered a series of thoughtful and searing critiques of current federal, state, and local policies impacting Black life. By using his public rhetoric, he was able to educate and organize Black community residents around common issues and thus put public pressure on the traditional political institutions represented by the entities to address negative conditions affecting African American life.

Author George Breitman's 1967 book, *The Last Year of Malcolm X* represents the first work concentrating on the subject's political life after his separation from the Nation of Islam. The author attempts to examine the conflicts that eventually led to Malcolm X being forced out of the organization. Breitman discusses the evolution of Malcolm's political ideology during the last year of his life by his exploration for a political ideology to "internationalize the struggle" of African Americans to gain greater political control of their communities. A limitation with this book (acknowledged by Breitman) is a lack of access he had to Malcolm's private thoughts shared with associates during his last year. This point is significant because subsequent research and examination of his speeches now shows that Malcolm X was continually gathering more information and beginning to reformulate his opinions on advocating a political strategy. This point is important for all scholars studying Malcolm X and searching for a definitive political message, for him based solely on his final speeches (Breitman, 1992, p. 59).

To the extent that Malcolm changed his political ideology in the last year of his life is the subject of ongoing debate and discussion. His position on politics and the African American community, at the very least, indicates his attempt to expand globally the struggle against racism linking Black oppression in the U.S. to colonial oppression of Black people on the African continent. This would lead to Malcolm X embarking on two trips to Africa in 1964 to solicit the support of leaders of several newly independent sub-Saharan African nations (Malcolm X, 1992a, pp. 350-363 & Goldman, 1979, pp. 206-208)

Upon leaving the NOI Malcolm X clearly adopted a philosophy of Black Nationalism and thus laid the groundwork for later expressions of both political and economic advancement that would manifest in the Black Power and Cultural Nationalist Movements of the late 1960s (Karenga, 1994, pp. 175-176).

To broaden the struggle against Black oppression, Malcolm X's statements and travels sought to and received international media coverage. When examining diverse views on Malcolm X's political life, a common theme throughout is that his activism became manifest through his statements about relieving poverty and suffering in African American communities. It is in this role that Malcolm served as a community advocate and activist first at the local level, next at the regional and then at the national levels. After his departure from the NOI, Malcolm X would then attempt to internationalize the struggle for African Americans and Africans in the diaspora as a proponent of Pan-Africanism.

Having left the NOI in 1964, Malcolm X pursued a path which would allow for political involvement with Civil Rights organizations. This marked a very turbulent year for America's cities that erupted in riots in the summer.

Malcolm X fought a war on several fronts: Upon his departure from the NOI, he had to address threats to his life from NOI members, organize and raise funds for his two newly formed organizations and develop a strategy that would allow him to work with more moderate and conservative leaders of national civil rights organizations whom he had vehemently criticized for years while in the Nation of Islam. Further, Malcolm then shifted toward an international forum linking the plight of Black Americans with the plight of Black Africans as he sought to educate African leaders about Black suffering in the United States.

2.4 The Convergence of Black Politics and the International Freedom Struggle: Malcolm X and Pan Africanism

If competition for limited resources forms the basis for political participation, then a problem for African American political participation is the inability to compete on a level playing field due to historical and structural inequality and limited influence in both major political parties resulting in a failure of Black communities to have full participation in the formal political process. Throughout his public career Malcolm X made public statements in Black communities in which he emphasized Black political control and a relationship with newly independent African nations. Malcolm X believed that if Blacks were to exercise power, they would be able to effect positive social change in their communities, thereby being active participants in alleviating their historical suffering rather than waiting for government officials to respond to their concerns.

Malcolm X's attendance at local rallies in the Black community of Harlem in New York City, his attendance at the March on Washington in 1963 and in other public forums represented a personal interest while in the NOI for the organization to become more involved in the Black freedom struggle as represented by the Civil Rights Movement. After his departure from the NOI Malcolm in 1964 reflected on this point:

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 are engaged in more action. By that, I mean I thought privately we should have amended, or relaxed our general non-engagement policy. I felt that, wherever Black people committed themselves, in the Little Rocks and the Birminghams and other places, militantly disciplined Muslims should also be there—for all the world to see, and respect, and discuss. (Malcolm X, 1992a, p. 289).

Malcolm X's desire for the NOI to become more active addressing overall Black suffering and frustration that it would not, eventually contribute to an ideological rift with Elijah Muhammad and the organizational hierarchy. Richard Brent Turner (1997) notes the power of Malcolm's words gained the attention of international leaders:

His ability to "make it plain" to the black masses began to attract the attention of radical Third World political and religious leaders as early as the late 1950s. His association and/or friendships with Ahmad Sukarno of Indonesia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Gamel Abd al-Nasser and Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi of Egypt, Patrice Lumumba of the Belgian Congo, and Ben Bella and Mahmoud Boutiba of Algeria gradually exposed him to radical Third World political ideas in the 1960s. (pp. 203-204).

After his departure from the NOI, Malcolm initially embraced an operational form of Black Nationalism publicly as his new political philosophy. Yet, he also demonstrated an interest in working with Civil Rights groups he had previously criticized to take a more active role in the overall effort of helping Black people desiring to gain power in their communities. To do this Malcolm advanced this political philosophy when in 1964 he and his supporters formed two organizations: The Muslim Mosque Incorporated (MMI), focusing on Islamic religion and The Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), focusing on Political and social concerns.

Malcolm X's leadership was viewed as a threat to United States national security; thus, he was monitored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) from the early 1950s until his assassination in 1965 (Carson, 1991, pp. 11-14). Malcolm X's local activity in New York also caused tensions within the NOI leadership hierarchy and eventually contributed to his departure from the organization. But while in the NOI, Malcolm developed ties to several local political leaders such as U.S. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. from Harlem. Malcolm X's influence on party politics in New York City was significant enough that the Freedom Now Party (an independent Black political party) asked him to run for Powell's congressional seat if Powell resigned (Perry, 1991 pp. 296, 302-304). Malcolm made overtures to Martin Luther King, Jr. and members of the Civil Rights Movement to reconcile his past criticisms and to discuss larger issues in order to find common ground towards a posture of operational

unity and mutual cooperation in the freedom struggle to eradicate de facto and de jure racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. At the same time, he sought to internationalize the political struggle of African Americans by linking their struggle against institutional racism with Africa's struggle against European colonialism. These explorations would then result in Malcolm's efforts toward an operational form of Pan-Africanism through coalition building. It could be argued that in these public statements Malcolm recognized that growing global markets would play an ever-increasing role in a future world in which political autonomy and operational unity among African people in the diaspora would position them to be important participants on the larger stage of world events in the near future. Thus, Malcolm X's search for a political ideology to advance his leadership led him further toward Pan-Africanism. According to William Sales (1994) Malcolm's emphasis on Pan-Africanism carried on the tradition of scholar-activist W. E. B. Du Bois in attempting to internationalize the struggle of Black political empowerment:

In this period of Pan-African internationalism, Malcolm X's formulations were not finished theoretical products but a rapidly developing perspective which he was never allowed to complete. Many questions which Malcolm addressed, therefore, were incompletely answered or not answered at all. There were also other important questions he did not take up before his death. It is clear that Malcolm X felt that the Eurocentric international system had to be transformed into one which could extend justice and equality to all of the world's peoples. It is equally clear that he felt this had to be done in some way as to preserve the plurality of cultures and nationalities and not through the forced homogenization of "integration." He had only begun to formulate the actual contours and mechanisms which would empower such new social forces and most often with specific reference not to the entire Third World but only to Afro-America and Africa. (pp. 84-85).

Though there were common themes of class oppression in his public lectures serving to educate poor people about the problems impacting them economically Malcolm X's emphasis on race and culture led him to explore a Pan-Africanist basis for problems in African American communities. In 1964, Malcolm X's two trips to Africa led him to seek support in the struggle for Black liberation in the United States. Malcolm's Pan-Africanist approach to African American problems taught Black adults to link their struggle for self-determination with similar struggles of independent African and Asian nations facing colonialism. In an open letter to his supporters, Malcolm X stated the importance and risk of his trip:

You must realize that what I am trying to do is very dangerous, because it is a direct threat to the entire international system of racist exploitation. It is a threat to discrimination in all its international forms. Therefore, if I die or am killed before making it back to the States, you can rest assured that what I've already set in motion will never be stopped. The foundation has been laid and no one can hardly undo it. Our problem has been internationalized. The results of what I am doing will materialize in the future and then all of you will be able to see why it is necessary for me to be here this long and what I was laying the foundation for while here. (Malcolm X, 1992b, p. 110).

Though there is some debate surrounding what Malcolm's final vision would have been had he lived, it is evident that in his search for a political ideology to liberate Black people in various milieus led him to teach them by his example of exploring alternative ideological approaches and tactics to gain Black political power for Black communities. It can be argued that his philosophical rhetoric in the form of public statements and speeches was an attempt by him to offer a pragmatic approach for working out a post-segregation and post-colonial strategy that would be needed in the immediate future.

3.1 The birth of Malcolm X's exploration and assessment of Economic Organization in Black communities

In Kawaida Theory, Africana Studies theorist, and scholar Maulana Karenga notes that economic organization is concerned with the system of producing, distributing and consuming goods and services in African American communities (p. 57).

Black economic organization in the twentieth century often is linked to discussion of noted Black educator Booker T. Washington and Black Nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, who both advocated social separation and economic independence. Both leaders spoke to the masses of Black people in their communities, attempting to provide hope and economic opportunity desperately needed. Both of Malcolm's parents, Earl and Louise Little were laborers; his

father was a carpenter by trade and his mother was a domestic worker. The Little family eventually owned a small farm in Michigan where they raised livestock and vegetables. As followers of Marcus Garvey, they attempted to gain some economic independence by growing, selling, and eating their own food (Malcolm X, 1992a, pp. 8-11).

3.2 Marcus Garvey's Expressions of Black Economic Nationalism

A major proponent in the early 20th century of Black Nationalism, Marcus Mosiah Garvey was Born in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica in 1887 and was raised in a majority Black society. He eventually arrives in the United States in 1916 and seeks to provide a program for millions of disenfranchised Blacks to address their economic, political, and educational plight during the early twentieth century. Garvey was attracted to aspects of Booker T. Washington's program of economic independence through self-help which he felt would be more practical for the masses of poor Black people (Karenga, 1994, p. 157). In 1918, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) as an alternative for Black empowerment vis-à-vis the interracial organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League that emphasized racial integration and interracial cooperation as the means for African American advancement. Because of the systematic resistance to Black integration among Whites in the U.S., Garvey believed Black separation would be the best chance for them to realize their full potential as human beings culturally, socially, politically, and economically. Garvey's socio-political philosophy of a Black Nationalism, expressed in the UNIA, emphasized cultural pride, social separation, and economic empowerment. His emphasis on racial pride, political and economic self-determination proved to be an attractive message for a segment of African Americans during the early twentieth century.

As noted by Malcolm X himself, his political ideology was Black Nationalism. Malcolm pointed out early in his autobiography that his parents were followers of Marcus Garvey and members of the UNIA thus impacting Malcolm and siblings at an early age (Malcolm X, 1992a, pp. 1-3). This early exposure to Black Nationalism was important in providing a foundation that would prepare Malcolm to later embrace Black Nationalism fully after his departure from the Nation of Islam (Malcolm X, 1992a, pp. 3-7).

After being discouraged in middle school from pursuing a professional career as a lawyer, Malcolm, along with most African Americans at this time, was faced with the reality of limited occupational choices due to employment discrimination and inferior public schools located in poor Black communities. In the 1950s and 1960s an increase in NOI membership led to greater emphasis on economic independence:

Economic imperative largely overrate any particular Political Philosophy during this period, and the Muslims undertook new areas of growth and administrative development. With the advent of a few model businesses and a drastic increase in membership and donations during the 1950s, Muhammad and his followers were able to showcase to the Black community in Chicago and elsewhere the potential of African Americans who pooled their resources. (Clegg, 1997, p. 157).

3.3 Malcolm X's Leadership and Black economic ideological foundation in the Nation of Islam

The influence of Black Nationalism can be found in the ideological formation of the Nation of Islam in the 1930s (Essien-Udom, 1962, p. 18). The organization's emphasis on Black economic nationalism was represented in their solicitation of funds for the development of organization run businesses. The economic program of Elijah Muhammad's leadership allowed Malcolm X to advance the economic growth of the NOI by increasing its membership resulting in a greater economic base of support. In the 1940s, the NOI practiced a form of economic nationalism which became evident in the 1950s as the growth of its businesses coincided with the growth in membership (Clegg, 1997, p. 98).

Malcolm X's role in the economic growth of the NOI resulted mainly from his organizing temples in various cities as a support base for economic growth. In 1955, Malcolm was instrumental in the growth of the organization:

After two weeks in Lansing, Malcolm X quickly moved on to Joliet, Illinois, then Cleveland and Dayton, Ohio, and from there to Camden, Paterson, and Jersey City, New Jersey. At each stop he opened a new temple. By the end of the year, Malcolm X had established more than twenty-seven temples, up from the barely functional seven temples existing when he left prison three years earlier. (Evanzz, 1992, pp. 66).

After becoming a member of the NOI while incarcerated in the late 1940s, Malcolm X adhered to the organization's adaptation of Garvey's economic philosophy of Black Nationalism emphasizing group empowerment through race pride, economic development, and social separation.

Malcolm X promoted the NOI's ideology of economic independence for African Americans during the 1950s and early 1960s. This form of "Economic Nationalism" focused on increasing membership and patronizing NOI-owned businesses as the organization encouraged its members and sympathizers to support economic initiatives and individual entrepreneurship, i.e., the concept of a separate nation within a nation built on businesses owned by the NOI. During Malcolm's time in the NOI, the organization founded their newspaper "Muhammad Speaks," while organizing new temples, restaurants and acquiring land for development (Clegg, 1987, p. 157).

As discussed previously, during the period of 1953 through early 1964, Malcolm was restricted to a position of political non-engagement on Civil Rights and other social issues affecting African Americans. As leader of the NOI, Elijah Muhammad forbade all members from participation in Civil Rights organizations, marches, or any political activity in general (Clegg, 1997, pp. 149-157; Perry, 1991, pp. 207-212 & Essien-Udom, 1962, pp. 177-178) During the late 1950s the NOI moved away from the political rhetoric of Black Nationalism and focused more on religious teachings of Muhammad and the development of the organization through economic patronage to address psycho-social problems affecting their constituents.

It was during the period of the early 1960s that Malcolm, an advocate for improving conditions for African Americans through NOI teachings of political and cultural empowerment began to privately question the organization's ideology and program for African Americans generally and probably for the organization as a whole. Malcolm X believed that the organization, with its resources, could do more to address the plight of *all* African Americans and not just Black Muslims. His views were probably influenced in part, by action-oriented organizations such as Garvey's UNIA in the 1920s and 1930s as well as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and student groups like the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which both became foundational linchpins of the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and mid-1960s. In 1963, Malcolm began to change his public rhetoric, aligning himself more with a philosophy of Black Nationalism. It was this change that would eventually lead him to seek cooperation with the politically active organizations of the Civil Rights Movement after his departure from the NOI in 1964 that he had criticized more vocally while in the NOI. (Goldman, 1979, pp. 175-176).

Malcolm X's call for economic independence for African Americans continued after his departure from the NOI and his adoption of Black Nationalism. Malcolm X's message to Black communities stressed economic self-determination as represented in the Black Nationalist philosophy. Malcolm's discussion of economic empowerment was not extensive after his separation from the NOI. Rather, his emphasis on political empowerment appeared to dominate much of his public discourse on discussing problems facing Black people. As a proponent for Black Nationalism, Malcolm X was an advocate for economic and political self-determination of Black people to seek control of their communities.

With the acceptance of Black Nationalism, Malcolm developed the basis for an economic ideology for organizing Black people in their communities:

The economic philosophy only means that we should control, own and operate the businesses of our community, and thereby be in a position to create job opportunities for our own people so that they won't have to boycott and picket and beg others to give them a job. (Goldman, 1979, p. 149)

His discussion of Black control of economic resources in Black communities meant a focus on community control independent of a single existing organization. His ideological shift from advocating economic ownership to statements referring to cooperative control of economic resources may have resulted from seeing organizational corruption with various NOI's businesses as the focus on entrepreneurship found store managers and some officials engaged in embezzling from the organization. (Goldman, 1979, pp. 160-161).

3.4 The Evolution of Malcolm X's Economic Ideology: From local to international

When examining the economic organization of the African American communities we find the lack of economic development and inaccessibility to capital as a serious problem. When examining economic systems, African

American leaders have often pointed to the issue of Black economic independence and the means for production as being desirable goals for African American communities. An examination of African American economic conditions in the United States has resulted in Black leaders calling for alternative approaches to Black economic empowerment. In examining Kawaida Theory further Karenga states:

Kawaida stands in the ranks of socialism not as a satellite or burning bush Marxist, but in the shared-social-wealth tradition of African communalism or communitarian society . . . Kawaida judges economic systems, indeed all systems, by their benefit, harm, level and quality of participation it allows and facilitates for the masses. (Smallwood, 2001, p. 141)

A core issue of economic organization for Black people is access and control of resources leading to economic independence for community organizations and their members. As the NOI emphasized Black economic development through participation in organization-run businesses. The growth of the organization in the 1950s resulted in an expansion of NOI-run businesses, located primarily in Black communities. Elijah Muhammad's biographer Claude Clegg (1997) states that these businesses served to create economic growth for the NOI by serving many Black communities (pp. 157-163). The impact on African American communities may have been more symbolic and inspirational than improving the overall economic conditions:

Ironically, the same economic nationalism and fiscal advancements that made the self-help program of the Muslims appear progressive, even radical, also thinly veiled tendencies toward materialism and a self-centered management style on the part of Muhammad and the national leadership. Prosperity, while good for the image and recruitment efforts of the nation, gnawed at the ethical fiber of men (and women) in the Chicago elite. By the early 1960's, a consuming preoccupation with making money and conspicuous display was quite evident among the high command, though not all highly placed individuals used membership donations and business profits for their own benefit and ends. (p. 157)

In most cases NOI businesses controlled by officials that embezzled profits were not turned over to Elijah Muhammad's Chicago headquarters. Still, Black-owned businesses in various Black communities along with the powerful rhetoric of the organization gave them high visibility and despite corrupt actions they would provide an important service for Black people as businesses that served as symbols of possibility for Black economic development and independence.

Upon leaving the NOI, Malcolm X initially sought to return to the form of economic nationalism previously defined by Marcus Garvey. In his founding rally for the OAAU in June 1964, Malcolm discusses the problem of the NAACP receiving economic support from White philanthropists:

Because as soon as White liberals begin to support it, they tell [Black organizations] what to do and what not to do. This is why Garvey was able to be more militant. Garvey didn't ask them for help. He asked our people for help. And this is what we're going to do. We're going to try and follow his books. (Malcolm X, 1992b, p. 59).

As with his exploration of Black Nationalism, Malcolm X attempted to teach Black people specifically that their shared needs should drive any attempt toward economic control and development of their communities. This ultimately led Malcolm X to examine Du Bois's concept of Pan-Africanist philosophy linking the social and political struggle of African Americans with Africans in the diaspora.

From an economic standpoint, Malcolm X's emphasis on Pan-Africanism led him to seek support from recently independent African nations for his political struggle for Black equality in the United States. This became a global form of Du Bois's concept of cooperative economics with Malcolm X linking African American economic concerns with Africa. In examining Black Nationalism, Socialism and Pan-Africanism, Malcolm X continued in the tradition of Garvey, Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and others by placing the needs of African people at the center of his statements and actions. Though Malcolm X did not express an economic philosophy publicly, his criticism of the economic blight of Black communities suggested a need for Black community control whereby African American culture would serve as the unifying force to bring together Black community residents across different religious faiths and economic classes of people.

Because Malcolm was unable to publicly articulate a fully developed economic philosophy prior to his assassination, his statements embracing Black Nationalist ideology have remained his enduring message for economic organization in African American communities. This overall message of Black control of community resources would serve to inspire a new generation of African Americans identifying with Africa and newly independent African nations as an inspiration to uplift Black communities. William Sales (1994) notes the message Malcolm was trying to get across:

Although he did not create the ideology of Pan-Africanism, Malcolm X struggled to popularize it in the last months before his murder. He informed his constituency of its rich tradition, one with considerable literature and adherents in the United States and abroad. During the latter 1960s and early 1970s, activist organizations at the local and national levels could not maintain their legitimacy without addressing a significant portion of the program to Africa support work . . . The Militants associated with all of these organizations were self-defined disciples of Malcolm X. (p. 170)

Malcolm's emphasis of Black community empowerment and the development of community resources would inspire Black activists Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Huey P. Newton, and Bobby Seale in the late 1960s. These people and others would pool human resources in the community to address pressing social problems. Malcolm's message on cultural pride through knowledge and celebration of African heritage is one of his enduring messages to Black people. It's important to note that in 1991, a Detroit lawyer discovered a 14-point Economic Plan that was part of the unpublished works of Malcolm's autobiography purchased in an auction of Alex Haley's estate. Though the author does not go into detail, it is evident that Malcolm X was working to put his plan for economic development into action:

Best known as a portrait of a Black Leader's life, The Autobiography of Malcolm X was meant to contain a 14-point economic plan for Black America. The plan is spelled out in one of four unpublished chapters of the manuscript, bought several months ago at an auction of Alex Haley's estate by a Detroit lawyer, Gregory J. Reed. In a chapter titled "20 million" (referring to the number of Blacks in America), Malcolm sketches a step-by-step program for establishing Black schools, libraries and banks. "For the first time, the White man would see the Black man as a man," writes Malcolm. "Producing what he wants. And buying what he needs." (Farley, 1993, p. 15)

During the last year of his life, Black economic development continued to be one idea which Malcolm would explore. Malcolm's actions represented individual entrepreneurship via fund raising as he was pressured to sustain his two young organizations. As a Black leader he did engage in open public dialogue on the merits of economic nationalism and was therefore important in teaching Black people about the complexities of economic conditions they faced in searching for an adequate solution. Despite recent scholarship suggesting that he may have had a fully formed economic program, it is not likely that Malcolm did not have the time to develop a fully formed economic theory and his public articulation of an economic program would never occur. Researchers have examined Malcolm X's public statements during his last year to determine in which direction he was headed. Malcolm stated publicly two months prior to his death that he was still exploring alternative approaches to the development of Black communities (Malcolm X, 1992b, pp. 159-160).

4. Conclusion

Since the time of his death, the unique contributions of Malcolm X have been examined and reassessed with additional insight from former colleagues, friends, and relatives. The scope and universality of Malcolm's message is considerable given the recognition of Malcolm X internationally and with ideologically diverse members of the African American community claiming him as their hero (rapper/activist Chuck D and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas among others). Yet, the complexity and full scope of his life and legacy must also be understood. The founding rally for the Organization of Afro-American Unity, where Malcolm publicly discussed the organization's program of action addressed in part the importance of economic development as one of the growing problems in Black communities.

We must establish all over the country schools of our own to teach our own children to become scientists, to become mathematicians. We must realize the need for adult education and job retraining programs that will emphasize a changing society in which automation will play a key role.

We intend to use tools of education to help raise our people to an unprecedented level of excellence and self-respect through their own efforts. (Malcolm X - June 28, 1964) (Malcolm X, 1992b, pp. 45).

Because Malcolm X never gave a definitive economic plan for Black economic development, researchers have been left to speculate about his final vision of Black economic empowerment for Black communities. What is evident in viewing the totality of Malcolm X's leadership is that his posture is indicative of an attempt to analyze multifaceted and complex problems facing African Americans in their communities while attempting to offer a solution through collective action. To do this Malcolm X as an organizational leader used his self-study, analytical ability, intellectual capacity and public rhetoric to offer a pedagogical thrust clearly locating him in the tradition of Black leaders who also served in a non-formal educative capacity as lay teachers whose discourse transcended the social malaise of institutional racism to inspire their constituents to shed their acceptance of social and psychological inferiority in order to seek Black political and economic empowerment through careful study, cultural celebration and collective action as means for addressing and improving their overall conditions.

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