

# LIFE

Death of Malcolm X and the  
Resulting Vengeful Gang War

## A MONUMENT TO NEGRO UPHEAVAL



Largest Muslim mosque bombed out  
after Malcolm X's killing

MR RICHARD MARGOSIAN  
28 01 GALTHERIA  
195 8TH AVE  
TROY NY 12180

MARCH 5 · 1965 · 35¢

®



## THE VIOLENT END OF THE

His life oozing out through a half dozen or more gunshot wounds in his chest, Malcolm X, once the shrillest voice for black supremacy, lay dying on the stage of a Manhattan auditorium. Moments before, he had stepped up to the lectern, and 400 of the faithful had settled down expectantly to hear the sort of speech for which he was famous—flaying the hated white man. Then a scuffle broke out in the hall and Malcolm's bodyguards bolted from his side to break it

up—only to discover that they had been faked out. At least two men with pistols rose from the audience and pumped bullets into the speaker, while a third cut loose at close range with both barrels of a sawed-off shotgun. In the confusion the pistol men got away. The shotgunner lunged through the crowd and out the door, but not before the guards came to their wits and shot him in the leg. Outside he was swiftly overtaken by other supporters of Malcolm and very

**LIFE**

Vol. 59, No. 9 March 5, 1965



**DEATH ON THE ROSTRUM.** These pictures were taken within a minute or two after the killers fired their pistol and shotgun fusillade. At left,

Malcolm X lies dying near the lectern, while his supporters who rushed up bare his bullet-riddled chest. In top picture above, a young Negro

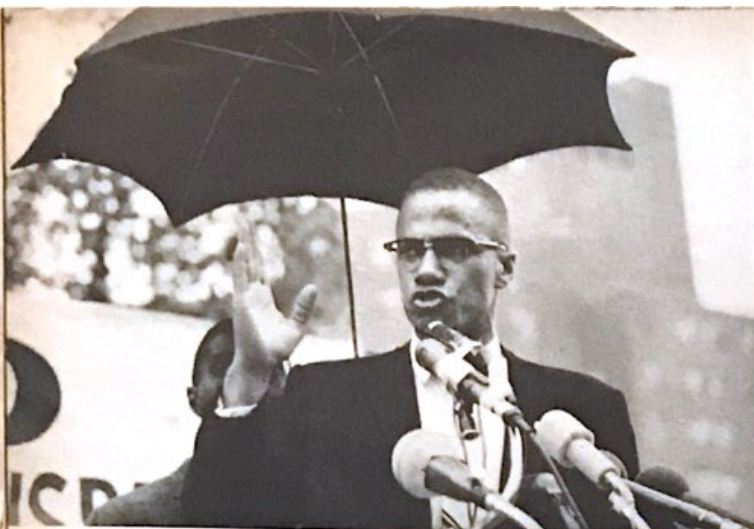
attempts mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Then Malcolm's wife Betty (in white blouse, bottom picture) kneels at his side, sobbing, "They killed him."

# MAN CALLED MALCOLM X

likely would have been stomped to death if the police hadn't saved him. Most shocking of all to the residents of Harlem was the fact that Malcolm X had been killed not by "Whitey" but by members of his own race.

The country's Negro community was suddenly faced with the possibility of a fratricidal war. Almost before Malcolm X's body was cold, someone put the torch to the Black Muslims' big Harlem

mosque, and Malcolm's dedicated followers served notice that arson alone would not do. Their vendetta was whetted by the memory of Malcolm's predictions. From the time he broke with the Black Muslims a year ago to form his own militant cadre, he had said that Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad was out to get him. Elijah, now the hunted, took refuge in his Chicago headquarters behind a screen of bodyguards, from whence he denied any part in the murder.



**HARANGUE IN HARLEM.** Standing under an umbrella on a sweltering June day in 1963, Malcolm X—then the No. 2 man of the Black Muslims—exhorted a crowd of 2,000 to “get the white monkey off your backs.”



**FLATTERING THE CHAMP.** On the night Cassius Clay defeated Sonny Liston for the heavyweight championship, Malcolm photographed him at a celebration party in Miami. He recruited Clay into the Black Muslims.



**WITH A CONGRESSMAN.** Malcolm X and Harlem’s Adam Clayton Powell attended a 1964 meeting, called as a show of unity in support of a Negro boycott of New York City schools to object to “de facto” segregation.

## ‘I WAS A ZOMBIE THEN

A close observer of the career of Malcolm X, Photographer-Writer Gordon Parks gained unprecedented access to the Black Muslim society while working on his comprehensive word-and-picture report in the May 31, 1963 issue of LIFE.

by GORDON PARKS

Death was surely absent from his face two days before they killed him. He appeared calm and somewhat resplendent with his goatee and astrakhan hat. Much of the old hostility and bitterness seemed to have left him, but the fire and confidence were still there. We talked of those months two years ago when I had traveled with him through the closed world of Muslimism, trying to understand it. I thought back to the austere mosques of the Muslims, the rigidly disciplined elite guard called the Fruit of Islam, the instruction it received in karate, judo and killing police dogs. I recalled the constant vilification of the “white devil,” the machinelike obedience of all Muslims, the suspicion and distrust they had for the outsider. But most of all, I remembered Malcolm, sweat beading on his hard-muscled face, his fist slashing the air in front of his audience: “Hell is when you don’t have justice! And when you don’t have equality, that’s hell! And the devil is the one who robs you of your right to be a human being! I don’t have to tell you who the devil is. You know who the devil is!” (“Yes, Brother Malcolm! Tell ‘em like it is!”)

Malcolm said to me now, “That was a bad scene, brother. The sickness and madness of those days—I’m glad to be free of them. It’s a time for martyrs now. And if I’m to be one, it will be in the cause of brotherhood. That’s the only thing that can save this country. I’ve learned it the hard way—but I’ve learned it. And that’s the significant thing.”

I was struck by the change; and I felt he was sincere, but couldn’t his disenchantment with Elijah Muhammad have forced him into another type of opportunism? As recently as December 20 he had yelled at a Harlem rally: “We need a Mau Mau to win freedom and equality in the United States! . . .” There was an inconsistency here. Could he, in his dread of being pushed into obscurity, have trumped up another type of zealotry? I doubted it. He was caught, it seemed, in a new idealism. And, as time bore out, he had given me the essence of what was to have been his brotherhood speech—the one his killers silenced. It was this intentness on brotherhood that cost him his life. For Malcolm, over the objections of his bodyguards, was to rule against anyone being searched before entering the hall that fateful day: “We don’t want people feeling uneasy,” he said. “We must create an image that makes people feel at home.”

“Is it really true that the Black



Muslims are out to get you?” I asked. “It’s as true as we are standing here. They’ve tried it twice in the last two weeks.”

“What about police protection?” He laughed. “Brother, nobody can protect you from a Muslim but a Muslim—or someone trained in Muslim tactics. I know, I invented many of those tactics.”

“Don’t you have any protection at all?”

He laughed again. “Oh, there are hunters and there are those who hunt the hunters. But the odds are certainly with those who are most skilled at the game.”

He explained that he was now ready to provide a single, unifying platform for all our people, free of political, religious and economic differences. “One big force under one

# —LIKE ALL MUSLIMS, I WAS HYPNOTIZED'



**PLANNING THE LAST RALLY.** Malcolm's pregnant wife Betty and their four children sat at his side as he urged

a Harlem gathering to attend rally chalked on the blackboard—the rally where the assassins would lie in wait.

banner," he called it. He was convinced that whatever mistakes he had made after leaving Elijah Muhammad had been in the name of brotherhood. "Now it looks like this brotherhood I wanted so badly has got me in a jam," he said.

Within the last year he had sent me postcards from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Tanganyika, and I thanked him for them.

"Everybody's wondering why I've been going back and forth to Africa. Well, first I went to Mecca to get closer to the orthodox religion of Islam. I wanted first-hand views of the African leaders—their problems are inseparable from ours. The cords of bigotry and prejudice here can be cut with the same blade. We have to keep that blade sharp and share it with

one another." Now he was sounding like the old Malcolm: "Strangely enough, listening to leaders like Nasser, Ben Bella and Nkrumah awakened me to the dangers of racism. I realized racism isn't just a black and white problem. It's brought blood baths to about every nation on earth at one time or another."

**H**e stopped and remained silent for a few moments. "Brother," he said finally, "remember the time that white college girl came into the restaurant—the one who wanted to help the Muslims and the whites get together—and I told her there wasn't a ghost of a chance and she went away crying?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've lived to regret that in-

cident. In many parts of the African continent I saw white students helping black people. Something like this kills a lot of argument. I did many things as a Muslim that I'm sorry for now. I was a zombie then—like all Muslims—I was hypnotized, pointed in a certain direction and told to march. Well, I guess a man's entitled to make a fool of himself if he's ready to pay the cost. It cost me 12 years."

As we parted he laid his hand on my shoulder, looked into my eyes and said, "A salaam alaikem, brother."

"And may peace be with you, Malcolm," I answered.

Driving home from that last meet-

ing with Malcolm, I realized once more that, despite his extremism and inconsistencies, I liked and admired him. A certain humility was wed to his arrogance. I assumed that his bitterness must have come from his tragic early life. His home in East Lansing, Mich. was burned to the ground by white racists. He had lived for many years with the belief that whites had bludgeoned his father to death and left his body on the tracks to be run over by a streetcar.

**M**alcolm's years of ranting against the "white devils" helped create the climate of violence that finally killed

# FIRE BOMBS WITH A PLAN FOR VENGEANCE

MALCOLM X CONTINUED

him, but the private man was not a violent one. He was brilliant, ambitious and honest. And he was fearless. He said what most of us black folk were afraid to say publicly. When he told off "a head-whipping cop"—as he described him—his tongue was coupled with a million other black tongues. When he condemned the bosses of the "rat-infested ghetto," a Harlem full of fervid "amens" could be heard ricocheting off the squalid tenements.

I remember Malcolm's complete devotion to Elijah Muhammad and his words when he was serving as the Muslims' spokesman: "All that Muhammad is trying to do is clean up the mess the white man has made, and the white man should give him credit. He shouldn't run around here calling [Muhammad] a racist and a hate-teacher. White man, call yourself a hate-teacher because you invented hate. Call yourself a racist because you invented the race problem."

Malcolm was not after power in the Muslim organization, but his unquestioning belief in the movement, his personal charm, his remarkable ability to captivate an audience brought him that power. With Elijah aging and ailing, Malcolm became the obvious choice as his successor. But his power and prominence also made him a marked man in the tightly disciplined society. His downfall had started even before his notorious comment on President Kennedy's assassination ("Chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad!") But with that statement he unwittingly made himself more vulnerable.

On the night of Malcolm's death, at the home of friends where his family had taken refuge, I sat with his wife Betty, his two oldest children and a group of his stunned followers, watching a television review of his stormy life. When his image appeared on the screen, blasting away at the injustices of "the enemy," a powerfully built man sitting near me said softly, "Tell 'em like it is, Brother Malcolm, tell 'em like it is."

The program ended and Betty got up and walked slowly to the kitchen and stood staring at the wall. Six-year-old Attallah followed and took her mother's hand. "Is Daddy coming back after his speech, Momma?"

Betty put her arms around the child and dropped her head on the refrigerator. "He tried to prepare me for this day," she said. "But I couldn't bring myself to listen. I'd just walk out of the room. The other day—after they tried to bomb us out of the house—was the only time I could stay and listen. I just closed my eyes and hung onto everything he said. I was prepared. That's why I'm ashamed I cried over him when he was lying there all shot up."

Only Qubilah, the four-year-old,



**FACE OF ANGER.** A follower of Malcolm X stares down at his leader's body as it is carried out of the auditorium, and worried police struggle to control the angry, milling crowd.

seemed to understand that her father wouldn't come again. She tugged at her mother's skirt. "Please don't go out, Momma."

"I won't go, baby. Momma won't go out." She gently pushed the child's head into her lap and told her to go to sleep.

"He was always away," Betty went on, "but I knew he would always come back. We loved each other. He was honest—too honest for his own good, I think sometimes." I started to leave and she said, "I only hope the child I'm carrying is just like his father."

"I hope you get your wish," I said.

I rode back to the city with the heavy-set man who had sat near me during the telecast. He slumped in disgust and guilt. "We could have saved him. We could have saved him," he kept mumbling. "How stupid. How stupid."

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Plenty, brother, plenty. They made a mistake. We'll rally now like one big bomb. Those zombies are the biggest obstacle in the progress of our people. They're like quicksand. They swallow up people by the dozens. I got into the organization thinking I was going to help promote progress and all the stuff they hand you. The next thing I knew, I was hawking their lying newspaper."

"So, what happens now?" I repeated.

"Six brothers are already on their way for the main visit."

"Main visit?"

"There's always been a standing order. If anything happens to Brother Malcolm, six brothers catch the first plane to Chicago, or Phoenix—wherever he's at."

"Elijah Muhammad, you mean?"

"He's the top zombie. He's the first to be visited."

I thought back to the time in Phoenix when I last saw Muhammad and Malcolm together—the two men warmly embracing, their cheeks touching in farewell. I felt empty.

"And after him?" I asked.

"The names on Brother Malcolm's list—the ones who were trying to kill him."

The list, as the newspapers reported, was taken from Malcolm's pocket as he lay dying.

"They know who they are. They've been properly notified," he said solemnly. The list also includes the principal targets for vengeance: the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper office, the Shabazz Restaurant, Mosque No. 7. "If they're able to hold their meetings at the mosque after tomorrow night," the man said, "I'll join up with them again. Brother, that place will be no more."

I took his word for it—and my despair deepened.



**FIRM DENIAL.** At Chicago press conference which he called two days after Malcolm's murder, Elijah Muhammad denies that his disciples had any part in the gangland-style slaying.

**RETALIATION BY FIRE.** Soon after the murder, flames—started by an arsonist—obliterated Muhammad's Harlem Mosque No. 7. Followers of slain leader vowed "maximum retaliation."

