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## Malcolm X

Malcolm Little was born in 1925, the son of a Baptist Minister influenced by the 'Back to Africa' teachings of Marcus Garvey. Following a turbulent childhood, Malcolm fell into criminality and was imprisoned in 1946. While in prison, Malcolm was exposed to the Black Muslim faith and joined the separatist religious group, the 'Nation of Islam', led by Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X was a passionate and articulate speaker for the NOI, as well as a talented and tireless evangelical for the movement. He established numerous NOI temples and made countless fiery speeches across the USA. Eventually, Malcolm fell out with the NOI and Elijah Muhammad in 1964 and set up his own religious group – the MMI – as well as his own secular group – the OAAU. Prior to his assassination in 1965 by NOI members, Malcolm had started to move towards the Civil Rights 'mainstream' and temper his racial views. He spent months travelling across Arabia and Africa, 'internationalising' the struggle of black Americans. Malcolm is often credited with inspiring the 'Black Power' movement and Afro-American inspired media.

Patrick's arguments that Malcolm X deserves a more critical appraisal	Elliott's arguments that Malcolm X made significant achievements
Malcolm X was in the separatist religious organisation known as the 'Nation of Islam' between 1952 and early 1964, prior to his assassination in 1965. For most of his public life, he was not able - or indeed willing – to do anything more than replicate the separatist and highly niche religious doctrines of Elijah Muhammad.	Malcolm X provided the only real viable alternative to the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The failure of King's peaceful tactics to combat the socio-economic conditions of young urban blacks in the north combined with his middle class, Baptist upbringing, led to increased support for Malcolm X and his 'ideology'.
Malcolm X was <i>not</i> a Civil Rights leader. For most of his public life, he called for complete separation of the black and white races, not integration. This was incongruent with the will of most black Americans – which was to integrate on an equal legal basis. Therefore, Malcolm X's strategies and goals were self-defeating.	Malcolm X was able to 'revolutionise' the Nation of Islam and make it a national enterprise with hundreds of temples and thousands of adherents. When he left the NOI he founded Muslim Mosque Inc. and the secular Organisation of African-American Unity as a method of tackling the religious <i>and</i> political issues of black Americans.
It is highly difficult to point to any concrete achievements made by Malcolm X. The two organisations that he set up in 1964 – the MMI and OAAU – were in conflict, lacked any significant support and folded soon after his death.	With his global travels, he was able to internationalise the black struggle, put blacks at the centre of a new 'worldview' and make himself America's "...black ambassador to the developing world" (Ta-Nehisi Coates).
By completely shunning the support of sympathetic white Americans and by peddling an idiosyncratic religious doctrine for black Americans only, his views lacked popular support. Furthermore, his repeated use of the 'white devil' phraseology in the NOI made Malcolm X synonymous with racism and extremism.	Malcolm X's impact on black culture was (and is) profound. The NY Times reported that he was the 2 <sup>nd</sup> most sought after speaker in the US in 1963. He was one of the first black leaders to take his message onto TV (e.g. The Mike Wallace Program) and spent months of the year on university campuses espousing his beliefs. He helped spur the notion of Black Power, and ushered in an era of art that celebrated black culture – from the blaxploitation films of the 1970's to hip hop in the 1980's and beyond.

Don't forget to check out Dr Elliott L. Watson's free website: [www.thecourseworkclub.com](http://www.thecourseworkclub.com) and follow him at @thelibrarian6 on Twitter.

Don't forget to check out Patrick O'Shaughnessy's free website: [www.historychappy.com](http://www.historychappy.com) and follow him at @historychappy on Twitter.