

The Malcolm X Interview

A PLAYBOY CLASSIC: ALEX HALEY INTERVIEWS MALCOLM X

On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was gunned down in the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem. One witness to the hail of gunfire that killed him was his then four-year old daughter, Qubilah Shabazz, who has now, at age 34, been implicated in a plot to kill her father's bitter rival, Louis Farrakhan. In light of the continuing controversy over Malcolm X's death, and life, we now offer visitors to the PLAYBOY WEB SITE the opportunity to read the great spiritual and political leader's own account of his beliefs, as recounted in a May 1963 PLAYBOY INTERVIEW. The questioner was the late Alex Haley, who would go on to co-author The Autobiography of Malcolm X before completing his own masterpiece of African-American literature, ROOTS.



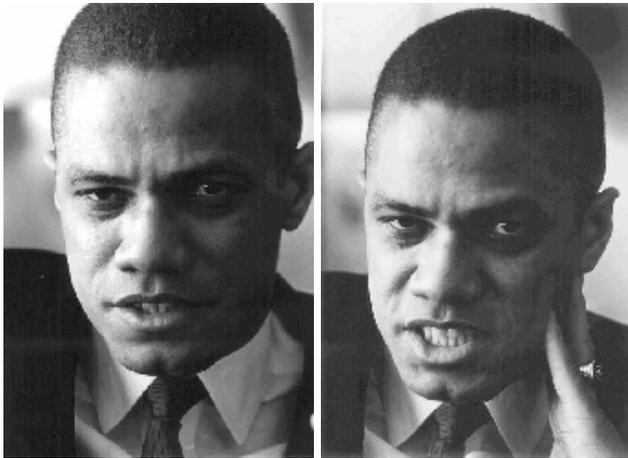
"I don't know when Armageddon is supposed to be. But I know that the time is near when the white man will be finished. The signs are all around us."

.

.

.

"Christ wasn't white. Christ was black. The poor, brainwashed Negro has been made to believe Christ was white to maneuver him into worshipping white men."



"Verwoerd is an honest white man. So are the Barnetts, Eastlands and Rockwells. They want to keep white people white; we want to keep black people black."

Within the past five years, the militant American Negro has become an increasingly active combatant in the struggle for civil rights. Espousing the goals of unqualified equality and integration, many of these outspoken insurgents have participated in freedom rides and protest marches against their segregationist foes. Today, they face opposition from not one, but two inimical exponents of racism and segregation: the white supremacists and the Black Muslims. A relatively unknown and insignificant radical religious Negro cult until a few years ago, the Muslims have grown into a dedicated, disciplined nationwide movement which runs its own school, publishes its own newspaper, owns stores and restaurants in four major cities, buys broadcast time on 50 radio stations throughout the country, stages mass rallies attended by partisan crowds of 10,000 and more, and maintains its own police force of judo-trained athletes called the Fruit of Islam.

Predicated on the proposition that the black man is morally, spiritually and intellectually superior to the white man, who is called a "devil," Muslim doctrine dooms him to extermination in an imminent Armageddon—along with Christianity itself, which is denounced as an opiate designed to lull Negroes—with the promise of heaven—into passive acceptance of inferior social status. Amalgamating elements of Christianity and Mohammedanism (both of which officially and unequivocally disown it) and spiked with a black-supremacy version of Hitler's Aryan racial theories, Muslimism was founded in 1931 by Elijah Poole, a Georgia-born ex-factory worker who today commands unquestioning obedience from thousands of followers as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, Messenger of Allah. At the right hand of God's Messenger stands 36-year-old Malcolm Little, a lanky onetime dining-car steward, bootlegger, pimp and dope pusher who left prison in 1952 to heed Muhammad's message, abandoned his "slave name," Little, for the symbolic "X" (meaning identity unknown), and took an oath to abstain thereafter from smoking, drinking, gambling, cursing, dancing and sexual promiscuity—as required of every Muslim. The ambitious young man rose swiftly to become the Messenger's most ardent and erudite disciple, and today wields all but absolute authority over the movement and its membership as Muhammad's business manager, trouble shooter,

prime minister and heir apparent.

In the belief that knowledge and awareness are necessary and effective antitoxins against the venom of hate, PLAYBOY asked Malcolm X to submit to a cross-examination on the means and ends of his organization. The ensuing interview was conducted at a secluded table in a Harlem restaurant owned by the Muslims. Interrupting his replies occasionally with a sip of black African coffee and whispered asides to deferential aides, the dark-suited minister of Harlem's Muslim Temple Number Seven spoke with candor and—except for moments of impassioned execration of all whites—the impersonal tone of a self-assured corporation executive.

Many will be shocked by what he has to say; others will be outraged. Our own view is that this interview is both an eloquent statement and a damning self-indictment of one noxious facet of rampant racism. As such, we believe it merits publication—and reading.

PLAYBOY: What is the ambition of the Black Muslims?

MALCOLM X: Freedom, justice and equality are our principal ambitions. And to faithfully serve and follow the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is the guiding goal of every Muslim. Mr. Muhammad teaches us the knowledge of our own selves, and of our own people. He cleans us up—morally, mentally and spiritually—and he reforms us of the vices that have blinded us here in the Western society. He stops black men from getting drunk, stops their dope addiction if they had it, stops nicotine, gambling, stealing, lying, cheating, fornication, adultery, prostitution, juvenile delinquency. I think of this whenever somebody talks about someone investigating us. Why investigate the Honorable Elijah Muhammad? They should subsidize him. He's cleaning up the mess that white men have made. He's saving the Government millions of dollars, taking black men off of welfare, showing them how to do something for themselves. And Mr. Muhammad teaches us love for our own kind. The white man has taught the black people in this country to hate themselves as inferior, to hate each other, to be divided against each other. Messenger Muhammad restores our love for our own kind, which enables us to work together in unity and harmony. He shows us how to pool our financial resources and our talents, then to work together toward a common objective. Among other things, we have small businesses in most major cities in this country, and we want to create many more. We are taught by Mr. Muhammad that it is very important to improve the black man's economy, and his thrift. But to do this, we must have land of our own. The brainwashed black man can never learn to stand on his own two feet until he is on his own. We must learn to become our own producers, manufacturers and traders; we must have industry of our own, to employ our own. The white man resists this because he wants to keep the black man under his thumb and jurisdiction in white society. He wants to keep the black man always dependent and begging—for jobs, food, clothes, shelter, education. The white man doesn't want to lose somebody to be supreme over. He wants to keep the black man where he can be watched and retarded. Mr. Muhammad teaches that as soon as we separate from the white man, we will learn that we can do without the white man just as he can do without us. The white man knows that once black men get off to themselves and learn they can do for themselves, the black man's full potential will explode and he will surpass the white man.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that the Black Muslims' goal of obtaining "several states" is a practical vision?

MALCOLM X: Well, you might consider some things practical that are really impractical. Wasn't it impractical that the Supreme Court could issue a desegregation order nine years ago and there's still only eight percent compliance? Is it practical that a hundred years after the Civil War there's not freedom for black men yet? On the record for integration you've got the President, the Congress, the Supreme Court—but show me your integration, where is it? That's practical? Mr. Muhammad teaches us to be for what's really practical—that's separation. It's more natural than integration.

PLAYBOY: In a recent interview, Negro author-lecturer Louis Lomax said, "Eighty percent, if not more, of America's 20,000,000 Negroes vibrate sympathetically with the Muslims' indictment of the white power structure. But this does not mean we agree with them in their doctrines of estrangement or with their proposed resolutions of the race problem." Does this view represent a consensus of opinion among Negroes? And if so, is it possible that your separationist and anti-Christian doctrines have the effect of alienating many of your own race?

MALCOLM X: Sir, you make a mistake listening to people who tell you how much our stand alienates black men in this country. I'd guess actually we have the sympathy of 90 percent of the black people. There are 20,000,000 dormant Muslims in America. A Muslim to us is somebody who is for the black man; I don't care if he goes to the Baptist Church seven days a week. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad says that a black man is born a Muslim by nature. There are millions of Muslims not aware of it now. All of them will be Muslims when they wake up; that's what's meant by the Resurrection.

Sir, I'm going to tell you a secret: the black man is a whole lot smarter than white people think he is. The black man has survived in this country by fooling the white man. He's been dancing and grinning and white men never guessed what he was thinking. Now you'll hear the bourgeois Negroes pretending to be alienated, but they're just making the white man think they don't go for what Mr. Muhammad is saying. This Negro that will tell you he's so against us, he's just protecting the crumbs he gets from the white man's table. This kind of Negro is so busy trying to be like the white man that he doesn't know what the real masses of his own people are thinking. A fine car and house and clothes and liquor have made a lot think themselves different from their poor black brothers. But Mr. Muhammad says that Allah is going to wake up all black men to see the white man as he really is, and see what Christianity has done to them. The black masses that are waking up don't believe in Christianity anymore. All it's done for black men is help to keep them slaves. Mr. Muhammad is teaching that Christianity, as white people see it, means that whites can have their heaven here on earth, but the black man is supposed to catch his hell here. The black man is supposed to keep believing that when he dies, he'll float up to some city with golden streets and milk and honey on a cloud somewhere. Every black man in North America has heard black Christian preachers shouting about "tomorrow in good old Beulah's Land." But the thinking black masses today are interested in Muhammad's Land. The Promised Land that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad talks about is right here on this earth. Intelligent black men today are interested in a religious doctrine that offers a solution to their problems right now, right here on this earth, while they

are alive.

You must understand that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad represents the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy to us. In the Old Testament, Moses lived to see his enemy, Pharaoh, drowned in the Red Sea—which in essence means that Mr. Muhammad will see the completion of his work in his lifetime, that he will live to see victory gained over his enemy.

PLAYBOY: Are you referring to the Muslim judgment day which your organization's newspaper, MUHAMMAD SPEAKS, calls "Armageddon" and prophesies as imminent?

MALCOLM X: Armageddon deals with the final battle between God and the Devil. The Third World War is referred to as Armageddon by many white statesmen. There won't be any more war after then because there won't be any more warmongers. I don't know when Armageddon, whatever form it takes, is supposed to be. But I know the time is near when the white man will be finished. The signs are all around us. Ten years ago you couldn't have paid a Southern Negro to defy local customs. The British Lion's tail has been snatched off in black Africa. The Indonesians have booted out would-be imperialists as the Dutch. The French, who felt for a century that Algeria was theirs, have had to run for their lives back to France. Sir, the point I make is that all over the world, the old day of standing in fear and trembling before the almighty white man is gone!

PLAYBOY: If Muslims ultimately gain control as you predict, what do you plan to do with white people?

MALCOLM X: It's not a case of what would we do, it's a case of what would God do with whites. What does a judge do with the guilty? Either the guilty one repents and atones, or God executes judgment.

PLAYBOY: You refer to whites as "the guilty" and "the enemy"; you predict divine retribution against them; and you preach absolute separation from the white community. Do not these views substantiate the fact that your movement is predicated on race hatred?

MALCOLM X: Sir, it's from Mr. Muhammad that the black masses are learning for the first time in 400 years the real truth of how the white man brainwashed the black man, kept him ignorant of his true history, robbed him of his self-confidence. The black masses for the first time are understanding that it's not a case of being anti-white or anti-Christian, but it's a case of seeing the true nature of the white man. We're anti-evil, anti-oppression, anti-lynching. You can't be anti-those things unless you're also anti-the oppressor and the lyncher. You can't be anti-slavery and pro-slavemaster; you can't be anti-crime and pro-criminal. In fact, Mr. Muhammad teaches that if the present generation of whites would study their own race in the light of their true history, they would be anti-white themselves.

PLAYBOY: Are you?

MALCOLM X: As soon as the white man hears a black man say that he's through loving white people, then the white man accuses the black man of hating him. The

Honorable Elijah Muhammad doesn't teach hate. The white man isn't important enough for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad and his followers to spend any time hating him. The white man has brainwashed himself into believing that all the black people in the world want to be cuddled up next to him. When he meets what we're talking about, he can't believe it, it takes all the wind out of him. When we tell him we don't want to be around him, we don't want to be like he is, he's staggered. It makes him re-evaluate his 300-year myth about the black man. What I want to know is how the white man, with the blood of black people dripping off his fingers, can have the audacity to be asking black people do they hate him. That takes a lot of nerve.

PLAYBOY: How do you reconcile your disavowal of hatred with the announcement you made last year that Allah had brought you "the good news" that 120 white Atlantans had just been killed in an air crash en route to America from Paris?

MALCOLM X: Sir, as I see the law of justice, it says as you sow, so shall you reap. The white man has reveled as the rope snapped black men's necks. He has reveled around the lynching fire. It's only right for the black man's true God, Allah, to defend us—and for us to be joyous because our God manifests his ability to inflict pain on our enemy. We Muslims believe that the white race, which is guilty of having oppressed and exploited and enslaved our people here in America, should and will be the victims of God's divine wrath. All civilized societies in their courts of justice set a sentence of execution against those deemed to be enemies of society, such as murderers and kidnapers. The presence of 20,000,000 black people here in America is proof that Uncle Sam is guilty of kidnapping—because we didn't come here voluntarily on the Mayflower. And 400 years of lynchings condemn Uncle Sam as a murderer.

PLAYBOY: To return to your statement about the plane crash, when Dr. Ralph Bunche heard about it, he called you "mentally depraved." What is your reaction?

MALCOLM X: I know all about what Dr. Bunche said. He's always got his international mouth open. He apologized in the UN when black people protested there. You'll notice that whenever the white man lets a black man get prominent, he has a job for him. Dr. Bunche serves the white man well—he represents, speaks for and defends the white man. He does none of this for the black man. Dr. Bunche has functioned as a white man's tool, designed to influence international opinion on the Negro. The white man has Negro local tools, national tools, and Dr. Bunche is an international tool.

PLAYBOY: Dr. Bunche was only one of many prominent Negroes who deplored your statement in similar terms. What reply have you to make to these spokesmen for your own people?

MALCOLM X: Go ask their opinions and you'll be able to fill your notebook with what white people want to hear Negroes say. Let's take these so-called spokesmen for the black men by types. Start with the politicians. They never attack Mr. Muhammad personally. They realize he has the sympathy of the black masses. They know they would alienate the masses whose votes they need. But the black civic leaders, they do attack Mr. Muhammad. The reason is usually that they are appointed to their positions by the white man. The white man pays them to attack us. The ones who attack Mr. Muhammad the most are the ones who earn the most. Then take the black religious

leaders, they also attack Mr. Muhammad. These preachers do it out of self-defense, because they know he's waking up Negroes. No one believes what the Negro preacher preaches except those who are mentally asleep, or in the darkness of ignorance about the true situation of the black man here today in this wilderness of North America. If you will take note, sir, many so-called Negro leaders who once attacked the Honorable Elijah Muhammad don't do so anymore. And he never speaks against them in the personal sense except as a reaction if they speak against him. Islam is a religion that teaches us never to attack, never to be the aggressor—but you can waste somebody if he attacks you. These Negro leaders have become aware that whenever the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is caused by their attack to level his guns against them, they always come out on the losing end. Many have experienced this.

PLAYBOY: Do you admire and respect any other American Negro leaders—Martin Luther King, for example?

MALCOLM X: I am a Muslim, sir. Muslims can see only one leader who has the qualifications necessary to unite all elements of black people in America. This is the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

PLAYBOY: Many white religious leaders have also gone on record against the Black Muslims. Writing in the official NAACP magazine, a Catholic priest described you as "a fascist-minded hate group," and B'nai B'rith has accused you of being not only anti-Christian but anti-Semitic. Do you consider this true?

MALCOLM X: Insofar as the Christian world is concerned, dictatorships have existed only in areas or countries where you have Roman Catholicism. Catholicism conditions your mind for dictators. Can you think of a single Protestant country that has ever produced a dictator?

PLAYBOY: Germany was predominantly Protestant when Hitler ----

MALCOLM X: Another thing to think of—in the 20th Century, the Christian Church has given us two heresies: fascism and communism. Where did fascism start? Where's the second-largest Communist party outside of Russia? The answer to both is Italy. Where is the Vatican? But let's not forget the Jew. Anybody that gives even a just criticism of the Jew is instantly labeled anti-Semite. The Jew cries louder than anybody else if anybody criticizes him. You can tell the truth about any minority in America, but make a true observation about the Jew, and if it doesn't pat him on the back, then he uses his grip on the news media to label you anti-Semite. Let me say just a word about the Jew and the black man. The Jew is always anxious to advise the black man. But they never advise him how to solve his problem the way the Jews solved their problem. The Jew never went sitting-in and crawling-in and sliding-in and freedom-riding, like he teaches and helps Negroes to do. The Jews stood up, and stood together, and they used their ultimate power, the economic weapon. That's exactly what the Honorable Elijah Muhammad is trying to teach black men to do. The Jews pooled their money and bought the hotels that barred them. They bought Atlantic City and Miami Beach and anything else they wanted. Who owns Hollywood? Who runs the garment industry, the largest industry in New York City? But the Jew that's advising the Negro joins the NAACP, CORE, the Urban League, and others. With money donations, the Jew gains control, then he sends the black man doing all this wading-in, boring-in, even burying-in—everything but buying-in.

Never shows him how to set up factories and hotels. Never advises him how to own what he wants. No, when there's something worth owning, the Jew's got it. Walk up and down in any Negro ghetto in America. Ninety percent of the worthwhile businesses you see are Jew-owned. Every night they take the money out. This helps the black man's community stay a ghetto.

PLAYBOY: Isn't it true that many Gentiles have also labored with dedication to advance integration and economic improvement for the Negro, as volunteer workers for the NAACP, CORE and many other interracial agencies?

MALCOLM X: A man who tosses worms in the river isn't necessarily a friend of the fish. All the fish who take him for a friend, who think the worm's got no hook in it, usually end up in the frying pan. All these things dangled before us by the white liberal posing as a friend and benefactor have turned out to be nothing but bait to make us think we're making progress. The Supreme Court decision has never been enforced. Desegregation has never taken place. The promises have never been fulfilled. We have received only tokens, substitutes, trickery and deceit.

PLAYBOY: What motives do you impute to PLAYBOY for providing you with this opportunity for the free discussion of your views?

MALCOLM X: I think you want to sell magazines. I've never seen a sincere white man, not when it comes to helping black people. Usually things like this are done by white people to benefit themselves. The white man's primary interest is not to elevate the thinking of black people, or to waken black people, or white people either. The white man is interested in the black man only to the extent that the black man is of use to him. The white man's interest is to make money, to exploit.

PLAYBOY: Is there any white man on earth whom you would concede to have the Negro's welfare genuinely at heart?

MALCOLM X: I say, sir, that you can never make an intelligent judgment without evidence. If any man will study the entire history of the relationship between the white man and the black man, no evidence will be found that justifies any confidence or faith that the black man might have in the white man today.

PLAYBOY: Then you consider it impossible for the white man to be anything but an exploiter and a hypocrite in his relations with the Negro?

MALCOLM X: Is it wrong to attribute a predisposition to wheat before it comes up out of the ground? Wheat's characteristics and nature make it wheat. It differs from barley because of its nature. Wheat perpetuates its own characteristics just as the white race does. White people are born devils by nature. They don't become so by deeds. If you never put popcorn in a skillet, it would still be popcorn. Put the heat to it, it will pop.

PLAYBOY: You say that white men are devils by nature. Was Christ a devil?

MALCOLM X: Christ wasn't white. Christ was a black man.

PLAYBOY: On what Scripture do you base this assertion?

MALCOLM X: Sir, Billy Graham has made the same statement in public. Why not ask him what Scripture he found it in? When Pope Pius XII died, LIFE magazine carried a picture of him in his private study kneeling before a black Christ. What was the source of their information? All white people who have studied history and geography know that Christ was a black man. Only the poor, brainwashed American Negro has been made to believe that Christ was white, to maneuver him into worshiping the white man. After becoming a Muslim in prison, I read almost everything I could put my hands on in the prison library. I began to think back on everything I had read and especially with the histories, I realized that nearly all of them read by the general public have been made into white histories. I found out that the history-whitening process either had left out great things that black men had done, or some of the great black men had gotten whitened.

PLAYBOY: Would you list a few of these men?

MALCOLM X: Well, Hannibal, the most successful general that ever lived, was a black man. So was Beethoven; Beethoven's father was one of the blackamoors that hired themselves out in Europe as professional soldiers. Haydn, Beethoven's teacher, was of African descent. And Solomon. Great Biblical characters. Columbus, the discoverer of America, was a half-black man. Whole black empires, like the Moorish, have been whitened to hide the fact that a great black empire had conquered a white empire even before America was discovered. The Moorish civilization—black Africans—conquered and ruled Spain; they kept the light burning in Southern Europe. The word "Moor" means "black," by the way. Egyptian civilization is a classic example of how the white man stole great African cultures and makes them appear today as white European. The black nation of Egypt is the only country that has a science named after its culture: Egyptology. The ancient Sumerians, a black-skinned people, occupied the Middle Eastern areas and were contemporary with the Egyptian civilization. The Incas, the Aztecs, the Mayans, all dark-skinned Indian people, had a highly developed culture here in America, in what is now Mexico and northern South America. These people had mastered agriculture at the time when European white people were still living in mud huts and eating weeds. But white children, or black children, or grownups here today in America don't get to read this in the average books they are exposed to.

PLAYBOY: Can you cite any authoritative historical documents for these observations?

MALCOLM X: I can cite a great many, sir. You could start with Herodotus, the Greek historian. He outright described the Egyptians as "black, with woolly hair." And the American archaeologist and Egyptologist James Henry Breasted did the same thing. Read Pliny. Read any of the ancient Roman, Greek and, more recently, European anthropologists and archaeologists.

PLAYBOY: You seem to have based your thesis on the premise that all nonwhite races are necessarily black.

MALCOLM X: Mr. Muhammad says that the red, the brown and the yellow are indeed all part of the black nation. Which means that black, brown, red, yellow, all are brothers, all are one family. The white one is a stranger. He's the odd fellow.

PLAYBOY: Since your classification of black peoples apparently includes the light-skinned Oriental, Middle Eastern and possibly even Latin races as well as the darker Indian and Negroid strains, just how do you decide how light-skinned it's permissible to be before being condemned as white? And if Caucasian whites are devils by nature, do you classify people by degrees of devilishness according to the lightness of their skin?

MALCOLM X: I don't worry about these little technicalities. But I know that white society has always considered that one drop of black blood makes you black. To me, if one drop can do this, it only shows the power of one drop of black blood. And I know another thing—that Negroes who used to be light enough to pass for white have seen the handwriting on the wall and are beginning to come back and identify with their own kind. And white people who also are seeing the pendulum of time catching up with them are now trying to join with blacks, or even find traces of black blood in their own veins, hoping that it will save them from the catastrophe they see ahead. But no devil can fool God. Muslims have a little poem about them. It goes, "One drop will make you black, and will also in days to come save your soul."

PLAYBOY: As one of this vast elite, do you hold the familiar majority attitude toward minority groups—regarding the white race, in this case, as inferior in quality as well as quantity to what you call the "black nation"?

MALCOLM X: Thoughtful white people know they are inferior to black people. Even Eastland knows it. Anyone who has studied the genetic phase of biology knows that white is considered recessive and black is considered dominant. When you want strong coffee, you ask for black coffee. If you want it light, you want it weak, integrated with white milk. Just like these Negroes who weaken themselves and their race by this integrating and intermixing with whites. If you want bread with no nutritional value, you ask for white bread. All the good that was in it has been bleached out of it, and it will constipate you. If you want pure flour, you ask for dark flour, whole-wheat flour. If you want pure sugar, you want dark sugar.

PLAYBOY: If all whites are devilish by nature, as you have alleged, and if black and white are essentially opposite, as you have just stated, do you view all black men—with the exception of their non-Muslim leaders—as fundamentally angelic?

MALCOLM X: No, there is plenty wrong with Negroes. They have no society. They're robots, automatons. No minds of their own. I hate to say that about us, but it's the truth. They are a black body with a white brain. Like the monster Frankenstein. The top part is your bourgeois Negro. He's your integrator. He's not interested in his poor black brothers. He's usually so deep in debt from trying to copy the white man's social habits that he doesn't have time to worry about nothing else. They buy the most expensive clothes and cars and eat the cheapest food. They act more like the white man than the white man does himself. These are the ones that hide their sympathy for Mr. Muhammad's teachings. It conflicts with the sources from which they get their white-man's crumbs. This class to us are the fence-sitters. They have one eye on the white man and the other eye on the Muslims. They'll jump whichever way they see the wind blowing. Then there's the middle class of the Negro masses, the ones not in the ghetto, who realize that life is a struggle, who are conscious of all the injustices being done and of the constant state of insecurity in which they live. They're ready to take some stand against everything that's against them. Now, when this group hears

Mr. Muhammad's teachings, they are the ones who come forth faster and identify themselves, and take immediate steps toward trying to bring into existence what Mr. Muhammad advocates. At the bottom of the social heap is the black man in the big-city ghetto. He lives night and day with the rats and cockroaches and drowns himself with alcohol and anesthetizes himself with dope, to try and forget where and what he is. That Negro has given up all hope. He's the hardest one for us to reach, because he's the deepest in the mud. But when you get him, you've got the best kind of Muslim. Because he makes the most drastic change. He's the most fearless. He will stand the longest. He has nothing to lose, even his life, because he didn't have that in the first place. I look upo myself, sir, as a prime example of this category—and as graphic an example as you could find of the salvation of the black man.

PLAYBOY: Could you give us a brief review of the early life that led to your own "salvation"?

MALCOLM X: Gladly. I was born in Omaha on May 19, 1925. My light color is the result of my mother's mother having been raped by a white man. I hate every drop of white blood in me. Before I am indicted for hate again, sir—is it wrong to hate the blood of a rapist? But to continue: My father was a militant follower of Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement. The Lansing, Michigan, equivalent of the Ku Klux Klan warned him to stop preaching Garvey's message, but he kept on and one of my earliest memories is of being snatched awake one night with a lot of screaming going on because our home was afire. But my father got louder about Garvey, and the next time he was found bludgeoned in the head, lying across streetcar tracks. He died soon and our family was in a bad way. We were so hungry we were dizzy and we had nowhere to turn. Finally the authorities came in and we children were scattered about in different places as public wards. I happened to become the ward of a white couple who ran a correctional school for white boys. This family liked me in the way they liked their house pets. They got me enrolled in an all-white school. I was popular, I played sports and everything, and studied hard, and I stayed at the head of my class through the eighth grade. That summer I was 14, but I was big enough and looked old enough to get away with telling a lie that I was 21, so I got a job working in the dining car of a train that ran between Boston and New York City.

On my layovers in New York, I'd go to Harlem. That's where I saw in the bars all these men and women with what looked like the easiest life in the world. Plenty of money, big cars, all of it. I could tell they were in the rackets and vice. I hung around those bars whenever I came in town, and I kept my ears and eyes open and my mouth shut. And they kept their eyes on me, too. Finally, one day a numbers man told me that he needed a runner, and I never caught the night train back to Boston. Right there was when I started my life in crime. I was in all of it that the white police and the gangsters left open to the black criminal, sir. I was in numbers, bootleg liquor, "hot" goods, women. I sold the bodies of black women to white men, and white women to black men. I was in dope, I was in everything evil you could name. The only thing I could say good for myself, sir, was that I did not indulge in hitting anybody over the head.

PLAYBOY: By the time you were 16, according to the record, you had several men working for you in these various enterprises. Right?

MALCOLM X: Yes, sir. I turned the things I mentioned to you over to them. And I

had a good working system of paying off policemen. It was here that I learned that vice and crime can only exist, at least the kind and level that I was in, to the degree that the police cooperate with it. I had several men working and I was a steerer myself. I steered white people with money from downtown to whatever kind of sin they wanted in Harlem. I didn't care what they wanted, I knew where to take them to it. And I tell you what I noticed here—that my best customers always were the officials, the top police people, businessmen, politicians and clergymen. I never forgot that. I met all levels of these white people, supplied them with everything they wanted, and I saw that they were just a filthy race of devils. But despite the fact that my own father was murdered by whites, and I had seen my people all my life brutalized by whites, I was still blind enough to mix with them and socialize with them. I thought they were gods and goddesses—until Mr. Muhammad's powerful spiritual message opened my eyes and enabled me to see them as a race of devils. Nothing had made me see the white man as he is until one word from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad opened my eyes overnight.

PLAYBOY: When did this happen?

MALCOLM X: In prison. I was finally caught and spent 77 months in three different prisons. But it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me, because it was in prison that I first heard the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. His teachings were what turned me around. The first time I heard the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's statement, "The white man is the devil," it just clicked. I am a good example of why Islam is spreading so rapidly across the land. I was nothing but another convict, a semi-illiterate criminal. Mr. Muhammad's teachings were able to reach into prison, which is the level where people are considered to have fallen as low as they can go. His teachings brought me from behind prison walls and placed me on the podiums of some of the leading colleges and universities in the country. I often think, sir, that in 1946, I was sentenced to 8 to 10 years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a common thief who had never passed the eighth grade. And the next time I went back to Cambridge was in March 1961, as a guest speaker at the Harvard Law School Forum. This is the best example of Mr. Muhammad's ability to take nothing and make something, to take nobody and make somebody.

PLAYBOY: Your rise to prominence in the Muslim organization has been so swift that a number of your own membership have hailed you as their articulate exemplar, and many anti-Muslims regard you as the real brains and power of the movement. What is your reaction to this sudden eminence?

MALCOLM X: Sir, it's heresy to imply that I am in any way whatever even equal to Mr. Muhammad. No man on earth today is his equal. Whatever I am that is good, it is through what I have been taught by Mr. Muhammad.

PLAYBOY: Be that as it may, the time is near when your leader, who is 65, will have to retire from leadership of the Muslim movement. Many observers predict that when this day comes, the new Messenger of Allah in America—a role which you have called the most powerful of any black man in the world—will be Malcolm X. How do you feel about this prospect?

MALCOLM X: Sir, I can only say that God chose Mr. Muhammad as his Messenger, and Mr. Muhammad chose me and many others to help him. Only God has the say—so.

But I will tell you one thing. I frankly don't believe that I or anyone else am worthy to succeed Mr. Muhammad. No one preceded him. I don't think I could make the sacrifice he has made, or set his good example. He has done more than lay down his life. But his work is already done with the seed he has planted among black people. If Mr. Muhammad and every identifiable follower he has, certainly including myself, were tomorrow removed from the scene by more of the white man's brutality, there is one thing to be sure of: Mr. Muhammad's teachings of the naked truth have fallen upon fertile soil among 20,000,000 black men here in this wilderness of North America.

PLAYBOY: Has the soil, in your opinion, been as fertile for Mr. Muhammad's teachings elsewhere in the world—among the emerging nations of black Africa, for instance?

MALCOLM X: I think not only that his teachings have had considerable impact even in Africa but that the Honorable Elijah Muhammad has had a greater impact on the world than the rise of the African nations. I say this as objectively as I can, being a Muslim. Even the Christian missionaries are conceding that in black Africa, for every Christian conversion, there are two Muslim conversions.

PLAYBOY: Might conversions be even more numerous if it weren't for the somewhat strained relations which are said by several Negro writers to exist between the black people of Africa and America?

MALCOLM X: Perhaps. You see, the American black man sees the African come here and live where the American black man can't. The Negro sees the African come here with a sheet on and go places where the Negro—dressed like a white man, talking like a white man, sometimes as wealthy as the white man—can't go. When I'm traveling around the country, I use my real Muslim name, Malik Shabazz. I make my hotel reservations under that name, and I always see the same thing I've just been telling you. I come to the desk and always see that "here-comes-a-Negro" look. It's kind of a reserved, coldly tolerant cordiality. But when I say "Malik Shabazz," their whole attitude changes: they snap to respect. They think I'm an African. People say what's in a name? There's a whole lot in a name. The American black man is seeing the African respected as a human being. The African gets respect because he has an identity and cultural roots. But most of all because the African owns some land. For these reasons he has his human rights recognized, and that makes his civil rights automatic.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel this is true of Negro civil and human rights in South Africa, where the doctrine of apartheid is enforced by the government of Prime Minister Verwoerd?

MALCOLM X: They don't stand for anything different in South Africa than America stands for. The only difference is over there they preach as well as practice apartheid. America preaches freedom and practices slavery. America preaches integration and practices segregation. Verwoerd is an honest white man. So are the Barnetts, Faubuses, Eastlands and Rockwells. They want to keep all white people white. And we want to keep all black people black. As between the racists and the integrationists, I highly prefer the racists. I'd rather walk among rattlesnakes, whose constant rattle warns me where they are, than among those Northern snakes who grin

and make you forget you're still in a snake pit. Any white man is against blacks. The entire American economy is based on white supremacy. Even the religious philosophy is, in essence, white supremacy. A white Jesus. A white Virgin. White angels. White everything. But a black Devil, of course. The "Uncle Sam" political foundation is based on white supremacy, relegating nonwhites to second-class citizenship. It goes without saying that the social philosophy is strictly white supremacist. And the educational system perpetuates white supremacy.

PLAYBOY: Are you contradicting yourself by denouncing white supremacy while praising its practitioners, since you admit that you share their goal of separation?

MALCOLM X: The fact that I prefer the candor of the Southern segregationist to the hypocrisy of the Northern integrationist doesn't alter the basic immorality of white supremacy. A devil is still a devil whether he wears a bed sheet or a Brooks Brothers suit. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches separation simply because any forcible attempt to integrate America completely would result in another Civil War, a catastrophic explosion among whites which would destroy America—and still not solve the problem. But Mr. Muhammad's solution of separate black and white would solve the problem neatly for both the white and black man, and America would be saved. Then the whole world would give Uncle Sam credit for being something other than a hypocrite.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel that the Administration's successful stand on the integration of James Meredith into the University of Mississippi has demonstrated that the Government—far from being hypocritical—is sympathetic with the Negro's aspirations for equality?

MALCOLM X: What was accomplished? It took 15,000 troops to put Meredith in the University of Mississippi. Those troops and \$3,000,000—that's what was spent—to get one Negro in. That \$3,000,000 could have been used much more wisely by the Federal Government to elevate the living standards of all the Negroes in Mississippi.

PLAYBOY: It is a matter of record that President Kennedy, in the face of Southern opposition, championed the appointment of Dr. Robert Weaver as the first Negro Cabinet member. Does this indicate to you, as it does to many Negro leaders, that the Administration is determined to battle the forces of white supremacy?

MALCOLM X: Kennedy doesn't have to fight; he's the President. He didn't have any fight replacing Ribicoff with Celebrezze. He didn't have any trouble putting Goldberg on the Supreme Court. He hasn't had any trouble getting anybody in but Weaver and Thurgood Marshall. He wasn't worried about Congressional objection when he challenged U.S. Steel. He wasn't worried about either Congressional reaction or Russian reaction or even world reaction when he blockaded Cuba. But when it comes to the rights of the Negro, who helped to put him in office, then he's afraid of littlepockets of white resistance.

PLAYBOY: Has any American President, in your opinion—Lincoln, FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy—accomplished anything worthwhile for the Negro?

MALCOLM X: None of them have ever done anything for Negroes. All of them

have tricked the Negro, and made false promises to him at election times which they never fulfilled. Lincoln's concern wasn't freedom for the blacks but to save the Union.

PLAYBOY: Wasn't the Civil War fought to decide whether this nation could, in the words of Lincoln, "endure permanently half slave and half free"?

MALCOLM X: Sir, many, many people are completely misinformed about Lincoln and the Negro. That war involved two thieves, the North and the South, fighting over the spoils. The further we get away from the actual incident, the more they are trying to make it sound as though the battle was over the black man. Lincoln said that if he could save the Union without freeing the slaves, he would. But after two years of killing and carnage he found out he would have to free the slaves. He wasn't interested in the slaves but in the Union. As for the Emancipation Proclamation, sir, it was an empty document. If it freed the slaves, why, a century later, are we still battling for civil rights?

PLAYBOY: Despite the fact that the goal of racial equality is not yet realized, many sociologists—and a number of Negro commentators—agree that no minority group on earth has made as much social, civil and economic progress as the American Negro in the past 100 years. What is your reaction to this view?

MALCOLM X: Sir, I hear that everywhere almost exactly as you state it. This is one of the biggest myths that the American black man himself believes in. Every immigrant ethnic group that has come to this country is now a genuinely first-class citizen group—every one of them but the black man, who was here when they came. While everybody else is sharing the fruit, the black man is just now starting to be thrown some seeds. It is our hope that through the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, we will at last get the soil to plant the seeds in. You talk about the progress of the Negro—I'll tell you, mister, it's just because the Negro has been in America while America has gone forward that the Negro appears to have gone forward. The Negro is like a man on a luxury commuter train doing 90 miles an hour. He looks out of the window, along with all the white passengers in their Pullman chairs, and he thinks he's doing 90, too. Then he gets to the men's room and looks in the mirror—and he sees he's not really getting anywhere at all. His reflection shows a black man standing there in the white uniform of a dining-car steward. He may get on the 5:10, all right, but he sure won't be getting off at Westport.

PLAYBOY: Is there anything then, in your opinion, that could be done—by either whites or blacks—to expedite the social and economic progress of the Negro in America?

MALCOLM X: First of all, the white man must finally realize that he's the one who has committed the crimes that have produced the miserable condition that our people are in. He can't hide this guilt by reviling us today because we answer his criminal acts—past and present—with extreme and uncompromising resentment. He cannot hide his guilt by accusing us, his victims, of being racists, extremists and black supremacists. The white man must realize that the sins of the fathers are about to be visited upon the heads of the children who have continued those sins, only in more sophisticated ways. Mr. Elijah Muhammad is warning this generation of white people that they, too, are also facing a time of harvest in which they will have to pay for the

crime committed when their grandfathers made slaves out of us.

But there is something the white man can do to avert this fate. He must atone—and this can only be done by allowing black men, those who choose, to leave this land of bondage and go to a land of our own. But if he doesn't want a mass movement of our people away from this house of bondage, then he should separate this country. He should give us several states here on American soil, where those of us who wish to can go and set up our own government, our own economic system, our own civilization. Since we have given over 300 years of our slave labor to the white man's America, helped to build it up for him, it's only right that white America should give us everything we need in finance and materials for the next 25 years, until our own nation is able to stand on its feet. Then, if the Western Hemisphere is attacked by outside enemies, we would have both the capability and the motivation to join in defending the hemisphere, in which we would then have a sovereign stake.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad says that the black man has served under the rule of all the other peoples of the earth at one time or another in the past. He teaches that it is now God's intention to put the black man back at the top of civilization, where he was in the beginning—before Adam, the white man, was created. The world since Adam has been white—and corrupt. The world of tomorrow will be black—and righteous. In the white world there has been nothing but slavery, suffering, death and colonialism. In the black world of tomorrow, there will be true freedom, justice and equality for all. And that day is coming—sooner than you think.

For further information: Cindy Rakowitz 310/246-4000

Reprinted from PLAYBOY, May 1963 Copyright © 1995 Playboy Enterprises, Inc. No part of this article may be produced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise—without the written permission of the copyright owner.