

Malcolm X

Malcolm X was one of the most famous civil rights activists from America. His ideas helped support the black power movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Early Years

He was born on the 19th May 1925, as Malcolm Little, in Nebraska, USA. His mother, Louise, looked after Malcolm and his siblings, sometimes having to protect them from being attacked. This was largely because his father, Earl Little, was a Baptist minister and supporter of an organisation called **The Black Nationalists**. Belonging to this group angered some people, who sent him death threats. After living with this trouble for many years, the family moved to Michigan. However, in 1929, their house was burned to the ground and two years later, his father was killed when he was run over by a streetcar. Many people believed at the time that he was murdered by members of the **Black Legion** for being a member of the Black Nationalists. To this day, no one knows for sure.



The Black Nationalists - A political group whose aim was to promote black communities and were proud of their black ancestry.

Black Legion - A white supremacist terrorist group who killed many people.

Prison

Malcolm's family split up after his father's death as his mother could not cope. Malcolm, his brothers and his sisters ended up in care. Eventually, Malcolm and a friend moved back to Boston but Malcolm was arrested for burglary and given a ten-year prison sentence, seven of which he served. During his time in prison, he spent time learning as much as he could. Visits from his brother inspired him to learn more about the Muslim religion and an organisation called the Nation of Islam (NOI), that supported African-American people working to have equal rights within America.

The Next Step

By the time Malcolm left prison in 1952, he was a spokesperson for the NOI. He changed his name to Malcolm X saying that his other name 'Little' was his slave name and that 'X' stood for what his real, African name should have been.

He was very popular in the NOI and helped their membership rise from 500 to 30,000 people in one year. However, as he was getting more popular, the government noticed and they started to watch and follow him as they saw him as a threat. In 1964, he left the NOI after some disagreement and he set up his own organisation, The Muslim Mosque Inc.

Family

In 1958, he married a nurse, Betty Shabazz (also known as Betty X), and they went on to have six daughters. However, family life was not easy due to Malcolm's fame and there were a number of attempts to kill him. On 14th February 1965, their home in New York was fire-bombed but luckily no one was harmed.

Death

On 21st February 1965, just a week after the incident at their house, Malcolm was shot and killed by three men as he spoke to a crowd of people in Manhattan. He was just 39 years-old. Over 1,500 people came to his funeral in Harlem. Later that year, his twin girls Malaak and Malikah were born and were named after him. Even though he died in 1965, his memory and work lives on through books, the Internet and films and his words are still as important as ever:

"Without education, you're not going anywhere in this world."

Malcolm X

Malcolm X Questions

1. On what date was Malcolm X born?

2. Which group did his father belong to? Tick **one**.

- Black Legion
- Black Nationalists
- NOI
- The Muslim Mosque Inc

3. How do you think the events in Malcolm's childhood affected his adult life?

4. Tick the boxes to say whether the statements below are **true** or **false**.

Sentence	True	False
Malcolm was arrested for burglary.		
He changed his name because he thought X sounded better.		
He married Betty Shabazz in 1957.		
Malcolm was shot and killed by three men.		

5. What did Malcolm's brother visiting him in prison inspire him to do?

6. Was Malcolm a popular member of the NOI? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

7. After reading the story of Malcolm X and how famous he became, do you think not being famous might have saved his life? If so, why do you think that he chose not to lead a quiet life?

8. What did the 'X' in his name stand for?

9. What do you think the final quote means and do you agree? Explain your answer.
