

# **BREAKING THE CHAINS**

The Relation between Race, Religion & Violence in Malcolm X's Pursuit  
of Black Liberation

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## **Abstract**

This essay aims to explore the complex interplay between race, religion, and violence as depicted in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley. Through an exploration of Frantz Fanon's theories regarding recognition and violence, alongside James H. Cone's concept of Black theology, the essay establishes a foundation for the analysis. This analysis will analyze Malcolm X's evolving transformative identity and political agenda. The essay aims to understand Malcolm X's engagement with Islamic teachings, his critique of Christianity, and his experiences with violence, and how these themes together shape his social and political agenda in his pursuit of liberation. Malcolm X challenges the racial narrative and argues that White people are devils. This perception undergoes a profound shift after his pilgrimage to Mecca. This transformative journey sheds light on the factors that shaped Malcolm X's perspective on religion, racial separation, self-defense, and liberation. This essay argues that Malcolm X underwent a profound evolution of ideological perspectives after his affiliation with the NOI and his trip to Mecca, leading to a deeper understanding of Black liberation and the complexities of racial identity.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The legacy of Malcolm X lives on to this day, as we can engage in a spiritual conversion narrative in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley. This book was published in 1965, the same year as Malcolm X's assassination. The journalist Alex Haley collaborated with Malcolm X through interviews and co-authored the autobiography to illustrate his life as an activist. Spanning from 1963 to 1965, the autobiography centers around Malcolm X's experiences and perspective on his life as a Black man in a society of inequality. In this essay, I will analyze the relationship between race, religion, and violence as portrayed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. This will be analyzed by exploring the theory of recognition and violence by Frantz Fanon in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. I will also incorporate James H. Cone's concept of Black theology in his work *Black Theology of Liberation*.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X invites the reader into his personal experiences and convictions. Malcolm X is seen embracing change resulting in a transformative journey in his pursuit of discovering his identity and beliefs. One of Malcolm X's recurring topics to discuss was religion, race, the oppression of African Americans, and how these themes correlate to each other. Malcolm X shares unique ideas about how the Christian faith in America harmed black people's identity and self-awareness (Haley 283). These ideas played a pivotal role in shaping Malcolm X's ideology of violence and liberation.

This essay undertakes an exploration of how Malcolm X's affiliation with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and experiences in Mecca influenced his social and political agenda. I will also analyze how these experiences shape his evolving transformation regarding true liberation. This essay aims to explore the intricate relationship between race, religion, and violence in the means of liberation, as depicted in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley. I seek to explore how Malcolm X's critique of Christianity as a tool of oppression, his engagement with Islam, and his experiences of racialized violence influence and contribute to his transformative journey regarding his perspective on faith, self-defense, racial separatism, and liberation. Through an analysis of Malcolm X's transformative journey, it becomes evident that he underwent a profound evolution of ideological perspectives after his affiliation with the NOI and his trip to Mecca, leading to a deeper understanding of Black liberation and the complexities of racial identity.

## **2.0 Historical Context**

### **2.1 Who Was Malcolm X?**

Malcolm X, previously known as Malcolm Little, was one of the most influential Black leaders during the Civil Rights Movement. In his school years, he had one of the highest grades in his studies. However, discouraging teachers who underestimated his knowledge due to his race led him to drop out of school. His father was killed early on by members of the Ku Klux Klan, which resulted in Malcolm X's mother's mental health issues. Due to her instability, she was taken into health care at a mental institution, leaving her children under the supervision of other people (Haley 35-36). When Malcolm X reached his twenties, he became a hustler in the streets which ultimately led him to be sentenced to prison, causing him to confront the realities of his existence (Haley 134).

After joining the NOI, Malcolm X decided to change his surname from Little to X, symbolizing the unknown African family name that was taken away from his ancestors during slavery. Not only does this change represent him stepping away from the American identity, but it also illustrates him turning in the direction of reclaiming and rediscovering his true identity as a Black man. In the article "All America is a Prison", Zoe Colley explains that by changing the surname, African Americans would gain a new identity and reclaim racial pride and self-respect, while also rejecting the racial ideology of Black inferiority. However, it is also seen as a rebirth as many were given an Islamic name (Colley 400). Malcolm X's name change is a significant part of his journey, as it reflects his enthusiasm towards renouncing American society to fulfill his identity and knowledge regarding his heritage. However, after a pilgrimage to Mecca in his later life, Malcolm X decided to change his name to "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz", indicating that he underwent another transformation during his pilgrimage. Throughout the autobiography he is seen embracing change to evolve his identity, demonstrating that his ideologies are dynamic rather than static.

### **2.2 The Nation of Islam**

The NOI was established in Detroit, Michigan in 1930 by W.D. Fard Muhammad. However, after Fard Muhammad left Detroit in 1934, Elijah Muhammad emerged as its official leader. W.D. Fard Muhammad, who was a teacher to Elijah Muhammad, is regarded as a mysterious man whose background continues to spark scholarly debates to this day (Curtis 659).

The NOI managed to attract up to a hundred thousand African Americans and became one of the most controversial movements in America. The NOI regarded Islam as the original religion of Black people, which was stolen from them during slavery and replaced with

Christianity. By rejecting Christianity, African Americans would break free from suffering. Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, the movement aimed to redefine Islamic principles, which differed significantly from conventional Islamic teachings. Elijah Muhammad sought to merge the new Islamic principles with the experience of oppression faced by African Americans, which in turn fostered a sense of Black pride and a hope for a brighter future. Additionally, The NOI advocated for racial separatism within various domains including businesses, schools, neighborhoods, and even as a sovereign state. The aim of this transformation was however not pursued with violence or war, but rather by reshaping African Americans' consciousness, self-image, and identity (Curtis 658, 662).

In *Malcolm X and The Cross*, Louis A. Decaro, Jr. explains how the NOI often is referred to as a construction of an anti-white and 'race hatred' movement. However, Decaro, Jr. argues that not many scholars acknowledge how NOI's teachings managed to challenge the Christian church and create a powerful movement that would redefine the essence of being Black. Decaro, Jr. states that the NOI is not only considered a movement but also a cultural phenomenon for achieving Black power (Decaro, Jr. 2).

According to Zoe Colley's examination of the rise of the NOI within America's penal system, NOI's strong appeal among African American prisoners is overlooked by scholars, causing an unexplored historiographical gap in the understanding of the NOI's influences (396). The NOI's doctrine combined religion with African-American history and heritage, constructing a philosophy that resonated with African-American prisoners' experiences. Elijah Muhammad had established a strong influence within the penal system, particularly through his personalized engagement with inmates via letters (Colley 402). Inmates who adopted the teachings of the NOI were typically in their twenties and with histories of criminal activity like Malcolm X. These converts would distinguish themselves from other African American inmates and devoted their time to prayer, studying the Quran, and spreading the word of Elijah Muhammed amongst other inmates (Colley 407)

### **2.3 Selective Narratives: Haley and Lee's Depiction of Malcolm X**

Alex Haley's work *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Spike Lee's film adaptation illustrate the captivating life of Malcolm X. Despite extensive public praise for these works, many scholars have acknowledged the presence and absence of specific narrative elements in both creations. Alex Haley collaborated with Malcolm X to narrate Malcolm X's journey, thoughts, and beliefs. Yet, he is criticized for neglecting significant moments of Malcolm X's life that are essential for his story, while simultaneously influencing the narrative of his perspective. Consequently, Malcolm X's narrative is allegedly influenced by the issues of the

creation. According to Floyd-Thomas, Alex Haley depicted Malcolm X's life from a Christocentric narrative, creating an ideological bias that diminishes the complex understanding of Malcolm X's emergence of identities and ideologies. Moreover, Floyd-Thomas acknowledges the limited portrayal of Malcolm X's identity as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, which raises questions regarding the accuracy of Haley's understanding of the historical and cultural context of Malcolm X's evolving transformations (Floyd-Thomas 48-49). Additionally, Alex Haley also published the book after Malcolm X's assassination, which further challenges the accuracy and objectivity of the illustration of Malcolm X's life. Malcolm X did not have the opportunity to agree to the final work, leaving the autobiography unclear regarding clarifications of narratives.

Spike Lee's movie adaptation also faces challenges as it tries to capture a large and complex journey in a limited cinematic scope. As a result, Spike Lee chose to highlight certain aspects and neglect others. Furthermore, his work is also impacted by his cinematic artistry, which can make the narrative come across as biased (Painter 434).

According to Samaa Abdulraqqib, Spike Lee's movie emphasizes Malcolm X's political life and skims over his religious journey within the NOI and his experience in Mecca. Moreover, Abdulraqqib states that it is problematic to illustrate Malcolm X's political and religious experiences as fragmentary, causing the relationship between Malcolm X's politics and faith to be less explained. Lee neglects the historical significance of Malcolm X's journey, causing his political and spiritual influences to be somewhat diminished (Abdulraqqib 171-172). While Haley and Lee have contributed to Malcolm X's remembrance and legacy, it is also important to critically investigate how these narratives are presented and the possible objectivity or biases that shape the narrative.

### **3.0 Previous Research**

In this section, I will present previous research concerning Malcolm X's transformative journey in shaping his identity, beliefs, and ideologies. I aim to explore how Malcolm X's experience with religious teachings influenced his social and political beliefs. Furthermore, I seek previous research that has been conducted on intersectionality in terms of gender dynamics within the NOI. Moreover, I will incorporate critiques that have arisen regarding Alex Haley and Spike Lee's portrayal of Malcolm X.

### 3.1 The (De)Christianization of Malcolm X's Life and Legacy

In the article "Gaining One's Definition: The (De)Christianization of Malcolm X's Life and Legacy", Juan M. Floyd-Thomas examines the evolution of Malcolm X's ideologies after his trip to Mecca. Furthermore, he explores the collaboration between Alex Haley and Malcolm X and its pros and cons. Secondly, Floyd-Thomas investigates Malcolm X's ability to become a big icon in a country dominated by White Christianity. He also explores Malcolm X's transformation after his trip to Mecca. Floyd-Thomas's investigation will help me to unravel complex nuances of Malcolm X's life which will contribute to a deeper analysis of his complex evolution of ideologies.

Floyd-Thomas explores Malcolm X's last identity as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and explains that this trip to Mecca was a turning point in Malcolm X's life. Floyd-Thomas argues that this pilgrimage changed Malcolm X's perspective regarding racial separatism and his animosity towards White people. After this trip, he began to adopt a more humanistic approach to Black liberation and no longer believed in racial separation or expressed animosity towards White people. This came after him being exposed to a global Muslim community, where he was witnessing Muslims from different countries and cultures. Thomas's integration of Malcolm X's journey shows that his embrace of Sunni Islam, made him question what the right way Islam would be to advocate for Black liberation. Although Malcolm X departed from the NOI where he was known for his devotion to Black nationalism, he kept this devotion by creating his Black organization but changed his approach. Although he no longer acquired an anti-white mentality, he continued to critique White supremacy and imperialism within American Christianity (53-54).

Furthermore, Thomas examines the creation of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and argues that Haley illustrates Malcolm X's life from a Christocentric narrative. Floyd-Thomas explains that this creates an ideological bias that limits the deeper understanding of Malcolm X's identities and ideologies. Since Malcolm X and Alex Haley had different takes on faith, it was important for them to remain professional and unbiased in the creation of the book. However, Floyd-Thomas argues that Haley's narration does not fully capture the deep nuances of Malcolm X's Muslim identity, especially as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. This indicates a possible concern regarding the autobiography's biased stance, and whether or not the nuances of Malcolm X's religious ideology at the end of his life were depicted accurately. This challenges the accuracy of how Malcolm X's religious identity is understood in the context of historical and cultural background (Floyd-Thomas 48-49).



### 3.2 Malcolm X's Afro-Arab Political Imaginary

In the article “Between the Secular and the Sectarian: Malcolm X's Afro-Arab Political Imaginary”, Alex Lubin discusses Malcolm X's trip to Africa and the Middle East, and how his encounters with people in these continents brought him further away from the NOI and the concept of Black separatism and closer to a more internationalist Black politic where he acknowledged racism and discrimination occurring globally. Lubin delves into Malcolm X's interactions with people from the Middle East and Africa, exploring how these interactions influenced his ideologies regarding the Black freedom movement. Lubin explains that Malcolm X underwent drastic transformations throughout his life, and kept transforming his identity until he felt secure and content with his identity. Malcolm X's interaction with other Muslims throughout Africa and the Middle East shows Malcolm X's open-mindedness to change his understanding of race, religion, and liberation. According to Lubin, there is too much emphasis on Malcolm X's departure from the NOI in the context of his transformative journey. He explains that it certainly is the case that he and Elijah Muhammad fell out of favor. However, he argues that this narrative dismisses the internationalist movements that inspired Malcolm X's evolving view. According to Lubin, there are elements of the long history of Afro-Arab internationalism that are being neglected in the analysis of Malcolm X's evolving change (Lubin 85).

Malcolm X's relationship with different nationalist movements such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) influenced his perspective on liberation and social justice for African Americans. Malcolm X's discovery of international liberation organizations challenged his views on racial separation and his previous teachings from Elijah Muhammad. When he was introduced to these nationalist movements around the world, he began comparing them to the liberation struggle of African Americans and started to rethink his approach to liberation and his political agenda. His experiences with the Arab and African world opened up a new dimension for Malcolm X's pursuit of liberation. Lubin explains

While encountering white Muslims during his pilgrimage led him to question the racial nationalism of the Nation of Islam, this does not mean, as Alex Haley—and to some extent, Manning Marable—have argued, that Shabazz rejected Black nationalism and embraced U.S. racial liberalism (Lubin 85).

In this passage, Lubin explores Alex Haley's interpretation of Malcolm X's ideologies following his pilgrimage to Mecca. Lubin highlights a prevalent misconception concerning Malcolm X's later stance on Black liberation, as depicted by Alex Haley. Although Malcolm X's interaction with White Muslims in Mecca influenced his perception of racial nationalism

and racial separatism within the NOI, this does not indicate that he fully rejected Black nationalism and instead adopted U.S. racial liberalism. Rather, it indicates that he changed his approach while remaining devoted to his belief in Black nationalism.

### **3.3 The Greatest Tool of The Devil**

In her article, "The Greatest Tool of the Devil: Mamie, Malcolm X, and the PolitiX of the Black Madonna in Black Churches and the Nation of Islam in the United States", Eboni Marshall Turman explores the intersection between race and gender in Malcolm X's pursuit of Black liberation. This is analyzed in the context of Malcolm X's rhetoric of Black nationalism of liberation. Turman argues that Malcolm X's advocacy for liberation prioritized Black men over Black women, resulting in African-American women's position in society being ignored, forgotten, and marginalized compared to African-American men. Furthermore, Turman states that because Malcolm X neglected the struggle of African American women, his dedication to Black liberation for his community is contradictory. This is because he is not emphasizing the multidimensional elements of oppression that African American women endured during the civil rights era (Turman 131).

During the time of the Black nationalist movement, present both within Black churches and The Nation of Islam, Afro-Patriarchy advocated ideologies that perpetuated the subjugation of African-American women. While Malcolm X is doing everything in his power to fight against White oppression, Turman argues that he is ignoring the struggles faced by African American women in society. Malcolm X held paradoxical views regarding women. While he perceived them as beautiful Black sisters, he also viewed them as tools of the devil. This dual portrayal of women shows the piousness and mistreatment of African-American women in Black churches and within the NOI (Turman 133-134).

Furthermore, Turman delves into Hudson-Weem's perspective on Malcolm X's transformative perception of Black women. Hudson-Weem suggests that Malcolm X's attitude towards Black women shifted from an Afro-misogynistic perspective to a more protective attitude toward Black women after joining the NOI. Moreover, Turman includes Hudson-Weem's perspective on Angela Y Davis's reflections on Malcolm X's being a potential Black feminist. Hudson-Weem acknowledges Davis's reflection and addresses that much of Malcolm X's evolution regarding gender is defined by his growing concern for "All African women". According to Hudson-Weem, this change became more noticeable after his separation from the NOI and his pilgrimage to Mecca (Turman 139).

Turman's analysis contributes to a complex and critical view of Malcolm X's perception of Black liberation and what that means for African-American men and women.

This analysis sheds light on the intersectionality of gender within the Black nationalist movement and the marginalization of African-American women. This can provide a fundamental exploration of gender dynamics during the civil rights era.

### **3.4 Malcolm X in Film and Text**

In the article “Malcolm X Across the Genres”, Nell Irvin Painter presents the development of self that occurs throughout *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and Spike Lee’s cinematic adaptation of *Malcolm X*. Painter explains that Lee’s movie chooses to dismiss certain aspects of Malcolm's life, and accentuate others. Lee specifically chooses to highlight Malcolm X’s confrontation with the police, using the situation involving a character named Brother Johnson to illustrate the issue of police brutality. over the police brutality of a character called Brother Johnson. Painter writes that this is highlighted as “a major turning point rather than one of many steps” (434). She also highlights that the moments when Malcolm X was in prison, and then released and started working as an organizer for the NOI are portrayed as racialized drama, where the shot is filmed in black and white (434). Painter however believes that this causes other questions surrounding the situation to be left less intelligible. Painter's analysis of Lee’s movie shows that cinematic creations can shape audiences' perspectives on characters and themes. By changing the color in a specific scene, filmmakers can strategically shape public perception, evoke emotions, and convey narrative motifs through visual language (Painter 435).

Painters' analysis of Spike Lee’s film represents how critical thinking can be applied when comparing the two texts. From reading the autobiography to watching the movie, distinct depictions and portrayals of Malcolm X’s life become noticeable. These distinct differences demonstrate the multifaceted nature of his story. According to Painter's article, Spike Lee’s movie includes various scenes of female characters, which he argues that the autobiography skims over. Lee also includes scenes concerning patriarchal gender values within the NOI, such as Malcolm X demanding his wife not to raise her voice in his home (435). Moreover, Lee acknowledges the NOI’s aim for racial redemption but does not elucidate the complexities, resulting in the vague portrayal of Malcolm X’s deep engagement in the movement (436).

## **4.0 Theoretical Framework**

For my theoretical framework, I will synthesize Frantz Fanon's theory of recognition and violence, along with James H. Cone's concepts of Black liberation theology. This will create

a foundation to delve deeper into the intricate relationship between race, religion, violence, and liberation as portrayed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley. The combination of Fanon's psychological perspective on recognition and violence, and Cone's illustration of Black theology in the pursuit of liberation, will enhance the analysis of how Malcolm X's engagement with religious teachings influenced his political and social ideologies. Additionally, the insights on violence enrich the analysis of Malcolm X's response to racial violence. These theories will unravel complex nuances in the relationship between race, religion, and liberation in Malcolm X's life.

#### **4.1 White Recognition and Internalized Racism**

Frantz Fanon's theory of recognition in his work *Black Skin, White Mask* will be an important component in my research as it sheds light on the psychological effects that colonization had on Black people. Fanon mainly focused on colonization in Africa while Malcolm X focused on Black nationalism in America. Even though Fanon and Malcolm X have different experiences and backgrounds, they both understand the relationship between race, identity, and liberation.

What Fanon believed to be psychological trauma from oppression can be analyzed in African Americans who Malcolm X argues have lost their knowledge of their heritage. Fanon's ideas regarding recognition will provide the research with a deeper understanding of Malcolm X's perspective on the lost African essence how racial identities are shaped by oppression, and how that limits the achievement of liberation. Fanon's ideas regarding internalized racism will also enhance the understanding of Malcolm X's transformation and ideologies. By analyzing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley with ideas by Fanon, the research can unravel complex dynamics that characterize the pursuit of liberation that Malcolm X wanted for African Americans.

One of Frantz Fanon's many strengths was his ability to interpret colonization through psychoanalysis and the social effects of racism. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks* we understand how colonization affects the mindset of the colonized and the consequences of it. Since Fanon explains that a Black person is only Black in contact with a White person, we are offered an insight into the idea of the self concerning the other and the power dynamic between them (212). This essay will be using Fanon's theory of recognition to analyze the psychological consequences of injustice illustrated in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley, and how it functions as the first step into coming into awareness of the deeply rooted injustice of Black people during the civil rights era.

In Chapter 7 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon addresses the psychological effects of the persistent action of comparison between individuals of African descent, referred to as Antillians in his context. This comparison causes Antillians to frequently doubt and scrutinize their self-worth by comparing their flaws with one another. Fanon explains that their self-worth is often determined by the comparison of others. Consequently, their sense of identity is tied to these comparative judgments. Additionally, Fanon addresses that Black people feel pressured into suppressing parts of their identity to assimilate into White society, a method that would allow them a bit of humanity and security within that context. This contributes to a psychologically draining effect where the Black person is constantly experiencing internalized racism, even if they are not actively aware of it. This is evident in chapter 7 where Fanon says “Every position of one’s own, every effort to security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other” (211).

Throughout Chapter 7 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, we come across Black people's struggles with self-awareness and Black identity. Fanon discusses that despite there being no ongoing conflict between Whites and Blacks, there is still a power dynamic between them where one is inferior to the other. The inferior one will recognize the Black as a colonized person, but not as an individual with an identity of his own. This causes the feeling of being worthless and trapped in a cycle of constantly self-critiquing oneself and feeling unrecognizable (216-217). Fanon further explains that the solution to end this cycle is if both parts are recognized for how they want to be portrayed. It is not enough for only one part to recognize the other, rather, they should acknowledge each other for their unique attributes as humans. Fanon's analysis shows that there should be mutual recognition to eliminate dehumanization and social injustice (217).

#### **4.2 The Theory of Violence**

In Chapter 1 of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon focuses on the process of decolonization and how violence is an inevitable part of it. This theory will be used to understand Malcolm X’s perception and juxtaposition of violence and self-defense.

Throughout Chapter 1 of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon explains violence in different dimensions. Fanon begins by stating that decolonization will always be a violent phenomenon. Since colonization happened violently, it will also be received violently (35). Fanon argues that it is fundamental to change every aspect of society to fulfill true liberation. That means that every level in that structure needs a change, not just the surface level. When it is only the surface that is under consideration for change, you neglect the depth of all the other aspects, such as values and norms. Fanon explains that by saying “The proof of success

lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up” (Fanon 35). This is an essential element in my research as it provides the essay with insight into why Malcolm X wanted to challenge many different aspects during the civil rights era. Malcolm X’s critique of Christianity is one of these deep-rooted factors in society that he wanted to change. However, Fanon further argues that this change only could happen if it’s willed and called for by the people living in injustice (35-36). This change is something that Fanon believes is compelling in the consciousness of colonized men and women, and this change in social structure also evokes fear in the consciousness of the colonizers (Fanon 36-38).

Fanon addresses the deeply rooted impact that colonial violence had on colonized people. Not only did colonial violence contribute to psychological consequences for the oppressed, but it also affected their economic, cultural, and social dimensions. As a result, structures within society were deeply ingrained by new facets and destroyed the natives’ social and economic structure. Fanon explains:

The violence which governed the ordering of the colonial world, which tirelessly punctuated the destruction of the indigenous social fabric, and demolished unchecked the systems of reference of the country’s economy, lifestyles, and modes of dress, this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities (Fanon 40)

Fanon further explains that the same violence that was imposed on colonial societies, will be embraced and justified by colonized people. This is to retain power over their lives and the social order. Fanon illustrates the eagerness for radical transformation within the colonized society that will break the chains of injustices, resulting in colonized people gaining control over their lives. This reflects structural violence that changes the structure of society, which Fanon argues places the colonized in a weak position economically and socially.

Another key concept in Fanon's work *The Wretched of The Earth*, is his perspective on counter-violence as a response to racial violence. Fanon explains that in an environment where extreme racial violence is active, the daily life of a colonized becomes very difficult which leads to counter-violence. He emphasizes the interplay between violence from the colonial regime and counter violence that adheres as a response from the colonized. Fanon explains that the relationship between these two creates a tense atmosphere resulting in conflict. Fanon explains this by saying:

The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. This reign of violence will be more terrible in proportion to the size of the implantation

from the mother country. The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the threatened colonial regime (Fanon 88)

Fanon uses the term “reciprocal homogeneity” to articulate how the two forms of violence mirror each other's intensity, causing an unending cycle of aggression and revenge. In a large colonial establishment, confrontation between the colonizer and colonized is more likely, increasing the level of violent actions. Fanon explains that the counter violence that is reciprocated is dependent on the level of violence that is imposed by the colonial regime. This means that even if the counter violence is brutal and extreme, it is still a reflection of the large oppression they face by colonizers. Both Fanon and Malcolm X acknowledge the importance of counter-violence and the necessity of confronting the violence that is imposed on marginalized people.

### **4.3 Black Liberation Theology**

In the book *Black Theology of Liberation*, James H. Cone delves into the relationship between Christianity and the pursuit of freedom among African Americans. Cone seeks to analyze the correlation between race, religion, and liberation by examining the interaction between African Americans and prevailing White Christian ideologies. Cone’s attempt to contextualize Christianity is seen as a strategy to help African Americans combat racial oppression, specifically during American segregation and integration. It is essential to note that the term “liberation” can have different meanings depending on the period and context. In Cone’s context, his work emphasizes Black theology as a tool to liberate African Americans from inequality and injustice in a society of systematic racism.

While Cone’s ideas resonate with the struggles faced during the civil rights era, they can also be perceived as a promotion of racial separation. This analysis arises from his emphasis on the Black experience that cannot be understood by the White, as well as his emphasis on a Black God that comprehends the injustice faced by African Americans. Amid my exploration of his work, I experienced his intention to directly accentuate African Americans' struggle of revealing their true self apart from what they have been taught as marginalized people in White society. His ideas align closely with Malcolm X’s perspective on Black theology, resulting in a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion and liberation in Malcolm X’s life.

Cone’s key point underscores the importance for Black individuals to reclaim and redefine their identity through religious teaching as a means of resisting racism. He advocates for a theology that hinders injustice through collective action for social justice. Furthermore,

Cone states that true liberation from systematic racism only could be achieved by challenging and confronting structural inequalities that are deeply rooted in society. Cone's perspective on race, religion, and liberation provides a well-connected illustration of the struggles faced by African Americans, and how churches run by White Americans hindered their pursuit of liberation and justice in a society of racism.

In chapter 2 of *Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone challenges White Christianity, which he perceives as a dominant White theology used to perpetuate racism. He argues that the White church is debating whether African Americans are considered human, indicating that there is inequality in how they are being treated. This experience is according to Cone a fundamental element for the rising of Black theology and that God must be understood in the context of racism. Cone explains:

The purpose of black theology is to make sense of the black experience. And this experience is more than just encountering white insanity. It is about black people realizing their singularity in their experiences and making a decision about themselves regarding their identity, this realization according to Cone is the definition of black power within a community (Cone 57).

This passage highlights the multi-dimensional Black experience that extends beyond having to endure racism faced by African Americans. Cone's term "White insanity" could illustrate the blatant racial discrimination that would affect African Americans in horrific ways. His statement indicates that other significant elements within that experience deserve more attention. Cone speaks enthusiastically about the unique attributes of Black people that need to emerge from their experiences within a White realm. Hence his emphasis on the importance of Black people's need to make sincere decisions about their identity and regain power within the Black community. Cones explains "The power of the black experience cannot be overestimated. It is the power to love oneself precisely because one is black and a readiness to die if White people try to make one behave otherwise" (Cone 56). Cone's critique is not aimed toward Christian theology as a whole, but rather at specific perspectives of Christian theology through a White perception. Moreover, he states that this White perspective on Christianity has been used to perpetuate the disempowerment and subjugation of African Americans. Cone emphasizes that African Americans should learn to love themselves and be unapologetic about their identity, even if it results in their death. This illustrates the Black readiness to maintain power in Black nationalism.

During the post-civil War, Cone argues that Black churches lost their emphasis on civil freedom and began instead to identify Christianity with moral purity. They did not



intertwine their Christian beliefs with their pursuit of liberation, which Cone critiques. Cone believes that religion unrelated to Black liberation is irrelevant since it does not seek to hinder the oppression of a marginalized group. This illustrates that there is a strong correlation between religion and the pursuit of freedom, by separating the two elements religion remains apocryphal. Cone argues that religion is inauthentic if it does not emphasize Black freedom. Some influences during the civil rights movement that Cone believes supported this belief were Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammed, and Martin Luther King Jr. (Cone s.113).

## 5.0 Analysis

### 5.1 From Prison to Preacher: Malcolm X's Spiritual Awakening

In chapter 10 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley, Malcolm X is serving time in prison, causing him to rethink his life. Reginald, a friend of Malcolm X who has been released from prison introduces Malcolm X to The Nation of Islam. Reginald explains that God had revealed himself to Elijah Muhammed, a Black man who claimed himself to be the last messenger. Moreover, Reginald also explained the concept of White people being the devil who cut African Americans off their knowledge regarding their culture, religion, and language (Haley 195-196). Malcolm X's interaction with Reginald marks a pivotal turning point in Malcolm X's life as it made him rethink his experiences and heritage. After various visits from Reginald where he would advocate Elijah Muhammed's teachings, Malcolm X began to reason with the idea of White people being the devil. Malcolm X's interest in NOI's concept of an all-black religion began to interest him the more he spoke to Reginald. It was during these times that Malcolm X began to delve into his experiences with injustices, leading him to reshape his ideological perspectives on American social constructs. Malcolm X's exposure to the teachings of the NOI made him reconsider his identity, which led him into a process of self-exploration. Malcolm X explains:

When Reginald left, he left me rocking with some of the first serious thoughts I had ever had in my life: that the white man was fast losing his power to oppress and exploit the dark world; that the dark world was starting to rise to rule the world again, as it had before; that the white man's world was on the way down, it was on the way out. "You don't even know who you are," Reginald had said. "You don't even know, the white devil has hidden it from you, that you are a race of people of ancient civilizations, and riches in gold and kings (Haley 202).

This moment is a significant part of Malcolm X's life as he not only challenged his previous perspective on life, but also began to delve deeper into the relationship between race, religion, and liberation. Additionally, he analyzed the power dynamic between White people and African Americans, resulting in his perspective on African Americans regaining the power that had been demolished. Furthermore, this quote illustrates Malcolm X coming into awareness of his heritage and identity that he had lost knowledge of. This connects to Fanon's theory of Black people being unaware of their origin, culture, and language, causing them to feel inferior to themselves in *Black Skin, and White Mask*. The quote provided above shows his development of consciousness regarding the complexities of racial identity. As time goes on, the NOI is seen as a catalyst for the evolving development of Malcolm X's journey. This journey would shape his transformation of becoming an influential figure who embraces a distinct role in advocating for political change. The rest of Malcolm X's prison time would be dedicated to studying psychology, history, and the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X states that Islam meant more than anything to his life and that Elijah Muhammad had changed his worldview, showcasing the significant influence that the NOI had on Malcolm X's ideologies.

After Malcolm X had learned about the NOI, he began seeking knowledge regarding the history of slavery. Malcolm X explains how slaves' identities would be torn down to the point that they had no value within themselves, they would obey the White man and his teachings in the hope of being recognized as humane. One of these teachings that would be imposed on the colonized was White Christianity. Malcolm X says:

And where the religion of every other people on earth taught its believers of a God with whom they could identify, a God who at least looked like one of their kind, the slavemaster injected his Christian religion into this "Negro." This "Negro" was taught to worship an alien God having the same blond hair, pale skin, and blue eyes as the slavemaster - This religion taught the "Negro" that black was a curse. It taught him to hate everything black, including himself (Haley 204)

This quote illustrates the elongated effect that slavery has had on oppressed people, where generations would be brainwashed into believing the beliefs of their slave masters. This correlates to Frantz Fanon's interpretation of White recognition in *Black Skin, White Masks*, namely that the Black man constantly searches for validation from the White man because of the constant self-doubt and the persistent practice of comparison between Black people. The Black man is suppressing his blackness to fit in the White standard (Fanon 211). According to Fanon, this contributes to an ongoing cycle of self-criticism that is unbreakable unless both

parties recognize each other for how they want to be depicted (217). In contrast to Fanon's perspective on mutual recognition, Malcolm X chose to engage the NOI which would significantly influence his ideology on racial reparation. Fanon and Malcolm X's different path raises uncertainties about the applicability of Fanon's ideas of mutual recognition in the context of Malcolm X. While Fanon delves into the cycle of self-doubt and validation-seeking perpetuated by historical oppression, Malcolm X's approach suggests another response to the issue. However, this contrast does not invalidate Fanon's concept entirely but rather highlights individuals' different reactions and approaches regarding the impact of systematic oppression. Still, through further examination of Malcolm X's religious and political journey, such as his departure from the NOI and experience in Mecca, Malcolm X's beliefs move closer to Fanon's concept of mutual recognition.

Malcolm X began drawing parallels between racism and White Christianity. He argues that the White man's religion only perpetuates oppression and systematic racism, as its concept of "Turning the other cheek" functions as a manipulative tactic to maintain African Americans as inferior. He also critiques the White image of God, who has similar attributes to White people. This connects to Cone's concept of a Black God; Cone explains that when Black people become aware of their Black essence and identity, they will love themselves and create a hatred of whiteness. This results in a change of perspective on the representation of God, which according to Cone must reveal himself in his blackness. According to Cone, there is no place for a colorless God in a society where people suffer because of their skin color. The blackness of God is found in the concept of liberation, which Cone argues White theology denies (Cone 120-121).

After Malcolm X's release from prison, he got closer to Elijah Muhammad and eventually became a minister within the NOI. Malcolm X participated in every lecture along with Elijah Muhammad where they were advocating for racial separation, opposing integration, promoting self-defense, and critiquing White Christianity. In chapter 14 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X joins a panel discussion where he is welcomed to defend the NOI and the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. He goes on to explain the notion of racial separation and anti-integration, he explains that integration never was the answer to the issue of Black liberation. He says:

No sane black man really wants integration! No sane white man really wants integration! No sane black man really believes that the white man ever will give the black man anything more than token integration. No! The Honorable Elijah

Muhammad teaches that for the black man in America, the only solution is complete separation from the white man! (Haley 293)

Malcolm X explained confidently that integration was not the solution to the oppression of racial injustice. He states that an African American who is conscious of the oppression he is faced with, and the generations whose identities have been torn down, would never want to integrate with White Americans. After this quote, Malcolm X continues his discussion and argues that American society is deteriorating and filled with immorality.. Malcolm X argues that the only solution for African Americans to be saved from this immorality is to separate themselves from it. Instead of integration, they should focus on building their community where they can reform themselves and be self-sufficient. He explains that there has to be willed segregation, which will result in African Americans regaining power over their lives (Haley 293-294)

Malcolm X's anti-integration ideology aligns with Cone's critique of America's attempt to integrate African Americans found in *Black Theology of Liberation*. Cone explains that the Black identity was heavily destroyed by the forced segregation of African Americans (Cone 38). However, this changed after 1954 under the banner of liberalism. It was during this period that the concept of integration came forward with a new approach and intention: White people aimed to further destroy the Black identity by integrating African Americans into their White society. This would further erase the culture of African Americans and instead, place them in a society where they should mirror White people. Cone argues that in a situation like this, there is one appropriate thing for African Americans to do. Cone says "That is to destroy the oppressor's definition of blackness by unraveling new meanings in old tales so that the past may emerge as an instrument of black liberation" (Cone 39). Furthermore, Cone emphasizes that Black theology functions as a survival theology. This is because it offers theological narratives that are necessary for the pursuit of Black empowerment and liberation. Cone explains that it is crucial to acknowledge the conflicting nature of White oppression in relation to Christian principles and to respond by reshaping religious discourse. (Cone 39).

Both Cone and Malcolm X recognize the manipulation of Black identity in the attempt of integration, and the theological necessity to challenge oppressive forces. Fundamentally, Malcolm X's involvement with the NOI and the relationship between NOI's religious teachings and racial injustice shaped Malcolm X's ideology of Black liberation in America. Malcolm X's evolving perception of true liberation, along with Cone's perspective

on Black liberation theology, accentuates the intersection between race and religion in the means of liberation in the context of the African American experience.

## **5.2 Racial Violence: Personal Experience and Father's Legacy**

Malcolm X's father Earl Little was a Baptist minister who dedicated much of his time to UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), a social and political movement that emphasized racial pride. The UNIA believed that African Americans would not achieve political and social freedom in America, and should instead return to their homeland in Africa (Haley 14). Malcolm X argues that despite the controversies and hate that UNIA received, Earl Little was not afraid and decided to risk his life to spread his philosophy. Earl Little had witnessed his friends die from racial violence, resulting in his emphasis that African Americans should leave the country to the Whites. However, even though Earl Little was anti-White, Malcolm X believed that Earl Little had subconsciously been brainwashed by White oppression, leading him to favor Malcolm over his siblings because of Malcolm X's light skin color (Haley 18).

Malcolm X describes Earl Little's political engagement throughout the first chapter of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, but there is not much critique of his father's experiences as a civil rights activist while still being a devoted Christian. Despite their divergent perspective on White Christianity, Earl Little's engagement in the UNIA could have had a significant impact on Malcolm X's perception of racial injustice and liberation. Earl Little's attempt to achieve liberation for African Americans was not fulfilled as he was murdered by members of the KKK.

Although both Malcolm X and his father advocated the same principle, they shared their differences, the main one being their religion. Earl Little's death might have influenced Malcolm X's desire to uphold his father's pursuit of social and political liberation for African Americans, yet under the guidance of the NOI's perspective. Despite their different rhetorics in the pursuit of Black liberation, the autobiography does not fully capture the contrast between them. This could be because Malcolm X did not want to insult his father's perspective on racial identity and instead avoided undermining his father.

Malcolm X began to delve deeper into his father's death while serving time in prison. The anti-white teaching of Elijah Muhammad influenced Malcolm X's perspective on his father's death, resulting in a more complex understanding of the reality of racial violence. Malcolm X says: "The white people I had known marched before my mind's eye. From the start of my life. The state white people always in our house after the other whites I didn't know had killed my father..." (Haley 196). Malcolm X's reminiscent of his father's tragic

death, along with his negative encounters with White people, awakened his consciousness of the brutal reality of racial violence faced by African Americans. Malcolm X's alignment with the NOI and his ideologies regarding self-defense and racial separation can be seen as a continuation of his father's legacy. Additionally, since his father was killed by a group of conservative White Christians it could have affected Malcolm X's perception of religion and racial injustice. As a result, Malcolm X seeks the true pursuit of liberation through the NOI.

In the autobiography, Malcolm X does not explicitly argue for violence as a means of achieving Black liberation. Instead, he is advocating for self-defense when faced with racial violence. Throughout the autobiography, Malcolm X critiques the term "turn the other cheek when faced with violence" various times. This is evident in chapter 13 during Malcolm X's speech: "Do nothing unto anyone that you would not like to have done unto yourself. Seek peace, and never be the aggressor—but if anyone attacks you, we do not teach you to turn the other cheek" (Haley 258). This quote illustrates that Malcolm X did not believe in unnecessary violence and did not wish for his people to pursue an aggressive approach. Instead, he simply argued that victims of racial violence are allowed to respond with counter-violence. Malcolm X's rhetoric of self-defense was heavily controversial, making headlines in the media worldwide. He would on several occasions be faced with questions about his political agenda and his strong critical stance on White people. This is evident in chapter 14 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*:

Mr. Malcolm X," those devils would ask, "Why is your Fruit of Islam being trained in judo and karate?" An image of black men learning anything suggesting self-defense seemed to terrify the white man. I'd turn their question around: "Why does judo or karate suddenly get so ominous because black men study it? Across America, the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, even the YWCA, the CYP, PAL—they all teach judo! It's all right, it's fine—until black men teach it! (Haley 289).

In this passage, Malcolm X observes the fear that White people have in the thought of Black people learning martial arts focusing on self-defense techniques. He also acknowledges the double standard associated with self-defense, where it seems to be acceptable for White people to learn, but viewed with fear when African Americans pursue it. This observation of Malcolm X aligns with Frantz Fanon's perspective on the relationship between racial violence and counter violence. According to Fanon, oppressed people will be forced into a position where self-defense will be necessary to survive and resist brutality. This is something that the oppressor will fear, which could

result in more tension leading to more racial violence. This is because the colonizer will fear that the colonized will be fearless and rise against the oppression that it faces. Fanon's concept resonates with Malcolm X's idea of self-defense. Where the White man similar to the colonizer will fear the resistance of the African American, just like the counter violence of the colonized. Both Fanon and Malcolm X's situation shows how the one in power will do anything to suppress any expression of resistance, which according to Malcolm X is through the weaponization of faith (Fanon 88).

### **5.3 Breaking Bonds: From NOI to Mecca**

In chapter 16 of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, we witness Malcolm X's tense relationship with Elijah Muhammad. The shocking allegation about Elijah Muhammad performing adultery caused Malcolm X to feel the need to defend his teacher. However, Malcolm X soon realized the allegations rapidly spread around various Muslim communities and went to Elijah Muhammad for advice. Elijah Muhammad does not take accountability for his actions and tries instead to justify them (Haley 355-356). This causes friction between the two, and their relationship is destined to worsen.

After President John F. Kennedy's assassination, Malcolm X broke a rule within the NOI by sharing his unfiltered thoughts regarding the murder to the press. He comments on the incident, stating, 'The chickens coming home to roost', suggesting that there is a justification for the murder. Elijah Muhammad infuriatingly decided to silence Malcolm X for 90 days, but Malcolm X later understood that Elijah Muhammad's disapproval of the statement was only an excuse for Malcolm X to be expelled from the NOI (Haley 359).

Eventually, Malcolm X began to hear rumors that the NOI had ordered people within the sect to murder Malcolm X. This shocking news left Malcolm X feeling betrayed, and he described the feeling as "a sudden divorce after 12 years of a beautiful marriage" (Haley 363). This estrangement from the NOI affected Malcolm X deeply, causing him to feel betrayed after having defended Elijah Muhammad for so long. After some time to rethink his life, Malcolm X embraced his departure from the NOI and began to plan how he would carry out his political agenda alone. However, Malcolm X decided that it was time to fulfill his pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, a place where he would reinvent his identity once again.

Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca is considered as a second, and last turning point in his ideological transformation. During his trip, Malcolm X experienced a form of unity that changed his perspectives on racial issues. He encountered various cultures and began reflecting on the different languages, skin colors, and traditions of the Muslims around him.

The wide diversity of people, people with blue eyes and blond hair, embracing Malcolm X in a brotherly manner surprised him. Malcolm X describes this as an “atmosphere extended the oneness of Man under One God” (Haley 391). Malcolm X also met Dr. Omar Azzam and his father Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam. The Azzams invited Malcolm X over for dinner and offered him a luxury suit to rest in. This warm and genuine hospitality surprised Malcolm X and left him feeling overwhelmed. He could not comprehend the kindness of people who looked just as White as the White American man. This is a significant part of Malcolm X’s journey as it changed his perception of the White man. This change of perspective adhered to the morning after his encounter with the Azzams, Malcolm says:

It was when I first began to perceive that “white man,” as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, “white man” meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been. That morning was the start of a radical alteration in my whole outlook about “white” men (Haley 395-396)

In this passage, we witness Malcolm X’s change of the previous perception of the White man. Malcolm X rethinks his definition of what a White man means in a specific context. Since Malcolm X’s alignment with the NOI, Malcolm X perceived all White people as devils who utilize hate through actions. This perception of White people did not correspond in Mecca as they treated him with kindness. This experience challenged Malcolm X’s previous ideologies of racial separation and he began rethinking his knowledge and rhetoric, resulting in him fully embracing his departure from the teachings within the NOI. The color-blindness in the Muslim world had a major impact on Malcolm X and shaped his new ideologies. Instead of racial separation and an anti-White attitude, Malcolm X changed his narratives and embraced the unity of races. Malcolm X stated:

We were truly all the same (brothers)—because their belief in one God had removed the ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior, and the ‘white’ from their attitude. “I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in reality the Oneness of Man—and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their ‘differences’ in color (Haley 403).

This quote highlights Malcolm X’s shift from his earlier advocacy of racial separatism and the belief that all White people are evil without exception. His trip to Mecca makes him



understand that the issue of racial injustice lies in the psychological construction that perpetuates inequality. Malcolm X wishes for these mental barriers to be challenged so people can live in unity. However, he also suggests that people in America should embrace the belief in one God and the concept of all humans being equal to each other (Haley 428)

After Malcolm X's return to America, he gained more confidence in his new worldview and identity and attended his biggest press conference since the beginning of his career. Malcolm X explains that his attitude regarding White people has changed since his trip to Mecca where he met various cultures and people who look White. However, Malcolm X states that the issue of racial oppression remains in America, he still believed that the White man of America, and White Christianity contributed to much damage for African Americans. Malcolm X still believed that there needed to be a solid Black nationalism so that African Americans had a community of shared thoughts, experiences, and identities. Malcolm X's new perception of brotherhood reminds a lot of his father's alignment with the UNIA, and even Malcolm X explains the influence that Marcus Garvey has on his new political ideas. Because of Malcolm X's major profile and association with the NOI, it was hard for him to escape his earlier public "Black Muslim" image. Unlike the NOI, Malcolm X wanted an all-black organization that was tolerant of all religions. Malcolm X kept his devotion to Islam and encouraged his people to follow the faith as it would ease their economic, psychological, and racial understanding of life. One of his emphases was on economic philosophies. He wanted African Americans to be confident and strong to get up on their feet and feel self-sufficient economically. Upon his return to America after his pilgrimage, Malcolm X became more open-minded to a diverse friend group and began accepting people from different races and religions in his life (Haley 444).

## **6.0 Teaching with Film: English 7**

This section aims to explore the strategies and benefits of including film within the English 7 classroom. By including insights from William B. Russell III's article "The Art of Teaching Social Studies with Film", this section demonstrates how to utilize his film pedagogical strategies to teach with the film *Malcolm X* by Spike Lee. Although Russell's article concerns teaching within social studies, its film pedagogical insights are applicable to teaching Malcolm X in the realm of English 7. The primary goal of this pedagogical approach is to empower students to explore how film can construct narratives and convey important

historical events. They will also have the opportunity to connect past events to present events and reflect on the similarities.

### **6.1 Approaches to Teaching with Film**

There are different ways and methodologies to use in the incorporation of film within teaching. This section will explore two methodologies from William B. Russell III's article 'The Art of Teaching Social Studies with Film', which provide effective strategies for teaching Spike Lee's movie *Malcolm X*. These methodologies, namely 'Teaching Film as a Visual Textbook' and 'Film as Historiography', offer structured approaches to engage English 7 students in the story of Malcolm X while fostering critical thinking and historical analysis.

**Teaching Film as a Visual Textbook:** The concept of including film as a visual textbook involves utilizing film to accentuate historical events, contexts, and characters. Russell explains that films can accurately depict past events, though he also acknowledges the potential for historical inaccuracy in certain films. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that films have the power to influence audiences' perceptions of history. By incorporating Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X*, students are immersed in a vivid portrayal of his story. This experience facilitates an emotional connection to historical events (Russell 158).

**Teaching Film as Historiography:** Russell also introduces the idea of film as historiography, emphasizing that films themselves are interpretations of historical events. Filmmakers, just like historians, make choices in presenting characters, events, and perspectives. Teaching film as historiography guides students to critically assess these cinematic choices and the resultant impact on audience perception. Furthermore, the teaching of films like *Malcolm X* prompts students to analyze the filmmaker's perspective and its effects. This approach challenges analytical skills, creating a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical representation through the medium of film (Russell 160). Here is an example of 4 stages on how a teacher can implement these methodologies in the classroom:

- 1. Preparation:** Introduce the historical context surrounding Malcolm X, the Civil Rights era, and the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). This stage will be the foundation of the study of Malcolm X, racial justice, and activism. The teacher should also emphasize the relationship between Malcolm X's advocacy for Civil Rights and the ongoing struggle for equality in the BLM movement. Moreover, presents the goals, focus points, and educational purposes of watching the film.
- 2. Guided Viewing:** Provide the students with specific questions that delve into the correlation of Malcolm X's story, historical events, and ideas of the BLM movement. While watching the film, provide students with a list of directorial choices to observe.

These could include visual symbolism, lighting, camera angles, auditory elements, and language. The teacher can create specific questions such as “How does the film depict moments that contribute to Malcolm X’s evolution, and what significance do these hold?”. Moreover, involve questions regarding Lee’s portrayal of violence in the film and its correlation with historical realities.

3. **Watching with a Critical Eye:** When watching the movie it is important for the teacher to ensure that the students are focused on their task. By ensuring this, the teacher can stop the film at certain moments and ask the class if they are following along, or to highlight key moments that they need to focus on. The teacher can also clarify certain moments that are fundamental to the understanding of the film.
4. **Analysis and Discussion:** After the film concludes, transition to a structured activity that enables students to collectively analyze and discuss their observations. Organize students into smaller groups, each tasked with presenting their insights on the film. Encourage them to explore the film's interpretations, depictions, and narrative shaping through the lens of directorial choices. Guide the subsequent discussion toward the profound impact these cinematic elements wield in portraying Malcolm X's life. Encourage critical thinking about how such choices align with historical truths and contribute to our understanding of Malcolm X and his era.

This multi-faceted approach to film analysis not only enriches students' understanding of history and social movements but also encourages them to critically evaluate the filmmaker's intentions and the broader implications for contemporary society. This engagement aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the Swedish Curriculum for English 7, fostering global awareness, critical thinking, and the ability to understand complex socio-political perspectives.

## 6.2 Critical Thinking Through Film Analysis

Spike Lee’s movie *Malcolm X* not only unravels historical narratives from the Civil Rights era, but also cultural, political, and social contexts from these historical events. Lee’s film explores Malcolm X's advocacy for justice which finds resonance with the concept of the BLM movement. By exploring scenes that depict racial discrimination, systemic injustices, and the fight for civil rights, students can identify parallels between Malcolm X's struggle and the BLM movement’s attempt to combat racial inequality and police violence. This connection encourages students to recognize the historical roots and how narratives of the past influence present-day social justice movements.

The Swedish Curriculum for English 7 emphasizes themes, ideas, and content in both literature and film. By teaching the film *Malcolm X*, students can engage in media analysis and critically evaluate the correlation of visual storytelling with literary narratives. By examining how Malcolm X's story is portrayed cinematically, students develop a deep understanding of narrative diversity and the influence of the medium on storytelling.

Furthermore, the curriculum's emphasis on students developing a global awareness and critical thinking aligns with the examination of Malcolm X's narrative in relation to the BLM movement. This analysis gives students the ability to scrutinize how historical contexts continue to shape modern activism. The discussions derived from this connection encourage students to navigate complex socio-political perspectives, ultimately contributing to their ability to comprehend and engage with global issues.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This essay delved into Malcolm's transformative evolution concerning his social and political agenda in the pursuit of Black liberation. Throughout my exploration, it became evident that Malcolm X underwent various identities and ideological shifts depending on his affiliation with religious teachings. Malcolm X's perception of White people as devils changed after his trip to Mecca, where he witnessed diversity and began to adopt a more humanistic and colorblind perspective on racial issues. However, he still maintained his belief in the importance of strong black nationalism in American society. This is because he continued to view White Christianity as a tool of oppression against African Americans, as shown in the last chapter of the book where Malcolm X attempts to create a new black organization focusing on economic and social dilemmas within the context of African Americans. I also conclude that Malcolm X's new rhetoric transforms into a more tolerant attitude toward other races and religions, while he remains dedicated to restoring the demolished African American identity.

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