



**“MALCOLM, LIBERATION, JIHAD AND JUSTICE:
RIGHTEOUS WARRIOR AND WITNESS TO THE WORLD”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The day of birth and welcome into the world of Al Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Min. Malcolm X, May 19, remains a special and sacred day of remembrance, marking and meditation for the advocates of our organization Us, not only because of how much our beginning was framed and founded in his insightful teachings and exemplary practice, but also because of the enduring relevance of the strong model, powerful message and clear mirror Malcolm offers as righteous warrior and witness to us as a people and the world. Indeed, this was for Malcolm the central mission and ultimate meaning of his life and the enduring lesson and legacy he worked and struggled to leave, i.e., a self-sacrificing offering of his life as a *living-practice* text which he said, when “read objectively...might prove to be a testimony of some social value”. In spite of Malcolm’s personal humbleness and intellectual modesty, his life readily reads as a testimony and text of great and timeless value, providing a vital model, message and mirror by which we can measure, understand and assert ourselves in the world.

The enduring and awesome message of Malcolm comes into sharp relief in the context of the Obama election-focused and media-manufactured controversy around Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s critique of U.S. policy here and around the world within the framework of Christian liberation theology. And one wonders if they were disturbed and undone by Rev. Wright’s liberation theology, what would they think of the thunder and theology of Divine judgment and justice of Min. Malcolm X? For Malcolm, especially in his early period, taught the Muslim liberation theology of the Hon.

Elijah Muhammad whose teaching had problematized Black Christianity for the first time in a comprehensive and undeniably transformative way, challenging the Christian color and conception of God, the identity of the devil, the social and spiritual nature of sin, the use of Christianity as an instrument of enslavement and oppression, and the Divine presence and mission in history and society. And this along with other factors aided the positive move of Black Christianity from self-assured preaching to a systematic liberation theology that offered a radical reconception of Christianity and argued its continued relevance in the life and struggle of our people.

Malcolm declared that neither God nor he had any “mercy or compassion for a society that crushes people, and then penalizes them for not being able to stand up under the weight”, that “America is the last stronghold of White supremacy”, that it has, by its own actions at home and in the world, sown the seeds of its own demise, that the White oppressor “has been weighed in the balance and all the seeds of injustice he has sown in the past are coming home to plague him”. In other words, he said “the chickens are coming home to roost” and U.S. society is both “damned and doomed”, if it does not “repent, atone and compensate for its crimes” against Africans and humanity.

Malcolm’s life and legacy must be understood both in the context of his cultural community and in the framework of his religious faith. He is before and after his *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, a Black man and a Black Muslim, bearing witness to truth and engaged in the righteous and relentless struggle for self and social transformation.

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Indeed, to understand him as a righteous warrior and witness is to build on the Islamic concepts of *jihad* (righteous struggle within and without), *mujahid* (righteous warrior), and *shahid* (righteous witness or martyr) and at the same time, pay homage to our history and culture which contain an ethics of liberation already in practice and a righteous struggle for freedom already in process.

For Malcolm, righteous struggle became in a real sense a *way of worship*, a way to serve and satisfy the Divine, and liberate and uplift his people. He, as we all must, begins with the inner jihad, making himself worthy and capable of his role and responsibility. And it is his own call to “wake up, clean up and stand up” that he, himself, answers first, for it originates within him as a prerequisite and promise of a new life and way forward.

Then he calls on Black people to reject the brainwashing and degradation of the oppressor, “recognize each other as brothers and sisters, stop carrying (weapons) to harm each other”; stop all vices that undermine the community; “elevate the Black woman; respect her, and protect her..., form a platform that will be good for all our own people as well as for others (and)...unite”; and wage a righteous and relentless struggle for freedom, justice, equality, truth and peace in the world. And this righteous and revolutionary practice will make us an “uncontrollable forest fire” for good and against evil. Here, Malcolm joins the inner and outer struggle of jihad, the personal and social, and calls on us to stand steadfast, as

he was, and ever “ready to fight and die in defense of our lives”, dignity and “right to live as human beings”,—free, equal, and fully aware and active in our own interests and in the building of a good world.

As he himself anticipated, thru his righteous struggle and the uncompromising stand he took, Malcolm became the ultimate witness, a shahid, a martyr, for his people and his faith. As a mujahid, he appreciated the good of a life well-lived, but affirmed that because of his faith, he was not afraid of death or the dealers-in-death who pursued him. Thus, he said “To speculate about dying doesn’t disturb me as it might some people”, and that his belief, his disposition and his “one hundred percent dedication” tended to “make it just about impossible for me to die of old age”.

Malcolm ends his autobiography saying, “I cherished my ‘demagogue’ role”, using quotes to focus on its root meaning, “leader of the masses” and his profound and unshakeable commitment to them. He said that he knew “that societies have often killed the people who have helped to change those societies.” But he refused to be like so many—silenced or “blinded by childlike patriotism” or frightened of losing one’s life, job or designation as “responsible” by the oppressor. On the contrary, as a righteous warrior and witness, Malcolm dared to lift up the light that lasts, to teach truth, transformation and resistance, and to constantly and courageously struggle to secure and expand free space for real justice, true peace and human flourishing in the world.

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