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*Deconstructing an Empire and the Quest for the Self through the Autobiography
of Malcolm X (1965)*

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Dedications

To my parents Youcef and Fariza,

To my brothers Amine and Kheir-Eddine and my sisters Nouria and Amina,

To my dear and best friend Mira,

And to all my friends and all the people who were by my side through my
academic year.

Ikram

To my father, Mohammed Amokrane,

To my mother, Ouahes Sadia,

In the memory of my beloved brother, Salim.

Yanna

ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempt to study The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley (1965). Our major interest is to examine the life experiences of Malcolm X that led to his beliefs, practices, and their impact on him as a transformational leader. From his early childhood, his imprisonment, his joining to the Nation Of Islam, and his pilgrimage to Mecca. We draw our theoretical bearings from Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia (1936) and Louis Althusser's Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1970). Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive examination of the autobiography, and the constant change of Malcolm X's vision, faith and world views, thus exposing its complexity in addressing identity, race, and power. In this study, we also relate the findings to the modern era; the results revealed that Malcolm X's evolving thinking and worldview highlight the fluid nature of identity formation, especially in the context of systemic racism and Islamophobia. This study contribute to the ongoing dialogue about racial equality and religious tolerance by linking Malcolm X's experiences and outlook on the broader struggles faced by marginalized communities today. Additionally, the study highlights that Malcolm X's global perspective on racial and religious justice offers a valuable framework for addressing these forms of discrimination and religious persecution that still persist in the present day.

Keywords: *Malcolm X, autobiography, power, racial injustice, Islam, African American history, utopia, deconstruction, empire, Self.*

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements | I |
| Dedications..... | II |
| Abstract..... | III |
| Table of Contents..... | V |
| I. Introduction..... | 1 |
| The Review of Literature..... | 2 |
| II. Methods and Materials..... | 7 |
| 1. Methods | 7 |
| A. Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)..... | 7 |
| B. Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)..... | 8 |
| C. Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge | 9 |
| 2. Materials..... | 12 |
| A. Malcolm X's Biography..... | 12 |
| B. Synopsis of <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (1965)..... | 13 |
| III. Results..... | 14 |
| IV. Discussion..... | 17 |
| Chapter One: Deconstructing of Empire..... | 17 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. Critique of Institutional Racism..... | 17 |
| A. Segregation in Education..... | 18 |
| B. Denial of the Judicial System..... | 19 |
| 2. Critique of Cultural Imperialism..... | 20 |
| A. Malcolm X’s reaction to the media’s Cultural Imperialism..... | 21 |
| B. The Role of Media in Shaping Malcolm X's Perception..... | 22 |
| C. Reacting Against the Media’s in Marginalizing Black Voices..... | 24 |
| 3. Critique of Economic Imperialism..... | 26 |
| A. Critique of Capitalism..... | 28 |
| B. Quest for Economic Self-Sufficiency..... | 29 |
| C. Investment in Education..... | 31 |
| Chapter Two: The Quest for the Self..... | 34 |
| 1. The Personal Transformation of Malcolm X : Unmasking Ideologies and Reclaiming Identity..... | 36 |
| A. Childhood and Youth: The Formation of Consciousness | 36 |
| B. Criminal Life and Incarceration: The Breaking of Chains..... | 37 |
| C. The Nation of Islam: Reconstructing Identity..... | 39 |
| D. The Path to Enlightenment: Malcolm X’s Final Transformation | 40 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 2. Rejection of Stereotypes and Imposed Identities..... | 44 |
| A. Critique of Identity Imposed by Whites..... | 44 |
| 3. Cultural and Spiritual Reaffirmation..... | 47 |
| A. The Role of Religion: How Islam Changed Malcolm X..... | 48 |
| A.1 The Rise of Islam: Muslims’ Immigration..... | 48 |
| A.2 The Prominence of Islam in the United States..... | 48 |
| A.3 Malcolm X is Introduced to Islam..... | 49 |
| B. Pilgrimage to Mecca: A New Perspective..... | 52 |
| C. Racial Pride and Cultural Heritage..... | 58 |
| V. Conclusion..... | 62 |
| Bibliography..... | 64 |

I. Introduction

The expansion of White Anglo-Saxon Europeans, beginning in the 16th century, was driven by a combination of economic ambitions, religious motivations, and beliefs in cultural superiority, resulting in the exploitation of indigenous populations, the establishment of racial hierarchies, and the imposition of European institutions (Crosby, 1986). In the United States, ideologies such as Manifest Destiny justified territorial expansion and the practice of slavery, mirroring broader imperialistic attitudes (Horsman, 1981). Although the Declaration of Independence (1776) proclaimed ideals of equality, freedom of speech, and religious liberty, the reality of racial injustice persisted, exemplified by the enslavement of African Americans, segregation, and systemic racism (Foner, 1988). Despite the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, white supremacist resistance, particularly in the South, ensured the perpetuation of racial inequality (Alexander, 2012). The Jim Crow era further institutionalized segregation and kept African Americans politically and economically marginalized (Woodward, 1974). During the Civil Rights Movement, figures like Malcolm X emerged as critical voices challenging systemic oppression, as evidenced in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (X & Haley, 1992). Despite significant progress, the enduring legacy of white supremacy and systemic racism, along with religious oppression, continues to shape social and economic inequalities in contemporary society, even as efforts toward racial justice persist (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

This thesis, titled *Deconstructing an Empire and the Quest for the Self through the Autobiography of Malcolm X*, explores how Malcolm X's life story reflects the influence of oppressive systems of power on individual and collective identities. By examining his autobiography, our study seeks to understand how Malcolm X resists these systems and embarks on a journey of self-discovery and self-definition. As students of literature and

civilization, this research incorporates multiple theoretical perspectives, including postcolonial theory, deconstruction, and utopia. These frameworks provide deeper insight into the significance of Malcolm X's experiences and the wider implications for others facing similar struggles. The significance of this research extends beyond understanding Malcolm X's personal journey to shedding light on the broader dynamics of racial identity formation, systemic oppression, and resistance in the context of African American history. It highlights the intersections between individual transformation and collective movements, offering insights into the ways in which marginalized communities challenge dominant narratives and reclaim their identities in the face of societal constraints. This study also contributes to ongoing discussions on the impact of cultural, social, and political structures on identity and resistance. It also addresses the enduring challenges of race, identity, and resistance in contemporary society. By analyzing Malcolm X's narrative, we gain a better understanding of the ongoing fight for justice and equality. This dissertation starts with a review of relevant literature and theories, then proceeds into a detailed analysis of Malcolm X's autobiography, and finally discusses the findings and their implications. Through this exploration, we aim to honor and shed light on Malcolm X's legacy and draw lessons that are still relevant today in the fight for human dignity and equality.

Literature Review

The literature on Malcolm X's activism, life, and legacy presents a rich tapestry of academic works that examine various aspects of his relevance within the larger context of racial inequality and liberation efforts. However, these works have often focused on constructing an idealized narrative, sometimes neglecting the more controversial aspects of Malcolm X's life, particularly his early criminal activities and the complexities of his relationship with Islam. This brings up the question of whether these extent are shaped to fit a

more comfortable American view, focusing on positive change while minimizing the more radical part

We start with Manning Marable's biography; *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (2011) offers a critical examination of Malcolm X's life, arguing that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides an idealized and somewhat sanitized narrative, heavily influenced by Alex Haley's narrative choices. Marable contends that the autobiography focuses on Malcolm's transformation and redemption, potentially making him more acceptable to a mainstream audience by downplaying the more controversial aspects of his life. For instance, Marable suggests that "Haley's account simplifies Malcolm's criminal career, portraying him as a small-time hustler who was swiftly transformed in prison. In reality, Malcolm's criminal enterprises were more extensive and included activities that were omitted or glossed over in the autobiography" (Marable, 2011, p. 67). This critique ignores the triumphant transformation of the person into a sort of popular icon and raises the question of whether the text serves to present a version of Malcolm X that is palatable within a certain American ideological framework, one that might prefer to focus on redemption rather than a nuanced exploration of systemic oppression. Additionally, Marable's critique misses the profound way in which Islam not only reshaped Malcolm X's earlier views but also expanded his worldview to include a more global perspective on justice, equality, and solidarity that transcended race and Nationalism.

Bruce Perry's *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America* (1991) also provides a critical perspective, focusing on the psychological and emotional development of Malcolm X. Perry argues that the autobiography selectively represents Malcolm's life, highlighting the positive transformation while glossing over his emotional vulnerabilities and personal conflicts. He critiques this selective representation, suggesting that it contributes to a

mythic, heroic image that might overlook the deeper psychological and socio-economic dimensions of Malcolm's journey. Perry notes, "Malcolm's childhood was marked by profound trauma and instability. The loss of his father and the institutionalization of his mother left deep psychological scars that the autobiography only briefly mentions" (Perry, 1991, p. 78). However, like Marable, Perry's analysis does not delve deeply into the role of Islam in Malcolm X's life, particularly how it shaped his ideological transformation and discourse. Discusses how the autobiography has become central to the discourse on Black resistance and the formation of cultural identity. Neal posits that the autobiography serves as a blueprint for understanding racial injustice and empowerment, transcending its immediate historical context. He discusses the influence of Malcolm X on cultural movements, noting how artists like Public Enemy and Tupac Shakur drew inspiration from his rhetoric and activism.

Mark Anthony Neal, an American author and a Professor of Black Popular Culture states, "The autobiography transcended its immediate historical context to become a blueprint for understanding racial injustice and empowerment" (Neal, 2014, p. 15). Neal's analysis similarly falls short in exploring the significance of Malcolm X's embrace of Islam and how it reshaped his discourse on race and identity, offering a vision for unity that extended beyond American racial divides. However, Neal's analysis falls short in capturing the profound way in which Islam reshaped Malcolm X's earlier views on race and identity. Before his conversion to Sunni Islam, Malcolm X's vision was largely centered on racial separatism. Islam, however, offered him a new framework that transcended these racial boundaries. His pilgrimage to Mecca played a pivotal role in this transformation, as he witnessed a unity among people of various ethnic backgrounds and skin colors, all bound together by their shared faith. Neal overlooks how Malcolm X's embrace of Islam fundamentally shifted his point of view from a race-based lens to a more expansive, spiritual understanding of human

equality. This newfound belief allowed Malcolm to reject the limitations of racial identity imposed by American society and instead adopt a vision rooted in universal brotherhood. Islam provided Malcolm with a deeper critique of not just white supremacy but also of the entire construct of race, positioning his message within a broader global context. By failing to explore this aspect, Neal misses the profound evolution in Malcolm X's thought, where Islam became the key to uniting his fight for Black liberation with a global struggle for justice (Neal, 2014).

Eugene Victor Wolfenstein's *The Victims of Democracy: Malcolm X and the Black Revolution (1981)* provides a Marxist and psychoanalytic critique of the autobiography, arguing that it presents a simplified narrative. Eugene Victor Wolfenstein focuses on how systemic oppression and economic exploitation influenced Malcolm X's struggle, suggesting that the autobiography does not fully capture the depth of Malcolm X's internal struggles and the psychological impact of racism. He asserts that "The psychological scars left by systemic racism are profound and lasting. Malcolm X's autobiography, while addressing some of his internal conflicts often portrays his transformation in heroic terms, overlooking the ongoing psychological battles he faced" (Wolfenstein, 1981, p. 67). While Wolfenstein's work provides insight into the structural and psychological aspects of Malcolm X's journey, it similarly overlooks the role of Islam in shaping his discourse and ideological stance. Wolfenstein overlooks how Islam fundamentally altered Malcolm X's approach to identity and race. It shifted his focus from a purely racial struggle to a broader vision of human equality, transcending racial boundaries. This omission is significant because Islam did not only influence Malcolm personally but it also reshaped his entire outlook in promoting unity and solidarity among all oppressed people, regardless of race. By not exploring this, Wolfenstein misses a key factor in Malcolm X's ideological transformation. (Wolfenstein, 1981)

By examining these critiques, a common thread emerges: the literature often constructs a narrative that focuses on the "positive" or "heroic" aspects of Malcolm X's story. This construction may reflect an inclination to present Malcolm X in a manner that aligns with a more palatable, mainstream outlook, potentially influenced by a desire to integrate his narrative into a broader American ethos. This inclination could inadvertently align with white supremacist ideologies by emphasizing redemption and positive transformation over the more radical elements of Malcolm X's message and life, including his critique of systemic oppression and his embrace of Islam. Furthermore, these works often do not adequately engage with the role of Islam in Malcolm X's transformation and discourse. Islam was not merely a personal religious experience for Malcolm X but a profound ideological shift that offered solutions beyond race relations, providing a framework for understanding and resisting systemic oppression. Malcolm's pilgrimage to Mecca and subsequent embrace of Sunni Islam marked a significant transformation in his understanding of race, unity, and social justice, leading him to advocate for a more inclusive, global perspective on human rights.

Our dissertation seeks to fill this gap by examining *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* through the lens of discourse analysis, with a focus on Malcolm X's ideological transformation. We will explore how Malcolm X's embrace of Islam reshaped his outlook, offering an alternative framework for understanding and challenging systemic oppression. This approach allows us to question the ways in which the autobiography may have been shaped to fit within a certain ideological framework while uncovering the deeper layers of Malcolm X's message and the broader implications for identity, and resistance. This study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*, positioning it within the larger struggle for social justice and emancipation. We will explore how Malcolm X deconstructs the economic and racial exploitation, articulating a vision for

the "Human self" that extends beyond the confines of racial identity and toward a broader, more inclusive understanding of human rights and dignity. This analysis seeks to illuminate the enduring significance of Malcolm X's work in the contemporary fight against systemic oppression, highlighting the transformative potential of his spiritual journey and the power of discourse in shaping narratives of resistance and liberation.

II. Method and Materials

1. Method

This dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining discourse analysis and sociological theory, to examine how Black identity is constructed and deconstructed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Through discourse analysis, it explores the language and narratives Malcolm X uses to resist racial stereotypes and imposed identities, while sociological theory, particularly Karl Mannheim's concepts of ideology and the sociology of knowledge, provides a framework to analyze how systemic oppression shapes identity formation and how Malcolm X reclaims his identity within this context. By leveraging concepts such as the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) as outlined by Althusser (1971), this study investigates how Malcolm X's narrative confronts and subverts these structures of racial, cultural, and ideological dominance, particularly those that seek to marginalize and erase Black identity. The dissertation also incorporates Mannheim's (1936) theories of Ideology and Utopia to delve into the ways Malcolm X articulates a vision of societal transformation that offers an alternative worldview. Through this lens, the narrative is not just an account of personal transformation but a critique of the systemic structures that perpetuate racial hierarchies and oppression.

A. Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)

Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) refers to the institutions that function primarily through ideology rather than through overt force. These institutions—such as schools, churches, media, and the family—perpetuate the dominant ideology of a society, ensuring that individuals internalize and accept the values that uphold the status quo. In this framework, these institutions play a subtle but powerful role in shaping people's beliefs and behaviors, reinforcing social hierarchies without the need for direct coercion.

In this dissertation the concept of ISA is applied to explore how Malcolm X's early life, particularly his experiences with the educational system, was shaped by these institutions. Through schooling and societal conditioning, Malcolm X, like many African Americans, was made to internalize notions of racial inferiority and limited expectations for success. These ideological forces sought to instill in him a sense of subservience, undermining his potential for self-actualization and fostering a view of Black identity as inferior to white identity.

B. Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)

The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) refers to institutions that function primarily through repression and coercion. These institutions—such as the police, military, and the judicial system—maintain social order by employing direct force to suppress dissent and ensure compliance with the dominant ideology. The RSA operates through violence, punishment, and fear to keep marginalized groups under control and prevent them from challenging the established order.

Malcolm X's life, as well as the broader African American experience, was deeply impacted by these repressive forces. The judicial system, police brutality, and systemic racial violence worked to directly oppress Black communities, keeping them in a state of fear and

subordination. Malcolm X's personal transformation, as analyzed in this dissertation, can be seen as a conscious rejection of both the ideological control exerted by the ISA and the direct repression enforced by the RSA. His defiance against these forces not only involved a deconstruction of the narratives imposed on him but also a courageous confrontation with the repressive mechanisms that sought to marginalize Black individuals.

C. Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge

Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936) provides a foundational framework for understanding the ways in which knowledge and belief systems are shaped by social structures. Mannheim argues that ideologies, those belief systems that reinforce the status quo, function to preserve existing power structures by maintaining the dominant group's control over intellectual and cultural life. Conversely, utopias represent alternative visions that challenge the status quo and propose radical changes aimed at transforming society. Through this lens, one can see how ideologies work to uphold established social orders, while utopias thought seeks to disrupt and replace them. Central to Mannheim's theory is the sociology of knowledge, a conception coined by Max Scheler, and Karl Mannheim's book studied the relationship between human thoughts and the relationship of those thoughts with the social context (Mannheim, 1936).

Sociology of Knowledge posits that all knowledge is socially constructed and that our worldviews are shaped by our social position within a given historical context . Mannheim argues that "At the same time, I will be shown how far the social position of the observer affects his outlook." (Mannheim, 1936, p. 244). The concept of Sociology of Knowledge challenges the idea of an objective, universal truth, suggesting instead that different social groups produce different bodies of knowledge depending on their material conditions and interests. For Mannheim, understanding the role of social context is crucial for analyzing how

individuals and groups think and why certain ideologies prevail in society. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge can be used to analyze the ways in which marginalized groups develop counter-ideologies in response to their oppression. These counter-ideologies, often aligned with utopian visions, offer alternative frameworks for understanding the world and imagining possibilities for social change. In contrast, dominant groups tend to produce and perpetuate ideologies that legitimize their continued power and privilege. The tension between these forces—the ideologies of the dominant and the utopian visions of the marginalized drive social conflict and transformation.

This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for examining historical figures and movements that have sought to challenge dominant ideologies. For instance, the life of Malcolm X can be briefly understood through Mannheim's framework, as his evolving views on race, power, and society illustrate the tension between dominant and counter-ideologies. Initially influenced by the dominant narratives of racial superiority and inferiority, Malcolm's later embrace of utopian visions for Black liberation and empowerment reflected a radical departure from the status quo, embodying the transformative power of alternative knowledge systems. Ultimately, Mannheim's theory underscores the importance of recognizing that all knowledge is influenced by social context. It challenges us to question the dominant ideologies that shape our understanding of the world and to remain open to utopian visions that seek to imagine a different, more just society.

Material Selection and Analysis

The primary material for this study is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), which serves as the main text for analyzing Malcolm X's ideological transformation and his critique of systemic oppression. A detailed examination of the autobiography reveals key moments where Malcolm X confronts the forces of "institutional racism", "cultural imperialism", and

imposed identities. Through close textual analysis, this study identifies how Malcolm X's personal experiences — from his childhood to his involvement with the Nation of Islam and later pilgrimage to Mecca — reflect broader societal issues related to race, identity, and resistance. By dissecting pivotal moments in his life story, the dissertation traces Malcolm X's journey towards rejecting imposed ideologies and advocating for Black pride and autonomy, demonstrating how his personal evolution mirrors the collective struggle for liberation among African Americans.

The secondary sources used in this thesis include key scholarly works that provide the theoretical foundation for analyzing Malcolm X's life and thought. Louis Althusser's seminal work *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1971)* offers a critical perspective on how societal institutions like schools and churches function to maintain ideological control over individuals, reinforcing racial hierarchies. This concept is crucial for understanding Malcolm X's early life experiences and his eventual rejection of these imposed ideologies. Additionally, *Karl Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia (1936)* serves as a fundamental text in the sociology of knowledge, illustrating how knowledge and ideologies are socially constructed based on an individual's position within society. Mannheim's framework is applied to examine how Malcolm X's evolving consciousness was shaped by his shifting social positions throughout his life. These secondary sources are essential to contextualizing Malcolm X's ideological transformation and resistance against systemic oppression.

Goals of the Approach

This methodology aims to uncover the complex layers of Malcolm X's identity formation and resistance against systemic oppression. It seeks to demonstrate how *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* not only critiques existing power structures but also engages in the deconstruction of empire, exposing the mechanisms of racial and cultural

domination. By dismantling these structures, the text proposes ways of reconstructing them to foster a powerful and autonomous Black identity. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the ongoing struggle for identity and liberation in the context of systemic oppression.

2. Materials

A. Malcolm X's Biography

Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, was the fourth of eight children to Louise and Earl Little. His father, a Baptist minister and follower of Marcus Garvey, faced threats from white supremacists, forcing the family to move multiple times. After his father's suspicious death, widely believed to be a murder by white supremacists, Malcolm's family fell apart. His mother was institutionalized, and he and his siblings were placed in foster care.

As a young man, Malcolm moved to Boston and became involved in criminal activities, influenced by the racial and economic constraints on Black men at the time. In 1946, he was sentenced to ten years in prison for burglary. During his incarceration, Malcolm began his transformation, educating himself through reading and embracing the teachings of the Nation of Islam (NOI), which promoted Black self-reliance and empowerment. Inspired by NOI leader Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm rejected his "slave name" and adopted "X" to symbolize the lost African heritage taken by slavery.

After his release in 1952, he became a prominent spokesperson for the NOI, advocating Black empowerment and self-defense against racial oppression. His militant rhetoric drew attention, making him a central figure in the struggle for racial justice. He

became known for his militant stance on racial justice. Unlike the previous Civil Rights activists such as Martin Luther King for instance who emphasized on nonviolence, Malcolm called for Black people to defend themselves "by any means necessary" against racial oppression.

In 1964, during his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm experienced a major ideological shift, embracing Sunni Islam and the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. This transformation expanded his views on race and unity across racial lines. He founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) to promote African American empowerment globally. Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, but his legacy endures through his autobiography, which serves as a critique of systemic racism and a testament to Black resilience.

B. Synopsis of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*

The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965) is a pivotal work that traces the life of one of the most significant figures in the African American civil rights struggle. The narrative is structured around different phases of Malcolm X's life, each illustrating key moments in his ideological evolution. The autobiography begins by exploring Malcolm's early years in *Nightmare* (Chapter 1) and *Mascot* (Chapter 2), focusing on how systemic racism shaped his upbringing. These experiences of racial oppression laid the groundwork for Malcolm's awareness of systemic injustice. In *Mascot* (Chapter 2), his struggles with identity in a predominantly white school highlight his internal conflict with the oppressive society surrounding him. The chapters *Homeboy* (Chapter 3), *Detroit Red* (Chapter 4), and *Caught* (Chapter 5) detail Malcolm's descent into a life of crime and his eventual imprisonment. After moving to Boston and later New York, Malcolm became involved in various street hustles,

which led to his arrest for burglary in 1946. His time in prison marked a significant turning point as it became a period of intellectual awakening and self-education.

Malcolm's spiritual transformation is the focus of *Saved* (Chapter 6) and *Minister Malcolm X* (Chapter 7). During his imprisonment, he converted to the Nation of Islam (NOI), inspired by the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, which emphasized Black self-reliance, racial separatism, and rejecting white society. After his release, he rose rapidly within the NOI, becoming one of its most influential spokespeople. A crucial moment in Malcolm's life comes in *Mecca* (Chapter 17), where he describes his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964. This journey marked a profound ideological shift as Malcolm embraced Sunni Islam and witnessed Muslims of all races worshipping together. This experience led him to move away from the NOI's strict racial separatism and adopt a more inclusive view of humanity, recognizing the potential for racial unity. Finally, in *1965* (Chapter 19), Malcolm's evolving vision is fully realized. After leaving the NOI, he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), linking the fight for Black empowerment with global anti-colonial struggles. His focus expanded from the plight of African Americans to advocating for human rights and justice on a global scale. Despite his assassination in 1965, Malcolm X's legacy continues to inspire movements for racial and social justice, with his autobiography standing as a testament to his journey of transformation.

Results and Discussion

III. Results

Our study focused on deconstructing an empire and the quest for the self through *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*. Through a detailed analysis, we concluded that Malcolm X's life journey is marked by contrasting stages of awareness. From his early childhood and

youth, where he internalized the societal norms and racial hierarchies, to his involvement in criminal activities as an expression of internalized oppression, his awareness was shaped by a series of transformative and pivotal events. His time in incarceration represents a turning point, leading to a heightened awareness and challenging his former identity. This phase contrasts sharply with his earlier years and illustrates the evolution of his consciousness. His involvement with the Nation of Islam (an Islamic organization founded in the early 1930s, which he had joined. The NOI advocated for “the natural religion for the Black man” and aimed at improving the conditions of African Americans rather than focusing solely on spirituality), signifies another stage of development, where he embraced a structured vision that offered an alternative to the dominant white-imposed identity. Yet, this too was a stage with its limits, as Malcolm eventually sought a more expansive understanding of identity beyond the Nation's teachings. This is most profoundly evidenced in his pilgrimage to Mecca, where he experienced a spiritual and ideological transformation that further broadened his perception of race and unity.

In the first chapter, titled “Deconstructing of Empire” we critically examine how systemic oppression and racial hierarchies were established and maintained within imperial systems. This analysis exposes the mechanisms of control that sought to suppress and marginalize the identities of the colonized and subjugated, providing a contextual foundation for understanding Malcolm X's personal struggle and resistance against these oppressive structures.

The second chapter, titled “The Quest for the Self,” delves into Malcolm X's journey of self-discovery and resistance against imposed identities. This exploration was structured around three key dimensions: personal transformation, rejection of stereotypes, and cultural and spiritual reaffirmation. By analyzing Malcolm X's rejection of the negative stereotypes

imposed on Black people, the study reveals how he encouraged self-definition and the reaffirmation of Black cultural and spiritual values.

Through this comprehensive examination, the study highlights Malcolm X's critique of white-imposed identities and his ultimate affirmation of Black identity. His life story becomes a testimony to the possibility of reconstructing one's identity in the face of systemic oppression, emphasizing the significance of cultural and spiritual liberation in the broader quest for Black selfhood. By examining the contrasting stages in Malcolm X's awareness, from internalization to rejection, and ultimately to transcendence, the study illustrates the dynamic process of self-realization and empowerment.

IV. Discussion

Chapter one: Deconstructing of Empire

This chapter aims to dissect the intricate mechanisms through which systemic oppression has been established and maintained in society, focusing on the pillars of institutional racism, cultural imperialism, and economic imperialism, this analysis draws on the work of key theorists. The concept of institutional racism was coined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, while cultural imperialism was articulated by Herbert Schiller. Additionally, the critique of economic imperialism is rooted in the works of thinkers such as Karl Marx and various postcolonial theorists. By unraveling these layers, we explore how these structures have worked to entrench racial hierarchies and suppress the identities of marginalized communities, particularly African Americans. The chapter critically examines the ways in which these forms of domination have not only perpetuated inequality but have also shaped the social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Through this deconstruction, we set the stage for understanding the broader context within which Malcolm X's quest for identity and resistance unfolds.

1- Critique of Institutional Racism

Judicial and institutional racism has long been a prevalent concern in the legal and socioeconomic institutions of many nations, particularly in the United States. This sort of racism refers to the systemic and structural biases that target and disadvantage racial minorities inside legal, educational, and governmental institutions (Alexander, 2012). These institutions have reinforced them through discriminatory laws, practices, against Black Americans (Bell, 1992). Academics such as Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* (2012)

and Malcolm X in his autobiography (Haley & X, 1965) have emphasized the role of the criminal justice system in sustaining racial injustice. Malcolm X writes,

The truth is, I hadn't. I never have figured out why I told him, "Well, yes, sir, I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer. . . Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised... He said, "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic.... But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer-that's no realistic goal for a nigger...You're good with your hands-making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person-you'd get all kinds of work (Haley & X, 1965, p.63).

This excerpt illustrates the deeply integrated racial prejudices. Mr. Ostrowski, acknowledged Malcolm's academic potential but did not foresee a professional career for him beyond manual labor. The teacher's advice is an indicative of the broader societal limitations placed on Black Americans, even for talented and intelligent ones. His assertion that Malcolm should "be realistic about being a nigger" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 63) underscores the expectation that Black people remain in subservient roles, reflecting the racial discrimination prevalent in mid-20th century, America ultimately discouraging Black youth from aspiring to careers traditionally held by white professionals.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), Malcolm X delivers a comprehensive analysis of judicial and institutional racism, his critique is grounded in his personal encounters with the justice system and his broader analysis of the systemic inequalities ingrained in American society. His speeches and writings powerfully highlighted how the judicial and educational systems in the United States were systematically biased against Black Americans. He argued that these institutions were not merely neutral or objective but were instead tools of oppression, functioning to maintain and reinforce racial inequalities (X & Haley, 1965).

A. Segregation in Education

Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) provides a framework for understanding how institutions, such as the educational system, reinforce dominant

ideologies, including white supremacy. According to Althusser, ISAs function through institutions like schools, churches, and media to perpetuate the ideology of the ruling class, ensuring the reproduction of social relations that maintain the status quo (Althusser, 1971). In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), the educational system serves as an ISA, perpetuating racial segregation and Black oppression. Schools teach values that uphold racial hierarchy, as seen during the Jim Crow era, where Black students were conditioned to accept subordinate roles. Malcolm X's interaction with his teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, exemplifies this, with Ostrowski's advice that Malcolm pursues carpentry aligning with societal norms that confined Black people to manual labor. This exchange reveals how schools function as ideological tools, reinforcing racial and class hierarchies. Althusser (1971) argues that institutions like schools sustain the status quo by promoting norms that serve the ruling class, in this case, supporting systemic racism. The teacher's discouragement of Malcolm's aspirations symbolizes the ISA's role in maintaining racial inequality. Jim Crow laws further institutionalized this racism by legally segregating public schools and other aspects of life, severely limiting Black Americans' opportunities. Segregated schools for African Americans were underfunded and overcrowded, reflecting the broader systemic racism that denied Black students access to equal education. These conditions reinforced the belief that Black students were inherently inferior. Malcolm X's refusal to accept this system marked the beginning of his intellectual radicalization. This challenging of the white supremacist structures embedded in American institutions aims at deconstructing existing imperialism.

B. Denial of the Segregation in Judicial System

Judicial racism undermines justice by fostering biased decision-making and discrimination within courts, disproportionately affecting racial and ethnic minorities. Althusser's theory of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) explains how institutions like the

judiciary, police, and military use coercion to maintain social order, benefiting the ruling class. According to Althusser, RSAs operate primarily through physical force or the threat of it, functioning to uphold the interests of those in power (Althusser, 1971). These thoughts are echoed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), which details Malcolm X's experiences with institutional racism. Malcolm's father, Earl Little, a follower of Marcus Garvey's Black self-reliance movement, was killed under suspicious circumstances, but his death was ruled a suicide, illustrating the judiciary's role in protecting white supremacy. After his father's death, Malcolm's family faced state welfare intervention, exacerbating their hardship and leading to the institutionalization of his mother. Malcolm's resentment toward the judicial system is clear: he viewed welfare agents as dehumanizing, reducing his family to mere numbers.

Malcolm X's later imprisonment further reveals the judicial system's racial bias. He received an unusually harsh sentence for burglary, reflecting systemic racism that imposes heavier penalties on Black individuals. His transformation in prison, catalyzed by his encounters with intellectual figures like "Bimbi," highlights the limited rehabilitative potential of incarceration. Malcolm's criticism of the judicial and penal systems emphasizes the psychological scars and dehumanization inherent in imprisonment.

Malcolm X's experiences with institutional racism, both in education and the judicial system, highlight the deep-rooted systemic oppression faced by Black Americans. His personal journey reveals how these institutions functioned as tools to reinforce racial hierarchies and limit the potential of individuals based on their race. Through his critique and resistance, Malcolm X exposed the pervasive nature of these systems, emphasizing the need for a radical re-evaluation of the structures that perpetuate inequality and discrimination.

2. Critique of the Cultural Imperialism

“Cultural Imperialism” refers to the domination of one culture over another, where the values, beliefs, and practices of the more powerful society are imposed upon a less dominant one (Schiller, 1976). In African American history, this process had been particularly evident from the era of slavery to the present, with Black Americans experiencing the devaluation of their heritage, languages, and traditions. Institutions such as media played a significant role in enforcing white cultural norms as the standard of success and morality. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X critiques the “cultural imperialism” imposed on Black Americans by institutions such as the media and education system, which reinforced white cultural norms and devalued Black identity. Drawing on Schiller's concept of “cultural imperialism”, this analysis will explore how Malcolm X exposed the internalization of racial inferiority through media-driven stereotypes and white superiority. Furthermore, this essay will examine how Malcolm X's counter-narrative redefined Black identity, challenging these dominant ideologies and inspiring resistance against cultural domination.

A. Malcolm X's reaction to the media's Cultural Imperialism

In his autobiography, Malcolm X critiques the media for its negative portrayal of Black Americans. During Malcolm's time, the media often reinforced stereotypes, depicting Black people as criminals, servile, or intellectually inferior. Malcolm X recognized the media's immense power to shape public opinion, viewing it as a tool of cultural Imperialism that perpetuated the oppression of Black Americans. He writes, “All you know is what the press has had today, and the press is white. And when I say the press is white, I mean it is white. And it's dangerous” (Malcolm X, 1965, p. 41). This excerpt from *Malcolm X Speaks* (1965) highlights the media's role in reinforcing cultural Imperialism by controlling the narrative and shaping public perceptions. When Malcolm X says, "The press is white" he means that the

dominant media outlets, run by white people, reflect a biased worldview. This worldview perpetuates stereotypes and misrepresentations of Black people and their struggles. By asserting that the press is "dangerous," Malcolm X is underlining the media's power to manipulate societal beliefs and reinforce white supremacy. The press acts as a tool of "cultural imperialism" by imposing a white-dominated perspective, influencing not only how white Americans view Black individuals but also how Black people see themselves. In the broader context of cultural Imperialism, media outlets controlled by the dominant group white Americans serve to maintain existing power structures by promoting ideologies that sustain racial hierarchies. This leads to a limited or distorted portrayal of Black life, ensuring that the narrative of Black Americans is told through a lens that preserves the supremacy of white culture. Malcolm X's critique of the media finds support in the work of scholars like Stuart Hall, who argued that media representation is a key site of cultural struggle. Malcolm X recognized this ideological battle and sought to use the media as a tool to fight against the harmful narratives that reinforced white supremacy and negative stereotypes of Black people. He understood that to change perceptions, it was necessary to confront the media's role in perpetuating these racist ideologies and to create alternative narratives that celebrated Black identity. Malcolm X's personal experiences further illustrate how the media influenced perceptions of race among both white and Black Americans.

By framing the media as a central tool in oppression, Malcolm X's critique remains deeply relevant. The media continues to serve as a powerful influence in shaping how society perceives race and power. Malcolm X's call for Black pride and self-determination resonates today as Black voices continue to reclaim and redefine identity in the face of enduring media-driven cultural Imperialism.

B. The Role of Media in Shaping Malcolm X's Perception

The media holds immense power in shaping public perception, and this influence had a direct impact on Malcolm X's personal life. As a young man, Malcolm internalized the negative stereotypes about Black people that were constantly reinforced by the media. Black men were frequently portrayed as criminals, and these images influenced Malcolm's early behavior. He became involved in criminal activities, in part because he believed he was conforming to the roles society expected of him. Malcolm himself acknowledged this influence when he said, "I was trying to be as bad as the worst, and all the time, I was preening my feathers for the white man's approval" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 119). This statement is a powerful example of how cultural imperialism operates. By continuously promoting negative stereotypes of Black men as criminals, the media created an environment where young Black men, like Malcolm, felt trapped in these roles.

Malcolm X's early life serves as a case study of how the media can be an instrument of oppression, subtly influencing individuals' self-perception and choices. The portrayal of Black people as criminals or inferiors was not just a reflection of societal biases, but a deliberate attempt to maintain a racial hierarchy, controlling the minds and behavior of Black individuals by normalizing these negative images. As Malcolm matured and became more conscious of these systemic forces, he started to recognize the deeper implications of media distortions. Malcolm X began to see the media as a central tool of cultural imperialism, actively controlling narratives to keep Black Americans in a subordinate position.

By controlling what is seen and heard, the media can manipulate how individuals view themselves and others, creating false narratives that benefit the dominant culture. As Malcolm X grew older, he rejected the media's influence and fought back against these harmful representations. He became a vocal critic of how the media shaped public perceptions, particularly in regard to race and power dynamics. His journey from internalizing these

negative stereotypes to recognizing and resisting them illustrates the process of decolonizing the mind. Malcolm's growing awareness allowed him to break free from the narratives imposed by cultural Imperialism and embrace his identity as a leader in the fight for Black liberation.

In essence, Malcolm X's life demonstrates how the media's portrayal of race is not just a reflection of existing social structures but an active force in maintaining those structures. By controlling how Black people are seen and understood, the media shapes the boundaries of what is considered possible or acceptable for Black individuals. The stereotypes and distortions presented in the media work to justify existing power relations, keeping marginalized groups in subordinate roles. Malcolm X's personal experience of grappling with these media portrayals and ultimately overcoming them is a testament to the importance of critical media awareness in resisting cultural Imperialism and reclaiming agency.

C. Reacting Against the Media's in Marginalizing Black Voices

One of the most insidious aspects of cultural imperialism is its ability to silence or marginalize the voices of the oppressed. The media, as a dominant cultural force, has historically played a key role in this process by either ignoring or misrepresenting Black opinions. As bell hooks argues in *Reel to Real*, the media often operates as a tool of cultural imperialism, distorting Black narratives to serve white-dominated power structures (hooks, 1996). This distortion of reality serves to reinforce the dominance of the oppressors, while simultaneously erasing or misrepresenting the efforts and struggles of marginalized communities.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*, Malcolm describes how the media often portrayed the Nation of Islam and its leaders in a negative light, focusing on the more

controversial aspects of their message while ignoring their efforts to uplift the Black community. Malcolm X's own experiences with the media further illustrate this point. As he became more prominent as a leader of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm found himself increasingly at odds with the mainstream media, which sought to portray him as a dangerous radical. By focusing on Malcolm's more incendiary rhetoric and ignoring the substance of his critique of white supremacy, the media sought to delegitimize his message and marginalize the voices of those who challenged the status quo.

This media-driven marginalization of Black voices is an example of cultural imperialism in action. By controlling the narrative and limiting the platforms available to Black leaders like Malcolm X, the media ensured that the dominant cultural norms remained unchallenged. This, in turn, helped to maintain the racial hierarchies that underpinned American society. As Malcolm observed, "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 268).

This excerpt from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* highlights the power of media in shaping public perception and controlling societal narratives. It reflects a keen awareness of how language and discourse can be manipulated to serve the interests of those in power. In this quote, Malcolm X critiques the media's role in upholding racial hierarchies by portraying Black resistance as a threat while legitimizing white dominance. The language used by the media, as Malcolm suggests, constructs a binary opposition between the oppressed and the oppressors, positioning the latter as morally superior or justified in their actions.

This manipulation of discourse serves to dehumanize and criminalize the oppressed, reinforcing racial stereotypes and maintaining the status quo. The media's framing of

marginalized communities often operates to depict them in a negative light, distorting their narratives to fit dominant ideologies. In doing so, it not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but also ensures that the systems of power remain unchallenged. As bell hooks argues in *Reel to Real*, the media functions as a tool of cultural imperialism, shaping public perception in ways that uphold the interests of the dominant group (hooks, 1996). The statement "hating the people who are being oppressed" reveals how the media weaponizes language to invert reality, making the victims of systemic injustice appear as villains in the public eye. By controlling the language and framing used to describe social justice movements, the media becomes an essential tool of cultural imperialism, protecting entrenched systems of power.

To conclude, cultural imperialism, as depicted in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*, is a pervasive and insidious form of domination that seeks to reshape the identities of the oppressed by imposing the cultural norms of the dominant society. Through his critique of the media, Malcolm X provides a powerful commentary on the ways in which cultural imperialism operates and its impact on Black identity. His journey from a victim of this cultural domination to a vocal advocate for Black pride and self-determination serves as a compelling narrative of resistance against the forces that sought to erase Black identity. Malcolm X understood the media's key role in perpetuating cultural imperialism by shaping public perception and reinforcing racial hierarchies. His rejection of these imposed norms and embrace of an empowered Black identity exemplify the potential for decolonization and reclaiming one's identity. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* offers a critique of cultural imperialism and highlights how African Americans resisted this domination. His legacy continues to inspire those challenging cultural imperialism and affirming the dignity of all people.

3. Critique of Economic Imperialism

In addition to cultural imperialism, economic imperialism has also shaped power dynamics by exploiting resources and labor, enriching dominant powers at the expense of marginalized communities. This section discusses economic imperialism and racial capitalism, emphasizing Malcolm X's critique of capitalism, which enriched Whites and impoverished Blacks. Malcolm X highlighted the accumulation of White wealth through the exploitation of unpaid African American labor, particularly through slavery. This exploitation was vital to U.S. economic development and has contributed to persistent racial wealth inequality.

Systemic racism, entrenched in U.S. institutions, perpetuates this inequality by unfairly benefiting the Whites while impoverishing African Americans. One key aspect of systemic racism is wealth accumulation. White individuals have historically gained wealth through unpaid African American labor, benefiting from intergenerational wealth transmission. Although some Whites claim not to have owned slaves, they still benefit from this system, while African Americans remain disproportionately impoverished. Throughout the period of slavery (1619-1865), White individuals from various social, political and economic backgrounds gained significant wealth through slave ownership, production for the slave trade, and forced labor (Baptist, 2014; Beckert, 2015). Today, White individuals continue to benefit from the economic gains from the slavery era. The subjugation and mistreatment of African Americans were entrenched through racial violence and discrimination, which became embedded in the fundamental legal, economic, and social institutions of the United States (Alexander, 2012; Muhammad, 2010).

This legacy of economic exploitation and systemic racism continued even after the formal end of slavery, as Malcolm X observed that White-owned businesses dominated Black neighborhoods, profiting from Black consumers while depriving Black communities of

economic resources. These businesses often offered inferior goods at higher prices, exploiting segregation and limited options for Black consumers. This dynamic further entrenched economic disenfranchisement. In *Malcolm X Speaks*, he states: "The man who has the money to buy, and who has the influence to dictate, controls the whole economy, and this is exactly what the white man has done" (Malcolm X, 1990, p. 38). This quote underscores the economic control exerted by White individuals over Black communities, pointing out the systemic issues of exploitation.

A. Critiques of Capitalism

Throughout his autobiography, Malcolm X consistently criticizes the capitalist system for perpetuating inequality and exploitation. Malcolm X views on capitalism are rooted on his comprehension of racism, economic injustice, and the necessity for systemic change. Malcolm X's early experiences with poverty and destitution in his youth affected his point of view on capitalism, he regularly complains against the economic exploitation of Black communities by the White and he believes that capitalism and racism are inextricably linked.

In one his speeches, he states: "It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism. And if you find one capitalist . . . who has a philosophy that makes you sure they don't have racism in their outlook, usually they're socialists or their political philosophy is socialism" (Breitman, *Malcolm X Speaks*, 1965, p. 106). Malcolm X observes that White-owned enterprises controlled the economies of Black neighborhoods, controlling everything from grocery stores to clothing shops and businesses: these made enormous profits by selling services and products to Black people, but the wealth generated by Black consumers was drained out of their communities and into the White's hands. This economic dependency left Black communities destitute and reliant on enterprises that had no vested interest in their well-being. These businesses offered minimal

wages, excessively long work hours, and poor working conditions. Furthermore, these exploitative practices were supported by forms of legislation that enforced a labor-market cartel. These laws included enticement laws and contract-enforcement laws, which were designed to restrict competition in the labor market. Vagrancy laws aimed to prevent Black individuals from having periods of unemployment while seeking jobs that provided higher wages. Emigrant agent laws restricted the activities of labor recruiters. Additionally, the convict-lease system increased the effective punishment for Black individuals acquitted of violating other laws. Collectively, these laws added to the burden on Black communities in their quest for wealth and stability (Franklin & Moss, 2011).

In addition, Malcolm X also regularly pointed out that these White-owned enterprises charged greater prices for inferior goods and services, because of segregation and scarce choices, Black people were forced to patronize these companies despite the horrible treatment and exploitation. This strategy not only stripped Black communities of their financial resources but also created a cycle of economic disenfranchisement. Malcolm X delineated numerous remedies and concepts in his autobiography, with the objective of ameliorating the economic circumstances of the Black people in order to attain financial stability and freedom and in the longer term, and to be more self-reliant. (X & Haley, 1965).

B. Quest for Economic Self-Sufficiency

Malcolm X strongly promoted the idea of Black economic self-sufficiency, and advocated for the Black community to prioritize the establishment and promotion of enterprises owned by Black individuals, in doing so, ensuring the continuous flow of financial resources within their own community far from the control of the Whites. He states “Our economic philosophy is that we should gain economic control over the economy of our own community, the businesses and the other things which create

employment so that we can provide jobs for our own people instead of having to picket and boycott and beg someone else for a job.” (Malcolm X, "The Black Revolution," in *Two Speeches by Malcolm X* (New York: Merit, 1965). This approach was based on the notion of economic nationalism, which aimed to reduce dependency on businesses held by white individuals and, instead, establish a self-sufficient economic ecosystem and gain wealth that can span generations into their family.

Malcolm X consistently advocated for the notion that economic autonomy was crucial in attaining genuine liberation and independence for African Americans, and stressed the need of economic self-reliance because he believed that achieving economic empowerment was crucial in ending the cycle of poverty and discrimination that afflicted the black community. The individual contended that economic influence had a pivotal role in determining social and political authority (X & Haley, 1992; Davis, 1981).

Moreover, Malcolm X held the belief that achieving economic self-sufficiency was a means for African Americans to establish their autonomy and self-governance within a society that had historically ignored and subjugated them. He thought that via these actions, African Americans might confront the existing power structure and establish a more egalitarian society for themselves and the upcoming generations. According to Malcolm X, achieving economic self-sufficiency was a way to regain control and authority inside a system that had consistently deprived them of these essential privileges, and establish their own economic ventures and provide assistance to black-owned businesses. He saw that economic power was a crucial instrument for confronting institutional racism and establishing a society that is more inclusive, where the contributions of all individuals are respected of their race in which he saw as a way to combat the pervasive racism that limited opportunities for African Americans in the workforce.

Furthermore, Malcolm X stated that economic self-sufficiency was crucial for establishing actual political authority and influence within the United States. He realized that economic power was strongly tied to political power, and that without control over their own economic fate, African Americans would always be vulnerable to the whims of those in authority. By calling for economic self-sufficiency, he aspired to empower African Americans to develop their own economic basis and harness this ability to campaign for political change and influence public policy in ways that served their community.

Malcolm X also believed that achieving financial independence was a strategy to generate sustainable and enduring change within the black community. He knew that depending on external sources could only go so far in resolving the deep-rooted challenges of poverty and discrimination that beset African Americans. By fostering economic self-sufficiency, which aimed to construct a foundation for long-term success and prosperity within the black community, one that would last beyond his own lifetime and continue to uplift future generations of African Americans (X & Haley, 1965).

C. Investment in Education

Malcolm X acknowledged the importance of education in attaining economic empowerment and emphasized the weight of the educated Black people acquiring knowledge not only in conventional academic disciplines but also in economics, business, and trade. In his speech at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro—American unity he states that “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today”. (Malcolm X. (1964, June 28). *Speech at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity*. New York, NY).

Malcolm X has the belief that possessing information and abilities were essential for the development of economic prowess as he remembered that he hadn't been this intellectual leader if it weren't for education. This is necessary if the black community wants to strive and better its situation in almost all aspects of life. During the 1960s African Americans rarely owned land, they only worked on it, enslaved to ensure the Whites wealth and success, but Malcolm X frequently emphasized the significance of land ownership as a pathway to attaining economic stability. Malcolm X recognized agriculture as a crucial industry through which Black individuals could attain power and accumulate prosperity. Through land ownership and cultivation, the community may meet its own requirements and decrease reliance on external sources and will rely less and less on white businesses and resources: self-sufficiency.

He also held a profound conviction that knowledge constituted a potent force, and contended that education endowed individuals with the capacity to comprehend the intricacies of their environment, to challenge the prevailing norms, and to resist the shackles of oppression. For him, education was not merely a tool but the very key to unleashing this power, empowering Black individuals to seize command of their own lives and futures. He regarded it as vital for shattering the mental and societal bonds enforced by a prejudiced society.

Malcolm X frequently discussed how the act of self-education served as a means of emancipation from the state of being uninformed and constrained that had previously characterized his existence. He frequently employed the notion of mental slavery or the term 'Uncle Tom' (black man believed to be excessively obedient and servile to white masters) to characterize the state of Black individuals who had been improperly taught and indoctrinated by the prevailing culture. He held the belief that the mainstream American education system purposefully disseminated inaccurate information to Black students, instructing them to

absorb sentiments of inferiority and subservience. To Malcolm, education was a chance to break free from this mental enslavement, allowing Black people to restore their sense of self-worth, dignity, and agency. He felt that an educated individual should be able to critically assess the world, grasp the mechanisms of oppression, and design strategies for resisting and conquering them, and saw education as a vehicle to acquire this kind of knowledge, which was important for effective action and leadership in the struggle for civil rights and social justice (X & Haley, 1965).

We can conclude that Malcolm X's critiques of capitalism, institutional racism, and economic imperialism reveal a thorough awareness of the historical and structural injustices that have plagued African Americans since the era of enslavement. He carefully observed how white-owned firms and businesses exploited Black labor to gain wealth, contributing to economic disenfranchisement in Black communities. The legacy of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and systemic racism not only impoverished African Americans but also built generational riches for White Americans. Malcolm X's emphasis on Black economic self-sufficiency, investment in education, and the formation of Black-owned enterprises reveals his vision for correcting these injustices and recovering financial sovereignty. He believed that economic power was crucial and paramount to achieve true liberty and social justice for African Americans. By calling for self-reliance, economic independence, and education, Malcolm X aspired to empower African Americans with the tools necessary to challenge the structures that perpetuated racial and economic inequity.

Chapter Two: The Quest for the Self

The quest for identity is a fundamental aspect of human development, which shapes our perceptions, actions, and sense of self. For African Americans, however, this quest had been particularly complex and fraught with challenges. From the time of slavery (1619-1865) to the present day, the African American experience has been characterized by a relentless struggle against systemic oppression, and identities imposed by a dominant white society. This struggle is deeply rooted in the history of cultural Imperialism, where the identities, languages, and traditions of Black people were systematically suppressed and replaced with those of their oppressors. (hooks, 1992). This chapter will explore how Malcolm X's journey from Malcolm Little to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz embodies this quest for identity and the broader implications it holds for understanding the Black experience in a racially divided world.

In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)*, this struggle for identity is vividly portrayed through the life of Malcolm Little, who later becomes Malcolm X and, ultimately, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Malcolm's transformation is not only a personal journey but also a powerful critique of the broader socio-political forces at play cultural Imperialism, economic exploitation, and racial oppression. Malcolm X's life and work also engage deeply with several critical concepts that are essential to understanding the broader Black experience in America and beyond. These include the concept of utopia, as theorized by Karl Mannheim, which envisions a society free from the bonds of racial and class oppression; alienation, particularly the alienation experienced by African Americans in a society that has historically dehumanized them; and finally, emancipation, the ongoing struggle to achieve freedom from both physical and psychological chains.

This struggle for emancipation is poignantly illustrated by Frantz Fanon, a prominent theorist of decolonization, who observed, “The colonial world is a world divided into compartments” (Fanon, 1963, p. 3). This division is not just physical but also psychological, creating a deep sense of alienation among the colonized. In the case of African Americans, this compartmentalization has been perpetuated by the systemic forces of racism and cultural domination. Malcolm X tirelessly fought against these forces, recognizing that the path to identity reclamation and true liberation was intertwined with challenging the socio-political structures that sought to confine and oppress.

1. The Personal Transformation of Malcolm X : Unmasking Ideologies and Reclaiming Identity

The life of Malcolm X, as depicted in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), represents one of the most profound journeys of personal transformation in modern history. It highlights his journey from internalized racial oppression to a symbol of Black resistance and empowerment. Malcolm X's life mirrors the broader struggle of African Americans against systemic oppression, cultural erasure, and imposed identities. His early life was shaped by a society entrenched in white supremacy, leading him to internalize negative stereotypes and engage in criminal activities. However, his time in prison marked the beginning of his awakening, as he engaged with the Nation of Islam and began to reject the racist ideologies that had defined his identity, embracing Black pride and self-determination. A pivotal moment in his transformation occurred during his pilgrimage to Mecca, where he developed a more inclusive view of race and identity, shifting from racial division to a vision of unity and human rights. This part, therefore will use discourse analysis to explore key moments in Malcolm X's life his childhood, incarceration, involvement with the Nation of Islam, and pilgrimage to Mecca highlighting his journey as both a personal triumph and a reflection of the collective struggle of African Americans for freedom and self-determination.

A. Childhood and Youth: The Formation of Consciousness

Malcolm X's early life, marked by the loss of his father, the internalization of his mother, and his experiences in predominantly white educational settings, laid the groundwork for his understanding of racial oppression. During his childhood and youth, Malcolm internalized the inferiority imposed upon him by a society that valued whiteness above all.

This period can be understood through the lens of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, which suggests that our consciousness is shaped by the social environment we grow up in, Mannheim says “ Our thinking is determined by our social position is not necessarily a source of error” (Mannheim, 1937, p. 111). The dominant ideologies of white supremacy and racial hierarchy were not merely external forces; they became ingrained in Malcolm's early sense of self. He recalls being told by a teacher that his dream of becoming a lawyer was "no realistic goal for a nigger" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 48). As if he was forced to have a slave dream and not a master dream since being a lawyer was not realistic for a black. Thus, black people have to conform to the social, cultural, and ideological norms established by white-dominated society. It represents the expectation that Black individuals should adopt the values, behaviors, and identities dictated by a system that was not designed for their empowerment or liberation.

Malcolm X's early experiences reflect the broader struggle of Black individuals in their quest for self-identity and empowerment. His internalization of societal expectations reveals how oppressive narratives from a white-dominated society can stifle aspirations. However, as he confronts these limitations, his journey becomes a powerful call for Black liberation. By rejecting imposed identities, Malcolm X exemplifies the essential struggle to reclaim agency and redefine oneself, highlighting the importance of resisting ideologies that perpetuate racial oppression in the pursuit of a more equitable society.

B. Criminal Life and Incarceration: The Breaking of Chains

Malcolm's descent into a life of crime and his eventual imprisonment marked a critical turning point in his life. It was during his incarceration that Malcolm began to critically examine the ideologies that had shaped his life. Karl Mannheim's concept of ideology is particularly relevant here, as it highlights how dominant groups maintain control by shaping

the beliefs and values of the oppressed. Mannheim explains, "The ruling groups attempt to influence the thought process of the whole society in such a way that the conceptions of the given order of things become the only conceivable way of thinking" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 40). In prison, Malcolm encountered the teachings of the Nation of Islam, which provided him with a new lens through which to view the world that rejected the ideology of white supremacy and instead promoted Black empowerment and self-worth. This was the beginning of Malcolm's intellectual awakening, as he began to unmask the ideologies that had kept him mentally and physically imprisoned. He states, "The hardest test I ever faced in my life was praying" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 157), reflecting the deep internal struggle involved in breaking free from the ideological chains of his past.

This struggle resonates with Frantz Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) also sheds light on this phase of Malcolm's life. Fanon argued that the colonized person is alienated from their true self and taught to see themselves through the distorted lens of the colonizer, leading to a psychological state of inferiority and dependency (Fanon, 1952). This internalization often results in self-hatred and a disconnection from one's cultural roots.

Malcolm X's transformation during his incarceration represents a rejection of the imposed inferiority associated with his earlier identity. In the isolating environment of prison, he engaged in self-reflection and education, exploring topics related to race, history, and politics, which broadened his understanding and allowed him to reclaim his identity on his own terms (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965). By embracing the teachings of the Nation of Islam, he reconstructed his self-image from Malcolm Little—burdened by societal oppression—to Malcolm X, a symbol of empowerment and resistance (Breitman, 1971). This journey illustrates the broader struggle for identity among African Americans and emphasizes the importance of self-education and critical thought in reclaiming one's narrative and agency in

the face of systemic oppression, resonating with Fanon's idea that true liberation requires asserting one's identity and rejecting imposed limitations.

C. The Nation of Islam: Reconstructing Identity

Malcolm X's involvement with the Nation of Islam (NOI) marked a crucial phase in his personal transformation and identity reconstruction. By adopting the name "Malcolm X," he rejected his "slave name", this reflects his desire to reclaim his identity and resist imposed oppression. This event was a turning point in Malcolm's consciousness, as he embraced NOI teachings to challenge the racial hierarchies and the cultural erasure that had shaped his early life.

The sociology of knowledge, as theorized by Karl Mannheim (1936), provides a useful lens through which to understand Malcolm X's transformation. Mannheim's idea that "all knowledge is from the very beginning a co-operative process of group life" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 3) underscores how Malcolm's new knowledge and identity were not formed in isolation but were shaped through his engagement with the Nation of Islam. Within the NOI, Malcolm was introduced to a collective framework that directly contradicted the dominant ideologies he had internalized throughout his life. The teachings of the NOI, which emphasized Black pride, self-reliance, and the rejection of white supremacy, allowed Malcolm to reinterpret his experiences of racial oppression within a new ideological structure. The Nation of Islam also offered Malcolm X a sense of purpose and a clearer understanding of the systemic nature of racial oppression. Under the guidance of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the NOI, Malcolm embraced the belief that white society was fundamentally corrupt and that Black people must separate themselves from it to achieve true empowerment.

Elijah Muhammad's teaching, "So let us separate from this white man, and for the same reason he says—in time to save ourselves from any more 'integration'!" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 231) encapsulates the Nation of Islam's call for racial separation as a means to safeguard Black self-determination. Malcolm X's feelings are echoed in his famous declaration, "We didn't land on Plymouth Rock. The rock was landed on us" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 185). This reflects his growing awareness of the forced imposition of white cultural norms on Black people and the deep historical roots of their oppression. During Malcolm X's time with the Nation of Islam, his language began to reflect a radical rejection of white-dominated society and a celebration of Black identity. This discursive shift marked a pivotal moment in his personal transformation, as he began to challenge the narratives that had previously oppressed him and the others. Through the framework of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X developed a new cultural identity rooted in Black Nationalism and Islamic faith, rejecting both assimilation with white society and the imposed ideologies that supported racial hierarchies.

However, while the NOI was instrumental in reshaping Malcolm X's identity and views on racial oppression, it was only one stage in his ongoing transformation. His pilgrimage to Mecca later led to a more inclusive understanding of race and identity, as his point of view evolved beyond the NOI's teachings. Yet, this period with the Nation of Islam remains a crucial phase, in which he laid the groundwork for his future advocacy for Black empowerment and human rights by first unmasking the ideologies that sought to oppress him.

D. The Path to Enlightenment: Malcolm X's Final Transformation

Malcolm X's pilgrimage to Mecca marked the culmination of his personal transformation, but it also highlighted the growing ideological divide between him and Elijah Muhammad (1897-1975), U.S religious leader, Self proclaimed messenger of Allah and the leader of the

Nation of Islam (NOI). Malcolm was deeply influenced by Elijah (Robert Pole), almost revering him as a spiritual guide or *guru*, as our supervisor Dr. Benmechiche points out. (Benmechiche, personal communication, [September,2024]). Elijah's influence on Malcolm was akin to that of a *guru*, guiding him down a path focused on racial separatism and the belief that white people were inherently evil. While under Elijah's direction, Malcolm had embraced this worldview, believing that Black Americans needed to separate themselves from white society entirely to achieve liberation; his experiences in Mecca led him to question and ultimately reject these views. The universal brotherhood he witnessed among Muslims of all races during his pilgrimage fundamentally changed his point of view. As Malcolm reflected, "I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color" (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 304). This experience made him realize that the true message of Islam transcended race and was inclusive of all people, regardless of their ethnicity. As Malcolm X claims "The feeling hit me that there really wasn't any color problem here" (X & Haley, 1965, p. 288) let us think that the shift has begun, and that the wall of prejudice starts to tremble.

After Malcolm X's departure from the Nation of Islam, his view became more nuanced and inclusive. His pilgrimage to Mecca and exposure to a broader spectrum of Islam led him to embrace a more global and humanistic opinion. Malcolm X expressed a desire for racial harmony and cooperation among people of all races. Thus, after his pilgrimage to Mecca, he recognized that Elijah's version of Islam was more of a political and racial ideology than a religious one. The Nation of Islam's focus on race and separatism, while crucial in the fight against American racism, differed from the more universal message of Sunni Islam, which emphasized unity and brotherhood among all races. Malcolm's spiritual transformation in Mecca led him to embrace this broader understanding of Islam, which he believed was essential for achieving true liberation not just for Black Americans, but for all oppressed

people worldwide. This shift is evident in his speeches after the pilgrimage, he began to advocate for a multiracial approach to the struggle for justice, As Malcolm by himself states, “I believe in a religion that believes in freedom. Any time I have to accept a religion that won’t let me fight a battle for my people, I say to hell with that religion” (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 319). This quote underscores the ideological shift Malcolm underwent, as he transitioned from a more separatist ideology within the Nation of Islam to a global perspective, grounded in Sunni Islam.

The broader understanding of Islam allowed Malcolm to challenge not only the racial oppression he had encountered in America but also the limitations of Elijah Muhammad’s teachings within the Nation of Islam. Muhammad’s vision, focused on racial separatism and Black superiority, contrasted with the Sunni Islamic beliefs Malcolm encountered in Mecca, and which promoted a more inclusive and egalitarian approach to faith and human relations. This ideological conflict ultimately led to Malcolm’s break from the Nation of Islam and his embrace of a vision of justice that transcended race and nationality.

Alex Haley poignantly claims, “And Malcolm was free. No one who knew him before and after his trip to Mecca could doubt that he had completely abandoned racism, separatism, and hatred. But he had not abandoned his shock-effect statements, his bristling agitation for immediate freedom in this country not only for blacks, but for everybody” (Haley & Malcolm X, 1965, p. 404). This reflection encapsulates Malcolm’s final transformation, which not only freed him from racial separatism but also solidified his commitment to the global struggle for human rights and dignity. The significance of this statement lies in its acknowledgment of the profound shift that occurred in Malcolm X’s worldview. The brotherhood he witnessed among Muslims of all races during his pilgrimage made him realize that the struggle for justice was not limited to racial lines but was a universal fight for human dignity. Malcolm

began to see the interconnectedness of struggles for liberation around the world, recognizing that the fight for Black liberation in America was part of a larger movement for freedom and equality for all oppressed people. This ideological expansion, brought on by his pilgrimage, enabled Malcolm to transcend the racial boundaries that had previously defined his activism. Haley's observation that Malcolm had not abandoned his bristling agitation is also critical. While Malcolm's rhetoric softened in terms of race, he remained as impassioned as ever in his demand for immediate justice. Furthermore, the contrast between Malcolm's pre-Mecca and post-Mecca perspectives underscores the complexity of his journey. As he transitioned from Malcolm Little to Malcolm X and ultimately to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, his ideological transformation was marked by a deep understanding of the root causes of oppression. Haley's summation also reminds us that while Malcolm rejected the racial separatism of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, he did not abandon the urgency of his message. His post-Mecca speeches still conveyed the same sense of immediacy, calling for radical and swift change. The key difference was that Malcolm's focus had shifted from a Black nationalist framework to a global, humanist perspective. He later saw the fight for Black liberation as part of a larger struggle against systemic oppression worldwide. Haley noted, Malcolm was truly "free" free from the ideological constraints of racial hatred, free to advocate for a more just and equitable world for all people. This final phase of Malcolm's life marked the pinnacle of his evolution as a leader, as he moved beyond the confines of American racial politics to become a global icon in the fight for human rights (Malcolm X & Haley, 1965).

In conclusion, one can say that Malcolm X's personal transformation transcends individual experience, by becoming a universal symbol of resistance against oppressive ideologies. His life serves as both a personal and collective narrative of awakening, challenging the systemic forces that sought to diminish the Black identity. The profound shifts in Malcolm's beliefs and

self-understanding from internalized oppression to radical empowerment demonstrate the critical role of ideological awakening in the pursuit of liberation. By unmasking the ideologies that shaped his early life, Malcolm reclaimed his identity and offered a blueprint for others to resist cultural Imperialism, confront systemic racism, and forge a path toward self-determination. His journey underscores that the fight for justice, freedom, and equality is not just a personal struggle but a collective endeavor that transcends race, nationality, and borders.

1. Rejection of Stereotypes and Imposed Identities

Malcolm X's journey in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* reflects a continuous rejection of the identities and stereotypes imposed by white society. His life and work emphasize the necessity for Black people to define themselves on their own terms, rather than conforming to the expectations and norms set by a racially oppressive system. This section explores how Malcolm X critiques the identity imposed by white society, advocates the development of an autonomous Black identity, and promotes cultural and spiritual reaffirmation as essential elements of Black liberation.

A. Critique of Identity Imposed by Whites

Malcolm X's critique of white society's imposition of identity on Black people is a central theme in his autobiography. He argues that the identity imposed by white society is not only limiting but also serving as a tool of oppression that reinforces white supremacy. Throughout his life, Malcolm X observed how Black people were expected to conform to stereotypes and adopt behaviors that aligned with the expectations of the white majority. One example is Malcolm X's rejection of the symbols of white authority, such as the American flag, which he views as a symbol for the oppression of Black people. He states, "I don't respect or believe in

this damn flag, it's there because I can't hold a public meeting without it unless I want the white man to put me in jail" (X & Haley, 1965, p. 358). This statement reflects Malcolm X's refusal to accept the symbols of a society that continued to marginalize and discriminate Black people. By rejecting the flag, Malcolm X challenges the idea that Black people must show allegiance to a nation that has systematically oppressed them, illustrating his broader critique of imposed identities and the forced acceptance of white societal norms. Another powerful example is Malcolm X's assertion that "Anyone who wants to follow me and my movement has got to be ready to go to jail, to the hospital, and to the cemetery before he can be truly free" (Malcolm X & Haley, 1965, p.370), and which underscores the depth of resistance required to break free from this imposed identity. This statement reflects the profound personal sacrifices and risks associated with challenging and dismantling the oppressive structures enforced by white society. The journey towards authentic self-determination and liberation is fraught with hardship and struggle, and it highlights the fact that true freedom is not easily attained within a system that seeks to confine. In this context, Malcolm X's quote illuminates the harsh realities of resisting an imposed identity and the lengths to which individuals must go to achieve real liberation and self-expression.

Moreover, Malcolm X calls for Black people to recognize and throw off the psychological constraints placed upon them by whites. He passionately states, "The black man needs today to stand up and throw off the weaknesses imposed upon him by the slave master white man!" (X & Haley, 1965, p.201). This quote underscores Malcolm's belief that Black people must reject the feelings of inferiority and dependency instilled in them by centuries of oppression. The call to "stand up" is not just about physical liberation but also about reclaiming mental and cultural independence from white-imposed definitions of what it means to be Black.

Malcolm X's critique of identity imposed by white society is not just directed outward but also inward, reflecting on his life choices and behaviors influenced by societal expectations. In his autobiography, he recounts his younger years when he wore a zoot suit and styled his hair in a "conk," a popular hairstyle among Black men that involved chemically straightening the hair. He writes, "The drape and the cut of a zoot suit showed to the best advantage if you were tall—and I was over six feet. My conk was fire-red. I was really a clown, but my ignorance made me think I was 'sharp' ” (X & Haley, 1965, p. 79). This passage reveals how Malcolm X viewed his younger self as conforming to an image shaped by external influences, particularly those imposed by white cultural standards. The zoot suit and conk hairstyle represent more than just fashion choices; they symbolize a deeper struggle with identity and a form of internalized oppression. Malcolm X later described these choices as "clownish," acknowledging how he, like many other Black people, had been conditioned to adopt styles and attitudes aimed more at conforming to what white-centric society considered acceptable or "sharp" than at expressing a true sense of self. His use of the term "ignorance" highlights how these imposed identities served to obscure a deeper understanding of self-worth and cultural pride. By rejecting these superficial styles in his later life, Malcolm X makes a broader argument for the necessity of self-awareness and the rejection of all forms of imposed identity. This is not merely about rejecting certain fashions, but about recognizing and dismantling the deeper societal forces that dictate how one should look, act, or even think to be considered valuable or respectable.

Malcolm X's critique of imposed identities also extended to the cultural expectations around the desire for integration. In his speeches, Malcolm X frequently denounces the notion that Black people should aspire to be accepted by white society. In his "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech, he argued that "integration will not bring us together... it will only dilute our blood and make us lose our identity" (Malcolm X, 1964). He further asserted, "If the white

people realize what the alternative is, perhaps they will be more willing to hear Dr. King," signaling that integration was merely a lesser evil in the eyes of white society. By saying, "It's a victory for the white man when he can get a black man to accept integration," Malcolm X emphasized that seeking integration within a system built on white supremacy would only lead to the erosion of Black identity and dignity (Malcolm X, 1965). This reflects his belief that pursuing integration, rather than striving for self-reliance and independence from oppressive systems, was equivalent to accepting a form of cultural emasculation. By using the word "castrate," Malcolm X metaphorically described how integration strips Black men of their autonomy, power, and cultural uniqueness. He saw integration as a compromise that ultimately benefitted white society by undermining Black unity and identity.

To sum up, Malcolm X's rejection of stereotypes and imposed identities serves as a powerful critique of the systemic racism that seeks to define and confine Black people within the boundaries of white societal norms. His life and work challenge the notion that Black people must conform to these externally imposed identities, advocating instead for a process of self-definition grounded in cultural pride, historical awareness, and spiritual awakening. Through his transformation and teachings, Malcolm X illustrates that true liberation begins with the rejection of all forms of oppression, both external and internal, and the reclamation of a self-determined identity. His journey and philosophy continue to inspire movements for racial justice and the fight against all forms of identity-based oppression, demonstrating the enduring power and relevance of his message.

2. Cultural and Spiritual Reaffirmation

This section of our dissertation will delve deeper into the transformative period of Malcolm X's life, particularly focusing on the profound cultural and spiritual values he embraced during and after his time in prison. His experiences behind bars marked a critical

turning point in his journey toward self-discovery and personal empowerment, as he sought to break free from the constraints of his past and the oppressive societal structures around him. These values not only shaped his identity as a Black leader and civil rights activist but also redefined his understanding of racial pride, self-reliance, and resistance against white supremacy. We will explore how these newfound principles became the foundation of his leadership, influencing his vision for both Black liberation in America and broader human rights on a global scale.

A. The Role of Religion: How Islam Changed Malcolm X

A.1. The Rise of Islam: Muslims' Immigration

The beginning of Islam in America can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Muslim immigrants from regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa began arriving in the United States. These early Muslim communities faced numerous challenges, including religious discrimination and the pressures of assimilation (Curtis, 2009).

A.2. The Prominence of Islam in the United States

Despite being few in number, they were vital in preparing the way for the development of Islam in the United States. The building of the nation's first mosque is a key moment in the early history of Islam in America. As a result of geopolitical circumstances and shifting immigration regulations, Muslim immigration to the United States rose. An important aspect in the growth of Islam in the United States throughout the 1970s was the increase of African American Muslims frustrated by the racial injustices and persecution they suffered, African Americans started exploring other alternative ideologies and religions. The teachings of Islam, which placed an emphasis on equality, social justice, and the unity of humanity, offered comfort and empowerment to many influential personalities who converted to Islam.

This is the case with Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, who contributed to the increase of interest in Islam among African Americans (Marable, 2011; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

A.3 .Malcolm X is Introduced to Islam

Malcolm X's years of imprisonment, are widely believed to have been the most significant turning point in his life, during which he encountered the Nation of Islam, a black religious group. Two notable aspects emerge when examining Malcolm X's early years in prison for indications of his transformation: his deliberate pursuit of self-education and his encounter with the Nation of Islam. The first aspect is that he was greatly influenced by a fellow convict named "Bimbi," who was a very knowledgeable black man who gained respect in prison due to his exceptional intelligence. Bimbi became a source of inspiration for Malcolm X and served as a commendable Black role model, something Malcolm was not accustomed to encountering in the underworlds of Harlem. As Malcolm X recalls, "Bimbi had always taken charge of any conversation he was in, and I had tried to emulate him. He was the first man I had ever seen command total respect...with his words" (Malcolm X, 1965, p. 159).

The second key aspect of Malcolm X's prison years was his introduction to the Nation of Islam (NOI), initiated by his siblings through letters and visits. They introduced him to the NOI. This latter, teaches that Wallace Fard Muhammad is considered as the incarnation of God on earth, which contrasts with Sunni Islam's belief in a non-corporeal God. Elijah Muhammad, in *Message to the Blackman in America*, explicitly refers to Fard as Allah in human form, emphasizing his divine role in leading Black people to salvation (Muhammad, 1965). The NOI also believes that the white race emerged from a malevolent experiment by a scientist named Yacub and that the white race was prophesied to dominate for 6,000 years. Elijah Muhammad, who later led the NOI, declared himself the "Messenger of Allah" and blamed the "devil white man" for Black subjugation. He argued that Christianity played a role

in promoting racial inferiority by portraying Blackness as a curse. His teachings emphasized Black autonomy, dignity, and independence, rejecting integration into a white-dominated society, which he believed could never treat Black people justly. This vision aligns with Mannheim's concept of utopia, as it sought to transcend racial oppression and establish a new order based on Black self-determination. As Malcolm noted, throughout his life up to that point, all white people had acted like devils. In his autobiography Malcolm X says:

From the start of my life the state white people [were] always in our house after the other whites I didn't know had killed my father [...] The white people who kept calling my mother crazy to her face[...] until she finally was taken off by white people to Kalamazoo asylum[...]the white judge and others who had split up the children. . .I was in school[...] the teacher who told me to "be a carpenter" because thinking of being a lawyer was foolish for a Negro. (Haley & X, 1965, p. 160-161).

Malcolm was unable to release his anguish and mistreatment at the hands of the white man from his thoughts, as he was constantly reminded of it in prison by the presence of the white prison guards. Based on the teachings of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm concluded that he lacked self-knowledge due to the oppressive actions of the white oppressor. Nevertheless, the more he learned about the Nation's racial beliefs, the more he drew closer to faith. What would eventually win him over to fully join the Nation was the fact that these racial ideals denying black inferiority and labeling white men as wicked beings absolutely coincided with his life experiences, as he admitted, "The first time I heard the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's statement, 'The white man is the devil,' it just clicked"(X & Haley, 1965, p.164). According to the tenants of the Nation of Islam, the white man was considered to be a morally corrupt creature and hence should be treated in accordance with this belief which later in life Malcolm X found was the wrong approach to dealing with this issue of racism and oppression. Malcolm X's transformation in prison was deeply influenced by his dedication to self-education at the Norfolk Prison Colony, an institution known for its educational ties to colleges like Harvard and Boston University (Ehrenbold et al., n.d.; Mass Moments, n.d.; Malcolm X & Haley, 1965). During his sentence, he participated in structured debates,

discussions, and extensive reading across various subjects, which became crucial in his intellectual and personal development (Ehrenbold et al., n.d.; Malcolm X & Haley, 1965). His involvement with the Norfolk Debating Society sparked a passion for public speaking that ultimately fueled his activism (Ehrenbold et al., n.d.).

Furthermore, Malcolm deliberately sought out the historical background of the Black man, immersing himself in Black literature such as *Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois, *Outline of History* by H. G. Wells, *Story of Civilization* by Will Durant, and *Negro History* by Carter G. Woodson. Malcolm found the Nation of Islam's (NOI) social base familiar, as Elijah Muhammad's teachings, similar to Garvey's, sought to affirm Black identity and promote Black separatism. Within the NOI, this vision was closely tied to a religious and cultural reclamation. Islam, as taught by the NOI, became a tool for Black self-realization, breaking from the psychological oppression of white-dominated Christianity. After accepting the Nation, Malcolm's life was transformed. He later reflected: "Islam meant more to me than anything I ever had known... Islam and Mr. Elijah Muhammad had changed my whole world." (X & Haley, 1965, p. 171). While incarcerated, Malcolm participated in discussion groups to improve public speaking and studied not just for knowledge but to affirm Elijah Muhammad's teachings. His intellectual and religious awakenings merged during this time, as Islam gave him purpose in the African American struggle for liberty and equality, which in turn fueled his education. Prison became the fertile ground for Malcolm X's transformation. Through reading, he learned that slavery had robbed Black people of freedom, identity, and heritage, with no acknowledgment of tribes like Wolof, Serer, and Ashanti. His readings confirmed Elijah Muhammad's teachings that the white man had exploited and brutalized all non-white people, further validating his belief that the white man was the devil. Malcolm says:

I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life as the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive. My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America (Haley & X, 1965, p. 180).

Malcolm acquires a genuine interest in educating himself through reading and learning about Black history. He later recounted, “my reading had my mind like steam under pressure. Some way, I had to start telling the white man about himself to his face” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 184). Malcolm concluded that Islam is his way of life, his people’s faith, and that African American do not need to migrate back to Africa in order to be alienated culturally, socially and economically because they have been separated for years, so they have lost their root of culture and do not belong to Africa. However, through Islam, they can obtain their identity as African American and position themselves differently from white people.

It was also in jail that Malcolm was able to clean himself up, and learn self-respect, discipline, and a sense of mission, attributes which he became vital in influencing his followers later in his life. Malcolm learned how to aid others and organize them to speak out for rights, and understood the importance of historical and social knowledge, developed a respect for the written word and the power of literature; he also recognized that all information did not come from books. Written facts had to be checked against the lessons of his own experience and that of the individuals he led and affected. This was especially crucial because African Americans’ experience and viewpoints differed greatly from the experiences of the people who penned most of the books about history. It is vital to remember that people followed Malcolm not only out of a connection to his charisma, but because he offered his followers ideas and insights that were rooted in their experiences; he was familiar with Black individuals from every walk of life. He was, thus, able to describe the hidden suffering and anguish that many working-class African Americans lived with every day.

B. Pilgrimage to Mecca

We can incorporate the idea of utopia by Mannheim into Malcolm X's growing perspectives on Islam and his aspirations for the Black community progress. Mannheim contended that utopias are concepts or perspectives originating from marginalized or oppressed communities, presenting aspirations of profound social change. These concepts contest the existing order and motivate initiatives aimed at an envisioned future (Mannheim, 1936). Mannheim distinguishes between ideologies that serve to preserve the current social order and utopias that challenge and aim to transform it. He says in his book *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (1936): "Utopias are those ideas which transcend the reality existing in a given society, and at the same time, in the minds of the bearers of these ideas, shake off the existing order" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 173).

Malcolm X's connection with Islam, particularly its evolution from his first affiliation with the Nation of Islam (NOI) to his subsequent embrace of Sunni Islam to his pilgrimage to Mecca, may be analyzed via Mannheim's utopian paradigm. Islam furnished Malcolm X with a spiritual and conceptual framework to analyze the structural racism that subjugated Black Americans and presented a vision of a reformed society grounded in justice, equality, and Black empowerment. Many causes contributed to the initially just ideological and then official distancing of Malcolm X from the Nation of Islam. Among the main factors that pushed Malcolm X out of the Muslim organization were the scandals surrounding Elijah Muhammad's affairs, including illegitimate children and sexual misconduct, which cast doubt on the spiritual leader's sincerity and moral character. Additionally, there was hostility from the upper echelons of the Nation towards Malcolm X due to his increasing influence, as well as divergent point of views between Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X on how best to address the problems facing Black people. Ultimately, Malcolm X perceived Muhammad's jealousy of him because of his growing popularity, exceptional erudition, and public speaking skills, which challenged his leadership role. Malcolm X's relationship with the Nation of

Islam fractured after his controversial comments on President Kennedy's assassination, leading to a suspension that would become indefinite. He had long advocated for unity between Africans and African Americans and used his global platform to discuss racial oppression and civil rights. Supported by his sister Ella, he left for Mecca, facing escalating threats from Nation of Islam extremists.

His pilgrimage reflected both a spiritual journey and a reprieve from mounting tensions within the organization. Malcolm X wrote enthusiastic accounts of his brief stay in Germany, noting that 'Europeans act more human' and that 'people seeing you as a Muslim saw you as a brother'—something he had never experienced in the United States. He spent two days in Cairo, where Egyptians 'accepted him like a brother.' He also recalls a sense of culture shock during his journey to Jeddah, describing how 'stuffed on the plane were white, black, brown, red, and yellow individuals, blue eyes and blond hair, and my kinky red hair, all together, brethren! Honoring the same God, Allah, while also treating one another with the same respect' (Haley & X, 1965, p. 323). Malcolm was further shocked to see a Black man of Egyptian heritage piloting his jet, something he had never seen before:

“The captain of the plane came back to meet me. He was an Egyptian, his complexion was darker than mine; he could have walked in Harlem and no one would have given him a second glance. He was delighted to meet an American Muslim. . . The co-pilot was darker than he was. I can't tell you the feeling it gave me. I had never seen a black man flying a jet. That instrument panel: no one ever could know what all of those dials meant! Both of the pilots were smiling at me, treating me with the same honor and respect I had received ever since I left America.” (Haley & X, 1965, p.324).

This quote highlights Malcolm X's profound sense of identity and belonging during his travels, as he experiences a transformative moment of recognition and respect from Black pilots in a context that starkly contrasts with the racial dynamics he faced in America, emphasizing the shared humanity and dignity within the global Muslim community.

Malcolm was later detained in the city of Jeddah, and asked Dr. Omar Azzam, an affiliate, to aid him. And in just a short period of time, he was amazed by his generosity: “I was speechless at the man’s attitude, and at my own physical feeling of no difference between us as human beings. I had heard for years of Muslim hospitality, but one couldn’t quite imagine such warmth” (Haley & X, 1965, p.333). This quote reflects an encounter that challenges preconceived notions about race and humanity. The statement “I was speechless at the man’s attitude” conveys Malcolm X's astonishment at the warmth and kindness he received, highlighting the profound impact of interpersonal connection across racial, cultural, and religious divides. His acknowledgment of feeling “no difference between us as human beings” (X & Haley, 1965, p.297) signifies a moment of realization that transcends the societal divisions imposed by race, reflecting their unification through Islam. This sentiment underscores a core tenet of his journey: recognizing shared humanity despite the pervasive racial tensions of his time.

The reference to “Muslim hospitality” (X & Haley, 1965, p.297) serves to emphasize the cultural values of Islam’s generosity and community, contrasting sharply with the discrimination he experienced in America and the Nation of Islam. Malcolm reconsidered his thoughts about the white man, determining that the term “white man” referred to specific attitudes and actions regarding Black individuals, as well as all other non-white men. He noted that the racial harmony and religious devotion of his fellow Muslims, coming from all over the world, made him not conscious of color or race around whites for the first time in his life. Through his interactions with foreign Muslims, he learned that since they treated all people equally, they recognized no distinctions between race and religion in their faith and in human society. This experience fundamentally shifted his idea on race, challenging his previous views of Black separatism.

In his *Letter from Mecca*, Malcolm X wrote: "I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color" (Malcolm X, 1964). He also remarked: "Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this Ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad, and all the other prophets of the Holy Scriptures." For the past week, he stated, "I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people of all colors" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 304). Malcolm X expresses deep appreciation for the genuine hospitality and brotherhood he experiences in the "Ancient Holy Land" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 304). He highlights the transformative power of this unity, noting how it transcends race and color, leaving a profound impact on him.

America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered 'white' but the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color. (Haley & X, 1965, p. 345).

That is to say, Malcolm X pushes for a broader knowledge of Sunni Islam in America, highlighting its ability to bridge racial differences. The remark that "this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 304) emphasizes Malcolm X's belief in Islam's capacity to establish genuine equality and fraternity among all humans, regardless of their racial backgrounds. His traveling experiences in the Muslim world have led him to observe interactions that starkly contrast with the racial tensions prevalent in the United States. The statement "the 'white' attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam" (Haley & X, 1965, p. 304) suggests that adherence to Islamic principles can lead to a profound transformation in attitudes and relationships among people of different races, as it encourages followers to view one another as equals. Malcolm X's reflection on

witnessing “sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 304) reinforces the idea that the Islamic faith can create an inclusive community where individuals are valued for their character rather than their race. Malcolm X says:

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to re-arrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth. (Haley & X, 1965, p. 345).

This reflects on the transformative impact of his pilgrimage to Mecca, expressing how this experience has compelled him to reassess and modify his previously held beliefs during his involvement with the Nation of Islam. “You may be shocked by these words coming from me” (Haley & X, 1965, p.304). This signals his awareness of the potential surprise or disbelief from his audience, indicating the significance of the revelations he has encountered. Malcolm’s admission that he had to “re-arrange much of my thought-patterns” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 305) suggests a deep intellectual and emotional engagement with the new ideas and experiences he has encountered during his Pilgrimage to Mecca and his willingness to “toss aside some of my previous conclusions” (Haley & X, 1965, p.305), underscores a key aspect of his character development. In addition, his assertion that he “has always kept an open mind” (Haley & X, 1965, p. 305) emphasizes the importance of intellectual flexibility and adaptability, qualities that he deems essential for any serious quest to seek the truth.

In a *Letter from Mecca*, Malcolm X expresses this change in vision, noting that Islam’s universalism offered a model for a society based on equality and brotherhood, transcending racial boundaries (Malcolm X, 1964). His point of views on racial relations in America were drastically changed by the trip to Mecca, which introduced him to a broader, more tolerant viewpoint on race and humanity, and inspired him to adopt a more global perspective on the fight for human rights. Thus, instead of concentrating on Black separatist, he began to

advocate for racial justice and equality on a larger scale. Malcolm X knew both spiritual and intellectual metamorphoses throughout his trip, which reshaped his legacy as a leader and an intellectual.

Utilizing Mannheim's idea of utopia, Malcolm X's vision might be seen as a more expansive and inclusive utopia: a vision of a society where racial justice is attained not by segregation but by togetherness and reciprocal respect. Islam, in its worldwide manifestation, serves as the spiritual and ideological foundation. Malcolm X's post-pilgrimage lectures and public declarations express his aspiration for a reformed world where racial and spiritual emancipation will foster a more equitable global community.

In conclusion, after his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm X's vision of Islam emphasized unity, justice, and equality for all people, transcending race. He advocated for civil rights and social justice for all oppressed groups, promoting alliances across racial and religious lines to achieve lasting change. This transformation marked a shift from racial separatism to a more inclusive and humanistic perspective, with a broader vision of Islam focused on justice, unity, and equality, which became central to his philosophy and activism.

C. Racial Pride and Cultural Heritage

Malcolm X's spiritual growth profoundly influenced his pride in African heritage and his rejection of the negative stereotypes of Black people perpetuated by the dominant white culture. Since childhood, the life of Malcolm X had been marked by all of the main aspects that would later stress his message to a generation of black people who were plunged in disaster and struggle. Particularly in the cage and prison of racism, Malcolm X would come to know from his boyhood the truth of the hatred and the detachment of white racism toward the fight of black folk. The truth would gradually press on his human experience as he developed from childhood into maturity. However, Malcolm's autobiography may easily be considered

to epitomize the black experience in the United States- particularly the experience of Urban North- his origins were not at all typical in some amount. In reality, these distinctive, even unique qualities of his foundational years, offered his work and message differentiating features that were vital to his success as a black leader in an age when many organizations and leaders were seeking to compete for the loyalty of blacks. Through his efforts and deep founded passion in the legacy of Africa, he ensured his place as a supreme leader of Afro-Americans in America, Africa, and overseas. Malcolm X's speech on "Black Man's History" February 21, 1965, advocates and preserves his love for African cultural heritage as he declares in this speech:

The thing that has made the so-called Negro in America fail, more than any other thing, is your, my, lack of knowledge concerning history. We know less about history than anything else. There are black people in America who have mastered the mathematical science, have become professors....but very seldom can you find one among us who is expert on the history of the black man, no matter how much he excels in the other science, he is always confined, he is always relegated to the same low rung of the ladder that the dumbest of our people are relegated to. And all of this stems from his lack of knowledge concerning history. Malcolm X. (1962, December 13). *Black man's history*. Speech presented at the Nation of Islam Mosque. Los Angeles, CA.

The end of the Malcolm's speech stated that the white man must not dodge from his coming ruin due to his diabolical nature. This belief system profoundly transformed Malcolm X's view on his own identity and lineage. Thus, he began to reject the sanitized past and ideas of Black inferiority, viewing "Blackness" as something powerful and meaningful. In his speeches, Malcolm X often warned about the psychological damage that "institutional racism" (Williams, 1997) caused on Black people by distorting their view of their own identity. One of his primary concepts was the necessity for Black Americans to reject the disparaging labels imposed upon them by white culture and, instead, cherish their African roots. For example, in his renowned speech "Message to the Grassroots" (1963), Malcolm X argued: "You can't hate the roots of a tree and not hate the tree. You can't hate your origin and not end up hating yourself. You can't hate Africa and not hate yourself". Malcolm X.

(1963, November 10). (*Message to the Grassroots* Speech presented at the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, Detroit, MI) . The speech reiterated and emphasized that rejecting Africa and its history and culture meant rejecting a vital component of Black identity, which was important to the freedom and empowerment of Black Americans.

Malcolm X's endeavor was to connect Afro-Americans with their ancestors to know that they are not homeless, brotherless, sisterless, or even guardianless. They have their promising history of their forefathers and ancestors, who can supply enough mental power to revive them from the lethargy of the coming centuries and generations. His endeavors in the United States aimed to establish a significant connection between Africa and Africa's displaced American descendants. He consistently urged African Americans to seek cultural and spiritual inspiration from Africa. He urged his siblings to embrace their African cultural heritage. Especially, he forcefully condemned the ways in which white society had depicted Black people. He spoke against the cultural forces that promoted images of Black people as inferior, ugly, subordinate, undeveloped and violent. In speeches such as "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964), he implored Black individuals to dismiss these adverse representations and restore their intrinsic beauty and dignity: "The white man made you hate yourself, made you hate your hair, made you hate the color of your skin. You don't see any beauty in yourself. He's trying to destroy your mind" (Malcolm X. 1962). *Who Taught you to Hate Yourself?* Speech presented at the Nation of Islam Mosque, Los Angeles, CA). This speech was important to Malcolm X's advocacy for Black empowerment and solidarity. By encouraging Black Americans to dismiss these detrimental prejudices, he was promoting a psychological and cultural transformation that would enable Black individuals to perceive themselves as attractive, and strong. Malcolm X's love and appreciation for African cultural heritage embodies the resolution of Black struggle, it promotes African pride under the banner of Afro-American unity. He cautioned his constituents that the perils confronting black males in

America and Africa are very serious. The emancipation of all black people from white dominance, oppression, and exploitation shall be waged with revolutionary firmness, resolve, devotion, honesty, and integrity.

Malcolm's thorough examination of the black man's roots from Africa provides a mind-raising influence on the African. Afro-Americans must be proud of their ancestry. In his speeches, he emphasizes the fact that Black Americans had to educate themselves on Africa's contributions to world civilization, rather than relying on a history written by the whites. In his speech "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?" (1962), Malcolm X stated: "Our forefathers weren't the Pilgrims. We didn't land on Plymouth Rock. The rock was landed on us." Malcolm X. (1962, May 5). This statement highlights the historical oppression faced by Black Americans, contrasting their experience of enslavement and colonization with the narrative of American founding figures. Malcolm X urged Black Americans to reassess their role in history, pushing them to take pride in their African origin and not perceive themselves through the lens of white-dominated narratives; his objective was to change black historiography.

Malcolm's love for African cultural heritage reflects his yearning for healing his people mentally in order to lift them out of the pit of inferiority. His spiritual maturation brought him to a better knowledge of the worth and beauty of Black culture and identity. He rejected the negative views on Black people which are propagated by the dominant white society, and, instead, championed Black ancestry as a source of pride and power. Through his lectures, such as "Message to the Grassroots" and "The Ballot or the Bullet", Malcolm X boosted Black identity, and urged his community to embrace their African ancestry and oppose the psychological oppression caused by white supremacy. His spiritual and intellectual maturation culminated in a strong message of self-determination and cultural pride that continues to reverberate in struggles for Black freedom today.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that *The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965)* provides a compelling narrative of resistance against the multifaceted systems of oppression that have shaped the experiences of Black Americans. Malcolm X's journey from experiencing "institutional racism" and "cultural imperialism" to becoming a leader who rejected imposed identities and advocated for Black pride and self-determination critiques the societal forces that sought to control and marginalize Black people.

His experiences within institutions like education, the judicial system, and the media reflect the pervasive nature of systemic racism and cultural Imperialism, revealing how these structures served to reinforce racial hierarchies and maintain the status quo. Malcolm X's critique of the white society's imposed identity on Black people, coupled with his advocacy for the reclamation of African cultural heritage, exemplifies the necessity of dismantling the ideologies that perpetuate oppression.

His rejection of stereotypes and insistence on self-definition challenged the dominant narratives of his time and underscored the importance of cultural pride, historical awareness, in the pursuit of true liberation. Through his intellectual and spiritual maturation, Malcolm X transcended his personal struggles to become a symbol of collective resistance, offering a blueprint for others to confront and dismantle the systems of racism, "economic imperialism", and "cultural Imperialism".

Furthermore, his life and teachings continue to inspire movements for racial justice, reminding us that the fight for equality is both a personal and a collective struggle that transcends national and cultural boundaries. Malcolm X's legacy serves as a powerful testament to the enduring power of resistance, self-determination, and the reclamation of

identity, offering valuable lessons for those who continue to challenge the forces of oppression in the modern world. His vision for Black pride and cultural empowerment remains a clarion call for justice, freedom, and dignity, urging marginalized communities to resist imposed identities and assert their rightful place in history. This call extends to exploring other critical topics such as the impact of systemic racism on mental health, the role of education in fostering cultural awareness, the significance of intersectionality in understanding oppression, and the importance of reclaiming narratives within marginalized communities.

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