

2000

## Nicknames of Malcolm

Brenda A. Ayres

*Liberty University*, bayres@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml\\_fac\\_pubs](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml_fac_pubs)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ayres, Brenda A., "Nicknames of Malcolm" (2000). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 14.  
[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml\\_fac\\_pubs/14](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml_fac_pubs/14)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English and Modern Languages at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

offer of assistance by how well it treated black Americans. This would be an appropriate measuring stick. A story was carried in the March 21, 1964, edition in which Malcolm claimed that the Black Muslims\* had sent an assassin to kill him. However, the potential assassin refused to try to kill Malcolm. Instead, he told Malcolm of the plot and informed him that he was wanted dead by the organization. The April 18, 1964, edition carried an article related to the eviction proceedings of Malcolm X from the home that he was living in. The home was in East Elmhurst,\* Queens, New York, and was owned by the NOI.

Malcolm was silenced by the NOI for his "chickens coming home to roost"\* statement over the assassination of President John F. Kennedy\* in November 1963. But he was still able to publicize a number of statements and news items in the *Amsterdam News* through Jimmy Booker, a columnist for the paper.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

*New York Amsterdam News*, March 21, 1964, April 18, 1964; B. Perry, 1991.

*Mfanya Donald Tryman*

**NEW YORK TIMES.** Except for *Muhammad Speaks*,\* perhaps no newspaper provided greater coverage of the life and times of Malcolm X than the *New York Times*. This does not mean that the coverage was always positive or that it always shed a good light on his statements, views, and activities. Until 1964, Malcolm was often described in the *New York Times* as an extremist, preaching violence, racial supremacy, and racial separation.\* The *Times* covered almost everything that Malcolm said or did. This included his views on racial segregation\* and legal racial separation,\* the eviction from his home in East Elmhurst,\* Queens, human rights\* and civil rights\* of African Americans, a confrontation between police and Black Muslims\* in Los Angeles (which the *Times* described as a Black Muslim riot), Malcolm's support for Barry Goldwater\* over Lyndon B. Johnson\* in the 1964 presidential election, his suspension from the Nation of Islam\* after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy,\* the firebombing of his home, and his assassination.

But Malcolm also received positive coverage from the *New York Times*. When he denounced Elijah Muhammad\* as a religious fake, the paper gave him positive coverage for his change in views as well. When Malcolm threatened to bring the case of human rights to the United Nations,\* the *Times* not only covered it but also pointed out Malcolm's contention that it was hypocritical of the United States in attacking apartheid in South Africa\* when the United States had the same situation in the American South.\* Similarly, when Malcolm argued that black Americans needed to return to Africa culturally, philosophically, and spiritually, the *Times* gave him positive press coverage. He reminded black Americans that Africa was their homeland and that they should have a psychological and cultural identity related to the continent. Malcolm argued in the *Times* article that the United States Information Agency (USIA)\* was attempting to give Africans an idyllic picture of African Americans in the United States.

At times, given its circulation, Malcolm sought out the newspaper, and often the newspaper would seek him. Both parties realized that it was advantageous in connecting with the other. Malcolm could make certain of his ideas public to a wide audience, and the *Times* could sell more newspapers given Malcolm's controversial public persona.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

*New York Times*, February 28, April 23, December 5, 1963, August 13, December 13, 1964, February 22, 1965.

*Mfanya Donald Tryman*

**NICKNAMES.** Throughout his life Malcolm X, formerly Malcolm Little, was known by his various nicknames, aliases, and titles. Some of these names reflected references to his physical characteristics, whereas others were directly related to the changes that occurred in his life. Malcolm's first nicknames came from other children who ostracized him for the reddish color of his skin and hair. "Chink," "Chinaman," "Snowflake," and "Eskimo" were some of the first names that, according to Malcolm, increased his bitterness about having a white rapist's (his maternal grandfather's) blood in his veins. One of his brothers, a favorite of his mother's apparently because of his darker skin, was called "Blackie" in contrast to Malcolm, who was called "Milky." The friction between Malcolm and his brother Philbert\* once led to a fight in which Philbert knocked out the inside corners of Malcolm's two front teeth; thereafter, some called Malcolm "Toothless Blondie."

As was the case with the other few black kids in Lansing, Michigan,\* Malcolm was called "Nigger," "Darkie," and "Rastus" so often that he once joked that he thought them to be his natural names. Because he was always such a free spirit, notably happy in his disposition on the streets of New York, friends and acquaintances nicknamed him "Happy." But the nicknames that caused him much anxiety were those that drew attention to his skin color. While working on a train, he came to be known as "Sandwich Red." In his days as a hustler, he was "Harlem Red," "Detroit Red," and "Big Red." When the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)\* established its first files on him in 1953, a notation indicates that he was also referred to as "Rhythm Red," likely a reference to his dancing reputation during his "hipster" days in Roxbury\* and Harlem.\* In prison he was called "Satan" because of his antireligious hostility. He was also called "Mr. Know-How" and the "Green-Eyed Monster."

Once converted to Islam,\* Malcolm took the last name of "X" to signify the unknown African name stolen from his ancestors when they came to the New World as slaves. Some Muslims\* referred to him as Big M. During his estrangement from the Nation of Islam (NOI),\* Elijah Muhammad\* would call him the "Child Hypocrite," although it would not detract from the more serious and respectful names of honor bestowed on him such as Omowale and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz.\* The former name meant "the child has come home" and was be-

stowed upon him by Nigerian traditionalists and students during his 1964 African tour; the latter name in honor of his pilgrimage to Mecca\* and conversion to Sunni Islam. While Malcolm continued to answer to and refer to himself as Malcolm X, his new Islamic name represented a new phase of his life, and the honorable recognition was very important to him. Hence, El-Hajj Malik Shabazz was the name that was engraved on his gravestone at his burial site in New York's Ferncliff Cemetery.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cone, 1992; DeCaro, 1996; Goldman, 1979; Malcolm X with Haley, 1965; Myers, 1993; O'Reilly (Gallen, ed.), 1994; B. Perry, 1991; Sales, 1994.

*Brenda Ayres*

**NIGERIA.** Malcolm X made two 1964 journeys abroad that included stops in thirty African countries. Malcolm's West Africa tours influenced his political and religious identity tremendously. The trips gave him a greater connection to his African origins and to his black Islamic roots. He was the first black leader of the 1960s to speak in Africa directly about the plight of blacks in the United States. Malcolm X visited the West African country of Nigeria in May 1964 and returned in the fall of 1964 on a more extensive African tour. He met with President Nnamdi Azikiwe, appeared on Nigerian radio and television programs, and spoke at the University of Ibadan, where students intimidated a West Indian professor who tried to defend the United States against Malcolm's criticisms. According to Nigerian scholar E. U. Essien-Udom,\* who knew Malcolm personally from his time in the United States, Malcolm excited the Nigerian crowds whenever he spoke with his rare combination of oratorical brilliance and "naked honesty." It was while in Nigeria that Malcolm seemed to abandon any idea of a large-scale African American physical return to Africa; rather, blacks should seek a philosophical, social, and cultural return to their homeland in order to develop a better working framework for Pan-Africanism.\* The Muslim Student Society of Nigeria made Malcolm an honorary member, giving him the name "Omowale," Yoruba for "the child has returned." Malcolm regarded the recognition as one of his greatest honors.

During his second 1964 trip to Africa, Malcolm's speeches took on an increasingly anti-imperialist cast. He hoped to internationalize the African American struggle by connecting the problems of blacks in the United States with those of the black community throughout the world. He met with African heads of states, which included Nigerian President Azikiwe, and lobbied to bring the issue of racism and discrimination against African Americans before the United Nations.\* The receptions that Malcolm received in West Africa solidified his position as an international figure.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Essien-Udom, 1971; Malcolm X (Breitman, ed.), 1987; *Militant*, June 1, December 7, 1964; Sales, 1994; R. Turner, 1997.

*Monte Piliawsky*



Richard Nixon during a dinner speech in Mississippi in the early 1960s. Mississippi Republican Party Papers, Special Collections Department, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.

**NIXON, RICHARD MILHOUS.** A graduate of Whittier College in 1934, and Duke University Law School in 1937, Richard Nixon narrowly lost the 1960 presidential campaign to President John F. Kennedy.\* In 1968, Nixon won the presidency and was reelected in 1972. The Watergate scandal caused him to resign the presidency on August 9, 1974.

Malcolm X taught that only under exceptional conditions could blacks make lasting gains in the electoral arena. He argued for an all-black political party, independent of the two major parties. An example of Malcolm's standard references to Nixon was his January 23, 1963, speech entitled "Twenty Million Black People in a Political, Economic and Mental Prison." Malcolm noted that in the 1960 presidential election, because whites were closely divided between the two candidates, the black vote made Kennedy president.

As it was with all white political figures, Malcolm thought little of Richard Nixon. He once referred to him sarcastically as "Tricky Dick," a term that