

## By Any Means Necessary

A review of Spike Lee's Malcolm X  
by Tony Tracy

The life and ideas of Malcolm X have been an inspiration to many, including Blacks and revolutionaries, over the past thirty years. Likewise, Spike Lee's film about Malcolm X is also tremendously inspiring, not only for the lessons of the past which are brought to life onscreen, but also for the linkages to current anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles and the conclusions which are applicable to conditions today.

Lee's film is a stunning success in that it allows Malcolm — via Denzel Washington's brilliant performance — to once again tell the truth about racism in America to an audience of millions. Of course, Spike Lee and others have already made millions from the various marketing spin-offs and merchandising of Malcolm X paraphernalia, as was evidenced by the number of "X" hats and t-shirts seen in the audience at the Montréal theater where I watched the film over the Christmas break.

However, happily, Lee did not cash in by watering down the power of the message given by Malcolm, or by turning him into a harmless icon. Lee places Malcolm X squarely at the center of a tradition of uncompromising Black struggle from the opening scenes of the movie, which include Malcolm's indictment of white America heard over the videotape footage of the beating of Rodney King in L.A., to the end of the movie, which has a succession of Black children from both Harlem and Soweto learning about the legacy of Malcolm and repeating one after the other "I am Malcolm X", followed by Nelson Mandela reading one of Malcolm's speeches. This sequence underlines the international nature of the struggle against racism and oppression, which became one of Malcolm's major themes toward the end of his life.

At the beginning of the movie, Malcolm begins to become immersed in the music, dance, and glamour of ghetto culture, and begins regularly undergoing the hair-straightening "conking" ritual which he later came to regard as the epitome of Black self-hatred. One third of the movie is devoted to this early life of Malcolm, including his humorous exploits with his friend Shorty (played by Lee himself) in the wartime Roxbury area of Boston and his recruitment to a Harlem numbers running and drug gang. As Malcolm becomes more and more immersed in a cocaine-crazed criminal life, we are shown flashbacks to Malcolm's childhood which reveal that Malcolm was trying to escape from the racism that destroyed his family and set out to teach him that he was worthless. There are very powerful images used to underline these feelings, including the images of hooded Klansmen attacking and intimidating Malcolm's family, as well as the image of a school teacher telling Malcolm that his dream of being a lawyer was "unrealistic for a nigger" and that he should look at carpentry instead. Clearly, it was Malcolm's rage at these childhood experiences which drove him into drugs; it was a rage turned inward.

It is only after Malcolm ends up imprisoned that his ideas begin to change, as his rage becomes directed at the real institutions of power, represented by the racist prison guards who put him in solitary confinement for failing to recite his number on demand. The remainder of the movie shows, to some degree, the transformation in thought which Malcolm was constantly undergoing and the change in his ideas which brought him from the street to a leadership position in the Nation of Islam.

In prison, Malcolm is introduced to the ideas of the Nation, but refuses to join the Nation until he sees a Black Muslim argue for Black nationalism under the nose of a white prison guard. By highlighting Malcolm's attraction to this apparently secular, militant side of the Nation of Islam, Lee captures the contradiction that would ultimately lead to his break with the organization. For while the Nation denounced racism in the United States, it stood apart from the civil rights struggles in the South and focused its activities on winning converts to the Muslim religion.

Upon his release from prison, Malcolm is shown in the movie moving up in the Nation of Islam's ranks to the position of national spokesperson. The power of the Nation's organization is also shown through a depiction of Malcolm leading a march on a police station and a hospital in response to the shooting and arrest of a Black man. His personal devotion to the leader of the Nation, Elijah Muhammad, was highlighted. Later, the screenplay dwells on Malcolm's discovery of corruption by Muhammad and others within the Nation, and particularly Muhammad's sexual infidelities with women on the Nation's staff.

One of the pivotal scenes of the movie shows Malcolm, silent and alone, watching television newsreels of Birmingham, Alabama Sheriff Eugene "Bull" Connor setting dogs and firehoses on Black children in 1963. Malcolm's frozen gaze and rigid demeanor symbolize his political paralysis inside the Nation of Islam. As a Nation leader, he was forbidden by Elijah Muhammad from relating to the increasingly radical struggle in the South.

Later, Malcolm is shown at a press conference giving comments about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Lee cuts between film clips of the assassination and Washington's portrayal of Malcolm, with a hint of a smile on his face, summing up the assassination as the inevitable result of a society built on violence, saying that "the chickens have come home to roost. And being an old farm boy myself, the chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad, they've always made me glad."

Malcolm's subsequent suspension from his position in the Nation by Elijah Muhammad, and his formal break with the Nation in early 1964 begin what is the most engaging portion of the film, while at the same time arguably the most problematic.

Malcolm's political evolution in the final year of his life is not explored in the film to the degree which it could have been. While Malcolm's pilgrimage to Mecca is shown as having introduced him to white Muslims and having opened him up to the possibility of working with whites and with other Black leaders whom he had previously denounced, his trip to West Africa is omitted, as are his linkages with American socialists and his brief but important meetings with Black student civil rights activists days before he was killed. The film does not make explicit Malcolm's critique of capitalism and his turn to revolutionary, internationalist politics after his break with the Nation of Islam. Rather than explore this political evolution, Lee's film is mainly concerned with speculations about a quite plausible conspiracy involving members of the Nation of Islam and the FBI to kill Malcolm.

While this omission of many of Malcolm's later ideas and political evolution do weaken the film considerably, it is still very much a film worth watching. Denzel Washington has recreated Malcolm X so effectively that those familiar with Malcolm's last speeches can easily fill in the blanks, while those unfamiliar with them will be inspired to learn more. The film's greatest accomplishment is that it puts Malcolm's legacy at the center of current political debate and shows his ideas to be relevant not only in the early nineteen sixties, but also in the nineteen nineties.

See Spike Lee's film. Then check out books of Malcolm's speeches (most of which are available from Pathfinder Press in New York) for a greater understanding of Malcolm X's contribution to the struggle against racism.

## The Other Side...

by Jethelo E. Cabilete

Hello! Hello! Hello! How's everyone this term? Get much loot from Santa? Never want to see another turkey? Well guess what, welcome back to Hell and Beyond, The Sequel. If you ask me, Christmas Break was too damn short! Anyway, this is The Other Side of the Picture, one of the many entertainment columns in here. Since this is the first issue of the term, I'll keep this short.

First off, the UNB Art Center (in Memorial Hall, just to refresh the ole' brain cells) is presenting two exhibitions starting January 10, 1993. George Fry's Blind Summer and Dale McBride's The Naked Ape are works that encompass the human figure in all its forms. Nancy Bauer will be the guest speaker January 10, and it opens at 2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m. on that Sunday. On January 14, 1993 at noon, the artists themselves will give a walking tour of the exhibition, and will answer questions about their respective artworks.

On the musical side of UNB, the UNB Centre for Musical Arts has two special events coming up. Starting January 10, 1993, the UNB Concert Band and Bicentennial Choir will be joined by the Fredericton Chamber Orchestra, Coeur de Sol and many others for an April performance of Mozart's Requiem. Approximately 100 performers will begin rehearsals for this sure to be stunning extravaganza, and anyone who wants to be a part of the performance should call Richard Hornsby at 453-4660. Remember, rehearsals begin this Sunday, January 10, 1993 at 7:30 p.m.

The second musical event, is a series of music workshops starting February. The four workshops will be held in Memorial Hall and is open for music teachers, advanced students and adult amateurs. The focus is on the different aspects of performing music with other people, using any instrument. The workshops cost \$50.00 and are to be held February 6, 13, 20 and 27, 1993 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The instructors will be Arlene and Jo Pach, Resident Musicians and Richard Hornsby, UNB's Director of Music. The deadline for registration is January 29, 1993 and any further information can be obtained by calling 453-4697.

Well, I guess this is it for now. Oh wait! As a sideline, the UNB Art Club, UNB Concert Band and Bicentennial Choir are still accepting members from students of UNB and STU. For all you musically and artistically minded people, this is your chance to strut your stuff. Soooo, until the next issue, I'm outta here! Ciao!

## Capital Film Society

January 11: Husband and Wives

dir. Woody Allen, USA, 1992, 110 min.

A film, according to John Harkness, that should be locked away for 10 years, so audiences won't see it through a scrim of pornographic gossip. Ironically, H&W, which depicts the collapse of two marriages, is probably Allen's best film since MANHATTAN. With its jittery, handheld, almost documentary-style camera work and the rawdy emotional performances of Mia Farrow and Judy Davis, the film is Allen's most perfect blend of comedy and drama.

January 18: A Brief History of Time

January 25: Salmonberries

February 1: Bob Roberts

February 8: The Living End

February 15: Secret Nation

February 22: Adam's Rib

March 1: Gas, Food, Lodging

March 8: The Best Intentions

March 15: Waiting

March 22: London Kills Me

March 29: Simple Men

April 5, 6: Tous les matins du Monde

April 12: Glengarry Glen Ross

April 19: Being at Home with Claude

All screenings are at 8:00 P.M. sharp

Le communautaire Ste-Anne, 715 Priestman St. Fredericton, NB, E3B 5W7.

For more information, phone 455-2344.

Half-year memberships: regular \$18.00; students (with i.d.) \$12.00; seniors \$12.00.

Admission per screening: with membership \$3.00; without memberships - regular \$7.00 seniors and students \$5.00

## R.I.P.

Dizzy Gillespe dies at 75

Legendary horn player Dizzy Gillespe, age 75, died January 6, in hospital. "His music was playing when he died", said Virginia Wicks, his spokeswoman. He is survived by his wife. They had no children. A private funeral is scheduled for Friday. (AP)

Gasworks Closes in Toronto

The Toronto bar immortalized in the movie Wayne's World and home to Toronto metalheads for the last twenty years closed its doors last weekend, forever. Toronto Sun

Bill Wyman Quits the Stones

Bass Guitarist Bill Wyman announced Wednesday that he has quit the Rolling Stones to concentrate on other music and business interests. (AP)