What role did Malcolm X play in the Civil Rights Movement?

**Learning Objectives:** To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement and to compare and contrast the views of Malcolm X with Martin Luther King.

**Key Terms, Events, Names:** Nation of Islam, Early Life, Elijah Muhammad, Career, Role in Civil Rights, Muslim Mosque Inc., Mecca, Assassination, Legacy

*Be peaceful, obey the law; but if someone puts his hand on you, send him to the cemetery.*

- *Malcolm X*
Are you surprised by this statement?

**Starter:**

“There is a magnificent new militancy within the Negro community all across this nation. And I welcome this as a marvellous development. The Negro of America is saying he’s determined to be free and he is militant enough to stand up” - King, 1963

**LO:** To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement
How did his early life shape his future ideology?

Born **Malcolm Little** in Nebraska his father Earl was an outspoken Baptist lay speaker. He preached the values of black pride and self-reliance along with other UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) leaders. Earl Little’s brothers, one of whom was lynched, died violently at the hands of white men. Because of Ku Klux Klan threats, the family relocated in 1926.
LO: To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement

Identity Issues

- His grandfather was **Scottish**, his mother was so light-skinned that she could have passed for white.
- Malcolm inherited his light complexion - Initially he felt his light skin was a status symbol, but he later said he "**hated every drop of that white rapist's blood that is in me.**"
- Malcolm X later remembered feeling that his father favoured him because he was the lightest-skinned child in the family; however, he thought his mother treated him harshly for the same reason.
- The issue of **skin color** and skin tone took on very significant implications later in Malcolm's life.
LO: To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement

Conversion to Islam

- Father was **murdered** in 1931 by the KKK.
- Malcolm’s mother suffered emotional breakdowns and as a result was sent to a **mental institution**.
- Started off as a great student, however after receiving discouragement from a trusted teacher, he dropped out of high school.
- By the age of 17, he was involved with **narcotics, prostitution** and **gambling**.
- At 21 he was sentenced to 10 years in prison, convicted on burglary charges. During his years in prison, his brother Reginald made continuous visits and introduced the **Muslim religion** to him.
• Intrigued by the Muslim religion, Malcolm began to study the teachings of the Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Elijah Muhammad.
• He became a devoted follower by the time he was paroled (after seven years in prison).
LO: To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement

Nation of Islam

- Founded in July 1930 by Wallace Fard Muhammad.
- Then led by Elijah Muhammad from 1934-75.
- Advocated that Black Americans to **reject white culture**.
- Muhammad enforced the belief that **whites worked to keep blacks from empowering themselves**
- Taught Black Americans to **rediscover African Islamic ancestry and culture**
LO: To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement

- Surname changed from “Little” to “X”, due to the ideology that Little was a slave name.
- Appointed Minister and National spokesperson of NOI.
- His **charisma**, drive and conviction attracted many new members and increased membership by almost 29,500.
- Increased media attention led to the uncomfortable reality of **surveillance** on him and his actions. (FBI agents infiltrated the organization.)
LO: To examine the impact of Malcolm X on the Civil Rights Movement

• After release became most prominent NOI preacher for his excellent speaking skills building membership to over 100,000 between 1952 – 64.
• Became a prominent commentator on civil rights movement – spoke at UN General Council in 1960.
• Believed that black people were superior to white people – came into direct conflict with MLK and opposed the non-violent tactics.
• Critical of March on Washington.
His change in values

- Malcolm resigned his position in NOI after a scandal involving his mentor Elijah-M was revealed. Distrust and tension made it increasingly hard, and as a result he left on a trip to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.
- The trip proved to be life altering as he met with people of all races in which he could “call his brothers”.
- When he returned, he preached not just to African Americans - but to all races of the changes that needed to be made.
- Marked for assassination in the NOI after the tension due to his resignation increased.
Compare and contrast the ideas and beliefs of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X in relation to the Civil Rights Movement. Watch the documentary debate and use the websites below to help you with this task.

**Sources**
- Comparison between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X
- Read pages 110-118 of 'Civil Rights in the USA 1945-68' by Vivienne Sanders