



"People are always speculating- why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth, must be reviewed. Our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient... In that an objective reader may see how in the society to which I was exposed as a Black youth here in America, for me to wind up in prison was just about inevitable. "

Malcolm X

COMING FROM HOLLYWOOD

Most of the films that we watch come from Hollywood and are set in America. But what image are we given of America in these films? In the chart below try to indicate the kinds of images that we are given in the films that we see. So, if the image of America as a rich country is usual given, then you should put a tick in the "very" box.

AMERICA AND ITS PEOPLE....

	VERY		AVERAGE		VERY		
Rich	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Poor
Violent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Peaceful
Healthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sick
Generous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Mean
Quiet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Noisy
Prejudiced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Tolerant
Modern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Old-Fashioned
Caring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Uncaring
Black	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	White
Religious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Atheist
Workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Bosses

How far do you think that this is a true representation of America? If you think that it is not true, then why do you think that it is the representation that is most commonly shown in films from Hollywood.

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN FILM

The films that you see at the cinema all tend to have the same form of telling a story. There is a beginning, a middle and an end. At the beginning of the film, a situation is shown, during the middle section events happen to unbalance the situation shown at the opening and at the end there is a resolution of the events. Changes have occurred during the whole story.

When we come to talk about "MALCOLM X, the story of one man's life, one could expect the story to begin with his childhood and end with his death. However, the director, Spike Lee, has chosen a different way of showing Malcolm X's life. This is not the only difference in the film, however. The major difference between this film and most of the films that we are shown at the cinema is that the central character of the film is Black.

We will start by examining this point. In the chart below, list the last five films that you have seen (excluding "MALCOLM X"). For each film shade in the box which best fits the description of the central character of each film.

LIST OF YOUR FILMS	BOY 0-18	GIRL 0-18	WOMAN 18+	MAN 18+	WOMAN 55+	MAN 55+

When you have completed this chart, take each of the central characters and try to describe them - their colour, their jobs etc.

When you have done this, as a class pull together your findings. It is useful to do this as this will give you a greater range of films. Can you draw any conclusions about who is represented and who is not? Do you think that the types of people rarely represented in films ever go to the cinema?

Before we move onto look at the character of Malcolm X and others shown in the film, think about Black characters that do appear in films. Try to think of four or five films that you have seen which contain Black characters. What sort of role do they play? How important are they to the overall development of the story? If Hollywood gives an image of Black people, what is that image? Can you come to any conclusions as to why this is the image that is given?

THE CHARACTER OF MALCOLM X

As we said earlier on, what happens in a film and the ways in which the various situations are resolved are normally in the hands of one character. In the case of the film that you have just seen, that character is Malcolm X. As a member of the audience we get to know the different characters by different means.

For the following characters in 'MALCOLM X' draw up a character profile under the headings given:

	The Honourable Elijah Mohammad	Shorty	Betty
Age	_____	_____	_____
Appearance	_____	_____	_____
Gestures	_____	_____	_____
Lifestyles	_____	_____	_____

What other information would you like to have known about the character? If you try to do the same with Malcolm, can you come up with simply one description of him? Or do you need more than one? Have a go at repeating the exercise, using the same headings as above. You might need to present more than one character profile for him.

FILM AS BIOGRAPHY - TIME SCALES



At the start of this guide we said that filmed stories tend to have a beginning, a middle and an end. 'MALCOLM X' begins in 1992. It shows an extract from the video of Rodney King being beaten by four policemen intercut with a burning American flag.

Why do you think that Spike Lee chose to start the film like this? What does the juxtaposition of these two images say to you? How do they help introduce what will follow? What do they say about the relevance of Malcolm X's message in the 1990's?

The film then moves back to the 1940's when Malcolm is in his late teens. Continually in this first section there are flashbacks to his childhood.

Why do you think that Spike Lee did not start with all of the childhood sequences and then move on to the 1940's but instead intercuts them at relevant moments of the story? Look-at the quotation at the beginning of the guide. How do Malcolm X's own words help shape the film?

DESIGNING MEANING

As the film progresses through Malcolm's life we see the various changes that occur within him and in the circles within which he moves. As well as the words that we hear him saying, the way that the film is made also helps us to notice these changes.

The production designer of the film, Wynn Thomas, has said that the film was designed in three parts. The first covers his early years, the second the period of his enlightenment in prison and the third his development as an activist.

'We made the beginning phase of his life very colourful and vibrant. We've filmed several nightclub scenes during the 1940's using lots of texture and colours. "

"What happens to Malcolm during that period (in prison, the second phase) is a rebirth. We are draining colour from his life and as a result the prison is treated monochromatically. We used a lot of greys, whites and blues. "

"In the third phase of the film Malcolm has become a leader and he's more serious, so we're using earth tones - browns, greens and natural tones - to reflect controlled realism. "

Ruth Carter's wardrobe selection follows suit, as indicated in the clothing for Baines, the Muslim who introduces Malcolm to the NOI in prison.

"When we first see Baines, he's dressed in warm brown tones to show how inviting he is. As Baines gets closer to the Honourable Elijah Mohammad and begins to plant poison in his mind about Malcolm, I dressed him in greys. Finally, after Elijah Mohammad's health deteriorates and Baines becomes more powerful in the NOI, he is wearing dark double breasted suits."

If we add an additional section to these breakdowns into sections - the moment when Malcolm goes to Mecca, let us see if you can identify the various changes in Malcolm's development and the ways in which they were shown in the film.

Firstly, can you think of moments from the film which would illustrate the comments made by Thomas? Which sequences actually show the ways in which each phase of Malcolm's life were different. Then insert the different stages of Malcolm's life as you have described them earlier.

To take this idea one stage further, consider the two sequences which take place in dance halls. The first is in the early part of the film when Malcolm is still a young street hustler. The second is at a dance organised by the OAAU which comes towards the end of the film. How were the two different sequences shot?

As we have said, the sections of documentary footage at the end of the film are from footage taken at the time. One other interesting piece at the end of the film are the sequences of Nelson Mandela and the streets of Soweto. Why should Lee include these in the film? Again, what does this tell us about Malcolm's message?

DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

The producer of the film, Marvin Worth, had already made a feature film length documentary about Malcolm X in 1972. Since that time he had been trying to find someone to make a feature film about 'MALCOLM X'

Why do you think that it was important for Worth that the story of Malcolm X was also made into a feature film? What would you say were the differences between a documentary and a feature film? Try to list these as many differences as you can think of.

Which of the two forms do you think delivers a truer picture of an event? Why do you think this is? The fact that the film 'MALCOLM X' is based on the book "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" means that what we see is twice removed from the actual events. It is also worth bearing in mind that Malcolm's life is seen through the eyes of the scriptwriter and director of the film. How might this affect what we are shown on the screen?

In addition to the fact that the film is based on a true life story, it also deals with political themes. When we talk about films we normally say that they "entertain" us. Would you say the same about politics? Do they entertain us? What do you think are the challenges to a film director who wants to make a film about a political subject? How can they make the film "entertain" as well as possibly "instruct. us?"

Having seen the film, is it possible to say which sections of the film fit into the idea of entertainment and which sections get across a message. Has Spike Lee succeeded in merging the two so that we are "entertained" and "instructed" at the same time?

DOCUMENTARY IN DRAMA

Oliver Stone's film 'JFK' was criticised because it used black and white footage shot in 1990 as part of a reconstruction of events alongside real footage actually shot at the time of Kennedy's assassination. Critics said that audiences would not be able to tell the real documentary footage from the reconstruction and thus would be biased in their views.

Spike Lee adopts a similar and yet different approach. He includes black and white footage which is reconstructed within the film but then at the end of the film he runs a selection of documentary' footage from the 1960's. Why do you think that Lee shot parts of the film itself in

black and white to look like documentary footage? b) what was the point of including the real documentary; footage at the end of the film?

Whilst watching the film itself did you believe that the black and white sections were real footage from the time? Were you given any clues as to whether they were or were not genuine documentary, footage?

THE MESSAGE

The words that we hear Malcolm X saying in the film are words that were actually spoken at the time. It is important to realise that these were just one of the attitudes taken in America during this period by Black people. Below are some comments made by Malcolm X and also a short extract from a speech by Martin Luther King. Compare the attitudes that the two men have towards the problem of civil rights and the position of Black people in American society (then and to all intent and purposes now).

"We are simply seeking to bring into full realisation the American Dream - a dream yet to unfulfilled. A dream of equality' of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men no longer argue that the colour of a man's skin determines the content of his character; the dream of a land where every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality - this is the dream."

MARTIN LUTHER KING

All of the following are statements by Malcolm X:

"What is looked on as an American Dream for white people has long been an American nightmare for Black people. "

"Any Negro trying to integrate is actually admitting his inferiority, because he is admitting that he wants to become a part of a "superior" society. "

"The real criminal is the white man who poses as a liberal - the political hypocrite. And it is these legal crooks, posing as our friends, (who are) forcing us into a life of crime and then using us to spread the white man's evil vices among our own people. Our people are scientifically manoeuvred by the white man into a life of poverty. You are not poor accidentally. He manoeuvred you into poverty. You are not a drug addict accidentally. Why, the white man

manoeuvres you into drug addiction. You are not a prostitute accidentally. You have been manoeuvred into prostitution by the American white man. There is nothing about your condition here in America that is an accident."

"What I want to know is how the white man, with the blood of Black people dripping off his fingers, can have the audacity to be asking Black people do they hate him. That takes a lot of nerve."

"We declare our right on this earth to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being, in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary. "

Here is a quotation from Malcolm X after he had returned from Mecca. How does this differ from his earlier statements?

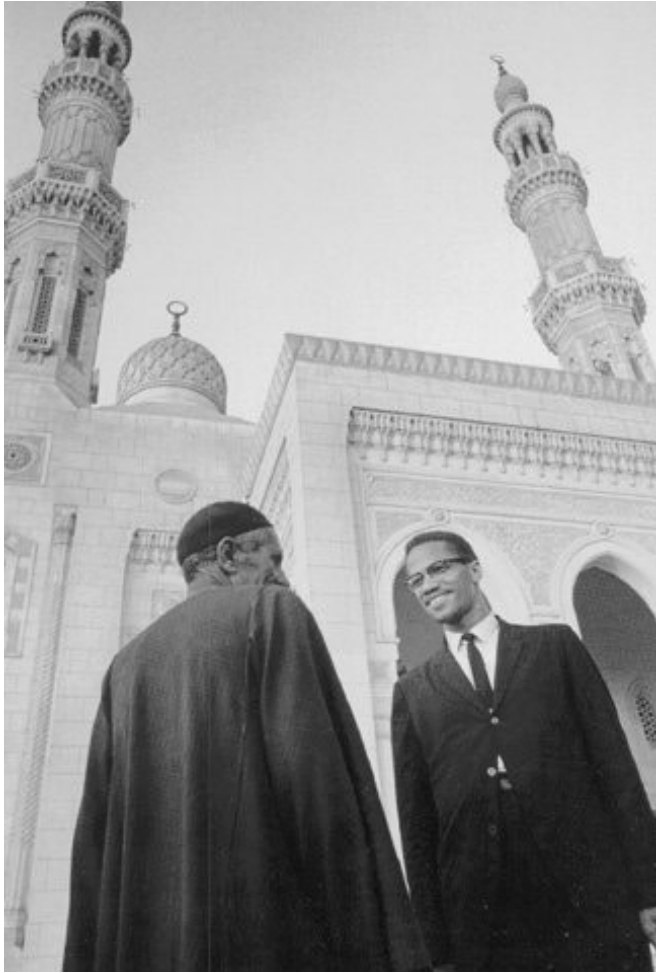
"I don't speak against the sincerer, well meaning good white people...I have learned that not all white people are racists. I am speaking against the white racists."

YOU AND THE FILM

You have seen the film and have worked on a number of different activities. How would you describe the film to a friend. You will obviously make a value judgement - good or bad. But what are you basing your judgement on? To what are you comparing the film 'MALCOLM X'?

In your description of the film, what will you say? Is it "the story about a man who lived in the sixties and was killed". Or is it about more than this? Answer the following questions before you give your final answer.

- 1 Did you find the film dramatic or exciting?
- 2 How would you describe the character of Malcolm X. Is he an idealist? Or is he easily persuaded by others - from his friend Shorty to the Honourable Elijah Mohammad to follow in their footsteps?
- 3 Of the main characters, which actor or actress gave the most convincing performance?
- 4 What have you learned from the film about the conditions of Blacks in America in the 1960's?
- 5 Does this film tell you enough to understand what was happening during the period?
- 6 How does the film relate to the 1990's?



"Sometimes I have dared to dream . . . that one day, history may even say that my voice- which disturbed the white man's smugness, and his arrogance, and his complacency - that my voice helped to save America from a grave, possible even fatal catastrophe. "

Malcolm X

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