

Malcolm X Written Primary Source Activity

In April, 1964 Malcolm X made a Hajj, a pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a journey that is a religious obligation of Muslims who are able to do so. While in Mecca for the annual Hajj, pilgrims take part in a series of rituals to reaffirm their faith and to connect them to other followers of Islam.

The reading below is a series of excerpts from a letter that Malcolm X wrote to a friend during his travels. He signs the letter El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. "El Hajj" is a title that people may use once they have made a pilgrimage to Mecca. He had changed his name from Malcolm X to the traditional Islamic name of Malik El-Shabazz when he broke with the Nation of Islam in March of 1964.

Read the excerpts and then answer the questions that follow.

Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and 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, I have been utterly speechless and spellbound by the graciousness I see displayed all around me by people *of all colors*....

There were tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blonds to black-skinned Africans. But we were all participating in the same ritual, displaying a spirit of unity and brotherhood that my experiences in America had led me to believe never could exist between the white and non-white.

...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.

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 always been 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.

During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug)--while praying to the *same* God--with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the *words* and in the *actions* in the *deeds* of the 'white' Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.

We were *truly* all the same (brothers)--because their belief in one God had removed the white from their *minds*, the white from their *behavior*, and the white from their *attitude*...I could see from this, that perhaps if white Americans could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in *reality* the Oneness of Man--and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their 'differences' in color....

...Never have I been so highly honored. Never have I been made to feel more humble and unworthy. Who would believe the blessings that have been heaped upon an *American Negro*? A few nights ago, a man who would be called in America a 'white' man, a United Nations diplomat, an ambassador, a companion of kings, gave me *his* hotel suite, *his* bed. ... Never would I have even thought of dreaming that I would ever be a recipient of such honors--honors that in America would be bestowed upon a King--not a Negro.

Sincerely,

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X)

1. Malcolm X twice mentions that he has eaten with white people in Mecca. Why do you think the act of sharing a meal with people different from himself was so notable to Malcolm X?

2. Malcolm X states that, “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.” What do you think he means by a “‘white’ attitude”?

3. In this letter, Malcolm X makes numerous statements that were in direct contradiction to views he had expressed publicly on many occasions. For example, he had often referred to all white people as “devils.” What does it reveal about his character that he was willing to reconsider his beliefs?

4. Excerpts from this letter were printed in the *New York Times* on May 8, 1964, in an article entitled, “Malcolm X Pleased by Whites’ Attitude on Trip to Mecca.” What reactions might people have had as they read about Malcolm X’s drastic break with his past views? Do you think that the *New York Times* would have published excerpts of the letter if it did not reflect a change from Malcolm X’s earlier belief that white people could not be trusted? (NOTE: This discussion will require a substantial level of maturity and trust among students because of the sensitive racial issues involved; it may not be appropriate for all classes.)