



On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X

By Louis A. DeCaro Jr.

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The mythic figure of Malcolm X conjures up a variety of images--black nationalist, extremist, civil rights leader, hero. But how often is Malcolm X understood as a religious leader, a man profoundly affected by his relationship with Allah?

During Malcolm's life and since, the press has focused on the Nation of Islam's rejection of integration, offering an extremely limited picture of its ideology and religious philosophy. Mainstream media have ignored the religious foundation at the heart of the Nation and failed to show it in light of other separatist religious movements. With the spirituality of cultic black Islam unexplored and the most controversial elements of the Nation exploited, its most famous member, Malcolm X, became one of the most misunderstood leaders in history.

In *On the Side of My People*, Louis A. DeCaro, Jr. offers the first book length religious treatment of Malcolm X. Malcolm X was certainly a political man. Yet he was also a man of Allah, struggling with his salvation—as concerned with redemption as with revolution.

Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including extensive interviews with Malcolm's oldest brother, FBI surveillance documents, the black press, and tape-recorded speeches and interviews, DeCaro examines the charismatic leader from the standpoint of his two conversion experiences--to the Nation while he was in jail and to traditional Islam climaxing in his pilgrimage to Mecca. Examining Malcolm beyond his well-known years as spokesman for the Nation, *On the Side My People* explores Malcolm's early religious training and the influence of his Garveyite parents, his relationship with Elijah Muhammad, his often overlooked journey to Africa in 1959, and his life as a traditional Muslim after the 1964 pilgrimage. In his critical analysis of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, DeCaro provides insight into the motivation behind Malcolm's own story, offering a key to understanding how and why Malcolm portrayed his life in his own autobiography as told to Alex Haley.

Inspiring and necessary, *On the Side My People* presents readers with a Malcolm

X few were privileged to know. By filling in the gaps of Malcolm's life, DeCaro paints a more complete portrait of one of the most powerful and relevant civil rights figures in American history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Until recently, general ignorance about Islam has been a limiting factor in both preparing and reading accounts of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and of Malcolm X, who was the chief spokesman for NOI founder Elijah Muhammad until late 1963; but things have changed of late, and this book makes good use of those changes. By the time of his assassination in February 1965, Malcolm X had himself become the most prominent spokesperson for black nationalism. DeCaro, in his first book, has produced a groundbreaking study of Malcolm's relationship to Islam as a religion. Included as well is an account of the often contentious interaction between NOI and more orthodox Islamic groups, as well as a revealing account of early Islamic evangelism in African American communities. This is the best, most thorough account we have of Malcolm X as a religious leader.

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From Library Journal

Malcolm X (1925-65), one of the most controversial and influential African American leaders of this century, rose from street hustler and convict to become the most outspoken minister in the Nation of Islam and the black community. In this replay of the famous Muslim's life, DeCaro, a religious educator and freelance writer, reflects on the spiritual side of the late martyr and critiques his autobiography. He details Malcolm's early life and spiritual training, his ministry, his pilgrimage to Mecca, and his relationship with his mentor, Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Black Muslims. He also presents a brief history of the Nation, rooted in black nationalism, the belief in a separate black state. For another perspective on Malcolm X's religious life, see James Cone's *Martin and Malcolm and America* (Orbis, 1991). This is a good refresher course but not a necessary purchase; suitable for religion collections and for those with an abiding interest in Malcolm X. Ann Burns, "Library Journal"

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From [Booklist](#)

A book that will surely find its way onto every short list of indispensable sources for understanding the life and work of Malcolm X. The religious dimension of Malcolm X is rightly emphasized, and in this respect, the book is an important addition to James Cone's groundbreaking *Martin & Malcolm & America* (1991). But it is also important for the clarity with which it presents Malcolm's Garveyite roots and internationalist perspective, both factors that owe more to his family than to the Nation of Islam. Those roots help explain Malcolm's development toward Sunni orthodoxy in the context of his pan-African commitment. Attending to them should help correct the provincial interpretation to which Malcolm has so often been subjected--by both detractors and admirers. DeCaro carefully traces Malcolm's spiritual development from the Garveyite teaching of his parents and pluralist religious toleration of his mother through his involvement with the cultic and exclusive Nation of Islam to his full embrace of Orthodox Islam before, during, and after his pilgrimage to Mecca. The whole life, as DeCaro reads it, is one of Islam, a submission that is marked by continuous conversion. DeCaro's work is scholarly and thorough, but it is also accessible; it will deepen both the popular and scholarly appreciation of Malcolm X and his contribution to the unfinished work of human liberation.

Steve Schroeder

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joshua Mendez:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Book is very important thing for us to understand everything in the world. Each publication has different aim or maybe goal; it means that publication has different type. Some people feel enjoy to spend their time to read a book. These are reading whatever they get because their hobby will be reading a book. Consider the person who don't like looking at a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book after they found difficult problem as well as exercise. Well, probably you will want this On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X.

Roberta Bourland:

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