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 FINE FOR
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WHEN MALCOLM X CAME TO TOWN

He came to air his views. Just weeks later, he was dead.

BY VALERIE RUSS
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HIS LIFE threatened by a “dissident group of Black Muslims,” Malcolm X found himself guarded by a phalanx of city police on his arrival for a late-night radio broadcast with WDAS DJ Joe Rainey on Dec. 29, 1964.

It had been a year since Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam, and numerous threats had been made against him, including that night at the station, said Wynne Alexander, the daughter of WDAS’ then-general manager Bob Klein.

About 75 cops, armed with shotguns and police dogs, combed through the woods around the station, then housed near Fairmount Park, on Edgley Road near Belmont Avenue. As Malcolm X made his way inside, only station employees and the press were allowed in with him.

Two months later, 47 years ago today, on Feb. 21, 1965, Malcolm X would be killed at the Audubon Ballroom, in New York.

But, on this emotionally charged night, he came to Philadelphia to discuss his new ideas on Islam and connections between the struggles of Africans and African-Americans.

“I’m happy to be here, Joe Rainey, honored and pleased,” Malcolm X said to the radio host, a journalist who frequently had civil-rights activists on his show.

“This is one of the few programs that I could get on in this country and get an objective reception.”

It would be a riveting discussion in which the controversial leader of the newly formed Organization of Afro-American Unity connected the struggles of African nations breaking away from colonialism with the struggles of black people in the United States to fight for equal rights.

The December 1964 visit occurred months after his second trip abroad to Mecca, the Middle East and Africa, and after he had renounced the former separatist, anti-white position that he often had

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Malcolm X arrived here at radio station WDAS with a police escort to protect him from suspected violence. Just two months later, he was assassinated in New York.

SAM PSORAS / PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS



Walking through a row of Philadelphia Police there to protect him, Malcolm X arrived at WDAS studios on the night of Dec. 29, 1964, for one of his last interviews.

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been criticized for espousing in the past.

In his *Autobiography*, co-written with Alex Haley, Malcolm X wrote that after seeing Muslims of different colors sitting and eating together, he saw that true Islam was not a religion based on segregation by skin color or ethnicity.

“Never have I witnessed such sincere hospitality and the 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,” he wrote in a letter quoted in the book.

“Even I was myself astounded. But there was precedent in my life for this let-

ter. My whole life had been a chronology of — changes.”

On his trip, he also met with heads of state in Egypt, Tanzania, Niger, Uganda, Kuwait and Lebanon.

“When we see that our problem is so complicated and so all-encompassing in its intent and content, then we realize that it is no longer a Negro problem, confined only to the American Negro; that it is no longer an American problem, confined only to America, but it is a problem for humanity,” Malcolm X said.

“It is a problem for the world and it ceases to be a problem of civil rights and becomes a problem of human rights.”

Although many people think that Malcolm’s break with Nation of Islam leader

Elijah Muhammad came after his trip to Mecca, the initial fallout happened in early December 1963.

That’s when Elijah Muhammad suspended Malcolm for 90 days after controversial remarks about the “chickens coming home to roost” following the November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

According to scholar Manning Marable’s *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, Elijah Muhammad ordered his ministers to say nothing in public about Kennedy’s murder, so as not to provoke even more harsh treatment of his followers.

But the 90-day suspension became an indefinite suspension, and by March

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Roots in Philly

WDAS was far from Malcolm X’s only connection to Philadelphia.

► His parents, Earl Little and Louisa Norton Little, lived in the city between 1918 and 1921. His parents moved to Omaha, Neb., where Malcolm was born.

► After he became part of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X was sent to Philadelphia from Boston in March 1954 to establish Mosque No. 12. The former mosque, now a Christian church, the Holy Ghost Crusade Church, still stands on Bailey Street, near Cecil B. Moore Avenue.

Winston Coles, who grew up in the neighborhood, said that his mother and aunt helped to found the Holy Ghost church in the building where Malcolm X once worked to build up the mosque membership.

“I think it’s fantastic to know that he was so close to us,” Coles said. “He was a great leader.” ■

African strength

TRANSCRIPT of Joe Rainey’s Dec. 29, 1964, “Listening Post” show:

Joe Rainey: “So what does the future hold for the black man in Mississippi?”

Malcolm X: “There used to be an expression used in this country that [something] doesn’t have a Chinaman’s chance — because he wasn’t respected, he wasn’t protected. His rights were ignored. . . . But the expression has become outdated. It doesn’t fit anymore. . . . By that I mean, since China itself had become a power on this earth, wherever you find the Chinese person, since China is respected, that Chinaman is respected. . . . His status or condition or position changed only to the degree that the continent or nation with which he was identified ancestrally also was changed. . . . As long as Africa as a continent is weak, is not recognized or respected, people of African origin, African blood or African ancestry wherever they are, Mississippi or otherwise, they won’t be respected, either. But as Africa becomes independent and becomes strong and becomes respected . . . then everyone of African origin and African blood will also be respected wherever they are.” ■

HISTORY

A 'PRINCE' TO THE KING

Malcolm was 'the vanguard of a new generation'

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AT MALCOLM X's funeral in Harlem, actor Ossie Davis described him as "a prince — our own black shining prince — who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so."

Davis spoke poetically about a man once known as a racial separatist, who referred to white people as "devils."

While Malcolm would later renounce those views, his politics were seen in contrast to those of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The "radical" Malcolm lectured black people about being "brainwashed" to hate the color of their skin and the texture of their hair.

And he inspired fear among many whites, even though predominantly white universities often welcomed him as a lecturer.

King, with his message of nonviolence, was the "safer" black activist, who would encourage whites to join the civil-rights movement.

Their perspectives were a 1960s version of a similar conflict between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington at the beginning of the 20th century, with DuBois urging black people to fight to integrate; Washington urging patience and self-reliance.

Islam was not the only factor that shaped Malcolm's views.

He was born May 19, 1925, to parents active in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which urged black people to take pride in their African heritage and become economically independent.

Davis also noted that Malcolm insisted, long before many other black leaders, on connecting himself to his African heritage:

"Malcolm had stopped being a 'Negro' years ago," Davis said. "It had become too small, too puny, too weak a word for him. Malcolm was bigger than that,

"Malcolm had become an Afro-American, and he wanted — so desperately — that we, that all his people, would become Afro-Americans, too."

Molefi Kete Asante, a Temple University professor of African-American studies, said that Malcolm X was the "counterpoint to a racist orthodoxy which had engulfed the lives of African people since the end of slavery.

"He was not just, as Ossie Davis said, 'our manhood,' he also was the vanguard of a new generation of African people who had a fierce sense of pride and a sense of dignity," Asante said. ■

MALCOLM

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1964, Malcolm decided to break away from the Nation of Islam.

Even before his comments on Kennedy's assassination, there had long been death threats, not to mention his home being fire-bombed. Some thought that was because members of the Nation didn't like Malcolm's growing fame as a speaker.

He was frequently invited to speak at colleges. Only weeks before his last appearance at WDAS, Malcolm had taken part in the Oxford Union Debate, at Oxford University, in England, on Dec. 3, 1964.

Malcolm X had spoken on WDAS before, but not under such heated circumstances.

The Rev. Joe Williams, a former member of the Dixie Hummingbirds and now pastor of the Mount Airy United Fellowship, remembers talking with the station's disc jockeys about the interviews.

"They talked about how smart he was," said Williams, who recalled that the Dixie Hummingbirds were scheduled to sing at the Audubon Ballroom the night

that Malcolm X was killed. "That was a very progressive station at that time, very progressive."

The station's ties to the civil-rights movement extended beyond Malcolm X, as showcased in a website created by Alexander, whose maternal grandfather, Max Leon, owned the station.

Her father and grandfather not only welcomed Malcolm X to be interviewed when other radio and TV stations banned him, but they also hosted other civil-rights leaders, including the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., New York Rep. Adam Clayton Powell and Philadelphia NAACP leader Cecil B. Moore.

She said that the station would host "charity concerts" at Philadelphia's old Convention Hall and donate the proceeds to both organizations.

"When he [King] got killed, it was the only time I saw my father cry," Alexander said. "He ordered all programming suspended and we went wall-to-wall with gospel music. We had different community leaders and healers on the air intermittently talking about the loss and Dr. King's ideas. There were appeals to stay calm."

She said that a number of people gave the station credit for helping to keep Philadelphians from rioting after King's death as people did in other cities. ■



Wynne Alexander's grandfather, Max Leon, and father, Bob Klein, made WDAS a welcome place for Malcolm and other rights activists.

CITY

Council's holidays to be cut?

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BECAUSE yesterday was Presidents Day, all city offices were closed and City Council will not meet on Thursday.

That's right. Council's next session will be March 1. It is part of a tradition in which Council does not meet during weeks of a federal holiday.

"It's always been odd that Council didn't meet in a week in which there is a holiday," said Zack Stalberg, president of political watchdog group Committee of Seventy.

Council President Darrell Clarke had hoped to change the age-old tradition, but said there was a miscommunication between offices.

"The absence of a Council session on the calendar [this] week because of a federal holiday is the result of an oversight in our office," Clarke said. "We are reviewing Council's meeting schedule and will make adjustments so it better enables us to conduct the business of the city."

He's reportedly also interested in breaking up Council's three-month summer recess. His spokeswoman, Jane Roh, said Clarke also wants to schedule more public budget hearings at locations around the city.

Although there is no public meeting this week, there is still a lot of work that gets done, Stalberg said, but he hopes Clarke looks into matter. "I hope he will rethink what has long been a long-standing practice," Stalberg said. ■