This is my last written assignment of any course in my graduate career. I embarked on this graduate degree to ignite a change in my life; perhaps more specifically my profession, status, or perspectives on education. I do not know what I hoped to gain, nor do I know what I will have to show for this degree in years to come. I stand looking towards a portal that represents my future, and like that of most portals illustrated in fictitious novels, I don’t know what lays ahead. Change is sometimes unpredictable and unexplainable. Sometimes, change just occurs, because it must. As hard as many change theories, theorists, social scientists and observers of history in all realms of academia try, there are just some moments and people theories can’t explain. Specifically, why or how change occurred within them. One figure that I feel this applies to is American civil rights leader Malik Shabazz, better known as Malcolm X. He is, to me, one of the most transformative human beings of the 20th century. His life has affected and changed (and changes) me in profound ways. Malcolm X, whose life was cut short at age 39 in 1965, exudes the idea of metamorphosis. How he changed himself, and the Civil Rights Movement, Black Freedom and Liberation Movement, Post-Colonial Pan-Africanism, Islamic identity in the North American context, and American politics is awe-inspiring. What he instilled in me from the time I first discovered who he was at age eight will be chronicled in this paper. This narrative inquiry will briefly look at the dynamics of change Malcolm X underwent in his short but monumental life. Then I will explain how that legacy has in many ways given my own life meaning and the motivation to constantly change, adjust to adversity, and reinvent myself. I will then conclude by attempting to explain how Malcolm is an outlier and anomaly when it comes to applying his life to two popular change models. It should be stated that in taking on this paper, I read the most recent, arguably most exhaustive explanation and controversial biographical depiction of Malcolm X, the six hundred page “Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention” (2011) by Columbia professor of African-American studies, the late Manning Marable. All facts summarized on the first six pages of this paper come from that biography (Marable, 2011). However, in my conclusion, I will elaborate how not since Spike Lee’s 1992 biographical motion picture “X”, has anything so profoundly altered my understanding of this historic figure.

Malcolm X was born with the last name Little, a name he later viewed as his slave name, on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His childhood was riddled with uncertainty. Stress, poverty, and strife at the hands of the Great Depression, immense institutionalized racism, the murder of his father, and nervous breakdown of his mother that led to her admittance into a state mental institute. The losses of his parents led to his subsequent separation from his siblings, for the children were all handed over to the foster care system. He grew rapidly apathetic his teen years, disenchanted by the degradation and low expectations his teachers and classmates had of him because of his African American heritage. He transitioned into the hustle and bustle of the nightlife in Detroit, Boston, and Harlem in his late teen years. That slowly led him down a path towards small-time drug dealing, prostitution, and robberies. The illegal activity he embarked on with many acquaintances across many cities in Northeast USA eventually lead him to incarceration, at twenty years old. Arguably, in addition to charges for breaking and entering, his sentence was increased because he was engaged in sexual activities with white women when apprehended, which infuriated those who prosecuted and tried him. He was given eight years for breaking and entering in federal prison. This was the moment that had Malcolm embark on his first change phase, that he underwent on his own terms.

Inside the prison walls, Malcolm learned of and met followers of The Nation of Islam (NOI), a Black American cult-sect that attempts to align itself with orthodox Islam. Through written correspondence, he found out that some of his full and half siblings were also joining the NOI. Impressed with the transformation they were undergoing, pride and optimism they ascertained from the teachings of the NOI’s leader Elijah Muhammad, who they saw as divine; Malcolm converted to this faith. Incarcerated, he changed his life from within prison walls. Malcolm inundated himself in books. Reading almost religiously, about everything. He was a veracious reader. He corresponded directly with Elijah Muhammad from jail, and when he was finally released in 1952, he answered a calling he felt saved him from a life of ignorance, crime, smut, and filth. He immediately moved to Chicago, and became a devout follower of the NOI. Malcolm soon became one of the most vivacious individuals within the group.

The Nation of Islam was a group built on the beliefs that Elijah Muhammed was a divine messenger sent from God, Caucasians were “devils”, and all Black Americans were the “found lost people of Africa”. All in the Nation were to live a life devoted to the empowerment and freedom of Black people, while staying separate and never integrating with mainstream (white) America. They were strong in their regiment and guidelines, and highly organized, having thousands of members around the United States. Though it was viewed as a religious sect and not a political movement, their inception and growth was in itself a pivotal change to the American tapestry at the time. Being manifested and organized in the early 20th century, it seems obvious that their creation was the aftermath for years of demoralization, Jim Crow laws, violence and brutal treatment of African Americans at the hands of “White America”. Its ideology and core values, though disguised in the tenants and beliefs of traditional Islam, were pregnant with anti-white and anti-government sentiments. Those sentiments can be seen as the outcome of Black people’s mistreatment for hundreds of years. It represented a new and more militant option of faith and advocacy for Black Americans. Rather than Christianity or integrationist movement organizations like the NAACP, members joined the NOI in large numbers because it was viewed as an immense and real threat to popular American society and the status-quo (of racial discrimination). The highly organized, strikingly militant group of African American men and women were uninhibited by vices, desires, corruption, or money. However, their momentum was fuelled by their hatred of White America and the dream of Black liberation, separation and sovereignty. These ideas were exciting for many fed up Black Americans, and no doubt petrified the rest of America. It was a threat to the hegemonic powers in the USA. The FBI, CIA, and all police departments, namely the NYPD watched, spied, and wiretapped the group and its activities. This campaign spiked and focused more so when Malcolm was granted the role of minister, and became an oratory powerhouse. He mobilized the membership of thousands and gave powerful sermons on behalf of the group across America. His intelligence, devout adherence to NOI rules around adultery, diet, drugs, alcohol, intoxicants, and violence deemed him almost impossible to indict on any charges or be lured towards any corruption by the FBI or American government, at the time. Giving almost a decade of his life from 1952 to 1962 to the NOI, he rose to prominence in their ranks to soon become the head minister of their movement, making him second in charge only to the head, Elijah Muhammed.

A decade of his life to an organization he would have no question died for. He lived for his father-figure messiah (Elijah Muhammad), a man he believed was a direct messenger from God. He was married to Betty Shabazz, and with her they bared four children. Devoted to his family, he would still put them second in importance to the Nation. One would never think that anything could change or redirect Malcolm’s identity and commitment to the Nation. However, the change Malcolm was about to endure could have quite possibly been just as monumental as the one he experienced in jail. This change was one that brewed inside of Malcolm both through his acquisition of knowledge and the result of certain circumstances thrust upon him.

As Malcolm grew closer to Elijah Muhammad, he soon discovered his vast flaws and inconsistencies. Namely his numerous infidelities and fathering numerous children with six women other than his wife. Malcolm’s disenchantment broke his heart. Concurrently, jealousy and envy against Malcolm grew among other top ministers and members of Elijah Muhammad’s family. In early 1964, Malcolm X received an indefinite suspension from the Nation of Islam for knowing too much, which coincided with his decision to leave the NOI on his own.

For his years in the NOI, Malcolm was notoriously known for his hateful rhetoric that echoed all white people are devils, Christianity was a white person’s religion, and America is a country damned to hell. Furthermore, he had very disingenuous things to say of other black leaders in America, which included Martin Luther King and Bayard Rustin. All was said under the guidance and tutelage of Elijah Muhammad and the NOI. However, after Malcolm broke apart, he travelled the world and experienced the orthodox Muslim pilgrimage of the Hajj. There he saw the races of all nations in solidarity; caring for and sharing with one another, everyone in harmony under the direction of one faith, all becoming renewed or reborn in the Abrahamic rituals that Hajj has one go through. In his travels, he grew to understand that the white race was not inherently evil. There was just something profoundly wrong with the racist policies in America. Furthermore, with his notoriety across the world, heads of states welcomed him across many Arab and African nations. From those meetings and experiences, he returned to America a changed man, seeing the unity of all races and all Black Americans as imperative to end racial injustice in America. Additionally, he saw that involvement in politics was also necessary for change to occur. It was the only means that led towards peace. A transformation had occurred within Malcolm X. One that, for those who knew and studied Malcolm at the time, seemed to be impossible. Sadly, it was, and forever would be, the last thing he had transformed into.

This inclusive and all embracing transformation would be the seal to his legacy. He was able to spread his message and mobilize real change under this new and very progressive paradigm for less than one year after his return from the Hajj. Malcolm X was publicly assassinated in front of his family and followers at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, New York City, on February 21st, 1965.

I was born seventeen years after the assassination of Malcolm X, on April 29, 1982, in Brantford, Ontario. Born second to a brother seven years older than me, I learned and grasped much of the world through his experiences. I knew at an early age that I stood out among my many classmates and friends at school, for often I was the only student of colour. To add to that contrast, I was also the only Muslim in many of my classes as well. From an early age, due to my brother’s interest, I listened to the early politically charged rap lyrics by such African American rap groups such as Public Enemy. They hurled messages about inequity and disenfranchisement, lyrics unquestionably fueled by the mistreatment of African Americans. As a young, curious child, I contemplated on these messages. Furthermore, I watched many videos, read numerous encyclopedias and child-targeted books on black civil-rights figures of the past. No one affected me as much as Malcolm X. To me, he defined what a Muslim has to face and disconnect from in North American society. Furthermore, I saw the parallels between Black Americans and every other visible ethnicity in North America, coming to an understanding that this inequitable and demeaning treatment can happen to any of “us” (visible and religious minorities). I believed truly in solidarity of all against any hegemonic power that chose to govern on a policy of fear, dominance, and injustice based on race and power. It enthralled me so greatly, that at the tender age of nine, in grade three, I did my public speaking speech on Malcolm X. It subsequently led me to be referred to the guidance counselor of our school, but that serendipitously resulted in being diagnosed as a gifted student in the elementary panel.

At this point in my existence, I see my life in three large spheres that coincide with one another quite like a Venn diagram. Those three spheres represent: who am I as a man, who am I as a Muslim, and who am I as a professional (educator). What I have learned from the life and transformative changes Malcolm underwent can be seen as one of the ingredients that formulates the nucleus in the centre of each of those (cell-like) spheres.

First, as a Muslim, Malcolm demonstrated for me that true Islam is not inherent, nor can it be taught by one entity. It’s the summation of a lifetime of trails and errors, journeys to find the truth, and conversations that occur between the heart and mind. In a secular society, a great deal is at one’s reach, but it can be toxic for your development. Rely on your beliefs and seek out the ramifications of all your actions before you partake in them. He led me to understand that being a Muslim is hard, and always will be. Not because of the strict regiment or guidelines, but because to do and believe in what you feel is true is not always easy, and it can make those you once loved become your most vicious enemies. Jihad is a concept that has been vilified by the media, but in Islam it truly means “endless struggle”, and that’s what life is. It is what our religion tells us life is. As much as Malcolm is a hero to me, his life was nothing short of an endless struggle, and what I can take from that is him and I are apart of a religion that does not fool us. Life will always be a struggle, and I have to endure. Malcolm was by no means a prophet, however, as my professor Maurice DiGiuseppe stated in a conversation with me (personal communication, November 7, 2012), he was “prophetic”, and the opinions he had, perspectives he shared, and takes on human kind are applicable to my life today. I do not idolize the man, nor should anyone, but in the realm of popular culture, he is an excellent example of what a North American Muslim should strive to be like.

As a man, I don’t really know where to begin. From the attention he commanded when he walked into a room with a clean and pressed appearance, to the mammoth power he had in his oratory skills, Malcolm taught me how one can catch the attention of others simply by the way you look and speak. I emulated that even at a young age. I always spoke with passion, and attempted to dress dignified and dapper for special occasions. Those traits are superficial. At a deeper and more philosophical level, what I am still grappling with, but no doubt believe, is that everyone has to live for something they are willing to die for. If not that, at least stand up for it in the face of strong opposition. What is mine; my driving force? Perhaps my faith, but I will never know because my life is currently not threatened because of my beliefs and convictions. Malcolm lived nearly a decade in that state. That takes great strength and assurance in what you are living for. What he lived for was for dignity and respect for all oppressed people, and he was willing to (metaphorically) take on all of the United States to achieve that.

Finally, as an educator, Malcolm compels me to always learn more. Ascend to the high ranks of a society one doesn’t see him/herself in, and become a dynamic conduit of change. Do not exist as just “another” somebody. Live your life to equalize the imbalance in power, give voice to the voiceless, and connect with all levels of society. Malcolm X, was the voice for the most downdraught of society. He gave hope and brought change to many who were lost in sadness, substance abuse, or the way of the world. As fierce as he was at a podium, he was sweet in his discourse in a one-on-one situation. He respectfully disagreed with another while always affectionately embracing them as his friend, and patiently listened while he was verbally cut-up and disrespected by those who disagreed with him. I must be that as a teacher and educator, to both children and adults. I feel, for the sacrifice he made for all people who were disenfranchised, I have an obligation to ascend to a position of influence. I have in my heart, with no question, to ascend to that of a director’s position, be it either in the board of education or the ministry. I must diversify what is a very monocultural cabinet of influential people, to enlist change that will meet the needs of all learners. I don’t think I would have that drive if I never knew of Malcolm X; I really don’t. Change is both spiritual and within, but it has to occur socially and politically as well if you want that change to spread beyond just yourself. I may not be one who wants to be in the sphere of popular politics, but I can definitely do it under the banner of education.

I mentioned in my introduction that some moments of change or people who embody the change cannot be explained, or the affect of that change lies outside the realm of explanation. Malcolm X is just that. He is an outlier when it comes to change. Having said that, I also believe this implies the complexity and superiority Malcolm has over other individuals in history. He is incapable of being fully understood by anything less than rigorous research and critical thinking. However, the cult-like framework and agenda that Nation of Islam established, especially during the time of Malcolm can very easily be explained within the frameworks of change theories. The implication that Malcolm’s message and legacy were far larger than the entire organization is an idea I whole-heartedly endorse. In an attempt to explain the Nation of Islam’s actions in creating change, and what sort of change agent Malcolm X was, I will review Lewin’s Three- Step Change Theory and Lipitt’s Phases of Change.

The philosophies and tenants of the Nation of Islam are of no surprise when that time in history is understood. The situation for all African Americans, either in the northern or southern part of the USA was toxic. When related to Lewin’s theory, to *unfreeze and move* the minds of thousands of Black Americans was not difficult when the pay-off was a new sense of importance, pride, empowerment, and sense of superiority. The nation filled members with a sense of hope and gave them a reason and rationale to fuel their hatred and antagonism for the white race and the white government, and all those who they felt corroborated with them (other black people included, “Uncle Toms”). Furthermore, the militancy of the group and its profound minister (at the time) Malcolm X kept the movement strong. However, the message and the action plan only took followers so far. Further inspection of the NOI’s actions during that time revealed that the leader of that Nation (Elijah Muhammad) did not practice what he “divinely” preached. The tenants were weak, and its leader was a hypocrite. The only means to *refreeze* this movement that had so much potential, but secluded itself from politics and apparently introspective judgment, was how most cults and ideological regimes do, through violence and fear. I humbly believe, from my research, the NOI is an organization built-up by and founded by a charlatan, and it could have no way kept the membership and faith of a person of Malcolm’s magnanimity. Malcolm on the other hand underwent a profound change when he embarked on his journey to Mecca (for Hajj). The experience and epiphanies he endured by observing the brotherhood of all races, outside of the American context, unfroze and propelled him. He unfroze and provided the momentum of his movement virtually on his own, and brought others to see and agree with him. The legacy of Malcolm has far outlived anything Elijah Muhammad ever attempted to bring the world. The refreeze period for Malcolm X has been continuous. They can be captured in what Marabel deems as “Malcolm’s Renaissance(s)” (Disc 17). Refreezing occurred during various times when Malcolm was in the Nation. Independently, there was a time in the mid-late 1960s following the release of his autobiography, and a revival in the early 1990s with the release of Spike Lee’s “X”. We may see another renaissance with the recent 600-page biography by Manning Marable. Ideally, Malcolm X has posthumously satisfied the criteria of Lewin’s *freezing* phase. I find this incredible. It truly speaks to the strength of his message and legacy.

In Lippitt’s Phases of Change Theory, the focus is mainly on the change agent. The change agent of focus here is obviously Malcolm, and I feel that he was able to satisfy most of the seven steps of the theory, in both his capacities as a minister in the NOI and as an independent civil rights leader. Malcolm was first a master at *diagnosing the problem*. Malcolm mobilized followers and demanded the masses to know the fight for respect, justice, and dignity as the *capacity for change and to motivate members.* He did this in both the NOI, and in the groups he created after the NOI, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) and Muslim Mosque Inc. In line with creating its own economic growth within its own tight community, facilitating a very strong and prominent membership that showed strong militancy and rigid self-discipline, the NOI laid the *motivation and resources for many to change.* There was, for better or worst, an *action plan* for the NOI (during and after Malcolm’s membership), but unfortunately due to a life cut short, one only partially developed for the OAAU and Muslim Mosque Inc. The *change agent* for both movements was obviously the powerhouse that was Malcolm X. *Communication* in the NOI through their for-profit newspaper publication “Muhammad Speaks” maintained the message the NOI wanted to spread to its members, but was not the soul facilitator of what maintained the change. A very violent and malicious campaign of “discipline” was what eventually seemed to be the only method to maintain the change and stronghold the NOI had on its members. Meaning, that the *termination of the helping relationship* was not the objective nor was it achievable in the NOI. It wasn’t achievable for Malcolm even before he broke away from the NOI (slightly prior to this campaign of violence). As an independent civil rights leader, Malcolm X was only able to satisfy the first five of seven steps, up to the *communication* and *termination of helping relationship*. His only personal *communication* to the world was his autobiography, and there never came a time where he could have *terminated the helping relationship* by his own will, for he was assassinated. However, a *termination of the helping relationship* **did** occur, and his message passed on without having him physically in the world. It seems clear that his messages were very benevolent ones, and still rings true to many that still admire him as one of the most inspirational figures of the 20th century. In conclusion, Malcolm may have not been able to personally execute the final two steps in Lippitt’s change theory, yet the change he wanted to so badly facilitate took flight without him even being alive to implement the change.

Malcolm X is one of the most definitive human beings of the 20th century that represents what change means, why it is needed, and how change can create a ripple effect in society. His life defined me for a period of time, and I thought the impact he had on my life was solidified. I felt I could only be energized or motivated from time-to-time when I listened to his speeches, or read articles of his life and times. However, this past month when I read Manning Marable’s biography in preparation for this paper, I found myself undergoing yet another change due to the onslaught of more information I found out about the life of this man. This time, I can’t explain what it was that brewed in me. This time, it wasn’t invigorating; it is borderline depressing. This biography unveiled personal and dark periods of Malcolm X’s life. From some misconceptions about his criminal years, questions regarding his sexuality in his teen years, interactions he had with some extremely disagreeable people (Klu Klux Klan and the Nazi party of America), and some sad details about what many traditionally thought was a loving marriage to his wife, Betty Shabazz. It tortured me to hear these (some just accusations or assumptions) items about a man who I held in such high regards. However, even from this experience, I find myself (eventually) positively change with the discovery. Like Malcolm, I also had some very regrettable encounters with disagreeable people, points of awareness and confusion with sexuality, and made mistakes and hurt people I did not mean to. Even in the face of personal and worldly struggle, Malcolm continuously reinvented himself, even when the stakes were against him. Often, many people give up in the face of adversity, and Malcolm faced it like a juggernaut. That is inspiring. I shall do the same. As if once I saw Malcolm as a hero, I now see him as more human. Far more relatable. Out of the shock and depression I may have experienced before writing this paper, I now find myself closer to him than I did before.

There are some vindicating critiques of Marable’s work, such as, “The Second Assassination of Malcolm X: A Critical Review of Manning Marable’s Biography” (Morrow, 2012). Yet, it is of no requirement for me to see the name of Malcolm X cleared or repaired. As a hero or a villain, the story of Malcolm X tells me that no one is perfect. Even so, endure life in the pursuit of perfection, and live for something you are willing to die for. And for whatever time you have remaining on earth, never fail to reinvent yourself to become a better person.

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