

Who Ordered the Killing of Malcolm X?

New Evidence May Implicate the New York Police Dept., the District Attorney, the FBI, and Even (Unthinkably) ...

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[This probe into Malcolm X’s killing is part of a new CAM series on the political assassinations of the 1960s. In January 2019, a [group of 60 prominent U.S. citizens called upon Congress to reopen the investigations of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X](#), which we support. The necessity of the investigation is underscored by recent events; notably the near-fascist takeover of the United States under Donald Trump and [January 2021 Capitol riot, which may very well have been instigated by agents provocateurs or served as a dress rehearsal for a full-blown coup attempt](#).

The power of the political right today in the U.S. has resulted from historical factors that were shaped by political developments in the 1960s. The assassination of magnetic liberal leaders at the time—Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Robert Kennedy and John F. Kennedy—left a leadership vacuum in the liberal movement that has yet to be refilled. The assassinations presented would-be progressives the message that if they challenged the imperatives of class rule in the U.S. and U.S. military empire—even only mildly—then they would be toast.

This series will provide updated overviews about what we know about the four major political assassinations of the 1960s and address their political implications. We hope to contribute to a push for official reinvestigation of these crimes and uncovering of the complete truth. This would allow for a better public understanding of the forces that have corrupted and destroyed U.S. democracy, with the hope that they might be effectively counteracted.—CovertAction Magazine Editors]

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On Sunday February 21, 1965, at 3:00 p.m., Malcolm X was gunned down at the Audubon Ballroom on Broadway and 166th Street in Manhattan while delivering a speech to an audience of about 400 people.

Born Malcolm Little, Malcolm X had converted to Islam while in prison and emerged as a

powerful spokesman for the Nation of Islam (NOI)—which he broke with a year before his death—and the radical wing of the U.S. civil rights movement.^[1]

Historian John Henrik Clarke wrote that Malcolm’s assassination “extinguished the brightest light we had produced in the 20th century and our movement was set back a generation.”^[2]

When Malcolm began his speech at the Audubon, a man’s voice drowned him out by shouting in the middle of the ballroom, “Nigger, get your hands out of my pocket.” As heads turned to hear what the commotion was all about, an incendiary device was triggered at the back, sending smoke into the air.

With people’s attention distracted, a man stood up in the fourth row with a sawed-off shotgun and fired point blank into Malcolm’s chest.

Two men in the front row further jumped up with pistols in their hands and coolly took aim at Malcolm and shot at him like a firing squad, according to a female eyewitness in the third row. Afterwards, they emptied their revolvers into Malcolm’s prone body before fleeing the scene.^[3]

As Malcolm fell backwards to the floor, the ballroom was filled with pandemonium.

OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10
MAY 1962 EDITION
GSA GEN. REG. NO. 27

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. W. C. Sullivan

FROM : Mr. F. J. Baumgardner *FJB*

SUBJECT: MALCOLM K. LITTLE, also known as Malcolm X
INTERNAL SECURITY - MMI

DATE: February 22, 1965

1 - Belmont
1 - Mohr
1 - DeLoach

1 - Sullivan
1 - Baumgardner
1 - Bland
1 - Floyd

Tolson
Belmont
Mohr
DeLoach
Casper
Callahan
Conrad
Felt
Gale
Rosen
Sullivan
Tavel
Trotter
Tele. Room
Holmes
Gandy

W.C. Sullivan
FJB
Holmes
Baumgardner
Bland
Floyd

67D

67D

Malcolm K. Little, leader of the Muslim Mosque, Incorporated (MMI), and the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), was shot and killed on the afternoon of February 21, 1965, at approximately 3:10 p.m. while speaking at a meeting of the OAAU being held in the Audubon Ballroom, 166th Street and Broadway, New York City. The New York Office was immediately advised of the incident [redacted] who was present at the meeting.

[redacted] was [redacted] at the back of the hall when someone in the audience called out indicating that his pocket had been picked. [redacted] observed two men standing near the front of the hall in about the third or fourth row, apparently firing some sort of weapons. He also recalls seeing two other men standing at the time, one several feet behind the first two, and the other several feet to the side. He presumed that they were also involved in the shooting. [redacted] two shots and saw Malcolm X fall backward to the floor. He then heard a volley of shots, probably twenty. [redacted] believes the assailants were also shooting at Malcolm's guards. At this point, [redacted] ran to the foyer of the hall and [redacted] which commanded a view of the entrance to the hall. He observed a man, later identified as John Hagen, running down the aisle crouching and weaving with a .45 caliber pistol in his hand. [redacted] one of Malcolm's followers who was behind the man, fired

Summary of the FBI investigation into Malcolm X’s assassination, February 22, 1965. [Source: [cbsnews.com](https://www.cbsnews.com)]

NOI Minister Louis Farrakhan characterized Malcolm’s bodyguards as “damn cowardly dogs” and “damn punks” who were “ducking and running” as the bullets flew, implying that they

had been compromised.^[4]

Two of the gunmen escaped through a narrow seldom-used flight of stairs leading down to the street, while the others formed a column and tried to escape through the front.^[5]

Talmadge Hayer, 22, of Paterson, New Jersey, was shot in the leg, allegedly by Malcolm's Secretary, Reuben Francis.

He was subsequently trapped by a mob and almost torn apart before he was arrested by two police officers whose squad car was cruising in the neighborhood.

Hayer was found with a clip of .45-caliber bullets in his pocket which matched the murder weapons found at the scene. In court, he confessed to the crime, though never said who sent him to kill Malcolm, only that he was a foot soldier, a "part of a machine."^[6]

Hayer [served 44 years in prison before his release in April 2010](#), at which time he claimed to have had "deep regrets" about his involvement in Malcolm's murder.

Wrongful Convictions

The two other men convicted for Malcolm's murder, Thomas Johnson (Khalil Islam), 30, and Norman Butler (Muhammad Aziz), 26, each spent about 20 years in prison.

[Johnson and Butler were both members of the NOI's Harlem mosque and lieutenants in the private Muslim army called the Fruit of Islam.](#)

They were [out on bail after being charged with shooting Benjamin Brown, a defector from Elijah Muhammad who had opened an independent mosque in Harlem.](#)

At the trial, Hayer told the court that Johnson and Butler had nothing to do with Malcolm's killing and that he did not even know them. He stated: "I was there. I know what happened. I know the people that did take part in it and they (Butler and Johnson) wasn't any of the people that had anything to do with it. I want the jury to know."^[7]

In 1977 and 1978, Hayer [gave the names of four men who he said were his accomplices as part of an affidavit given to civil rights lawyer William Kunstler in which he laid out a detailed time line of the assassination plot.](#)

Kunstler said that he did "[not know of any comparable case in American jurisprudence history in which an accomplice described a crime in such detail without a thorough reinvestigation.](#)"

The four men Hayer identified were part of the NOI's Newark, New Jersey, Temple Number 25.

According to Hayer, [a man he knew as "Wilbur" or "Kinly," later identified as Wilbur McKinley,^{\[8\]} shouted and threw a smoke bomb to create a diversion.](#)

A man named "Willie," later identified as William Bradley (aka Al-Mustafa Shabazz), 28, a stick-up man, had a shotgun and was the first to fire on Malcolm X after the diversion.

Hayer asserted that Bradley and a [man named “Lee” or “Leon,” later identified as Leon Davis,](#)^[9] [both armed with pistols, fired on Malcolm X immediately after the shotgun blast.](#) Hayer also said that a man named [“Ben,” later identified as Benjamin Thomas,](#)^[10] was involved in the conspiracy.

After the assassination, Bradley served time in jail for robbery, aggravated assault and drug possession and then settled in Newark where he ran a boxing gym and even appeared in a political ad for former Newark Mayor and New Jersey Senator Corey Booker in 2010 before passing away in 2018.^[11]

Baba Zak A. Kondo, author of the 1993 book *Conspiracys (ies): Unraveling the Assassination of Malcolm X*, said that he interviewed a retired Newark police officer who knew Bradley and contended that “a surprising number of people in Newark knew that Bradley was a killer.” The former policeman recalled once sitting in a bar talking to Bradley. Shortly after the assassin left, another brother looked at him and said, “You know, that’s a killer.” Years later, the officer learned that Malcolm had been one of Bradley’s victims.^[12]

As part of the frame-up, Butler (aka Muhammad Aziz) received a fake \$10,000 check right after Malcolm’s killing with a note “congratulating him for a job well done.”

The number on the check led to the Harlem Progressive Labor Party (PLP) in an account that had been closed in 1962.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—which had the capability to discover the bank account numbers of the PLP—may have written the check in an attempt to discredit both the PLP and Butler.^[13]

On the day of Malcolm’s killing, Butler, [a karate expert](#), said he was at home recovering from [thrombophlebitis of the leg](#), which made the scenario in which he leaped from the window of the lady’s room before making his escape implausible.

[A doctor who treated Aziz at Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx before Malcolm’s murder, Kenneth Saslowe, took the stand in Butler’s defense, stating that he had treated him the morning of Malcolm’s death.](#)^[14]

Johnson—a house painter and former heroin addict who had at one time been part of Malcolm’s security detail—said that on the day Malcolm was killed, he was [in his apartment across from the Bronx Zoo with his pregnant wife, sick in bed with a rheumatoid arthritis condition](#), and learned of the killing at 4:00 p.m. when he was visited by his Muslim friends.^[15]

Johnson was well-known as an enforcer with the Harlem Mosque #7 and would have been recognized at the Audubon Ballroom if he was there. Later, in prison, he passed a [polygraph test that had been paid for by Muhammad Ali.](#)^[16]

A Rigged Trial

The Judge assigned to Hayer, Johnson and Butler’s trial, Charles Marks, was [known for his harsh sentencing](#)—he once gave a confessed rapist and robber 60-100 years in prison, at

that time one of the longest sentences for non-murder in history—[and fixed enormously high bail for Black Panther Party members accused of plotting to terrorize New York City](#).

The New York Police Department (NYPD) allegedly had films of Malcolm X's killing that were never displayed at trial.

A key witness in identifying Butler, named Sharon, had a connection with the Newark mosque that was never explored.^[17]

Her boyfriend, whom she sat next to, Linward Cathcart, the [Lieutenant of Newark Mosque 25, wore a pin displaying his loyalty to Elijah Muhammad, was pictured laughing next to Malcolm's dying body, and was identified by one investigator as being part of the assassination team](#).^[18]

Another witness identified Ben Thomas of the Newark mosque as an assassin, though this lead was never followed up.^[19]

The testimony of other key prosecution witnesses was riddled with exclusions, distortions and outright lies; the witnesses were coached and manipulated by the police and District Attorney's office.

One was arrested on trumped-up charges and had to cooperate with the prosecution to avoid jail.^[20]

Another "star witness," Cary Thomas, one of Malcolm's bodyguards, was held in jail on \$50,000 bond. He had previously been admitted to a psychiatric facility for shouting in the streets about killing Jesus—a fact the judge refused to admit as evidence in court.^[21]

Thomas was a heroin addict and alcoholic and told different stories before two grand juries.

Before one, he said that Hayer and Butler caused a diversion and Johnson fired the shotgun that killed X, though in the other he swore that Johnson and Butler caused the diversion and Hayer fired the shotgun.^[22]

Neither the prosecution nor the defense called Reuben Francis, Malcolm's bodyguard who shot Hayer, to testify at the trial, or Malcolm's right-hand man, [Benjamin Kamin \(aka Benjamin Goodman\), who manned the door at the Audubon](#) on the day of the killing.^[23]

Karim had actually told police detectives and Assistant Attorney General Herbert Stern that [he knew both Butler and Johnson and that they were not in the Audobon ballroom on the day of Malcolm's assassination](#); their [only response, however, was to become angry at him](#).

"As If They Wanted It to Happen:" Police Misconduct

Days before his assassination, Malcolm's home in Queens had been firebombed, yet there was no police detail supplied to the Audubon when he was murdered. An exception was patrolman Gilbert Henry who was told to conceal himself some distance from the main auditorium where Malcolm spoke.^[24]

Henry testified that he had been told to stay where he could not be seen and communicate by walkie-talkie with a police detail concealed across the street in the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center complex where Malcolm's body was taken after the shooting, and to tell them to notify police in the hospital if anything happened.

At previous Malcolm X rallies there had been at least half a dozen police officers present. In this case, with no security at the door, the assassins were easily able to walk in.



Exterior view of the Audubon Ballroom in the Harlem section of Manhattan where Malcolm was killed.

[Source: pennlive.com]

The police later claimed that they offered protection, but that Malcolm refused it—though Malcolm had complained to Alex Haley that the police did not take his requests for protection seriously.

On the day of the shooting, journalist Jimmy Breslin received a tip from the NYPD that he should go to the Audubon ballroom, indicating someone in the NYPD knew what would transpire.

When the police arrived at the scene after Malcolm had been shot, according to eyewitnesses, they displayed no sense of urgency; it was “as if they wanted it to happen [Malcolm's death].”^[25]

Earl Grant said he saw [“an incredible scene”](#) in which [“a dozen police \[were\] strolling into the ballroom”](#) after the shooting at [“about the pace one would expect of them if they were](#)

patrolling a quiet park. They did not seem to be at all excited or concerned about the circumstances [and] not one had his gun out. As a matter of absolute fact, some of them even had their hands in their pocket."

Afterwards, the NYPD did not secure the scene of the crime as they normally would. A dance at the Audubon went on as scheduled at 7:00 p.m. with bullets still in the wall. A rostrum with bullet holes was found in the basement of the Audubon Ballroom years later; it had never been examined by the police.



Ballroom after it was roped off by police. A dance went on as scheduled that night. [Source: pennlive.com]

FBI and CIA Involvement

Historian David Garrow, a biographer of Martin Luther King, Jr., stated on the 2020 Netflix documentary [*Who Killed Malcolm X*](#) that by never taking a serious interest in investigating Malcolm's death, white-run institutions and law enforcement agencies sent the message that they did not value what his life represented.

In Garrow's view, FBI informants within the NOI were likely involved in Malcolm's assassination—he was almost certain of this.

The FBI at the time under its infamous Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) was promoting a war within the NOI in an attempt to destroy the organization, fearing that Malcolm was a "black messiah" who would lead a social revolution.^[26]

The [FBI's Chicago office, four years after Malcolm's death, boasted that it had "developed" the blood feud between Malcolm and the NOI.](#)

On the day that Malcolm was killed, the FBI had [nine informants in the Audubon Ballroom, none of whom was asked to testify at Hayer, Butler and Johnson's murder trial.](#)

[The day before, Hayer was spotted meeting in the Americana hotel with John Ali, who had stolen money from the NOI while serving as its national secretary and previously worked for the FBI.](#)^[27]

Malcolm told Alex Haley the day before his assassination that he no longer believed it was the Muslims who were planning his death but something bigger.

Malcolm's sister, Mrs. Ella Collins, believed that her brother had been "murdered by the CIA."^[28]

During his travels to the Middle East and Africa, CIA agents followed Malcolm's every move—boarding every flight he took, watching his hotels and keeping him under surveillance during meal-time—and allegedly tried to poison him twice.^[29]

The CIA's Deputy Director of Plans, Richard Helms, was scrutinizing Malcolm's activities up to the hour of his assassination.^[30] The State Department had required Helms to treat X as a "foreign agent or enemy of the United States."^[31]

Mysterious Second Shooter

On the day of Malcolm's killing, the early edition of both *The New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune* reported that the NYPD had apprehended two suspects.

Later editions of both papers, however, changed their headlines and reported that only one suspect, Hayer, was apprehended.^[32]

ation of Malcolm X

ice Hold Two for Questioning." From edition, we even learn the name of the "second" man. It is Patrolman who is quoted as saying he had "subject" being chased by some people. turn to the late city edition of the same only a few hours later, we find that its s changed. It now reads: "One Is Held the story hasn't yet been changed; olman Hoy still remains in the story, "second" man who has dropped out of fact, the story has more about Hoy he city edition.

Times reports: "As I brought him to ballroom, the crowd began beating me ' Patrolman Hoy said. He said he put otherwise identified later for a police car to be taken to the nue station." Then Hoy's captive the *Times* as completely and as he did from the *Herald Tribune*, and er daily papers. But there cannot be mind of anyone reading the accounts t a second man was captured and he police.

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The case of the missing suspect. Press at first reported two men arrested, later changed their stories with no explanation

Discrepancy in headlines in the *New York Herald Tribune* about number of suspects the police arrested.

[Source: Breitman, et al., *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, 53]

Black nationalists and Trotskyites noticing the discrepancy charged that the NYPD had covered up its involvement in the assassination and that the assailant was a BOSSI (Bureau of Special Services and Investigation) agent whom the crowd recognized as one of the killers because they had beaten and then shot him.^[33]

The NYPD and mainstream journalist Peter Goldman attributed the confusion about the number of suspects to the fact that reporters had debriefed NYPD officer Thomas Hoy at the scene and another NYPD officer, Alvin Aronoff, at the station house, not realizing they were talking about the same man.^[34]



Los Angeles Times article also claims more than one suspect was arrested. [Source: blog.rarenewspapers.com]

However, in a news video made right after the assassination, [the NYPD's chief inspector reported two suspects being in custody](#).

[Herman Ferguson, a founding member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity \(OAAU\), said that he witnessed an olive complexioned man who had been shot being taken by the NYPD away from the hospital across the street \(Jewish Memorial Hospital—which would have been a natural place given his injury\) and in the direction of the Hudson River.](#)^[35]

The FBI reported that Hayer was treated after being taken into custody [at the Jewish Memorial Hospital](#) across from the Audubon, where Malcolm was also taken, meaning that he was not the one witnessed by Ferguson in the patrol car.

Eric Norden reported that the olive-skinned man had been rushed into the patrol car by the cops and told to “get down between the seats.”^[36] Thin-lipped and wearing a turtleneck sweater, he bore an uncanny resemblance to a man who had tailed Malcolm on a trip to London through his return flight to New York one week before the assassination.^[37]

Red Squad

After Malcolm gave a press conference announcing his split from the NOI, William C. Sullivan, the FBI's #2, [contacted the directors of BOSSI and asked them to recruit several African-Americans to infiltrate Malcolm's new organization.](#)

Two of the directors, Jack J. Caulfield and Anthony Ulasewicz—who got his start with BOSSI spying on New York's annual May Day parade—were later implicated in the Watergate scandal.^[38]

They were happy to comply with Sullivan's request because [Malcolm had been a thorn in the side of the NYPD for more than a decade.](#)

Ulasewicz wrote that he considered Malcolm "the flip side of George Lincoln Rockwell [American Nazi whom Ulasewicz had also shadowed]. [Malcolm's] stated goal was to cut down the white man's forest, move in on his land, and send him packing."^[39]

BOSSI agents—several of whom were in the ballroom—claimed that Malcolm's assassination took them by surprise, though Chicago Police Department Captain William Duffy, head of the city's intelligence division, based on a tip, and Sergeant Edward McLellan, of the division's subversion unit, revealed that they had warned New York of a possible murder attempt on Malcolm.^[40]

When Malcolm's home was firebombed, the NYPD blamed Malcolm for setting the fire and BOSSI agents planted gasoline on his dresser.



NYPD Red Squad or BOSSI c. early 1970s. [Source: store.cinemaguild.com]

BOSSI had been modeled after the FBI and [spent decades infiltrating left-wing and other radical political organizations and spying on New Yorkers.](#)

Its detectives were expert in techniques of provocation, that is, in coercing subversive groups to commit violent and unlawful acts that would discredit them in the eyes of the public.^[41]

Tony Bouza, a former BOSSI detective and lieutenant from 1957 to 1965, explains that [the](#)

[NYPD, and not the FBI, was the primary agency conducting surveillance of Malcolm](#), who was considered a “dangerous man” and “grave threat” to public order. In the Netflix documentary *Who Killed Malcolm X?* [Bouza refers to Malcolm X as a “thug.”](#)

Elsewhere, Bouza suggested that the NYPD failed to take basic and minimal steps to protect Malcolm and failed to disclose all that it knew about the assassination. [“The investigation was botched,” he said, and a “parallel tragedy lies in the NYPD’s obvious stonewalling of any release of records.”](#)

“Remarkable Undercover Work”

A handwritten note from Japanese-American activist Yuri Kochiyama, written during a meeting of the OAAU Liberation School following Malcolm’s death, stated that “Ray Woods [sic] is said to have been seen also running out of Audubon; was one of two picked up by police. Was the second person running out.”^[42]

Wood was a black NYPD officer from Chester, South Carolina with an Air Force background who began his career by infiltrating the Bronx Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) chapter in 1964 under the name Ray Woodall.

Posing as a 27-year-old graduate of Manhattan College studying law at Fordham University, Wood was named CORE’s housing chairman and talked chapter chairman Herbert Callender into making a “citizen’s arrest” of Mayor Robert Wagner for discriminating against blacks and misappropriating public monies, telling him that the arrest was legal when it was not.^[43]

By 1965, “Woodall” had been reassigned under his real name to infiltrate a group calling itself the Black Liberation Movement (BLM).^[44]

He was subsequently credited with foiling a bomb plot by the BLM that targeted the Statue of Liberty and other national monuments, just a week before Malcolm X’s assassination.

The idea for the bombing had been Wood’s—under the direction of an FBI agent—and he did most of the planning, though he lied about this in court to comply with his supervisor’s directions to not implicate himself.^[45]

One of the four arrested and convicted in the plot was Walter Bowe, who co-chaired the cultural committee in Malcolm’s OAAU. Another, Khaleel Sayyed, was essential to Malcolm X’s security team.^[46]



Culprits in Statue of Liberty bomb plot. Bowe is second from the left, and Sayyed is third from the left.

Wood is featured on the far right with his back to the camera. [Source: coolopolis.blogspot.com]

Described as “the all-American boy” with tremendous “leadership abilities,” Wood was promoted to detective second grade for making the arrests in the Statue of Liberty bombing case, and received New York City’s highest award for heroism, the Medal of Honor.

U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach wrote a letter to New York City Police Commissioner Michael Murphy with a note of special congratulations to Wood for his “remarkable undercover work.”^[47]

Dwayne Bey, a photography student and former activist from Brooklyn CORE, said that, “in CORE, we suspected the white folks as the cops of the organized leftists but who would have looked at him?”^[48]

In a 2011 letter relayed through his cousin, Reggie Wood, Wood admitted that he had entrapped two members of Malcolm’s security team in a criminal plot to blow up the Statue of Liberty, which left Malcolm vulnerable at the Audubon Ballroom.



Reggie Wood, left, with Attorney Ben Crump and three daughters of Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz, at a press conference where Ray Wood’s confessional letter about the Statue of Liberty plot was read.

[Source: bluetoad.com]

Wood, who died in 2020, stated that his assignment was [“to draw the two men into a felonious federal crime so that they could be arrested by the FBI and kept away from managing Malcolm X’s Audubon Ballroom door security on February 21st, 2021.”](#)

Wood also revealed that he was inside the Audubon Ballroom at the time of Malcolm’s assassination along with another NYPD undercover officer, [Gene Roberts, a member of BOSSI, who had infiltrated the OAAU \(group Malcolm founded after leaving the NOI\), and become part of Malcolm’s security detail.](#)^[49]

Wood said that he had been “under instructions to watch and not interfere”; thus, he did not try to stop a gunman who was running out of the ballroom.^[50]

After the shooting, Wood was attacked by a mob who suspected him in the killing and then

taken away from the scene in an NYPD patrol car and put in a holding cell for three hours where he realized the significance of the Statue of Liberty plot.^[51]

Wood acknowledged subsequently that [“Johnson was innocent and was arrested to protect my cover and the secrets of the FBI and NYPD.”](#)^[52]

Socialist and Anti-Imperialist Views

Journalist Eric Norden wrote in a 1967 article that “[p]owerful forces, including the U.S. State Department and the CIA, had been deeply alarmed by Malcolm’s growing impact, particularly his efforts to internationalize the American racial question by bringing it before the United Nations under the Human Rights provision of the UN charter.”

A strong proponent of pan-Africanism, Malcolm’s travels overseas had put him in contact with socialist and anti-imperialist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Argentine revolutionary [Che Guevara, with whom he established a firm bond when they met at the UN in December 1964.](#)

At the time, Malcolm was disillusioned by growing authoritarianism and corruption within the NOI, and split with his mentor, Elijah Muhammad, to form a new movement, The Muslim Mosque Inc., which was aligned with the OAAU.

Planning to [coordinate voter registration drives and local organizing against police brutality, Malcolm was gunned down on the very day he was to announce his call for the United Nations to denounce American racial practices as human rights violations.](#)

The week before, on February 14th, he had given a powerful speech condemning [the Western “rape” of Congo because of its rich mineral wealth, and bombing of the country by CIA-trained mercenaries,](#)^[53] which most white liberals were silent about.

Like Martin Luther King, Jr., at the time of his death, Malcolm increasingly identified as a socialist.^[54]

He established contacts with the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party (SWP), urging his followers to read its publication, *The Militant*, and told its 1964 presidential candidate, Clifton DeBerry, that he hoped to live long enough to build a viable organization based on his current ideas.^[55]

Comparing capitalists to “vultures” and “bloodsuckers,” Malcolm said before his death that the “domestic exploitation of American Negroes was part and parcel of ‘American imperialism’s’ world-wide drive to control the poorer, predominantly non-white nations.”^[56]

In an interview with the *The Militant*, Malcolm noted further that “this system is not only ruling us in America, it is ruling the world.”^[57]



Malcolm X. speaking before a large crowd in Harlem. Before his death, Malcolm increasingly espoused socialist and anti-imperialist views. [Source: liberationschool.org]

Elsewhere, he noted that “the racists and segregationists in power exercise the same form of brutal oppression against dark-skinned people in the South and in North Vietnam, or in the Congo or in Cuba, or in any other place on this earth where they are trying to exploit and oppress; that is a society whose government doesn’t hesitate to inflict the most brutal form of punishment and oppression upon darker skinned people all over the world.”

Malcolm was an uncompromising opponent of the U.S. war in Vietnam long before Martin Luther King, Jr.

He told a meeting of the Militant Labor Forum in 1964: “What America is doing in South Vietnam is criminal, but the oppressed people of South Vietnam ... have been successful in fighting off the agents of imperialism.... Little rice farmers, peasants, with a rifle, up against all the highly mechanized weapons of warfare—jets, napalm, battleships, everything else. And America can’t put those rice farmers back where they want them. Somebody’s waking up.”^[58]

In 1958, Malcolm had similarly noted that Korea had “won the war against the white man with just a bowl of rice, sneakers and a gun.”^[59]

By the time of his death, Malcolm was adopting mostly pro-Chinese positions on international questions, stating that the explosion of China’s first atom bomb was “one of the greatest things that has happened because up until now, the nuclear devices have been in the hands of Europeans.”

Malcolm went on to express hope that the Chinese would in the future be able to “build bigger and better nukes” because “the only language that America understands is the

language of power and a dark nation has to be in a position to talk or speak the language that these imperialists understand.”^[60]

Gangland Execution

The media coverage after Malcolm’s murder was indicative of the deeply engrained prejudices directed against Black Muslims and radical Black groups in the 1960s.

The New York Herald Tribune ran an editorial on February 23, 1965, titled “Hate Full Cycle,” which stated that “the slaying of Malcolm X has shown again that hatred, whatever its apparent justification, however, it may be rationalized, turns on itself in the end. Now the hatred and violence that [Malcolm X] preached has overwhelmed him and he has fallen at the hands of Negroes.”^[61]

The New York Times, in an article entitled “Malcolm X Lived in Two Worlds White and Black,” blamed Black nationalist extremists for Malcolm’s death, describing him as “an extraordinary and twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose ... Malcolm had the ingredients for leadership, but his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement and the overwhelming majority of Negroes. It also marked him for notoriety and for a violent end.”^[62]

Time magazine a few days later editorialized that Malcolm “had been a pimp, cocaine addict and a thief. He was an unashamed demagogue. His gospel was hatred.”^[63] *Life* magazine followed suit by describing Malcolm as “the shrilled voice for black supremacy,” while *The Saturday Evening Post* considered his death the result of a “gangland execution.”^[64]



Spread in *Life* magazine after Malcolm's death in which he was characterized as "the shrilled voice for black supremacy." [Source: discovernikkei.org]

These depictions soured the public on an investigation and ensured that no outcry was raised when the wrong men were convicted.

Other Suspicious Deaths

Like with the Kennedy assassination, Malcolm's assassination resulted in other suspicious deaths. One was of Louis Lomax, an African-American journalist who befriended Malcolm X in the late 1950s and claimed to have solved the riddle of the assassination.^[65]

On July 31, 1970, [Lomax died in an auto accident](#) in New Mexico.^[66] At the time, he had a contract from 20th Century Fox to make a movie about Malcolm that would expose the U.S. intelligence community's role in his assassination.

The brakes on his car failed and Lomax [skidded across a highway](#) and died.

Lomax believed that Malcolm X was betrayed by a former friend—thought to be John Ali—who reportedly had ties to the intelligence community. Lomax called the suspect "Judas."^[67]

The second suspicious death was of Leon Ameer, Malcolm's New England representative and Cassius Clay's (Muhammad Ali's) former secretary, who had "vowed to carry on Malcolm's work" after his assassination.^[68]

The former karate teacher was found unconscious in the bathtub at Boston's Sherry Biltmore Hotel on March 13, 1965, hours after he had appeared at the Socialist Workers meeting in Boston. In a speech there, he said that the government was responsible for Malcolm's death and that he would shortly produce tapes and documents of Malcolm's to prove it.

Ameer stated in his speech that he had ["facts in my possession as to who really killed Malcolm X,"](#) and that ["this is probably the last time you'll see me alive."](#)^[69]

The Suffolk County medical examiner stated initially that Ameer, only 31 at the time, died of natural causes and suffered from an overdose of a medical drug called Domadeen which induces sleep.^[70]

Later, it was claimed that Ameer died of an epileptic fit or heart attack and had been found with froth in his mouth. But his wife said he had a medical check-up one month before and [there was no hint of epilepsy or heart trouble](#)—and he had not had an epileptic fit in the previous 11 years.

On his death, Ameer's blackened tongue protruded between his lips. In an epileptic seizure severe enough to cause death, the tongue is usually swallowed, causing asphyxiation.^[71]

Conclusion

Malcolm's supporters appear to have had the right intuition in thinking that he was murdered on "orders from the U.S. government."^[72]

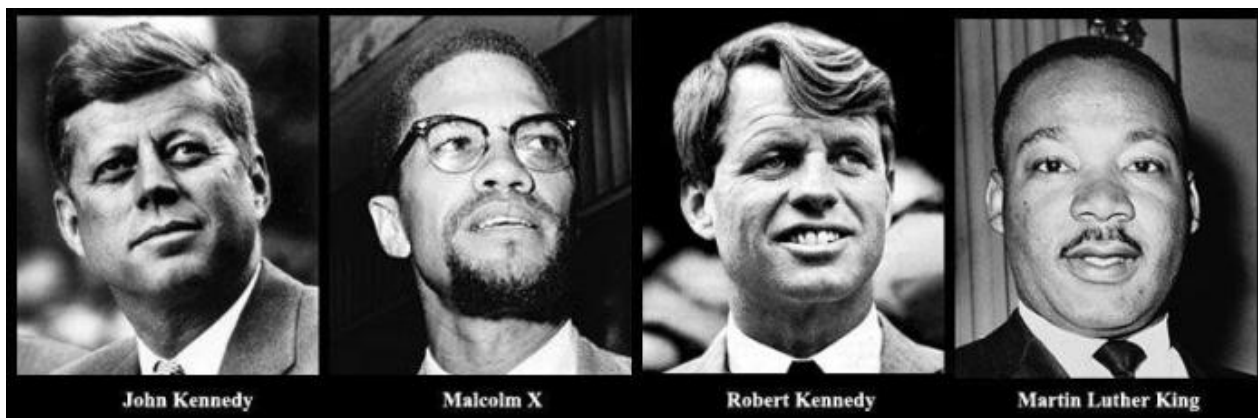
Precisely who gave those orders, however, remains unknown.

The Innocence Project is currently working with civil rights attorney David Shanies and the Conviction Integrity Program of the New York County District Attorney's Office to [re-investigate Butler and Johnson's convictions](#).

In February 2021, [New York County District Attorney Cyrus Vance reopened the case in order to determine if the wrong men were convicted](#).

[Vance tapped experienced prosecutors Charles King and Peter Casolaro, who was a member of the team that investigated and cleared the Central Park Five](#).

Whatever the outcome of their investigation, Malcolm X's death, alongside those of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the 1960s had a profound impact on American politics, helping to usher in a period of conservative ascendancy.



[Source: [pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)]

The tenets of American exceptionalism presume that political assassinations only occur in totalitarian states like Russia and China; an investigation into Malcolm X's killing, however, reveals that this is simply not the case.

*

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Notes

1. On his life history, see *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley, rev. ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992). Malcolm's father, a follower of Marcus Garvey, was

- killed by the Klu Klux Klan in Lansing, Michigan. Malcolm became a delinquent in Harlem before experiencing his transformation in prison and falling under the sway of Elijah Muhammad and the Black Muslim organization, where he emerged as an important leader.
2. Clarke quoted in Michael Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992), 67.
 3. Eric Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X," *The Realist*, February 1, 1967, 1.
 4. One guard, Charles Blackwell, took a lift afterwards to New Jersey from a suspected member of the assassination team.
 5. Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 438.
 6. Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 410.
 7. Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination*, 48.
 8. [McKinley was 30 at the time of Malcolm's assassination and owned his own construction firm that did work around the Newark mosque. He was a member of the Fruit of Islam. He is suspected of being an accomplice with Hayer in a 1963 gun-store robbery.](#)
 9. [Davis was 20 or 21 at the time of the murder and worked in an electronics plant in Paterson and was also a member of the Fruit of Islam and Mosque 25 in Newark.](#)
 10. [Thomas was 27 at the time of Malcolm's killing and the assistant secretary of the Newark mosque. A basketball player, he worked as an envelope cutter in an envelope manufacturing company in Hackensack, New Jersey. He died in 1986.](#)
 11. When investigator Abdur-Rahman Muhammad asked about Bradley in the Newark area, as featured in the Netflix documentary *Who Killed Malcolm X?* [he was told that this was a sensitive topic, and that Bradley was walking around because he was "protected by the state."](#)
 12. Baba Zak A. Kondo, *Conspiracys (ies): Unraveling the Assassination of Malcolm X* (Nubia Books, 1993).
 13. Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination*, 37.
 14. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 341.
 15. Historian Manning Marable said that Johnson was innocent, that as a well-known enforcer for mosque #7 in the Bronx he would have been recognized if he were present on the day of Malcolm's killing at the Audubon Ballroom. See Mark Jacobsen, "The Man Who Didn't Shoot Malcolm X," *New York Magazine*, September 28, 2007.
 16. Johnson was paroled in 1987 and died in 2009. Butler, who is still alive, was paroled in 1986. Journalist Peter Goldman reported that Johnson's left thumbprint was found on a scrap of film in the smoke-bomb, insinuating his guilt in the slaying. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 422.
 17. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 452.
 18. Cathcart was [never asked to testify at Hayer, Butler and Johnson's trial. After Malcolm's death, he was the one to offer a lift to Charles Blackwell, one of Malcolm's sentries, who appears to have sold out his boss.](#)
 19. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 452.
 20. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 21. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 22. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X." Charles Blackwell also gave a different story to the grand jury and contradicted himself.
 23. George Breitman, Herman Porter, Baxter Smith, *The Assassination of Malcolm X* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 107.
 24. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 25. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X." Jimmy Breslin's recollections are highlighted in Lisa Pease, *A Lie Too Big to Fail: The Real History of the Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy*

- (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2018), 294.
26. Karl Evanzz, *The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992), 15; Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012); James W. Douglass, "The Murder and Martyrdom of Malcolm X," in *The Assassinations: Probe Magazine on JFK, MLK, RFK and Malcolm X*, ed. James DiEugenio and Lisa Pease (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2003), 399. The FBI spied on Malcolm as early as 1950 when he was in prison. They took special attention beginning in the late 1950s when he was appointed as Elijah Muhammed's intermediary to foreign revolutionaries.
 27. Ali admitted to interviewing with J. Edgar Hoover for a job at the FBI, but claimed he was not hired.
 28. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 29. Louis E. Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man* (Los Angeles, CA: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1968), 177; Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X." Allegedly, the CIA tried to poison Malcolm in Cairo in July 1964 and was about to try again in Paris, though French counterintelligence learned of this, and he was barred from entering the country.
 30. Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, xix
 31. Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, 15; Douglass, "The Murder and Martyrdom of Malcolm X," in *The Assassinations*, ed. DiEugenio and Pease, 399.
 32. *The Times's* later story continued to mention a second suspect apprehended by Officer Thomas Hoy, but then mention of him disappeared. Breitman, et al., *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, 52.
 33. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X;" Brietman, et al., *The Assassination of Malcolm X*.
 34. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 287.
 35. Other witnesses also reported an olive-skinned man with a leg wound who had been rescued by the NYPD from a lynch mob.
 36. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 37. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X." Hoy was later impossible for the media to reach. Norden believed that the mystery man was Puerto Rican or Cuban, which tied him potentially to the CIA which recruited anti-Castro Cuban exiles.
 38. See Tony Ulasewicz, with Stuart A. McKeever, *The President's Private Eye: The Journey of Detective Tony U. from NYPD to the Nixon White House* (New York: Masam Publishing, 1990). In June 1955, Ulasewicz testified before the Subversive Activities Control Board in a proceeding initiated to prove that the United May Day Committee was a Communist Party front organization. Ulasewicz first met Nixon in the early 1950s while serving on Dwight Eisenhower's security detail. In July 1969, Ulasewicz was sent to Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts to investigate the car wreck incident involving Edward Kennedy that resulted in the death of Mary Jo Kopechne, one of Bobby Kennedy's former secretaries. Allegations were made that Ulasewicz was spotted on the island before news of the accident had been made public, raising questions about his involvement in a potential conspiracy.
 39. Ulasewicz, *The President's Private Eye*, 147.
 40. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."
 41. Frank Donner, *Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 169.
 42. See Garrett Felber, "Malcolm X Assassination: 50 years on, mystery still clouds details of the case," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2015.
 43. *The Ray Wood Story: Confessions of a Black NYPD Cop in the Assassination of Malcolm X, as told to Reggie Wood* (New York: Madera, 2021); Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 175; Ulasewicz, *The President's Private Eye*, 154, 155, 156. Callender was sent to Bellevue for psychiatric evaluation.

44. Once he achieved this, Wood proposed radical measures such as blowing up New York's sewer system. Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 175.
45. *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, 75, 76.
46. *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, 69-89; Donner, *Protectors of Privilege*, 175; Brietman, et al., *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, 54. Explosives were obtained from a Montreal TV host and Quebec separatist, Michelle Duclos, as part of the sting operation. [She served three months in jail after testifying against her co-conspirators and later served as a Quebec provincial representative to Algeria under Premier Bernard Landry.](#)
47. Susan Brownmiller, "Statue of Liberty Case: View from the Inside: I Remember Ray Wood," *The Village Voice*, June 3, 1965, in *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, vii; Ulasweicz, *The President's Private Eye*, 170.
48. Susan Brownmiller, "Statue of Liberty Case: View from the Inside: I Remember Ray Wood," *The Village Voice*, June 3, 1965, in *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, viii.
49. Roberts was a Navy veteran who, in 1968, helped found the New York chapter of the Black Panther Party. He helped [set up members of the "Panther 21" including Tupac Shakur's mother, Afeni, by encouraging them to blow up several Manhattan department stores.](#) In an interview for a 1994 documentary on Malcolm X, he acknowledged: "There are a lot of people in the black community that [consider me a traitor to my race](#) and the community." For more on him, see Edward Conlon, "The Undercover Lives of NYPD's Black Officers," *Esquire*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a53648/nypd-undercover-black-radical-groups/>; Douglass, "The Murder and Martyrdom of Malcolm X," in *The Assassinations*, ed. Di Eugenio and Pease, 411, 412. Roberts said that he reported to his superiors seeing a walk through of the assassination at the Audubon a week before, though they did not respond.
50. *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, 103.
51. *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*, 65, 101. This revelation confirmed Kochiyama's note and journalist Eric Norden and the SWP's suspicion about a second suspect who was an undercover agent. The question lingers as to why the crowd suspected Wood of being involved and attacked him after someone yelled "get that son of a bitch." Perhaps someone recognized him as an undercover informant because his face had appeared in the paper after the Statue of Liberty plot, albeit with his head turned. Another unanswered question is why Wood was instructed to go to the ballroom if he was not there to protect Malcolm.
52. *The Ray Wood Story, as told to Reggie Wood*. Raymond Wood's [daughter Kelly](#) claimed that the 2011 letter issued by her father admitting to his involvement in black operations [was a forgery](#). Suggesting that the signature on the letter was not her father's, she said: ["My father is not a coward. He would have never, ever asked anyone to speak on his behalf after his passing. If he had something to say, he would have said it when he was alive."](#)
53. The CIA mercenaries were anti-Castro Cubans who fought alongside South African white supremacists. A detailed history of this sordid intervention is provided in Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). In his speech Malcolm said: ["And they're able to take these hired killers, put them in American planes, with American bombs, and drop them on African villages, blowing to bits Black men, Black women, Black children, Black babies, and you Black people sitting over here cool like it doesn't even involve you. You're a fool. They'll do it to them today, and do it to you tomorrow. Because you and I and they are all the same." They're able to do all of this mass murder and get away with it by labeling it "humanitarian," "an act of humanitarianism." Or "in the name of freedom," "in the name of liberty." All kinds of high-sounding slogans, but it's cold-blooded murder, mass murder."](#) X's speech included discussion of U.S. support for [Moise Tshombe, the head of the Katanga](#)

[province, who had murdered Patrice Lumumba.](#) Malcolm called him a “cold blooded murderer” and “the worst African ever born,” and said that [“to show the type of hired killer he is, as soon as he’s in office he hires more killers from South Africa to shoot down his own people. And you wonder why your American image abroad is so bankrupt.”](#) At the end of the speech, Malcolm said: “[A]nother reason they don’t intend to give up [the Congo] is if you look at the map you’ll see that it is so [strategically located geographically](#). Wherein, if a real genuine African government were to come in power over the Congo, then it would be possible for African troops from all countries to invade Angola—which is a Portuguese possession. And if Angola fell, and it would fall, then it would only be a matter of time before South-West Africa, Southern Rhodesia, and Butuanoland also would fall. And it would put African troops right on the border of South Africa. And that’s where they really want to get, that man down there in South Africa. And the United States’ interests are involved in blocking this, yes! [Some of these liberals who grin in your face like they’re your best friends, they have money tied up in the Congo](#). Some of the most powerful political figures in this country, come up and governors over states, [have] got interests in the Congo, and got interests in South Africa, and got interests all over the African continent, and go there! And as the Africans awaken and realize, they—it makes them full of the incentive to never rest until that exploiter is driven out.”

54. Breitman, et al., *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, 39; Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.” On King’s turn toward socialism, see Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Free Press, 2001).
55. Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X;” Carson, *Malcolm X*, 448, 449; Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*, 178.
56. Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.” Malcolm stated: “It is impossible for capitalism to survive, primarily because the system of capitalism needs some blood to suck ... and it can only suck the blood of the helpless [like a vulture].”
57. Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.”
58. Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.”
59. In Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, 15.
60. Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.”
61. Quoted in Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X.”
62. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 454.
63. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 455.
64. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 455.
65. Lomax published the book, *When the Word Is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and the Black Muslim World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963), and *To Kill a Black Man: Shocking Parallel of the Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing, 1968).
66. Thomas Aiello, “Louis Lomax’s Relationship with Malcolm X and Its Role in the Evolution of the Nation of Islam’s Popularity and Lomax’s Philosophy,” *The Journal of African American History*, 104, 4 (September 2019), 584-618.
67. Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, xxiv.
68. “Malcolm X Aide Dead in Boston: Body of Leon Ameer Found in Hotel Room by Maid,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 1965, 57.
69. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 308; Norden, “The Murder of Malcolm X”; “Malcolm X Aide Dead in Boston: Body of Leon Ameer Found in Hotel Room by Maid,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 1965, 57. Norden claims that Ameer was found strangled to death.
70. “Murder Is Doubted in Death of Leon 4X,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 1965; Carson, *Malcolm X*, 411.

71. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X"; "Malcolm X Aide Dead in Boston," 57; Carson, *Malcolm X*, 411.

72. Norden, "The Murder of Malcolm X."

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