

FORUM

View Malcolm X as The Vitruvian Man at what would be his 90th birthday

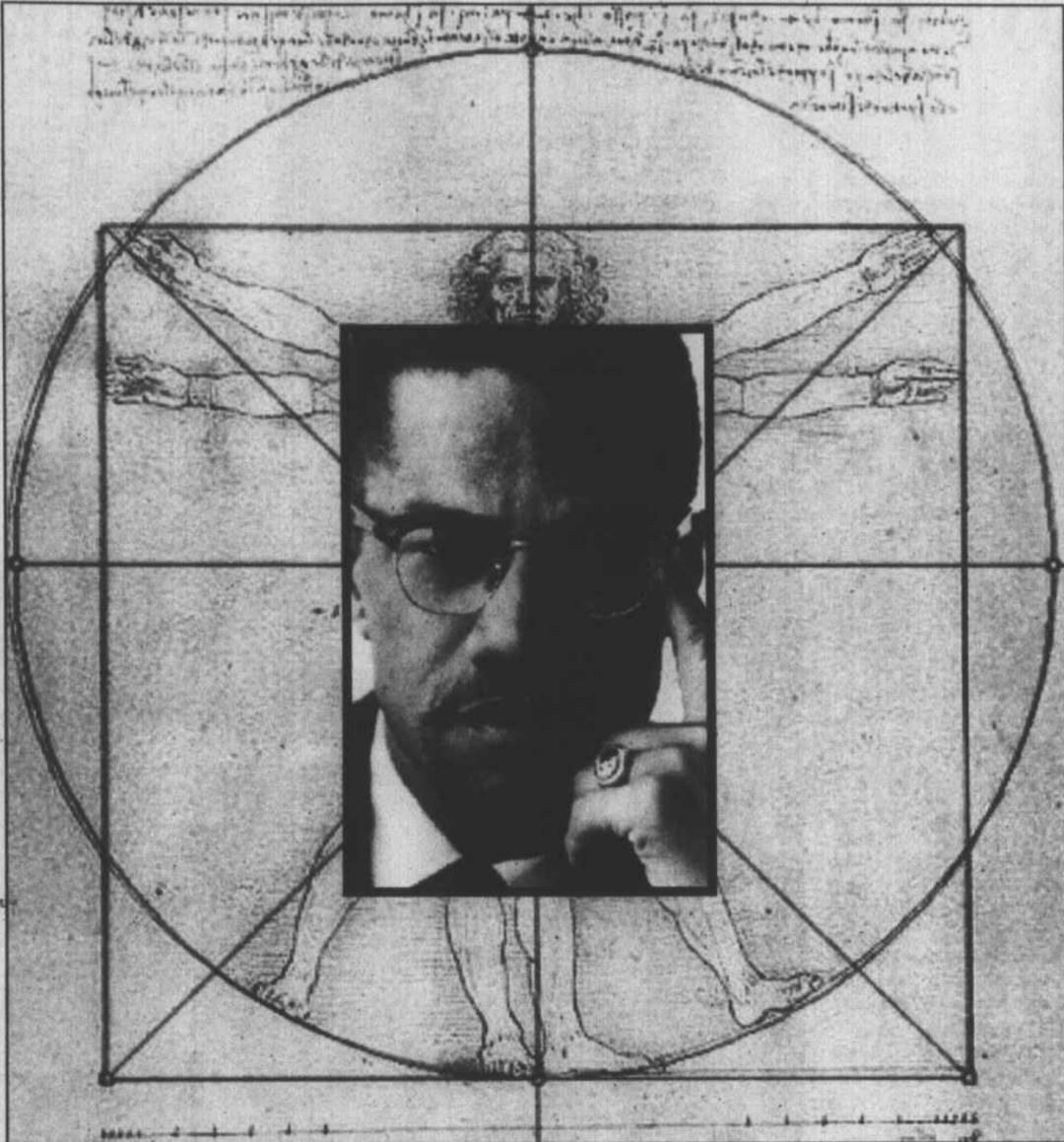


Bill Turner
Guest Columnist

"El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz was a Vitruvian Man," replied Alex Haley, the author of the riveting "Autobiography of Malcolm X," when I asked him 25 years ago to draw a circle around the life of this grand public figure whose beleaguered parents named him Malcolm Little.

When students are introduced to mathematics, often they start with a lesson on Leonardo da Vinci's world-renowned drawing that illustrates the properties and relationships of points, lines, angles, curves, surfaces and solids. The life and times of Malcolm X — who would be 90 this week had he not been killed 50 years ago — should be required study for the understanding of what is America's ongoing dilemma: the discrepancy between our valuing of equality on the one hand and the persistence of racial bigotry and inequality on the other.

The Vitruvian Man has been called the Canon of Proportions. "By any means necessary" was Mr. Malcolm's standard and all-encompassing response whenever he was asked for the formula for blacks to achieve freedom and equality. Taken on its surface, that answer pointed to an oblique reign of terror in the minds of most Americans, because it was always blown out of proportion, taken out of context, and framed inside the image of Malcolm as a monster, as compared to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Malcolm kept an open mind in terms of any and all strategies that could be employed to achieve the desired ends. "Necessary" says that if violence is not necessary in pursuit of freedom, justice, and equality then, it would not



"Malcolm kept an open mind in terms of strategies to meet the desired ends. 'Necessary'"

— Bill Turner

be used. That pretty straightforward line got curved and convoluted.

Just as da Vinci's figure depicts a nude male figure as two overlaid positions with arms and legs apart and at the same time inscribed in a circle and square, Malcolm X's points of view stripped bare the two-faced image of America. With the precision of his peerless oratori-

cal protractor and his level-headed logic, Malcolm X drew lines and circles around a binary set of laws: one for whites and another for blacks when it came to freedom of speech, of religious expression, of a free press, the right to peacefully assemble, to petition the government for redress of grievances, and especially the right of people to keep and bear arms.

The Constitutional circle — the Bill of Rights — did not square where people of color in America are concerned?

The life and times of Malcolm X, as told in the "Autobiography," published in 1965, was described by Time magazine as "one of the most important books of the century." Malcolm X, between his teen years and mid-20s,

was — between Boston and Harlem — a self-described live-by-the-wits street hustler, a drug peddler an addict, a con artist, a thug, and a gun-toting burglar who was caught and convicted and served eight years in prison. That was Malcolm's nature, his cosmos, and he was but a small-scale representation of millions of poor and uneducated young black

men, much similar to those who fail in the classrooms and have regular run-ins with the law, still seeking the American Promise, like Freddie Grey, in modern-day Baltimore.

But, what is lesser known about Malcolm, the complex part, is how he worked his way through various changes and conversions: from a turbulent street life to a disciplined, self-taught reader who became entranced with ideas, to the human rights leader the world would come to know; who, just before his murder, renounced the racist hostility he voiced while he was the leading spokesman for the Nation of Islam. At the apex of his life, the arc of Malcolm's embrace orbited all humans, stretching worldwide like a geometric ellipse; and, by changing so fundamentally, he circled his own square.

The Vitruvian Man and Malcolm X exist in the same space: both are expressions of the search for connections, with da Vinci exclaiming, "Man is the model of the world."

Malcolm X was an exemplary model of reinvention and it is good that he is now embraced and hopefully understood by a generation that has many of the same and some even greater and more complex challenges than existed during his lifetime.

Malcolm X symbolized the very heart and soul of the black experience; what went around in his day has come around again and the circle is unbroken.

Like Alex Haley said, El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Malcolm X, was a Vitruvian Man, a symbol of the ages.

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You Decide: How will the job market change?



Mike Walden
Guest Columnist

Although the job market in North Carolina has been improving for the last five years, there still is a long way to go.

The number of people employed today is 4 percent higher than before the recession and 12 percent higher than in 2000. But since the

turn of the century, the state's working age population (20 to 64) is up 24 percent.

Yet what if I told you that over the next 40 years, the number of jobs in the state could actually fall by 1.2 million? This would send the state unemployment rate to well above 25 percent. Am I just being an alarmist trying to grab headlines?

Actually, these calculations are based on the work of two economists — Frey and Osborne — analyzing the concept of "technological unemployment." Technological unemployment simply means the replacement of jobs by technology. Historical examples are vehicles replacing wagon masters, word processing programs replacing typists and answering programs and electronic calendars replacing secretaries.

Recent research shows one of the reasons for the relatively slow recovery of jobs after the recession is the decision by more businesses to replace workers with machines and technology. This is particularly the case for routine-type jobs — jobs where the same task is being done over and over. These kinds of tasks are obviously very susceptible to being performed by technology.

However, the expectation is that as technology advances, technological unemployment will become broader and deeper. Especially as "smart technology" is developed — where the technology can gather information and make decisions — jobs beyond those that are routine-oriented will become candidates for technological unemployment.

What Frey and Osborne did was tediously analyze all jobs classified into more than 700 occupations and assigned each a likelihood — or probability — that each would be replaced by technology in coming decades. I then took their results and applied them to the current occupations in North Carolina.

The results were startling. Scores of occupations in our state have more than a 70 percent likelihood of disappear-



ing. Included are occupations such as retail salespersons, cashiers, fast-food workers and office clerks. Customer service representatives, janitors and cleaners, and auto service technicians have a moderate (30 percent to 70 percent) chance of being eliminated by technology. Those with the lowest likelihood of downsizing are jobs requiring a high level of complex decision-making, like physicians, nurses, teachers and computer software developers.

I also discovered an income element to these findings. The occupations with the lowest probability of technological unemployment had the highest median salaries, while the occupations with the highest probability of technological unemployment had the lowest median salaries.

I then used Frey and Osborne's probability of technological unemployment for each occupation together with projected growth rates in the occupation's industry and job-to-output ratios to project the total number of jobs in North Carolina's current occupations remaining in 2050. This is where I found there would actually be 1.2 million fewer jobs in 2050 than today.

But there's reason for hope. Notice the 1.2 million fewer jobs is for current occupations in North Carolina. It is likely there will be new occupations created in our state over the next 40 years, just as there have been in the last 100 years. For example, when technological unemployment came to farming, factory occupations were created. When technological unemployment came to the factory, service occupations appeared.

So, along with the current wave of technological unemployment we'll likely see many new occupations

develop. What will they be? I certainly don't have a perfect crystal ball, but I think strong arguments can be made for new occupations in several areas, including repair and maintenance of new technology; data management, analysis and logistics; efficient resource usage; global interaction; and assistance to active and independent elderly households. Each of these developing occupations follow socio-economic trends that are expected to dominate our economy in decades ahead.

This means we will have to be agile with our future educational and training systems. The downsizing of some occupations and the creation of others will occur at an erratic and often imperceptible pace. Formal and informal training programs will have to be attuned to emerging trends and be willing to rapidly shift resources away from declining occupations to growing ones. Future workers will not only have many different jobs during their careers, but also many different occupations.

We've always had technological unemployment, but the information-technology revolution is sparking a new wave that has not yet run its course. You decide if we'll be ready!

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