

# Malcom X: an epic portrayal of a slain leader

## MOVIE REVIEW

By Tarsha White

In making *Malcolm X*, Spike Lee has attempted to cinematically portray the epic life of one of America's most charismatic and complex public figures, Malcolm X.

The film opens stunningly, with a screen filled by the American flag that ignites and burns, leaving at the center a charred "X". At the same time, Denzel Washington, who plays the title role, says: "I charge the white man with being the world's greatest murderer and kidnapper. For the black man, there is no American dream, only the American nightmare." Seconds later video scenes from the Rodney King beating are shown.

There are several flashbacks to Malcolm's childhood in Nebraska and Michigan. In one scene, Malcolm's mother (Lonette McGee) falls apart after her husband is killed by the Ku Klux Klan—a death which was officially ruled as a suicide. His brothers and sisters are separated and sent to foster homes by the government agencies, which causes the mental breakdown of his mother.

The film's second part, dealing with Malcolm's years in Boston during World War II, is the most entertaining. Here, Lee focuses on a dance hall sequence that shows off the humorous, less serious times in Malcolm's life. Malcolm becomes a street hustler, a drug pusher, and eventually a robber which, along



Drawing of Malcom X by Charles Lilly

with his affair with a white woman, gets him a 6 1/2-year sentence at Charleston State Prison.

In prison, Malcolm, with the help of his friend, Baines (Albert Hall), converts to Islam. This begins the third section of the film in which Malcolm becomes a leader and is much more serious. Malcolm becomes a dedicated follower of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI). "Elijah Muhammed is the only man I ever feared," says Malcolm. Elijah's sexual exploitation of women causes Malcolm to turn away from Islam, however.

As a result, Malcolm rethinks his philosophy and mellows his position towards whites. "There can be no Black-White unity until there is Black unity," he says, after returning to America from a trip to Mecca.

In the last few years of his life, Malcolm X has become the victim of a series of death threats. On February 14, 1965, Malcolm X's home in Queens, New York is fire-bombed.

"For the black man, there is no American dream, only The American Nightmare."

Denzel Washington in  
*Malcom X*

One week later, on February 21, Malcolm X is gunned down during a rally in Harlem by a group of Muslim extremists. Unlike Oliver Stone's film about Jim Garrison's investigation of the Kennedy assassination, Lee refrains from making wild and unsubstantiated charges about Malcolm's murder. Lee does suggest, however, that the CIA is involved.

Denzel Washington gives an impressive and mesmerizing performance as Malcolm X. His delivery of the many speeches given by Malcolm X is surprisingly powerful and he remains in control throughout the film. Denzel's previous movie credits include *A Soldier's Story*, *Carbon Copy*, *The Mighty Quinn*, *Heart Condition*, *Ricochet*, *Mississippi Masala*, *Cry Freedom*, and *Glory*.

Other strong performances are given by Albert Hall in the prison scenes, Delroy Lindo as the West Indian Archie, Malcolm's early partner in crime, and Lonette McKee as Malcolm's mother.

To meet the challenge of making a

film about Malcolm X, Spike Lee assembled a variety of behind-the-scenes artists, many of whom Lee has worked with on previous projects; including director of photography Ernest Dickerson (*Jungle Fever*, *Do The Right Thing*, and *Juice*); editor Barry Alexander Brown (Madonna's *Truth or Dare*, *Do The Right Thing*, and *Salaam Bombay!*); production designer Wynn Thomas (all five of Lee's previous films); costume designer Ruth Carter (all of Lee's previous films and Kid'N Play's *House Party*); and casting director Robi Reed (all of Lee's films).

Though *Malcolm X* is very long (three hours and 21 minutes), it is more than worth the sit. In addition to being entertaining, this film educates and informs about the life and times of Malcolm X. This movie, like *Roots*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and other historical Black documentaries presents a realistic and surprising picture of America through the eyes of African-Americans.

At the time he lived, Malcolm X was regarded by many people, including blacks, as a dangerous man who advocated violence to change society—a man who put his people's lives at risk. Malcolm was misquoted and misunderstood by the press who time after time took his words out of context. It is great to finally see the truth about this brilliant leader.

Like most of Lee's movies, *Malcolm X* is guaranteed to stir up even the deepest emotions of the people who will see the film.

# Fortinbras entertaining despite breaks in action

## DRAMA REVIEW

By Melanie Harrington

After 400 years theater audiences now know what happened in Denmark after Hamlet died. The University Players answered this age old question with their November production of *Fortinbras*, Lee Blessing's comic play which picks up the action where Shakespeare's *Hamlet* left off.

The story opens in the throne room of Elsinore, Hamlet's castle. Hamlet (Reggie Hood) has just died and in waltzes Fortinbras (Chester Dunton) who "happened to be in the neighborhood." Fortinbras fulfills Hamlet's dying wish and takes over the throne. He makes up a story that Hamlet and his family were killed by Polish spies. Horatio (J. Gary Brinn) disagrees and says they must tell the truth but no one will listen to him.

Osric (James B. Brothers) turns himself in as the Polish spy. Meanwhile, the ghosts of Claudius (Clarence M. Jones, Jr.) and Gertrude (Regina M. Riddick) appear to Fortinbras and tell him about the afterlife. After they leave, Ophelia's ghost (Renita A. Boone) appears and seduces Fortinbras.

Ophelia begins to take over Fortinbras' mind. While under Ophelia's spell, Fortinbras' army captures foreign lands and his kingdom grows. Fortinbras begins to act differently and decides that he must rid himself of Ophelia.

In order to do that, he marries a Polish maiden. The scene is comical as Fortinbras acts as groom, minister, and witness all at once.

In a misunderstanding, the Norwegian Captain (James Sims) hangs Osric. An enraged Horatio kills Fortinbras and then takes his own life. The play ends with all of the ghosts gathered on the battlements. The ghost of Horatio reads

the news to the others, that Fortinbras' army walked into a river and drowned. Denmark is once again without a ruler.

The University Players put on an impressive show. The costumes, sets, direction, and acting were all believable.

Although Chester Dunton's performance doesn't measure up to his portrayal of Seth Holley in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Dunton managed to captivate the audience with his energy and antics.

J. Gary Brinn (Horatio) also put on a fine performance. He and Dunton worked well together. Their fencing duel was the highlight of the play.

James B. Brothers (Osric) was convincing in his role. His character went from a faithful servant in life to a person who only looks out for himself in death. The change in character was complete and believable.

Renita A. Boone (Ophelia) made her debut with the University Players in *Fortinbras* as did Clarence M. Jones Jr.

and Regina M. Riddick (Gertrude). All gave excellent performances.

Reggie Hood (Hamlet) joins the University Players with acting experience already under his belt. Hood has appeared in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Crucible*.

The only fault in this production was the play itself. *Fortinbras*, directed by Shawn Smith, consists of fifteen scenes which took place on seven sets. The audience was forced to sit in darkness between each scene while the scenery was being rearranged. The frequent stops in the action became distracting at first and then annoying. The audience even quit applauding because of the distraction.

All in all, *Fortinbras* was entertaining and enjoyable, however maybe next time the Players will choose a play more suited to their facilities.