

Like it or not, 'Malcolm X' is gonna move your mind

Malcolm X

Denzel Washington, Spike Lee

directed by Spike Lee

Plaza
967-4737

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Wesent senior Omnibus writer Ian Williams and assistant Black Ink editor Jacqueline Charles to see Malcolm X. (Yeah, he's white, she's black.) Here's what they came up with:

IW: Do you think that the swirl of hype and merchandise surrounding this movie is giving it completely unreal expectations, or do you think it matters?

JC: Oh, I don't think it matters. I loved it. I didn't know what to expect going in, since there was so much talk one way or another, but it didn't matter. I thought it was great.

IW: The three hours go by quickly — it was probably just the right length.

JC: Scenes just grab you, even after they pass. You're still experiencing the last scene while the next one gets you. Everything is so charged with emotion.

IW: Probably the hardest thing to do in a film is portray someone, particularly a powerful public figure like Malcolm X, going through a huge transition in the way he thinks. Especially without seeming goofy or wishy-washy. When Malcolm goes from being vehemently separatist to feeling a sense of brotherhood, Spike Lee screenplays it really well.

JC: It was very realistic. You can't put someone's entire life into a movie, even if it is three hours, but the way Malcolm changes — it was well done. It was mostly through letters to his wife from Mecca. When he gets back to America and gives his press confer-

movie

IAN WILLIAMS & JACQUELINE CHARLES

ence, you know, his turnaround isn't some sort of big shock.

IW: I remember in the book itself, there was a lot more concentration on Malcolm's youth, like his mother, father and schooling. That stuff was more powerful to me than almost anything else, but Spike Lee concentrates on everything post-adolescence.

JC: Well, if he concentrated on the childhood, I mean, anyone could watch this movie and say, "So he had a bad childhood — who hasn't?" But by concentrating on his faults as a teenager and adult, it makes us see Malcolm as a real person.

IW: I think the reason Malcolm X is so hard for some whites — and even blacks — to deal with is that he was so hard to pin down. You can't really say he was a racist and you can't say he was terribly open-minded when it came to white folks. The only way to get his feelings across was to tell his story without getting in the way of it, and I think Spike Lee did that really well. There were no ...

JC: Huge gaps.
IW: ... and he never told the audience what to think. I never thought he abused his power as a filmmaker here, and he had all kinds of chances. A lot of his other films have pissed me off just for that reason.

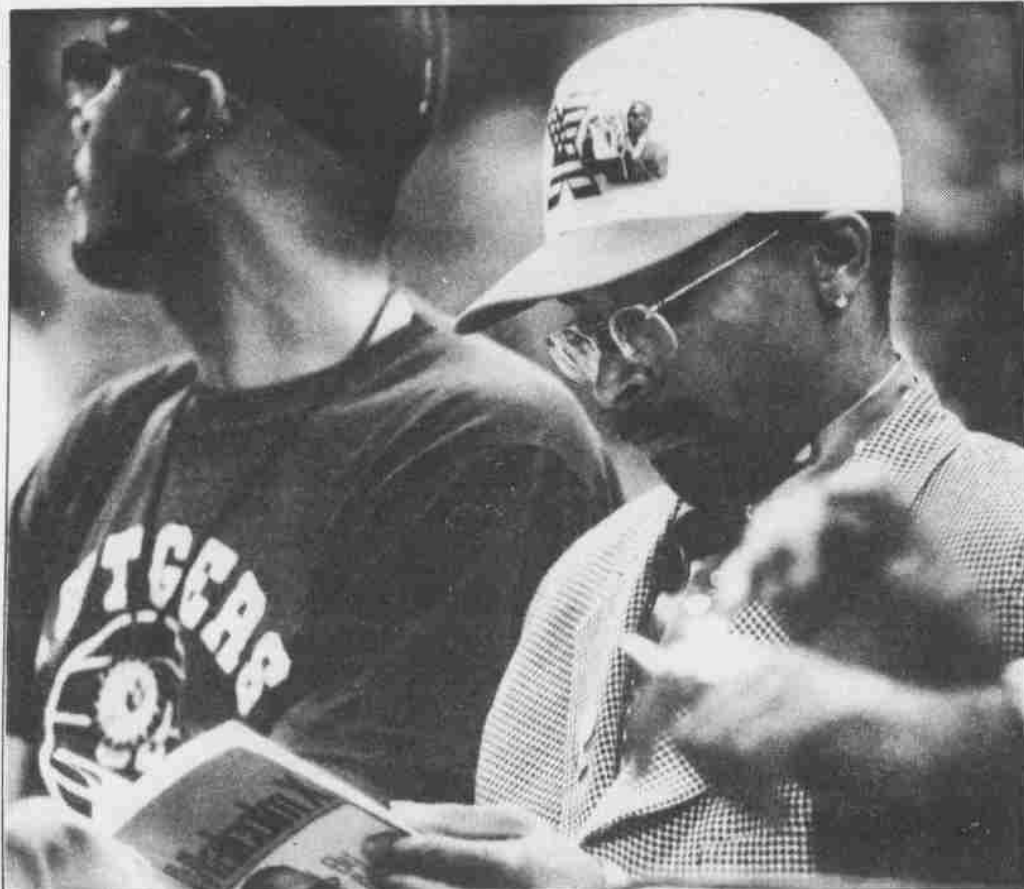
JC: Well, all of his films have dealt with social issues, they were sort of studies, like *Jungle Fever* and *Do the Right Thing*. This was a biography.

IW: Did anything bother you at all in this movie?

JC: There was this one thing that sort of confused me. You were talking transformations and transitions, and I thought that the man in prison who taught Malcolm the ways of Elijah Mohammed was good, but ...

IW: What was his name?
JC: I think it was Baines or something. In the book, it's Reginald. Anyway, I wished his character had been more consistent, because he appeared out of nowhere at the end. Only this time he was mostly a bad character — I wish I had some type of indication where he had been all that time.

IW: The prison sequences were so good that I was a little startled by the apparition of Elijah Mohammed in



Spike Lee: Guess his favorite letter

DEBBIE STENGEL photo

Malcolm's prison cell. That hologram totally reminded me of those scenes in *Star Wars* when Obi-Wan Kenobi comes back to dole out advice. "Turn off the computer Malcolm. Use the force ..."

JC: Yeah, although the voice-over during scenes like that saves them, puts them into perspective.

IW: The movie has a good sense of humor in places.

JC: Another thing that might be a problem were those scenes that have that "Spike Lee signature" — like Malcolm's face turning upside down, and people walking down streets without looking like their legs are moving.

IW: He did that in *Jungle Fever* too.
JC: You get so engrossed in the movie that these things jerk you out into reality.

IW: I'm torn between thinking that those "signatures" are self-indulgent Spike Lee-isms that get in the way of the movie, or else they are simply the cinematic spice that makes the whole movie different and cool. By the time Spike Lee starts messing with the camera here, though, Malcolm X has already become obsessed with his own death, getting kind of paranoid and

psychotic. I guess if your main character is getting psychotic, the filmmaker gets to as well.

JC: One thing I was impressed with was Denzel Washington. He is such an amazing actor.

IW: I mean, he was almost indistinguishable from the real thing. It would take me an hour to explain how forceful and subtle he was.

JC: The scene with Betty Shabazz, Malcolm's wife, when they have their first fight, when the reality of the situation starts to crash down around them, it was fantastic. Also when Malcolm is about to be converted to Islam in prison, it happens so gradually. Malcolm doesn't automatically kneel, he waits — it's not like ... boom! Welcome to Islam!

IW: That's the most impressive part of this movie — it has real restraint. This movie will be put on the table next to *JFK*, which was the white man's three-hour version of his cultural icon assassinated in the '60s. And *Malcolm X* is less judgmental, less maddening and totally less manipulative than *JFK*.

JC: As a black person, it got me redefining myself. It won't alienate any black people, it uses more of the "Pan African" idea of people like W.E.B. DuBois. The struggle isn't about blacks just in America, it's about blacks all over the world. Mandela's speech at the

end showed that so well.

IW: What about white people? A lot of my friends had that hang-their-head-in-shame thing going when they got out of the Plaza theater. Is that a good thing or bad thing?

JC: I'm in no position really to say. This movie is about defining your role in the whole problem of racism, and having an opinion. I mean, everybody should go see this movie, because whether you're black or white or whatever, you're going to come out feeling different than when you came in. You will have some sort of emotion, and whether it's anger, pride, or shame, any emotion that you have ...

IW: At least it's something.
JC: ... at least it's something.

top ten films

Figures indicate total gross

- Home Alone 2**
\$74.2 million, 2 weeks
- Aladdin**
\$25.8 million, 3 weeks
- The Bodyguard**
\$24.4 million, 1 week
- Bram Stoker's Dracula**
\$20.1 million, 3 weeks
- Malcolm X**
\$26.9 million, 2 weeks
- Passenger 57**
\$33.2 million, 4 weeks
- A River Runs Through It**
\$28.3 million, 8 weeks
- Under Siege**
\$72.4 million, 8 weeks
- The Last of the Mohicans**
\$67.9 million, 10 weeks
- The Mighty Ducks**
\$44.4 million, 9 weeks

ratings

- — wait for the video
- — go to the dollar theater
- — only pay matinee price
- — pay full price
- — take your sister, too

OMNIBUS

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CHELSEA Chapel Hill 958-3005
two thumbs up! 7:00, 9:30 (2:00, 4:30)
A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT
"A FLASH DEBUT!" Picks up where Scorsese's 'Mean Streets' left off! — *Los Angeles Times*
RESERVOIR DOGS R 7:10, 9:10, 12:10, 4:10

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