

New revelations of FBI and New York police conspiracy in the assassination of Malcolm X

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The family of Malcolm X held a news conference on Saturday, February 20, to reveal the deathbed confession of an undercover police officer about his involvement in a New York Police Department (NYPD) and FBI conspiracy to assassinate the famous black nationalist leader.

Raymond Wood was an undercover cop with the NYPD for seven years in the 1960s and early 1970s. In 2011, after a cancer diagnosis and when he believed he was near death, he composed a letter explaining his role at the time of the assassination. He asked his cousin, Reginald Wood, to reveal the contents of the letter only after his death, which did not take place until nearly ten years later.

The elder Wood wrote, “I was a black New York City undercover police officer between May of 1964 through May of 1971. I participated in actions that in hindsight were deplorable and detrimental to my own black people. ... Under the direction of my handlers, I was told to encourage leaders and members of the civil rights groups to commit felonious acts.”

Wood specifically recounted that his superiors instructed him to involve two of Malcolm X’s key bodyguards in “a felonious federal crime so that they could be arrested by the FBI and kept away from managing Malcolm X’s door security on Feb. 21, 1965,” at the public meeting where Malcolm X was killed. “At that time, I was not aware that Malcolm X was the target,” Wood wrote. The two men on the security detail were charged in connection with a phony plot to bomb the Statue of Liberty. They were taken into custody days before the event.

Last weekend’s news conference took place at the site of the old Audubon Ballroom in upper Manhattan, only one day before the 56th anniversary of the killing of Malcolm X as he began to speak to the assembled

audience on that Sunday afternoon. The site has since been partially restored as the Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz Memorial and Education Center.

In attendance this past Saturday were three of Malcolm X’s six daughters. The meeting was opened by Benjamin Crump, the attorney who represented the family of Trayvon Martin following his death at the hands of self-styled vigilante George Zimmerman in 2013, and who has since been prominent in many investigations of police violence, including the deaths of Michael Brown and George Floyd. The family is calling for a full probe. Ilyasah Shabazz, one of Malcolm X’s daughters, told the news conference, “Any evidence that provides greater insight into the truth behind that terrible tragedy should be thoroughly investigated.”

It has long been widely and very strongly suspected that both the NYPD and the FBI had a hand in the killing of Malcolm X, who was under massive surveillance, especially in the year since his public break with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI). The police sent agents into the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), which he had founded after this split.

One year ago, Netflix aired a six-part series, “Who Killed Malcolm X?” which deepened suspicions of state involvement in the killing, very likely utilizing elements within the Nation of Islam. Louis Farrakhan, then a prominent young Black Muslim leader and today the leader of the NOI, had written two months before the assassination that Malcolm X was a traitor and that “such a man is worthy of death.”

At the same time, two of the three Black Muslims convicted of the killing and sentenced to long prison terms have persistently maintained their innocence. In his deathbed letter, Raymond Wood wrote that Khalil

Islam, also known as Thomas Johnson, “was later arrested and wrongfully convicted to protect my cover and the secrets of the FBI and NYPD.” Johnson, paroled in the mid-1980s, died in 2009.

Wood added, “I am aging and in failing health; recently I learned about the death of Thomas Johnson and [am] deeply concerned that with my death his family will not be able to exonerate him. It is my hope that this information is received with the understanding that I have carried these secrets with a heavy heart and remorsefully regret my participation in this matter.”

It is very likely that the assassination of Malcolm X was a complex operation consisting of different elements. Wood’s role was only part of the conspiracy—the necessary weakening of door security on the fateful day. Very soon after Malcolm X began speaking there was a disturbance created in the hall, and then a man rushed forward and shot Malcolm once in the chest with a sawed-off shotgun as two others charged the stage firing semi-automatic handguns.

While the FBI declined comment, the office of the Manhattan District Attorney as well as the NYPD responded to the latest revelations with carefully worded, evasive and hypocritical statements. After the showing of “Who Killed Malcolm X?” Democratic District Attorney Cyrus Vance announced a reopening of the investigation into the murder. After the February 20 news conference, the DA’s office announced that “review of this matter is active and ongoing.”

The NYPD, meanwhile, which is directly implicated in Malcolm X’s murder, said it “has provided all available records relevant to the case to the District Attorney. The Department remains committed to assist with that review in any way.”

Alongside the necessary fight to reveal the truth about the killing of Malcolm X, some broader political conclusions must be drawn. Malcolm X was a marked man, not when he was in the Nation of Islam, but only after he left it and began, even in the most limited fashion, to acknowledge that racial separation was not the answer to racism, and that skin color was not the source of inequality and injustice. The lesson is not a new one but is underscored: Left-wing organizations must maintain the highest vigilance in relation to the various state agencies whose job is to employ infiltration, provocation and murderous violence to defend the outmoded system of capitalist exploitation.



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