

Exhibition in Harlem Offers New Look at Malcolm X

By CHRISTINE HAUSER

His voice was silenced 40 years ago by assassins during a rally in Washington Heights.

But the words of Malcolm X were heard and seen once again yesterday by hundreds of people at the opening of an exhibition of his recorded speeches, letters, photographs and personal items at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in Harlem.

Some visitors were old enough to have heard Malcolm X in person when he spoke at rallies in the 1960's. Others, like Amaru Zaire, 3, could learn only from the public legacy of one of the most important black figures of the 20th century.

"Who is that?" the little boy said, holding his mother's hand as he cocked his head to listen at the start of the exhibition. Around them, people stood transfixed as a television screen showed excerpts from Malcolm X's speeches and other appearances.

Amaru's mother, Jenee Robinson, 25, answered her son in a whisper. "That's Malcolm X," she said. "Now what did I teach you about him? When he talked, what did people do?"

Amaru replied: "They followed him. They listened."

The 250-item exhibition, "Malcolm X: A Search for the Truth," coincides with the 80th anniversary of his birth in Omaha. It displays, for the first time, items that his family and organizers of the exhibition say will enable scholars to take a more accurate look at his work and life.

"It will basically throw a shadow on all the historians who have paraphrased my dad," said one of Malcolm X's daughters, Malaak Shabazz, who was born after her father's death. "You can't paraphrase or rewrite an icon or human being."

Within two hours of the opening of the exhibition, which runs through Dec. 31, several hundred people had visited the library, on Malcolm X Boulevard and 135th Street. They walked along a timeline of Malcolm X's life, from his birth through his murder at the Audubon Ballroom on Feb. 21, 1965, fixed in frame after frame of black-



Ozler Muhammad/The New York Times

Tara Lake, a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, was among the visitors yesterday to "Malcolm X: A Search for the Truth." The exhibit of memorabilia will run through Dec. 31.

Forty years after his death, and 80 after his birth, a black leader is honored.

and-white photographs and letters in tidy penmanship.

Students took turns reading to each other from his letters from prison and gazed up at photographs of him with his wife and daughters, or praying at a mosque in Egypt, or shaking hands with well-wishers in other countries.

One of the pictures shows the eager faces of young black men and women pressed up against police barriers at a 1961 rally on West 125th Street. A young man with a wide, gap-toothed grin and a stylish suit peers into the camera.

"That is me," Earl Harley, 69, a visitor to the exhibition, said, pick-

ing himself out from the group in the photograph. He began to cry.

Mr. Harley, who sells handmade belt buckles on West 116th Street, said he could not remember exactly what Malcolm said that day. "I belonged to his temple," he said, wiping his eyes. "He taught us to be fair and honest. To keep our heads up. To stay strong."

The eager faces of Mr. Harley and the other participants in the rally that day contrast with the somber expressions in another photograph of mourners waiting in line to view Malcolm's body in an open coffin.

Alethia Ford, 63, who wraps gifts at Bloomingdale's, recalled standing in that line for hours with her son Ricky, then a toddler.

"The line was all the way around the block," she said, looking up at the picture and remembering how she thought Malcolm X looked in the coffin when they finally reached it. "Like a prince," she said.

"His killing took a lot away from us," Ms. Ford said. "But I have what he taught me in here," she said, her hand over her heart.

The man known as Malcolm X evolved from Malcolm Little, a petty criminal and con man. The displays acknowledge the days when he sold drugs and bootleg whiskey and wound up in prison. They also show his process of self-education and eventual conversion to the Nation of Islam. In 1953 he began preaching, and the next year he became the minister of Temple 7 in Harlem.

The exhibition includes pictures of the scene in the ballroom after Malcolm was shot, and the casings of the bullets that killed him.

Ms. Johnson said this was one of the reasons she took Amaru to the exhibition.

"I want him to understand the sacrifices that his people have made for him," she said. "And that superheroes are not only on TV."