

# On Malcolm X and Philadelphia's Black Mafia

Back when I used to lecture frequently about Philly's Black Mafia, I would often get questions about Malcolm X and whether he had anything to do with the notorious syndicate. The question on its face makes sense, of course, because of the role Philadelphia's Nation of Islam Temple 12 played in the group's murderous rise. Furthermore, Temple 12 Minister Jeremiah Shabazz (formerly Jeremiah Pugh) was a key player in the underworld along the Eastern seaboard for decades. Interested parties can read about Shabazz at length in my *Black Brothers, Inc.: The Violent Rise and Fall of Philadelphia's Black Mafia* (Milo 2005.07), and in a blog post [here](#). With the recent popular Netflix 6-part documentary *Who Killed Malcolm X*, the subject is popping up again.

Malcolm X, the flamboyant, headline-making spokesman of the NOI movement, moved to Philadelphia in 1954 to open NOI Temple 12. As I write in *Black Brothers, Inc*:

*Malcolm X found a loyal follower and a quick study in Jeremiah Pugh, and Brother Jeremiah soon rose to the rank of captain in Temple 12's Fruit of Islam guard. Jeremiah and Malcolm became virtually inseparable, and roomed together at 2516 W. Nicholas Street in North Philadelphia until Malcolm moved to New York. "Malcolm lived in a room with another brother and me for a year. So I got to know him well," recalled Pugh. "I woke up next to him every day, and went to bed next to him every night."*

Jeremiah Pugh soon began climbing the ranks within the NOI, including obtaining the name Shabazz along with a major location change to Atlanta. After spending just over five

years successfully establishing the NOI in the Southeastern United States, Jeremiah Shabazz was transferred back to Philadelphia in April 1964. Of course, Malcolm X made his fateful pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964 and turned toward Orthodox Islam and against the NOI.

*On December 4th, Louis Farrakhan (then known as Louis X) wrote in Muhammad Speaks, "If any Muslim backs a fool like Malcolm ... he would be a fool himself ... Only those who wish to be led to hell, or to their doom, will follow Malcolm. The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape ... Such a man is worthy of death."*

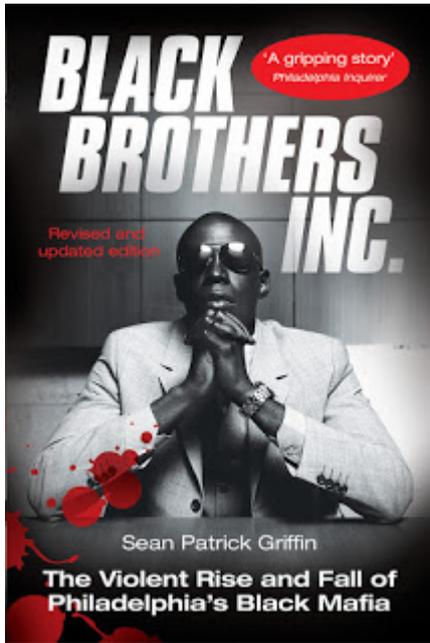
Some will recall the damning cartoon published in *Muhammad Speaks* about Malcolm's decision to turn against the NOI which featured his decapitated head tumbling in a graveyard toward a stack of skulls at the base of a tombstone marked with the names of history's most infamous traitors:



Last on this from *Black Brothers, Inc.*:

*When Malcolm and his bodyguards arrived at a Philadelphia radio station for an interview on December 29<sup>th</sup>, a crew from Temple 12 met them, and fought with Malcolm's guards in their effort to get at him. A police detective happened to be in the area, and managed to break up the fistfight. The crew sent to attack Malcolm was led by Sterling X. Hobbs, a gangster who was usually called upon when the need for physical force was expected. Hobbs would make headlines a decade later, but for now his importance was tied to Jeremiah Shabazz. He was close to Shabazz and thus the attack on Malcolm suggested that Shabazz had allied with Elijah Muhammad against his former friend and roommate. Another article in Muhammad Speaks predicted that 1965 would be "a year in which the most outspoken opponents of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad will slink into ignoble silence." Malcolm X took the threats seriously, and told anyone who knew him that his life was in danger. His concerns were validated on February 14<sup>th</sup> when his house was firebombed. Malcolm survived and continued to speak out against Elijah Muhammad. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, he was on the stage again, about to speak, when he was shot dead. Elijah Muhammad expressed no sympathy for Malcolm's death, stating instead that "Malcolm died according to his preachings. He preached violence and violence has taken him away."*

So, while it is true people like Jeremiah Shabazz and Sterling X. Hobbs would play key roles in the history of Philly's Black Mafia, and Malcolm X had an important and then troubling time in Philadelphia, there is no evidence the syndicate had any role in the slaying. Given the complicated and controversial subject matter, I easily understand the confusion and the questions.



spg