The Autobiography of Malcolm X

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

Malcolm X was born to a rural family in Omaha, Nebraska. His father, Earl Little, had strong views on race relations that drew the ire of conservative whites. This led to racial violence that eventually resulted in Earl's death and the scattering of the Little family. Malcolm moved to Boston and then New York as a teenager in 1929, where he fell in love with the culture and lifestyle of the urban ghettoes. After making ends meet through a variety of jobs and criminal activities, Malcolm went to prison for burglary in 1946. While in prison, he began to study history and converted to the Nation of Islam through the influence of his siblings. Upon his release in 1952, he became a high-profile minister and spokesman for the Nation of Islam for the next twelve years. Always a controversial figure, he was finally expelled from the Nation after accusations of misconduct. After his expulsion from the group, he travelled to Mecca and throughout Africa, and he began speaking more on a potential brotherhood between races and the Pan Africanism movement. A few months before his fortieth birthday, three men assassinated Malcolm at a public event; the men convicted of the crime were associated with the Nation of Islam. Thousands attended his funeral in Harlem. Alex Haley, who worked with Malcolm X to write his autobiography, grew up in a family that prided its mixed-race background and commitment to education. He was sent to college first at Alcorn State University at the age of fifteen, and then at Elizabeth City State College, but he eventually dropped out. He then joined the Coast Guard for what became a twenty year career. He spent much of his time working as a journalist, where he distinguished himself as an accomplished writer. In 1959, he retired from the Coast Guard and began a civilian career as a journalist. He often conducted high-profile interviews for Playboy Magazine, including one with George Lincoln Rockwell, the leader of the American Nazi Party. Haley ghost-wrote the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, with Malcolm playing a significant role in editing the final work. In 1976, Haley published *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, which chronicles his own family's history back to the figure Kunta Kinte; adapted into a mini-series, it is Haley's most famous work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Malcolm X lived in transformative years in American history. He grew up during the Depression, the largest economic downturn in US history that forced many people, especially minorities and those in rural areas, into poverty. However, the poverty also great affected the economies (both legal and illegal) in America's cities, as can be seen from Malcolm's experiences in Roxbury and Harlem. The entry of the US into the Second World War acted as a catalyst to the American economy, but it also drew millions of young men into the military through the draft. We read how Malcolm and Shorty both took dramatic measures to avoid military service. However, millions of other African American men did serve, and their experiences in the military and new expectations of racial equality in the United States helped to feed the discontent among African Americans that eventually erupted into the Civil Rights Movement. When Malcolm exits prison in 1952, these tensions have just begun to simmer, and they will reach their apex with events such as the 1963 March on Washington and the 1964 Harlem riots. Despite the legislative progress of the Civil Rights Act (1963) and The Voting Rights Act (1964), violence and prejudice continued to be directed at African Americans, something Malcolm was certainly aware of towards the end of his life.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In his Autobiography, Malcolm emphasizes multiple times the important role books have played in his life and in developing his thinking. For example, he invested much of his energy into learning history through books such as *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois, or H. G. Well's *The Outline of History*, which attempts to give a non-Eurocentric and non-racist account of history. He also read books on the history and atrocity of slavery; these include Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has a complicated past for reinforcing certain racial stereotypes, it also played a key role in the abolitionist movement of the 19th century. Malcolm's own ambivalence regarding the book is evident throughout his autobiography; while he writes, "that's the only novel I have ever read since I started serious reading," he also frequently uses "Uncle Tom" as an insulting indictment of other black leaders. The novel *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison also recounts a story very similar thematically to Malcolm's own life: Ellison's protagonist moves from the South to New York, looking to escape racism, but finds it to be an integral part of societal relations throughout the country. And finally, works by the author James Baldwin also speak in conversation with Malcolm's own ideas. Malcolm greatly admired Baldwin, whom he complimented by saying: "He's so brilliant he confuses the white man with words on paper." Baldwin's novel *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, for example, tells the story of a young man growing up in Harlem in the 1930s.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Autobiography of Malcolm X

- **When Written:** 1963-1965
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** 1965
- **Literary Period:** African-American memoir, 20th century memoir
- **Genre:** Autobiography, Nonfiction
- **Setting:** Primarily Lansing, Michigan, Boston, Massachusetts and New York City, with journeys throughout the US, the Middle East, and Africa
- **Climax:** While Malcolm's assassination occurs outside of the narration, it looms over the book like a shadow, and can therefore be rightly considered the climax.
- **Antagonist:** The racial caste system that denies equality and justice to African Americans
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Ghostwriter. A ghostwriter is someone who writes a book on behalf of someone else and generally attempts to mimic their voice. Whether or not Alex Haley is a ghostwriter in the context of the *Autobiogrpahy of Malcolm X* is up for debate. On the one hand, Malcolm had considerable oversight on the text, rendering it more in line with his own style and language. On the other hand, Haley had considerable influence in convincing Malcolm to allow certain thoughts and feelings to be made public. So, perhaps the *Autobiography* is best understood as a collaboration, rather than as the product of a ghostwriter.

Film adaptation. *Malcolm X* (1992), starring Denzel Washington and directed by Spike Lee, was largely based on the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Washington was nominated for an Oscar for Best Actor, but lost to Al Pacino's performance in *Scent of a Woman* (1992) – a choice publicly criticized by Lee.

PLOT SUMMARY

The autobiography begins with Malcolm describing his mother Louise, pregnant with him, as she confronts an angry mob of Klansmen. After Malcolm is born, the family moves to Michigan; but racist hatred continues to surround them. Malcolm's father, Earl Little, has an outspoken style of preaching, and this along with his connection to Marcus Garvey attracts the anger of the local Black Legion (a splinter group of the Ku Klux Klan)—and one morning he is found dead. As Earl was the family's main bread winner, and the Great Depression is in full swing, the family quickly falls into poverty. Meanwhile, state officials hound Louise incessantly about not being a good mother to her kids and being "crazy," before finally she does indeed have a mental breakdown.

The kids are scattered among local families and mostly settle in. Malcolm, however, has been acting out, and is soon expelled from school and sent to a youth detention center in nearby Mason. There, he is the only "Negro" in his class, making him more of a star than a target for discrimination. He is a successful athlete, a good student, and popular; he's even elected class president. And yet, the adulation is only ever superficial, hiding a deeper racist mentality. Nothing further illustrates this than Mr. Ostrowski, Malcolm's 8th grade teacher, who advises him to not aim for being a lawyer. Rather, "as a Negro," he should set his sights more reasonably, perhaps to becoming a carpenter. For the first time, Malcolm can see and feel the racial double standard. And after having spent one summer in Boston with his half-sister Ella and soaking in its vibrant black culture (at least, compared to Mason, Michigan), he moves in with her as soon as he finishes the 8th grade.

Upon arriving in Boston, Malcolm becomes immediately aware of the class hierarchy among African Americans living in Roxbury. Those living on the "hill" are those working in the white businesses downtown as janitors and couriers, while those living in "town" are poor and involved in criminal economic activities, such as gambling and prostitution. Malcolm is enamored with the "hustlers" in the town area, and he begins working a small hustle as a shoe shine boy, thanks to his new friend Shorty. From there, he quickly falls into the hustler culture, embracing a life of drugs and alcohol and the popular style of zoot suits and **conks**.

Ella attempts to extract Malcolm from this life by getting him a job at a respectable soda fountain clerk, but this leads to his greatest symbolic fall. After establishing a rapport with Laura, a well-educated black girl, Malcolm invites her to a Duke Ellington concert for a night of lindy-hopping (a type of swing dance). While they have an amazing time, Malcolm abandons Laura at the sight of an attractive white woman, Sophia, who comes to symbolize his idolatry of white people as being better than black people.

After moving in with Shorty, Malcolm begins working as a dishwasher on the railroads before quickly being promoted to selling sandwiches. Train journeys to New York and Washington D.C. allow him to see the experience of black people in America's major cities, a condition which is fraught with poverty and crime. Nonetheless, Malcolm falls in love with Harlem's night life, and after being fired from the railroad, he gets a job at Small's Place, a high-end bar and ballroom in Harlem. He starts to go by "Red" or "Detroit Red." This seals his move to New York, where he begins to learn more about the hustles happening in Harlem, especially those involving the accommodation of white visitors from downtown Manhattan. After being barred from Small's for a small criminal offense, Malcolm begins to sell marijuana, despite increasing attention from law enforcement. At the same time, he is called up for the draft, but his well-developed slang and overall criminal appearance keep him out of the war.

After increasing police pressure, Malcom moves to various other hustles, from burglary with Sammy the Pimp to gambling rings, underground mixed-race prostitution rings, and bootlegging liquor for a Jewish businessman named Hymie. However, the pressure from the police and various criminal elements in Harlem continues to build. Finally Shorty is forced to come from Boston to pick Malcolm up and extract him from a potentially fatal situation. Back in Boston, Malcolm begins to organize burglaries in upper class white neighborhoods with Shorty, their new contact Rudy, Sophia, and her sister. Once again, enemies begin to encircle Malcolm. Sophia's husband becomes aware of their affair, and the police begin hunting for the burglars' ring. Finally, Malcolm is caught as he tries to repair a stolen watch, and the whole crew is sent to jail (except Rudy, who escapes). Malcolm and Shorty, as black men, are sentenced disproportionately to ten years in prison.

The year is 1946, and Malcolm is now in jail. His tirades against God and legendary anger have gained him the nickname "Satan." However, after repeated letters and visits from several of his siblings, Malcolm becomes extremely interested in the new religious movement known as the Nation of Islam (a fusion of Black Nationalism and an adapted form of Islam), whose leader, Elijah Muhammad, preaches about the dignity of black people and the evils enacted upon them by white men. Malcolm rediscovers his fervor for learning and reading, which complements his newfound faith. After seven years of close study and debate among his fellow prisoners, he exits prison as a Muslim, completely committed to the cause of the Nation.

Malcolm then moves to Detroit with his brother, Wilfred. There, he begins to learn more about the Nation, its worship routines and its revered leader. He participates in a mass rally in Chicago, where Elijah specifically calls out to him and then invites him to his home. Quickly, their relationship grows into an extremely close bond in which Malcolm sees Elijah as his father, and Elijah sees Malcolm as a son. After working several menial jobs, Malcolm is made a full-time minister of the Nation and sent to establish temples in Boston, Philadelphia, and finally, New York.

In New York, Malcolm finds fervent competition amongst the many voices calling for racial justice. Nevertheless, the Nation's message attracts many poor blacks, particularly evangelical Christians who are intimately aware of the prejudice stacked against them. Despite hesitancy over Islam's strict moral code, one event above all serves to galvanize Harlem's support behind the Nation. Two Brothers of the Nation are attacked and arrested by white police officers in Harlem, which leads to a mobilization of the Nation's "Fruit of Islam" (the Nation's militant force). These men take formation outside the police department until their brothers receive proper medical attention, which increases their local and national image as a force of resistance and black power.

As the Nation begins to attract more negative attention, Malcolm begins to itch for the opportunity to defend his community. Finally, Mr. Muhammad grants him permission, and Malcolm embarks on a rhetorical rampage, lambasting more conservative black leaders as "Uncle Toms" and the media as prejudiced against the growing Muslim community. This national coverage evolves into a significant growth period for the Nation, which begins to hold massive rallies of Muslims around the country. The more the movement grows, the more leeway Malcolm is given to speak to the media and at universities and rallies; however, this also increases the envy of other leaders within the Nation. While Malcolm sees a growing struggle against the white power structure controlling the country's politics, his opponents see a narcissistic leader aiming only for personal glory.

Around 1963, Malcolm becomes aware that Elijah Muhammad, his idol, is not a godly figure, but just a man with a sinful history. This severely rocks his faith, as Mr. Muhammad's holiness formed a central pillar to Malcolm's Muslim faith. Nonetheless, he takes steps to protect the Nation's reputation. Unfortunately his efforts, combined with some of his inflammatory remarks, are used as an excuse to expel Malcolm from the Nation. Now, Malcolm is viewed as an enemy of the Nation. Thankfully, his friend Cassius Clay takes him in and gives him the space to plan his next move. As a faithful Muslim, Malcolm decides that it is time for him to embark on the Hajj (traditional pilgrimage for Muslims) to Mecca.

Now on his journey to Mecca, Malcolm encounters many people, such as Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam, who take him in and show him great hospitality. While these Arab men may appear to be white, they show Malcolm a hospitality which transcends his notions of race. This happens time and again upon the Hajj, which is a journey that emphasizes the brotherhood of all Muslims under Allah. These experiences begin to fundamentally transform Malcolm's views on race and racism from being a biologically determined fact to a socially determined condition. After the Hajj, he journeys through Africa, where he meets young student activists and politicians who are committed to ideas of Pan-Africanism (solidarity among all peoples of African descent) and Black Nationalism. No longer are African Americans a lost people; now, for Malcolm, they are brothers of those Africans looking to move beyond colonialism. This experience of worldwide black unity is epitomized by his meeting with Osagyeo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of Ghana, who discusses many of these ideas with Malcolm.

Upon returning to America, Malcolm looks to spread his newfound faith and ideology. After his experiences in the Middle East and Africa, he wants to emphasize both the possibility of brotherhood across racial divisions and the necessity of unity among the African diaspora as a means of resistance to white supremacy globally. Unfortunately, his more refined message leaves him in no-man's land. Neither a militant

nor a moderate, he is excluded from most African American civil rights movements. He attempts to found his own mosque, Muslim Mosque Inc., but he struggles to find support among both the Muslim and the non-Muslim communities in Harlem. After months of death threats and assassination attempts, Malcolm is quite prepared to die by violence. He informs the reader of the impending threat upon his life, with the hope that he has somehow advanced the cause of Black Americans. Looming beyond the final page is, of course, his assassination by three members of the Nation of Islam and his subsequent funeral, an event attended by thousands.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Malcolm X – Malcolm goes through multiple transformations in his life, which are reflected in his various names. There is Malcolm Little, the small-town boy from Lansing, Michigan; "Detroit Red", the Roxbury and Harlem hustler; Malcolm X, the minister and national icon of the Nation of Islam; and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, the orthodox Muslim fresh from the Hajj (a holy pilgrimage to Mecca) and ready to start a more inclusive mosque. Through it all, Malcolm displays an intense passion for learning and a stunning intelligence, whether as a young student or while in prison, where he would read for the entire day and join public debates with other well-read inmates. Furthermore, Malcolm has a shrewd eye for understanding his environment. Like a sixth sense, he always knows when the tide is turning against him, as when the police in Harlem begin to catch onto him dealing drugs. Malcolm X is assassinated before the publication of his autobiography, but he remains a crucial figure in American history and the fight for black rights.

Alex Haley – Malcom X's collaborator in writing his *Autobiography*, Alex Haley does not show up as a character until the Epilogue. There, he informs the reader of his two years spent talking with Malcolm late into the night, uncovering the most intimate details of his life. While Malcolm initially distrusted Alex thanks to his military background and status as a journalist, he eventually became an important source of emotional support and trust in Malcolm's life.

Elijah Muhammad – A slight, soft spoken man, Elijah Muhammad founded and led the Nation of Islam from 1934 until 1975. After Malcolm converts, he becomes his spiritual director and assumes a father-figure role in his life. Muhammad's apparent righteousness and humility inspire both the support of Malcolm and of the Nation at large. However, Muhammad eventually becomes jealous of Malcolm's growing fame, and he ultimately makes Malcolm into a scapegoat to divert from scandals around his own sexual affairs.

Louise Little (Malcolm's Mother) – Malcolm X's mother, Louise Little was born in Granada to a black woman who had been raped by a white man. This traumatic past instills her with a disgust for her own lighter skin tone, a disgust which is passed down to Malcolm. After Malcolm's father is killed, Louise gradually loses control of her family's finances, and eventually is institutionalized for mental illness, where she remains for the next 23 years.

Ella Little – Malcom's half-sister through his father Earl, Ella is a strong, independent dark-skinned woman who immediately impresses Malcolm. She supports him moving from Lansing, Michigan to Boston with her and continues to support him financially and emotionally throughout his life. Malcolm refers to her numerous marriages as proof that she was too strong and too independent for any one man.

Reginald Little – Reginald is Malcolm's younger brother who comes to live with him in Harlem. While he admires Malcolm, he also is unafraid to live his life in ways that diverge from Malcolm. Reginald leads Malcolm to the Nation of Islam, but is later isolated from both the Nation and his family for having an extramarital affair.

Sister Betty X – A devoted member of the Nation of Islam and trained nurse, Sister Betty X attracts Malcolm's attention through her committed service. One day, with practically no pretext, he calls her and asks her to marry him; she agrees, and she becomes his very devoted wife. While Malcolm the narrator tells us very little about her, he does say she is one of the only people in his life that he trusts.

Laura – Laura is a bright high school student with a promising future ahead of her – before she meets Malcolm. As a young man, he introduces her to the nightlife in Roxbury, which he believes to be the cause of her eventual fall into drug use and prostitution. Furthermore, Malcolm passes over her in favor of Sophia.

Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) – Later known as Muhammad Ali, Cassius is a heavyweight boxer. A charismatic, good-looking, and sharp young man, he becomes a good friend of Malcolm's, and he takes him in during his suspension from the Nation of Islam. This generosity touches Malcolm, but when Cassius eventually turns his back on him, the abandonment hurts all the more.

Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam – Malcolm reaches out to Abd and his son Omar for help in navigating customs in Saudi Arabia. Abd then takes Malcolm in as his guest and overwhelms him with his hospitality, despite the fact that in Malcolm's mind, Abd is a "white man." This relationship proves to be a turning point in Malcolm's understanding of racism.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Reverend Earl Little (Malcolm's Father) – Reverend Earl Little, Malcolm's father, is a powerful traveling preacher from Georgia and a member of the Black Nationalism movement. His outspoken views and support of Marcus Garvey attract

negative attention to Malcolm's family, eventually leading to Earl's suspicious death.

Hilda Little – One of Malcolm's older siblings, and a rather serious character, Hilda is influential in bringing Malcolm to the Nation of Islam. When visiting him in prison, she teaches him about the Nation's alternative historical narrative.

Philbert Little – Malcolm's closest brother in age, with whom he would frequently fight in childhood. He is one of the first Little siblings to join the Nation of Islam.

Wilfred Little – Malcolm's eldest sibling, Wilfred takes Malcolm in after he leaves prison and teaches him more about the Nation of Islam.

Mary Little – Malcolm's half-sister through his father's first marriage, she has a close relationship with Reginald.

Earl Little – Malcolm's half-brother through his father's first marriage, Earl lives in Boston.

Shorty – Shorty is a hustler and aspiring musician with a particular obsession with white women, who helps Malcolm to enter the Roxbury ghetto life. They go on to become good friends and partners in crime. However, once Malcolm becomes a Muslim, their separate lifestyles drive them in different directions.

"Sammy the Pimp" – A young, suave hustler, Sammy the Pimp becomes one of Malcolm's close associates and friends in Harlem. While he often supports Malcolm in times of need, Sammy also nearly kills him for disrespecting his girlfriend, permanently damaging their relationship.

Sophia – A beautiful white woman, Sophia has an ongoing relationship with Malcolm throughout his years in Boston and New York. Their relationship is one of mutual disrespect and racial stereotyping; while she brings him "status" within the black community, she only sees Malcolm as her plaything.

"West Indian Archie" – A "strongarmer," West Indian Archie works for a gambling ring in Harlem. He one day accuses Malcolm of lying, nearly leading to a shootout.

Prince Faisal – A tall and dignified yet humble man, he is the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. Upon meeting with Malcolm, he urges him to learn about and adopt a more orthodox form of Islam.

Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah – The president of Ghana, Malcolm regarded their meeting as the highest honor of his trip to Africa.

Dr. Omar Azzam – An engineer and the son of Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam. He shows Malcolm great hospitality while he is in Saudi Arabia.

Hymie – A Jewish restaurant investor, Hymie also employs Malcolm to bootleg liquor. While they have a good relationship, Malcolm will reflect in prison that Hymie, like all white men, was always using him in some capacity.

Rudy – Rudy, a good-looking light-skinned black man from Harlem, is one of the members of Malcolm's burglary circle in Boston. He leaves town before the police can arrest him, and is the only crew member able to escape.

Mrs. Swerlin – A large, jovial woman, Mrs. Swerlin treats Malcolm very kindly while he stays at her detention home for juvenile delinquents, and even goes out of her way to let him stay longer, rather than sending him on to a reform school.

Mr. Swerlin – Mr. Swerlin runs a youth detention home with his wife, Mrs. Swerlin. While Malcolm is there, he always treats him politely, despite holding some racist views.

Mr. Ostrowski – Malcolm's teacher who kills his dream of becoming a lawyer.

Freddie – A shoe shiner in Roxbury who teaches Malcolm his trade, which will become his first "hustle."

Bimbi – An old convict at Charlestown State Prison, Bimbi first pushes Malcolm to take up his studies again.

Mother Marie – Mother Marie is the mother of Elijah Muhammad, and she talks to Malcolm when he comes to visit in Chicago.

The "dark man from Lansing" – Louise begins seeing a tall, dark man resembling Malcolm's father, hoping he will marry her—but he eventually walks away from the impending responsibility.

Sophia's sister – Part of Malcolm's burglary circle in Boston and Shorty's girlfriend.

John Hughes – A skillful gambler and the owner of a gambling house Malcolm frequents in Boston.

Mr. Maynard Allen – A Welfare agency worker, he takes Malcolm to Mr. and Mrs. Swerlin's detention home.

Mr. Gohannas – He takes in Malcolm after Louise's breakdown, and he sometimes takes Malcolm hunting.

Mrs. Gohannas – Along with Mr. Gohannas, she takes in Malcolm after Louise's breakdown.

Big Boy – Mr. Gohannas and Mrs. Gohannas' son.

Laura's Grandmother – A religious woman, she disapproves of Laura's relationship with Malcolm.

Charlie Small – The co-owner of Small's Palace.

Ed Small – The co-owner of Small's Palace.

Brothel Madam – The owner of a brothel in Harlem and Malcolm's friend.

Mr. and Mrs. Lyon – A black couple from Mason, they take in Malcolm after he leaves the Swerlin home and treat him as one of their own.

Fewclothes – An old pickpocket who hangs around Small's, telling stories.

Turner – A black detective in Roxbury who detests Malcolm.

BillPeterson – Malcolm's only ever boxing opponent, who beats him badly.

Master W. D. Fard – The mythical founder of the Nation of Islam.

Wallace Muhammad – One of Elijah Muhammad's sons.

Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi – A Muslim scholar and professor from Egypt.

Talmadge Hayer – One of the men accused of the assassination of Malcolm X—he was arrested on the day of Malcolm's murder and later convicted.

Norman 3X Butler – One of the accused assassins of Malcolm X.

Thomas 15X Johnson – One of the accused assassins of Malcolm X.

Marcus Garvey – A political leader, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a key voice in the Pan-Africanism movement—a philosophy which called for people of African descent around the world to return to their ancestral homes, and for white colonizers to leave Africa.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – A famous Civil Rights leader and contemporary of Malcolm X. King advocated a non-violent approach to protesting, and though he and Malcolm often disagreed on tactics, they generally supported and respected each other. King was assassinated in 1968, three years after Malcolm.

TERMS

Ku Klux Klan The Klu Klux Klan is a national white supremacist organization. Throughout the Jim Crow Era and beyond, Klan members have been responsible for the lynching and house bombings of African Americans, along with other acts of violence and intimidation.

Black Legion A splinter group of the Klan, the Black Legion operated throughout the Midwest during the Great Depression.

Hustlers Hustlers, in Malcolm's day, are young men looking to make money through independent ventures which are usually illegal, ranging from selling drugs and alcohol to armed burglary. They typically sported conks and zoot suits.

Zoot suits A style of suits first popularized in African American communities, they became popular with other groups, as well. Zoot suits typically used excessive fabric, giving them a baggy look which was supposed to signal wealth and status.

Lindy-hopping A type of swing dance, the Lindy hop was closely associated with jazz music of the 1920s and 1930s. It was named for Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly non-stop from New York City to Paris.

Nation of Islam Founded in 1930 by W. D. Fard Muhammad, the Nation is an African American organization that fuses a political message of Black Nationalism with an adapted form of Islam.

Fruit of Islam The Fruit of Islam is the paramilitary force of the Nation of Islam. It is composed of young men, whose commitment to the Nation makes them its "fruit."

Hajj The Hajj, a pilgrimage to the ancient city of Mecca, is one of the central pillars of Islam. All able-bodied Muslims are required to undertake the Hajj at least once in their lives.

Pan-Africanism Pan-Africanism is a philosophy that calls for solidarity among all people of African descent throughout the world. It recognizes people of African descent as being oppressed in many different national contexts, and aims to build an international coalition against such oppression and injustice. As it is a broad movement, however, supporters of Pan-Africanism may hold very different views.

Colonialism Colonialism is the historical phenomenon when one nation-state takes over territory claimed by another nation or people, imposes a foreign political and economic structure and settles its own "colonists" in its new colony. Colonialism usually refers more specifically to the colonial empires built by Western European nations during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Muslim Mosque Inc. Founded by **Malcolm X** in 1964 after leaving the Nation of Islam, the organization failed to continue after his assassination.

Great Depression The Great Depression is the worst economic depression in US history. Following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the country struggled through chronic unemployment and poverty rates for the next ten years.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACE AND RACISM IN AMERICA

One of the driving influences in Malcolm's life is his ongoing relationship with race and racism in America. Malcolm's journey starts from a passive acceptance of the effects of racism around him; he then begins to gain and strongly emphasize self-respect for all black men, before ultimately coming to believe in the potential for brotherhood between all men.

As a child in rural Michigan, Malcolm's understanding and perception of racism is at first quite limited. For instance, when his family is forced to move multiple times because of inhospitable rural communities, Malcolm does not at first

connect this to racism, perhaps because racism is such an integral part of rural society, and most of rural Michigan had so few African Americans, that he doesn't perceive African Americans' inferior position in the rural North as something abnormal. In fact, even after his father Earl is murdered (likely by the Black Legion, a white supremacist group), his mother Louise is hounded into insanity by government officials, and he is separated from his family and sent to a foster home run by the Swerlins, who use the word "nigger" a hundred times a day, Malcolm still cannot hear any malice in the slur and never finds it odd. The racism surrounding him is so powerful and enduring that he internalizes it, as do many others. During his late teens and early twenties in Boston and New York, Malcolm describes his relationship to race as mirroring that of the other young black men around him, in which "whiteness" is seen as good and desirable, while "blackness" is to either be covered up or exploited. This is exemplified in Malcolm's relationship with Sophia, who as an attractive white woman brings him "status" throughout their relationship. Furthermore, he met Sophia while on a date with Laura, a young African American woman, underlining his rejection of blackness in favor of whiteness.

Later, while in prison, Malcolm's brother Philbert comes to visit, and he starts Malcolm on the path of conversion to the Nation of Islam by challenging his previous views on race. He tells Malcolm that the black man is the child of God, and the white man is a "devil." Malcolm responds to this shift in mentality by studying the history of the world, and African history in particular. In learning this history, Malcolm is able to see himself and other black people as having dignity and being worthy of respect, something that the racist society of both the country and the city never allowed him to see. In taking the last name "X", Malcolm symbolically is referring to this ennobling history that he feels has been hidden – or stolen – from him and other black people. And in the Nation of Islam – with its self-confidence, orderly manners and dress, and strong emphasis on community – Malcolm finds both fellow thinkers and expression for his shifting views.

However, part of what is notable about Malcolm is that even as he joins groups, he never entirely gives up his independence of thought. Ultimately, this leads to his ouster from the Nation of Islam after conflict arises when its leader, Elijah Muhammad, fails to live up to what Malcolm believes are the ideals of the organization. After Malcolm gets kicked out of the Nation, he decides to follow through on his own religious ideals and makes the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which according to Islam is a religious obligation for all able-bodied Muslims to do at least once in their life. On the journey to and during the Hajj, in both Europe and the Middle East, Malcolm is confronted by the possibility that the racial issues of the United States are not universal but rather particular to America. He is stunned, for instance, by the hospitality shown to him in Egypt by Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam, a man who would be considered "white" in America. Further, Malcolm sees how the Hajj is an inherently *color-blind* and multiracial event, where all Muslims are brothers and sisters. These realizations force him to reconsider his previous stance on race. In fact, Malcolm comes to believe that all people are brothers under one God, and that racism is not inherent in the nature of whites but rather is a product of social structures that make whites act in racist ways.

These new beliefs do not mean that Malcolm abandons his critiques of white society in the United States he saw around him. Rather, as Malcolm comes to believe in the possibility of brotherhood between races, he sees it as all the *more* necessary to resist and fight against the specific system of oppression and racial prejudice in the United States, because that system both oppresses blacks and stands in the way of the brotherhood he now believes possible.

RELIGION

Malcolm's religious journey is marked by a continuous struggle to find a faith in which he can believe and flourish both spiritually and intellectually. As with his views on race and racism, Malcolm's views on religion play a key role throughout his life, but also evolve as his own understanding and experience changes and broadens.

Despite the fact that Malcolm's father was a Christian minister, Malcolm never felt at home in Christianity. As a child, he simply finds it hard to believe in Christianity. As he puts it, "Even at that young age, I just couldn't believe in the Christian concept of Jesus as someone divine."

When Malcolm later begins to study more about history and religion while in prison, and then to preach as a minister of the Nation of Islam – which practiced an idiosyncratic variant of Islam that held black people to be gods and whites to be devils – his issues with Christianity become explicitly tied to his views on race. More specifically, Malcolm argues that Christianity played too large a part in European imperialism and oppression of blacks – both physically and psychologically – for it to be something in which black people could find spiritual sustenance. First, he argues that Christianity had, in practice, been used by whites in hypocritical ways to oppress black people. As Malcolm puts it: "I read, I saw, how the white man never has gone among the non-white peoples bearing the Cross in the true manner and spirit of Christ's teachings—meek, humble, and Christ-like." More specifically, he argues that whites used Christianity's message of "turn the other cheek" for their own gain: forcing Christianity on African Americans, who are then compelled to forgive the white man even as the white men take everything from them (even their freedom). Second, he preaches that Christianity conditions black people to worship a blond, blue-eyed God, which functions as a kind of psychological warfare upon black people's self-image.

Not surprisingly, Malcolm's preaching puts him in conflict with many Christian black leaders – including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – who are both outraged by his slandering of Christianity and, as leaders of the Vivil Rights Movement, feel that a more moderate approach of dialogue and peaceful protest is more likely to produce progress than Malcolm's (and the Nation of Islam's) more incendiary language. Malcolm, in turn, accuses these leaders of having themselves been "brainwashed" by Christianity's message of forgiveness.

Yet what Malcolm desires in a religion is not just something that justifies his political beliefs, but rather something that gives him ideals in which to truly believe. Malcolm thus experiences cracks in the foundations of his belief when it's revealed that the leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad, who was held up within the Nation of Islam as someone who "surely stood next to God," had numerous affairs and then attempted to cover it up. As Malcolm puts it: "And that was how, after twelve years of never thinking for as much as five minutes about myself, I became able finally to muster the nerve, and the strength, to start facing the facts, to think for myself."

After his doubts about Muhammad lead to his ouster from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm continues his quest to find a religion in whose beliefs and ideals he can thrive. This question drives him to make the Hajj to Mecca – a traditional Islamic pilgrimage. During the Hajj, Malcolm encounters a version of Islam that exposes the exclusionary practices of the Nation of Islam and the cult of personality around Elijah Muhammad. The brotherhood of the Hajj emphasizes a religion in which everyone is equal under the one true God, in which there are no good or bad races and there are no "Divine Men." Malcolm's attraction to the Islam he experiences on the Hajj stems from its openness to exploration of truth and equality between people. Put another way, while the Nation allowed him to see his dignity as a black man, orthodox Islam now confirms his dignity as a human being.

EDUCATION

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is the story Malcolm tells of his experiences and of his own growth. Alternatively, it is the story of his education. That education is not a standard one, with typical schooling. It is rather an education in racism, on the streets, and out in the world – but Malcolm is consistent in his efforts to learn from his experiences and to make an education, however informal, for himself.

As a child, Malcolm does very well in school, and he ranks among the top three students in his class. His dreams of becoming a lawyer, however, are blocked by his white teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, who tells him to set his sights more reasonably and pursue a career in carpentry. This marks one of the first times that Malcolm is acutely aware of being discriminated against because of his race, and he quickly drops out of school. More than teaching him subject knowledge, Malcolm's official school career makes him aware of racism, of how official society represented by public schools both oppresses black people and justifies that oppression through its view of black people as being inferior – a viewpoint that at least for a time Malcolm internalizes.

Malcolm then turns to a life on the streets, where he receives a very different kind of education, as he learns to "hustle" and to make extra money wherever he can. As another hustler Freddie tells him, "The main thing you got to remember is that everything in the world is a hustle." This advice becomes a guiding principle of Malcolm's throughout his hustling career and beyond, for both good and ill. On the one hand, Malcolm explains how it opens up his mind to see how so many relationships and moments which seem innocent actually involve some form of "hustle," or some hidden play for money, influence, or power. However, Malcolm also explains how it presses him into a "jungle mentality" in which he can only think in terms of survival. Plus, hustling (in this case, burglary) eventually gets Malcolm sent to prison for seven years.

In prison Malcolm's education shifts, especially after he gets transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony, a progressive institution with regular lectures, debates, and a large library. With both time and resources that have previously been denied to him, Malcolm rediscovers his love of books and learning, becoming particularly interested in the history of Africa, the American slave trade, and religion. He stays so busy studying that "months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life." This education is freeing not just in that it helps Malcolm pass the time or do something he enjoys, but that it gives him an understanding of things that had previously been hidden from him. It's freeing because it lets him see the lie in the racism forced upon him by his official schooling, and his own dignity as a black man, and it motivates him to join the Nation of Islam.

After breaking with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm characterizes that time of his life within the group as being "twelve years of never thinking." But the Hajj to Mecca, where he must learn the beliefs and customs of orthodox Muslims, gives him a final education. The Hajj exposes Malcolm both to a wider world and his own ignorance. For instance, he finds that he does not even know the proper Islamic prayer postures, and his body aches under the strain of practicing them. This education is extremely humbling, especially for a man who has been leading a growing religious movement for years. As Malcolm puts it: "Imagine, being a Muslim minister, a leader in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, and not knowing the prayer ritual." By humbling him from the position of minister to just another man simply learning to serve God, this education contributes towards his more tempered views on the goals of social justice.

Malcolm never loses his reverence for education. In fact, as he reflects in the *Autobiography* shortly before his assassination, he says his only regret is that he never finished his schooling to become a lawyer. He understands that education has been an empowering force in his life, but the one time he was denied further access to it he was forced to learn a different, more destructive way to survive.

FAMILY AND DYSFUNCTION

The concept of family, which often extends beyond biological ties, plays a very important role in Malcolm X's life. Unfortunately, this idea of family often serves to leave Malcolm even more alone than he was before, rather than acting as a bulwark against life's challenges.

Malcolm grows up in a fairly large family, the son of Earl Little, a traveling preacher, and Louise Little, a light-skinned Granadan woman. Family life was not perfect and was itself subject to the racist forces of society. For instance, later in his life, Malcolm realizes how his father favored him the most because he was light-skinned. Even more powerful, though, were the racist and un-merciful forces of society arrayed against his family, and which soon tore it apart. First, Malcolm's father is murdered, probably by the Black Legion, a white supremacist group. Then, his mother is regularly harassed by government officials throughout the Depression, until she is finally declared insane and sent to a mental institution. The kids, meanwhile, are sent to live with different families in the area. "The Welfare, the courts, and their doctor, gave us the one-two-three punch."

After the destruction of his own immediate family, and perhaps because of that destruction, Malcolm seeks time and again to form new families, whether biological or otherwise. He follows his half-sister Ella to Boston, and then when he moves on to New York he invites his brother Reginald to come live with him. He later creates a kind of family of street hustlers, with his mentor Shorty and "Sammy the Pimp." And finally, the most important family structure in Malcolm's life is the family of brothers and sisters in the Nation of Islam, with Elijah Muhammad as its head.

But like his original family, each of these "family" groups are beset by tensions both internal and external. Malcolm and Reginald have different temperaments, and Malcolm turns his back on his brother after Reginald is forced out of the Nation of Islam. After his time in prison, Malcolm makes a point to seek out Shorty and Sammy, but Sammy has died and Malcolm's life is now so different from Shorty's that their friendship no longer has a foundation. Meanwhile, Malcolm's reverence for Elijah Muhammad set the bar so high that Muhammad could never fulfill Malcolm's expectations. As Malcolm puts it: "That was how I first began to realize that I had believed in Mr. Muhammad more than he believed in himself." The closeness of his family-like ties to the Nation, and especially to Mr. Muhammad, are part of what make it so difficult for Malcolm when his conflict with Elijah Muhammad leads to his "isolation" from the Nation (including the fact that several of Malcolm's other biological siblings also cut ties with him when he is expelled).

While Malcolm's siblings and would-be brother figures do support him at various points in his life, they nearly all fail him in the end. Malcolm's life, then, is at least partially the tragic tale of a man devoted to ideas of family unity but who was never able to find or build family structures that could withstand internal tensions or external forces, leaving him to fend for himself against a violent world.

CLASS

Malcolm X is very aware of the plight of many African Americans in America's lower class, and a large part of his mission focuses on uplifting these people from poverty. Unfortunately, his efforts are often impeded by varying attitudes towards race relations within the African American community, largely due to class differences.

In Lansing, Michigan, where Malcolm grew up, most "Negroes" are unemployed and dependent on welfare; in his words, "The bulk of the Negroes were either on Welfare, or W.P.A., or they starved." Theispoverty extends and is most rampant, however, in the urban ghettos. When Malcolm gets a job with the railroad and travels the East Coast, he is astonished at the poverty in D.C., "just a few blocks from the White House." The proximity to the White House emphasizes the extent to which society has forgotten about (or never cared about) poor black people and their struggles.

Since Malcolm spent much of his early life in Lansing and then in Boston and New York around the poor, he has a special relationship with them that allows him to communicate in a way that other Civil Rights leaders cannot. It is said that Malcolm is the only black man in America who "could stop a race riot - or start one." This is largely because his message is most easily accepted by the poor, who are used to banding together to protect each other. For example, Malcolm and the other hustlers, who generally are thought of as competitors, "were huddled in there, bonded together in seeking security and warmth and comfort from each other, and we didn't know it."

In contrast, Malcolm holds what he calls "middle class" blacks in disdain. He believes that their class is not defined by actually having achieved a better life, but by being allowed into white society through menial labor, such as working as janitors at banks. He argues that this fake sense of status makes it even harder for these African Americans to see their inferior status in white America. Therefore, they tend to be hostile towards efforts by lower class African Americans to change the system. For instance, Malcolm describes how in Roxbury, a neighborhood in Boston, the black middle class segregate themselves from the lower class, yet in practical terms hardly

have any more wealth than the poor.

Once he joins the Nation of Islam and begins his speaking tours of universities, Malcolm encounters people he describes as the black "intelligentsia." These are often lawyers, professors, and doctors. Malcolm acknowledges their education and intelligence, but constantly has to battle to win their support, and rarely gets it. Like the middle-class African Americans, the black intelligentsia take their success as proof of the progress being made in society, and thus refuse to critique that society's racial hierarchy. As Malcolm puts it: "This twentieth-century Uncle Thomas is a *professional* Negro . . . by that I mean his profession is being a Negro for the white man." Despite the fact that Malcolm is sometimes able to connect with all black audiences on his college tour ("All Negroes, among themselves, admit the white man's criminal record"), he believes that the intelligentsia has lost connection with the African American poor who enjoy none of the privileges that the "intelligentsia" do, and in so doing are betraying those poor.

Malcolm paints class as a stark divider within the African American community, and he frequently uses class-based terms to criticize those who disagree with him. However, the *Autobiography* makes clear that Malcolm does not feel outright animosity toward black members of more privileged groups, but is rather exasperated that such class differences should drive the black population apart. For Malcolm, racial justice should be the true and unified struggle for all African Americans, not class warfare.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE "CONK"

During Malcolm's younger years in Boston and Harlem, he maintained a "conk" hairstyle, which was a way of chemically relaxing naturally kinky hair. The style was popular among African American men from the 1920s to the 1960s, despite the risk of chemical burns and the high amount of care necessary to maintain it. In his later years, as he reflects back on his youth and the culture of the "cool cats," Malcolm no longer sees this as simply an aesthetic choice. Rather, the style is motivated by a deep sense of racial inferiority and adoration for everything white. Black men, he thinks, are so desperate to be like white men, who have better jobs, more wealth, and more rights than them, that they will undergo a painful procedure to have hair that looks like that of a white person. Once Malcolm reaches this conclusion, he sees the conk as a badge of shame; however, the person wearing it is usually unaware of their subconscious self-hatred. It is only after Malcolm converts to the Nation of Islam and gains confidence in himself as a black man that he understands the conk in this way. The conk therefore symbolizes both a racial hierarchy that puts whites above blacks and an unawareness by some African Americans of just how deep that racist ideology goes even within their own psychology.

GLASSES, A SUITCASE, AND A WATCH

Shortly after he is released from prison, Malcolm goes to a store and purchases three items: a pair of glasses, a suitcase, and a watch. These will be his most valuable possessions throughout the rest of his life; in fact, they embody the nature of that life. Malcolm will spend the next thirteen years as a major leader in the Nation of Islam. In that capacity, he travels all around the world, works long days filled with meetings and events, and spends countless hours reading, either for work or as a way to continue to build his knowledge. These are the tools that he will use to achieve his greatest goal: to build the Nation of Islam. These three items, however, are not only his most valuable or useful possessions; they are also perhaps his only possessions. Malcolm repeatedly states that he owned no personal property and he never gained financially from his speeches and work for the Nation. In them, we see both a steadfast commitment to his religion and a symbol of his great humility.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ballantine Books edition of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* published in 1992.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ It has always been my belief that I, too, will die by violence. I have done all that I can to be prepared.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

Earl Little has seen four of his six brothers die by violence at the hands of white men. This has pushed him to support Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist, Pan-Africanism movement, which calls for the creation of a new state for African Americans in Liberia. These kinds of political messages were extremely controversial at the time, and it was dangerous to publicly support Garvey's movement.

Nevertheless, Earl Little accepts that he must do something, even if it means he will also die by violence.

While reflecting on his father's relationship to death, Malcolm says that he also anticipates a violent death. This premonition will not cause Malcolm to live cautiously, though—rather, he wholeheartedly accepts his fate and chooses to lead a public life that he hopes will make a positive impact on the rights of African Americans, no matter the danger involved.

❝ Back when I was growing up, the "successful" Lansing Negroes were such as waiters and bootblacks. To be a janitor at some downtown store was to be highly respected. The real "elite," the "big shots," the "voices of the race," were the waiters at the Lansing Country Club and the shoeshine boys at the state capitol. The only Negroes who really had any money were the ones in the numbers racket, or who ran the gambling houses, or who in some other way lived parasitically off the poorest ones, who were the masses. No Negroes were hired then by Lansing's big Oldsmobile plant, or the Reo plant... The bulk of the Negroes were either on Welfare, or W.P.A., or they starved.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5-6

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm here outlines his ideas about class that will inform his opinions throughout his life. While all African Americans are excluded to varying degrees from the rights and privileges afforded to white America, they are further divided amongst themselves by class divisions. Those with the most respected jobs are the ones working in white-owned businesses (like the country club), and those with money but little social capital are those involved in gambling and other hustles. Meanwhile, the bulk of the community either has to rely on the government or starve to death. These class divisions will continuously act as a barrier to African American unity in confronting white society's bigotry and socioeconomic oppression of black people, and Malcolm here calls out those class divisions in stark language.

❝ Eventually my mother suffered a complete breakdown, and the court orders were finally signed. They took her to the State Mental Hospital at Kalamazoo.

It was seventy-some miles from Lansing, about an hour and a half on the bus. A Judge McClellan in Lansing had authority over me and all of my brothers and sisters. We were "state children," court wards; he had the full say-so over us. A white man in charge of a black man's children! Nothing but legal, modern slavery—however kindly intentioned.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Wilfred Little, Philbert Little, Hilda Little, Louise Little (Malcolm's Mother), Reginald Little

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm's family has been going through hard times since their father Earl was killed, leaving them without a stable income. Malcolm's mother Louise has been doing her best to find work or even remarry, but her efforts have been unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the State Welfare agency has been increasingly encroaching on their family life, putting more psychological strain on Louise. Finally, she breaks down and the children become state wards. This racist society that murdered Malcolm's father and drove his mother to a breakdown thus now has legal control over the children, just like when slave masters had complete control over their slaves' children.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You're good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you'd get all kinds of work."

Related Characters: Mr. Ostrowski (speaker), Malcolm X

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm is the smartest student in the class, and he has just

told Mr. Ostrowski that he wants to become a lawyer. But whereas Mr. Ostrowski has supported all of the other students' dreams, he tells Malcolm that he should be more "realistic." The realism that Mr. Ostrowski makes apparent to Malcolm is the reality of racism in America, which will never allow someone like Malcolm (a poor, rural African American) to become a lawyer. Though he cannot articulate it at the time, Malcolm clearly comprehends the injustice of this system, particularly when Mr. Ostrowski describes it so clearly here. Malcolm's entire worldview has been altered, and he cannot return to his pre-racism-consciousness.

Chapter 3 Quotes

I looked like Li'l Abner. Mason, Michigan, was written all over me. My kinky, reddish hair was cut hick style, and I didn't even use grease in it. My green suit's coat sleeves stopped above my wrists, the pants legs showed three inches of socks. Just a shade lighter green than the suit was my narrow-collared, three-quarter length Lansing department store topcoat. My appearance was too much for even Ella. But she told me later she had seen countrified members of the Little family come up from Georgia in even worse shape than I was.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Ella Little

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm here describes his clothing and physical appearance when he first showed up to Boston from Lansing, Michigan. Then, as now, social class was often tied to being identified as either rural or urban. In other words, people in the city might have been poor, but even they looked down on their poorer, out-of-fashion rural counterparts. Malcolm's physical appearance thus reflects his ignorance of city life. However, as Ella assures him, he will start to blend in and catch up soon enough—and this is certainly the case, as Malcolm soon reaches the height of the city's "hustler" fashion and stature.

I spent the first month in town with my mouth hanging open. The sharp dressed young "cats" who hung on the corners and in the poolrooms, bars and restaurants, and who obviously didn't work anywhere, completely entranced me. I couldn't get over marveling at how their hair was straight and shiny like white men's hair; Ella told me this was called a "conk."

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Ella Little

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm has become entranced with the outward appearances of the cool "cats" in Boston, whom he would like to imitate. They dress, talk, and act very differently from himself and from anything that he has ever seen before, as he's from the countryside. In particular, he notices their hair style, the infamous "conk." This is the ultimate signal of their sophistication and sense of style; however, Malcolm will one day see conks as an attempt to make oneself appear white by imitating the way white people's hair sits flat. So, in becoming more stylish and cool, Malcolm is also beginning a descent into self-degradation and self-destruction.

"The main thing you got to remember is that everything in the world is a hustle. So long, Red."

Related Characters: Freddie (speaker), Malcolm X

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Freddie has recently hit the numbers (won at underground gambling), and so he quit his job as a shoe shine boy at the Roseland State Ballroom. Malcolm needs a job, so Freddie teaches him the trade. However, his parting advice is also tongue-in-cheek, since Freddie didn't really tell him that the job primarily involves selling alcohol and reefers and handing out contact information for prostitutes on the side. In an innocent way, then, Freddie has also "hustled" or schooled Malcolm. Malcolm soon learns the truth, though, and he shares a laugh with Freddie about it later on. This line will be crucial throughout the book, as Malcolm will from now on treat other people and institutions with suspicion, always expecting them to have a hidden agenda or "hustle."

Chapter 4 Quotes

Shorty would take me to groovy, frantic scenes in different chicks' and cats' pads, where with the lights and juke down mellow, everybody blew gage and juiced back and jumped. I met chicks who were fine as May wine, and cats who were hip to all happenings.
That paragraph is deliberate, of course; it's just to display a bit more of the slang that was used by everyone I respected as "hip" in those days. And in no time at all, I was talking the slang like a lifelong hipster.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Shorty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Clearly, Malcolm has come a long way since he arrived in Boston in Chapter 3 in an out-of-style, high-water green suit. Now, he looks and sounds like he's been there with the cool "cats" his whole life. This bit of linguistic virtuosity is also important, because it allows the reader a chance to imagine what Malcolm may have sounded like in those days, rather than simply hearing the well-read, grammatically correct and sober tone he uses throughout the book. His ability to communicate in slang and sound like a regular person on the street will then also allow him to have more influence and connections within the inner cities than most other civil rights leaders.

Chapter 5 Quotes

We were in that world of Negroes who are both servants and psychologists, aware that white people are so obsessed with their own importance that they will pay liberally, even dearly, for the impression of being catered to and entertained.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm makes an interesting observation about himself and his coworkers who work in service jobs on the railroads. They may have to serve white customers who look down on them and expect them to be servile, but they also lean into this role because they can then financially exploit their customers' self-importance and get bigger tips. So, rather than seeing these workers as "Uncle Toms" or some other negative stereotype of black servility, Malcolm sees them basically as hustlers, using white society's power dynamics against itself. This is an empowering way to view their lives which gives them agency within a difficult and degrading work environment.

Chapter 6 Quotes

In one sense, we were huddled in there, bonded together in seeking security and warmth and comfort from each other, and we didn't know it. All of us—who might have probed space, or cured cancer, or built industries—were, instead, black victims of the white man's American social system. In another sense, the tragedy of the once master pickpocket made him, for those brother old-timer hustlers, a "there but for the grace of God" symbol. To wolves who still were able to catch some rabbits, it had meaning that an old wolf who had lost his fangs was still eating.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Fewclothes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Malcolm compares the private, impromptu social safety net provided by the hustlers for their elders in Small's with the American social system, which has provided these men with zero opportunities for personal advancement or security outside of crime. The old pickpocket Fewclothes can no longer "hunt" for himself, but the younger generation takes care of him. This ritual of kindness then reflects the younger hustlers' fears of having no one to take care of them when they too are old, but it also shows the remarkable amount of brotherhood and solidarity within their community, despite the competitive and seemingly selfish atmosphere inherent in hustling.

The Boston draft board had written me at Ella's, and when they had no results there, had notified the New York draft board, and, in care of Sammy, I received Uncle Sam's Greetings. In those days only three things in the world scared me: jail, a job, and the Army.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Ella Little, "Sammy the Pimp"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

It's 1943, and the Army is drafting eligible young men to serve in World War II. However, Malcolm has no desire to be a part of the military. Like both jail and a job, the Army would mean giving up his free and independent lifestyle, where he can dress and talk as he likes, making money under the table hustling and having a good time with his friends. Each of those three options represents a type of regulation upon his life by mainstream (and white) American society, and more specifically the government – either by the justice system, the tax and employment system, or the military.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ There I was back in Harlem's streets among all the rest of the hustlers. I couldn't sell reefers; the dope squad detectives were too familiar with me. I was a true hustler—uneducated, unskilled at anything honorable, and I considered myself nervy and cunning enough to live by my wits, exploiting any prey that presented itself. I would risk just about anything.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Surprisingly, selling reefers (marijuana) is actually one of the more stable and "professional" jobs that a hustler can do in Malcolm's situation. Now, that option is no longer open to Malcolm, as the cops are familiar with him and eager to catch him. So instead he must turn to more difficult, more dangerous, and more irregular hustles. Malcolm tells the reader that he was fearless at the time and was willing to risk anything to survive and keep hustling. However, it is also clear that he essentially had no other choice. With no professional skills, education, or money, he *must* be willing to risk everything to survive, or otherwise he'll die. He may have been fearless at the time, but his situation certainly is scary to read about.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ It was in this way that for one period, one of our best periods, I remember, we specialized in Oriental rugs. I have always suspected that the fence himself sold the rugs to the people we stole them from. But, anyway, you wouldn't imagine the value of those things. I remember one small one that brought us a thousand dollars. There's no telling what the fence got for it. Every burglar knew that fences robbed the burglars worse than the burglars had robbed the victims.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Sophia's sister, Rudy , Sophia, Shorty

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147-148

Explanation and Analysis

The situation described here is the apex of Malcolm's criminal career. The burglary crew is having a lot of success and avoiding capture, and both Malcolm and Shorty are in relationships with white women (Sophia and her sister), which bring them status within the Roxbury neighborhood. However, even when they are at the top, they are still being exploited by their "fence" (a white man who buys their stolen goods and resells them) who makes much more profit than they do, and also distances himself from the more dangerous parts of the criminal enterprise. As Freddie told Malcolm, everything is a hustle. Malcolm's incredulity at the price of "Oriental" rugs here also ironically foreshadows his later appreciation of their value as a crucial part of Middle-Eastern and Muslim society.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ I was going through the hardest thing, also the greatest thing, for any human being to do; to accept that which is already within you, and around you.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Reginald Little

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Reginald has come to visit Malcolm and to teach him about the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad's message about the oppression of black people by white American society. Reginald tells him how this society has prevented Malcolm from ever making something more of himself. Malcolm then

thinks back through his life—and considers all of the white people he's known who have either hustled and exploited him or held him back in some way. He feels that Reginald's words are true, but he needs time to really believe them and apply them to his own experience. Malcolm has been so thoroughly shaped by a racist society that even his own reason has held him back from seeing the truth about both his oppression and his sins.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge. Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors—usually Ella and Reginald—and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Reginald Little, Ella Little, Elijah Muhammad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Since exploring his new faith and writing letters about it, Malcolm has been working on expanding his vocabulary by memorizing and copying words out of the dictionary. Now, when he reads and writes, he actually knows what's going on, and a whole new world has opened up to him. The idea of freedom is a recurring motif throughout the book. As a hustler, Malcolm had to work hard to stay free and out of prison or the Army. Now, he is experiencing an intellectual freedom as his mind is liberated from society's narrative which covers up the endemic racism in America. Despite his literal incarceration, he finally feels liberated in an entirely new way.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ And Allah blessed me to remain true, firm and strong in my faith in Islam, despite many severe trials to my faith. And even when events produced a crisis between Elijah Muhammad and me, I told him at the beginning of the crisis, with all the sincerity I had in me, that I still believed in him more strongly than he believed in himself.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Elijah Muhammad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm has gone to hear Elijah Muhammad speak in Chicago, and Elijah has publicly recognized Malcolm as an ex-prisoner who he believes will be a faithful servant of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm then turns to his reader to state that he has indeed been a faithful servant of the Nation of Islam. He will do this multiple times in the book, always in light of his later break with Elijah and the Nation as a whole. Malcolm's tone always conveys a deep respect for Elijah, though; for example, he attributes their break to "events," rather than to Elijah's actions. However, it is clear that Malcolm is also trying to make his case to the reader, whose opinion of him may have been influenced by gossip or the media.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ "Today's Uncle Tom doesn't wear a handkerchief on his head. This modern, twentieth-century Uncle Thomas now often wears a top hat. He's usually well-dressed and well-educated. He's often the personification of culture and refinement. The twentieth-century Uncle Thomas sometimes speaks with a Yale or Harvard accent. Sometimes he is known as Professor, Doctor, Judge, and Reverend, even Right Reverend Doctor. This twentieth-century Uncle Thomas is a professional Negro . . . by that I mean his profession is being a Negro for the white man."

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Elijah Muhammad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

Since the Nation of Islam has gained prominence on the national stage, other African American leaders have been criticizing Malcolm and Elijah harshly in the media. When they refuse to relent, Elijah gives Malcolm permission to attack them back. Malcolm's criticism, as stated here, illustrates the complex relationship between race and class. Malcolm's targets are well-off and well-educated, so they seemingly belong to a higher social class. However, Malcolm

repudiates them as having betrayed the African American community in exchange for this privileged position. He believes that they simply say things that their white friends and contacts would want them to say in order to stay in their good graces. Nevertheless, these upper-class African Americans are still looked down on as racially inferior by their white "peers."

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ The white liberal may be a little taken aback to know that from all-Negro audiences I never have had one challenge, never one question that defended the white man. That has been true even when a lot of those "black bourgeoisie" and "integration" -mad Negroes were among the blacks. All Negroes, among themselves, admit the white man's criminal record. They may not know as many details as I do, but they know the general picture.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm often gives talks to mixed-race crowds, and he often encounters resistance from the African Americans present who try to defend white society as not as bad as he makes it sound. However, when his crowd is all black, he claims, then nobody ever fundamentally disagrees with him. Malcolm implies that this is because black people are trained to be submissive and supportive of white people, so they can't help it if white people are present—it's only when no white people are around that they willingly accept and admit the truth. At the same time, however, there is also a contrary claim which Malcolm does not explore—it's possible that nobody disagrees with Malcolm in all-black crowds because nobody wants to be seen as an "Uncle Tom" among their peers. These opposed claims thus illustrate the difficulty in understanding how racism works and how it is perceived by various individuals, both the oppressed and the oppressors.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ And that was how, after twelve years of never thinking for as much as five minutes about myself, I became able finally to muster the nerve, and the strength, to start facing the facts, to think for myself.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker), Elijah Muhammad

Related Themes:

Page Number: 313

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm has been suspended from the Nation of Islam supposedly for having spoken negatively about JFK's assassination, while he was actually (he claims) suspended to draw attention away from Elijah Muhammad's multiple affairs and paternity suits. Yet even after realizing Elijah's mistakes, Malcolm was still willing to follow him blindly. However, Elijah could not take responsibility for his actions and be honest about them to the Nation—in short, he could not live up to Malcolm's expectations of him as a leader. Only when Malcolm finally realized that Elijah could not be the demigod that he wanted him to be, and in fact was just a man, did Malcolm begin to allow himself the right to think independently, and thus start to come into his own as a true intellectual and leader.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ We both had to leave to make appointments we had, when he dropped on me something whose logic never would get out of my head. He said, "No man has believed perfectly until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself."

Related Characters: Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

Since his ouster from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm has been contemplating making the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is a requirement for most orthodox Muslims. When Malcolm meets Dr. Shawarbi, he is deeply impressed with his knowledge and with his profound faith. Although he does not say exactly why, one can guess that this line made an impression on Malcolm because he was feeling ostracized by all those he had considered family: Elijah, the other Muslim brothers, and his biological brothers. This man, who barely knows Malcolm, has already shown him an openness and generosity that Malcolm has struggled to find elsewhere. This will encourage him to pursue orthodox

Islam and to go on to perform the Hajj.

Back at the Frankfurt airport, we took a United Arab Airlines plane on to Cairo. Throngs of people, obviously Muslims from everywhere, bound on the pilgrimage, were hugging and embracing. They were of all complexions, the whole atmosphere was of warmth and friendliness. The feeling hit me that there really wasn't any color problem here. The effect was as though I had just stepped out of a prison.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 328

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout his journey in the Holy Land, Malcolm will be continuously astounded by the fraternity among pilgrims of all races and nationalities. This will show him two things. One, racism – or specifically racism between whites and those of African descent – is an especially American problem. That is, racist hatred isn't inherent in white people, but is a socially constructed behavior. Second, religion (and more specifically Islam) has the potential to act as a mediator towards curing racial animosity. If everyone belongs to the same religion and worships Allah together as equals, then there will be no more racism, or so Malcolm will come to believe.

Chapter 19 Quotes

I told him, "What you are telling me is that it isn't the American white man who is a racist, but it's the American political, economic, and social atmosphere that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man." He agreed.

Related Characters: Malcolm X (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 378

Explanation and Analysis

While he is abroad, Malcolm has a conversation with a white American ambassador who strikes him as a very tolerant person. However, this ambassador admits to having racial biases whenever he returns to the United States. By identifying the social structure as the genesis of racism, rather than biology or an inherent set of beliefs, Malcolm frees himself from hating all white people as racists. Instead, he sees that it is the system that we are all trapped in that "nourishes a racist psychology." The downside of this structural critique is that it will now be much more difficult to combat racism. If no specific group of people is entirely to blame, then much more work will need to be done to make structural changes for everyone.

Epilogue Quotes

But this was the kind of evidence which caused many close observers of the Malcolm X phenomenon to declare in absolute seriousness that he was the only Negro in America who could either start a race riot—or stop one. When I once quoted this to him, tacitly inviting his comment, he told me tartly, "I don't know if I could start one. I don't know if I'd want to stop one." It was the kind of statement he relished making.

Related Characters: Malcolm X , Alex Haley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 403

Explanation and Analysis

Malcolm is seen as a leader of the urban poor who are usually the most likely to riot of any social class in order to draw attention to their grievances (which are usually the most ignored by the political establishment and upper classes). Malcolm has the ability to speak "in their language," which means that he could use that ability either to rile up the crowd or to calm them down. Haley's observation after Malcolm's noncommittal reply is interesting, because he implies that part of Malcolm's public persona is a playful act—he can be entirely serious about his message and nevertheless enjoy playing the part of firebrand.

He talked about the pressures on him everywhere he turned, and about the frustrations, among them that no one wanted to accept anything relating to him except "my old 'hate' and 'violence' image." He said "the so-called moderate" civil rights organizations avoided him as "too militant" and the "so-called militants" avoided him as "too moderate." "They won't let me tum the corner!" he once exclaimed, "I'm caught in a trap!"

Related Characters: Marcus Garvey, Alex Haley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 431

Explanation and Analysis

Towards the end of his life, Malcolm finds himself an ideological outcast within the civil rights movement. While part of the Nation of Islam, his message was quite harsh in regards to white society, but the Nation rarely took any sort of action towards achieving civil rights in the present. Now, Malcolm wants to have a more conciliatory message while also engaging in more direct resistance tactics. Those two versions of him have left those watching him from the outside confused, and he can no longer find his own place. One is also tempted to conclude that his lack of an ideological home is an inevitable result of him becoming a truly mature independent thinker—and even today he remains a controversial figure to many, seen by some as too extreme and by others as too moderate or confused.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: NIGHTMARE

As the autobiography begins, Malcolm X describes how his mother (Louise), pregnant with Malcolm himself, confronts a gang of Ku Klux Klan members who are looking to kill Malcolm's father, Earl Little. She bravely tells them he isn't home, and in response the Klansmen break every window in the house and then ride off.

Even before he has entered the world, Malcolm is already forced to confront the realities of racist violence and hatred. His mother's example of bravery serves as a model for and foreshadows his future stances against racism.

Earl Little, a travelling preacher and a tall, outspoken black man from Georgia, is a vocal supporter of Marcus Garvey and his ideas of Pan-Africanism, or the belief that people of African descent all around the world should join together against the oppression of whites. Earl always believed he would die by violence, and indeed, Earl and four of his five brothers will die from violence. Here Malcolm interrupts to say that he feels that he, too, will die by violence.

In Earl Little, the reader gets a glimpse at the archetype after which Malcolm will unconsciously model himself. Malcolm will reflect his father's activism and fervent religious belief in his life's work, and will follow him into an equally violent death—a tragic prediction on Malcolm's part, and one that readers cannot help but see through the lens of his assassination (which occurred soon after the publication of his autobiography).

Malcolm is born on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska, the fourth of Louise Little's children. His older siblings Wilfred, Hilda, and Philbert were born in Philadelphia, while his younger brother Reginald was born in Milwaukee. Earl had three children from a previous marriage as well: Ella, Earl, and Mary, all living in Boston. Malcolm's mother Louise comes from Granada, and is a mixed-race woman who looks white; her white father, whom she never met, raped her mother.

The identity of his white grandfather serves as a kind of "original sin" for Malcolm. Of all his siblings, Malcolm is the lightest one, which will bring him certain privileges in life, but it will also haunt him – a visible, intrinsic reminder of the horrors of racism and violence.

After a brief stay in Milwaukee, the family moves to Lansing, Michigan, where Earl plans to open a store one day. However, his spreading of Marcus Garvey's beliefs attracts the negative attention of the Black Legion, a splinter group of the Ku Klux Klan. One night in 1929, which Malcolm calls the "nightmare night," the Black Legion sets their house on fire. Earl shoots his pistol at the arsonists and then directs the family out and to safety.

By calling it a "nightmare night," Malcolm underlines the psychological scarring left by this experience. And like nightmares, Malcolm will be forced to relive this experience when, as an adult, his own family's house is fire bombed. The Black Legion gets its name because they wear black hoods, instead of the white hoods of the usual KKK.

After this incident, Earl Little goes on to build the family a home outside of town with his own hands. This will be the house Malcolm remembers as his childhood home. The police and firefighters, meanwhile, do nothing about the attack, other than to question Earl about his pistol.

When the State, which is theoretically supposed to protect all citizens, fails to act, Earl takes their future literally into his own hands, a lesson for Malcolm in both self-reliance and the racism inherent to the American establishment.

Earl Little was a violent man, Malcolm says, often beating his wife (probably because of Louise's educated way of talking back) and the other children for breaking his rules. However, he never beat Malcolm, who attributes this to his lighter skin tone, which subconsciously gave him a more privileged status in his father's eyes.

While Malcolm disapproves of his father's color bias, he also sympathizes with him. Earl cannot control this unconscious preference (the result of internalized racism) any more than Malcolm can control his own skin color.

Malcolm has memories of his father preaching in various churches, full of emotion as he led the service. However, Malcolm always had trouble believing in the Christian God, even as a child.

Unlike the Nation of Islam later on, Malcolm portrays these Christians as too interested in spectacle, rather than true faith.

The black people who attend his father's services, Malcolm tells us, were and still are in "bad shape." By this he means that they were too interested in status symbols. The "leaders" of the community worked in white businesses as waiters and shoe shiners. Meanwhile, the majority of people were on welfare or starved. Malcolm's family lived better, however, thanks to their country home and garden.

Malcolm's ongoing feud with "middle class Negroes" began at an early age. Rather than uniting to improve their lot, he sees these "leaders" as merely interested in a fraudulent notion of social status that caters entirely to whites.

The other image Malcolm has of his father Earl is of him leading meetings, spreading Marcus Garvey's philosophy. At these meetings, they would pass along literature and photographs of Garvey and his massive rallies. Seeing his father as the leader of these intelligent, down-to-earth meetings with their serious politics always made Malcolm more proud than when he saw him as a preacher. His leadership role, in Malcolm's eyes, confirmed that his father was a "tough man."

Here, Malcolm identifies the two traits he most admires in his father: his political activism and his strong masculinity. Not only should one engage in "serious" and intellectual political meetings, Malcolm believes, but one also should be courageous and defiant towards threats. These features will underlie his position in the Nation years later.

Meanwhile, his mother Louise had the enormous task of caring for the home and its eight children, often while arguing with their father about her dietary restrictions (she refused to eat pork and rabbit). Unlike Earl, she frequently beat Malcolm, and he suspects this was precisely because of his lighter skin; she unconsciously despised him because he resembled his rapist grandfather's skin tone. But Malcolm often escaped harsh punishment by crying loudly so as to alarm the neighbors and embarrass Louise.

Louise appears to be a complex character, who on the one hand embodies the strict self-discipline Malcolm will later embrace in the Nation, but on the other hand unreasonably beats her son for something out of his control. Malcolm, meanwhile, demonstrates a shrewdness that will serve him well throughout life.

At five, Malcolm began going to school with his other siblings. The schools were integrated, but nobody made a big deal about it. There weren't enough African Americans in the area for it to really matter or for there to be an alternative. And while he did receive racial slurs, Malcolm writes that they were not said "as an insult."

Racism is presented as simply a benign reality, not something always enacted out of malice. However, with such a small population of African Americans and the threat of violence always present, there is no plausible way for Malcolm to confront the issue, either.

One afternoon in 1931, Earl and Louise are fighting over whether or not she will cook a rabbit for dinner. After killing the rabbit and throwing it at her feet, Earl storms out of the house and heads for town. Louise, suddenly struck with a premonition that Earl will be killed, runs outside, calling after him. But he merely waves and walks on.

After the rabbit is killed and thrown at Louise's feet, she is struck by a vision, a sequence of events which mimics a kind of religious ritual. Yet Malcolm isn't sure what to make of his mother's intuition.

Louise finishes cooking dinner, but is on edge after her vision of Earl's death. When he doesn't come home, the family heads to bed, the children all aware of the tension. Malcolm awakes to the sounds of Louise screaming; Earl has been run over by a streetcar. The black community, however, whispers that this was not an accident, but rather murder by the Black Legion; not only was he run over, but he had first been badly beaten.

In both the children and in the black community at large, knowledge of oppression and violence is not something that can be spoken aloud; rather, it is something that is sensed or, at best, discussed behind closed doors. Meanwhile, the police choose to not pursue any investigation, settling for the more convenient answer.

Malcolm doesn't remember much of the funeral, other than it happening outside of a church – a strange detail, considering that his father was a minister. Family friends come in and out of the house for a week, but then life begins to return to normal. However, the family has practically no income, after one of Earl's life insurance policies is deemed void. The insurance company justifies this by claiming he committed suicide.

Even in death, Earl cannot get justice. Rather than being ruled a murder, his death has been labeled a suicide, taking his family's only income away from them. In this way, his death not only goes unavenged, but it has been made into a fortuitous event for the (white-owned) insurance company.

Wilfred, sensing the impending hardship, quits school and begins to work in town. Hilda takes care of the younger kids. Philbert and Malcolm, meanwhile, fight each other and anyone else they meet, with Reginald tagging along. Louise tries to find work as a housemaid, and she finds several positions thanks to her light skin. However, when each new employer finds out she is not white after all, she is let go.

Malcolm's childhood now exists in a state of suspension. On the one hand, he lives carefree and doesn't take on any of the responsibilities his older siblings do, but he will be affected by their shifting economic position nonetheless.

Around this time, Welfare agents begin to come frequently around the house, asking lots of questions. The family does begin to receive Welfare assistance, but it comes at the cost of these degrading meetings. Louise tries hard to not only provide for the family, but to do so in a way that she can be proud of. Unfortunately, her pride and the family's sustenance begin to unravel.

Louise finds herself in a lose-lose situation, a scenario which Malcolm will see repeatedly in others throughout the years. She needs help to survive, but in accepting that help, some intrinsic part of her self-worth does not survive.

By 1934, the family is at its lowest point. The Depression is at its worst and no one in town has enough to eat. Meals for Louise's family might consist of old bread, cornmeal, or sometimes just dandelion greens, to the amusement of some cruel schoolchildren. Malcolm and Philbert begin to hunt for rabbits and frogs, which they then sell to white neighbors, who support them out of pity.

Later in life, Malcolm will believe that every "white man is a devil." But here, when his family is at its lowest, he draws attention not only to how cruel whites can be, but also to how they can show compassion and pity.

The family, and especially Louise, begins to deteriorate psychologically. Malcolm, fed up with being labeled a Welfare recipient, starts to become criminally deviant and steal food. Alternatively, he will visit other families such as the Gohannases around dinner time, fishing for an invite to stay. His activities attract the attention of the town and the Welfare people, who begin trying to take him away from the rest of family.

The family essentially has nothing left to eat, and they've lost even their pride after being continually mocked and degraded. With nothing to lose, Malcolm begins to take a "devil may care" attitude—which then threatens the one thing he does still have, his family.

Louise also begins to receive visits from Seventh-Day Adventists, a conservative but welcoming religious organization, and she takes the family to their meetings out in the country. Malcolm thinks they are extremely friendly, even if a little eccentric. The main attraction, however, is the plentiful food that accompanies each of their meetings. Malcolm observes that white people don't season their food the way black people do.

The Adventists represent an image for Malcolm of white people and race relations at their best. On the one hand, they are extremely friendly and welcoming. On the other, they are undeniably eccentric and have different tastes and customs from the black people Malcolm is used to—not better or worse, just different.

The Welfare people continue to come, looking to separate the family and to take Malcolm away in particular. As the pressures from running the home and dealing with the state increase, implications that Louise is going crazy begin to circulate. Her religious dietary restrictions, spurred on by the Adventists, further these comments, as she refuses to cook pork for the family, even if it is free and they have nothing else.

The Welfare agency continues to try and gain more and more control over the Littles' lives, a fact that Louise recognizes. Her resistance to relinquishing her dietary habits is therefore not only a question of religious zeal, but of resisting total control by the State, a resistance which is then labeled as "crazy."

In an effort to make the family more secure, Louise begins to see a "dark man from Lansing" in 1935. She works hard to get him to marry her, but it would be an enormous burden for him to take responsibility for feeding eight stepchildren. After about a year, he finally walks away, a decision Malcolm understands. But he also understands his mother's attempts to save the family any way possible.

Malcolm describes this figure as resembling his father, and by not giving him a name, and thereby casting his identity in shadow, Malcolm turns him into a ghostly resurrected version of his father. Then he forgives this "ghost" when it must pass on, as if Malcolm is moving on as well.

At this point, Louise really starts to lose control of her mental state, and the state agencies begins to seriously discuss sending Malcolm to live with the Gohannases, who have offered to take him in. He doesn't want to leave his siblings, whom he loves very much. But, he is finally taken away.

Louise, on the other hand, cannot handle losing her last hope. If this "ghost" man allows Malcolm to move on, it only pushes Louise further towards her breaking point.

Malcolm shares a room with Big Boy, and they get along well. The boys would go hunting with Mr. Gohannas, and they would flush out rabbits. Malcolm figured out a way to get them for himself before the other hunters would have a chance, and they never caught on. He takes it as a lesson in how to be successful: if there's an established system, then it can be made to work in your favor.

The anecdote about the rabbits illustrates Malcolm's entrepreneurial instincts and his ease with deception. Later, when he runs "hustles" in New York and Boston, these skills will serve him well.

Malcolm continues to visit home, where his mother is mentally deteriorating. Finally, Louise breaks down and is sent to the State Mental Hospital. The children, meanwhile, are now fully under the protection and the watch of the state. Malcolm equates this state custody to the total control of black lives under the regime of slavery a century earlier.

Malcolm cannot help but notice the sinister parallel to slavery, when black children's lives were completely determined by white outsiders. Now, with one parent killed and the other carried away, the state entirely controls the futures of the Littles.

Louise will be in that hospital for 27 years, and visiting her will cause emotional pain for Malcolm for years to come. He tries to talk with her, but she often doesn't recognize him, and he feels totally crushed by her lack of recognition. He avoids discussing her with anyone to avoid lashing out emotionally or violently, and eventually he stops going to see her altogether.

Malcolm's mother becomes a stand-in for the most sensitive part of his own psyche. Not only can he not bear to see her physically, but he cannot bear to even think about her or discuss her. More than anything else, her illness deeply wounds him.

Wilfred and Hilda are allowed to stay on in their family's home, as they are nearly adults anyways; the rest of the children are sent to live with various families in the area. However, they manage to stay in touch and see each other often in Lansing.

Malcolm's siblings, despite being separated, do everything they can to maintain their unity, a unity which revolves around their childhood home.

CHAPTER 2: MASCOT

After Joe Louis knocks out James J. Braddock to become the Heavyweight World Champion, Philbert begins to gain an interest in boxing. He does well in his amateur fights, gaining the praise and respect of the community. Malcolm, seeing his brother's success, decides he should give it a try, too.

Joe Louis's championship bout was a key moment in history for African American solidarity and pride nationwide, and Malcolm makes sure to note its impact on his life, as well.

Malcolm's first fight is against Bill Peterson, a white boy. Bill is so scared of Malcolm that he decides to take the offensive, frequently knocking Malcolm down and easily beating him. Malcolm's reputation is completely destroyed within the black community, but worst of all, his adoring brother Reginald simply doesn't mention the fight at all. After training hard and going for a rematch against Bill, Malcolm loses almost immediately by knockout. Thankfully, he retires from fighting.

Bill Peterson's fear comes out of racial stereotypes about the ferocity and strength of black men. Ironically, by beating Malcolm so badly, Bill proves that Malcolm, a young black boy, is just a regular kid and not an amazing fighter simply because of his race.

One day, while being punished for wearing a hat to class, Malcolm places a thumbtack on the teacher's chair, resulting in his expulsion from school. He isn't surprised, and even welcomes it; he imagines that now he will be free to do as he pleases, or perhaps work. But then he is dragged to court, where he is told he will go to a detention home and then to reform school.

For just a second, the reader is fooled into believing the same fantasy that grips Malcolm: that he is free from school and free from authority. Then, we are dragged back into reality, a reality in which Malcolm is a minor and a ward of the state, and therefore under its care (or control).

Mr. Maynard Allen, a nice man from the Welfare Agency, accompanies Malcolm to the detention home and gives him advice on how to further himself. Mr. and Mrs. Swerlin run the detention home in nearby Mason, Michigan; they are kind people and treat Malcolm well. He has his own room and is allowed to eat with the Swerlins at the dining table. As a young black man, he is unaccustomed to being welcomeed to dine with white people, except at the Adventist revivals.

While Malcolm does not give the name of his teacher or the judge serving at the court, he takes great care to name and describe Mr. Maynard Allen and the Swerlins as kind and supportive people. While the court appears as a shadowy and impersonal institution, Mr. Allen and the Swerlins bring some humanity back into Malcolm's life.

His good behavior gets the Swerlins' approval, and they like Malcolm. At the same time, however, they seem to like him as a "mascot" or a pet, rather than as a thinking human being. They frequently talk about him while he is in the room as if he isn't there, or they make general racist observations about other black people in the area.

As a "mascot," Malcolm may be extremely well behaved and polite and even smart; however, he never has others' respect as an equal human being – a prejudice they seemingly don't even realize they carry.

Malcolm goes to Lansing often to visit his siblings. While his brothers want to go out with some of the local girls their age, Malcolm isn't much interested. Instead, he heads for the "Negro" bars, where he hangs around listening to the jazz music playing and watching the young people dance.

Throughout the book, Malcolm is taken to be older than he really is, thanks to a tall frame, his mature character, and perhaps an unconscious bias many people have to judge black boys as older than they are.

Malcolm keeps waiting to be sent to reform school, but Mrs. Swerlin keeps pulling strings to allow him to stay at their home. Eventually, Malcolm goes back to school at the local middle school. Like in the Swerlins' home, he is well accepted and popular, thanks to him being the only black student in class.

As the only black student, Malcolm is something rare and therefore precious. He is certainly being "tokenized" by his white peers, but in the process enjoys a special kind of popularity and attention.

Mrs. Swerlin helps Malcolm to get his first job washing dishes in a local restaurant so that he can have some spending money. He enjoys his work and takes great pride in making his own money. His first purchase is a green suit and some sweets for his classmates, both of which make him very proud.

Working his own job and earning spending money gives Malcolm a sense of independence, which will be a key component of his character as he continues to grow.

Malcolm joins the basketball team at his middle school. He experiences some prejudice in the way other teams would talk about him, but he isn't really bothered by it. At the local dances after games he avoids the white girls, knowing they are off-limits. These things are never said; rather, he senses the social norms restricting him.

Here, Malcolm's limitations as simply a "mascot" rather than an equal come out. He is allowed to play on the basketball team, but when it comes to social settings, he knows almost instinctively that he is not really welcome.

Some of the white boys Malcolm's age try and push him to "go for" some of the other white girls. If he were to do so, then the boys would have leverage over the girls, forcing them to accept their own advances. They assume that he instinctually knows more about sex than they do. And while Malcolm does in fact flirt with some of these girls, he does so quietly, and it never goes anywhere.

Malcolm's refusal of the white boys' suggestions is largely driven by an instinct of self-protection (recognizing the potential violence he could face if he did try to date a white girl). He also rejects their belief in his innate knowledge about sex, which is based on racial stereotypes of black men as more primitive.

On the other hand, Malcolm has seen plenty of race-mixing in Lansing. Late at night, white men would pick up black prostitutes walking certain streets and white women would go to meet black men waiting at a particular bridge. These arrangements were largely based on myths about black sexual prowess. Nevertheless, they were quite common and very little fuss was made about it.

Here, we see the same stereotypes and preconceptions that his peers had about Malcolm's supposed sexual prowess being played out by adults. As these myths were practically considered fact, no one says anything about this casual but exploitative race mixing.

Things continue to go well for Malcolm. One day, his class takes a vote, and they declare him class president. Malcolm is extremely proud of this accomplishment; only later does he see it as a futile attempt to integrate into white society. He has been elected president as a "mascot," not as a peer.

Not only is Malcolm singled out by being the only black student in the class; now, he is installed as the President, an honorable yet isolated position.

Malcolm manages to visit his siblings in Lansing nearly every weekend. Hilda and Wilfred still live in the old house, while Reginald and the others are with various families in Lansing. Malcolm likes to give the younger ones some pocket money from the money he makes washing dishes.

The Littles work hard throughout their lives to remain in contact with and support one another. Even with their parents gone, they maintain their ties to each other as a crucial source of support in their often chaotic lives.

One day Ella, Malcolm's half-sister, writes to the family and decides to come from Boston to visit. A strong, dark-skinned woman who is proud of her appearance, she impresses Malcolm with her no-nonsense and self-made businesswoman persona. She gives him a sense of pride in being part of the Little family, which has several successful members in the North and South. Ella suggests they all go to visit Louise together, and the visit goes surprisingly well.

Ella is the first black woman Malcolm knows who is proud *to be dark-skinned. She does not hide from her race, but rather revels in it. This pride, along with her independence, attracts Malcolm; he comes to see her as an early role model of black pride.*

In 1940, Malcolm catches a Greyhound bus while wearing his green suit. He's headed to Boston, where he'll stay with Ella for the summer. He soon falls in love with the thriving black culture in Roxbury, from the jazz music on the jukeboxes to the smell of "down-home black cooking" wafting from the restaurants. After trying to write home, he discovers that he can't find the words to express how wonderful it is here.

Roxbury quickly floods Malcolm's senses with smells, sounds, and sights, to the point where he can no longer describe them. Confronted with so much information, he cannot process this new world that enchants him, but he is clearly delighted to find a place that embraces black culture so wholeheartedly.

After his time in Roxbury, something changes in Malcolm. Upon returning to Mason, he discovers that he is no longer comfortable there, where he is constantly surrounded by white people, unlike in the mostly-black community of Roxbury. He begins to react negatively to people using the n-word and is uneasy at being treated differently.

When he returns to Mason, Malcolm finally begins to process his time in Roxbury. All that life and culture he experienced was black *life and culture, something seemingly missing in Mason.*

Nonetheless, Malcolm stays on top of his studies and is at the top of the class. One day Mr. Ostrowski, his teacher, finds a moment to pull him aside, asking what he wants to be. After replying "a lawyer," Mr. Ostrowski tells Malcolm he should set his sights more realistically, such as towards carpentry. Malcolm can clearly feel the double standard towards him, despite being one of the smartest students in class – perhaps *the* smartest student.

Until now, as a popular kid and the class president, Malcolm has more or less believed himself to be the equal of his classmates. But now, when he knows that he is objectively smarter than them, he is told he is not smart enough (or able) to pursue his dreams, an injustice which strikes at his very core.

Malcolm's ensuing unease is perceived by others as a form of rebellion or acting out. Mrs. Swerlin and Mr. Allen speak to him in the living room, trying to figure out "what's wrong." When he doesn't explain himself, Mrs. Swerlin tells him he will be sent to the Lyons' house. She can't understand what's changed about him, and he can't verbalize it, either.

At this time, Malcolm doesn't steal and isn't rude or disrespectful. His crime, so to speak, is simply to no longer be content with the inequality and dehumanization of forever being a "mascot."

Finally, Malcolm decides it's time to get out of Mason, and he writes to Ella. She helps him arrange to come and live with her in Boston, and he heads out as soon as he finishes the 8th grade. He reflects that if he hadn't have left at that time, then he probably would have never left Lansing in his whole life.

Though he's not quite sure why, Malcolm knows that he needs to get out of Mason. He heads to the one place he knows that electrified him and caused a shift in his sense of self, and that's Roxbury.

CHAPTER 3: "HOMEBOY"

Malcolm arrives in Roxbury in his mint green, high-water suit, completely out of fashion and clearly from the countryside. Even Ella is embarrassed by him; but, he notes, his funny appearance will later be a fond memory.

Throughout the book, Malcolm will contrast poor blacks from the country and city as being quite different in their ways of thinking, and this is also more light-heartedly reflected in their attire.

Ella is an extremely accommodating host. She fixes Malcolm a room and feeds him heaps of delicious food, which he thoroughly enjoys. She has recently split with her latest husband, but she seems entirely unfazed.

Malcolm admires his half-sister's boldness. In everything from her cooking style to her marital relations, she is unapologetic about being herself.

On Ella's advice, Malcolm sets out to explore and get to know Boston. He first walks around her neighborhood, which the residents refer to as "the Hill" or "the Four Hundred." The locals there look down on the poorer black people in the "town" area of Roxbury, and Malcolm is amazed at their behavior. He mistakenly believes they are more successful than the others, but eventually learns that their snobbery is mostly unfounded.

Within the very layout of the city, Malcolm can see how a particular group of African Americans separate themselves off from others based on economic class. This attitude of superiority is also a reflection of the attitudes of whites towards poorer blacks.

One major marker of class is those who own their own homes, a group which is further subdivided between native New Englanders and Southern and West Indian migrants. The "Four Hundred" people refer to each other as "professionals" even if they are just working as janitors or bootblacks in professional, white offices – a self-delusion Malcolm cannot stand.

The term "professional" acts as an instance of tragic irony, in which the audience (and the other neighbors) knows that they are not real professionals, but the people themselves are caught up in their own delusion.

Malcolm then starts to venture into the rest of Boston. He sees historical monuments, Boston University and Harvard University, and the main train stations. He takes in the sights of all the big restaurants and stores and movie theaters. Malcolm is particularly attracted by the Roseland State Ballroom, where all the major acts come to perform.

This more expansive trip through Boston shows all of the glamor and wealth of a big city, but it also implicitly marks these areas as off-limits to African Americans, who instead stay within Roxbury.

Once his sightseeing time is over, Malcolm starts to spend more and more time in the "ghetto" part of Roxbury, attracted by its excitement. Ella grows concerned, trying to convince him to meet the other kids his age in the area, but Malcolm sees himself as much older than them. Besides, he feels much more at ease in the town area than on the Hill.

Malcolm sees himself as older and so do his peers. This is partially due to his physical stature, but also because of his more mature way of carrying himself. These qualities will make him a natural leader throughout his life.

Malcolm is entranced by all the cool cats who stand around in their fancy suits and with their hair "**conked**" (chemically relaxed to lie straight). He is overwhelmed by all the slang and gambling rackets going on around him.

For a small-town boy, the hustle and bustle of the big city life is enchanting, and Malcolm similarly attempts to enchant his readers with his descriptions.

Deciding it's time to get a job (a.k.a a "slave"), Malcolm goes into a poolroom to talk to someone he's heard of called Shorty. The two soon learn they're both from Lansing, and Shorty enthusiastically promises to take Malcolm under his wing. He starts to point out who's who in the pool room, like the drug dealers, pimps, and gamblers. Shorty starts to spread the word to everyone that Malcolm is look for a "slave," and they promise to look out for openings.

As will happen many times throughout his life, Malcolm encounters someone with whom he immediately forms a bond and who agrees to help him through this new phase in his life. In this case, Shorty is his early teacher in learning about the Roxbury environment. The slang term "slave" is brutally ironic considering the past of black enslavement in America, and the way that economic and institutional racism continues that history of oppression.

Shorty talks about himself, as well. He shows Malcolm his saxophone and tells him that he "plays the numbers" (the lottery) every day, hoping to hit the jackpot and win enough money to put a jazz band together. He also confesses to having an attraction to white prostitutes. Shorty then gives Malcolm a couple dollars and promises to call.

For Malcolm, Shorty's love for jazz and white women are connected. Many African American musicians survive mostly through performing for white audiences, who then also fetishize those black musicians.

By the time Malcolm gets home, Shorty has already left a message with Ella that a position as a shoe shine boy has opened at the Roseland State Ballroom. In awe at the idea of being near so many famous musicians, Malcolm rushes out.

The new position as shoe shine boy is a metaphorical "first step." For Ella, it's a step in the wrong direction, but not according to Malcolm and Shorty.

Malcolm arrives at the ballroom, asking for the shoe shine boy, whose name is Freddie. After taking a quick peak at the beautiful ballroom, he heads upstairs. Freddie, who has just won some money and so will be moving on from his job shoe shining, agrees to show Malcolm the trade so he can take over at the next dance.

Freddie represents exactly what Malcolm would like to achieve. He's been a successful hustler, and now with a little luck, he's moving on to better things.

With precision, Freddie lays out the tools of the trade on his stand, and begins to show Malcolm how it's done. He also teaches Malcolm his first real "hustle": if Malcolm runs to the guys leaving the bathroom and hands them a towel, Freddie says, they'll be embarrassed about not washing their hands and give him a tip. The other trick is to "Uncle Tom" (or act in a stereotypically subservient way) to the white customers, who will then tip more.

Malcolm emphasizes to the reader how much skill is involved in even a seemingly simple task like being a successful shoe-shiner. Every step involves impressing or flattering the white customers in a conscious effort to make them tip more.

In between practicing on Freddie's shoes, Malcolm goes off to watch the dancing. He is enchanted by all of the white patrons, dressed up and carrying large bundles of cash, and by hearing all the Benny Goodman songs performed live.

Even though Malcolm will participate in the African American events here, the wealth and splendor of these white patrons creates a stark contrast to his own life.

After cleaning up the ballroom and while driving Malcolm home, Freddie clues him in on the main "hustles" for a shoe shine boy. He should start to buy condoms and then sell them for profit at the end of the dances, and once he's experienced, he can move on to selling liquor and marijuana reefers.

As with many things Malcolm will learn about, being a shoe shine boy is not what it appears; instead, there is a complex system operating in the background.

After a few weeks, Malcolm runs into Freddie downtown, and they laugh together. Malcolm has come to realize that the "side hustles" are actually the main source of income. In addition, he's started to pass on the phone numbers of black prostitutes (for a tip) to white men.

In Malcolm's life, sex between whites and blacks will often be a complicated and exploitative relationship. This is his first of many encounters with that world.

While most of the events are white only, Roseland's also brings in black bands for the black community. On these nights, the ballroom is packed, and many of the musicians come to have their shoes shined, including Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Malcolm recounts the time Johnny Hodges forgot to pay him.

Malcolm's relationships with famous musicians may seem glamorous, but they also imply something else: at the end of the day, African American shoe shiners and musicians both are still simply employees for white people.

At the black dances, the dancers are much more improvisational and loose than the dancers at the all-white events (this may have been influenced by the large amount of alcohol snuck in to the black dances). In the last hour, the band yells "Showtime!" and only the best dancers stay on the floor to compete. With the lights shining and the hall rocking, Malcolm feels electrified.

Malcolm's genuine love of dancing, music, and the joyous atmosphere of the dance hall complicates the image of him as an austere Muslim preacher. The reader is forced to see Malcolm as a more dynamic character.

Around this time, Malcolm starts to hang out socially with Shorty and his friends, where they play craps, drink, smoke, and tell jokes late into the night. He starts to grow his hair out so that he can "**conk**" it, and Shorty tells him to buy his first zoot suit (an especially baggy style of suit).

Malcolm then contrasts his positive memories with others that he is now ashamed of. As an older man, drugs, alcohol, and conks all represent a degradation of his self-worth.

At a local neighborhood store and on Shorty's recommendation, Malcolm gets measured for a sky blue zoot suit that he buys on credit (a practice that Earl Little always condemned). The store manager helps him complete the look with a thin leather belt with his initial L on it, a hat with a feather, and a long gold-chain watch.

Malcolm's description of his trip to the tailor and his new suit is tongue-in-cheek. To him, what sounded and looked great at the time now just seems ridiculous.

While Ella doesn't approve of Malcolm's new attire, she accepts it as inevitable, given the style of the times and his group of friends. Malcolm gets photos taken of himself in his new attire, and sends one copy to his siblings, gives one to Ella, and one to Shorty, who is noticeably moved by the gesture.

Shorty and Ella are the two most important people in Malcolm's life now. Even though their opinions may differ, Malcolm values them both.

Finally, Malcolm's hair is long enough to be **conked** for the first time. He and Shorty go to the drugstore to buy the ingredients for a do-it-yourself conk, and then head to Shorty's apartment. Shorty mixes the concoction, telling Malcolm that the lye will burn his scalp badly, but that it's necessary to make his hair stay straight.

This is an important step for Malcolm to take into fitting into the local community of hustlers. But hustlers are always fighting for cash, and Malcolm's DIY conk testifies to that life of struggle and hardship.

At first the chemicals just feel warm, but then Malcolm begins to feel like his head is on fire. After withstanding as long as he can, Malcolm rushes to wash out the lye. Shorty helps him to get all of the relaxant out, dries him off, and shows him his brand new **conk**. Malcolm's reddish hair now lies straight across his head.

The process is a very literal baptism by "fire." After enduring as much as he can and passing through the flames, Malcolm (who fittingly has naturally red hair) emerges as a new man.

Malcolm is in love with his new hair and vows to never go without a **conk** again. He reflects later that this was his first "step towards self-degradation," as he attempted to look white by enduring so much pain just to have straight hair. He observes that both lower class black men and upper class entertainers conk their hair, and he admires those who have chosen not to do so. Malcolm sees it as a symbol of shame, both for himself and for others who get conks.

In his strongest language yet, Malcolm attacks one of the symbols of how racism has dug deep into the African American psychology of the time. He offers himself as an example of someone who has also been affected by those illusions, showing that he understands other victims as well.

CHAPTER 4: LAURA

After spending time going to parties and hanging out with the "hipsters" and the "cool cats," Malcolm has learned to talk and to dress like them. He's also learned to drink and smoke and gamble; but the one thing he hasn't learned is to dress. At some point, though, with the liquor flowing and the music playing, Malcolm starts to get the hang of the lindy-hop. After that, he lets loose and falls in love with dancing, something he claims all black people can naturally do.

Looking back, Malcolm may not approve of his time spent gambling and drinking. But he cannot and does not attempt to hide his love for dancing, which seems to spring from inside of him. This ability to dance serves as a positive symbol of racial pride for him.

When the time comes for another dance for black people at Roseland's, Malcolm quits his job so that he can join the others on the dance floor. Ella is pleased he quit, and Shorty says he knew Malcolm would outgrow being a shoe shiner. Malcolm heads back to the tailor's shop to get a new zoot suit, which he chooses very carefully and purchases on credit. Then, with a fresh **conk**, he heads down to the Ballroom right as everyone starts to arrive. Heads are turning his way as he makes his way through the room.

Malcolm is no longer a fresh arrival from Michigan. Now, he has experience working a "slave," he's on to his second zoot suit and conk, and he's headed to the dance. Malcolm is perceived as an adult in the crowd, and an attractive one.

Once on the dance floor, Malcolm starts grabbing partners from every direction, pulling girls out to dance with him. Everyone can dance well and they are all grinning at each other, having the time of their lives. Malcolm has so much fun that he never misses another lindy-hopping night at Roseland's while living in Boston.

The dancers on the floor move from one partner to the next and experience joy together. While this may not be a political movement, it is an important example for Malcolm of African Americans coming together in community.

Ella, thrilled that Malcolm no longer shines shoes, finds him a job as a soda fountain clerk in a drugstore in her neighborhood. Malcolm can't stand the people on this side of town, but he respects Ella and decides to take the job. The locals come into the drugstore, putting on airs and pretending to be rich, when everyone knows they don't really have money or work professional jobs. After working all day, Malcolm escapes back into town to go lindy-hop and forgets all about the Hill.

Malcolm begins to live a double life, torn between the attractions of the town and his responsibilities to Ella and his new job on the Hill. The "fake" community of wealthy black patrons contrasts to his nightlife, made up of the more honest community of dancers and hustlers in town.

One day, Malcolm "hits the numbers" and wins sixty dollars. He almost decides to quit the drugstore's soda fountain counter, but he and Shorty end up blowing the money having a great time instead.

Malcolm doesn't manage to catch a big break, just a small bit of luck to have a good time.

A girl named Laura lives near the drugstore and comes in regularly to have a banana split. After seeing her for weeks and weeks, always reading a book and acting very friendly, Malcolm decides she's different from the others on the Hill. One day, Malcolm strikes up a conversation with her, and finds out she's an honors student living with her grandmother. Laura's grandmother is a very strict, religious woman.

Like his friends in town, Laura seems to be a much more honest and genuine person than the other customers. As both sincere and educated, she symbolizes the best of both worlds, which is exactly the kind of life Malcolm will one day try to live.

Malcolm enjoys talking with Laura, and he admires that she wants to go to college. Her studies remind him of his own love for school, and it makes him sad that he couldn't continue his education. Nonetheless, their affection for each other continues to grow.

Malcolm the narrator reflects on Malcolm the character looking back on dropping out of school. This "double reflecting" emphasizes the impossibility of his going back to school even in the "future."

Malcolm keeps Laura away from Shorty, and keeps Shorty away from Laura, thinking that because they come from such different worlds, they wouldn't understand one another. However, Laura mentions that she loves to dance, and so Malcolm asks her to go see Count Basie with him that weekend. While at first saying no because of her grandmother, Laura lies to her about a school function and agrees to come.

Laura's lie to her Grandmother is magnified to the level of original sin. For Malcolm, this turning away from her grandmother's strict religious and social views is Laura's first step onto a darker path.

The night of the dance, Malcolm brings Laura to Ella's house so he can change into his blue zoot suit. Ella immediately falls head over heels for Laura, a well-educated and upper-class girl. Malcolm, meanwhile, gets only Ella's disapproving glare because of his attire.

A stark contrast is formed between Laura, a very presentable girl, and Malcolm, who looks like every other hustler. Ella's judgment exacerbates this class difference.

Laura is filled with excitement about the lindy-hop. She and Malcolm share a taxi and then go inside the ballroom, where Malcolm greets everyone in the room. Then they start to dance. Halfway through the number, Malcolm notices that Laura is perhaps the most responsive partner he's ever had. With just the slightest touch, she goes where he leads with a "ballet style." With light footwork, they zoom around the dance floor.

Malcolm refers to Laura as having a "ballet style" and as being very light. His choice of words emphasizes her class upbringing (only wealthier girls would know ballet) and her relative innocence, as ballet dancers are usually very young and light.

Years later, Malcolm says, his friend Sammy the Pimp tells him that if he looks closely at a woman on the dance floor, "what she truly is" will bubble to the surface on her face. Malcolm wonders whether Sammy, with this supposed ability, could have foreseen the hard turns Laura's life would take.

Malcolm buys into old sexist norms that portray women as more "natural" beings that reveal their true selves when lost in passion, and what Laura truly "is" is something much darker and more primal than a college girl.

When it comes time for the "Showtime!" competition, the dancers on the floor start to thin out, and Malcolm is approached by a lindy-hopper with a reputation of being high-energy and hard to keep up with. Malcolm and the girl dance around the floor to the great approval of the crowd. Laura, however, says very little afterward, and maintains her distance for the next week.

Although she never says it, Laura is either jealous of the other dancer's skill or is offended that Malcolm went to dance with her. Either way, Laura keeps to herself as she makes her next decision.

One day Laura comes into the drugstore, wild with excitement and asking Malcolm to take her to see Duke Ellington. Malcolm agrees, and goes to her house to pick her up—but he is met by Laura's grandmother, who is extremely hostile to him. Laura and her grandmother then have a screaming match about Laura going out, and finally Laura leaves the house in tears with Malcolm.

Like Malcolm, Laura is walking step by step away from life on the Hill and closer towards life in the town. Her tears symbolize the difficulty of that break and the hardships awaiting her.

After the warmup rounds of dancing, Laura tells Malcolm she wants to compete. While he is skeptical about her ability to maintain her energy, she changes into her sneakers and they begin. Her "ballet style" of feather-light steps and his reputation gain them the attention of the very astute crowd. As Laura's stamina starts to fade, Malcolm carries her to the sidelines to the applause of the crowd and with a salute from Duke Ellington himself.

In an effort to outdo Malcolm's last partner, Laura rises to the occasion to compete against the other dancers. And while she does wonderfully, she ultimately falls victim to the grueling conditions, a foreshadowing of her eventual fall into drugs and prostitution.

As people in the crowd are congratulating Laura, Malcolm catches the eye of a beautiful, tall, blonde woman named Sophia. As dating white women was then a status symbol in black America, Malcolm is immediately struck by her obvious interest in him, almost instantly forgetting about Laura. After he takes Sophia to the floor for a dance, he agrees to take Laura home and then come back to meet Sophia.

While Laura is still trying to recover from the dance, Malcolm has already moved on to Sophia. While Laura may have been a superior dancer, Sophia has one thing Laura can never have – white skin.

When Malcolm returns, Sophia is waiting for him outside. She drives them in her convertible to a side road outside of Boston, before turning off the engine. For the next few months, Malcolm and Sophia go out several times a week together, making quite a statement throughout Roxbury. Sophia's beauty, wealth, and whiteness increase Malcolm's status in Roxbury so that he goes from being a young upstart to a respected man in the neighborhood. He's now known as "Red."

Malcolm and Sophia's relationship focuses around what each of them can gain from the other, not on love. Sophia has an attraction to black men and culture, whereas Malcolm can gain socially and economically from the relationship.

Laura never comes back to the drugstore after this. When Malcolm sees her again, years later, she has abandoned her plans for college and fallen into drinking, drugs, and then prostitution to fund it all. Throughout his life, Malcolm will feel responsible for her fall.

Laura's tragic fall has been foreshadowed throughout the chapter. Now, Malcolm simply sums up the course of her life, as if this part would inevitably follow, which says a lot about his views on "immorality."

Ella soon finds out about Sophia and makes her disapproval very clear. Malcolm then moves in with Shorty on Sophia's dime and finds a new job as a bus boy. Shortly thereafter, World War II reaches America at Pearl Harbor.

Malcolm can no longer live a double life, caught between the Hill and the town—so he chooses to move out of Ella's home and embrace his new life.

CHAPTER 5: HARLEMITE

Through a friend of Ella's, Malcolm lands a job working for the railroad, due to the war causing a labor shortage. Having always wanted to visit New York City, Malcolm jumps at the chance to work for the route traveling to and from the Big Apple.

While Malcolm may no longer live with Ella and she may no longer approve of his lifestyle, he will continue to benefit from her kindness and connections throughout his life.

Lying about his age and declaring himself 21, Malcolm instantly gets the job. They take him on as a dishwasher, but before working the NYC route, they put him on the "Colonial" to Washington, D.C. There, he sees the worst slums of his life, and all within proximity to the capital. There are nicer black neighborhoods as well, though; these well-educated residents work as janitors, porters, and mailmen.

In a very physical way, D.C. embodies the racist hierarchy that Malcolm sees throughout America. Right at the heart of the country's center of power, one finds that racial oppression is at its very worst, implying that power and oppression are inevitably entwined.

After several trips to D.C., Malcolm jumps at the chance to join the "Yankee Clipper" route, working as the sandwich man. In New York, he goes with the train's cooks to Harlem and to their favorite bar there, Small's Paradise. Here, he is overwhelmed by the natural decorum and manners of its customers. Unlike the pretentions of the Hill in Roxbury, these patrons appear cool and collected in their quiet manners.

The customers at Small's also carry themselves with dignity in a way that Malcolm has never seen before. Perhaps Malcolm will later be attracted to the Nation of Islam partially because their conservative, courteous manners will remind him of these hustlers.

Later, Malcolm continues his tour of Harlem, heading first to the Apollo Theater and then to the Braddock Hotel, a popular hangout place for black celebrities. From there, he heads to the Savoy Ballroom, which dwarfs Roseland's in Boston. There he dances with several of the girls on the sidelines as the room maintains a furious pace. The singer Dinah Washington eventually goes onstage, making the crowd go mad (and Malcolm notes that he and Dinah eventually became great friends).

At this stage, Malcolm is still very much a newcomer. Whereas in Roxbury he is often at the center of the dancing, here in Harlem, he can only manage to keep up with the dancers along the sidelines. In addition, he will know the celebrities of Harlem – but not yet.

The streets are filled with black servicemen, taking in the night life. Meanwhile, the prostitutes and the pimps are out on the streets working every single man they see, while the hustlers try to sell their merchandise. Malcolm says that in a few years, he could give any of these hustlers a lesson, but at this moment, he is mesmerized by the atmosphere and certain that he belongs here.

Malcolm describes the atmosphere of Harlem in a loving way and glorifies its nightlife. But this is meant to reflect how he felt at the time, rather than to simply enchant the reader with a romantic past.

Malcolm heads back to Boston, his head spinning. He tries to convince Shorty to try and enter the New York music scene. Meanwhile, Sophia tells him that he will only ever be happy in New York, a diagnosis he agrees with.

Malcolm's ambitions have outgrown the confines of Roxbury. He knows that he must be at the center of the action.

Malcolm works hard at his sandwich job, putting on a show for the passengers, which virtually assures that they will buy something from him. The others working on the train do the same, catering to white people's egos through being more subservient, but in a very calculating and conscious way.

While the white customers believe that all black people simply are subservient, these train workers use that prejudice to their advantage to gain larger tips and deceive the customers.

Malcolm stays in Harlem for one day between journeys; he first takes a room at the YMCA, and then at a boarding house. He explores every area of Harlem, from the nicest to the most poor. Its atmosphere is like the town section of Roxbury "magnified a thousand times." He goes into basement parties packed with people, music blaring and everyone drinking and dancing.

For Malcolm, there is no such thing as people being too low-class for him. He readily explores and meets with people of all economic levels, and in fact, he finds that he connects the most with the poor.

Malcolm quickly becomes a regular at Small's and the Braddock bar, where the bartenders pour him a shot of his favorite bourbon as soon as he walks in. He's known as "Red" to the old hustlers there, and he makes friends with many famous musicians.

The fact that the bartenders and regulars know him signals that Malcolm is no longer an outsider, but an accepted member of the group – or at least a welcome guest.

Malcolm's record sales of sandwiches ensure that he keeps his job over the man he replaced; he understands that white customers, just like his old shoe shine customers, want to be entertained. However, the other workers begin to joke that he won't last. Malcolm's language has apparently grown too profane, and some of the customers have started to complain.

While this job is a sort of hustle as well, Malcolm must maintain a certain level of decorum, since it involves white people, who expect to be treated with respect by their racial "inferiors"—but Malcolm is quickly losing that capacity.

Malcolm remembers one large, white, drunk serviceman who had been offended and declared that he was going to fight Malcolm. Malcolm agreed, but insisted the man take off some of his clothes. As the man stripped further and further, people started laughing at him and he was escorted away.

Malcolm's inflammatory language (whether profane or religious) will incite opposition throughout his life, but one of his greatest joys is to use his mind to defeat his enemies.

At this time Malcolm is living a very fast life, and his coworkers say he is out of control. In Boston, he goes out every night with Sophia. Then, coming to work drunk or high, he blasts through his shift before heading to the bars in Harlem in his zoot suit. Finally, after the railroad receives an angry letter from a passenger, Malcolm is let go.

Just like the train that is traveling back and forth every other day between New York and Boston, Malcolm himself is shooting between substances, his mind in a blurry haze.

Now that he is free of employment, Malcolm decides it would be a good time to visit his siblings in Michigan. He sees everyone except Wilfred, who has gone to university to study a trade, but his siblings barely recognize him. He causes quite a stir in Lansing, stupefying everyone. Malcolm, meanwhile, basks in the attention.

Malcolm does not long for the approval of his siblings or the townspeople in Lansing. However, in retrospect he also does not approve of his flamboyant appearance and attitude at the time.

Malcolm then pays several house calls in Lansing. He first goes to see his mother Louise, who doesn't really recognize him. Shorty's mother, an elderly woman, thanks him for news of Shorty. Mrs. Swerlin, on the other hand, is extremely uncomfortable in his presence, and he quickly leaves.

These mother-figures each keep their distance from the new Malcolm, either through non-recognition, not being his own mother, or through exhibiting clear discomfort with his new life.

Before leaving Lansing, Malcolm goes to a school dance, where he shows off all his best moves. He stuns the crowd, who all leave the dance floor to watch. He even signs autographs before leaving the gymnasium at the Lincoln School.

Suddenly, Malcolm himself represents the stardom and glory of New York to these rural young people.

With no employment, Malcolm goes to work for another railroad, the Seaboard Line, who need a man for their route to Florida. However, Malcolm is soon fired after running afoul of the line's white conductor.

Malcolm's options outside of Harlem are quickly closing around him.

Back in New York, one of the bartenders at Small's tells Malcolm that a job as a day waiter is about to open up. With a railroad background serving as a good recommendation for a waiter, Charlie Small and Ed Small take him on, based on their impression of him always being calm in their bar. The year is 1942, and Malcolm is 17.

Malcolm gets extremely lucky with this job. Not only has he burned his bridges with the railroads, but he also must use those shaky credentials to get himself a new job.

For Malcolm, working at Small's, which is the center of life in Harlem, is "Seventh Heaven seven times over." He quickly starts to learn the trade and how to get on the good side of the cooks and bartenders. The customers, who are used to seeing him amongst them, treat him very well too.

The biggest advantage for Malcolm at this time is that he is a very sociable and likeable person. His character helps him to establish himself in his new work.


In fact, the customers begin to teach Malcolm about Harlem as they eat. Harlem had been home to many groups of immigrants throughout its history: first the Dutch, then the Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, and finally the African Americans. Meanwhile, African Americans had been in New York City since 1683.

The greatest advantage about Small's, meanwhile, is the opportunities it affords Malcolm to learn about Harlem. This marks the beginning of a new kind of education.


In 1910, after a few black families started to move into Harlem, the Jewish community began to flee, which led to more black families moving in, until the neighborhood was nearly completely black. Then, in the 1920s, Harlem became a center for music and entertainment for New York City around when Louis Armstrong arrived in the city. Small's opened in 1925, followed by the Cotton Club and Savoy Ballroom in 1926.

Like many minority groups before them, African Americans had not originally been welcome in Harlem. But once the neighborhood became a thriving center for music, they made the place their own.


Harlem's reputation for great music attracts whites from downtown, and many of the clubs and impromptu speakeasies cater specifically to whites. The whole area is flooded with entertainers, hustlers, and pimps as everyone competes for white people's money. The lindy hop, named for Charles Lindbergh's famous flight to Paris from New York, takes off in 1927. The partying continues right up until the stock market crash of 1929.

The hustlers in Small's draw a direct connection between the economic and cultural success of Harlem and the ability of white patrons from downtown to pay for it. Harlem's economy cannot sustain itself, but rather must be fueled by outside cash.


Malcolm loves to hear the old timers talk about these bygone days, taking in everything they have to tell him about the past and about their own hustles. In this way, he gathers a vast trove of wisdom on how to make money and survive on the streets.

In addition to his history lessons, Malcolm begins to gain skills and knowledge that will carry him beyond the world of waiting tables at Small's.

CHAPTER 6: DETROIT RED

While working at Small's, Malcolm sometimes waits on people who have just hit the numbers and are coming in to celebrate with their friends. Seeing their good fortune makes Malcolm long to hit the numbers too, and so he plays every day, spending all his tip money, sometimes as much as fifteen or twenty dollars.

This kind of gambling would give Malcolm a big payoff if he ever won. But instead, he simply loses all his money and can never save anything to use for anything more substantial.

A "hit" in the numbers racket constitutes replicating the last three digits of the New York Stock Exchange total sales for the day. The odds of doing so are a thousand to one, and the payout is six hundred to one—a $1 hit pays $600. Many of Harlem's businesses had been founded or bought out from previous big hits.

The numbers game is an example of tragic irony, as the poor play a game which mimics the rich with the false hope of one day becoming rich themselves.

Either despite the widespread poverty or because of it, nearly everyone in Harlem plays daily, giving their bets and numbers to runners, who work for a controller, who report to the (white) banker. Everyone gets a cut of the profit, including the police. The methods for choosing numbers are infinite, from phone numbers, telegrams, zip codes, dream books (for interpreting dreams into numbers), and many other systems.

While there are many ways to pick numbers, there is no way to get around the fact that the odds are stacked in favor of the numbers guys. Thus Harlem daily gives its money away to these hustlers who represent a white banker.

At Small's, many of the old hustlers take a liking to Malcolm and do their best to teach him their ways and "straighten him out." One, for example, buys him an expensive, conservatively cut suit as a gift. This patron is a member of the "Forty Thieves" gang, who specialize in robbing high-end garment stores.

Malcolm's new suit reflects a more mature and collected style compared to his more flamboyant days in Roxbury. He will wear suits like this for the rest of his life.

Malcolm's coworkers and customers also start to identify the plainclothes police officers to him, an essential catalog of faces crucial to avoiding arrest. In 1942, the police and military are particularly interested in any hustles aimed at draft dodging or at hustling servicemen.

The police are always a worry for the hustlers. But now, the federal government begins to take an interest in anything that might jeopardize the war effort – as if hustling were a treasonous activity.

Lots of servicemen during this period are coming through Harlem, and often ask for illegal goods and services, but they are mostly treated curtly. The first rule of hustling, according to Malcolm, is to never trust anyone outside of your closest circle.

Malcolm will follow this rule throughout his life—especially since the threat of violence or police infiltration will always hang over him.

The bartenders pick out to Malcolm the customers who are "fronts," (who merely pretend to have connections), the ones really involved in crime, and the dangerous ones to avoid crossing. These men, like "West Indian Archie," mostly worked as strongarmers for Dutch Shultz, a prominent criminal boss and banker in the numbers racket until his assassination in 1934. They now work as big bet runners for the top bankers and are generally left alone by the police as being simply too dangerous.

The hustlers identified as "fronts" are portrayed as practically less than a person—just a façade. Meanwhile, the strongmen are elevated to the level of heroes, untouchable even by the police. For Malcolm, everyone in Harlem exists either on the level of myth or hardly at all.

Malcolm befriends some of the pimps who come through Small's as well. "Cadillac" Drake, a large, bald man, only employs unattractive women on the theory that they "work harder." His complete opposite is "Sammy the Pimp," a young, smooth character, who employs the most beautiful prostitutes in Harlem.

Exactly who qualifies as a notable character can vary quite a bit. Rather than any one quality, it's a persona that makes a person into a somebody.

One of Sammy's girls is known as "Alabama Peach," a tall, blonde woman with a characteristic Southern drawl. She frequently tells the story of how she heard as a young girl about the sexual prowess of black men and forced a black man to have sex with her, saying that if he didn't she would cry rape. After high school, she moved straight to Harlem and went into Sammy's employ. Malcolm, looking back, says he has frequently wondered what became of her.

Malcolm and the others are enamored with Alabama Peach's stories, accent, and white skin, and they don't see the racism underlying her story. After all, she used her privilege to force a man to have sex with her, and then essentialized and fetishized all black men as good lovers.

An old-time pickpocket named Fewclothes comes into Small's almost every day to tell tales and make jokes. Once one of the best at his craft, he has now contracted bad arthritis, making it impossible for him to keep working. Nevertheless, the other regulars buy him dinner and drinks every night while they listen to his tales. Malcolm has reflected many times in life on the significance of that kindness, and how it spoke to the brotherhood among the hustler community.

This is a very important moment, as Malcolm tries to understand the emotional connections happening underneath all the bravado and storytelling. Since society clearly doesn't care about them, these hustlers must take care of each other, even in old age.

Another regular is "Jumpsteady," who specializes in burglary by entering through white people's windows. Later, Malcolm will learn that he kept his nerves in check by getting high before his jobs. Despite naming so many criminals as regulars, Malcolm insists that Small's was in fact one of the most respectable places in Harlem, especially at night time.

Malcolm challenges the reader to look at criminals differently. Rather than simply imagining slick hustlers in zoot suits, he insists that the reader imagine these men as also some of the most respectable and respectful people around.

Malcolm's first room in Harlem is on the 800 block of St. Nicholas Avenue, where most of the tenants are prostitutes and where everyone uses some kind of drug to make their days bearable. The prostitutes display a level of trust and sisterliness that Malcolm says he hasn't seen among married women. In fact, he believes most women, and particularly white women, to be much more dishonest and unvirtuous than most of those prostitutes, many of whom he befriended.

Malcolm's admiration for prostitutes throughout the book is very out of character with his generally strict and conservative moral code. This admiration displays a more sophisticated opinion which admires them as people who are generally virtuous, but who are bound to an "immoral" line of work.

Men come and go all day long, but in the morning, there is a rush of men coming in before work, and then all rushing out again. Malcolm blames this behavior on overly controlling wives who have made their husband's home lives unbearable. The prostitutes then have to let the men "be men." According to the prostitutes, the men are too easy to push around and needed to be firm (physically) with their wives.

Malcolm's views on marriage are quite old-fashioned and disturbing for a modern reader. Not only does he believe domestic violence is an acceptable practice, but he thinks that wives must let their men act out their sexual urges, whether the wife is interested or not.

Every once in a while, Sophia visits from Boston, and her looks and whiteness once again turn heads and increase Malcolm's status in the bars. In particular, the musicians at the Braddock bar make a big deal about her. But it's not just black men who are interested in mixed-race relationships; Harlem is full of white people from downtown who have come to get a piece of the "atmosphere" in Harlem.

The problem for Malcolm is not the idea of a mixed-race couple that loves each other. Rather, he reflects on how these relationships and attractions always seem to boil down to racial stereotypes and exploitation.

One white girl, for example, comes to the Savoy Ballroom to dance exclusively with black men, and then takes the subway home without saying a word to anyone all night. Another young white "hippie" who appropriates the style and slang of the black zoot suiters can be seen everywhere in Harlem. Nevertheless, this white boy still makes a nasty comment to Sophia about her being with Malcolm, and Malcolm learns how deep racial hypocrisy can run.

These two young white people represent different ways of appropriating and using black culture for their own pleasure, while still maintaining an idea of racial hierarchy (and all their own white privilege, of course).

Malcolm becomes good friends with Creole Bill, who runs a late-night speakeasy in his apartment. Malcolm leads white people there who still want to party after the bars close, and the room is filled with music, Cajun food, and booze. Eventually, Malcolm says, Bill made enough money to open a Cajun restaurant.

Like many other Harlem businesses, the speakeasy is dependent on performing *a particular idea of blackness for white outsiders.*

Sophia has recently married a white serviceman, but wants to maintain her relationship with Malcolm, who agrees. Sammy and Malcolm had discussed mixed-race couples before, and Sammy told him that white women were simply practical. They needed a white man for money and stability, and maintained their relations with black men out of either love or lust.

Malcolm may gain from this relationship, but he also is clearly second-place to Sophia's husband. Instead, he is there for her to have fun and be rebellious or fashionable. While he pretends not to care at the time, it is hard to believe that this objectification would not affect him.

In early 1943, Malcolm (by now known as "Detroit Red") observes a soldier looking lonely and sad at Small's; on a bad impulse, he offers to give the man the number of a prostitute. He almost immediately realizes his mistake and sees that the soldier is a military spy hoping for that kind of offer. Malcolm is taken to the police station, but as he has no record, they merely scare him and let him go. However, as he's attracted police attention, he is now barred from Small's—a bitter loss.

The police and military are not content to simply observe crime and then react, but have resorted to baiting possible hustlers into offering illegal services to undercover officers. Malcolm is actually still inexperienced in this field, which saves him from a more serious punishment.

Sammy ends up taking in Malcolm in his time of need, helping him to plan his next move. They decide that the best business for him will be to go into selling reefers, as it is an easy business to start, pays immediately, and caters to Malcolm's connections with musicians.

Besides the fact that he already has a willing client base amongst his musician friends, selling reefers also appeals to Malcolm's sense of independence.

After an initial loan from Sammy, Malcolm starts to immediately turn a profit, selling mostly to his musician friends. With some money in his pocket, he feels truly independent for the first time. Around this time, Malcolm falls in love with the cinema. He often spends his days at the theater, and then prepares his supplies for the night and goes out to make his rounds.

Malcolm has begun to fall into a daily rhythm comprised of watching movies, getting ready, and heading to business. This routine gives him a sense of security and independence. Malcolm will one day advocate for black-owned businesses as also offering a sense of security.

With no obligations, Malcolm makes a trip to Boston. He visits with Ella, who still doesn't approve of his life, but is pleasant. He calls Sophia to meet him at Shorty's house; they have to be more cautious now that she's married. After she leaves, Malcolm goes to see Shorty's (newly formed) band, which he rates as "fair."

As with his family back in Michigan, Malcolm's friends and siblings in Boston remain an important part of his life, and his trip to see them reflects the importance he places on these relationships.

Malcolm recounts the story of how Sammy the Pimp became a pimp. After leaving Kentucky, he became a waiter in Harlem and would pick up single women. After having their house key duplicated and then robbing them, Sammy would then offer them a small amount of money to support them, and from then on, they would become dependent on him.

Malcolm recounts how he became great friends with Sammy the Pimp. However, it is impossible to hear this story and not imagine how Malcolm would have felt about this kind of clearly immoral exploitation later in life.

Malcolm quickly catches the notice of the narcotics squad, but he finds a method to avoid arrest. If he feels he is being followed, he simply drops his bundle of reefers from under his armpit and keeps walking. Then he goes back later to pick them up. He also begins to carry a small .25 caliber handgun in the small of his back, but he's not sure exactly why.

When Malcolm was younger and found a more effective method for hunting rabbits, he reflected that if there is a method, it can always be improved. In selling reefers and not getting caught, this is his improvement.

Even with all his precaution, word gets out that the narcotics squad has labeled Malcolm a top priority. After he finds his room searched, he moves out and starts to move from place to place. Meanwhile, he is stopped and patted down nearly every day. To combat this, Malcolm starts hiding his reefers in old cigarette and bandage cartons, then leaving them in secret, public places. But as police harassment continues and he moves to a poorer neighborhood, he begins to lose too much of his product to thieves.

As will happen many times throughout his life, Malcolm finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place. Any less precaution and he may be sent to jail. Any more, and he won't be able to sell enough of his product to survive.

With business at a crawl, Sammy advises Malcolm to use his railroad I.D. card to travel through New England, selling reefers to the traveling musicians. Most conductors, upon seeing a railroad I.D. would let him ride for free, allowing him a way to make money and get out of Harlem for a while. The bands, meanwhile, are pleased to see him so far from home and with marijuana to sell.

For nearly every occasion that Malcolm finds himself in a tough situation, an escape route presents itself. This is true of when he left Lansing with no future prospects and of when he found his job at Small's on only his railroad credentials.

One day after Malcolm comes back from a trip, Reginald is waiting for him at Sammy's apartment. They get a room at the St. Nicholas hotel and stay up talking about the family and their younger years. Malcolm is very happy to see his younger brother, who has gone into the merchant marine and is in town while his ship gets repaired in New Jersey.

In this scene, the reader sees a much softer side to the hustler who spends his evenings dodging the cops. Here, Malcolm describes his emotional reunion with his younger brother, back from the high seas.

Reginald fills Malcolm in on the family. Wilfred is an instructor at a trade school, and Hilda and Philbert are both talking about marriage. Meanwhile, Malcolm's youngest siblings Yvonne, Wesley, and Robert are still in school in Lansing. Philbert has also apparently become very religious. Before Reginald leaves, Malcolm urges him to move to New York. Rather than jumping at the offer, Reginald promises to think about it, with a coolness Malcolm admires.

It is clear that Reginald and Malcolm have the most in common of the Little siblings, as they are the two who have struck out from home alone, while the others remain in the Midwest.

One day, Malcolm receives a draft notification; he is to appear in front of the draft board in ten days' time. He immediately starts to make a show of seeming crazy and constantly high in public where military spies might see him. He even professes his desire to join the Japanese army.

When working as a shoe-shiner, it was important for Malcolm to seem deferential to the white customers. Now, he must appear to be the exact opposite – confrontational and out of control.

The day of the draft board, Malcolm shows up wearing a brand new, outlandish zoot suit, and puts on his most over-the-top impression of a hipster possible. He walks in swaying, and presents himself to the receptionist. Nonetheless, he is led to the big hall with the other prospective inductees, where he proceeds to talk nonstop, attracting a lot of bad looks and condescending smirks from the mostly white men waiting with him.

Malcolm knows that zoot suits and the people who wear them are representative of white America's worst prejudices about black men. By choosing to put on this character, he is actively resisting the militaristic mentality, which calls for uniformity, subservience, and respect for order and norms.

After his medical examination, Malcolm is led to the Army psychiatrist's office. A young black woman is the secretary, and she clearly looks down on him. Malcolm, meanwhile, sees her as an uppity "first" – a black person who has risen to a higher position and then lords it over everyone else.

Whereas Malcolm and the secretary may have similar backgrounds, she has chosen to conform in order to rise economically, whereas he is purposefully not *conforming in order to resist.*

Upon entering the psychiatrist's office, Malcolm starts to pull him in, not wanting to seem to be obviously faking his insanity. After answering the man's questions for a few minutes, he confesses to wanting to organize an armed rebellion in the South among black people. With that, he is dismissed, and shortly thereafter, he receives a 4-F notification (designating medical or psychological unfitness) in the mail.

In the South before the Civil War, it was illegal to allow a slave to carry a gun for fear that they may start a slave rebellion. While he probably did not know that at the time, Malcolm nonetheless plays on deeply engrained, racist fears of violent, rebellious black men.

CHAPTER 7: HUSTLER

One day, Malcolm is playing blackjack with the other black railroad men in a locker room at Grand Central Station, when one of the others tries to cheat. Malcolm pulls his gun on him as a threat. The next time he goes back, Malcolm gets confronted by the police and is told to never come to the station again unless he has a ticket to go somewhere. And so his trips on the railroad come to an end.

Malcolm the narrator's nonchalant and disturbingly calm tone in recounting these events reflects how familiar Malcolm the character was with violence and the threat of violence at the time.

Back in Harlem, the narcotics squad knows Malcolm too well for him to keep selling reefers. With no other skills, he has to find a new hustle. He likens the hustler's life to that of an animal who must constantly move and prey on others to survive. He starts to do small robberies and stickups in nearby cities for the next six months. His use of narcotics keeps him from getting too nervous both on the jobs and in between, but he still changes rooms often.

Now that legal employment and low-level narcotics sales are no longer options, the only thing Malcolm can do is scale up the level of his crimes. He then copes with the psychological toll of this escalation in danger through using ever-increasing amounts of drugs.

Once, Malcolm and Sammy are nearly caught. As they are running away, they hear sirens behind them. The police car approaches, and they move into the street, pretending to ask for directions. The cops fall for the trick, curse them, and drive on to find the robbers.

This incident highlights Malcolm's incredible ability to think on his feet in difficult situations. Yet the trick's simplicity also testifies to the cops' inability to imagine a black man as capable of outwitting them.

Malcolm disciplines himself to not perform more "jobs" than necessary; he only goes when he is running low on cash. Meanwhile, he plays the numbers every day, waiting to one day have a big payout—but he never gets a big hit.

A delicate balance exists between Malcolm's need to survive and the danger of being caught, while his gambling is a constant attempt to quickly break out of this economic situation.

Reginald comes back on his ship one day, and this time, he decides to stay. He has fallen in love with Malcolm's musician friends and their world. Malcolm introduces him to everyone, such as Billie Holiday, who then treat Reginald as their own baby brother.

Malcolm has long felt at home and amongst family with Harlem's musicians. Now, his younger brother's presence amplifies that feeling.

Wanting to provide Reginald with a stable home, Malcolm starts to rent an apartment for $100 a month. At nighttime, Malcolm "schools" Reginald on what's happening around them, and then introduces him to his friends at the late-night speakeasies. Those speakeasies, as always, are packed with white people, who have come to take in black "soul." Often at the most popular places, like Jimmy's Chicken Shack, there are big-name celebrities, both white and black.

Malcolm's actions reflect the treatment that Shorty gave him upon his first arrival to Roxbury, and he takes that role seriously. Malcolm wants Reginald to see him as a man who knows what he is doing and knows what is happening around them.

Malcolm gets Reginald a hustle that will make him money but be risk-free—he gets him a license to sell petty goods, and then takes him to buy cheap goods from a manufacturer's outlet. Reginald will then present the goods as if they're stolen and high-value, and thereby get more money for them.

Unlike Malcolm's reefer business or burglaries, Reginald's hustle is completely legal and mostly risk-free, reflecting Malcolm's big-brother concern for Reginald's safety.

Malcolm assumes that Reginald, like most black men at the time, will be interested in white women, but that is not the case. Instead, Reginald starts dating a black woman in her thirties who provides everything for him. His choice in partner gains Reginald even more respect from Malcolm.

While Malcolm is himself seeing a white woman on a regular basis, he still understands it to be a kind of weakness or betrayal of his race.

Racial tensions throughout the war simmer just below boiling point. Then, in 1943, a white officer shoots a black soldier, and a riot ensues. Many stores are smashed and lots of goods are stolen, which leads to even worse economic conditions after the riot ends. After this, very few white people keep coming to Harlem for the night life.

The economic downturn before the war, the fewer visitors, and the increased police presence push Harlem's frustrations to its limit, which ultimately ends in even more difficult economic conditions.

Nowadays (in the early 1960s), Malcolm says, Harlem's night life scene is gone, including the scene for black people. Black people that have money instead choose to go downtown and spend it in fancy white-owned hotels and restaurants, something Malcolm sees as simply another way of putting on airs and of undercutting black businesses.

By taking their hard-earned cash out of the community and spending it elsewhere, these individuals, according to Malcolm, are throwing their money away and not using it to support their neighbors.

The poor economic situation (in 1943) has hurt all parts of the Harlem underground, and the hustlers and prostitutes are all getting day jobs. Malcolm and Sammy start to pull more dangerous robberies together. One day they are caught mid-act, and Sammy's arm is grazed by a bullet from a security guard. They split up, and then meet back at Sammy's apartment early the next morning. Sammy's girlfriend is crying very loudly and blaming Malcolm. Malcolm hits her "to shut her up," and Sammy reaches for his gun. Malcolm is able to get away, and he and Sammy later make up, but things are never the same between them after that.

This is a key moment in Malcolm's life, when the threat of death by violence is particularly high, as both a security guard and his own partner have tried to shoot at him in one day. Separately, Malcolm shows no awareness for why Sammy may be angry with him for enacting violence against his girlfriend. This blind spot towards women not only endangers Malcolm in the moment, but it opens him up to criticism (as a writer) of sexism.

Malcolm enters the numbers business on his reputation as a good hustler. His new boss and his wife have been granted control of a section of the city's numbers racket for six months by the mob. Malcolm's job is simply to pass on a bag of numbers slips to another man at a bus stop every day. Sometimes, he will have conversations with the boss's wife about how the criminal world is actually inseparable from politics and the legal world.

The idea that politics and the criminal world are intertwined foreshadows and underlies the views Malcolm will hold as a minister in the Nation. If U.S. politics is corrupt and intertwined with the criminal world, then the "criminal game" is one that is constantly rigged to take money and opportunities away from black people.

Now that he's in the racket, Malcolm decides to start placing his bets with West Indian Archie, who works for the same boss. Archie has a photographic memory, which makes him very valuable as a numbers runner, as he never carries evidence of gambling. Placing bets with him is a status symbol, since he only takes large betters. He also often pays off the hits from his own money, and then collects from his banker later.

West Indian Archie has already been referred to as one of the most feared strongmen in Harlem. Now, his character appears even more dangerous as Malcolm emphasizes both his intellectual abilities and his high status as a man with his own money (and who is therefore very prideful).

Malcolm meets a Brothel Madam who recruits Malcolm to help her outsource certain sexual requests that her workers won't do. His job is to stand on the corner of 45th and Broadway with a white flower in his lapel, and then to accompany the customers to special locations in Harlem where their desires will be met. This steering gets him very heavy tips from the middle-aged and senior men, who are often big politicians and leaders in society. One of the people Malcolm directs his clients to is a big, strong black woman who whips her customers as they beg for mercy—and sometimes they pay Malcolm to watch.

The men who are the most respected and powerful in society also seem to be the ones who are most interested in sexual acts that even many sex workers won't perform, which Malcolm sees as proof of white America's immorality. While he clearly finds these men's desires disturbing, Malcolm does seem to secretly admire the woman for making so much money by beating and degrading old and powerful white men.

Another of Malcolm's acquaintances is a white lesbian woman who runs a "stable" of black men for white women. Having heard of black men's prowess, these often bored, married womenpay heavily, and almost always with a color preference for the darkest men. Malcolm sees this color preference as ironic, because these customers nevertheless do not respect the people they use, men and women alike. Malcolm also believes that black men, like himself, who sleep with white women (in his case, Sophia) are also just using them.

The color preference for dark sex workers is the same for female and male customers, which is reflective of how society in general treats "blackness" as something exotic or sexually appealing—but because "blackness" is simply something interesting to be fetishized or enjoyed in sex, then black bodies are simply there to be used.

One morning, a bar in Harlem gets held up by a light-skinned black man, and Malcolm is considered a suspect. After he gets interrogated by some thugs looking for the robber, he calls Sammy and the Brothel Madam, who then help him to leave town and go see Philbert in Michigan. About a week later, Sammy telegrams him that the coast is clear: someone else confessed.

While he may no longer be involved in the underground world, Malcolm is grateful to all those people, like Sammy and the Madam, who were his friends and protected him so that he could become who he is today.

Malcolm then starts working for Hymie, a specialist in renovating bars and restaurants and then selling for profit. Malcolm's main job is to transport bootleg liquor to some of the bars in Harlem, where it is substituted for brand-name liquor, unbeknownst to the customers. Malcolm and Hymie get along well, and he's making good money. But after a scandal involving corruption at the State Liquor Authority, Hymie is murdered at sea.

Hymie's brief relationship with Malcolm is one of the few good relationships he has had with a white person. Hymie's murder, then, also reminds Malcolm and the reader that death could be around the corner at any minute for those in the criminal world.

In the Bronx, a tall, light skinned black man holds up an Italian mobsters' craps game, once again bringing suspicion on Malcolm. Unarmed, he is confronted by two Italians, when all of a sudden a cop walks in, thereby saving him.

After having been so recently reminded of the randomness of violence, Malcolm once again finds himself suspect to a crime, and only narrowly escaping.

Meanwhile, Malcolm has just hit his number on a small bet and is going to meet his friend Jean Parks for a night out. He heads to Sammy's place, where he tells him what just happened, and Sammy says that West Indian Archie just came looking for Malcolm. While they wait for the evening to proceed, they do some cocaine.

Just as many of the hustlers Malcolm has met use drugs to calm their nerves before a job, Malcolm now uses drugs as a way to push off his worries, even as violence and danger encircle him.

CHAPTER 8: TRAPPED

West Indian Archie shows up at Sammy's apartment, carrying a gun and demanding that Malcolm give him back the three hundred dollars from his hit. Archie claims that Malcolm didn't hit and was trying to fool him. When Malcolm says he doesn't have the money, Archie gives him until noon the next day to get it to him.

After many close encounters with violence, Malcolm is finally given an ultimatum. If he doesn't meet it, then he will be forced to confront Archie.

In essence, the dispute is not over the money, as that could be raised fairly easily. Rather, West Indian Archie has made it about each other's reputation. He can't let Malcolm get away with appearing to have tricked him, and Malcolm can't allow himself to appear weak and like he can be strongarmed. The only way out is to shoot it out or to run. And to this day, Malcolm doesn't know if he or Archie made the mistake regarding which numbers Malcolm played.

In the world of hustlers in Harlem, the most important thing to maintain is one's reputation. If either Malcolm or Archie give in, then they will lose face and respect, and their careers will suffer greatly. With no other skills or opportunities, losing their hustles could be a death sentence.

Malcolm nevertheless goes out with Jean Parks to listen to Billie Holliday sing at the Onyx Club. When she sees Malcolm, she sings one of his favorite songs, and then comes to greet them at their table. She asks if something is wrong, but he plays it off as nothing.

Billie Holliday's tender concern for Malcolm is contrasted with his hard callousness, but this is more reflective of his worry than of his indifference.

From there, Jean and Malcolm go to the La-Marr-Cheri, one of his regular hangouts. As he is very high on cocaine and booze, Jean soon goes home. Malcolm sits with his back to the door, and so he doesn't see West Indian Archie come in. Archie proceeds to threaten and humiliate Malcolm publicly, until some of Archie's friends manage to quietly drag him out and defuse the situation. Malcolm walks outside and waits, but when Archie doesn't emerge to confront him, he leaves.

Malcolm has lost control of himself and the situation by leaving himself exposed to a surprise attack. But the fact that nothing serious happens is telling; perhaps neither Malcolm nor West Indian Archie want to hurt each other, but are nonetheless obliged to put on a public show of masculinity and confidence.

At this point, Malcolm decides the best course of action is to get unbelievably high. He first smokes some opium, then takes Benzedrine tablets to perk up. He then smokes some marijuana with his neighbor, who helps him roll a hundred reefers. Malcolm then goes to Sammy's, where they do cocaine. He arrives at his lesbian friend's apartment to deliver them fifty reefers, and then proceeds to pass out for the rest of the day. Malcolm stays high for the next couple of days, and nothing happens—his would-be shootout with Archie never occurs.

In a way, Malcolm's drug use is a quasi-religious escape from a reality that is full of violence and hatred. In his haze, he completely checks out of his difficulties and simply waits for fate to unfold itself. Of course, drugs are much more harmful for one's health than praying, but a similar attitude can be observed in the Nation of Islam's hands-off approach to contemporary political issues.

After a slight scuffle in a bar one day, Malcolm can sense the police coming. He gives his gun away just in time, as the police come into the bar and pat him down. They recommend that he leave town. With the narcotics squad, West Indian Archie, and the Italian mob all looking for him, Malcolm feels very trapped.

Malcolm remarks early in the autobiography that his mother and his siblings have always had an intuition for impending danger; here, the reader sees that intuition in action.

Sammy calls Shorty in Boston and asks him to come get Malcolm, as he needs to get out of town. Shorty arrives, and Malcolm gratefully packs up the car and they leave town. Malcolm writes that he's always been grateful to Sammy for making that call.

One of the greatest things that any friend ever did for Malcolm was to essentially offer him an escape route. Soon, Reginald will offer him a similar "escape."

CHAPTER 9: CAUGHT

Ella cannot believe how profane Malcolm has become in both his speech and in his general outlook. Shorty, likewise, is a little overwhelmed by how predatory Malcolm is, like a dangerous animal. At first, Malcolm just sleeps and smokes reefers for two weeks at Shorty's house. Once he starts going out and finds some cocaine, though, he begins to want to talk and make plans for the future. Malcolm talks with Sophia in the evening and with Shorty all night.

Malcolm the narrator marks the time lapse since his last time in Boston by his changed attitude, which shocks his friends and family. This attitude, which he describes as predatory, is completely goal-focused: looking forward only to the next high, the next score, the next hustle.

Sophia's husband works now as a traveling salesman, giving her more ability to come see Malcolm. Malcolm has always exploited Sophia for money, but she's never complained about it. He also occasionally would hit her, but she always came back. Now, his demands for money and her beatings have gotten worse, but he never worries that she will stop coming.

Malcolm the narrator reflects that this level of extortion and abuse was out of hand. However, he seems to imply that a certain level of extortion and abuse is normal and acceptable – a potentially shocking claim to a contemporary reader.

Malcolm notes again Shorty's love for white women, and he goes crazy for Sophia's younger sister, who likewise goes crazy for him as a black musician. Malcolm takes the girls to Shorty's shows, where other black men gather to drool over the two beautiful white women.

Shorty and Sofia's sister represent for Malcolm a sort of match made in hell, both completely obsessed with the image *of the other, rather than with the other's true nature.*

Malcolm decides to begin a new hustle, but first he needs funds. So he takes what money he can from Sophia and gambles at John Hughes' gambling house. One day, Malcolm manages to win a huge pot and John's respect as a gambler, and John welcomes Malcolm to come back whenever he wants.

Malcolm displays his diverse hustler's skill set, which is a product of a sharp intelligence and careful study from the older hustlers in Harlem and Small's Palace.

John Hughes requires his guests to check their guns at the door. Malcolm usually checks two guns—but one day, when another gambler tries to cheat, Malcolm pulls a third gun on him, earning himself a reputation as trigger happy and crazy. And in reflection, Malcolm believes that he probably was a little insane during that time.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Malcolm saw his outlook as that of a predatory animal. His quick recourse to threats demonstrates how few qualms he had about violence.

Reginald comes to visit in Roxbury, after having returned to Harlem and discovering all the mess Malcolm left behind. As always, Malcolm is very happy to see his closest brother. Malcolm also says that while Ella still disapproved of his lifestyle, he believes she secretly admired his rebellious ways, as she herself is very independent and brave.

Malcolm's two closest siblings both admire him for his resourcefulness and independence, which are two qualities that he also sees and admires in them.

While he could take up gambling as a regular hustle, Malcolm wants to do something that will allow him to make enough money to support Shorty as well, who is living as a starving musician. He proposes they get into house burglary, and to his surprise, Shorty agrees. Shorty also brings in his friend Rudy.

Malcolm may see himself as a predator, but if so, he's more of a lion king than a lone wolf. His sense of responsibility for Shorty is quite touching and shows how much he values their friendship.

Rudy is a mixed-race, good-looking guy. He works as a waiter, but also has a side hustle satisfying the desires of an elderly white man. Rudy would undress them both, carry the man to his bed, and then sprinkle him in talcum powder, causing him to orgasm. Naturally, Malcolm and Rudy swap stories about the things they've seen.

While Malcolm tells several stories of strange sexual fetishes, this is certainly one of the strangest. Its racial overtones, however, make it for Malcolm not only strange, but unacceptable.

Having learned from the best, Malcolm insists that the group take their time and carefully plan their jobs. He insists they find an area to work in and stick to it, and that they only work at night, as Malcolm's light skin and tall stature are quite conspicuous. Realizing that they need someone to scout out good targets in rich neighborhoods, Malcolm decides they should bring in Sophia and Sophia's sister, who instantly agree. Then they decide to rent a place in Harvard Square that can act as their base of operations. Meanwhile, Malcolm finds a "fence" (someone who will buy their stolen merchandise) for their goods.

Malcolm's organizational skills tell the reader two things. First, they attest to his thorough experience with burglary and other criminal operations from his time in Harlem. Second, they offer a glimpse of how effective Malcolm will be as a leader in the Nation of Islam, when he will be orchestrating the spreading of the faith throughout multiple cities.

At their first meeting, they devise a plan. Sophia and Sophia's sister will pose as saleswomen or college students, and they'll look around the home once invited inside. Malcolm, Rudy, and Shorty will handle the actual burglaries, with two inside and one waiting in the getaway car.

Their roles not only reflect their varying skill sets, but the ways the crew members are seen in society. Only Sophia and her sister could be welcomed into nice neighborhoods without suspicion.

In order to establish himself as the boss of the crew, Malcolm puts on a show for the others. He removes the bullets from his revolver, then puts one back. He twirls the cylinder, places the gun to his temple, and pulls the trigger. He does this three times in all to show that he is fearless and they should never cross him—and they never do. (Malcolm later reveals that he had palmed the bullet.)

When working on the train, Malcolm and the crew had played into racial stereotypes to earn bigger tips. Now, Malcolm plays into his image as a "crazy animal" to display his dominance and assure control over the group.

The group's first target is the old man Rudy works for. Everything goes as smooth as clockwork, and the old man later tells Rudy that the cops suspect a gang which had been in Boston for a year. Their next jobs continue to go smoothly, as the girls are freely shown into people's houses. The families are often home when the burglars enter, but Malcolm assures the reader that it is much simpler than it sounds. And while they are making good money, especially on Oriental rugs, they are still aware that their "fence" is surely making much more profit than they are.

In Harlem, most of the businesses were owned by white owners who then hired black managers to act as the face of the business. In burglary and in the numbers business, the people making most of the money are the bankers and fences, usually white people, while the black hustlers in Harlem and Roxbury take most of the risks.

Their only close brush with the police occurs as they make their getaway one night, and a police car flashes behind them. As he did once before, Malcolm gets out and asks for directions to Roxbury, and the police give him directions and drive off. Malcolm remarks that white men never believe a black man would be bold enough or smart enough to try and trick them.

Malcolm's contempt for the police and their presumptions is very noticeable. It might be fair to say that he can barely imagine a white man whom he couldn't *fool.*

Everything is going well for the crew. Sophia and Sophia's sister still go with Malcolm to see Shorty and his shows, and then they all smoke reefers back at Malcolm or Shorty's apartment. Malcolm notes how Shorty is so obsessed with his girlfriend and her white skin that even if the lights are out, he opens the window shade to see her skin by the streetlight.

The way Malcolm describes it, Shorty seems to be obsessed with the white color of Sophia's sister's skin. For Malcolm, this obsession is rooted in years of conditioning by society which tells us that white is inherently more beautiful than black.

Malcolm spends a lot of his time before and after jobs in the Savoy club, so that people questioned will always be able to say they saw him in there around the time of the crime. One day while there, he receives a call from Sophia, but Turner, a black detective who hates Malcolm, answers it instead. Malcolm and Turner then exchange veiled threats and Turner backs down.

Malcolm's interaction with Turner recalls his interaction with Archie. Both know that the other is very dangerous, but neither is willing to make the first move. Instead, they simply content themselves with threats, perhaps secretly hoping to avoid violence.

Malcolm begins to use drugs with so much frequency and quantity that it starts to cloud his judgment. One night, Sophia and Sophia's sister unwillingly come to a bar with the best friend of Sophia's husband, who wanted to see the black ghetto. Malcolm, high, barges up to their table, making it obvious they know each other and ousting Sophia.

As with the days right before his escape to Boston from Harlem, Malcolm's drug use is an attempt to block out his surrounding situation, and it works so well that he has trouble functioning in the world.

Later that night, the friend shows up at their Harvard Square hideout, and Malcolm hides under the bed as he comes in. The man finds Malcolm, and they talk a little. While nothing happens, Malcolm's relationship with Sophia is obvious. Malcolm is concerned by how thoughtless he was in hiding under a bed, and without his gun, no less.

When compared to how much precaution Malcolm took in avoiding police detection while selling reefers, it's telling that his mind is no longer sharp enough to protect him in a possibly violent situation.

Two days later, Malcolm goes to pick up a stolen watch he had taken for a repair. As the repairman knew the watch was stolen, the police were alerted and a trap was set for Malcolm. After Malcolm pays, an officer emerges from the back. Then another black man walks into the store, and the officer briefly turns his back on Malcolm—but rather than reaching for his gun, Malcolm freely tells the cop to take it from him. Unbeknownst to him, two other cops had him covered the whole time, so his decision not only earned him the cops' respect, but saved his life.

Reflecting on this moment, Malcolm believes that only Allah saved him from death. Given the amount of drugs he was taking and the "predatory" state he had fallen into, it was truly a miracle that he didn't reach for his gun to try and kill the officer.

If the cops hadn't picked Malcolm up for the watch, then he may have died that day. While he was being taken to the station, Sophia's husband had come to the apartment with a gun, looking to kill Malcolm.

Of every threat on his life so far, this day's double threat may have been the most dangerous thus far – and the threats will only grow larger.

The girls were soon picked up after the cops got Malcolm's address from some of his papers, and Shorty was then arrested while performing. They tried to get Rudy, but he managed to get out of Boston in time, an escape that has always marveled Malcolm.

Malcolm's writing style here reflects that of a crime-beat journalist, reporting the facts in a matter-of-fact way.

All in all, burglary was not a very serious crime, with the average sentence for first time offenders being only two years. The police and the social workers were mostly concerned that Sophia and Sophia's sister, two well-to-do white women, were sexually involved with two black men. Even Malcolm's own court-appointed lawyers were outraged by this.

After Malcolm has reaped the benefits from his relationship with Sophia for so long, and Shorty has enjoyed his own interracial romance, they are now both forced to pay the price for those socially taboo relationships. The racist and sexist mentality of whites at the time is still very preoccupied with "protecting" white women from black men.

Malcolm addresses the reader, saying that he has not shared these details of his life to excite or entertain anyone. On the contrary, he sees it strictly as necessary to understanding who he is as a person today to see where he has come from. The main point of the narrative until now is to show that he had fallen to the lowest point possible in society.

The reader should take this passage seriously, as Malcolm the narrator's chief mission in life is to preach and spread the truth of black oppression. However, certain passages above also may show that Malcolm has a certain nostalgia for those days.

CHAPTER 10: SATAN

In February, 1946, the gang appears in court to receive their sentences. Shorty receives his sentence first, eight to ten years for each count, sentences which are to be served concurrently. However, Shorty doesn't know the word *concurrently*, and he collapses at the thought of serving those sentences *consecutively*. Sophia and Sophia's sister are given one to five years. At the age of twenty-one, Malcolm is sentenced to ten years in prison.

The opening scene of the chapter presents an example of gallows humor, where a very dark scene is told in a cynically funny way. Shorty's collapse at the thought of a life in prison may be unnecessary, but it doesn't negate the fact that they will all spend several years in prison.

Malcolm reflects that he no longer remembers his prison number. This surprises him, as it was such an integral part of prison life. However, neither he nor any other ex-con he's ever talked to has been able to forget the prison bars. The bars are burned into his memory and never let him forget his time there.

Malcolm's inability to remember his prison number is not a simple lapse in memory, but rather highlights the traumatic experience of being locked up.

Malcolm's time at Charlestown State Prison starts terribly. The prison is old and the cells are tiny, with no indoor plumbing, just a pail. Malcolm's withdrawal from drugs makes him extremely irritable, especially to the prison psychologist, prison chaplain, and Malcolm's religious brother Philbert, who has written him a letter. Ella comes to visit, but they have very little to say, especially under the watch of the visitor room guards.

While in Harlem and making money, Malcolm felt entirely free, despite the pressures of the hustling life. His early time in prison is marked not only by a radical loss of freedom, but by an imposition of additional hardships, which causes him to reject his family's empathy.

Malcolm doesn't remember much of his first year in prison. He spends most of his time getting high on nutmeg or smuggled pills and weed, then intentionally getting in trouble to be put in solitary. His rants and curses against God and the Bible earn him a nickname: Satan.

Malcolm continues to live in his "predatory" mentality of simply trying to stay high and reject his surroundings. This new nickname of "Satan" represents an ultimate low point for him, particularly in light of his later religious fervor.

The first person to make an impression on Malcolm is Bimbi, and old burglar who commands tremendous respect in the prison through his public discussions on educated topics. His language attracts Malcolm, and Bimbi eventually tells Malcolm to start taking advantage of the library and the prison correspondence courses. As his command of written and formal English has fallen to an abysmal level, and as he has the time on his hands, Malcolm decides to follow Bimbi's advice. After a year he can write a decent letter, and he has even begun a course in Latin.

Bimbi can connect with Malcolm because they are both criminals and because Malcolm still values education and learning. After watching someone that he admires, Malcolm sets himself to imitate Bimbi and starts to pursue his studies again.

Meanwhile, Malcolm begins a new circle of hustles. He first wins packs of cigarettes through dominoes games, and he then takes sports bets (paid in cigarettes). When Jackie Robinson joins the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, Malcolm follows him obsessively, listening to every game and tracking his batting average.

In his obsession with Jackie Robinson's stats, the reader sees how Malcolm's new life of studying intersects with his old hustling life—both involved a voracious curiosity and resourcefulness. Robinson's career represents a significant victory for African Americans in sports.

In 1948, Malcolm has been transferred to Concord Prison, when Philbert writes to him about a new religion he's found, the "natural religion for the black man." Reginald sends him a separate letter, telling him that if he stops smoking cigarettes and doesn't eat pork, he'll help Malcolm get out of prison. While Malcolm curses Philbert, he listens to Reginald, who he assumes is organizing some kind of legal maneuver for early release. He nearly effortlessly quits smoking, and then a few days later, refuses the pork platter at the mess hall. The news that "Satan" didn't eat pork causes quite a stir, which makes him inexplicably proud.

Malcolm has not yet been exposed to the teachings of the Nation of Islam. Therefore, he can only assume that Reginald's advice is connected to a new "hustle" to get him out of prison early. Nonetheless, he experiences a lot of pride in holding himself to a higher standard than his peers, which elevates him beyond the level of a "predator" trying to survive.

Ella has been working to get Malcolm transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony, and she succeeds in late 1948. Upon arriving, Malcolm is struck by its progressive model. With no bars and every inmate having their own room, he feels like he's in heaven. The prison has regular group debates and lectures from visiting Harvard and Boston University professors, and the library has thousands of books the prisoners are free to browse, mostly dealing with history and religion.

This better prison environment allows Malcolm the space to completely exit his "predator" mentality. Now that the psychological stress of being in a prison of bars has been removed, Malcolm is better able to pursue his studies. Eventually, this calmer environment will also facilitate his conversion to Islam.

After having seen his nasty reply to Philbert, his siblings (all new converts) have decided to send Reginald to talk with Malcolm. Reginald comes to see Malcolm, looking very well-groomed and discussing the family. Malcolm, meanwhile, is itching to know the answer to the "no smoke and pork" riddle. Reginald takes his time before finally declaring that there is someone who knows everything, who has 360 degrees of knowledge, and his name is Allah.

Malcolm's siblings work as a team to teach him about Islam. As when they were children looking out for each other when the Welfare Agency tried to break up their family, they now look out for their brother who is under government lock and key.

Allah, Reginald says, came to America and revealed himself to a man named Elijah. But there was also a devil, and this devil only had 33 degrees of knowledge, known as Masonry, which he used to trick people, especially black people. Reginald, while explaining all this, then gestures to the white guards, saying, "The white man is the devil." Malcolm mentions their old friend Hymie, but Reginald counters that Hymie only ever used Malcolm to make a profit, anyway.

Freemasonry is a fraternal organization of freethinkers without specific religious beliefs, originally founded in Europe. Reginald and the Nation decry the Masons as symbolic of the secular beliefs of European white society.

After Reginald leaves, Malcolm thinks through every white person he's ever known: the state welfare people, the judges, Mr. Swerlin and Mrs. Swerlin, Mr. Ostrowski, the white people at Roseland's dances, the railroad people, the people he took to brothels, the prison guards, and Sophia. He concludes that they were indeed all using him or treating him inhumanely.

Malcolm goes through a long list of all the white characters who have appeared in the first half of the book. His current position in prison stands as an indictment against all of them, as if they are all in some way responsible for his misfortune.

To test Reginald's statement about Masons, Malcolm approaches a Mason in the prison. He draws him a circle and asks how many degrees are in it. When he responds with 360 degrees, Malcolm asks why the Masonic hierarchy only has 33 degrees of knowledge. When the man can give him no good answer, Malcolm becomes convinced that Reginald has spoken the truth.

Malcolm's connection between the number of degrees in Masonry and God's total knowledge seems quite strange to the contemporary reader, but this was a central teaching of the Nation of Islam. (It also perhaps recalls Malcolm's later-revealed tendency of assigning precise percentages to how much he trusts certain people.)

Reginald comes to visit again, and he finds a very attentive Malcolm waiting for him. Reginald then talks to him for two hours about how black men have been oppressed, but says that they are rising up across the world. Black people in America may have been cut off from their history, their own names and language, but they are now rising to overthrow their white oppressors. Malcolm struggles to take in all of this information, which has always been around him but he's never seen before.

Reginald's first goal was to show Malcolm that there is more *knowledge out there than society has so far given him. His second step is to teach him some of this knowledge about racial oppression. And even though lots of Reginald's points seem true, Malcolm's mind resists them, as if even his ability to reason has been oppressed and shaped by white society.*

After this Malcolm begins to receive letters from all his siblings—they have all converted to the Nation of Islam. They urge him to accept the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, who is described as a wise, gentle man—and a black man just like Malcolm. Reginald also explains that as a sign of submission to Allah, Muslims do not eat pork, and they do not use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs.

Now that Malcolm is open to hearing them, his siblings begin to pour more information into his open ears.

Malcolm's knowledge of the truth—as maintained by the Nation of Islam—comes to him slowly. He learns that white men have been oppressing black people for hundreds of years, and that they rewrote history to make it impossible for modern black men to know the truth. Great civilizations and cultures had existed in Africa, but white men have portrayed Africa as full of uncultured barbarians and savages. Slaves, who were stolen from their homelands, were then not allowed to use their own names, languages, or cultural practices. Completely cut off from their own identity, black people were not only physically but psychologically enslaved to white people, seeing them as somehow superior to them.

At the time, the fields of archeology, history, and anthropology knew relatively little about African civilizations, and American society had repressed what knowledge was available to sustain the racist belief that people of African descent were in some way inferior to Europeans. Malcolm's education consists of learning both about this history and of how it has been repressed.

This enslavement, according to the Nation of Islam, found its greatest example in Christianity. Black people were forced to convert to their masters' religion, in which they would worship a blonde, blue-eyed savior as a God, who they soon equated with all whiteness. Meanwhile, Christianity indoctrinated in black people a morality of "turn the other cheek," which acted as a further way to keep them from rebelling against the injustices done to them while waiting for justice in heaven.

In most classical representations of Jesus Christ, he is portrayed as having European features and skin tone. According to the Nation of Islam, this was not simply an artistic choice, but an ideological one which equated white Europeans with being more divine, while blacks were seen as savages.

Looking back on his reception of all this knowledge, Malcolm believes that his very sinful previous life actually prepared him for such a full conversion to the truth. By having so much guilt, and admitting it, he could make room inside of himself for the truth to take hold. While Malcolm denies any likeness to the Apostle Paul, he claims to understand Paul's experience of being struck dumb by the truth.

In Arabic, the word Islam means submission, which also means to admit one's own faults. By having so many faults, Malcolm has the potential to submit more *and thus receive more of the truth. The Apostle Paul was famously struck blind by a vision of Jesus that suddenly converted him.*

But before that reckoning moment comes, Malcolm first spends weeks in contemplation, hardly eating. The other prisoners, the guards, and the prison doctor all try to figure what is wrong with him, but there is nothing to be done. He is coming to terms with the reality of oppression around him.

Malcolm's time spent reflecting on his own sins and on the world around him is similar to a religious ritual, in which one cleanses themselves through contemplation, repentance, and fasting.

Malcolm's siblings gather their funds to send his older sister Hilda to come and visit him. She urges Malcolm to write to Elijah Muhammad, who understands the hardships of prisoners, as he himself just finished a five-year sentence for draft evasion. She then begins a tale, as taught by the Nation of Islam, of how black and white men came to be on the Earth, known as "Yacub's History."

Hilda's trip is very symbolic of the ethics of the Nation of Islam in general. The whole community (his family) sacrifices to send a wise "prophet" to go and spread the truth to a potential convert.

In the beginning, Hilda says, there were only black people, who founded the Holy City of Mecca. Then, around sixty-six hundred years ago, a dissatisfied and extremely intelligent scientist called Mr. Yacub learned the secrets to eugenics (breeding races). After Yacub began to gain a significant following, he and his followers were exiled to the island of Patmos. As revenge against those who exiled him, he decided to use his knowledge to create a "devil race" of white men to plague the black men.

While "Yacub's History" may not be factually true, some of its points are interesting because they describe the Nation of Islam's powerful ideology. For example, by saying that in the beginning all men were black, Yacub's History teaches that black men are not inferior, but actually superior to white men.

After six hundred years of careful eugenic breeding, the island was finally filled with white, blue-eyed savages. These men eventually returned to their homeland, where they sowed discord and misery among the black people. However, they were finally exiled to Europe. Allah then showed mercy on them by raising up Moses to lead them, and his first followers were the people known as Jews. The white race would then rule for the next six thousand years and bring black people as slaves to America. But then, a mighty race of black people in America would rise against the evils of the white man and lead the oppressed people of the world to overthrow him. The original founder of this movement is Master W. D. Fard, the mixed-race founder of the Nation of Islam, who then left Elijah Muhammad in charge of leading it.

From the very beginning, according to Yacub's History, white men have been a plague towards virtuous black men. However, there is hope. Even though white men have ruled the world for thousands of years, Allah has foreseen this—and also foresaw that their rule would be overthrown and people of color all over the world would be liberated. Finally, the weight of this entire prophetic overthrow rests on the shoulders of Elijah Muhammad, which makes him an extremely powerful and divine figure in the Nation's theology.

While this tale stuns Malcolm and he is speechless as Hilda leaves, later in life he will disavow this story and other parts of the Nation of Islam's doctrine. These tales are not supported by orthodox Islam, and infuriate its followers. However, Malcolm partially blames them for allowing such "religious fakers" to pretend to represent Islam.

Malcolm the narrator's tone in this entire section has been very impartial, simply telling the story as he heard it. By waiting until the very end to call it false, he gives his criticism even more force (and shows how much his views have changed since then).

CHAPTER 11: SAVED

After many drafts and attempts to express himself, Malcolm manages to write a short letter to Elijah Muhammad. He receives a very gracious typed response in which Elijah tells him to have courage—and also gives him five dollars. Elijah also tells Malcolm that black prisoners symbolize the oppression white men enact on all black people in America.

Elijah Muhammad's response is very empathetic to Malcolm's situation, but it is also very strategic. By supporting prisoners and calling them a symbol of the movement, he virtually ensures their support for the Nation.

The hardest thing Malcolm ever has to do in his life is to repent and submit himself to Allah, or in other words, to pray. He has to continuously try to force himself down to his knees, and continuously force himself to try and reckon with his past sins. Finally he manages to kneel, but then has no idea what to say.

This is an extremely intimate moment in Malcolm's life – as he says, it's the hardest thing he's done. But he also says relatively very little about it, perhaps because he wants to keep it private.

Almost instantly, Malcolm's old life falls away, and he dives head first into his new faith. He writes two letters a day, one to Elijah and one to one of his siblings. Meanwhile, he also writes letters to all the people he once knew in New York and Boston, like Sammy the Pimp, letters which he's sure gained him a reputation as insane. He writes further letters to politicians, but receives no replies.

This scene resembles Pentecost in the Christian tradition, when the apostles were so caught up in their religious fervor that they immediately went out preaching to every community. In Malcolm's case, he "preaches" to his old hustler friends.

Malcolm grows increasingly frustrated that he cannot express himself more articulately and can only construct his thoughts in slang. And while he "reads," he often skips the words he doesn't know, and so acquires no knowledge. Finally, he resolves to remedy this by studying and copying out the entire dictionary. He starts by copying the entire first page, and marvels that he remembers those words the next day. He continues like that every day until he completes the entire dictionary.

Throughout his life, Malcolm has always thought very logically. It's important to understand the basics, and then move on from there. His decision to study the dictionary is then like a radical example of that principle.

Armed with his new vocabulary, a whole new world of knowledge opens to him in the books he reads. From then on, Malcolm spends nearly all of his time reading or else writing his letters and dictionary entries, either in the library or in his bunk. He prefers the solitude of his room, however, where he can truly focus. The only thing that holds him back is the 10 PM lights out, but then he reads by the light coming from the crack under his door.

Malcolm's newfound passion literally knows no bounds. Not only does he study all day, but he pushes himself to study and learn even when he can barely see. This follows a pattern of Malcolm becoming convinced of new ideas or a new lifestyle, and then immediately devoting all his energy and brainpower to that worldview.

Elijah Muhammad's teachings about the "whitening" of history really struck a chord with Malcolm and thousands of other black people who could remember there being no mention of black people in their history books as children, other than as racist caricatures. Therefore, Malcolm resolves to focus particular attention on history books that explore the history of black people in Africa and in America. These include Carter G. Woodson's *Negro History*, *The Outline of History* by H. G. Wells, and *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois. Malcolm is also drawn to genetics, and reads Gregor Mendel's *Findings in Genetics*, which reinforce Malcolm's belief in Elijah Muhammad's teachings.

From now on, the most important thing in Malcolm's life will be his faith. All his studies can therefore be seen not as a separate pursuit, but as an attempt to support his religious beliefs with facts and arguments. This fusion of academics and religious belief will make Malcolm a very persuasive and effective preacher and debater.

Malcolm is particularly horrified by the history of slavery and the atrocities done to black people. He reads about these in books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and in pamphlets distributed by abolitionists before the Civil War. He also reads about Nat Turner's rebellion, in which Turner led slaves to rebel against and kill their masters, before he was finally captured and hung.

To the contemporary reader, it may be easy to assume that everyone in American history has always been aware of the horrors of slavery. However, Malcolm's surprise and disgust prove how much of this history had been forgotten or actively repressed.

Other authors such as Herodotus, Will Durant, and Mahatma Gandhi teach Malcolm about the horrors of colonialism and empire that have been perpetrated for millennia by white Europeans against people around the world. While always coming masked as Christian missionaries, these European conquerors plundered Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Two examples Malcolm gives are: the British control of India and the carnage that followed the 1857 Rebellion against colonial rule; and the First Opium War in China, in which the Chinese objected to the British distributing opium in the country.

Later in life, Malcolm will take a more international perspective on the struggle of people of color against white colonizers. However, his early education in Gandhi's writings and world history shows that he already was gaining an awareness that African Americans were not the only oppressed group in the world.

In assessing the damage done by white men throughout the world, Malcolm concludes that now (in the early 1960s) the ex-colonial nations are joining in alliances together against Europe and America. While some complain that this kind of alliance is a "skin game," Malcolm sees that as hypocritical, given that Western imperialism has always involved racism.

Malcolm's argument is similar to the argument against "reverse racism." It's hypocritical to say people of color are playing a "skin game" by simply acknowledging that they've been the victims of racism for centuries.

Malcolm's studying is always aimed at helping him to better understand the oppression of black men and how to defend the teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Rather than seeking a degree or some kind of recognition, his studying is meant to serve others and to satisfy his own lifelong "craving to be mentally alive." Even today, he says, whenever he has even fifteen minutes to himself he will constantly be reading and learning whatever he can.

Malcolm connects his current studies to his time in prison. This is worth thinking about: while in prison, he was completely immersed in his studies and felt "completely free" (despite his physical incarceration). Even in his present life, then, Malcolm makes sure to find moments to return to this space of intellectual freedom and exploration.

In at least one way, Malcolm appreciates the time he spent in prison. Where else, he asks, would he have the opportunity to study with so few distractions and with such intensity? He would never have learned as much in a university, he asserts.

For Malcolm, his time in prison studying was not a punishment, but a liberating experience, which is a very hopeful message for all those who feel trapped.

Malcolm's philosophical readings include Kant, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, whom he sees as mostly debating useless issues, rather than ones that can actually make the world a better place. In fact, he holds most of Western philosophy in contempt as being too entangled with Western history and racism.

Western philosophy up until Malcolm's time rarely dealt with issues of race. According to Malcolm, philosophers thus made themselves complicit in their racist societies by ignoring the issue or even justifying racist actions.

Meanwhile, Malcolm points to the discoveries that are being made in modern-day archeological digs in Africa, discovering priceless artifacts and pieces of art. These pieces attest to the great civilizations which were destroyed by conquerors or intentionally erased by white historians. Even many black scholars don't know about this history. One example is the discovery of ancient human remains in Africa, which proves that Africa is the birthplace of humanity.

As was seen before, Malcolm actively tries to "uncover" the facts that prove the Nation of Islam's faith is the true faith—in his religious zeal he works backward from a conclusion, rather than drawing a conclusion after reviewing the evidence. He sees the fact that humanity was born in Africa as proving that Yacub's History is indeed true.

After having spent so much time studying and learning about how ignorant he had been made of black history, Malcolm sets about teaching his fellow prisoners this history. He tries to go slowly, as people cannot easily have their entire worldview turned upside down.

This is one of Malcolm's first attempts to preach, but it is not his first time to spread knowledge: don't forget his time spent "schooling" Reginald.

If one of his pupils seems to be wavering and about to report Malcolm to the guards, he tells them, "The white man is the devil," which shocks them and gets them thinking about it until they come back around. Malcolm says that criminals, since they have been forced to do terrible things to survive, are the most ready to believe that the system has been rigged against them from the start. They have received the worst treatment from society their whole lives, and now sit behind bars, caged up. How could they not believe their captors/masters to be evil?

Malcolm's argument runs like this: if all black people in America are oppressed, then surely the most oppressed are those in prison for crimes they had to commit just to survive. So, if he wants to teach someone to see how black people are oppressed, then the most *oppressed are the most likely to agree.*

Malcolm also begins to debate with the other well-read prisoners in weekly public debates. Once he gets a taste of it, he falls in love with the intellectual rigor of debating. And always, if he can, he includes what he's learned about history and the oppression of black people. These debates cover many topics, including the need for compulsory military service, the existence of Homer, and the identity of Shakespeare (Malcolm's theory is that King James used "William Shakespeare" as his pen name).

These debates illustrate that Malcolm's knowledge went way beyond the teachings of the Nation of Islam and extended into many areas. This reflects Malcom's personal passion for learning and knowledge of every kind, which shows him to be more than a religious fanatic, as some would have the reader believe.

When Reginald comes to visit Malcolm, Malcolm tries to share some of his studying and learning with his brother. But Reginald is uninterested, and in fact begins to speak poorly of Elijah Muhammad. Then Malcolm learns that Reginald has been expelled from the Nation of Islam for maintaining an improper sexual relationship. Malcolm writes a letter to Elijah, pleading on his brother's behalf.

Malcolm's first instinct is to protect his younger brother and advocate on his behalf. Even though he knows that sexual relations outside of marriage are not allowed in the Nation, he cannot bear the thought of losing his brother.

The night after he mails the letter, while praying vigorously, Malcolm receives a vision of a man sitting in his cell with him, a brown-skinned man in a dark suit. Malcolm can't place his ethnicity, other than to say he is non-white. Then, just as suddenly, the mysterious man disappears. Later, Malcolm believes this to be Master W. D. Fard.

One possible interpretation of how Malcolm thinks about this vision is to see it as a visit from his new family. If he loses Reginald, it's okay, because W. D. Fard and the Nation will still be with him, and can be his new family.

Elijah responds to Malcolm's letter, asking why he does not trust in the truth. He knows his brother's conduct was in the wrong; so why question that? At the time, Malcolm cannot know that Elijah will one day be accused of the same sins. But at the time, his letter sways Malcolm, and Malcolm no longer lets Reginald influence him in any way.

As soon as he receives and reads Elijah's letter, Malcolm disavows Reginald and entirely devotes himself to the Nation. This may be a result of his vision, or it may simply be a result of his immense faith in Elijah as a kind of personal savior.

Reginald continues to visit him, but Malcolm pays little heed to his conversation. Reginald's appearance grows shabbier, and he goes back to Detroit. Then Ella comes to visit, and tells Malcolm that Reginald showed up at her door in Boston, saying he walked from Detroit. At the time, Malcolm firmly believed that this was Allah working his revenge upon Reginald's senses for having attacked his Prophet and teachings.

Malcolm and his siblings steadily reject Reginald more and more as he deteriorates mentally and physically. However, Malcolm connects his state to a divine punishment, rather than to social or personal causes.

Reginald later begins to hallucinate and then say strange things, like how he is the Prophet, or how he is greater than Allah. Eventually he is institutionalized. In later years, Malcolm no longer sees this as divine retribution, but the result of his entire family turning their backs on him in favor of Elijah's teachings.

Malcolm's belief in the social and psychological causes of Reginald's breakdown is not a repudiation of his faith. Rather, his faith has matured so that he no longer believes Allah would punish his brother in that way.

Malcolm then returns to the subject of his mysterious visitor. He believes that he had a pre-vision (a vision of someone one has never met) of Master W. D. Fard, the original founder of the Nation of Islam.

It seems plausible that the figure of W. D. Fard is connected to Malcolm's brother Reginald, as the loss of one signals the "arrival" of the other.

After Malcolm has spent so much time spreading the word of Islam, the authorities at Norfolk grow concerned and have him transferred to Charlestown prison. Here he has much less mobility, but decides to attend the Bible class, where he can perhaps spread his own beliefs.

Malcolm's assertion that the Nation of Islam attracts lots of prisoners seems to be backed up by evidence, since the prison officials are especially concerned about his evangelism.

Malcolm acknowledges that the young seminary student from Harvard leading the class really knows his Bible. Nevertheless, Malcolm finds a way to upset him and provoke discussion. Malcolm asks if it's true that Paul was black, and the seminarian says yes. Malcolm then asks what color Jesus was. The seminarian says brown, and Malcolm lets the issue rest there. Malcolm's fame in the prison spreads, giving him leverage to start spreading Elijah Muhammad's teachings.

Malcolm's description of the young seminarian is quite interesting, as he generally describes his adversaries so negatively. Instead, he respects the man's knowledge of the Bible and relative honesty about Jesus' ethnic history. This reflects how even at this point in his faith he can never see all *white men as "devils," but always operates within some kind of spectrum.*

CHAPTER 12: SAVIOR

In the spring of 1952, Malcolm is informed that he has been recommended for parole. Hilda and Wilfred insist that he come to Detroit to live with them, as he still has much to learn about Elijah Muhammad's teachings. Wilfred secures Malcolm a job at the furniture store he manages, ticking Malcolm's last box for release. In August, with a little cash and a cheap suit, he is released from prison.

While Malcolm's trials in prison may be coming to a close, his siblings make it clear that his journey with the Nation of Islam is just beginning.

After staying a night with Ella (who also believes he should go to Detroit, but does not share his religious beliefs), Malcolm goes out to buy three things: **a pair of eyeglasses, a suitcase, and a watch**. Malcolm has reflected many times that not only are these perhaps his only personal possessions, but they have been symbolic of his life since prison. His life has been dominated by constantly reading, keeping appointments, and traveling in service of the Nation of Islam.

After being released from prison, this is the only time Malcolm mentions buying anything, which stands in stark contrast to his colorful descriptions of buying zoot suits and getting conks as a younger man. These simple purchases reflect his new and more ascetic, un-materialistic life—and these will be the only three principle possessions he always has with him in the future.

After arriving in Detroit by bus, Malcolm goes to work at the furniture store. But he is utterly ashamed at how overpriced all their goods are for such poor quality and how the advertising and financing schemes are directly intended to dupe and rob poor black people (as the store is in a black neighborhood). Furthermore, since the store is not owned by a black businessman, the profits are not going back into the local economy, but are instead being extracted to enrich others.

Malcolm's years as a hustler inform his views of business. Even if it's legal, he still considers it a "hustle" if it takes advantage of other people by selling them bad goods with deceptive financing schemes. And like the numbers racket in Harlem, the ones making the profit are not local businessmen, but white owners and bankers.

Wilfred invites Malcolm to move in with him, an offer Malcolm gratefully accepts. Wilfred and his family teach Malcolm about how a Muslim family conducts itself daily, from the morning ablution (washing ritual) to the morning prayers and greetings to family members. Wilfred, as the head of the family, leads the rest of the family in their prayers facing towards Mecca as the sun is at the horizon. At the time, Malcolm said the prayers in English, but now he says them with his family in Arabic. Then, after a light breakfast, the family goes to work and school.

Malcolm tries to impress on the reader that being a Muslim is a full-time experience. The Muslim family's day begins in prayer and then proceeds from that state of mind. Additionally, its patriarchal structure probably appeals to Malcolm, given some of his stated beliefs about women being weak and men being more suited to be leaders.

Malcolm goes to Temple with Wilfred's family on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, and he is amazed at the quiet, dignified conduct of the other Muslims in the Temple. Despite their Temple's humble location across the street from a hog slaughterhouse, they carry themselves with pride and show love and respect to their fellow members.

Muslims are forbidden from eating pork. The Temple's location across from a slaughterhouse thus emphasizes the hardships and indignities the community is willing to endure to celebrate their faith.

At the front of the Temple's worship space is a blackboard. On one side of the blackboard is painted the United States flag, a Cross, and a picture of a black man hanging, along with the words, "Slavery, Suffering, and Death." On the other side is the Nation of Islam flag with its crescent moon and star, the words, "Islam: Freedom, Justice, Equality", and then the longer phrase, "Which One Will Survive the War of Armageddon?"

In stark imagery and language, the temple describes the religious clash between white Christian society and African/Middle-Eastern Muslim society as it is seen by the Nation of Islam. Furthermore, the Nation's ideology firmly connects violence against black men with white Christian America.

Malcolm, rapt with attention at the sermon given by the minister, is also enflamed by the fact that there are empty seats. With so many black people suffering from poverty and without direction in Detroit as in Harlem, he feels they should be more proactive in their recruiting efforts. Wilfred and the Temple, meanwhile, advise that he be patient.

Malcolm has never been one for waiting around; he prefers to take action. In one way, this could be seen as a residue of his "predatory" lifestyle, which was always goal-focused.

"With an eagerness never since duplicated," Malcolm anxiously awaits their Temple's caravan trip to Chicago, where they will go to hear Elijah Muhammad himself speak in Temple Number Two. Never again has Malcolm felt such warmth and excitement as he did in that small crowd waiting for Elijah. Then Elijah appears onstage, flanked by the Fruit of Islam (the Nation's security and paramilitary force) - a small, fragile man in a dark suit, bowtie, and gold-embroidered fez.

The Nation of Islam's small number of members makes the environment more intimate and family-like. And if this is indeed Malcolm's new family, then Elijah Muhammad is the new patriarch, who appears like a father coming home to his waiting children.

Elijah speaks to the crowd about his devotion to spreading the word of God to them, even throughout his own imprisonment for draft evasion. He speaks of how the black man in America has been brainwashed by the "devil white man," who wishes to keep him oppressed, but through learning, hi will rise up. Then Elijah calls upon Malcolm by name, asking him to stand and telling the crowd of Malcolm's daily letters and strength in prison. Elijah wonders if Malcolm will avoid his old life and stay faithful now that he is out of prison, and he predicts that he will.

Elijah has clearly been impressed by Malcolm's devotion to his studies and to his letter-writing during his time in prison. By acknowledging him publicly, he both wishes to encourage him in his faith journey and to hold him up as an example to the others. Malcolm could not feel more touched if his own father were to return and praise him.

Malcolm assures us that he has indeed been faithful to his faith ever since, and he was always faithful to Elijah Muhammad, even when a "crisis" arose between them. According to Malcolm, jealousy has driven the two men apart, but he assures us their split was not from a lack of loyalty or faith.

Several times throughout the book, Malcolm will attempt to convince the reader that he never lacked in faith or loyalty, looking forward to his break with Elijah and trying to defend himself against the many accusations that he was indeed disloyal or unfaithful.

After the meeting, Mr. Muhammad invites Malcolm's entire family to come to his house for dinner, and he is a very gracious host to them all. As they talk during dinner, Malcolm asks for Elijah's advice on the recruitment of new members. When Elijah tells him to go for the youth and to recruit "thousands," Malcolm resolves to do just that.

Malcolm has been unsatisfied with the more hands-off approach of the Detroit leaders, so he goes around their authority by directly asking for Elijah's permission to pursue more aggressive recruiting.

Malcolm, with Minister Lemuel Hassan's blessing, immediately goes to work back in Detroit, "fishing" in the local bars, poolrooms, and on the street corners for new members, using his familiarity with lower class slang to pull people in. While he works hard, it is several months before the Temple's numbers begin to grow significantly. Elijah continues to praise Malcolm's good work, and Malcolm in turn "worships him." Meanwhile, Malcolm is granted the "X" at the end of his name, symbolizing his original African name that he will never know and marking him as a member of the Nation of Islam.

The "X" last name of the Nation's members signals an original African family name which they will never know, thanks to slavery's destruction of families and heritage—but it also connects them to illiterate slaves, who would often sign their names with an X, and it further connects them with each other, as all the members of the Nation would then share one common family name: X.

At his dinner table, Elijah begins to speak often about his need for enthusiastic young ministers to spread his word farther and faster than its current pace. Shortly thereafter, Malcolm's Temple minister asks him to address the congregation, and then to give a lecture. Nervous and humble, Malcolm agrees hesitantly, mostly speaking on slavery and Christianity, the topics he knows well. Then, in the summer of 1953, he is named Assistant Minister.

Malcolm first draws his topics from his experiences in prison, when he would discuss slavery and his other historical readings with other inmates. His public speaking background comes from his time spent in the prison debate group. These trainings did in fact serve him well.

Malcolm, after days spent "fishing" for converts with no success, would dream of what he would say in his next address. In his talks, he would talk about how black people had been made blind to the riches and control exercised by white people over them, and how they should be proud of their beautiful, black bodies and nappy hair, alluding to his own hatred of his white grandfather whose complexion was still visible in Malcolm's fair skin. Like Malcolm's grandfather, thousands of white slave owners had raped their female slaves, while their husbands and sons could do nothing to stop it. Thinking of this, Malcolm takes long walks at night, choked up with anger and sorrow.

The reader experiences a double vision of sadness and frustration in this scene. First, there is the horrific history of rape and mutilation described by Malcolm and perpetrated against black slaves. Then, there is the melancholic image of Malcolm treading through the streets, reflecting on this history and wanting to share his pain and his anger with other African Americans who may not even be aware of it.

One day, at his new job at the Gar Wood factory (manufacturing garbage trucks), the F.B.I. comes in and ask Malcolm to come to their office. After asking why he hasn't registered for the draft, he says he didn't think ex-cons were supposed to register. They believe him, and tell him he must go register immediately. When he does, he marks the "conscientious objector" box, which gets him an audience before a review panel. After a fairly condescending interview, they tell him his case is pending, after which he hears nothing for seven years. Then he receives a Class 5-A draft card in the mail, "whatever that means."

The Nation of Islam objects to its followers participating in wars that support white imperialism over other oppressed people of color. The most prominent case of a Muslim conscientious objector in the US is Muhammad Ali, who will object to participating in the Vietnam War after Malcolm X's death.A Class 5-A designation means the individual in question is now too old to be drafted.

Malcolm, overcome with enthusiasm and vigor, always loses his voice after addressing the Detroit Temple. He speaks passionately about why whites hate blacks out of guilt for their past crimes. Malcolm also changes jobs once again, now working for a Ford assembly line.

Malcolm's efforts to preach the truth take everything out of him; he confronts the violence done to black bodies by giving his entire body and voice to the fight against oppression.

Malcolm loves to travel to Chicago, where he hears Mr. Muhammad speak and stays at his house. There, he talks for hours with Elijah and his mother, Mother Marie. Then Elijah and Malcolm drive to visit the Muslim-owned stores in Chicago, which are supposed to act as examples of how the black community can help itself. Mr. Muhammad always shows the greatest humility, often sweeping the shop floors as they speak.

Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad clearly have a very intimate relationship. Malcolm looks up to Elijah like a father and Mother Marie like a grandmother figure. In their visits, Malcolm appears almost child-like, riding in the car with Elijah and listening to Mother Marie tell stories.

Back at the house, Mother Marie tells Malcolm all about her son's childhood. She once had a vision that Elijah would become a great man; and though he was quiet and not the oldest, he was the leader of all his siblings. While he had to quit school after the fourth grade to work, he would spend hours poring over the Bible, tears in his eyes for want of understanding. Furthermore, he showed an uncommonly high level of love for his race.

Like Malcolm's mother, Mother Marie has a sort of sixth sense for the future of her children. However, unlike Malcolm's family, which was decimated by tragedy, Elijah and his family now live comfortably as the leaders of a movement.

Elijah Muhammad could never stand to be degraded or cursed at by his employers, and he told them as much—but his work was so good that he was usually put into a leadership role. After he married his wife, Sister Clara, he was cursed at by an employer, prompting him to move the family to Detroit. There, in 1931, he mets W. D. Fard, "a brother from the East" who began to hold small meetings where he would teach the Bible and the Quran.

Elijah's sensitivity to being cursed at reflects a deep sense of self-worth and a discomfort with the racist standards of his time. Whereas white employers may simply take it as natural to curse at their black employees, he sees it as unacceptably degrading.

W. D. Fard taught that God's true name was Allah, his religion was Islam, and his followers Muslims. He taught that black people in America were a lost tribe Muslims whom he had been sent to redeem. In fact, as God's children, black people were Gods themselves, and Mr. Fard was the Mahdi, the Savior the world had been waiting for. Fard then set up the first University of Islam in Detroit. Elijah Poole, renamed Elijah Muhammad, was named head minister over all the other ministers, causing great jealousy. In 1934, Fard and Elijah went to start the Temples in Chicago and Milwaukee, when Fard suddenly disappeared without a trace.

Fard is an extremely interesting character. He is technically the founder of the Nation and the Mahdi, or Savior (and his disappearance is still an unsolved mystery), yet after he disappeared Elijah Muhammad clearly took over the spotlight as the center of the Nation, while conveniently blaming the other ministers of being "jealous" of his chosen position.

The other ministers then began to make attempts on Elijah's life, forcing him to flee for Washington, D.C., where he founded Temple Four. With "hypocrites" still after him, Elijah went on the run for the next seven years, never staying long anywhere. Then, in 1942, he was arrested for draft dodging, and was released in 1946 after three and a half years.

Elijah's history serves as an origin story of persecution. Like the Jews who wandered the desert for forty years and suffered many injustices, Elijah and his followers finally arrived at the "Promised Land."

Malcolm, looking back, reflects on how many times he gave speeches detailing this history without any kind of critical eye or skepticism. He accepted all that had been told to him point blank. That lack of independence will cause him a serious spiritual crisis, he says, when later he no longer believes in Elijah Muhammad's integrity.

Many points in Elijah's history could be debated—if attempts were really made on his life, or if Mr. Fard really appointed him head minister, or if Master Fard really could be a Divine figure—but Malcolm never critically considered these issues.

CHAPTER 13: MINISTER MALCOLM X

After realizing that Elijah Muhammad needs more help in spreading the faith, Malcolm quits his job at Ford and goes to Chicago, where he moves in with Elijah and becomes his disciple for several months. He studies harder than ever before to learn the proper rituals, procedures, and interpretations of the Quran and the Bible. Malcolm envisions Elijah as the Lamb from the Bible with a two-edged sword in its mouth; Elijah's sword is his liberating teachings. Malcolm adores him as if he had "the power of the sun."

Malcolm's commitment to the Nation reaches a new fervor as he enters under Elijah's tutelage to become his closest disciple. The closer Malcolm gets to Elijah, the harder it becomes for him to see Elijah as just a man. Instead, he takes on a divine nature in Malcolm's imagination—and thus becomes immune to criticism.

Once Elijah feels that Malcolm is ready, he sends him to Boston to work with Brother Lloyd X. Small gatherings of prospective Muslims would come to hear Malcolm preach in living rooms. He often speaks of the history and horrors of slavery, and he marvels at how many black people have no knowledge of this history. Once they are enraged by history, Malcolm switches tack to show them how white men continue to keep them oppressed in their own lives.

Malcolm uses a very sophisticated rhetorical technique. By connecting past atrocities to the present, he creates a tangible storyline that moves the audience to see why they should be upset at the injustices that continue to be perpetrated against black people in America.

After three months of preaching and receiving larger and larger crowds, Malcolm finally has a following large enough to justify renting a small space and folding chairs to establish a new temple. He joyously reports the news to Elijah Muhammad.

This is Malcolm's first success with establishing a new Temple. Despite its humble beginnings, he takes great pride in having served Elijah well.

Malcolm's sister Ella starts to come around and hear him preach, listening in the back but never saying anything or moving. Malcolm respects her space and independence by never attempting to talk to her about converting. Rather, he says, only Allah Himself could convert Ella.

Malcolm and Ella have always respected each other's independence and lifestyle. To push her would be to violate that history of mutual respect.

Malcolm hasn't been back in Roxbury for seven years, and decides to have a reunion with Shorty. He quickly makes it clear that he is very serious about Islam, but also puts Shorty at ease by talking to him in their old slang. They have a great reunion, talking about Shorty's new band and his time spent studying composition in prison. But Malcolm can tell that Shorty doesn't really want to hear about Islam, so he lets it lie.

Malcolm once treated Shorty like a brother, even going into a new criminal enterprise to support Shorty's music career. While he still cares about Shorty and wishes him well, their lives have taken separate paths, and Malcolm cannot share his new faith with him, even if he would like to.

By March 1954, the Temple is a healthy size and Malcolm heads for Philadelphia. There, the locals take to Islam very quickly and by May, Temple Twelve is up and running. Elijah then sends Malcolm to lead Temple Seven in New York City, which fills Malcolm with excitement and duty before this great responsibility.

When Malcolm was a younger man, he saw New York City as the center of the world and of black culture. He is repeating that first journey from the Midwest to the very center of things, but now with a spiritual mission in mind.

Malcolm heads to Harlem in search of Sammy the Pimp and West Indian Archie. He quickly learns that Sammy had been doing well for himself in the numbers business and even got married, but was then found dead one morning in bed.

The news about Sammy's death comes as a shock to Malcolm. He realizes that if he were still hustling, he could very well be the one found dead.

Malcolm talks with a lot of the old hustlers, looking for West Indian Archie, but nobody has heard from him. Many of the hustlers have died of various causes, and the rest have been reduced in their old age to either menial labor downtown or very small time hustles to survive. Cadillac Drake, for example, is now living on the street, addicted to heroin. Malcolm is very glad to have escaped that life.

For these old hustlers, there is no exit strategy, no retirement plan. At a certain point they have no options left, and their big personas and glamorous facades come crumbling down.

Malcolm finally receives word that West Indian Archie is sick, and living up in the Bronx. He takes a taxi to go see him, and is welcomed inside, where they talk about the old times. They both agree to forget their old dispute, neither sure who had made the mistake with the numbers. They also both know that Archie's end is near, and Malcolm is overcome by how far he's fallen from his once mythical stature. Malcolm insists on giving him a little money and then leaves.

At the time, Archie and Malcolm's dispute seemed too large to ever be overcome – the only options were death or escape. Now, with death and poverty looming over Archie's head, their dispute seems trivial, and Malcolm is moved with pity.

When Malcolm arrives at the New York Temple, it is just a small storefront room—and they can't even fill it with members. Frustrated with his inefficacy at recruiting new members, he decides to take a new strategy. Malcolm and his preachers go to the edges of the street corner crowds drawn by the Black Nationalists, handing out pamphlets and asking people to come to their meetings. Then they find their most fertile "fishing" spots, right in front of small evangelical churches after Sunday service; many of these churchgoers are open-minded to hearing someone else preach.

While Malcolm's history is most concerned with the growth of the Nation, this point in his autobiography presents the reader with an interesting view of Harlem in the late 1950s. Already the city is teeming with many different religious and political groups, many of them working to gather support for black civil rights and liberationist movements.

Malcolm sees these Christians as his best targets for conversion, as they are often the poorest in the community, and he can preach about the hypocrisy of Christianity's message and white Christians' treatment of black people. He also preaches how Christianity, with its white Savior, is utilized to brainwash black people. And since these crowds also tended to be heavily female, he further elaborates on the need for black men to respect and protect black women rather than chasing white women—a point that always draws praise.

Malcolm has an ongoing feud with the Christian Church. Not only did he reject it as a child, but he now sees it as an integral component and source of European colonialism and white supremacy. Malcolm then mobilizes his frustration to convince black Christians that their faith is being used against them.

Unfortunately for Malcolm, while many respond to his preaching, only a few will commit to following Elijah Muhammad and becoming Muslims, due to the strict moral code involved: no fornication, pork, tobacco, alcohol, or narcotics, and no dancing, gambling, dating, or vacationing. Further, there were to be no domestic quarrels or being disrespectful to others or the law, except for religious reasons. These rules are enforced by the Fruit of Islam.

In many Christian denominations, sin is wiped away by simply asking for God's forgiveness, which allows for its members to have a looser moral standard in their daily activities. The Nation, on the other hand, is extremely rigid in its standards and doesn't allow slip-ups.

The temple continues to grow, but too slowly for Malcolm. He stays busy by traveling to other cities to preach. He goes to Philadelphia on Wednesdays, Springfield, Massachusetts on Saturdays, and Hartford on Thursdays. In Hartford, he finds a particularly receptive audience amongst the domestic servants working in white homes.

Malcolm's adult life has many striking parallels to his young life as a hustler. For example, he spends his weeks on the road along the East Coast, just as he once spent his time catching trains from town to town with musicians.

Malcolm's enthusiasm brings him frequent chastisement from Elijah Muhammad on his visits to Chicago. Malcolm often feels that the other ministers are not working hard enough to bring in new Muslims, but Elijah appreciates their steadfastness.

These chastisements for "enthusiasm" may be a for-shadowing of Malcolm's eventual split with the Nation for apparently becoming too self-centered.

In 1955, Elijah sends Malcolm on his first long-distance trip to Atlanta, Georgia, where he helps Brother James X to found a Temple there. As the Temple has no money, their first meeting is held in a funeral parlor after the funeral of a Christian man.

In this passage, the reader gets a glimpse at how Malcolm conceives of America; to go to the South is to take a long trip, as if it were an entirely separate nation.

Malcolm uses this as an opportunity to explain Muslim attitudes towards funerals and death, reading passages from the Bible denying the existence of an afterlife. And since the deceased is now gone, he says, no tears are to be shed for them. Instead, money is to be given to their family. These short ceremonies always attract more members to the Nation; however, Malcolm will later learn that these teachings are in stark contrast to those taught by Islam at large.

The Nation of Islam's funeral services, like any religious ceremony, are largely a spectacle or a performance that display publicly the key tenets of their faith. For example, they don't believe in an afterlife (another diversion from traditional Islam), which means that their followers must work hard to make this life a just one.

By 1956, the Temples in the major cities have grown significantly and have begun to attract more middle-class African Americans as well. The congregations are certainly larger than most of America was aware of at the time. Malcolm, meanwhile, is working very hard and sleeping very little to continuously try and meet the demands of his job. Around this time, Elijah authorizes Temple Seven to buy a car for Malcolm to use for his traveling preaching, a gesture he greatly appreciates.

Class dynamics within the African American community are quite important throughout the book. The arrival of middle-class African Americans into the Nation's congregation means that it is now gaining respectability and cultural capital within the community at large, rather than being simply a fringe group.

Malcolm tries to avoid any personal relationships with the Muslim sisters, much to the annoyance of those sisters, as he feels himself too busy with his work to get married. Furthermore, he distrusts the idea of a wife; after spending so much time with prostitutes and hearing how *they* were the ones to really listen to the husbands who slept with them (instead of the husbands' presumably nagging wives), Malcolm doesn't want to run the risk of also being emotionally and spiritually torn down by a marriage.

Malcolm clearly has a deep-rooted suspicion of marriage and of wives. Though many of his claims here seem essentializing and sexist, the reader may also be justified in connecting these ideas to Malcolm's childhood—perhaps Malcolm partly blames his mother's nature for his family's disintegration.

In 1956, a new sister joins Temple Seven. It's Sister Betty, a native of Detroit. Malcolm has no intentions towards her, and they never speak; in his words, he just "notices her." A nursing school student, she teaches classes on hygiene and health to the Thursday Night women's group. One day, thinking it may help with her classes, Malcolm offers to take her to the Museum of Natural History. There they discuss evolution, among other things, and Malcolm is "halfway impressed" with Betty's intelligence and education.

As he is very suspicious of women in general, Malcolm approaches his relationship with Sister Betty in a very hesitant way. In fact, it does not appear that he is very honest with himself about his attraction to Sister Betty and instead hides his feelings behind a professional (and hyper-masculine) attitude.

Shortly thereafter, Malcolm hears from another sister that Sister Betty's parents have threatened to stop funding her nursing school if she doesn't leave the Muslims. Now Malcolm begins to wonder if a marriage might help her in this situation. He also notices that, according to Elijah's teaching, she is the right height and age for him.

Malcolm does not approach the idea of marriage as something to be done out of spontaneous feelings of love, but rather as a duty and a responsibility.

After then being shocked at his own desires, Malcolm decides to confront the possibility directly. He tells Elijah he is thinking of marriage—and Elijah smiles and asks to meet the woman. On the pretext of attending a course for instructors, Sister Betty is sent to Chicago, where she meets Elijah in person. He warmly approves of her.

Just as a son would traditionally bring his prospective bride home to meet the family, Malcolm first has Sister Betty sent to meet his spiritual father, Elijah.

On his way to see his brother Wilfred in Detroit, Malcolm suddenly pulls off to the side of the road, calls Sister Betty from a payphone, and asks her to marry him. After acting surprised at his proposal, she agrees and flies out to Detroit. There, Malcolm meets her foster parents, who appear happy for them, and Sister Betty meets Wilfred and his family. After attempting to get married in Indiana but failing due to long waits, they drive to Lansing to stay with Philbert. There they get married the next day, in a simple ceremony with a white Justice of the Peace and all-white witnesses.

Malcolm insists on telling his story in the most practical tone, as if he suddenly checked off an action item from his to-do list. However, he is clearly pleased that Betty not only accepted, but pretended to have been surprised. In short, Malcolm may present his marriage in a very sober and unemotional way, but the reader can infer that he does indeed have romantic feelings for Betty.

Betty has to fly back to New York for nursing school, but she quickly returns. In Detroit, Elijah makes the marriage announcement before the whole Temple, shocking many sisters who had shown interest in Malcolm. Then, back in New York, they really shock everyone. Even some of the brothers, who had followed Malcolm in his wariness of women, feel mildly betrayed. Meanwhile, everyone congratulates Betty, saying she "got" him.

Malcolm's suspicions of women and marriage do not die out once he himself is married. In a (mostly) light-hearted way, he wonders if Betty was simply the most clever of all the Muslim women and found a way to "trap" Malcolm into this marriage.

Malcolm and Betty then move in to Queens, where they share a home with another brother his family. After their first daughter Attallah (named for Atilla the Hun) is born in 1958, they move into their own home. There, they will raise three more daughters, Qubilah (for Qubilai Khan) in 1960, Ilyasah ("Ilyas" is the Arabic name for Elijah), in 1962 and Amilah in 1964.

Malcolm names his first two daughters after two famous emperors. Atilla was a conqueror and enemy of the Roman Empire, while Qubilai ruled the Mongol Empire. Note that three of Malcolm's daughters are named for men, which may show a secret wish to have sons instead.

Malcolm, with hesitation, says that he now loves Betty. Even more importantly, she is one of only four women he has ever trusted. He and Betty share true love, he says, because they do not simply look to the exterior, which is simply lust. Rather, she understands him and she understands how demanding his work is; therefore, she supports him in all his travels that keep him away.

Malcolm reflects that Betty has always been supportive of him throughout his work life. Though she rarely appears in the book even after their marriage, this statement of gratitude shows that Malcolm is indeed aware of the strain his public ministry has had on his family's life.

One day, while guest preaching in Boston, Malcolm is astonished to see his half-sister Ella among those standing, signaling her readiness to follow Elijah Muhammad. It may have taken five years to convince her, but he's all the more pleased for it.

Ella's commitment to the Nation of Islam came on her own terms, which makes that commitment more heartfelt and sincere than if she had been bullied or tricked into joining.

A series of events in Harlem one night suddenly brings the Nation of Islam to national attention. Two white cops, breaking up a fight, tell the crowd to disperse. When two Muslim brothers don't move fast enough, the cops attack one with their clubs and then arrest him. Within half an hour about fifty Fruit of Islam members gather outside the police precinct, standing in rank formation, causing great anxiety inside the station and great curiosity in the black community at large.

The white police wouldn't have expected a formation of black men to stand quietly yet menacingly outside the police station in response to an incident of police violence. This symbolic gesture of solidarity and strength was a powerful response to physical abuses enacted against individuals in the community.

Malcolm enters the station, informing the police that the Muslims will not leave until they have seen their brother and are sure he is receiving medical treatment. After finally being allowed to see the injured brother, Malcolm demands he be sent to the hospital. The Muslims then lead a crowd following the ambulance to the hospital. When the doctors assure Malcolm that his brother is being treated, the Muslims slip away, leaving the police at the scene to deal with the angry crowd. The incident propels the Nation of Islam to the front of media coverage and puts them under police scrutiny.

Malcolm must argue for every single one of his demands, from the simple request to see his "brother" to demanding that he receive medical attention at the hospital. And based on many other incidents of racist abuse and neglect by police, they probably wouldn't have accommodated any of Malcolm's demands if he did not have the strength and the threat of the Fruit of Islam members standing outside the police station the entire time.

CHAPTER 14: BLACK MUSLIMS

Two different groups approach Malcolm about projects on the Nation of Islam. Louis Lomax, a black journalist, proposes a documentary film, while C. Eric Lincoln, a scholar at Boston University, would like to write his dissertation on the Nation of Islam. With Elijah's blessing, Malcolm gives both projects the go ahead.

The events at the police station in Harlem have attracted more attention to the Nation, but Malcolm is wary of how these first major media projects may present the Nation to the country at large.

Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad have both written columns for the Amsterdam News—the Harlem newspaper—but Malcolm wants to expand the Nation of Islam's media capabilities to have their own full-fledged newspaper. While traveling in Los Angeles, he goes to visit the offices of the Herald Dispatch to see the workings of a newspaper. Upon returning to New York, he starts practicing taking and developing pictures, and then founds the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* to be sold and distributed on New York's streets.

Malcolm is not content to have the news about the Nation be spread by outside media organizations. Instead, he takes the initiative to found an independent newspaper so that Muslims can learn about the latest developments within the Nation. However, this could also make it very biased and a powerful source of propaganda.

At this time, Malcolm travels as Elijah Muhammad's representative to many nations, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Nigeria, and Ghana, who have begun to recognize the Nation of Islam as an important group among black liberation movements.

Malcolm does not elaborate much about these journeys, so the reader can infer that his experiences were mostly professional and concerned with representing the Nation.

Towards the end of 1959, Louis Lomax's documentary airs, titled "The Hate that Hate Produced." Intended to shock and awe the American public, there is instant negative outcry against the Muslim community, especially in New York (Malcolm predominately blames the title for the negative reaction). Over time, the press reactions to the film become more one-sided, and then black leaders began to denounce the Nation of Islam as a hate-cult in the press.

Malcolm does not offer an opinion on the content of the film. Instead, he focuses on the title, saying its double usage of the word "hate" made the Nation sound bad, no matter what the content. The public's superficial reading of the film is similar to how bigotry works in general—oversimplifying and judging by only examining the outside.

Malcolm spends hours a day on the phone talking to the press, all of whom are looking for a reaction to the negative coverage. Though he is angry, he remains reserved in his responses, on Elijah's orders. Malcolm particularly notes that American journalists push the "hate-cult" narrative more than European ones do, and he attributes this to an unconscious guilt and projection of their own bigotry and hatred.

If a group of people have been historically involved in the oppression of another group, then they will certainly have some prejudices in their points of view, but it is easier to justify these prejudices if one can blame the oppressed group for also being "hateful."

Malcolm defends the Nation's preaching as aimed at uplifting black people and raising their self-worth. He also defends their support of separation rather than integration as sensible and as what most white people actually want. In particular, he defends the Fruit of Islam as an innocuous defense group, rather than some foreboding paramilitary force.

In Malcolm's mind he is not presenting a radical ideology, but rather an honest depiction of what white society wants in reverse. Instead of white supremacy, the forced separation of races, and the NRA, the Nation espouses black supremacy, the voluntary separation of races, and the Fruit of Islam.

Utilizing his knowledge of history, Malcolm defends Elijah against claims of being a "demagogue" by explaining that a demagogue means "teacher of the people" in Ancient Greek. Therefore, if he is a demagogue, then he is part of a group including Socrates, Jesus Christ, Martin Luther, and Gandhi. But the reporters respond even more negatively to history lessons, and turn away.

Malcolm has a keen awareness of the importance of history and context in our everyday lives. Just as a reporter must know the history of a term to use it effectively, one must know the history of oppression to oppose it effectively, which is perhaps the core idea behind his self-education.

While Malcolm mostly does battle with the press, his personal anger is reserved for the black leaders who attack the Nation. Elijah asks Malcolm and the others to avoid lashing back at them, as this is what the white man wants and will further divide the black population. However, after the attacks continue unabatedly, Elijah gives Malcolm the go ahead.

Since journalists at the time were mostly white, Malcolm expected confrontations with them. But attacks by other black leaders hurt him personally, as he sees this as a form of betrayal against black solidarity.

Malcolm attacks these black leaders as "Uncle Toms" and as "Black bodies with white heads." He charges them as out of touch with the realities of poor black communities in America, and instead simply saying what their white benefactors and bosses want them to say. These leaders to do not take these attacks well, and respond even more aggressively.

Malcolm sees these confrontations as having a strong class dimension. These black leaders either cannot understand the situation of the poor or are intentionally hiding it in order to protect their own privileged positions.

Soon, the radio and television stations start asking Malcolm to come on and debate with both white and black scholars to defend Elijah Muhammad and the Nation. Passionately furious, he agrees with no hesitation. As Malcolm goes to the studios, he sees that the black commentators are very friendly with the white producers and hosts, something he takes as proof of their collusion to keep black people ignorant.

At this point in his life, Malcolm appears to think of himself as a Warrior for Elijah Muhammad, fighting the entire world on his teacher's behalf. He seems to follow the rule, "If you aren't with me, then you're against me."

Malcolm begins his appearances by introducing himself as a way to control the tone and the narrative. Then, when he is asked a question, he refuses to stop until he has made his point. For example, when asked about separation, he argues that it is different from segregation, because in segregation, somebody else controls one's life and liberty, while separation happens as a choice between equals.

In his battle against the media and more moderate black pundits, Malcolm realizes that he is being demonized and made to look crazy. He counters this by making sure that his logic is always clear, rather than letting himself be cut off before he can make his point.

Malcolm repeatedly assures the reader that while he went on television and radio, even if he was the one on camera, his entire goal was to represent Elijah Muhammad to the best of his abilities and to never accept any praise for himself.

Malcolm against insists on his entirely pure intentions. He certainly believes what he says here, but the reader should also be wary of fully trusting an autobiographer's self-portrayal.

Dr. C. Eric Lincoln's book *The Black Muslims in America* comes out, and the press immediately seize on the phrase "Black Muslims," despite Malcolm's attempts over the next two years to kill its usage.

As when the documentary came out, a bad label gives the Nation an insidious persona in the white media.

Around this time, the Nation begins to have mass rallies around the country, which become a phenomenal success. Now, instead of small caravans of ten cars going to Chicago to hear Elijah Muhammad speak, there are whole fleets of buses coming from the East Coast cities. The events, which are only open to black people, boast as many as ten thousand attendees. The events are guarded by Fruit of Islam members, who conduct careful security checks, looking for weapons that may threaten Elijah Muhammad's life.

The size and frequency of these meetings attest to the Nation's growing presence throughout the country. Malcolm is especially proud of the fact that the audiences were all-black. In a way, these rallies were small examples of the Nation's eventual political goal of achieving a separate, all-black state within the U.S.

While most of the attendees are Muslims, the Nation always make sure to leave a section at the front for "dignitaries," invited leaders from the black community (many of whom had attacked the Nation). Another section is accessible only to black journalists; Malcolm credits the Nation with jumpstarting the careers of many black journalists.

By inviting journalists and other black leaders, the Nation hoped to reach out to the people within the black community who had the most visibility and power to spread their message – if they chose to do so.

The ministers and leaders of the Nation sit up on stage behind Elijah Muhammad's chair. As the event gets ready to begin, new and old ministers alike greet each other, and a generally festive atmosphere surrounds the event. For Malcolm, seeing these ministers from so many Temples that he personally helped found or organize gives him a strong sense of pride. Not only that, but the sight of the large crowds reminds him of the visions Elijah told him about; he described seeing large crowds, waiting to hear Allah's message.

Beneath the festive atmosphere, there is a fundamental tension at these rallies. Elijah has envisioned himself as the leader of a great movement and as giving speeches to the crowds, but it's Malcolm who does most of the work of spreading the Nation's message.

Malcolm goes up to the microphone to warm up the crowd for Elijah, addressing them as "black people of all faiths." The main point he underlines is that Elijah Muhammad has finally opened their eyes to the identity of their enemy, the white man. According to Malcolm, he had been the first leader with the courage to say publicly what they had all been suffering privately their entire lives.

Malcolm's message is addressed to all black people, not just the Muslims, and it centers on racial solidarity. This has been a key part of his belief system ever since the days of his father's involvement with Black Nationalism.

Then, as Malcolm continues to speak, Elijah Muhammad begins to approach the stage through the center aisle. A slight, fragile man, his meekness inspires adoration from the crowd, who call him, "Little Lamb!" Malcolm himself is often overcome at the sight of the man who had rescued him and treated him like a son after he had felt so lost in prison.

Malcolm sometimes chastises Christians as being overly emotional and jubilant during religious services, but here he describes a predominantly Muslim crowd, himself included, as they go wild at the sight of their human leader. The idea of Elijah as a "little lamb" also connects him to Jesus, the "lamb of God," adding to Elijah's status as a kind of messiah for his followers.

Elijah Muhammad then speaks, and the Muslim crowd yells out their praises as he pauses. Then, as the energy grows and he continues his criticism of the white men who trick and oppress black people into serving them for so little, the Christians in the crowd begin to join in. Even as his frail strength starts to fade, Elijah carries on, much to the anxiety of his ministers. Suddenly, when he can go on no longer, he abruptly stops and is led away by Fruit of Islam ushers.

The parallels to a traditional Christian revival are once again very strong. The preacher (Elijah) goes to the front and denounces the "devil" (white society) in strong words as the crowd shouts along, until he collapses in spiritual and physical exhaustion.

One of the Nation's greatest points of pride is that Elijah Muhammad does not accept financial backing from any white organizations or donors. They only accept donations from black people in order to maintain their intellectual independence. As Malcolm explains this, the collection plates go around and soon fill up.

As black America has been economically oppressed, it can be difficult to start organizations without support from white donors, but this often leads to those donors going on to control the organization's message.

As they hold more rallies, Elijah Muhammad starts to allow a small section for white press, and then a small visitor's section for a white audience. Those who come are generally students and scholars, eager to learn about the "Black Muslims." Meanwhile, Malcolm also keeps a close eye on the visiting black leaders in attendance; in their faces, he believes he sees the recognition that they have been puppets of white men, working against the betterment of their own people.

Throughout the book, Malcolm shows great respect for young college students of all races, as he sees them as the most open to understanding and opposing racist oppression. While at this point in his life he believes in the separation of races, he nonetheless also thinks white students can learn from the Nation's message, and perhaps vice versa.

Meanwhile, the F.B.I. and the police constantly watch and follow them. The phones of the Nation's branches and of its leaders' houses are all tapped. Yet Elijah tells them to have no fear, for they have the truth on their side.

Malcolm shows contempt for state surveillance by barely talking about it. The police may be following him every day, but he only gives them a passing mention.

In addition to the surveillance, black agents are sent to infiltrate their ranks. Some of them, upon hearing the Muslims' message, confess their roles and convert to Islam; of these, some even start to counterspy to inform the Nation on what law enforcement agencies are saying about them. One of their authorities' concerns is the increasing number of prisoners who, like Malcolm, convert to Islam while in prison.

Malcolm has an unfailing belief in the power of the truth. Even if the enemy has been sent amongst their ranks, if they speak the truth, then the spy won't be able to help himself in turning to support them.

Malcolm also claims that the Nation had a very good track record at getting people to quit heroin. Their program is built around having ex junkies go back into their old environments and convince their friends to quit their habit. They try to explore and explain to them why it is they use dope, which they say has a strong connection to racist oppression in America. Once they agree to participate, they are brought to the Nation's local restaurant and become part of a support network within the Nation to gradually build their confidence and sense of self-worth. Then the addict goes cold turkey while the Muslim brothers watch over him and nurse him back to health. Once he is well, he is sent back into the community to help others quit their own addiction.

Many addiction treatment programs have a strong community-focused aspect. The Nation's program combines that community based support with a religious dimension (like AA often does, for example). In a nutshell, this is the same structure as the Nation of Islam in general: a strong sense of black community and mutual support is combined with a common faith to combat problems brought on by racial oppression.

In 1961, the Nation is flourishing. A brand new Islamic Center is to be built in Chicago as the headquarters of the nation. Elijah Muhammad travels to the Middle East, and then directs that all Temples be known as mosques from now on. Furthermore, more and more Muslim businesses begin to open up with the objective of keeping profits within the black community. Elijah Muhammad's influence continues to grow as his speeches are broadcast on the radio, and the two Universities of Islam (in Chicago and Detroit) teach black history to school children.

Elijah and Malcolm both see the Nation of Islam as extending beyond the mosque. Rather, they believe that its ideology and faith should serve as a foundation for the education, health care, and employment of African Americans throughout the Nation. By its very nature it is a very political and practical religion.

Thanks to Malcolm's hard work and fundraising throughout the Nation, Elijah's eight children all become full-time employees of the Nation, serving in different offices. This is largely a symbolic victory, as it keeps Elijah's children from having to work for white businessmen.

Malcolm has naively installed all of Elijah's children in important offices within the Nation, something which could easily decrease his influence significantly if he ever has a rift with Elijah.

Elijah's bronchial cough, which has bothered him for many years, becomes enflamed after so many public appearances. Finally, the doctors tell him he must move to a drier climate, so the Nation buys him a house in Phoenix. However, his relocation in no way affects his administrative responsibilities within the Nation; in fact, they only increase. As a consequence, Elijah is forced to transfer more responsibility and independence to Malcolm regarding his public appearances, a burden Malcolm humbly takes on. Elijah urges Malcolm to become famous so that the Nation will be famous—but he also warns that fame always attracts jealousy.

This passage reflects a central problem with the text: should the reader trust the narrator? Malcolm portrays himself as a humble servant, simply becoming famous for the sake of the Nation. After their split, the Nation will blame Malcolm as having been power-hungry and obsessed with his own fame. But did the others become jealous of the selfless Malcolm, or did Malcolm himself become greedy or self-important and just not admit it?

CHAPTER 15: ICARUS

As Malcolm continues to speak for the Nation of Islam, he receives more and more mail, overwhelmingly from white people. Besides the random threats, most of the letter writers are concerned with two things: whether or not God will destroy their civilization for oppressing black people, and Malcolm's thoughts on interracial couples. Malcolm also tries to clarify in his public speeches that when criticizing the "white devil," he is criticizing society as a whole, every not individual white man.

Malcolm has a complex relationship with individual white people. He describes receiving letters from many whites who think similarly to him, and also clarifies that his critique is a societal critique, not an indictment of individuals. This idea continues to be misinterpreted today in various social justice spheres—an oppressed group condemning their oppressors as a whole doesn't mean they hate or scorn every individual member of that group, but are simply expressing righteous anger and pointing out systemic oppression in society as a whole.

One of Malcolm's brothers from the mosque gets ahold of a confidential sociological report on the "Black Muslims" in Harlem and shows it to him. In it, he finds lots of complicated language about how Malcolm essentially doesn't understand the "Harlem sub-culture." Malcolm says reports like this are examples of how educated black people work against the interests of black people at large.

The first half of Malcolm's autobiography was intended to serve as evidence that he has an intimate understanding of "Harlem's sub-culture," so any assertion to the contrary is now seen by the reader as absurd.

The white man, Malcolm says, is extremely clever and good at getting his enemies to work against each other so that he can advance his own economic and political interests. However, a superiority complex also keeps him from seeing that he acts in a racist way towards non-whites. As proof, Malcolm cites the Japanese American internment camps of World War II, while German Americans were largely left alone.

The example from World War II illustrates two things. First, white society imposed racist policies of segregation and oppression in the very recent past against other racial minorities. Second, society didn't see its own hypocrisy in not also interning German Americans.

The year is 1963, and Malcolm is continuously dealing with the press, who frequently turn his statements inside out so that his original words are never printed as he said them. While he feels attacked by other civil rights leaders, he feels he should still support their efforts, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and he says so in his statements. During this time, he becomes very strategic and adept with his interview skills, learning to have prepared answers to typical questions and arguments.

During this period, Malcolm becomes a "professional" at dealing with the press, and this professionalization may have been a contributing factor in his estrangement from the Nation. The Nation's other leaders may have seen him as too good at his job, as if he were more interested in confrontation and debate than preaching.

Malcolm states publicly that he feels the Northern Freedom Riders efforts in the South to be ridiculous, as many Northern cities have just as many problems with segregation and racial equality as the South. While they could be doing more for racial justice in the North, they instead go South. His comments draw the ire of Northern liberals, who do not see themselves as implicit in a racist system. Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad see the honest and upfront racism of Southerners to be much easier to combat than that in the North, where people talk about equality and democracy but rig the system behind the scenes.

This passage should remind the reader of Malcolm's first "long distance" trip to the South. It was suggested that Malcolm sees the South as practically another country; here, he says something similar. While he supports desegregation efforts in the South, he also thinks that Northerners should deal with their own problems, rather than simply demonizing racists in the South (and considering themselves innocent in comparison).

Malcolm sees "integration" as a concept that doesn't really mean anything. While a small number of black people want to live amongst white people, most prefer to live in communities that share their own ethnic and cultural background. The truth is, says Malcolm, that white people and black people are just *different*, and those differences should simply be acknowledged and accepted, rather than ignored.

While the claim that Malcolm is "racist" against white people is nonsensical, it is fair to say that he has an essentialist *view on race, meaning that he sees people from different races or ethnicities as essentially or intrinsically different—and not just in their experience of or treatment by society.*

Until World War II, Malcolm says, there was virtually no honest dialogue between the black and white communities. That's why when black people started to rise up in civil rights disputes, white communities were so caught off guard that anything was amiss. Rather than true communication, white business and political leaders in cities across America had only talked with black leaders they themselves picked and who didn't speak for the community.

In Malcolm's view, true leaders spring from among the people, rather than being chosen and imposed from the outside. If a black leader was too friendly with white leaders, then this proved he could not possibly be representing the true interests of the African American community.

Malcolm believes that an uprising against Western countries and the governments they control is happening worldwide in the Third World. And while the West exports its ideas about equality and democracy, the violence and repression against blacks in America stands as evidence of the West's hypocrisy.

In the early 1960s, multiple revolutions and rebellions against European powers had either recently happened or were ongoing in formerly colonized countries, and these movements often supported each other.

Instead of trying to integrate, Malcolm wants the black community to focus on pulling itself up. Through the creation of locally owned businesses and initiatives to lower drug and alcohol abuse, among other things, the black community needs to build up its self-respect. Malcolm says there are a few African Americans who have lots of wealth and spend it all at fancy, white-owned restaurants in an effort to seem white and cultured—but he holds this group in contempt.

Malcolm does not have an egalitarian belief system; he is not opposed to the idea of some people gaining wealth and rising above others. However, he is opposed to middle- and upper-class African Americans who don't use their wealth to lift up other African Americans who have been less fortunate.

The only real integration, Malcolm says, would be intermarriage, an idea that he opposes. With so much racism in the world, mixed-race couples are just asking to not be welcomed in either community and to create a complicated situation for their children to navigate. He sees the separation of races as the only way for them to preserve their own culture and heritage. An example of how integration has failed, he argues, is the Jewish Holocaust in Germany. While Jews were major contributors to every part of the German economy and culture, and many had married into ethnically German families, they were nonetheless targeted and killed en masse.

Malcolm presents his argument from a pragmatic point of view. Mixed-race couples are a bad idea because they pretend that racism simply doesn't exist around them and only make life harder for themselves and their children. Furthermore (at least as Malcolm sees it), the minority partner in a mixed-race couple can more easily forget that they have fewer privileges in society, which could lead to a catastrophe like the Jews being caught off-guard by Nazi persecution.

Another example of shallow integration politics is what Malcolm calls the "Farce on Washington." At the time a largely leaderless, young, and angry movement is growing nationwide in both the countryside and the city centers. Fearing that such a group could pose a serious threat to the government in D.C., the White House asks national civil rights leaders to stop the march, but they aren't in charge. So in order to quell the tension and defuse the radical demands of the March, the White House publicly *endorses* the March. Then, the "Big Six" civil rights leaders are offered funding by a white philanthropist if they will begin to direct the March's organizing process. As they portray themselves as the leaders of the March in the media, the people planning to participate shift from a predominately poor, black group to a mixed-race, middle class group. Instantly the political atmosphere of the March is completely changed. Meanwhile, according to a poll, not even one Congressman changes their position on civil rights post-march.

This is a very different history of the March on Washington than the one the reader is probably familiar with. Malcolm complicates the March's history by describing its class background. The poor are always the ones in society who suffer the most from social inequality, so they are also the ones most likely to pose radical demands for change in the political dialogue. Because of this, the white "power structure" used more mainstream black leaders, who represented the middle classes, to redirect the tone and atmosphere of the march. It then became largely a symbolic gesture, rather than a revolutionary occupation of the nation's capital.

A month before the March on Washington, The New York Times reports that Malcolm is the second most sought after speaker throughout the country's universities. Many schools have made Lincoln's book, *The Black Muslims in America* required reading, spreading the Nation's fame. Overall, Malcolm enjoys speaking to colleges, as he finds the debates with faculty members and objective questions from curious students to be exhilarating and a way for him to continue improving his own arguments.

Later, Malcolm will say that his one regret is not having a university education. This regret and his admiration for college students' open minds reflects his respect for the power of universities to shape people's minds and perhaps even change the world.

Contentiously, Malcolm asserts that he can tell when a question is coming from a Jewish audience member just by its content. According to Malcolm, Jews tend to ask very subjective questions that concern how they may be affected by Malcolm's beliefs. Malcolm does not begrudge them this attitude, as Jews have been the subject of persecution for centuries, so they are naturally defensive. However, he also believes that this insular view means that Jewish business owners in black ghettos tend to care more about their profits than about the good of the community.

Malcolm (and the Nation in general) has been accused of anti-Semitism, but he denies this charge here and throughout the book. Instead, he asserts that Jewish culture simply has certain aspects which he can recognize in Jewish people. This goes back to his essentialist views on race, which largely reduce individuals' actions and attitudes to being attributable to their ethnic background.

While some black people may defend society as good overall when in mixed company, Malcolm asserts that no black person has ever challenged his accusations against white society when it is an all-black audience. While they may want to gain favor by denouncing Malcolm around white people, they all are perfectly aware of the crimes committed by white people, such as slavery, segregation, and lack of rights.

This is part of the reason why Malcolm supports the Nation as an all-black organization. It is always difficult to talk about racism, but if black people are going to confront racism even in sympathetic whites, then they first need to have solidarity before complicating the dialogue.

Malcolm tells Elijah that these speaking tours allow more people, especially those in elite universities, to hear their message, which is good for the Nation. At the time, Elijah doesn't seem to supportive of these events, something Malcolm doesn't understand. But later, he learns that Elijah is secretly jealous of Malcolm's ability to handle such intellectual and educated debates.

Once again, the question of whether to trust Malcolm's explanation comes up. Malcolm certainly does have quite a reputation as a public speaker and debater, but it's his word against Elijah's whether his skill inspired jealousy or pride.

While audiences are generally surprised to hear Malcolm talk about Jesus, he explains that he is one of the central Prophets of Islam, along with Moses and Muhammad. However, the message of love preached by Jesus has been largely ignored by Christianity and Western imperialist nations.

One of Malcolm's key strategies is to surprise his audience. While they always expect a simple message of racial antagonism, he always presents a more complex point.

Malcolm tells the story of a young white college student who came to him at the Muslim restaurant in Harlem after having heard him speak. Clearly from the South, she asks if he believes there are any good white people, and if there is anything she can do. He replies no, and she runs out crying.

Malcolm's harsh response to this one girl reflects his attitudes on confronting racism in general. He will later come to regret this interaction, but it accurately reflects his feelings at the time—since white people were created as "devils," none of them can truly be "good."

When Malcolm is invited to speak at Harvard Law School, he suddenly realizes that he is near to his old burglary ring's hideout. At that moment, he sees how much he's changed and grown, thanks to the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad. This awareness makes him more grateful than ever for how Elijah has led him through that darkness.

Harvard Law is the oldest and most prestigious institution in the country, and its proximity to Malcolm's criminal hideout is thus an instance of ironic juxtaposition. Malcolm's speech there represents an apex of his speaking career, and he recognizes that he owes so much to Elijah for helping him to reach this point.

Then the Greek myth of Icarus flashes through Malcolm's mind. In the myth, Icarus's father makes him artificial wings so they can fly away together (and escape prison). His father warns him not to go too high, but Icarus, enjoying himself so much, keeps going higher. Finally, the beeswax holding his wings together begins to melt in the sun, and Icarus goes crashing into the sea. Malcolm vows to himself to always remain humble and remember that his wings were given to him by Islam, not through his own merit or greatness.

Malcolm's vow unfortunately appears to come too late. He has already risen all the way to the halls of Harvard Law, and now he vows to be humble. His "father," Elijah, gave him his wings to rise up, but has been left far behind Malcolm/ Icarus's ascent. His eventual fall thus appears all but inevitable—though in his case it is not necessarily his own fault, but more as if Daedalus (Icarus's father) had grown jealous of his son and pulled him down himself.

CHAPTER 16: OUT

As Elijah Muhammad's bronchial condition begins to grow worse in 1961, he misses several major rallies and subsequently moves out to Phoenix. As Elijah needs to rest, Malcolm's workload continues to increase, but he's still very satisfied. After years of working to build up the Nation's mosques and to spread its messages throughout the media and into U.S. universities, Malcolm couldn't ask for anything more. His happiness, he says, is tied exclusively to serving Elijah and the Nation of Islam.

According to Malcolm, he does not wish to take Elijah's place as the figurehead of the Nation. However, he does feel that it is his obligation and duty to Elijah to take over the functions that Elijah's health will no longer allow him to fulfill, and doing so also happens to give him great pleasure.

Privately, Malcolm has one regret, and that is that the Nation has gained a reputation as being all talk and no action. With so many civil rights demonstrations and protests happening across the country, Malcolm feels that Muslims should be allowed to participate and show their solidarity with other black people. But beyond this, he has no complaints.

This private regret highlights that Malcolm is beginning to think about black solidarity as extending beyond the Nation of Islam. Not only would this be good for all black people, but it could possibly increase the Nation's own numbers.

Ever since Malcolm has taken on a more public role in 1961, he has heard rumors that some people in the Nation see him as power-hungry and prideful. He pays them no concern, as he remembers that Elijah had prophesied to him that his work would inspire jealousy; instead, he places his faith in Elijah to stand by him should he ever hear such talk.

Even while Malcolm's reputation is being attacked, he does nothing to defend himself. Instead, he places all his eggs in one basket, so to speak, and assumes that Elijah will always stand up for him.

Outside of the Nation, it is said that Malcolm is becoming rich from his engagements. This is clearly not true to anyone who knows him, though, as he owns no property of his own and makes no money. The Nation of Islam has loaned him a car and a house to live in and they pay his expenses, but that's it.

Not only is Malcolm's reputation completely dependent on the goodwill of the Nation and Elijah, but he has no financial security beyond the generosity of the Nation.

The only fight Malcolm ever has with Betty is about his lack of foresight regarding money. While she believes that he should make some money on the side to secure his family, he believes that the Nation will always provide for Betty and their kids should anything ever happen to him. That faith, it will turn out, is poorly misplaced.

Malcolm mentioned earlier that Betty was one of the only women whom he ever trusted. This is one of those moments when he did not trust her judgment, and it will cost their family dearly in the future.

Malcolm receives a lot of credit publicly and privately from people who see him as the face of the Nation of Islam, or as the "Number Two Muslim." This praise makes him feel very uncomfortable, and he does everything he can to direct the attention and praise towards Elijah Muhammad instead. For example, Malcolm passes out photos for reporters to use of Elijah instead of himself, and he urges them to go visit Elijah and interview the Messenger in person.

While Malcolm's humility and efforts to keep the spotlight on Elijah Muhammad are admirable, it is easy for the reader to see that they were doomed to fail. No reporter will ever prefer talking to a man a thousand miles away or using his picture when there is a live star right in front of them.

Around 1962, Malcolm notices that he no longer appears in the "Muhammad Speaks" newspaper that he himself founded. Now run by one of Elijah's sons, the staff has been given orders to run as little as possible about Malcolm. The Chicago headquarters also grows chilly with Malcolm, even asking him to no longer hold any rallies on his own. They have lost sight of their collective mission in spreading the Nation of Islam to as many African Americans as possible.

While the intended effect may have been to limit coverage of Malcolm, the paper under-mines its own mission by excluding important stories about the Nation that happen to feature him. A similar paradox is at work in the Chicago office, as they ask Malcolm to lead fewer rallies—which means that rallies have smaller crowds.

However, by 1963, Malcolm consciously starts to try and mitigate others' jealous comments. He stops appointing new ministers from among his followers and he refuses several major interview requests. He sees these as losses for the Nation and black people in general rather than losses for himself. Nonetheless, Malcolm still has every reason to believe that he enjoys Elijah's support. In 1963 at a rally in Philadelphia, Elijah embraces Malcolm, makes him National Minister and praises him as his "most faithful, hard-working minister."

Ever since he joined the Nation, Malcolm has always been "full steam ahead," and has often been reprimanded for being too enthusiastic. Instead, he now finds himself hesitating and holding off from doing things that he feels would help the Nation. Despite his hesitant feelings, he takes heart in Elijah's apparent show of support.

Morality and specifically chastity have been major parts of Malcolm's personal life and preaching since he joined the Nation. The Muslim's strict moral code is seen as the bedrock of their strength. Nevertheless, in 1963, Malcolm starts to avoid preaching about morality and only talk about social doctrine. He has just learned that Elijah Muhammad himself has broken their moral code.

Malcolm shocks the reader by announcing out of the blue that Elijah has not been a spotless example after all. This rhetorical tool allows the reader to experience and empathize with Malcolm's own astonishment.

In 1963, Elijah Muhammad faces paternity suits from two of his former secretaries, both of them in their twenties. Malcolm has heard rumors about Elijah's infidelity since 1955, but he absolutely refused to pay them any heed. It is impossible to reconcile his total faith in Elijah as the moral, perfect head of the Nation with someone who has committed adultery, an offence that normally leads to expulsion from the Nation.

Malcolm presents the problem as a logical puzzle. Directly at the top of the Nation is someone who actually represents an example of someone who should be expelled according to the rules spelled out by that leader himself—a contradiction which Malcolm can't work out.

Malcolm remembers how he had rejected his brother Reginald because he had been "isolated" from the Muslim community for a sexual affair. He had put the Nation and faith in Elijah above even the ties of family, a decision that he now finds deeply troubling.

While he doesn't say so explicitly, Malcolm's doubts in the Nation are now causing him to feel guilty for his zealous rejection of his brother.

By 1962, the rumors have already begun to spread throughout the Chicago black community, leading many Muslims to leave the mosque. Thankfully, the rumors spread more slowly to New York and the rest of the country. Malcolm begins having nightmares of the scandal this news will cause when it hits the major press. Yet he still can't admit the situation to himself. When people ask him "if he'd heard the rumors," he acts completely ignorant, not wanting to admit it to himself or to them.

Malcolm realizes how absurd it is to pretend ignorance of something that he clearly knows—but he cannot help himself. It's as if he has partitioned off and repressed the part of himself that knows about Elijah's affairs, while nevertheless remaining aware of that psychic split.

Malcolm finally decides to act. He first flies to Chicago, where he meets with Wallace Muhammad, one of Elijah's sons. He instantly understands why Malcolm has come, and they begin to discuss what should be done. Wallace does not think Elijah will want any large effort to defend him publicly.

Malcolm's meeting with Wallace is mysterious—while Wallace supports Malcolm and clearly doesn't want the Nation to suffer, he also doesn't offer any solutions or ways forward. Wallace (later known as Warith) is presented as diverging from his father in many ways, and indeed when he inherited control of the Nation after Elijah's death, he disavowed many of his father's teachings and turned the Nation towards traditional Sunni Islam instead.

From there, Malcolm seeks out three of Elijah's former secretaries to hear the story directly from them. They all say that Elijah is the father of their children. Further, they tell Malcolm that Elijah would praise Malcolm in public, but tear him down in private, saying that he would one day leave Elijah behind. Malcolm is very hurt by this.

Malcolm (and the reader) now has a view on a part of Elijah's life that he's never known before. In his most private circles, he shares that he does not fully trust Malcolm, and his trust has previously been Malcolm's most prized possession.

Feeling disloyal through his inaction, Malcolm decides to write a letter to Elijah, telling him about the rumors that have been circulating about him and asking for guidance. Elijah promises they will discuss it the next time he sees him. Meanwhile, Malcolm and Wallace begin to prepare a "defense" of Elijah's sin. They will teach the Nation that, like the Biblical figures of Moses, David, and Lot, Elijah's accomplishments in service of Allah outweigh his human weaknesses.

Malcolm and Wallace's proposed defense entails admitting that Elijah has indeed sinned, but while also elevating him to the status of a Biblical Prophet. His weakness will actually be used to make him appear even more holy.

In April 1963, Malcolm flies to Phoenix to see Elijah. They embrace, and then Malcolm tells Elijah about the content of the rumors and how he and Wallace can teach that this is actually prophecy. Elijah immediately jumps on the idea, claiming that he is indeed like King David and Noah.

Malcolm does not confront any of his feelings of betrayal in his conversation with Elijah. Instead, he buries them and proposes a tactical approach to the issue as if he hasn't also been personally hurt by this.

In order to prepare for the moment when the rumors go public, Malcolm decides to tell six other ministers about them and about his planned teachings. However, this move is then recast by the Chicago headquarters as Malcolm spreading rumors about Elijah, rather than as him trying to defend him. The plan, apparently, is to unite Muslims around blaming and hating Malcolm, rather than seeing Elijah's sin.

Once again, Malcolm is betrayed by his willingness to trust other people. By gathering a small circle of people around him in order to save the Nation, he creates the conditions for others to accuse him of doing the exact opposite.

As he grows more and more tired and feels more estranged from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm begins to have contact with a few white reporters. This is huge, as he hasn't had friendly relations with any white person since becoming a Muslim. But one reporter in particular seems very sincere, and they discuss history and archeology together for nearly two hours, giving Malcolm a welcome distraction from his worries.

Throughout the book, Malcolm generally does not discuss personal anecdotes, especially after his conversion. This makes these conversations seem all the more touching and important to him. In it, the reader can see a foreshadowing of Malcolm's increasingly complex and accepting views.

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. The Nation of Islam sends out a directive telling all ministers to make no public comment on the assassination. A few days later, Malcolm goes to an event to speak in Elijah's place, and he delivers a prepared speech on how white America will reap the hate it has sown. When asked about JFK, he calls it "a case of the chickens coming home to roost."

As Malcolm recounts it, this incident was simply a case of unfortunate timing and an insensitive comment, but not particularly different from his past statements. He limits his culpability and tries to convince the reader in advance that any criticism of his words will be overblown.

Malcolm then flies out to see Elijah, where he feels that something bad is going to happen. Elijah brings up Malcolm's comments about JFK, which are in all the major newspapers. Elijah then says that Malcolm will be "silenced," or barred from public speaking, for the next ninety days to allow this to cool down. Shocked but humble, Malcolm submits to the order.

Malcolm is caught off guard, as he did not feel that his comments were truly incendiary. However, he still wants to show his respect for the chain of command, despite the doubts he has been gathering about Elijah.

The Chicago headquarters swiftly informs the press of Malcolm's silencing, and they then put out the word to the Muslim community that he will be reinstated "if he submits." Malcolm clearly reads their implication and feels they are trying to set him up. Finally, he hears that people have begun to loosely talk about how he should be killed for what he's done, a serious threat which he feels could only occur with Elijah's approval.

Malcolm discusses two levels of discourse related to his punishment. There are the official communications coming from headquarters, and there are the gossip and rumors flying around amongst the Muslim community, which both point to a coordinated campaign against him from above.

Under great psychological stress, Malcolm reaches out to his friend Cassius Clay, who invites him and his whole family to come stay with him in Miami as Cassius trains to fight Sonny Liston. While they are no longer friends, Malcolm says, he is extremely grateful for Cassius's hospitality and support at the time.

Having had his voice "removed" from the discourse around him, Malcolm then physically removes himself from the poisonous atmosphere in New York, giving himself the space to think and recover.

Malcolm meets Cassius in 1962, when he comes into the Muslim restaurant in Detroit before Elijah is about to speak in the mosque. A handsome, likeable person, Cassius and his brother make quite an impression on Malcolm and all the other Muslims present. After that, Cassius continues to pop into various mosques around the country.

Malcolm takes great care to portray Cassius as an imposing figure in both his personality and his physical stature. These details show not only his respect for Cassius, but a tender affection.

Cassius's infectious and genuine personality really touches Malcolm, and he invites him to his home to meet his family, who all love him. They discuss many things together, including how Cassius intentionally acts cocky in public, hoping to psyche out and trick Sonny Liston into coming to the fight underprepared.

Here Malcolm testifies to the intelligence of his friend, who is often criticized within the media as just a big mouth. Those boasts, he tells us, are actually strategic and said with intent.

Back in 1963, Malcolm is at his wits' end both emotionally and psychologically. He compares his sudden estrangement from the Nation to suddenly being asked for a divorce. Malcolm goes around Cassius's training camp, talking with people and with the press, but he's mostly not paying attention. Instead, he's thinking through the last twelve years, trying to come to grips with this "divorce," as he is more and more certain that after ninety days, he will not be reinstated. Instead, he will probably be suspended indefinitely, and then either isolated or assassinated.

Malcolm's difficult emotional break with the Nation of Islam illustrates how the Nation had become much more than simply his faith organization. Rather, the Nation had been his family. It is also important to note that the Christian Church is often called the "Bride of Christ," so Malcolm's metaphor is actually a classic religious image.

For one of the first times, Malcolm emphasizes how important Betty is to him. As a loving, supportive, and strong wife, she holds him up in this difficult period, and she understands exactly what he is going through. While this surprises him, he feels reassured by her support.

It is extremely interesting that Malcolm professes his love for his wife right after describing his split with the Nation as a "divorce." Breaking with one "spouse" allows him to truly appreciate the other.

Malcolm is still trying to convince himself that Elijah's mistakes were actually divine prophecy, and therefore not really mistakes. But he cannot deny that Elijah has not stood up and either admitted his mistake or maintained it was prophecy; instead, he has chosen to hide behind the scandal being created around Malcolm. That lack of bravery then destroys Malcolm's faith in Elijah as a nearly divine figure. And finally, after so many years of blindly following Elijah, Malcolm begins to think for himself.

Elijah's mistake is essentially two-fold. First, he doesn't admit his sin, and everyone must be able to ask for forgiveness and admit their shortcomings. Second, he uses Malcolm as a scapegoat to cover up his cowardice. These mistakes point to deep character flaws, which are even more serious than his original sinful relationships.

Malcolm briefly returns with his family to New York, but he wants to support Cassius in his fight, especially as Cassius is now a Muslim. So he flies back to Florida to be his spiritual advisor. There, Malcolm tells Cassius that this fight is a modern crusade, and Allah is on his side against the Christian Liston, who represents a religion which has oppressed people of color for centuries.

Both Sonny Liston and Cassius Clay are African American men. However, Malcolm has maintained that Christianity is a means for brainwashing black people to support white society. Therefore, in Malcolm's view, only Cassius is truly fighting for himself and for other people of color.

For Malcolm, Sonny Liston represents the class of wealthier black individuals who move to white neighborhoods and try to integrate into their communities. Cassius, on the other hand, loves to take evening walks through the black neighborhoods, a trait he shares in common with Malcolm.

According to Malcolm, Sonny's rejection of black society becomes complete when he earns more money and chooses to leave black neighborhoods in order to appear more "white."

The night of the fight comes, and Malcolm and Cassius stand at the back of the Convention Hall, watching Cassius's younger brother in his first professional fight. Cassius is extremely calm and collected, dressed in a black tuxedo. After his brother wins, Cassius goes to prepare for his own fight. Malcolm and Cassius pray together to Allah, and then it's fight time.

Cassius takes on a truly heroic aura before the fight. Dressed in a smart tuxedo, calm and praying to Allah, he is not only a modern crusader, but a modern Greek hero, nearly a demigod. His victory seems inevitable. (And indeed, his continued legendary status even many decades later affirms this view.)

Malcolm rather drily describes the fight as going "according to plan." From his point of view, this was essentially an intellectual fight, in which Cassius knew that Liston would get tired quickly, and then he would have the advantage.

Malcolm's brief description of the fight reflects his attitude that Cassius's victory was never in doubt, but it also reflects the Nation of Islam's doctrinal rejection of sports.

That night, Cassius and a few friends come over to Malcolm's motel. There, they simply talk while Cassius eats ice cream. After Cassius the "boyish king" feels sleepy and takes a nap, he decides to go back home.

While Cassius previously appeared godlike, now he is childlike. In fact, Malcolm's tender description could even have been about his own child.

The next morning at breakfast, Cassius tells the press in simple terms that he is a follower of Islam. A media uproar is created at the idea of a Muslim holding the heavyweight title. Malcolm sees this as ridiculous, especially when Floyd Patterson, another African American boxer, declares that he wants to fight Cassius as a Catholic.

To Malcolm (at this point at least) unity amongst all African Americans is more important than a confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Malcolm believes that Floyd Patterson should support Cassius regardless of his religion.

An official at Mosque Seven orders one of his underlings to rig Malcolm's car to explode. However, as the assistant is aware of how faithful Malcolm is to the Nation, he cannot do it and instead goes to Malcolm with the news. Afterwards, Malcolm begins to see Muslim men following him everywhere. These threats finally allow him to begin his "psychological divorce" from the Nation.

This is the first explicit claim Malcolm makes that the Nation of Islam wants to kill him and has the means to do so. However, the propaganda machine set up against him cannot undermine the solid reputation he has been building up for years.

Assessing his position, Malcolm recognizes that he has a huge microphone and that anything he says will be picked up by the news. He also notes that he has quite a following of non-Muslims in New York, who started to respect him after the confrontation with the police years back. Furthermore, his knowledge of the streets and their slang lets him get much closer to the people, especially the poor, than is possible for other black leaders. And finally, he understands that the "most dangerous black man in America was the ghetto hustler."

While he may have been silenced within the Nation of Islam, Malcolm has an audience that extends far beyond the mosques. In fact, he not only has the ability to speak to the black community at large, but he has a responsibility *to continue to be a leader for that community.*

Hustlers have no professional skills and no money to fall back on. They must make their entire living constantly feeding off working people through various criminal activities. However, this constant struggling also makes them very frustrated, and with no ethics or religion, this frustration can quickly bubble up into violence.

Malcolm is describing the situation of hustlers that he sees around him, but he is also referencing his own life and experiences, of course.

Malcolm first became aware of this potential for violence at a rally in Harlem. Malcolm felt he had been used by the other leaders to draw a crowd, and so he walked off stage. This caused a lot of young people to get upset, and the rally had the potential to explode into a riot any minute. Malcolm jumped up on a car and was able to calm the crowd down; the papers later said he was the only black man in the country who "could stop a race riot – or start one."

There are a few takeaways from this episode. First, Malcolm does not want to start riots, hence why he stopped one. Second, the masses respect him and will follow his leadership. And finally, he may not be advocating for violence, but without changes in the current oppressive system, it can emerge at any minute.

Malcolm reflects that a lot of this anger has been caused by more or less forcing blacks into urban ghettos where there are then no avenues for them to make a stable life for themselves. That anger and resentment has been bubbling across America, and the riots of the summer of 1964 are just a taste of how bad it could be, if something isn't done.

This description sounds very similar to Malcolm's description of hustlers. Like hustlers who must struggle to survive every day, the black community at large must struggle with no long-term way out.

Malcolm's task seems clear. He knows that he already occupies a leadership position in the ghettos and that the people trust him. So, he must build an organization that is committed to raising them up and curing them of their various "sicknesses."

Notice how "Messianic" Malcolm can seem at times. In other words, he almost presents himself as the only one who can save Black America.

According to Malcolm, the black population is mentally sick from accepting white culture as good, spiritually sick from Christianity's false promise of brotherhood, and economically sick from a lack of black-owned businesses that could support the local economy. Above all, it is politically sick from allowing white men to divide them up between Republicans and Democrats, when neither group helps them. In order to wield any political power, the black population must learn to vote in a bloc for their own interests.

The scope of Malcolm's new organization goes beyond the goals of the Nation of Islam. While the Nation had emphasized increasing social awareness, starting black-owned businesses, and accepting its brand of Islam, Malcolm also recognizes the need to push into electoral politics to assert the demands of the black community to the nation.

As Malcolm begins to gather a picture in his mind of his planned organization, he calls a meeting in the ballroom at the Theresa Hotel. More and more Muslims from Mosque Seven have broken with the Nation to come with Malcolm, and he has increasing support from non-Muslims across class boundaries. The news of the upcoming meeting generates a huge outpouring of support from across the country, as many people wish to get involved.

At the outset, Malcolm's new project appears very promising. He has gathered exactly the kind of coalition he hoped for: Muslim and Non-Muslim black people across class boundaries. Perhaps, however, it will be too good to be true.

Malcolm calls a press conference and announces that he is starting a new mosque called Muslim Mosque, Inc. The mosque will serve as the spiritual basis for a larger movement meant to represent and work for the interests of the African American community.

The new organization reflects Malcolm's changed values. Religion still serves as his base, but the organization's responsibilities go beyond matters of faith.

Malcolm continues to be aware that he is being followed and that the Muslim brothers intend to kill him. He knows this because he himself taught them to follow Allah's will, which may include killing an enemy of the Nation.

When Malcolm served the Nation blindly, he inadvertently set up the mechanism for his own death if he were ever to leave the Nation.

However, Malcolm does not feel prepared to start a new mosque without first preparing himself spiritually. He travels to Boston to once again ask for the help of his sister, Ella. He tells her he wants to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, a spiritual requirement for all Muslims at least once in their lives. She agrees to help immediately.

Malcolm has never had any financial resources of his own since he left prison, so he must ask humbly for help. Ella's generosity reflects their deep bond and her awareness of his social calling to lead.

CHAPTER 17: MECCA

"The pilgrimage to Mecca, known as Hajj, is a religious obligation that every orthodox Muslim fulfills, if humanly able, at least once in his or her lifetime." As the Nation of Islam is very different from what Malcolm calls "orthodox Islam," he has generally been quite hostile when other Muslims suggested he make the Hajj and learn more about the religion. But now that he's broken with the Nation, he wonders if he should expand his thinking and religious knowledge, an idea which Wallace Muhammad supports as well.

Malcolm's exit from the Nation of Islam allows him to expand his thinking not just politically, but also spiritually. By becoming more independent, he also becomes more willing to listen to opposing views and perspectives, rather than simply rejecting them as hostile towards his own view.

Often, Arab Muslims urge Malcolm to talk with Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, a professor from Cairo and a well-respected scholar. One day, they are introduced by a newspaperman and proceed to have a very cordial conversation. Dr. Shawarbi makes quite an impression on Malcolm.

This interaction stands in contrast with Malcolm's previous interactions with orthodox Muslims, which were normally hostile and unproductive.

Malcolm also feels inspired by his sister Ella, who has freely broken with the Nation of Islam. Instead, she's joined an orthodox mosque and opened a school for teaching Arabic. After talking all night, she firmly believes that Malcolm should go on the Hajj, using the funds she had been saving to make the trip herself. Her independence and generosity have both been very important factors in Malcolm's life, and he is very grateful to her.

Ella has always been an independent character, unafraid to break ties that are no longer good for her. Early in his life, Malcolm respected her for having "broken" with two husbands who were unable to keep up with her and for establishing her own business, as she has done once again.

When applying for a visa, Malcolm is told that he will need approval from Dr. Shawarbi—a fact Malcolm takes as a sign of Divine Providence. Dr. Shawarbi readily approves, and also gives Malcolm a book by Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam, an Egyptian intellectual who wished to send this copy specifically to Malcolm. Dr. Shawarbi also gives Malcolm the contact information for his own son in Cairo and for Abd's son, Omar Azzam, who works in Jedda.

Malcolm insists throughout his journey that his good fortune is a sign of Divine Providence. This proves that of all the experiences he has undergone in life, this one will be the most formative and the most important.

The beginning of Malcolm's trip is marked by surprising instances of friendliness from strangers, like his two Muslim seatmates on the flight to Frankfurt or the white boy from Rhode Island in the airport men's room. Malcolm notes that the shopkeepers in Frankfurt are more "humane." Many pilgrims of all nationalities are also there on their way to Cairo (and then on to Mecca).

As soon as Malcolm leaves the United States, he feels integrated in society in a way he never has before, even with white people from *America.*

Once he arrives in Cairo, Malcolm encounters people of all races in what is a festive and friendly atmosphere. He parts ways with his new flight friend, who gives him his number and promises to get Malcolm in contact with an English-speaking group that would be headed to Mecca soon. After spending a couple of days sightseeing in Cairo and having a lovely dinner with a very intelligent couple, Malcolm meets up with the Hajj group, who speak English perfectly and welcome him warmly.

It is important for the reader to keep in mind the environment that Malcolm has just left – a hostile New York full of racist white authorities and black Muslims gossiping about his disloyalty and threatening to kill him. His friendly reception in Cairo is therefore all the more stunning and soothing.

At the Cairo airport, thousands of pilgrims are entering the state of Ihram, "a spiritual and physical state of consecration." In this state, all pilgrims don two simple white towels, a pair of sandals, and two small bags for carrying their papers and money. Then they call out, "Labbayka!" (Here I come, O Lord!) to demonstrate their enthusiasm for the journey.

The pilgrims' garb reflects their humility as they prepare to enter the Holy Land. Before God, all pilgrims are now equal.

On the plane, Malcolm sees people of all races, ready to make the Hajj together. He feels a profound sense of fraternity and equality. Meanwhile, word spreads that he is an American, and the captain comes to meet him. Malcolm is taken to see the cockpit, where another dark-skinned man is in the co-pilot's seat. Surrounded by Muslims treating him like a brother and watching black men fly a plane, the experience begins to feel surreal, or as Malcolm puts it, "Brother, I *knew* Allah was with me."

On his journey, Malcolm has entered something like a parallel universe, where he is treated as an honored guest, rather than a second-class citizen, and where black men can be pilots. It's almost as if he is in a mystical or dream-like haze.

The plane lands in Jedda, where the airport is even more packed than in Cairo. The airport has only three kinds of people: pilgrims, their guides (known as Mutawaf), and the airport officials. The airport resounds with the sound of chanting and praying as Malcolm's group makes their way slowly towards customs.

At the airport, Malcolm enters in a mass of people who all share the same state of mind. He is no longer one man on a journey, but a part of something larger than himself.

Malcolm is nervous, as he knows an American passport will raise questions. Sure enough, the customs official protests in Arabic, and despite the objections from the others in his group, he is told that he must go before the Mahgama Sharia to determine whether or not he is an authentic Muslim, before he can enter Mecca. Sadly, and with much concern, his friends are forced to continue on their journey without him.

Malcolm's detention is largely because of his country of origin, which is not known to have a large population of Muslims. However, it also embodies his own questioning of his legitimacy as a Muslim after years spent in the sect-like Nation of Islam.

Feeling very alone, Malcolm is taken by a Mutawaf to a dormitory above the airport to await his hearing the next day. While the other pilgrims in the room watch them, his guide shows him the proper Muslim prayer postures. Now Malcolm feels very embarrassed that as a minister of Islam, he has never learned these before, and his body's lack of flexibility struggles to perform them.

As Malcolm tries to perform the prayer postures, his body betrays him; not only does he not know them, but he cannot physically perform them. This certainly creates doubts in his mind and in the reader's as to whether he will be able to pass his hearing.

When the sun rises and the other Muslims in his room wake up, they all watch each other attentively. Malcolm takes particular note of the multi-use nature of rugs in Arabic culture. Individual rugs are used for praying, while large communal rugs are used for eating, talking, sleeping, settling disputes, and teaching. He finally realizes why the rugs he once stole in Boston were so intricate and beautiful, given their cultural origins.

In this moment Malcolm makes a connection to his past, when he was less educated and less cultured. But even now he has only come to realize how complex these rugs are within their social setting, which mirrors his growing appreciation of the complexities of Arabic culture at large.

One of the others in the room tries to talk with Malcolm, and Malcolm begins to teach him English. When Malcolm says "Muhammad Ali Clay," the whole room perks up, as they believe *he* is Muhammad Ali. Malcolm soon learns that Ali is a hero to the entire Muslim world.

Here the specter of Malcolm's friend is raised, bringing interest and care from those around him. In a way, Clay is still helping Malcolm along his journey.

When the Mutawaf from earlier returns, he takes Malcolm down to the mosque for morning prayer. Malcolm knows that before prayer come ablutions, but even these he doesn't perform correctly. Then, inside the mosque, he does his best to copy his guide's movements and to quietly mumble along to the Arabic prayers.

To a certain extent, the reader may believe that Malcolm is indeed a fraud and shouldn't be admitted to the Holy Land, or they may see his behavior as following the advice, "Fake it 'till you make it."

Back in his dormitory, Malcolm is offered food and tea by many of his roommates, but he politely refuses. Partially he does not want to impose, but he is also wary of the communal, utensil-less style of eating. So he decides to go exploring for food of his own. Malcolm finds a restaurant, orders a whole roasted chicken, and then proceeds to eat it with his hands just as everyone around him does. On another exploration, he meets two English-speaking Muslims, but they are just about to leave, making Malcolm feel alone again.

Malcolm's journey through the Holy Land is a constant education in learning to adjust to different customs and ways of being. As eating is one of the most fundamental parts of the day, his discomfort with Middle Eastern dining habits stands in for his general discomfort as he slowly adapts to an entirely new culture.

That evening after prayer, Malcolm suddenly gets a wave of inspiration and remembers that he has Omar Azzam's phone number, and that he lives in Jedda. Malcolm rushes downstairs and asks a group of airport officials to please call Omar for him. Seeing that he is an American, they agree. Omar then shows up within half an hour, a very warm man whose only concern is that Malcolm didn't reach out to him sooner. He promptly has him released and brings him to his home.

Omar feels that Malcolm has made a "mistake," but it is not a normal one. Rather, he feels hurt that Malcolm did not think to reach out and depend on him sooner for support. Malcolm's time in the Holy Land will teach him to expand his level of trust in and dependence on others who care about him.

Malcolm is blown away by the hospitality shown to him by Omar, a civil engineer, and by his father, Abd, who is an extremely well-respected scholar at the United Nations. While it is quite late when they arrive at Omar's home, everyone is waiting for him and treats him like a brother. Abd is also quite outraged that Malcolm was made to stay at the airport for a whole day, and goes to make a phone call.

These men, whom Malcolm does not know and who have nothing to gain from a poor, scandal-mired Nation of Islam preacher, nonetheless treat him as a brother, something Malcolm cannot even say about his "brothers" in the Nation of Islam.

Malcolm is then ushered into a car and brought to the Jedda Palace Hotel. Omar leaves him in his father's suite, while Abd spends the night at his son's house. Malcolm says that he would have protested this arrangement, but by the time he knew what was going on, he was alone in the beautiful suite.

Malcolm is overwhelmed by their generosity and selflessness. In fact, one may say that he at first failed to understand his situation because he couldn't even imagine such generosity coming from strangers.

That morning, Malcolm reflects on the significance of Abd's generosity. Here was a white-complexioned man with international influence and family relations to the rulers of Saudi Arabia, and with nothing to gain by treating Malcolm so well, and he nonetheless gave up his suite simply for Malcolm's comfort. This forces Malcolm to reassess his views on the "white man." Rather than racism being tied primarily to complexion, he says, it is actually a set of attitudes towards whiteness and those perceived as not white.

While the contemporary reader may find it odd that Malcolm identifies Arabs as "white," rather than as people of color, this identification allows Malcolm to make a split between "light-complexioned people" and inherent or built-in racism. In other words, this man's behavior proves that light skin doesn't necessarily lead to racism.

After writing in his notebook and praying multiple times to thank Allah for protecting him, Malcolm sleeps for several hours. When he receives a call from Omar informing him that he will come to collect him for dinner, Malcolm gets dressed and goes to the lobby of the hotel, where the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who lives down the hall, is being received by the press.

Malcolm's actions at first seem to reflect a strange paradox. On the one hand, he is humble before Allah as he thanks and praises him. On the other, he notes the grandeur of his fellow guests, which may seem like bragging, but actually underlines Abd's generosity.

At dinner, Malcolm is once again blown away by Abd's hospitality and intelligence; he has a command of many topics of conversation and world affairs. He also teaches Malcolm how the idea of color superiority is an idea that originates and dominates in the West.

In some ways, Abd takes on the role of teacher and father figure recently abandoned by Elijah. He temporarily guides Malcolm's new ways of thinking.

The next morning, Malcolm goes before the judge of the Hajj Committee Court. The judge is very kind as he enquires into Malcolm's sincerity as a Muslim. Once he confirms that he is indeed a true Muslim, he gives Malcolm two books on Islam, and says that he hopes he becomes a great preacher in America one day.

After all of Malcolm's fears and self-doubts, he finds that the judge is as friendly and supportive as the other Middle-Eastern Muslims that he has so far encountered.

After having lunch at the Hotel and then once again sleeping, Malcolm is awoken by a call from the Saudi Prince Faisal's office, saying that a car has been commissioned to take him on the Hajj after dinner. The car breezes through all the checkpoints, and Malcolm is astonished by such star treatment.

Malcolm always emphasizes that he feels humbled by the generosity others show to him, but this may make the reader question if Malcolm is a little blind to his own fame and star power.

Mecca is an ancient city filled with winding streets and thousands of pilgrims headed for the Great Mosque. There, Malcolm performs the ablutions with a Mutawaf, and then enters the mosque, which is being renovated by Omar Azzam. Thousands of pilgrims are praying, chanting, and walking in seven circles around the Ka'ba, a large black stone at the center of the mosque. After his seventh time around, Malcolm prostrates himself to pray while his Mutawaf protects him from being trampled.

This experience overwhelms Malcolm with the majesty of the mosque and the piety and unity of the thousands of Muslims, walking together around the Ka'ba. As before, he joins a living community that makes him one of many.

Over the next few days, Malcolm's Mutawaf takes him through the other essential rituals of the Hajj journey. They drink from the well of Zem Zem, run between the Safa and Marwa hills, and climb Mount Arafat, where they give thanks to Allah. Malcolm's state of Ihram has ended.

It is important that the Ihram had a clear starting point (in the Cairo airport) and a clear end point; these mark off the in-between time as something truly special.

Sitting with other Muslims who have also just finished the Hajj, Malcolm tells them about the contrast between the brotherhood he experienced here with the racism found in America. They seem shocked at the terrible plight of black men in America. Malcolm, meanwhile, is grateful for the feeling of oneness with others and with God.

Malcolm, of course, can never forget where he comes from and what drives him. Even in this moment of oneness, he has an internal pull to discuss and spread the truth about oppression in America.

Malcolm writes a letter to his wife Betty, explaining that Allah has allowed him greater insight into the truth of Islam. Muslim society is essentially color-blind, and he has found great solace here. He is positive that Betty will instantly understand and join him in his newfound perspective.

Malcolm takes for granted that Betty will understand his conversion. This could reflect his respect for her intelligence, or it could mean that he simply assumes she will always follow him.

Malcolm then writes more versions of essentially the same letter to his sister Ella, Dr. Shawarbi, Wallace Muhammad (who had advocated for the Nation to move towards orthodox Islam) and to his assistants at the new Muslim Mosque, Inc. He asks the latter to distribute his letter among the press. Malcolm is himself astounded at the profound shift in his mentality. And yet, his "whole life had been a chronology of – *changes*."

Each of the changes in Malcolm's life has been accompanied by a kind of education. Now, he has learned about the possibility of a race-blind society of brothers and sisters united in a common faith, which pushes him to be more open-minded and hopeful.

In his letter, Malcolm recounts what he's experienced on the Hajj, and especially emphasizing the sense of communion and brotherhood he felt with men of all colors and races, including the whitest of men, as they worshipped the same God together. He believes that it is up to the younger generation to see the destructive nature of racism and turn towards the "spiritual path of truth" in order to avoid disaster. Finally, he contrasts the way he has been treated with the utmost dignity and honor by the relatives and servants of Princes to how in America, he is simply "a Negro." Malcolm signs the letter, "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, (Malcolm X)."

When Reginald came to visit Malcolm in prison, he asked him to reflect on how every white person in his life had treated him as worthless. Now, Malcolm has experiences of the exact opposite, and these new experiences force him to begin to see a new path forward. In short, self-examination leads to change. Malcolm then makes that change very tangible by identifying himself with a new name ("El-Hajj" being an honorific for one who has completed the Hajj, and "Shabazz" being an ancient African Islamic name that Malcolm had actually used briefly before taking the "X").

CHAPTER 18: EL-HAJJ MALIK EL-SHABAZZ

Prince Faisal has declared Malcolm an official guest of the state and loans him a car and a chauffeur to take him around Mecca. Along with seeing the sites, he is able to participate in several special prayer rituals. While he is learning the Arabic prayers, his ankles still hurt from the difficult positions.

Malcolm has now been recognized by Saudi Arabia as a royal guest, which is an even higher honor than the hospitality shown to him thus far.

Meanwhile, Malcolm has grown to be very comfortable with Arab culture, including eating and drinking from the same pots and glasses and washing from the same pitcher. While sleeping under the stars he observes that everyone snores in the same language.

Malcolm's growing ease with the cultural norms around him shows that he is becoming less suspicious of all strangers and more mature in his education towards a more communal style of living.

Never before has Malcolm felt as helpless as he did in the Middle East without any knowledge of Arabic. He wishes to have a basic understanding of the language by the next time he comes on the Hajj. Thankfully, he has had the support of many English-speaking people who have translated for him and guided him along. At the same time, he recognizes that Muslims do not speak the "American language" very well – that is, the language of modern advertising. With a more proactive effort, he thinks, they could have millions more converts to Islam.

As always, Malcolm sees himself as someone who accepts a given method and then devotes himself to and improves it. He has found fulfillment in traditional Sunni Islam, so now he sees it as his responsibility to use his skills to more effectively spread this system of belief throughout the United States.

Wherever he goes, Malcolm is asked about the system of racial discrimination in America. For his part, he never wastes an opportunity to spread the news of the plight of African Americans. He has conversations with both regular pilgrims from all over the world and with learned religious leaders, such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Often he gives public lectures within the lobby of the Jedda Palace Hotel, where he experiences solidarity with other people of color.

Many of Malcolm's listeners in other countries are often shocked to learn about the racial oppression within the United States. Malcolm is therefore starting a dialogue, which will hopefully open other people to support his movement from around the world. It also gives him (and, ideally, his readers) an important new perspective that race relations don't have *to be the way they are in America.*

In order to be effective leaders in the United States, Malcolm believes black people should first travel extensively in non-white parts of the world to form bonds of solidarity and to learn new ways of looking at and overcoming oppression. These leaders would then have the ability to start thinking internationally, possibly even coordinating within the United Nations to demand equal rights for African Americans.

Malcolm's thinking and influence has clearly expanded to focus on strategies that are no longer about simply passing out fliers on the street corner, but about making international alliances that can hold sway over America's politicians.

After praying that it would happen, Malcolm is invited to have an audience with Prince Faisal. The prince strikes Malcolm as a dignified yet humble man who is very warm with him. Faisal clearly condemns the Nation of Islam as having the wrong idea about Islam, to which Malcolm explains that he now wishes to discover "true Islam." The Prince approves, saying there is "no excuse for ignorance."

Malcolm's humble tone and description of the Prince shows his admiration for him, and he chooses to take Faisal's light reprimand in stride. In fact, Malcolm's lifetime spent learning reflects his agreement with the Prince's feelings.

From Mecca, Malcolm flies to Beirut to address the faculty of the American University of Beirut. He receives an extremely supportive and emotional response from the African student body who clamor to hug him. Then, while walking the streets, he notes the more liberal dress of women in public, which he attributes to French influence. He wonders how material progress and morality can possibly be combined.

To a certain extent, Malcolm still views European society through the lens of the Nation of Islam. The closer a country is to Europe, the more likely it is to have been morally polluted by Europe's more "liberal" societies.

Arriving in Nigeria, Malcolm is invited to dinner by a professor whom he previously met in the United States. At the dinner, the other guests ask him if he knows anything about a recent murder in Harlem by a group called the Blood Brothers—which has been linked to Malcolm. While Malcolm knows nothing of the murder, he tells them that he is not surprised by the media using him as a scape-goat.

During his time away from the U.S., Malcolm is taking the time to learn and grow. However, the forces within the American media (and perhaps the Nation) use his absence and silence as an opportunity to slander him publicly, further corrupting his image back home.

At Ibadan University, Malcolm speaks about the need for a Pan-African movement that would unite African Americans and Africans in the fight for civil rights and justice. He receives very sharp and intelligent questions from the students, and when one man stands up to denounce him, he is run off by the crowd. Afterwards, Malcolm is made an honorary member of the Nigerian Muslim's Student Society and given the name "Omowale" – "the son who has come home."

Malcolm's interactions with Pan-African thought began when he was just a child, listening to his father lead meetings on Marcus Garvey's philosophy. Now, he has come full circle and is himself advocating for a Pan-African movement.

While in Nigeria, Malcolm speaks with Peace Corps members, makes radio and television appearances, and meets with local government officials. The latter describe how the US Embassy tries to give the impression that the "race issue" in the US will soon be solved, while the whole world knows otherwise.

The first step to creating solidarity has always been to first spread the news that there is a problem which needs fixing. In this case, Malcolm is confronting the United States government's propaganda that there is no "race issue."

From Lagos, the journey continues on to Ghana, the birthplace of the Pan-African movement. Yet Ghana is also full of American businessmen, intent on extracting its resources. These men smile and pretend to not be racist, yet Malcolm sees them as just as bad as the violent bigots in America.

These colonialist businessmen plan to extract resources, enacting violence against the Earth and taking advantage of the local population by not properly sharing the profits, mirroring racist exploitation at home.

Julian Mayfield leads a group of African-American ex-patriots living in Ghana, which includes figures such as Maya Angelou, who have been anxiously awaiting Malcolm's arrival; they even created the "Malcolm X Committee" to organize his speaking schedule. At this dinner, where he is regarded as the symbol of a militant black struggle, he is heartened by their support for that very movement.

In Ghana, Malcolm is seen as a hero and a leader by these other well-known African-American figures. This solidarity helps to give him confidence, even while things are turbulent back home.

The local press, meanwhile, sees Malcolm as a hero in the fight for racial justice and has also been anticipating his arrival as the beginning of an international struggle. At his first press conference, he is inevitably asked about his split with the Nation, which he attributes to political differences, while affirming Elijah's very important message for African Americans. He is also firmly corrected from using the word "Negro" in favor of "Afro-American," the preferred term in Ghana.

Despite the threats on his life and the negative press generated about him, Malcolm still refuses to talk poorly about Elijah. This restraint reflects how he still sees the Nation as generally a force for good, even if he cannot be a part of it any longer.

The Malcolm X Committee keeps Malcolm extremely busy with press conferences, dinners, and visits to Embassies, including with the Algerian and Chinese Ambassadors, both of whom he finds to be perceptive men committed to a militant struggle against oppression.

Malcolm continues to interact with people who have participated in or supported militant insurrections, which shows the range of possibilities he is considering for the future of his own struggle.

At the University of Ghana, Malcolm addresses a large crowd of both white and black people. He denounces the false manner in which whites treat Ghanaians nicely while only wanting to take their minerals. Meanwhile, they treat Afro-Americans terribly back home.

Malcolm connects global capitalist expansion with racial oppression back home—an insightful if controversial view, which the reader may agree with or see as an unfair indictment of these individual white business people.

One night, Malcolm is invited to meet most of the top officials in Ghana's government, where he is entertained with as much honor as when W.E.B. Du Bois came to Ghana. A few days later, he addresses the Ghanaian Parliament, calling for them to support Afro-Americans the way they support blacks in South Africa, a speech which receives a warm reception.

It is very interesting that Malcolm draws a parallel between the situations in America and South Africa, given that South Africa was internationally denounced throughout the years of apartheid, while the U.S. was not.

Malcolm then meets with the president of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who had once studied in the United States and was therefore very aware of the African American struggle. They both agree that Pan-Africanism would be the most effective strategy going forward for all those of African heritage. Malcolm calls this meeting his highest honor while in Ghana.

Malcolm is decried as a "reverse racist" and fanatic in the U.S., but his warm receptions by world leaders abroad attest to the bias and one-sidedness of these charges.

Malcolm addresses another group of students committed to continuing "Ghana's intellectual revolution," when an African American man stands up, offering a defense of white America. He is quickly booed into silence and regarded as an agent of the CIA, while others call for him to join them and learn something.

In the United States, it was common for African Americans to disagree with Malcolm's harsh statements and defend white Americans, but that kind of talk here is regarded with suspicion, as this audience hasn't been as indoctrinated into the racist hierarchy of American society as all Americans—even black Americans—have been.

The Chinese Ambassador holds a dinner in Malcolm's honor, followed by a film screening. From there, he is taken to a lively party at the Press Club where he calls on everyone to enjoy themselves, but to not forget all those still struggling for freedom, like Nelson Mandela (who was recently arrested for blowing up a power station).

Nowadays Mandela is generally seen as a symbolic, heroic, and relatively uncontroversial figure, but it is important to remember that Mandela was widely considered a terrorist in his time, making Malcolm's comment of support for him far more radical.

Malcolm attends a luncheon hosted by the Nigerian High Commissioner the next day, who speaks to his own experiences of racism in America. Then, while holding up a photo of Malcolm and an illustration of a royal Nigerian Muslim from four hundred years ago, he declares them to be brothers. As a symbol of their brotherhood, he gifts Malcolm a beautiful robe and turban like the one worn in the picture.

An important component of his travels throughout Africa has been the opportunity for Malcolm to create a personal and cultural connection to Africa. This gift symbolizes that Malcolm is part of a lineage that makes him a "brother" in both race and religion.

Afterwards, Malcolm is taken by Shirley Graham Du Bois to see the home of her late husband, the great writer W. E. B. Du Bois. She tells him about how he had a very close personal relationship with President Nkrumah.

This visit is something like a miniature pilgrimage, but this time it's to go see the home of an "American saint," a man who fought for racial equality on Malcolm's home turf.

As Malcolm prepares to leave Ghana, he runs into Cassius Clay, who has been in the country for a few days. As Cassius is still aligned with Elijah and the Nation, they barely speak, but Malcolm does sincerely wish him well.

This broken relationship weighs heavy on Malcolm's heart, as he and Cassius had been as close as family, a situation which recalls Malcolm's rejection of his brother, Reginald. (And in a tragic echo of Malcolm's sentiments regarding Reginald, Muhammad Ali would later say that turning his back on Malcolm was one of the things he most regretted in life.)

The entire Malcolm X Committee meets Malcolm in the lobby and accompanies him to the airport. As they say their goodbyes, five Ambassadors arrive to personally wish him well – an honor leaving him speechless.

This gesture is a final acknowledgement of Malcolm's international standing, despite his controversial reputation in America.

Malcolm then travels quickly through Liberia, Dakar, Morocco, and finally to Algiers, Algeria. There, he talks with ordinary people who hate America for having supported the French colonizers, and he admires these revolutionaries' courage.

To Malcolm, the Algerian citizens who have overthrown colonialism are a view of what African Americans could be like if racial oppression in America ever ended.

When Malcolm's plane touches down at JFK Airport on May 21, 1964, he is met by the largest press contingent he's ever seen. While he's been gone, lots of violence and the formation of African American Rifle Clubs has been blamed on him, and they now want to hear his comments. Instead, he tries to argue why African Americans could make a case against the US government for a "denial of human rights."

When Malcolm arrives back in the United States, it is as if he and the press no longer speak the same language. The press is caught up with the current local rumors, while Malcolm is swept up in his new religious feelings and theorizing about possibilities of international action and solidarity.

The reporters then shift to asking Malcolm about his "Letter from Mecca." He elaborates on how his thinking has been broadened to see the possibility of brotherhood between whites and blacks, and he no longer believes all whites to be evil. And yet, he says, the reality is that America is still governed largely by racism, which means that brotherhood is not yet possible on a massive scale. Furthermore, that same racism has been directed at many different people of color, leading to an international movement among oppressed people against white colonizers, like the Vietnamese struggle against the French and Americans.

The press's unease with Malcolm's new ideas may reflect an innate awareness that a real Pan-African movement could cause great social upheaval within the U.S., and so they try to control the narrative and direct Malcolm to focus on the newfound ideas of tolerance he talked about in his letter.

CHAPTER 19: 1965

Malcolm's new political strategy revolves around two main points: an international perspective on the struggle of African Americans in America, and a turn towards orthodox Islam. Unfortunately, there is not much enthusiasm for an international approach, and orthodox Islam is too foreign to catch on in America's black Christian communities. Therefore, Malcolm tries to focus more on a broad social justice approach, but his audiences largely take a "wait-and-see" attitude towards his stance.

Malcolm has always touted his ability to connect with regular black people on the streets of America's cities as one of his strengths, but that time may have finally come to an end. His message has become too foreign for others who have never traveled abroad to jump at the idea of following him.

While in the Holy Land Malcolm had felt whole for the first time in his life, like he was truly standing before the Creator. In that space, he had recalled many memories from his childhood, along with all the time he had spent in solitary confinement, envisioning large crowds before him. He also thought back over his time serving Elijah Muhammad in the Nation and how he had believed in him as a divine figure, rather than just as a man.

By saying that the Holy Land made Malcolm feel "whole," the text already starts to allude to his imminent death. If his life has been made "whole," then it must be nearly "complete" temporally as well.

In short, Malcolm had come into his own as a thinker and felt ready to address African Americans' issues from his own enlightened perspective. Yet the mainstream press now largely ignores his more nuanced views and simply blames him for the unrest happening in many urban ghettos in the summer of 1964. And while he rejects responsibility for that unrest and doesn't endorse physical violence, he sympathizes with the rioters' anger, which gets him labeled as "the angriest Negro in America."

Malcolm increasingly finds himself in a "Bermuda triangle" of media coverage. Everything bad happening within America's cities is blamed on him, while all of the messages he sends out are simply swallowed into the void. His righteous anger is seen as just the typical behavior of a stereotypical poor, angry black man.

Malcolm continues to try and clarify his position as not being against all white people but as only against white racists. He says that he is for violence only if there is no other solution, and says that non-violence in that case would be a non-solution. Yet by saying that white people have committed crimes against black people that might provoke violent responses, he is labeled "a revolutionist."

After having met so many real "revolutionaries" while traveling abroad, Malcolm is certainly open to the idea of violence as a last resort, but his rejection of the label "revolutionist" is an act of humility and respect to those real revolutionaries.

Malcolm then quotes Martin Luther King, Jr. (without naming him) who spoke about how "our nation was born in genocide" against the native population. This violence is upheld as a righteous conquering of the land, while any violence that goes against white society is condemned.

Violence is not a concrete term that applies equally to everyone in society's discourse. This discrepancy in the way we discuss violence is a perfect example of the double standard within a racist society (an idea that still certainly applies today, when breaking shop windows during a riot is seen as "violence" while attacking unarmed Native and Black Americans is not).

According to Malcolm, Christianity may have been founded in the Middle East, but once it spread through Europe, it became entangled with ideas of empire and white supremacy. Under the banners of the Crusade and then later under Christian colonialism, Europeans invaded and dominated Africa by force. Instead of force, Malcolm believes true leadership and love spring from the "spirit."

Malcolm is no longer simply critiquing white Christian society as responsible for racial oppression. Instead, he is now trying to imagine a new way to organize society around values other than conquest, power, and domination.

Reflecting on the spread of Christianity throughout the world, Malcolm now sees the rise of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism as rejections of European society and colonialism. In America, he believes that only Islam can unite black people, as Islam has a long history of confrontation and successful rejection of European imperialism.

When he talks about these religions rejecting Western values and colonialism, Malcolm is referencing the political revolutions and decolonizing projects happening throughout the Third World at this time.

Now, Malcolm sees the decline of Christianity's influence and its spiritual emptiness in America as signs of the end of Western civilization. He sees the biggest reason for this decline as Christianity's inability to recognize or combat racism. This may be Christianity's last chance to repent for the sins committed under its name, including slavery, rape, and murder. Unfortunately, he does not think white society is prepared to ask for forgiveness and find a way to remedy its effects.

In his analysis of Christianity in the West, Malcolm agrees with the opinions of many conservative Christian ministers that the West is in moral decline. But Malcolm sees this as an opportunity for the creation of a new society that is free of ideas of domination and exploitation—ideas that have become inextricably linked to Western Christianity.

After returning to America for a while, Malcolm again goes abroad for 18 weeks, in which he meets many foreign and religious leaders. While abroad, he has a conversation with an American ambassador who tells him that he only sees and prejudges on race when he's in America. Malcolm asks if he thinks this is because of the "American political, economic and social atmosphere," and the ambassador says yes.

This interaction with the ambassador shows how much Malcolm has grown. He not only is willing to have an extended conversation with a white man on racism, but is willing to agree that racism actually a societal (rather than in ethnic or biological) problem.

While abroad, Malcolm is well aware that he is being followed by a US intelligence agent. So one morning while at breakfast, he gets up and confronts this man, asking if there is anything he would like to know. Their conversation quickly turns ugly as the agent accuses Malcolm of being un-American and possibly a Communist, not to mention a "Black Muslim." Malcolm tells the "super-sleuth" that he has changed his religious affiliation.

Unlike his previous interaction with the ambassador, Malcolm's discussion with the agent doesn't go anywhere. The agent is unwilling to rationally discuss things with him, and instead simply throws accusations in his face—showing the consistently antagonistic relationship the U.S. government maintained towards most black leaders during the Civil Rights era.

Then, on a hunch, Malcolm guesses that the man is of Jewish heritage. He tells him that while Jews have been very vocal supporters of civil rights, they have also played negative roles in African American communities by exploiting poor blacks in their business practices. Not only that, but when blacks move into white neighborhoods, the Jews in the community are always the first ones to leave.

This passage is an example of why Malcolm has been accused of being anti-Semitic. While he takes care to avoid racial stereotypes, he nonetheless attributes responsibility for certain behaviors to all Jews.

During Malcolm's time abroad, the 1964 presidential election is in full swing, and reporters constantly ask him for his opinion. While he says he has no preference between Barry Goldwater and President Johnson, he does "commend" Goldwater for his honesty. Goldwater is openly against civil rights, whereas Johnson presents himself as pro-civil rights, but has many segregationist friends in the South.

Malcolm's response shows a contempt for electoral politics, which he sees as more of a show than not. If both candidates are probably racist, he reasons, then at least one of them is honest about it. This reflects his otherwise stated ideas about the American North vs. the South, or liberals vs. conservatives—both are racist, but one group hides it better than the other.

Now conceiving of his movement as a Black Nationalist movement, Malcolm describes his continuing troubles with getting it off the ground. He has gravitated towards Black Nationalism as a multi-religious movement with an emphasis on black solidarity, but his previous affiliation with the Nation continues to hinder his efforts.

Unfortunately, all those years he spent with the Nation of Islam now make it very difficult for Malcolm to start building the broad coalition group he has been imagining.

The issue, Malcolm writes, is a human one, in which both whites and blacks must do what they can. Whites must combat the racism of other white people, while black people must become aware of how they have been hypnotized into inaction by a racist society. This presents a stark contrast to the attitude he took with the white female college student years back (who asked him what she could do).

In this new approach, everyone (including white people) has a responsibility and a role to play in creating a just society. Everyone who is willing to take on that responsibility should be encouraged, rather than turned away or demonized.

In regards to his new organization, Malcolm does not want to allow whites to join. On the one hand, they would be more effective at working within white organizations to combat racism. On the other, after seeing how whites in New York used to fetishize black culture and black bodies, Malcolm has an inherent distrust of white people who rush to surround themselves with black people. Not only that, but black organizations that welcome white people inevitably end up being led by those whites, which blunts their political message of black empowerment.

As he has said, Malcolm would like to coordinate efforts with white organizations to combat racism. However, the power dynamics and racist history within American society means that integrated organizations may be less effective (or less equitable) than partnered but parallel organizations.

The most important factor in ending oppression for Malcolm is a commitment to "humanism and moral responsibility." Otherwise, the riots and unrest will simply continue. He sees himself as having the same goal as Martin Luther King's non-violent movement, even if their strategies and discourses vary. Either way, he does sense the impending threat of violence hovering over both movements.

Throughout the book, Malcolm has always avoided criticizing other black leaders by name, but King and his non-violent movement has always been one of Malcolm's implied targets. Now Malcolm aligns himself with King, or at least finds something they have in common.

Since he was a boy and saw his father and uncles die by violence, Malcolm has always had a feeling that his life would end similarly. This does not trouble him, he says, as he sees it as simply inevitable given his hot-headed temperament and fervent beliefs. But this does make him see his current actions as urgent.

Malcolm's stoicism before his death, at least the way it is presented here, taps into a long tradition of writing about martyrs, and it particularly brings to mind the calm acceptance of Jesus Christ before his death.

Malcolm has poured his time into this book so that it might act as a testimony on American society. His time in prison, given the social factors stacked against him, was simply inevitable. He hopes that the reader will understand how he came to see the white man as a devil, and how then he grew to have different views.

This passage, made especially poignant in light of his death, is Malcolm's formal "apology" or explanation for the book: essentially saying, "Please forgive my faults and use my story for good."

Malcolm believes that in his early life, he fell as far as anyone can within American society, but that his fall also led to his eventual joy and happiness in Islam. He has fought as best he could for the black community. His biggest shortcoming, in his opinion, has been his lack of education. With the right opportunities, he might have become a great lawyer, or he might have been able to learn many different languages, including Arabic and Chinese. Even at this point in his life, Malcolm's greatest personal desire is to have the opportunity to learn and study.

Here Malcolm ties together his love of learning and his decades-long fight for racial equality. His knowledge has allowed him to fight for black America on a variety of levels, and his only wish would be to have studied more so that he could have been even more effective.

As previously stated, Malcolm is aware of the death threats against him and regards every day as a borrowed day. This death may come from the Nation of Islam or from white racists. Either way, Malcolm makes a powerful prediction: when he's gone, the press will identify him with hate, which will conceal all the truth he's been trying to spread.

Malcolm's prediction about the media's treatment of his memory will be proven correct. However, this book itself stands as a counterargument against those who would reduce him to simply "violence and hate."

Malcolm acknowledges that he has enjoyed confronting white society while trying to spread the truth. When he felt resistance to his ideas, he felt closer to the truth. And if one day it turns out that he has contributed to destroying racism in America, then he attributes all the credit to Allah, and all the failures to himself.

At the end, Malcolm shows his mischievous side by admitting to having enjoyed fighting the good fight, but he also makes himself into a sacrificial subject by taking all of his works' failings entirely onto himself.

EPILOGUE: ALEX HALEY

After 20 years in the Coast Guard, Alex Haley hears about a new religion called the Nation of Islam, which is only for black people and is led by Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. While visiting the Muslim restaurant in Harlem, Alex proposes to Malcolm the idea of doing a piece on the Nation for Reader's Digest, but Malcolm reacts with skepticism for mainstream news outlets. He agrees to think about it, though, while Alex gets to know some of the very religious members of the group.

Before even beginning the project Malcolm had agreed that Haley could write an epilogue to the book, but the fact that this epilogue was written after Malcolm's death makes it all the more poignant, as well as crucial to a full understanding of the book. In Malcolm's view, if the American government and society are generally oppressive to black people, then a black man should not join the military, which protects that government and society. By serving in the Coast Guard for so long, then, Alex is a suspicious figure, or even a potential traitor to his race.

Finally, Malcolm suggests Alex go to Chicago to ask permission from Elijah. Elijah talks primarily of being under government surveillance while "sizing up" Alex. When Alex returns to Harlem, Malcolm is much more cooperative, but answers all of Alex's questions guardedly. He then sends him to visit other Temples throughout the country.

Early on Haley alludes to the strict hierarchical structure of the Nation. When unsure how to respond or move forward, Malcolm always defers to Elijah's judgment and then follows it wholeheartedly.

Alex publishes his piece, entitled, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks", and he is praised by Elijah and Malcolm for writing an objective piece, as promised. Malcolm then agrees to give Alex an interview for Playboy magazine. Much to his surprise, Playboy publishes his words just as he said them.

Malcolm clearly had bad experiences with the mainstream press which have made him very suspicious, but Alex continues to gain his trust by keeping his word.

Malcolm has now begun to trust Alex as a viable outlet to mainstream news. Then, in 1963, Alex's agent proposes that he ghost write Malcolm's autobiography, but Alex realizes that he knows almost nothing personal about Malcolm, other than that he apparently has a crime-ridden past and is now a very strict Muslim.

In public, Malcolm only presents himself as a servant of the Nation and Elijah Muhammad. These early impressions support Malcolm's self-image as a humble servant, rather than a power-hungry usurper.

Malcolm is caught off guard by Alex's proposal for an autobiography. After considering the proposal, he agrees, on the condition that the book focuses on the Nation of Islam, all the proceeds go to supporting the Nation, and that he gets permission from Elijah. After flying out to Phoenix, Alex receives permission from Elijah. He then goes back to Malcolm, who demands that the book be published with only his own words and that nothing be left out which he wants included. In exchange, Alex asks for Malcolm to commit his time and to allow Alex to write an epilogue.

The negotiations between the ghost writer and his subject are not simply practical and financial. Rather, they are negotiating the very nature of the work itself. Whereas Malcolm would like to make this a tool for the Nation, Alex would like more creative control to focus on Malcolm's life and to offer his own commentary at the end.

The project begins very poorly. Malcolm often arrives visibly exhausted, and he is still unsure of Alex's allegiances. He believes that Alex may be a spy for the FBI, and treats him as such, always addressing him as "Sir."

Malcolm's curtness here may seem somewhat surprising, after we've just read such a warm and personal account of his life. But Haley is giving the background of how that account first came to be.

Just as Alex starts to lose hope, he realizes that Malcolm often scribbles random notes on scrap paper while speaking. Alex begins to bring Malcolm extra napkins with his coffee, and then to collect these notes after the sessions. From these notes, Alex decides to ask Malcolm about his opinions on women, and Malcolm declares all women to be untrustworthy (except his wife Betty, whom he says he trusts seventy-five percent). This is their first productive session, which also leads to more coffee napkin notes.

Alex's attention to Malcolm's scribbles is a stroke of insight that also reminds the reader of Malcolm's own ingenuity and seemingly endless creative energy. Alex has been studying his subject, and he finally has a way in. Malcolm's precise and quantitative measures of trust reflect other ideas he has expressed throughout the book, and again show his logical and practical way of thinking.

The next time Malcolm comes, Alex asks him, on a hunch, about his mother, Louise. Malcolm is so exhausted and emotionally vulnerable at the time that he responds honestly to Alex's question and doesn't stop talking about his childhood until dawn. After that, he never hesitates to share anything with Alex.

Alex figuratively takes on the persona of a psychiatrist, asking his patient about their parents. Malcolm then becomes the hypnotized patient, sharing his most intimate memories almost against his will.

On one memorable night, Malcolm shows up and starts talking about his life as a young man. Suddenly, he jumps up, scat-singing and dancing with a pole for a partner. Finally catching himself, he plops down, "and for the rest of that session, he was decidedly grumpy." In general, however, he expresses no regrets about his former life, as his criminal life was the result of social repression.

Malcolm has a joyous nature inside that wants to burst out, though he generally represses it and grows grumpy at failing to do so. This may then be a sign that his psychological state while in the Nation is not healthy, or at least not natural and happy.

Malcolm cheers up talking about his time in prison, as he would torment the guards by threatening to spread rumors that they were actually light-skinned black men. He talks about the books he read and about how prison changes a man, sets him apart from others.

Malcolm claims to not want to glorify the hustler's life, but he simultaneously wants to assert that ex-cons know things other people never will, for better or worse.

Throughout their interviews, Malcolm continues to show skepticism that his autobiography will be printed faithfully, and he insists that he doesn't want to glorify his own life. At the same time, touching emotional events from the day may trigger him to recall very personal memories from his childhood, or an interesting book he recently read could get him going about education and learning.

Haley has constructed a very logical and linear account of Malcolm's life, but we now learn that their sessions were quite sporadic. Stories came out one at a time and often in relation to events happening in Malcolm's day-to-day life, rather than always emerging chronologically.

After a short trip out of town, Malcolm returns, proudly telling Alex that his questions about his mother Louise had pushed Malcolm to go and visit her. Not only that, but his siblings have arranged to have her released from her mental institution. Malcolm acknowledges that he has blocked her from his mind, as he never felt there was anything he could do to help her. This psychic blocking is one of his weaknesses, he says.

Once again, the two men's relationship is presented as similar to the relationship between a psychiatrist and his therapist. After talking through his past, Malcolm has felt compelled to confront one of his "psychic blocks," and then he comes back to report his progress proudly.

Malcolm's daily conflicts often bleed into his sessions with Alex. If something bad happens to the Nation, he's fuming with anger. If someone (like Martin Luther King) accuses him of being a radical, he declares them insane for *not* being radical. Yet he is also careful to avoid making any statements that might make him appear self-important.

While Malcolm could be affected by touching events during the day, he could also become enraged at what he saw as unfair criticism and persecution.

Malcolm's temper often leads to inflammatory statements in public. Once, he stirs a whole crowd against a white reporter before redirecting their anger away with laughter. These moments are what gain him a reputation as the only black man capable of either starting a riot or stopping one. Malcolm doesn't exactly deny that possibility.

Haley describes Malcolm as a bit mischievous or devilish. He is not a perfectly responsible orator; rather, he enjoys playing with words and with the crowd's emotions, even if that leaves his motives ambiguous. In general, though, he is clearly a magnetic and mesmerizing public figure.

In this time, both Alex and Malcolm get very little sleep, as they stay up late talking and then spend their days going to various events for the Nation. Malcolm's relentless schedule worries Sister Betty, who nonetheless supports her husband. Wherever he goes, Malcolm is recognized in public, and his presence often makes white people around him very uncomfortable. On the other hand, he has a way of commanding the room wherever he makes an appearance.

Malcolm, in a certain sense, is larger than life. His reputation has grown so much that people feel disproportionately either drawn to or repulsed by him. While that has its benefits, it also metaphorically makes him a larger target. (It's also worth noting that he was physically imposing—six foot four, thin, and austerely handsome—and this further made him stand out and command the attention of those around him, whether they loved or hated him.)

Once while riding the train together from Philadelphia, Malcolm is approached by a porter who recognizes him from his train days. Malcolm acknowledges him and then goes on to shake the hands of a few other white customers who want to meet him. The rest of the passengers, meanwhile, simply gawk at Malcolm from behind their newspapers.

This is an example of Malcolm's polarizing effect on society. While working class black men identify with him and some white people respect him, many others view him with suspicion or fear.

Alex's position in the press allows him to see other people's opinions of Malcolm, and then report these back to him. The White House Press Secretary obviously disdains him, the Nazi Party Leader respects him and offers to do a speaking tour with him, and Martin Luther King expresses an interest in Malcolm as a person and in meeting him (Alex asserts that Malcolm also had a "reluctant admiration for Dr. King").

In these times, Malcolm's hardline positions on race attract strange people to him, such as the leader of the Nazi Party in America—who perhaps respected some of Malcolm's earlier essentializing views on race, or at least his bluntness and courage—while they repel or give pause to other more centrist figures (such as the Press Secretary in a Democratic White House).

Eventually, Alex and Malcolm develop a truly friendly relationship. Malcolm opens up to Alex, and Alex finds him fascinating. When Alex goes out of town, Malcolm even makes time to personally pick him up from the airport. Or when it's Malcolm who's out of town, he calls Alex late at night to talk about the book. Once, Malcolm calls him to simply say, "I trust you seventy percent" (he had previously said he only trusted him twenty percent).

Throughout his life, Malcolm has built many affectionate, fraternal relationships with men that he respects and cares for. Now, Haley presents their own relationship as part of this elite group of fraternal bonds.

Alex observes that Malcolm has a growing respect for individual white people which gives testament to the fact that Malcolm is not a prejudiced person at heart. For example, he expresses great admiration for M. S. Handler, another reporter, and he often gets very excited by the discussions at universities with white and black students.

Haley seems to believe that there is a "true Malcolm" that has been hidden or repressed by the Nation of Islam's strict ideology, and it's just waiting for the opportunity to break free and manifest itself.

Meanwhile, Malcolm has a list of black men who also greatly impress him. This list includes the photographer Gordon Parks, the actor Ossie Davis, the newspapermen James Hicks, James Booker, Louis Lomax, Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, and the author James Baldwin. The list goes on to include a limited number of black preachers, like Eugene L. Callender and the lawyer Percy Sutton.

Most or perhaps all of these figures are not Muslims, which again points to the idea that a "true Malcolm" who wants to unite all black people regardless of religion is just waiting to free himself from the burden of a repressive ideology.

Alex observes that Malcolm is most at ease when he's taking his daily walks through the side streets of Harlem, associating with the regular people. He talks with everyone he passes, trying to gently and light-heartedly get them to pick themselves up and not fall for the "white man's tricks" by getting drunk or getting **conks**. The people love Malcolm, and he loves them back. All the while, no matter what setting he's in, he always makes sure to give all the credit for his success to Elijah Muhammad.

The reader is reminded that Malcolm was not only a leader for racial equality, but that he was specifically attuned to the class dimensions of inequality. Unlike many other famous civil rights leaders, Malcolm feels at ease and can relate to the working poor and all those most abused by capitalist society.

One day, Malcolm asks Alex if he has "heard anything" being said lately. Alex responds that he has no idea what Malcolm is referring to. Nonetheless, he has been aware that something is amiss within the Nation, probably related to how much press coverage Malcolm gets. Then one day when Alex calls Malcolm at nine a.m., Malcolm tells him to check the newspaper, where Alex sees that Malcolm has been silenced for ninety days. When Alex sees Malcolm later in the day, he is taking phone calls from the press, expressing his obedience to Elijah and his regret for having let him down, but Alex knows him well enough to see that Malcolm is silently fuming.

When Malcolm recounts these events in his life, he also emphasizes his obedience and total acceptance of his punishment. Alex then complicates that narrative by presenting a private Malcolm who is actually furious, and whose pride has been injured by his public humiliation. This doesn't necessarily undermine Malcolm's claims in the autobiography itself, but it complicates his character.

Shortly thereafter, Malcolm and Sister Betty fly to Florida to be with Cassius as he trains. This helps to take his mind off his present worries. Malcolm calls Alex, insisting that Cassius will win his fight. When Cassius does win the fight, he goes on to announce he is a Muslim and then meets with various diplomats in meetings arranged by Malcolm.

Malcolm's insistence to Alex that Cassius will win demonstrates how much faith he has placed in Cassius' skill and Allah's plan for the larger implications of the fight.

Alex moves to upstate New York to work on his book. In his phone calls with Malcolm, he hears him critique Elijah Muhammad and speculate that he might not be reinstated to the Nation. At the same time, he also asks Alex to arrange for his contract to be changed so that all the proceeds from the book go to Sister Betty. When Alex hears of the death threats made against Malcolm and expresses his concern, Malcolm simply says that he can take care of himself.

Haley implicitly references the time when Reginald was about to be kicked out of the Nation. Reginald had also begun to speak poorly of Elijah and to speculate about a possible break with the Nation, perhaps to even form his own religion (as he had begun to have hallucinations of himself as a prophet or messiah).

Alex soon conducts an interview with Cassius for Playboy magazine, and Cassius says that he doesn't want to discuss Malcolm, who has betrayed the Nation. Elijah Muhammad also apparently becomes very emotional and upset if anyone mentions Malcolm in his presence, calling him a hypocrite and a traitor.

Elijah has been a father figure to Malcolm for over a decade, and Cassius had become a very close friend. Their harsh words then reflect their own pain at what they see as his betrayal.

Malcolm returns to New York, clearly upset and believing his life to be in danger. He tells Alex that he was kicked out of the Nation because of jealousy and because of his objections to Elijah's affairs, not his JFK comments. He alludes to the fact that he's built up the Nation from 400 followers to 40,000. When Alex tells him about Cassius's comments about wanting to stay away from Malcolm, Malcolm becomes visibly hurt and emotional.

Throughout his life, Malcolm has had many painful breaks with close friends and family members, especially in his "divorce" from the Nation—but Malcolm's earlier affectionate descriptions of his relationship with Cassius make this one particularly moving. (And as stated earlier, Cassius would later come to greatly regret his rejection of Malcolm.)

Malcolm receives lots of secretive phone calls while he sits with Alex, and he tells him one day that he's "a marked man." Alex worries this may make Malcolm bitter and push him to want to change the previous chapters related to the Nation of Islam. Malcolm says that the thought has crossed his mind, but he thinks they should stay as they are.

The book is not a sterile reflection of Malcolm's life. Rather, it is a vibrant dialogue in which his opinions and viewpoints changed throughout the creative process itself.

Late in March, Malcolm sends Alex a note, letting him know about his imminent visit to Africa and to Mecca. He continues to send him postcards, and then in mid-May, Sister Betty calls to say that Malcolm will be home the next day. After flying in, Malcolm drives with Betty to go and pick Alex up on the way to a press conference. When they arrive at the Hotel Theresa, the room is packed with reporters and well-wishers, and Malcolm proceeds to field their questions about his new beliefs masterfully.

While this book may be a kind of artifact detailing Malcolm's changing views, Haley also mentions a different collection of written artifacts – Malcolm's notes, postcards, and letters home. These documents attest to the profound changes Malcolm's thinking underwent in a relatively short period of time.

One day, Alex sends Malcolm several chapters to review, and he is horrified at the amount of edits Malcolm has made to his original remarks, especially regarding Elijah Muhammad. Alex reminds Malcolm of their previous decision to leave those things as they are, and after thinking it over, Malcolm agrees it is the best thing to do. After that, he never asks to change his own words.

At that time, the whole country seemed to know that Malcolm and Elijah had split. Alex thus wants to keep those chapters that illustrate their once close bond as a way to explain how their relationship has developed over time.

Only once does Malcolm show regret for a portion of his life, and that's regarding his brief relationship with Laura. Another time, he mentions to Alex that the day he put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger three times, he'd actually palmed the bullet.

Even within Malcolm's autobiography, which is apparently the "whole story" of his life, there are still some parts that may be hidden or which Malcolm kept to himself.

Malcolm soon calls another press conference to announce his new organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), which is a non-religious, militant black nationalist group focused on attaining human rights for African Americans. This group will be open to collaborations with other organizations, but it will also advocate for self-defense practices, rather than non-violent protests.

This project represents Malcolm's most mature political thought. Not only does he want the organization to be open to all black people, but he wants it to focus on political practice, rather than solely on religious or social critique.

A poll comes out that says most African Americans see Martin Luther King as the most important leader for civil rights, which irks Malcolm. However, another article in *the New York Times* acknowledges that the urban poor regard Malcolm as "one of their own," and in order for King to reach out to these people, he is going to have to cooperate more with Malcolm.

Despite his self-portrayals as simply a humble servant, Malcolm is quite proud of what he has accomplished and of his national reputation. He thus naturally resents not being regarded as the most important black leader.

While Malcolm travels abroad for an additional six weeks (which irks his OAAU staff), Alex sends him news clippings about him, some good and some bad. When Malcolm returns, he is met by a huge crowd of fans and reporters in the airport, giving him obvious pleasure. He then talks over some of the details of his trip with Alex so that they can go into the book; he emphasizes that the trip had been focused on building ties with Africans so that they will support African Americans' struggle for rights.

Malcolm may have upset his OAAU staff by staying away from the fledgling organization for too long, but he believes that building international ties is an essential part of the path forward for African American human rights.

Malcolm's OAAU is struggling to get off the ground, especially as Malcolm begins to receive more criticism throughout the community. Many say that he is all talk and no action, and others say that his ideology has become too confused for him to be a leader.

The public has not failed to notice Malcolm's evolved political positions. But it has not fully embraced them, or it finds the change quite jarring and hard to understand.

Meanwhile, Malcolm is besieged by a number of problems. His family is being evicted from the house loaned to them by the Nation of Islam, he is struggling to keep up with his financial obligations, and every minute of his time is taken up with giving interviews and speeches. The psychological strain causes him to occasionally lash out at his swamped aides.

Malcolm's failure to create a contingency plan in the event of a split with the Nation of Islam is now catching up with him. He must deal with his past obligations as he also struggles to build a future for himself and his family.

As the court battle over the house drags on, Malcolm begins to speak out against Elijah Muhammad publicly, something he had largely avoided since leaving the Nation. Death threats continue to pour in, and on a few occasions, OAAU members get into (sometimes armed) confrontations with Nation of Islam members. Malcolm is convinced that the threats can only be coming from the Black Muslims.

By speaking out against Elijah, Malcolm may actually be giving support to those Nation of Islam members who see him as a traitor and as a blasphemer.

In December, Malcolm and Alex again meet up in New York City to go over the latest version of the manuscript. On an impulse, Alex buys two large dolls as Christmas gifts for Malcolm's oldest daughters. Malcolm, who is very touched by the gesture, then confesses that he has never bought a present for any of his children; he's always been too busy.

The reader has been mostly given a view of Malcolm's public life. Only now does one realize that hardly any of the autobiography dealt with his personal family life – perhaps because Malcolm himself was largely removed from home.

One day in January when Alex is between flights, Malcolm drives out to Kennedy airport to talk with him in his car. He tells Alex how he's struggling to make alliances with anyone; moderate organizations see him as too militant, and vice versa. But they also discuss Malcolm's coming child, who he hopes will be a boy, after four girls. They then say their goodbyes and well wishes, and Malcolm drives off. It will be the last time they see one another.

The criticisms earlier voiced among black New Yorkers that Malcolm's ideology is confused have now solidified. He can no longer find a place for his voice and organization within the divisions of black liberation politics.

One day while giving a television interview, Malcolm supports the idea of interracial marriage as simply a personal decision between one human being and another. However, he does think that most of the pressure against intermarriage and integration has come from white groups, not black people.

Alex includes this anecdote to support his claim that Malcolm's thoughts on race have evolved beyond his more narrow-minded, confrontational views from when he was with the Nation.

On January 28th, Malcolm flies to Los Angeles to meet with two of the former secretaries suing Elijah. Throughout his entire stay, he is followed by Black Muslims, and they even stake out his hotel lobby. Malcolm stays mostly in his hotel room until it's time to head to the airport. On the way there, he is followed by two more cars.

Even though Malcolm is still doing his best to travel the country and continue to be an agent of change, the threats against his life make him ineffectual, as he must often hide inside his hotel just to stay alive.

In Chicago, Malcolm testifies in the Attorney General's office regarding the investigation of the Nation of Islam. While the police keep Malcolm under close guard, he sees Black Muslims following him everywhere, and he suspects they want to silence him before he divulges too much information about the Nation.

Neither Alex nor Malcolm says what exactly Malcolm testifies about to the Attorney General, but it is plausible that, as a former leader, he could have done legal damage to the Nation of Islam through his testimony.

Malcolm returns to New York, calls Alex, and confesses to being completely exhausted. Nonetheless, he must hit the road again, this time headed for Selma, Alabama to speak in front of crowds in support of Martin Luther King. He says that he is offering an alternative to King's non-violence movement, but he privately tells Mrs. King that he wants to help, not inflame passions.

Malcolm's comments to Mrs. King are difficult to understand, but it appears that he wants black people to either support him or MLK, but no matter what, he would like to work with King and his followers.

After Alabama, Malcolm flies on to France, but he is officially barred from ever entering the country. Irate, he goes on to London, where he visits a town in which many people of color live, causing some to accuse him of fanning racial tensions. He also speaks at the London School of Economics.

In Africa, Malcolm's reputation as a leader fighting against white and colonial oppression gained him fame and hospitality. In Western Europe, the response is (rather predictably) not so warm.

On February 13, Malcolm returns home to New York. Then in the middle of the night, someone throws Molotov cocktails through his front windows, setting the entire house on fire. The family escapes, and Sister Betty takes the children to go stay with friends. Malcolm, meanwhile, must continue to give speeches in New York and Detroit. However, his nerves are clearly getting the best of him. He threatens to release the names of the Black Muslims who have been commissioned to kill him and to apply for a pistol license with the police department.

This is the second time Malcolm's home has been firebombed. As a child, white supremacists burned down his childhood home, and shortly thereafter killed his father, a Black Nationalist. Tragically, Malcolm (now a black nationalist himself) is about to follow in his father's footsteps.

On Thursday, February 18th, Malcolm has a good conversation with the photographer Gordon Parks. He talks about being glad to have moved beyond the Nation of Islam; he says he was just a zombie following orders. Then he recalls the white college student who he once turned away as an example of something he regrets saying. When asked if he was serious about there being threats on his life, he assures Gordon that he is very serious.

By referring to himself as a "zombie" under the Nation, Malcolm offers his strongest criticism yet. According to Malcolm, the Nation does not inspire critical thinking or independent ideas; rather, its members are simply pawns in the service of Elijah's agenda.

On Saturday, Malcolm goes house hunting with Betty, and they find one they like, but they need $4,000 for a down payment. Malcolm then calls Alex to ask if the publisher may advance him the money; Alex promises to find out on Monday. Malcolm goes on to talk about the threats on his life, and how he is now unsure if it is indeed the Black Muslims. Then, abruptly, he says that he's proud to have established connections between African and African American human rights movements.

The OAAU's future is very uncertain at this moment, with Malcolm's life in danger and the public expressing hesitancy about joining Malcolm so far. Nonetheless, Malcolm feels proud of his more relational and structural achievements in making the struggle an international one.

That night, Malcolm goes to stay at the New York Hilton Hotel. After several men ask the bellboys what room he is staying in, extra security is put onto his room. The next morning, a strange caller awakens him, only saying, "Wake up, brother." Malcolm then calls Betty and asks her to bring the children to see him speak at 2 pm at the Audubon Ballroom.

Earlier, Malcolm mentioned that he has always had premonitions or intuitions before bad things happen to him. The reader is certainly invited to wonder if that phone call was then a sign of things to come.

The Audubon Ballroom is a large space frequently used for community events. At 1:30, hundreds of wooden chairs have been set up in front of the stage, and some people are already seated towards the front. The press has been barred from this event, but two black reporters are allowed to enter "as citizens." At 2:00, Malcolm arrives, and says to his assistants that he plans to talk about the need for unity among black people, rather than violence against one another. He wants to downplay his own personal issues.

Haley meticulously describes the setting, which rhetorically turns the public ballroom into a crime scene even before the crime has occurred. Malcolm may be planning to talk about things other than the threats on his life, but the stage has already been set for violence.

Several notable guests, including the Reverend Galamison, were supposed to come, but none of them show up, disheartening Malcolm. When an assistant suggests that brother Benjamin X speak in their stead, Malcolm snaps at her, but then agrees to the idea. When it's his turn to go up on stage, he turns to the assistant, asking for her forgiveness, and then walks out to begin his speech.

While Haley doesn't say it, he clearly implies that at the end of his life, Malcolm had very limited support from other black leaders. In essence, they have all abandoned him to let him die alone.

About eight rows from the front, a man stands up shouting, "Take your hand out of my pocket!" As the crowd turns to look, gunmen approach the stage (conflicting reports say they came up the side aisles or stood up from the front row). Then they proceed to fire on Malcolm; in total, he is hit by sixteen bullets or shotgun pellets. As the firing stops, several people rush to the stage to try and save him, including Sister Betty, who is crying.

It appears that the man in the back intentionally caused a disturbance to distract Malcolm and the crowd as the real gunmen approached him. This implies that the gunmen had a coordinated plan centered around chaos and confusion.

A patrolman stationed outside apprehends a suspect who is being chased by a crowd. Two more officers who happen to be driving by grab another man who is being assaulted by the crowd. They push him into the cruiser and take him to the station. He is later identified as 22-year-old Talmadge Hayer (a member of the Nation of Islam), and the police take him to the hospital for a gunshot wound to the thigh.

The crowd viciously attacks the men they believe to be the assassins, demonstrating their loyalty to Malcolm. However, their blind anger also highlights the level of confusion after the shooting, making it harder for investigators to get the facts.

Malcolm is brought on a stretcher to the Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. He arrives at 3:15, and at 3:30 pm he is pronounced dead. As news spreads throughout Harlem, a crowd gathers in front of the Theresa Hotel (the headquarters of the OAAU), while the Muslim Mosque and its restaurant have closed as a precaution. Meanwhile, hundreds of extra police officers are brought in to Harlem to maintain order.

After the riots during the summer of 1964, the police are on edge to avoid a similar situation. However, Harlem residents generally gather peacefully, deep in mourning rather than ready for violence.

At the time of publication, many questions still remain about the assassination. Police claim that they repeatedly offered Malcolm protection, a claim that contradicts statements made by his associates. Allegedly, special agents were in attendance, but they were never seen responding to the assassination. One of the suspects still has not been named publicly. Elijah Muhammad refuses to make a statement, as does Wilfred, initially.

In theory, the police and Malcolm's family should be those those most directly responsible for keeping Malcolm safe and for testifying on his behalf after his death. Instead, the reader sees that Malcolm has been largely abandoned by these support structures.

Malcolm is taken to the morgue, where a shotgun pellet to the heart is established as the cause of death. Sister Betty buys Malcolm a casket and then announces that his body will be made available for public viewing for the week before his funeral (though this causes some negative reactions within the orthodox Islam community).

It is normal for public leaders to be placed on display for the public to pay their respects. However, Malcolm's wake may also bring to mind the public viewing of Emmett Till, the young black boy murdered in 1955, catalyzing the civil rights movement.

Elijah puts out a statement on Monday, saying that Malcolm's death was the result of his violence-centered preaching. Elijah's house in Chicago is heavily patrolled by police and Fruit of Islam security. However, the Mosque Number 7 in Harlem is firebombed at night; the other mosques then go under increased police security.

Elijah's statement denouncing Malcolm is extremely disrespectful, especially given that Malcolm can no longer defend himself. Haley's book, therefore, serves as Malcolm's last defense.

Malcolm's body is supposed to go on view at the funeral home at 2:30 on Tuesday, but bomb threats force the police to search the building twice. Finally, at 6:30, with police and sharpshooters surrounding the building, Sister Betty and her children go in to see Malcolm. At 7:20, the first members of the public start to trickle in to see his body. He is dressed in a dark suit and white shirt, with a plaque stating his name and dates of birth and death.

Sadly, Malcolm's burial also evokes images of his childhood. After his father's death, the family came under the careful watch and "care" of the state; now, Malcolm's widow and orphaned children can come to see him only under the gaze of state sharpshooters.

Malcolm's followers struggle to find a church to hold the funeral. Many churches refuse either because they disagreed with Malcolm or because of safety concerns. Finally the Faith Temple, Church of God in Christ (directed by Bishop Alvin A. Childs) accepts the request. He immediately begins to receive bomb threats.

Even in death, Malcolm cannot rally other religious leaders in New York to his cause. He has been completely blackballed.

After Malcolm's death, many major African American figures speak out about the loss his death means for the community. Among these is James Baldwin, who blames the long history of racism in the West as the root cause of his murder. Others, such as Dr. C Eric Lincoln, blame the volatile competition among civil rights groups and call for unity.

The testimony of these writers, thinkers, and intellectuals is a counterargument against those black leaders who would distance themselves from Malcolm. Instead, they embrace him as a brother.

A new organization in Harlem, the Federation of Independent Political Action, calls for all businesses to close for two days in honor of Malcolm. However, the Uptown Chamber of Commerce meets and resists their calls and threats of picket lines. In the end, the businesses stay open and only twenty picketers arrive in front of one store; Haley notes that the leaders at the picket are two white men.

At first, the reader may find this anecdote to be pointless. But it is actually a tongue-in-cheek vindication of Malcolm's belief that mixed-race civil rights organizations almost always end up with the white men being in charge.

The downtown newspapers continue to run stories about how Harlem is about to burst into violence at any minute, but these accounts and stories are disputed by the Harlem Ministers' Interfaith Association, which states that such stories are simply trying to sell papers on stereotypical images of black people as violent.

Throughout the book, Harlem has served as a primary source of imagination for downtown Manhattan. Sometimes jazzy and creative, sometimes "exotic," it is now imagined as a violent hotbed of extremists.

Meanwhile, the foreign press, especially in Africa and Asia, covers the murder extensively and sometimes erroneously (or with a lot of bias in favor of Malcolm), much to the chagrin of the United States Information Agency Director, Carl Rowan. In other countries, such as those throughout Europe, the story receives only brief coverage. In London, however, the newspapers follow the criminal investigation in quite a lot of detail.

The multiplicity of narratives about Malcolm's life demonstrates how he is already being mobilized for particular political agendas. He might be a figure of racial justice, or he may simply be a celebrity at the center of a murder.

On Friday, Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson, both members of the Nation, are arrested in connection with the assassination. This causes tensions to rise considerably among all groups connected to Malcolm's killing, particularly at the Black Muslim National Convention in Chicago. About three thousand Muslims gather to celebrate "Saviour's Day," and all are subject to an intense security check. Fruit of Islam guards make constant rounds, and the sparse crowd reflects the widespread fears of a bombing.

The Nation now has three members that have been connected to the assassination, and many fear that his supporters may lash out violently during this public event. The Fruit of Islam's intense security contrasts strongly to Malcolm's insistence that his crowds not be asked to undergo security checks.

Meanwhile, Malcolm's presence is heavily felt at the Convention. Wallace Muhammad, who had sided with Malcolm, is made to publicly repent and ask for forgiveness. Then, Wilfred and Philbert, ministers in Detroit and Lansing, respectively, both advocate unity and moving beyond Malcolm's violent preaching and death. Finally, Elijah Muhammad gets up and rails against Malcolm as a hypocrite and a traitor who was destroyed by his own teachings. After an hour and a half of speaking, he finally returns to his seat.

In a deeply disturbing way, this series of testimonials is a kind of perverted funeral. Rather than testifying on the deceased's behalf and speaking from a place of mourning, his brothers (both biological and religious) publicly denounce him and advocate forgetting him.

Also on Friday, a man wearing a dark robe and white turban arrives at the Unity Funeral Home. He is Sheik Ahmed Hassoun, a Sunni Muslim from Sudan who had come to New York to be Malcolm's spiritual advisor and teach at the Muslim Mosque, Inc. The Sheik prepares Malcolm's body according to Muslim tradition, wrapping him in white linens, anointing him with holy oil, and reading from the Koran.

Malcolm spent much of his life as either nonreligious or as part of the Nation of Islam. It is fitting, therefore, that the Sheik only comes to change Malcolm's funeral clothes to those of an orthodox Muslim the day before his funeral—but this act of international respect and care also reflects Malcolm's global stature late in his life.

Late that afternoon, Alex joins the public viewing line, waiting to see Malcolm. Policemen stand by keeping watch while members of the press chitchat over to the side. When he arrives at Malcolm's coffin, Alex can only think that "it was he, alright – Malcolm X." Then, with a final goodbye, he walks on. That night, the public viewing will end, and 22,000 people in total will have come to see Malcolm's body.

Deep in mourning and shock, Alex cannot manage to bring about an emotional response yet. Instead, he can only acknowledge what is true on the surface: Malcolm X, that hated and beloved larger-than life figure, is dead.

The day of the funeral, thousands arrive on the nearby city blocks. Around 9:20 AM, some of the OAAU members are let in, who then proceed to seat the other six hundred guests As the services begin, the actor Ossie Davis stands to read telegraphs of condolences sent in from around the world, including from Martin Luther King and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Then another man stands up to give his remarks; he focuses on how Malcolm was a hero who died on the battlefield for Islam. Ossie Davis then stood back up to give a very moving eulogy, calling Malcolm Harlem's "own black shining Prince."

In a moment of poetic justice, Malcolm's funeral represents a fulfillment of his dream of uniting African Americans across class and religious lines. Leaders of the community, celebrities, and ordinary people all gather together either in body or spirit to pay respects to their friend and leader, Malcolm. And though he was often abandoned or rejected by his contemporaries in life, his continued fame and legacy attest to his status as a true "black shining Prince."

After the services, which last about an hour, Sister Betty goes to see Malcolm one last time and suddenly bursts into tears, prompting many in the crowd to sob as well. Then a long entourage of cars heads out behind the hearse, headed for a cemetery in Ardsley, New York. Final prayers are said over the coffin, and then several of the Muslims from OAAU began to fill in Malcolm's grave themselves, rather than leave it to the white gravediggers. Finally the sun sets, and Malcolm is at rest.

As has been previously noted, Malcolm's autobiography does not contain many references to his personal or family life. However, Haley makes sure to note Betty's grief and the loyalty of his OAAU members as a way of testifying that Malcolm was a very loved person by those who knew him personally.

Alex tells the reader that Malcolm asked him to be a writer, "not an interpreter," and that he has tried hard to recount his life dispassionately. But given Malcolm's electric character, that has been extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible.

Alex asks forgiveness for any mistakes he may have made along this journey. In this rhetorical move he imitates Malcolm's closing words, which also asked for forgiveness and for the reader to look for an overarching message rather than lingering on the writer's personal flaws.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

De La Cruz, Matthew. "*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 26 Jul 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

De La Cruz, Matthew. "*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*." LitCharts LLC, July 26, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-autobiography-of-malcolm-x.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

X, Malcolm. The Autobiography of Malcolm X. Ballantine Books. 1992.

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X, Malcolm. The Autobiography of Malcolm X. New York: Ballantine Books. 1992.