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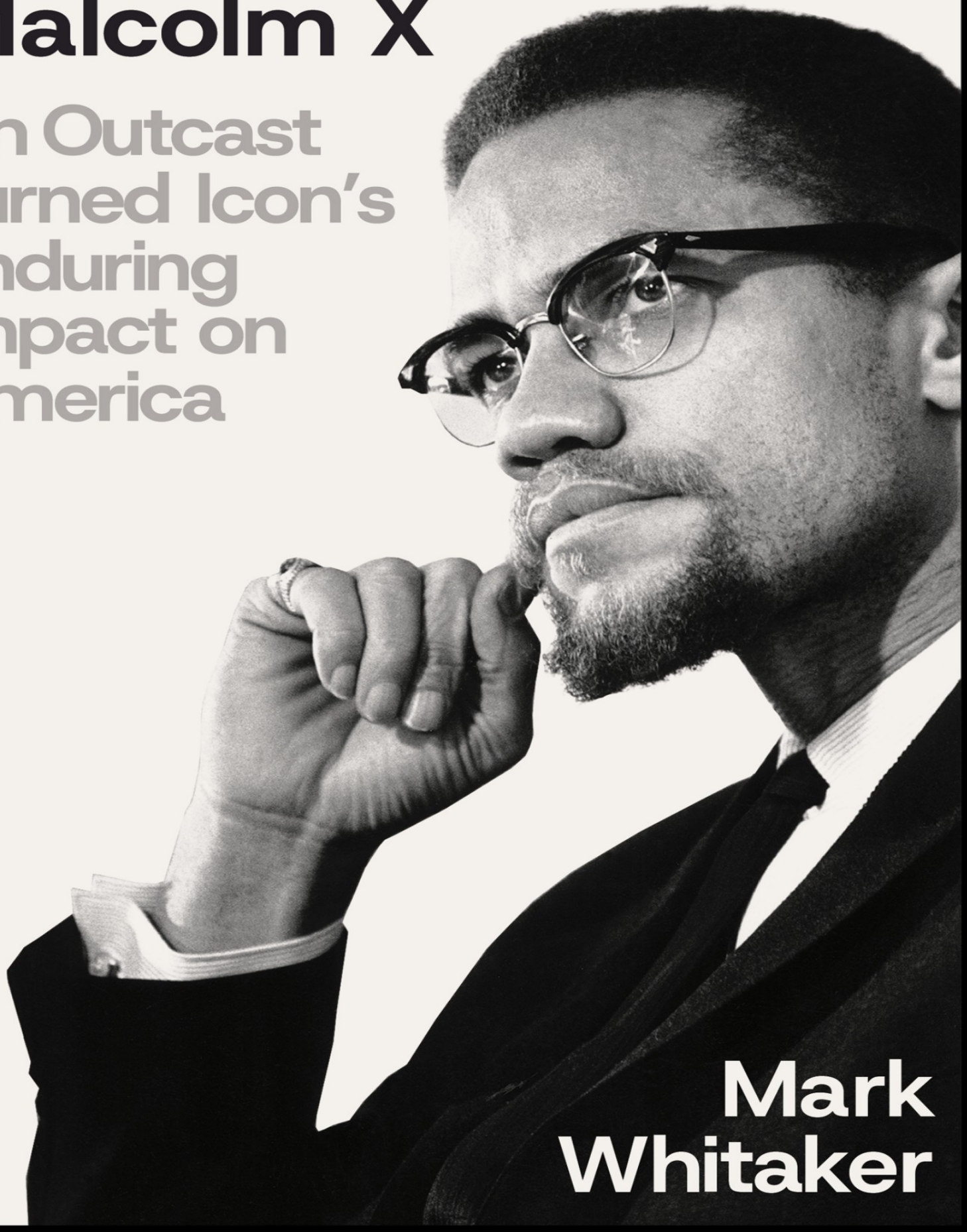

Mark Whitaker

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For Alexis

After signing the contract for this book, Malcolm X looked at me hard. "A writer is what I want, not an interpreter." I tried to be a dispassionate chronicler. But he was the most electric personality I have ever met, and I still can't quite conceive him dead. It still feels to me as if he has just gone into some next chapter, to be written by historians.

—ALEX HALEY, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X*, 1965

Prologue

Within days after a point-blank burst of shotgun fire struck down Malcolm X in a panic-filled ballroom two miles to the north, a sign appeared outside the National Memorial African Book Store in Harlem. So many times, Malcolm had preached from that very spot, at 125th Street and Seventh Avenue, cutting a mesmerizing figure in the dark suits that cloaked his tall, slender physique, and the scholar's glasses that framed the handsome face with its fringe of reddish hair, high mocha cheekbones, and intense light eyes. Those street corner sermons drew the most diverse crowds anyone had ever seen in Harlem—shopkeepers and street hustlers, professors and pimps, doctors and junkies, all gathered to hear that resonant voice full of fury, wisdom, and biting humor.

In Harlem, the bookstore was known as "Michaux's," after owner Lewis Michaux, who had started selling books out of a wagon and eventually assembled a collection of 200,000 volumes on all things Black. Among the teeming stacks inside, Malcolm had spent countless hours browsing through the works of philosophers, historians, and poets who helped guide him on his intellectual journey from separatist to pan-Africanist, from narrow dogmatist to globe-trotting searcher. Sometimes he read so late into the night that Michaux locked the doors and let him stay inside. Now Michaux turned to the oral tradition to honor his slain friend, posting a sign outside that mixed homemade verse with a proverb that came down from the Black ancestors:

MAN, IF YOU THINK BRO. MALCOLM IS DEAD,
YOU ARE OUT OF YOUR COTTON PICKING HEAD.
JUST GET UP OFF YOUR SLUMBERING BED,

AND WATCH HIS FIGHTING SPIRIT SPREAD.

EVERY SHUT EYE AIN'T SLEEP

EVERY GOODBYE AIN'T GONE.

Six days after the murder, Ossie Davis delivered a eulogy for Malcolm in front of six hundred mourners at Harlem's Faith Temple Church of God in Christ, at 147th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. The small Pentecostal venue was chosen as neutral ground after Molotov cocktails burned out the Nation of Islam mosque over which Malcolm had presided for a decade, an attack presumed to be an act of retaliation by his followers for what they saw as the NOI's hand in his bloody demise. Malcolm's widow, Betty Shabazz, had called on his friend Davis because she knew Ossie could do the task justice, with his actor's presence and playwright's way with words. But Betty was also looking for someone respected enough by all the dangerous factions pointing fingers in Harlem to keep the event peaceful. Brushing aside the risk that white bosses in the entertainment industry wouldn't approve, Davis accepted the invitation, and offered a tribute that became famous for how he described what Malcolm X meant to Black America. "Malcolm was our manhood," Davis exclaimed, "our living, black manhood!"

Less noticed was a promise of resurrection that Davis held out to his people as he looked down upon the wrought copper casket set on a platform draped in red velvet. They were "consigning these mortal remains to earth, the common mother of all," Ossie declared, "secure in the knowledge that what we place in the ground is no more now a man—but a seed—which, after the winter of our discontent, will come forth again to meet us. And we will know him then for what he was and is—a prince—our own black shining prince!—who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so."

Within the year, that princely presence reemerged in the pages of a posthumous autobiography, coauthored by Alex Haley, a ghostwriter who wove a tale of moral redemption out of Malcolm's odyssey from prison to preacher's podium. After the hardcover received surprisingly positive reviews in the white press, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* became a bestseller as a $1.25 paperback, captivating both Blacks inspired by Malcolm's unreserved message of pride and whites jolted by his blunt perspective on race.

By the fourth anniversary of his death in 1969, Malcolm had become such a folk hero to the Black youth of New York City that they demanded time off from school to honor him. Thousands of collegians and high school students packed events in four of the city's five boroughs, and as far away as Long Island University. At Harlem's fabled Apollo Theater, 1,600 schoolchildren sat through a two-hour program of music and speeches that included the Symphony of New York playing Bach and Ossie Davis reenacting his stirring eulogy.

The events across the city that day were covered for *The New York Times* by C. Gerald Fraser, one of a small group of Black journalists whom the paper had only recently hired to report on developments in Black America previously assigned to white "race beat" reporters. As Fraser explained to the largely white *Times* readership: "Malcolm, since his assassination by three Black Muslims four years ago yesterday in the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights, has become something of a legend to youths, many of whom were too young to have known him or have seem him alive. The movement for black unity and black awareness, black consciousness and black pride was developed, in part, out of the speeches of Malcolm and his records and best-selling autobiography. He became a hero because, in the eyes of slum residents, he was the first man they heard who effectively challenged white America."

The celebrations of that "Malcolm X Day," as some were already calling it, stretched to Black urban communities across America. Detroit officials made school optional for the day, and fourteen thousand Black students stayed home. In Boston, a procession of sixty marched through the Black neighborhood of Roxbury and proclaimed their intention to rename a well-known gathering spot "Malcolm X Square." Outside Chicago, students who had taken over a house on fraternity row and renamed it the "Black House" mounted his portrait over a fireplace mantel and captioned it "St. Malcolm." At the University of California at Santa Cruz, Black students demanded that one the school's seven colleges be named after Malcolm X and devoted to ethnic studies.

At San Jose State College, the day's festivities were organized by Harry Edwards, the Black sociologist who had launched the protest movement that inspired the black-gloved salute at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Edwards had met Malcolm while earning his PhD from Cornell University and christened his movement the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) in tribute to Malcolm's attempt to bring the plight

of Black Americans before the United Nations as a human rights issue. Edwards had even modeled what would become his own signature look—horned-rimmed glasses and a goatee beard—after Malcolm. A reporter covering the San Jose State event asked Edwards why in parts of Black America, Malcolm was already celebrated more than Martin Luther King Jr., who had been cut down by a white assassin's bullet less than a year earlier, in 1968. "It wasn't so much that he led in action as that he inspired action in others, even beyond the grave," Edwards said of Malcolm. "I suspect that won't be so true of Martin Luther King. He's dead."

Thanks to the enduring place of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in high school and college classrooms and on library and home bookshelves across America, and to the memorable impact of director Spike Lee's biopic *Malcolm X*, people around the world are familiar with the broad outlines of the extraordinary life that began on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. Malcolm Little was the seventh child of Earl Little, an itinerant Baptist preacher from Georgia, and Earl's fourth by his second wife, Louise Langdon Little, an immigrant from Grenada who like him was also a follower of the Black separatist leader Marcus Garvey.

After members of Omaha's white community looking to punish the Littles for their racial activism attacked their home while Earl was out of town, the family moved first to Milwaukee and then to Lansing, Michigan. There, they were again targeted by a white supremacist group called the Black Legion, who burned their new house to the ground when Malcolm was three years old. At age six, he learned that his father had been found dead on the streetcar tracks he passed on the way into town, a tragedy for which he long suspected the Black Legion was responsible. Struggling to provide for the family on her own, Louise Little sank into mental illness that led to institutionalization and left her children to fend for themselves.

The decade that followed took Malcolm on a dramatic journey from secular descent to religious salvation. Placed in a juvenile home and then with foster families in Lansing, he excelled at his studies but was discouraged by white teachers from pursuing his dream of

becoming a lawyer. Disheartened and restless, he dropped out of the eighth grade and went to live with his half-sister, Ella Collins, in Boston. There and then in Harlem, he fell into a world of drug use and petty crime that landed him in a Massachusetts prison at the age of twenty-one. During six years there and at two other prisons, he received news from three of his siblings that they had converted to the Nation of Islam. Under their influence, Malcolm began to study the teachings of the NOI's self-made American "prophet," Elijah Muhammad, who combined calls for racial separatism and personal rectitude with eccentric theories that portrayed whites as genetically engineered "blue-eyed devils."

The young prisoner wrote a series of fan letters to Muhammad, and as soon as he won parole in 1952 he applied to join the NOI and change his name to Malcolm X, in keeping with the sect's belief that followers should shed "slave names" inherited from whites who once owned their ancestors. Rewarding Malcolm's devotion and seeing his promise, Muhammad put him in charge first of the NOI's mosques in Detroit and Philadelphia, and then its largest outpost, Mosque No. 7 in Harlem. Over the next decade, Malcolm became the most visible and dynamic national spokesman for the NOI, giving speeches on college campuses and engaging in debates on radio and television that made him a figure of fascination to many Blacks, and to many whites a feared alternative to the uplifting gospel of nonviolence and racial integration preached by Dr. King.

Then, in the last year of his life, Malcolm's odyssey took another, unexpected turn, one that would transform him into a symbol of political outreach and spiritual growth. He confronted Elijah Muhammad about his history of getting young female assistants pregnant, and Muhammad retaliated by suspending Malcolm from the Nation of Islam in supposed punishment for intemperate remarks he made about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. After breaking entirely with the NOI, Malcolm made his first pilgrimage to Mecca, converted to the orthodox international version of Islam, and visited the capitals of Africa and Europe.

Returning to Harlem, Malcolm launched his own new political movement with the goal of uniting American Blacks across divides of class and politics and making them see common cause with people of color liberating themselves from white colonial rule around the world. Rightfully fearful that he was being targeted for death from the time of his split with the NOI, he nonetheless kept up a relentless pace of travel, speeches, and

interviews in his final year. Then, on the afternoon of Sunday, February 21, 1965, three Black gunmen stormed the stage of the Audubon Ballroom north of Harlem as Malcolm was beginning to give a speech and shot him dead in front of his wife, their four young daughters, and four hundred of his followers—a sudden and brutal end that left millions to mourn the man and the promise of what he could have achieved had he lived longer.

Yet it wasn't the final chapter. This book will tell the story of the extraordinary impact that Malcolm X has continued to have on American culture and politics since the assassination—a mark that in the sixty years after his death arguably far surpassed what he was able to achieve in less than forty years of life. That influence began with the enormous critical and commercial success of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, published just nine months after his death. First in hardcover and then in a bestselling paperback edition, the book has sold millions of copies and been named one of the most important books of the twentieth century. It has also continued to fascinate students of Malcolm's thinking into a new millennium, when a previously unknown chapter that was removed from the *Autobiography* and later bought by a private collector at an auction of Alex Haley's estate finally became available to the public after being acquired by New York's preeminent Black history archive.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Malcolm's memory and example provided inspiration to the founders of the Black Power movement, to the poets and playwrights of the Black Arts Movement, and to the first campus advocates of Black Studies. In the world of sports, they had a life-changing impact on three athletes who set an example for the activist-athletes of today: boxer Muhammad Ali; basketball great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar; and John Carlos, one of the two U.S. sprinters who raised those gloved fists at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. In the 1980s and 1990s, Malcolm found a new generation of admirers and "samplers" among pioneers of hip hop music such as Public Enemy, KRS-One, and Tupac Shakur. The publicity surrounding Spike Lee's 1992 biopic further fueled the revival of interest in Malcolm and drove a surge in sales of "X" merchandise.

In the twenty-first century, the influence of Malcolm X on American politics ranged from the hold he had over the imagination of Barack Obama, the country's first Black president, to the inspiration he provided to the young leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement that in the summer of 2020 produced the largest outpouring of interracial protest in support of racial justice in a generation. Sixty years after Malcolm confuted his reputation for condoning violence by urging supporters to cast ballots before resorting to bullets, his name was even invoked at a Democratic presidential convention. After Kamala Harris replaced Joe Biden at the top of the party's ticket in the summer of 2024, delegates from Malcolm's home state of Nebraska proudly wore T-shirts emblazoned with his image on the convention floor in Chicago and proclaimed him one of their native "icons" during a raucous roll call vote accompanied by a live DJ.

On the political right, meanwhile, Malcolm's calls for Black self-improvement and economic self-reliance have also made him a hero to conservative Black intellectuals, jurists, and policymakers. As a college radical, Clarence Thomas hung a poster of Malcolm in his dorm room, and he continued to feel a sense of kinship as a born-again conservative. "I don't see how the civil rights people of today can claim Malcolm X as their own," Thomas said in 1987, four years before he was appointed to the Supreme Court. Making Malcolm-like appeals for greater personal responsibility in Black communities, Louis Farrakhan, his controversial onetime protégé turned accuser, persuaded hundreds of thousands of Black men to descend on Washington, D.C., in 1995 to declare their commitment to being better domestic partners and fathers.

Sixteen years later, the academic historian Manning Marable produced an exhaustively researched biography that portrayed Malcolm as more radical than the conservatives understood, or than Alex Haley allowed to come across in the *Autobiography*. While winning some of publishing's top prizes, Marable's book was attacked by other devoted students of Malcolm's legacy for its provocative allegations about his personal life. That controversy, in turn, only heightened the interest in another award-winning biography that came out a decade later, by veteran journalist Les Payne, who like both Malcolm and Marable didn't live to see his book published.

In the end, however, the fighting about the would-be keepers of Malcolm's flame only served to demonstrate how much he defied easy categorization. At different times, Malcolm was scoldingly old-fashioned and breathtakingly modern, a preacher of

individual responsibility and an organizer of group resistance. He was both a stickler for hardheaded realism and a pioneer of the kind of consciousness-raising that propelled the Black Power movement and later infused the women's rights and gay rights movements. On that early "Malcolm X Day" in 1969, C. Eric Lincoln, the Black scholar who wrote the first major study of the Nation of Islam, speculated about the various things that Malcolm might have become had he lived longer. "The projections of what he was about to do," Lincoln mused, "range from a seat on the board of directors of the Urban League to a Castro-style revolution." As Spike Lee's movie was about to come out, Emanuel Cleaver, the Black mayor of Kansas City, described Malcolm as a man with "ten different personalities and eleven messages to be learned from them."

Malcolm was also ahead of his time as a master of modern media. He was delivering what would become arresting sound bites, viral videos, and memorable memes before those concepts existed. His elegant fashion sense—the conservative dark suits and thin ties; the distinctive glasses, with their horn rims on the top and wire rims on the bottom—evoked the cool of the bebop era then and remain in vogue among artists and intellectuals still. "In the days before Instagram and the proliferation of style as politics, Malcolm understood the power of images," cultural journalist Vikki Tobak pointed out in an essay about a photograph of Malcolm taken by Eve Arnold for *Life* magazine in 1960. Wearing a fedora rakishly tilted over his head, Malcolm sat, as Tobak described it, "in profile, stoic, refined and stylish AF, his hand draped loosely on his neck to frame a ring on his finger bearing the star and crescent moon."

It was an image that premature loss froze in time. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. were the same age when they were killed: thirty-nine. Like other young icons who didn't outlive that turbulent era—from John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, to rock legends such as Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin—they could ascend into the realm of myth partly because we never had to see them grow old or watch them lose their powers. But in our memories, King will always seem older and more saintly than he was in real life. As a figure of identification and projection, Malcolm will forever stand on the edge between youth and middle age, between daring and discipline, between the psychological attraction of the thrilling bad boy and the stern father.

As much as the still electric effect of the sight and sound of Malcolm X, however, it has been the grim persistence of the racial divide in America that has kept his legacy alive.

As scholar C. Eric Lincoln once put it, the explanation for Malcolm's enduring appeal "lies in the simple fact that we have not yet overcome." From the "law and order" code language and "Southern strategy" of the Nixon era; to the racially targeted war on drugs and mass incarceration of the Reagan era; to the unfulfilled liberal promises of the Clinton and Obama eras; to the resurgent white nationalism of the Trump era, Malcolm's unflinching analysis of racial reality has remained recurrently relevant. Today, amid a backlash against affirmative action, so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, and other measures designed to rectify past racial injustice, Malcolm's calls for Black self-reliance have never seemed more urgent. For successive generations of young people, in particular, Malcolm has served as a model not only for what but for how to protest the injustices of each new age—with force and courage, but also with stylishness, erudition, and wit. For Malcolm's admirers, his has remained that most compelling of all voices: one that seems to speak not just *to* you but *for* you.

Stretching over this long time span has also been a murder mystery: Who really killed Malcolm X? This book will also trace that detective story, which began with the capture of a young Black New Jersey resident named Talmadge Hayer minutes after the assassination, as he fled after dropping a .45 caliber pistol inside the Audubon Ballroom. In the days after, two enforcers from the Harlem NOI mosque known as Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson were also arrested. In the middle of the murder trial, Hayer abruptly changed his testimony to swear that the other two weren't involved, but all three were convicted nonetheless and sentenced to life in prison. In the end, Butler and Johnson—who while behind bars embraced orthodox Islam and changed their names to Muhammad Abdul Aziz and Khalil Islam—languished there for a combined forty-two years before they were paroled.

Only in 2020 was the case officially reopened by Cyrus "Cy" Vance Jr., the high-profile Manhattan district attorney, after the D.A.'s office was approached with exculpatory evidence unearthed by the makers of a documentary on Netflix. In the film, a Black freelance journalist named Abdur-Rahman Muhammad is portrayed as identifying holes

in the original prosecution case and piecing together proof of who the real killer was and how he had hidden in plain sight. In a twenty-two-month investigation, a special task force appointed by Vance found that numerous pieces of evidence that would have supported Butler's and Johnson's claims of innocence were deliberately suppressed in order to protect the identity of FBI informants and undercover agents working for a secret intelligence unit of the NYPD. While not definitively answering the question that has loomed over the assassination from the beginning—were the FBI or the NYPD somehow in on the Audubon hit?—the probe also offered shocking new proof of how much the feds and the New York police knew about the threats to Malcolm's life before they left him largely unprotected on the day of the murder.

In November 2021, Vance stood before a New York County Supreme Court judge and submitted a forty-three-page motion requesting that the convictions of Aziz, now eighty-three, and Islam, who had died in 2009, be vacated. When the judge declared the two men officially exonerated, the courtroom erupted into loud applause. Documentarian Abdur-Rahman Muhammad and his producers were there to witness the emotional scene, and to join Aziz for a celebration outside. "I felt that I was able to get some semblance of justice for Brother Malcolm X and his family, first and foremost," Muhammad proudly told reporters, "and second of all, justice for these two men."

Yet that version of the detective story wasn't complete, either. All along, much earlier and less remembered credit for keeping the questions surrounding Malcolm's murder alive belonged to another, more unlikely sleuth. He was a shy, soft-spoken white reporter from the Midwest named Peter Goldman, who developed a personal connection with Malcolm while he was alive, and wrote a deeply reported book about him after the assassination, long before the prizewinning biographies. In the late 1970s, Goldman interviewed all three murder suspects in prison and tried, along with lawyer William Kunstler, to get the case reopened. Despite those efforts, the wrongful conviction saga would extend well into a new century—along with the stirring echoes of Malcolm X's voice that reverberated across six decades of American history.

PART ONE

CONVICTION

1965–1967

ONE

Death in the Afternoon

To close observers of the Nation of Islam, one of the first death threats came in the form of a cartoon. On March 8, 1964, Malcolm X announced that he was quitting the NOI, where he had served for a decade as minister of the sect's largest outpost, Mosque No. 7 in Harlem, and the most visible spokesman for the leader he long referred to reverently as the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, or "the Messenger of Allah." Four months earlier, Muhammad had suspended Malcolm as punishment for a provocative statement he made after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Malcolm was speaking to a rally at the Manhattan Center in New York City nine days after the murder, and in the question period afterward he criticized Kennedy for not having done enough to investigate the killings of Black civil rights martyrs and anticolonial leaders around the world. Kennedy "never foresaw that the chicken would come home to roost so soon," Malcolm quipped, to loud applause from a crowd of seven hundred followers. "Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they made me glad."

The press interpreted the crack as a heartless suggestion that Kennedy deserved to die, and Elijah Muhammad used the furor as a pretext to put Malcolm in his place. Months of attempts to negotiate a rapprochement between them went nowhere, and now Malcolm was formally announcing his departure from the Nation of Islam and plans to start his own new "black nationalist party." In a statement to the press, he claimed he had no desire to pick fights with Elijah Muhammad or to poach followers from him. Without naming names, however, Malcolm hinted that the real reason for the falling out was not the remark about Kennedy but the Messenger's jealousy. "Envy blinds men and makes it impossible for him to think clearly," he explained. "This is what happened." Malcolm said nothing about the other source of tension that had arisen behind the two men: the questions Malcolm raised privately about Elijah Muhammad's practice of seducing and

fathering children with his female assistants, in defiance of the Nation's code of sexual monogamy.

A month after Malcolm's announcement, a cartoon titled "On My Own" appeared in the April 10 issue of the NOI's house newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, which was published at its Chicago headquarters and personally approved by Elijah Muhammad before it went to print. The artist was the paper's cartoonist, who called himself Eugene Majied and signed his artwork with that last name. In the cartoon, Malcolm's severed head bounced through a graveyard toward a tombstone etched with the names of notorious traitors: "Judas/ Brutus/ Benedict Arnold/ Malcolm 'Little Red.'" With each bounce, a thought bubble formed over Malcolm's skull.

"I split because no man wants to be Number 2 man in nothing!" read the first thought bubble. "The officials at headquarters fear my public image," read the second.

"The Messenger's family was jealous of me," read the third.

"Even the Messenger... Bla... Bla... Bla..." read the last thought bubble.

Decades later, Eugene Majied had left the Nation of Islam, retired to his native South Carolina, and reclaimed his birth name: Eugene Rivers Jr. His son, Boston-based minister Eugene Rivers III, went to visit his father, and asked him about the famous cartoon. Was March 1964 the point at which Malcolm's fate was sealed? the son asked.

No, the elder Rivers responded. The turning point came years before that—by 1959. For several years, envy of Malcolm among Elijah Muhammad's courtiers had been growing when Louis Lomax, a Black reporter and television producer from New York, teamed up with Mike Wallace, the future celebrated host of *60 Minutes*, to produce a five-part series on the Nation of Islam for a nightly local public television program called *News Beat.* Titled *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the series cast the NOI in a menacing light, with Wallace describing the sect as spreading "Black racism" and a "gospel of hate" to a quarter of a million Blacks in fifty cities.

Yet what Wallace showed spoke louder than words. In an opening scene, thousands of NOI followers filled a huge arena, the men dressed in sober dark suits and the women in long white dresses and headscarves, waiting for the arrival of their leader. Elijah Muhammad had been born Elijah Poole in rural Georgia, Wallace explained. After moving to Detroit, Poole had fallen under the spell of a mysterious Black man named Wallace D. Fard, who claimed to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad and had

founded the then tiny Nation of Islam sect. After Wallace Fard Muhammad, as he called himself, disappeared, Poole took over leadership of the Nation and claimed the name Elijah Muhammad. Since then, he had built the NOI into a national movement and attained almost godlike status among his followers, Wallace explained. But when Elijah Muhammad finally arrived at the hall and made his way to the stage, surrounded by bodyguards, he cut an odd-looking figure. He was short and moonfaced, with a large kofia hat encrusted with jeweled crescents and stars perched on his head, and he spoke in a high-pitched lisp. In a one-on-one interview with Louis Lomax, Muhammad seemed even more recessive, his soft voice muffling threats of a coming race war with "plenty bloodshed."

By contrast, the man TV viewers saw introduce Elijah Muhammad was tall and handsome, with an electrifying speaking voice. He was Malcolm X, Wallace explained, the minister of the NOI mosque in New York City and Elijah Muhammad's "ambassador-at-large." In his own one-on-one interview with Lomax, Malcolm was as confident and cogent as the Messenger was shy and mumbling. Asked whether Elijah Muhammad taught his followers to hate white people, Malcolm responded in the language of love. "It's not hate," he told Lomax. "It's not that you hate the source but your love for your people is so intense, so great, that you must let them know what is wrong with them, what is the source of their ills.... [Muhammad] teaches black people to love each other."

Originally broadcast in short nightly segments on the local New York public TV station, *The Hate That Hate Produced* proved such a sensation that Wallace re-aired the documentary the next week in its entirety, followed by a panel discussion with mainstream Black leaders that included baseball legend Jackie Robinson and Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. From then on, Malcolm X became a nationally recognized figure in white as well as Black America. He began receiving invitations to appear on television and radio talk shows, to speak on college campuses, and to be profiled by national publications. "Much of America came to believe that Malcolm was the Muslims," as one observer put it.

Yet from where the elder Eugene Rivers sat, at NOI headquarters in Chicago, Malcolm's growing celebrity only fed more resentment, no matter how many converts he attracted or how much praise he heaped on the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. From

then on, Rivers told his son, Malcolm was bound to become a marked man sooner or later.

Less than two weeks after his resignation from the NOI in March 1964, Malcolm made his own report of a secret murder plot. He accused two former lieutenants at Mosque No. 7—Captain Joseph X, the head of security, and a deputy minister known as Henry X—of using the period of his ninety-day suspension to turn his Harlem followers against him. "As soon as they felt I had been sufficiently isolated, Captain Joseph X then used assistant minister Henry X to spread lies from the speaker's stand that were skillfully designed to make the Muslims think I had rebelled against the Honorable Elijah Muhammad," Malcolm claimed in a statement that was ignored by the white press but covered in the Black-owned *New York Amsterdam News*. "When Joseph felt Henry's poison had turned sufficient number of Muslims against me, Joseph then sent some Brothers from his 'special squad' out to try and kill me in cold blood. Thanks to Allah, I learned of the plot from the very same Brothers he had sent out to murder me."

Despite that scare, Malcolm kept up a frantic public schedule for the rest of 1964. In April, he flew to Saudi Arabia, becoming one of the first Black Americans ever to make the hajj, the pilgrimage of orthodox Muslims to the Islamic holy site of Mecca. On colorful stationery illustrated with drawings of the holy sites, he wrote a long letter sharing his impressions with followers in New York, and signed it with the new name he was given in honor of the pilgrimage: "El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X)." The followers leaked the letter to Michael "M.S." Handler, a veteran foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* who was now covering the civil rights beat and had become Malcolm's favorite white reporter at the paper. In a front-page story, Handler quoted Malcolm as saying that the trip had caused him to "'rearrange' much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous assumptions"—particularly when it came to his blanket attacks on white people as the source of the world's ills.