

MALCOLM X

A Life of Reinvention

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Johnson were subsequently bailed out of jail, but police were convinced that both men were involved in Brown's shooting, because they were well-known "enforcers."

Thomas 15X presented a curious case in the Nation's crusade to poison its members' opinions. Malcolm's driver for years, Johnson had abandoned his boss during the schism with the Nation. However, at first, he had not shared the obsession to destroy Malcolm that had infected other FOI members. When in December 1963 Malcolm had been silenced, Johnson stated that like all mosque members he was surprised, but had assumed that the minister soon would be reinstated. Yet after Malcolm established the MMI and OAAU, Johnson firmly sided with the Nation against him. Thomas 15X's hardening of purpose began with the Queens court hearing over the disputed ownership of the Shabazz home. "Malcolm wasn't just a minister; he was top minister," Johnson stated, going on to explain that, because of his status, NOI members had agreed to purchase a house for him and his family. "But if you leave, you can't have that house. We bought you a brand-new car and everything. . . . As long as you are correct, you've got that."

Johnson claimed that the order to assassinate Malcolm came directly from national secretary John Ali, who while visiting New York City gathered Mosque No. 7's lieutenants separately from Captain Joseph and gave a series of reasons why Malcolm had to die. In the more than four decades that have passed, however, nothing has emerged that could definitively prove or disprove Johnson's claim of Ali's involvement. Johnson had great difficulty accepting some of the national secretary's reasoning, and noted that "the other lieutenants didn't [buy Ali's arguments] either." Several weeks later new instructions came down from Chicago: "Elijah Muhammad sent specific orders. He said, 'Don't touch [Malcolm].'" Consequently Johnson and his crew beat up and harassed Malcolm's people, but no active plan was set in motion to murder him. Johnson claimed, "I used to see Malcolm every day in the Theresa Hotel." Malcolm would walk over and say, "How you doing?" That his intended victim maintained a degree of civility impressed Johnson.

By the fall of 1964, though, as the rage against Malcolm infected every part of the Nation, Johnson was finally persuaded that Malcolm had to be killed. He received instructions with four other lieutenants "that we had to go to Philly. He was speaking over there . . . and we were supposed to hit him then." The crew drove to Malcolm's lecture site (probably on December 26), but Malcolm had anticipated such an assault. "He sent a brother out that sort of favored him." The would-be assassins chased after the decoy,

and Malcolm escaped. Johnson may have also participated in at least one other failed attempt to assassinate Malcolm in Philadelphia. Had he been present at the Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965, Thomas would have eagerly participated in the assassination. The fact that he was absent that afternoon, but was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime, raises profound questions about both U.S. law enforcement and the courts.

During the final weeks of Malcolm's life, there were two topics that preoccupied his followers. First, the obvious political, ideological, and religious changes Malcolm was experiencing disoriented both his critics and supporters. His evolution seemed to keep unfolding toward tolerance and pluralism along racial and religious lines. In Rochester on February 19, Malcolm had told his audience, "I believe in one God, and I believe that God had one religion. . . . God taught all of the prophets the same religion. . . . Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, or some of the others. . . . They all had one doctrine and that doctrine was designed to give clarification of humanity." This, along with his increasing statements about not judging men by the color of their skin, produced deep concern among followers who clung to the belief that Malcolm's new pronouncements were merely cosmetic changes designed to increase his public appeal. Some die-hards like James 67X simply refused to believe that their boss had changed. Betty, for her own reasons, took the same position. But in the Harlem audience that had loyally turned out for Audubon rallies, there was tremendous uneasiness.

After Betty publicly accused Lynne Shifflett of sleeping with Malcolm, Shifflett resigned from her position as general secretary of the OAAU in late 1964. Weeks later, after Malcolm returned home from Africa, he replaced Shifflett with another articulate, intelligent black woman, Sara Mitchell, the young woman from the *New Yorker* who had written him in June. Although Mitchell shared some of Shifflett's middle-class views about politics, at heart she was a progressive black nationalist who viewed Malcolm from that vantage point. Describing Malcolm's 1965 activities years later, for instance, Mitchell argued that "underlying [his] efforts was his still unfulfilled and paramount ambition: the redemption of the 'disgraced' manhood of the American Blackman. That was the spur piercing him; it would not let him stop or even rest." To Mitchell, the two new organizations Malcolm had established performed distinctly different functions. Muslim Mosque, Inc. "was set up to encourage study and consideration of a religious alternative"

while the Organization of Afro-American Unity had been designed “for eventual correlation and unification of varied aspects of the black struggle.” She recognized the limitations of both groups, lacking resources and permanent, full-time staff. “Consequently,” she recalled, “deadlines were not met and postponements were inevitable. During the lagging interim, dissatisfied fingers shook in his face from all directions.”

Mitchell could sense that broad elements of the black nationalist community outside the Nation were displeased with Malcolm’s new orientation. Many African Americans had “experienced discreet self-pride” when Malcolm had promoted “black supremacy,” but as his change progressed “they were disappointed and annoyed; for he was no longer providing the bold, caustic, chastising voice.” She also thought that Malcolm’s preoccupation with lecturing at elite universities had a negative effect among sectors of the black dispossessed. “Grassroots black people began wondering if his participation on Ivy League type forums meant that ‘their’ Malcolm was abandoning them for the ‘good life’ and higher stakes.” From an organizational standpoint, Mitchell found this effect highly problematic. Virtually alone within Malcolm’s inner administrative circle, Mitchell worried that her leader’s ideological leaps in new directions alienated many old core supporters, while not converting enough new followers. As a result, “isolation and loneliness were prices paid for his radical pioneering.”

James 67X was relieved to be rid of Lynne Shifflett and quickly found a much better working relationship with Mitchell. But the tensions and disaffections that Mitchell described created an atmosphere of uncertainty that benefited opportunists like Charles 37X Kenyatta. During December and part of January, after Malcolm had discovered his involvement with Betty, Kenyatta had disappeared from MMI and OAAU events. On January 24 he finally showed up at an OAAU rally, voicing complaints. He bitterly announced to several members that he was now “finished” with both the MMI and the OAAU. He hinted that James was responsible for financial irregularities. The “best way to get money is to go out and work for it,” Charles advised.

Yet the worries over Malcolm’s positions were trumped by fears about his safety. By early 1965 most of Malcolm’s closest associates believed that without a change of course he would soon be dead, and they grew preoccupied with exploring ways to save their leader’s life. They knew that various African governments had offered him positions; Ethiopia had been willing to grant sanctuary; the Saudis would have permitted both him and his family to live in the kingdom as guests of the state. The entire African-

American expatriate community in Ghana urged him to bring Betty and the children to Accra. Even Malcolm’s celebrity friends had offered their summer homes and second houses, where the family could live in anonymity. A nervous Ruby Dee had even suggested hiding Malcolm behind a secret wall in her home, a plan vetoed by her husband, Ossie Davis.

On Friday, February 19, Maya Angelou arrived from Ghana, ready to volunteer for the OAAU’s staff. She had heard about the firebombing and was so shaken that she phoned Malcolm while still at JFK airport. “They almost caught me,” he admitted to her. Malcolm offered to pick up Angelou at the airport, but she informed him that she planned to travel straight to San Francisco to see her family first. However, when she returned home, her mother cautioned her not to work with that “rabble-rouser.” “If you feel you have to do that—work for no money—go back to Martin Luther King,” her mother advised.

Although most Malcolmites thought the Nation of Islam was actively conspiring to kill their leader, many also suspected the U.S. government as being behind the murder attempts. “We all knew what was happening to black people, and [Malcolm] always talked about the government being involved in the problems we were having,” Herman Ferguson recalled. Malcolm supposedly had been worried that “the CIA was out to kill him” when he was abroad, and his rejection at French customs made him further suspect government meddling in his affairs. Ferguson felt that during the final weeks OAAU members did too little to protect Malcolm: “We didn’t pick up on the signs that we should have picked up on. . . . Like cannon fodder, people sat around and talked about the danger that Malcolm was in. It was just like, ‘The brother should be more careful.’” Several OAAU members had places in Manhattan that Malcolm could use as safe houses to spend the night. There was some discussion about assigning him drivers, but nothing was done about it. The drift toward disaster continued.

It is difficult to know what Malcolm may have contemplated as he pondered the likelihood of impending murder. For decades after the assassination, James 67X struggled privately with the question of whether his leader truly wanted to die. He had lived for over a year with death threats coming from the Nation, and in his final days he seemed of two minds, partly accepting of what he believed to be his fate and partly wishing or hoping that the problems might disappear and allow him to go back to a normal life. In his last week, he spent much of his time away from his family, so as not to put them in danger. He also appears to have traveled around without bodyguards, though he had long had either James 67X or Reuben X accom-

panying him wherever he went. He communicated infrequently, and sometimes it was impossible for MMI and OAAU members to reach him with information. As the world closed in on him, Malcolm, always an extremely private individual, kept his own counsel. He fought desperately to shield others' doubts and fears.

That he continued to harangue the Nation even when he knew that doing so would leave little choice but to strike at him seems to suggest that on some level he may have been inviting death. As Malcolm became more aware of Islamic tradition in his last years, he probably learned about the third Shiite imam, Husayn ibn Ali, and his tragic murder. Husayn was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and the son of Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad. After the murder of Ali and the abdication of his older brother, Hasan, Husayn became the object of allegiance for many Muslims. At Karbala in 680 CE in what today is Iraq, Husayn and a small band of supporters were attacked by religious opponents; nearly all of them were killed or captured. Husayn died bravely and gloriously, so much so that his murder became central to the Shiite ethos of martyrdom, suffering, and resistance to oppression. The Shiite mourning observance of Ashura reenacts the tragedy as a passion play, in which participants engage in remorse and self-punishment over Husayn's assassination, and rededicate themselves to the struggle for freedom and justice.

Like Husayn, Malcolm made the conscious decision not to avoid or escape death. This he could have accomplished easily; had he remained in Africa for several years, the level of the Nation of Islam's animosity surely would have diminished. That he chose to return to the United States meant he recognized the real possibility of being killed at any moment, even while asleep inside his home. If he did not desire death, he still seemed prepared to embrace it as an inevitable part of his personal destiny. Such an interpretation would help explain why Malcolm was so insistent that no one at the Audubon be searched and that none of his men except Reuben X carry weapons. By not checking for guns, Malcolm made the assassination more likely; by disarming his security personnel, he protected them from being targets in an exchange of gunfire as Malcolm's murderers probably would not shoot unarmed security personnel. If anyone should die, Malcolm may have reasoned, let it be him.

Law enforcement agencies acted with equal reticence when it came to intervening with Malcolm's fate. Rather than investigate the threats on his life, they stood back, almost waiting for a crime to happen. "They had the mentality of wanting an assassination," said Gerry Fulcher of the NYPD

brass, though it is unlikely that NYPD officers were directly involved in the murder. "They would want to keep their hands clean from the actual thing." Fulcher knew that the NYPD and BOSS had placed Gene Roberts inside the MMI and OAAU, but they had also recruited other informants who provided the police with internal information. By early 1965, Fulcher had been taping conversations at the MMI and OAAU office for over nine months. After Malcolm's return from abroad, Fulcher listened carefully to his arguments and became even more convinced that the police were making a big mistake about him. "This is a guy we should be supporting," he concluded. One of the favorite topics for cops was "'them niggers on welfare.' [Malcolm] wants them off, too," he argued. Malcolm "should have been a companion, not an enemy" of law enforcement, Fulcher insisted. "But they always viewed him like the enemy."

By that time, however, Malcolm and the NYPD had already reached a practical *détente*. Even before leaving the Nation, Malcolm had developed what Peter Goldman called "distant cooperation" with the police, hoping to avoid the confrontations and shootings that had occurred in Los Angeles. He consequently informed the police whenever he was having public rallies, and ordered Reuben X Francis and other subordinates to share information with them. In 1964 and 1965, the NYPD regularly assigned between one and two dozen officers to the MMI and OAAU rallies held at the Audubon. Several would be stationed inside the building but rarely the Grand Ballroom, where the rallies were held. Most were positioned outside the building, either clustered around the entrance or standing across the street in the small neighborhood park. The detail's commander and one or two other policemen sat in a glassed-in booth on the second floor, overlooking the entrances to the building's two ballrooms, the Rose and the larger Grand.

Across the Hudson in Newark, the small assassination crew that had been formed in the spring of 1964 had fallen apart when Malcolm was out of the country. But after his return, the question of whether, and how, to commit the murder became active once again. Talmadge Hayer had several conversations with Ben Thomas and Leon Davis. Hayer later told Goldman that, since Ben was a mosque administrator, he naturally assumed from the outset that senior NOI officials had authorized the mission. "I didn't ask a whole lot of questions," Hayer explained. "I thought that somebody was giving instructions: 'Brother, you got to move on this situation.' But I felt we was in accord."

As the group began exploring how to go about the killing, they contem-

plated gunning Malcolm down outside of his East Elmhurst home; however, when they drove out one day to case the house, they found it heavily protected by armed guards. For a time they considered just following Malcolm around Harlem and striking at some public event where he was scheduled to talk, but, according to Hayer, practical considerations got in the way. All of the Newark conspirators worked full-time, and they couldn't take off work to spend hours driving around Harlem. The group finally settled on a simple but bold tactical approach: shooting Malcolm at an Audubon rally, in front of hundreds of supporters and several dozen probably armed security people. The plan's advantage was the element of surprise. Malcolm's people believed he was safe at the rallies; they never considered a direct, frontal assault, because it would be suicidal. Yet every member of the assassination team was a devoted follower of Elijah Muhammad, prepared to sacrifice his life to kill Malcolm. If a would-be assassin is willing to die, anyone can be killed.

The likelihood of success was "a long shot," Hayer remembered. "But we just felt we would have to move on it . . . and that's what we did. Why there? . . . It was the only place we knew he'd be." Hayer was familiar with weapons, so he was assigned to purchase the guns, using his own money. He and several others in the assassination crew attended an OAAU rally, probably in January 1965, where they were surprised to discover that no one was being searched at the main entrance. They sat down and studied where guards were positioned and when they were relieved. On the night of February 20, the group paid to enter a dance in the Audubon Ballroom, checking out all possible exits.

The conspirators then drove back to Ben Thomas's home. It was decided that the initial round aimed at Malcolm, the decisive kill shot, would be fired by William Bradley. "Willie" had been a star athlete in high school, excelling in baseball. By his mid-twenties, however, he had grown fat, weighing over 220 pounds. But he was still athletic in his movements and he had learned how to handle a shotgun. Everyone agreed that the assassination would take place the next afternoon, Sunday, February 21.

On the morning of the twenty-first, a phone call awakened Malcolm in his room at the Hilton. A voice over the receiver menacingly said, "Wake up, brother." He checked the time; it was eight o'clock on a winter morning, but the day would not be frigid. Still, Malcolm wasn't taking chances with

the weather. He put on long underwear beneath his suit—the same suit coat he had worn during his tour through Great Britain.

At about nine a.m., he phoned Betty, asking her to come to the afternoon rally, and to bring the children with her. His request surprised and pleased her. Since his return from Africa Malcolm had again discouraged her involvement in MMI and OAAU affairs, and earlier that week had strictly ordered her not to come on Sunday because of the threat of violence. He failed to explain why he had changed his mind. Betty and her daughters were still staying with the Wallaces, and around one p.m. she began getting ready. All of the little girls were stuffed into attractive children's snowsuits. The children were thrilled. As Attallah Shabazz recalled, "It was still an exciting adventure to get ready and go see Daddy." If Malcolm expected a day of reckoning, why would he ask Betty to bring the children to witness his possible murder? One reason might be that, despite his observations about the dangers surrounding his daily life, he still wasn't absolutely sure. Or it might have been ambivalence as a kind of defense mechanism, a way of not thinking about something terrifying and inevitable. Perhaps, like Husayn, he wanted his death to be symbolic, a passion play representing his beliefs.

At one p.m. Malcolm checked out of the Hilton and drove uptown in his Oldsmobile. When he reached West 146th Street and Broadway in West Harlem, he pulled over and parked. He had made it a habit not to park his car at speaking venues, where he might be vulnerable to attack. As he waited for the uptown bus, an automobile with New Jersey plates slowed and stopped where he was standing. Malcolm did not recognize the driver, a young African American named Fred Williams, but he did know MMI member Charles X Blackwell in the backseat. Thus reassured, Malcolm slipped into the rear to join him. The car quickly covered the twenty blocks north to the Audubon Ballroom. It was by now just after two in the afternoon, but people were still standing about, indicating that no formal program had started on the main ballroom's stage.

As Malcolm walked into the Audubon, he might have noticed the absence of the usual police presence stationed in front of the building. According to Peter Goldman, one of Malcolm's "senior people had talked with the duty captain, requesting that the police leave the building and station themselves in a less public place." Given the firebombing and the restrictions Malcolm had placed on the MMI's security—the lack of weapons, and no frisking at the main door—it is difficult to imagine the rationale for such an odd

request, or why the police would grant it. In any event, about eighteen officers were relocated several blocks away, up Broadway, at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.

When Malcolm entered the Grand Ballroom on the second floor, he was immediately encountered by Peter Bailey, holding a bundle of copies of *Blacklash*. There was something in the OAAU's publication that wasn't quite right, and Malcolm ordered him not to distribute copies of the issue. "For the first time," remembered Bailey, Malcolm appeared "harried, not fearful . . . but just [like] somebody who had a lot on their mind." Malcolm asked Bailey if he recognized the Reverend Galamison, and Bailey said that he could. Malcolm further asked him to wait near the main entrance downstairs for Galamison; when he arrived, the civil rights leader should be escorted to the rear room behind the Grand Ballroom's main stage.

From its entrance to the far end of its plywood stage, the ballroom stretched 180 feet. Behind the stage, waiting in the small room for Malcolm to arrive, was his core MMI and OAAU staff: Sara Mitchell, James 67X, and Benjamin 2X. They immediately sensed that their leader was in a terrible mood. He flopped down on a metal folding chair, but a few minutes later was up, nervously pacing the floor. Benjamin recalled, "He was more tense than I'd ever seen him. . . . He just lost control of himself completely." When James explained that Galamison's secretary had contacted him hours before, saying that the minister's schedule was so crowded that afternoon that it would be impossible for him to drive uptown to address the Audubon audience, Malcolm demanded to know why he had not been informed earlier. James cautiously reminded Malcolm that he had neglected to notify him the previous day where he would be spending the night, so he had no idea where to contact him. Several hours ago, he explained, he had phoned Betty with this information and asked her to pass it on. Malcolm exploded: "You gave that message to a *woman!* . . . You should know better than that!" He continued to lash out at anyone near him. When Sheikh Hassoun tried to embrace him, he yelled, "Get out of here!" Both Benjamin and Hassoun left the rear room together, and Benjamin walked up to the podium to start the program.

Within a few minutes Malcolm quietly apologized to those still left in the room. "Something felt *wrong* out there," he told them. He added that he felt almost at his "wit's end." The OAAU program that was to have been announced at the rally, already postponed once because of the firebombing, was still not ready; Galamison and several other invited speakers would not be present. A successful event now all depended on his giving a suitably

spirited speech. "When he came backstage, Malcolm was trying to brush aside his own problems," Mitchell observed. "When someone suggested that he should let the people worry about *him* for a change, he answered with some irritation, 'No matter what has happened to me, I can't go out there complaining about it. What I say has to be said with their problems in mind.'"

Rattled by Malcolm's anger, Benjamin spent the first few minutes of his remarks trying to find focus. Repeatedly he implored audience members to "remain seated" and to "keep the aisles clear." It took about five minutes before he finally found his footing on familiar rhetorical terrain, and having established his rhythm, he reminded the audience that for more than a year, Malcolm had spoken frequently against the U.S. invasion of Southeast Asia. "So tonight, when Brother Minister Malcolm comes before you, I hope you will open your minds, open your ears," he told the crowd. "He'll try to do anything for us without the approval of the power structure that controls the policy systems that you and I live under." Without mentioning the recent firebombing and the growing death threats, Benjamin underscored the leader's personal courage and many sacrifices for their common cause. Any time such a person is "in our midst, he does not care anything about personal consequences, but only cares about the welfare of the people, this is a good man. A man like this," Benjamin emphasized, "should be supported. A man like this should be successful. Because men like this don't come every day. Few men will risk their lives for somebody else." A person in the audience shouted with approval, "That's right!" Most people would be "running away from death, even if they're in the right," Benjamin continued. Malcolm X was without question a leader who "cares nothing about the consequences, cares only for the people . . . I hope you understand." At this, the Audubon audience burst into applause.

As Benjamin 2X continued his address, the Audubon's main entrance and second-floor lobby became packed with late arrivals. At about 2:50 p.m., Betty arrived at the Audubon. For some of Malcolm's followers, Sister Betty's attendance was a pleasant surprise, as she had made few if any public appearances since his return from Africa. MMI member Jessie 8X Ryan left his seat beside his wife and escorted Betty and her children to a booth close to the stage. Betty's prominent appearance undoubtedly told the audience that Malcolm would soon emerge onstage. There were now approximately four hundred people seated in the ballroom.

At 2:55 p.m., the MMI's security detail made its third and final change of assignments. A few minutes before three p.m., without advance warning

Malcolm walked briskly out onto the stage with a portfolio in his hand and sat down next to Benjamin 2X. "Without further ado, I bring before you Minister Malcolm," Benjamin hastily announced. As the applause began, Benjamin dutifully turned from the speaker's platform and moved to sit down on the stage, but Malcolm stopped him from sitting down and, leaning over slightly, asked him to look out for Galamison's arrival. Since Galamison had canceled his appearance, the order made no sense, but Benjamin obediently left the stage and Malcolm walked up to the podium.

The enthusiastic applause lasted almost a full minute as Malcolm surveyed his admiring audience. To his immediate left, bodyguard Gene X Roberts quietly left box two and walked swiftly to the rear of the ballroom, only a few feet from Reuben X Francis. By doing so, whether by coincidence or design, he would escape being near the primary line of fire that ensued seconds later. "*As-salaam alaikum,*" Malcolm declared in Arabic, extending the traditional Muslim words of greeting. "*Walaikum salaam,*" hundreds in the audience responded. Before he could utter another sentence, a disruption broke out in the front center of the ballroom, approximately six or seven rows from the stage. "Get your hands out of my pockets!" Wilbur McKinley exclaimed to another conspirator seated next to him. As both pretended to tussle, the pushing and shoving distracted the entire audience, including the MMI security team. From the rostrum, Malcolm shouted repeatedly: "Hold it! Hold it! Hold it! Hold it!"

The principal rostrum guards that afternoon were Charles X Blackwell and Robert 35X Smith, unusual choices as they did not usually serve in this role and had little experience guarding Malcolm. William 64X George had guarded Malcolm at the rostrum many times, yet on this day he had been stationed outside. When the commotion broke out, Blackwell and Smith made a tactical blunder: they moved from their posts and began walking toward the two bickering men. Gene Roberts, George Whitney, and several other security personnel approached the men from the rear. Malcolm was now completely alone and unguarded onstage. At that precise moment, an incendiary smoke bomb ignited at the extreme rear of the ballroom, instantly creating panic, screams, and confusion. It was only then that Willie Bradley, sitting in the front row, got to his feet and walked briskly toward the rostrum. When he was fifteen feet away, he elevated his sawed-off shotgun from under his coat, took careful aim, and fired. The shotgun pellets ripped squarely into Malcolm's left side, cutting a seven-inch-wide circle around his heart and left chest. This was the kill shot, the blow that executed Malcolm X; the other bullets caused terrible damage but were not decisive.

This single shotgun blast oddly failed to topple Malcolm. As Herman Ferguson recalled, "There was a loud blast, a boom that filled the auditorium with the sound of a weapon going off." On cue, two men—Hayer in the first row, with a .45 next to his stomach, and Leon X Davis sitting next to him, also holding a handgun—stood up, ran to the stage, and emptied their guns into Malcolm. Ferguson, still sitting only feet from the stage, took in everything that happened next:

Malcolm straightened up momentarily . . . his hand came up and he stiffened. The shotgun blast [had been fired] at him by one of the assassins, who fired from the crook of his elbow. . . . He hit Malcolm point-blank in his left chest. . . . Then a fusillade of shots rang out. . . . This kept up for several seconds. And I remember saying, "If they would just stop firing, maybe he could survive. . . ." And when they did, Malcolm toppled over backwards . . . and the back of his head hit the floor with a crash.

Ferguson was perhaps the only eyewitness who had not fallen to the floor to escape the line of fire. He continued his account:

After so much noise, shooting and so on and the screaming of people, there was this sudden silence. . . . I could see all of the chairs and the people lying on the floor. There were three men standing in the center aisle, facing the door. And one of them appeared to have some sort of weapon in his hand. They [were] standing in a row, one behind the other. And they stood frozen in time [and] space for another few seconds, and then they took off, running and hopping over chairs and people's bodies.

Most of the MMI security force had also scrambled for cover at the first shot, making no effort to protect Malcolm or to apprehend his murderers. Rostrum guards Charles X Blackwell and Robert 35X Smith both had pulled out of position and had rolled to the floor seeking their own safety. John X Davis, nominally the chief of MMI's rostrum detail, subsequently admitted to police that when the shooting started, he, too, "fell to the ground." Charles 37X Kenyatta had also flopped to the floor and later claimed that he "did not see anything."

Several eyewitness accounts suggest that Bradley then pivoted to his left and may have fired a second blast above the heads of the audience, narrowly missing Ferguson. He then ran down the right corridor of the ballroom and quickly ducked into the women's lavatory, located barely sixty

feet from the stage. Discarding his shotgun, he and perhaps a second conspirator descended a narrow, seldom-used flight of stairs leading down to the street, making an easy escape. The other two gunmen, Hayer and Leon X Davis, inexplicably chose to run a virtual gauntlet, leaping over chairs and people, attempting to escape through the ballroom's main entrance on West 166th Street, 180 feet away. Adding to the confusion, the homemade incendiary device, composed of a bundle of matches and film stuffed in a sock, was still smoking up the ballroom.

The two shooters, trying to escape through the main entrance, hoped to conceal themselves within the large, panicking audience, but even before they were halfway across the ballroom, Gene Roberts intercepted them. One assailant, probably Hayer, fired at him at point-blank range. The bullet tore through Roberts's coat but did not hit him. Roberts grabbed a folding chair and hurled it into Hayer's legs, causing him to stumble and fall, after which Hayer tried to scramble up toward the now packed exit. As he did so, Reuben X Francis took aim and fired at him from eight feet away, pulling off three shots. Hayer was struck just once, in the left thigh; in pain, he stumbled and continued running down the stairwell, where he was immediately surrounded by Malcolm's enraged followers and viciously beaten. In the confusion, Leon X and the other conspirators managed to escape.

From his lone security outpost at the front door, William 64X George had heard the gunfire and immediately ran down the street to tell police, who within a minute were outside the Audubon. Turning back to the main entrance and front stairwell, William saw Hayer being grabbed by two MMI and OAAU brothers, Alvin Johnson and George 44X, who dragged the wounded shooter to the ground. "The crowd started to beat him," William would later recount. At that moment, police patrolman Thomas Hoy arrived at the scene and attempted to pull Hayer into the rear of his squad car. Seconds later Sergeant Alvin Aronoff and patrolman Louis Angelos drove up in a squad car and assisted Hoy in dispersing the angry crowd. Aronoff fired his revolver into the air and the officers were finally able to secure Hayer into a squad car.

The most detailed eyewitness account by a journalist was that of freelance writer Welton Smith, whose story appeared in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Smith first observed a man wearing "a black overcoat in the middle of the hall" rise to his feet and "[yell] at the man next to him, 'Get your hand out of my pockets!'" Gunshots then erupted from the front stage as Smith

found himself violently pushed to the ballroom floor by others. All the shots took place "within fifteen seconds." By the time Smith rose to his feet, he saw two men chase the man in the black overcoat, who turned and fired at his pursuers as he ran toward the main entrance. Smith located the smoke bomb at the back of the ballroom, smothered the fuse, and looked for water to douse it. Several minutes later, he could see that about eight people were bending over Malcolm. As several MMI security personnel attempted to keep others from crowding onto the stage, Smith saw Yuri Kochiyama, an OAAU member, bend over Malcolm and heard her shout, "He's still alive! His heart's still beating!"

Mercifully, Betty had witnessed only the first terrible seconds of her husband's murder. When she first heard the boom of the shotgun blast, she instinctively turned her body toward the stage. "There was no one else in there they'd be shooting at," she recalled later. Two more killers with handguns stepped forward, firing into Malcolm. Betty would later claim that she had seen her husband collapse onstage under this withering fire. Observers, however, saw her quickly gathering her terrified children, pushing them to the floor, shielded partially by a wooden bench and her own body. As the shooting continued, Betty screamed out, "They're killing my husband!" While the assassins fled the scene, the Shabazz children began to cry and to speak up. "Are they going to kill everyone?" one daughter asked. Betty could see people running up to the stage, overwhelmed by the terrible damage that Malcolm had sustained. Finally rising to her feet, she began to run toward the body, sobbing and screaming; friends tried to hold her back because she was clearly hysterical. After Gene Roberts checked on the safety of his wife, Joan, who had been seated in the front near several reporters, he rushed to the stage. Immediately he sensed that Malcolm was dead, yet he desperately attempted to revive him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Joan Roberts was deeply traumatized by Malcolm's assassination and her husband's near death. She wept uncontrollably in the taxi as she went home with her husband. Forty years later, Gene Roberts observed that "the horror of the incident stayed with her for years."

As the smoke still wafted overhead, MMI and OAAU members stumbled around the ballroom aimlessly, in stunned disbelief at what they had just witnessed. The journalist and OAAU member Earl Grant had been using the pay telephone near the front entrance, making a follow-up call to solicit funds at Malcolm's request, when the first shot rang out. He tried to reenter the ballroom but was pushed aside by the stampede of people fleeing the

building. When he finally reached the stage, Malcolm's shirt had been opened and blood covered his torso. Grant retrieved his reporter's camera and began taking photographs. His photos would become the main images of the death of Malcolm X.

When Herman Ferguson finally managed to reach the Audubon's main entrance, he saw to his immediate right "a big commotion going on in the street. . . . A crowd of people had a man up in the air and they were pulling and tugging on him." Wandering in shock, Ferguson found himself on the corner of Broadway and West 166th Street brooding over "what I had just seen—Malcolm's death." A few minutes later he recognized several MMI and OAAU brothers rushing by with a hospital gurney, which they wheeled into the building. Soon a group of policemen and the brothers returned with the gurney bearing a familiar figure: "I looked down at Malcolm. I could already see the pallor, the grayish pallor of his face. . . . His shirt was opened and his collar and tie were pulled down. You could see his chest . . . [and] a pattern of about seven bullet holes, holes large enough to fit your little finger. And I [thought] to myself that he was gone."

Ferguson stood disoriented at the corner for several minutes, trying to decide what to do next. Just then a police car, traveling north up Broadway, turned sharply and stopped only a few feet from him. The squad car held two policemen, one of whom he judged to be "police brass," due to "the scrambled eggs on his hat." The officer left the car and entered the Audubon, returning moments later with a man with an olive complexion who was "obviously in great pain." As the man was assisted into the backseat, Ferguson walked to the car. "He was slumped over, holding his midsection, and I had to bend down and look into his face." Ferguson figured the man had been shot; thinking that the wounded man was "one of our guys," he asked what was happening. The squad car sped away—only instead of making a right turn across Broadway toward Columbia Presbyterian, the nearest hospital, "they kept going down towards the [Hudson] river, across the street, down that incline, and disappeared out of sight."

When the frantic MMI and OAAU members and police carrying Malcolm's body reached Columbia Presbyterian's emergency room, one physician immediately performed a stab tracheotomy in an effort to revive him. Malcolm was then taken to the hospital's third floor, where other physicians set to work. The doctors knew Malcolm was almost certainly dead by the time he was brought into the emergency room, but they continued to try to revive him for fifteen minutes before giving up. At three thirty p.m., in a small office overflowing with Malcolm's supporters and a growing

cluster of journalists, a doctor announced in an oddly detached manner: "The gentleman you knew as Malcolm X is dead."

Malcolm's principal lieutenants did not personally witness the shooting. Mitchell, Benjamin 2X, and James 67X were all together backstage. "I heard a sound like firecrackers," Benjamin recalled. "I heard blasts of gunfire. . . . The perspiration broke out of every pore of my body. I knew that he was gone." He had tried to get up but physically couldn't. "I just sat there, stunned, staring through the open doorway at the body on the stage. . . . Then, all at once, it left me, the weight on my shoulders, and I felt a great relief come over me, Malcolm's relief from all his suffering. Death ends a thing on time. Whatever may be the instruments to bring it about, when it comes, it comes on time."

Sara Mitchell was struck by the actions of Malcolm's disciples, who clustered around his body: "'Maybe he can still make it,' they told each other and his wife, Betty. And together, they tried to beg him, pray him, will him back to life." Mitchell later complained, "After the gunfire ceased, terrible minutes passed and still there were no policemen on the scene." Although one of the city's major medical centers was only several blocks away, no ambulance arrived at the Audubon, which is why Malcolm's own men had to run to the emergency room to pick up a gurney. Several women "steered [Malcolm's] dazed wife outside and gathered his four little girls to be taken home. Only then did policemen come inside." MMI and OAAU members were outraged when the police finally showed up. "Their appearance was so ridiculously late," Mitchell recalled, "that one tearful woman yelled and waved them aside, saying, 'Don't hurry; come tomorrow!'"

"When the shots rang out," James 67X recalled, "Benjamin . . . dived down to the floor. I then walked out. . . . People were up on the stage, Malcolm was laying down, and I saw the life go out of his body." A film taken of the assassination's aftermath shows James kneeling over Malcolm and apparently removing something from the body. Then, inexplicably, without giving orders to subordinates or assuming command, he promptly walked through what remained of the disoriented crowd, passed by several police officers who were just arriving, and left the building. James 67X would claim years later that his immediate intention was "to shoot [Captain] Joseph" in retaliation.

Patrolmen Gilbert Henry and John Carroll had been assigned to the smaller Rose Ballroom, the farthest distance from the shooting site. When the sounds

of gunfire erupted, Henry frantically attempted to call for police backup, but “couldn’t get an answer” on his walkie-talkie. Both officers scrambled toward the Audubon’s entrance, the only direct route into the main ballroom, but they were blocked by hundreds of screaming, jostling people fleeing down the main stairwell into the street. In the chaos and confusion, it was impossible for the two officers to identify a fleeing assailant.

At approximately 3:05 p.m., less than two minutes after the shooting, Lieutenant Bernard Mulligan of BOSS learned that Malcolm had been shot. NYPD detectives Henry Suarez and Kenneth Egan were immediately dispatched to the crime scene.

Several minutes later, the two men arrived at the Audubon, where they were met by several other officers desperately attempting to restore order. Informed that Malcolm had been taken to Columbia Presbyterian, Suarez and Egan promptly went over to the hospital, where they consulted with NYPD detectives Ferdinand “Rocky” Cavallaro and Thomas Cusmano of the 34th Precinct. The officers jotted down the names of all those who had gone to the hospital from the ballroom; they also learned that although the assassination had occurred only ten minutes earlier, a wounded suspect, “Tommy Hagan,” was already being interrogated at the 34th Precinct. At 3:14 p.m., doctors told them that Malcolm had been “dead on arrival” upon reaching the emergency room.

At the hospital, Egan and Suarez secured the personal items found in Malcolm’s clothing. They carefully cataloged them: “One 1965 Red Diary which had been in his breast pocket, had 3 bullet holes; one tear gas pen devise [sic] ‘Penguin’ with two TG-4 cartridges for same, one of which was in the pen for immediate use.”

By 3:35 p.m., Cavallaro and Cusmano had returned to the Audubon, where they learned that one of the probable murder weapons, a sawed-off J.C. Higgins shotgun “wrapped in a man’s suit jacket,” had been found lying on a table in the left rear of the stage. Together with other officers they proceeded to comb the vacant ballrooms for additional physical evidence related to the crime. Locations of bullet holes and other ballistics debris were duly marked off, and the NYPD’s photo unit was called up. Investigators also learned that several others had been wounded during the assassination, all of whom were relocated to the hospital, and proceeded to interrogate them. The fifty-one-year-old OAAU member Willie Harris had been sitting three rows from the back of the ballroom when the trouble started. After the barrage of gunshots, he had tried to flee through the ballroom’s main entrance. As he explained to detective James Rushin, “I was

hit by a bullet. I then left the hall and went to a patrolman . . . and told him I had been hit.”

NYPD detective James O’Connell took the statement of another man receiving medical attention, thirty-six-year-old William Parker, a building superintendent in Astoria, Queens. Parker had taken his six-year-old son Nathaniel to the rally just “to see what the meeting was all about.” Sitting three rows back from the stage near the middle aisle, he had grabbed his son and dropped to the floor when the first shot was fired. As the fusillade continued, Parker felt a sharp pain in his left foot. It was only after he and the boy walked down the crowded stairwell that he realized that he had been shot. Given the number of bullets fired in an enclosed space, it was remarkable that, apart from minor wounds such as this, Malcolm’s was the sole fatality.

As the remaining MMI and OAAU members still inside the Audubon surveyed the initial stages of the NYPD’s investigation, most officers at the crime scene appeared apathetic about the shooting. Earl Grant recalled that the first police officers who entered the Audubon were “strolling at about the pace one would expect of them if they were patrolling a quiet park. . . . Not one of them had his gun out!” A few cops “even had their hands in their pockets.” As many as 150 members of the audience who had initially fled into the street by now had returned to the Grand Ballroom. One frustrated black man cried out, “There ain’t no goddamn hope for our people in this lousy country. You got to fight them lousy whites and fight the stupid niggahs too.” An elderly West Indian woman confronted reporter Welton Smith: “Don’t you menfolk let them get away with it. They done hurt Malcolm and don’t you let them get away with it. They can’t stop us. And the white man can’t stop us. We know the white man put them up to it.” Another man angrily declared to Smith, “I know the cops had a hand in it. . . . [L]ook how long it took the cops to get up to the hall after this happened. It must have been ten minutes, and it took the ambulance almost half an hour to come from the hospital right across the street. Now you tell me that this wasn’t nothing but coincidence.”

The deep skepticism about the NYPD’s unprofessional behavior was not without merit. Most street cops were contemptuous of Malcolm, whom they considered a dangerous racist demagogue. Many believed that Malcolm had firebombed his own house in some kind of publicity stunt. Besides, they thought, given Malcolm’s incendiary rhetoric, it was inevitable that the black leader would be struck down by the very violence he had promoted. Most police officers generally treated his murder case not as

a significant political assassination, but as a neighborhood shooting in the dark ghetto, a casualty from two rival black gangs feuding against each other.

Shortly before four p.m., James 67X returned to the Audubon, where police officers demanded to know where he had been. He replied, "I was going up . . ." Then James asked himself, "How do they know that I left? . . . They must have photographed this whole thing." Days later the police showed him "a seating plan . . . where everybody was seated in the Audubon Ballroom." The police demanded that both James and Reuben X accompany them to the 34th Precinct, where they were driven by a detective named Kitchman. Apparently, either Reuben or James left some ammunition in the rear seat of Kitchman's car, for the following day the detective found five .32 caliber bullets there. Reuben was charged with felonious assault and possession of a deadly weapon in the shooting of Hayer. At 8:20 p.m., New York County assistant district attorney Herbert Stern and police detective William Confrey began James's interview, which yielded little. At 8:32 p.m., the police report noted, "Mr. Warden stopped talking." James was released, going immediately to the Hotel Theresa, where he met with some MMI and OAAU members.

Two hours later, Stern interrogated Reuben X; police detectives John J. Keeley and William Confrey witnessed this interview. Reuben's story was only slightly less obscure than James's. He asserted that he had "arrived at the ballroom before Malcolm, and stood in the rear of the hall." After the gunfire had stopped, he said, he "saw two men running back towards the exit." He "ran after them and saw that one had been captured by the police." Reuben claimed that he then had just "returned to the ballroom" and that "he could offer nothing of any further value." Several days later, Reuben was released on bail. "Brother Reuben" was immediately hailed as a "hero" by MMI and OAAU members and other black activists as the sole bodyguard who had displayed the courage to return fire at Malcolm's killers.

Meanwhile, back at the Audubon, the NYPD photo unit was well into its forensic work. The detectives caucused informally to evaluate the evidence they had obtained so far, concluding that the open hostilities between two "black hate groups" could spark a riot throughout Harlem—and the possibility of having to quell such a major uprising was something they feared far more than the public slaying of a single black man. To forestall any act of vengeance by Malcolm's followers, officers promptly ordered the Nation's Harlem restaurant to close.

For the detectives working the case, too many facts didn't make sense. The request from Malcolm's team that the usual police detail be pulled back several blocks from the Audubon seemed strange, as did the police's agreement to do so in light of the recent firebombing. The detectives were also suspicious when they learned that nearly all of the MMI and OAAU security personnel had been unarmed and that none of the audience had been checked for weapons. Yet time would not be on the side of justice. As the forensic team continued its work, the Audubon's management asked that the police vacate the building as quickly as possible. A dance sponsored by a local black church had been scheduled for later that evening. Remarkably, the police never completed a full forensic analysis of the crime scene: the back wall of the stage was literally pockmarked with bullet holes of different calibers; Malcolm's blood still covered part of the shattered stage—yet the officers agreed to leave. By six p.m. three women workers were mopping up Malcolm's blood, moving chairs, and cleaning the ballroom floor. The festive George Washington Birthday Party dance was held at the Audubon Ballroom, as advertised, at seven p.m., only four hours after the assassination.

Meanwhile, the FBI was trying to piece together its own interpretation of what had happened. At least five undercover informants had been in the ballroom at the time of the shooting. One of them reported that the first assailant had been a man standing near or at the front row. He "put his left hand in his left pocket of his jacket and removed something. He then extended his arm toward Malcolm X." According to this informant, Malcolm "said, excitedly, 'Don't do it,' and stepped further to his left." This first gunman then fired four or five shots.

Another informant, Jasper Davis, placed the initial disturbance in the seventh or eighth row back from the stage. Others seated around the two quarreling men also stood up "and added to the confusion." Only then, reported Davis, did he hear "a shot coming from the front of the room." A third informant estimated that four to five individuals had been involved in the shooting. Two of the gunmen ran "past him," and two others ran "out [through] the ballroom." An FBI memo dated February 22 describes Reuben X Francis as having "shot one of the quote decoys unquote," which suggests that the FBI believed Hayer was one of the two men involved in the initial altercation, just before the first shot. The same memorandum reports that four other individuals had also been hit. Several hours after the shootings, one informant reported, "trusted members of the MMI met at the Hotel Theresa," where James 67X "stated that he had never headed an organization but would do all he could to preserve the idea and keep the program

alive. He stated that a lesson had been learned by the group in that now they must tighten up the security of both members and leaders, and stated, "We are at war."

Other important FBI evidence was connected with OAAU member and FBI informant Ronald Timberlake. Several hours after the shooting, Timberlake telephoned the Bureau's New York office to report that he had picked up one of the murder weapons. He specified that he would turn over the gun only to the FBI, not to the NYPD. The next day, however, February 22, he gave an account of the murder to the NYPD, specifying that he had arrived at the Audubon at approximately 2:10 the previous afternoon, where he had "hung out at the rear of the hall." When the audience disruption began, Malcolm had instructed the audience to "keep your seats." Shots were fired at Malcolm from four or five assailants, who then attempted to flee. Timberlake claimed that he had thrown a "body block" at the gunman closest to him. His general description of the man he had attempted to block was detailed: black, six feet in height, wearing a dark gray tweed coat and blue pants. Timberlake had tripped him and both of them had tumbled to the floor. A second assailant, whom Timberlake described as also black, approximately twenty years old and five feet, seven inches tall, wearing a dark brown three-quarter-length jacket, jumped over them and fled down the central stairway and out the main door. Seconds later, as the stairway was clogged with people, Timberlake pulled out his gun but found it impossible to locate the other shooters, or even to exit the front door. He put his handgun back in his pocket and returned to the ballroom to look for his coat. After waiting a few minutes, he simply returned home. Timberlake subsequently identified "Tommy Hagen [Hayer]" as one of the two shooters he had seen.

The news of Malcolm's murder was broadcast by the media within minutes, nationally and internationally. At the Nation of Islam Chicago headquarters, Elijah Muhammad was stunned, according to an account provided by a grandson. "Oh my God! . . . Um, um, um!" Muhammad reportedly murmured. The emotional split with his "lost-found" disciple had finally come to a tragic end. "You know, I really want to go home now," Muhammad told his grandson and other NOI subordinates. It was a wise decision. Undoubtedly, Muhammad's dedicated security force, the Fruit of Islam, realized that Malcolm's murder would almost certainly trigger an act of retaliatory violence against their leader. The Chicago office, while protected

by a corps of highly trained men, could still be difficult to defend from a frontal assault, but Muhammad's Hyde Park mansion had been carefully constructed to be virtually impregnable. Several family members and other devoted followers owned residences adjacent to Muhammad's mansion, and NOI security men routinely prowled the sidewalks surrounding the property. Muhammad and his advisers retreated to his fortress and waited.

The terrible news of Malcolm's murder quickly reached Alex Haley at his home in upstate New York. Less than two hours later, his grief was pushed aside by practical concerns. Haley typed a letter to Paul Reynolds, fearing their lucrative deal might now be in jeopardy. "None of us would have had it be this way," Haley wrote, "but since this book represents [sic] Malcolm's sole financial legacy to his widow and four little daughters . . . I'm just glad that it's ready for the press now at a peak of interest for what will be international large sales, and paperback, and all." He also advised Reynolds that Doubleday should be alerted to a potential financial problem:

I am almost certain that within the next two or three days Malcolm's widow, Sister Betty, will contact me asking for some advance money from Doubleday or some other would be possible for her, to tide her through the immediate weeks. She hasn't a home since last week they moved in the middle of the night, just ahead of the next day's legal eviction to return the home to the Muslims. And Malcolm, talking with me yesterday, said that he had "two or three hundred dollars," which would be the total extent of Sister Betty's funds.

A few days later, Haley had another thought. Again writing to Reynolds, he suggested, "Maybe some magazine might wish to pay well enough for a probing interview of Elijah Muhammad. I could accomplish this." Haley proposed something along the lines of his earlier personal interviews with Malcolm and Martin Luther King, Jr., featured in *Playboy*. Haley assured Reynolds that he would not be at any personal risk from such an assignment. "I know there would be no danger from the Muhammad faction side of the fence; they would want me to do it. They associate me with major publicity done with dignity, which they desperately want." Some of Malcolm's friends might "feel nettled that I was in Chicago with Muhammad," but they could be handled. Get the contract first, Haley advised; he would then "contact Sister Betty and also a couple of Malcolm's close lieutenants and tell them that I had the order, which is a professional job." Another benefit for Haley would be to maintain his line of communications with the Nation's leadership. "It would give me a chance to say to Muhammad

some things I'd like to regarding the book—that he isn't attacked as he might think, that he actually is praised by Malcolm." Haley insisted that "some other writers might presently have bigger 'names' (Baldwin, Lomax, Lincoln) . . . [but] actually I have the very best inside track to the Muslims' confidence." Nothing came of these overtures, and Haley and Reynolds's fears were fully justified. Within two weeks, in a terribly shortsighted move, Doubleday's owner, Nelson Doubleday, abruptly canceled the contract.

On the day of the assassination, NOI enforcer Norman Butler was still out on bail for the Benjamin Brown killing. That morning he'd visited a doctor to obtain treatment for leg injuries, which had come from his violent beating by the police during his recent arrest. Butler had spent most of Sunday watching television at home. When he saw the news reports about Malcolm's murder, he phoned Mosque No. 7 and finally reached Captain Joseph, who strongly advised him to get himself seen by others as soon as possible—to walk to the corner store and "buy a quart of milk," to speak to several neighbors in his building, and so on. Butler decided not to follow Joseph's advice; after all, he had not attended the event at the Audubon. He slumped back in his chair and continued watching television. That decision would cost him two decades of his life.

Thomas 15X Johnson, like Butler, had not known that Malcolm "was going to get hit that Sunday." At the time, he lived in a top-floor apartment across from the Bronx Zoo. A neighbor called up to Johnson and yelled, "Turn your TV on . . . Big Red just got hit!" Since the Benjamin Brown shooting and Johnson's arrest, Captain Joseph had forbidden Johnson from attending Mosque No. 7 functions. For weeks Joseph had met with him privately, giving him orders. Johnson was not at all surprised by Malcolm's murder: "I already knew—John Ali made it known." He found himself pleased that Malcolm was finally dead.

In Detroit, at Nation of Islam Mosque No. 1, Malcolm's oldest brother, Wilfred X Little, was conducting a service that Sunday afternoon when he received word of the murder. The news shook him terribly, but he went on with the service. At its conclusion, he solemnly announced to the congregation that Malcolm had been assassinated. Some in the audience had known his brother many years earlier, when he was their energetic assistant minister. "No sense in getting emotional," Minister Wilfred cautioned his flock. "This is the kind of times we are living in. Once you are dead your troubles are over. It's those living that're in trouble."

And in northern California that Sunday afternoon, Maya Angelou was chatting on the telephone with her girlfriend Ivonne. Angelou recalled that

there "was no cheer in [Ivonne's] voice" when she said, "These Negroes are crazy here. I mean, really crazy. Otherwise why would they have just killed that man in New York?" In disbelief, Angelou managed to place the phone receiver down on a table. She walked into a bedroom and locked the door behind her. "I didn't have to ask," she remembered. "I knew 'that man in New York' was Malcolm X and that someone had just killed him." The next morning in bed, her first thought was that she "had returned from Africa to give my energies and wit to the OAAU, and Malcolm was dead."

CHAPTER 16

Life After Death

The shattered remains of Malcolm Little were in the hands of Dr. Milton Helpern on the morning of Monday, February 22, 1965. A veteran medical examiner, Helpern had previously directed more than twelve thousand autopsies and had participated in fifty thousand others. As stenographer Frank Smith transcribed Helpern's forensic remarks, the autopsy examination proceeded: "The body is that of an adult colored male, six foot three inches tall, scale weight 178 lbs. There is slight frontal baldness. There is a wide mustache brown in color, also a goatee of brown hair with a few gray hairs." Physically, Malcolm had been in good condition: slender, but muscular. "The hands are well developed. The fingernails are neatly trimmed." Examining the head, Helpern determined that there were no hemorrhages to the scalp. Malcolm's brain was "heavy, weighs 1700 grams." A brain section was taken, which revealed "no abnormalities."

Helpern surveyed the evidence provided from the multiple gunshot wounds. Much of the damage had been caused by the initial shotgun blast, including two wounds on the right forearm, two more in the right hand. The full force of the blast perforated the chest, cutting into "the thoracic cavity, the left lung, pericardium, heart, aorta, right lung." Handgun bullet wounds pockmarked the rest of the body: several in the left leg, a slug shattering the left index and middle fingers, a slug fragment embedded into the right side of his chin, a "bullet wound of [the] left thigh" that extended "through the innominate bone into the peritoneal cavity, penetrating the intestines and the mesentery and aorta." Helpern methodically counted twenty-one separate wounds, ten of which had been from the initial blast. The forensic evidence indicated that three different guns had been used—a sawed-off

shotgun, a 9mm automatic, and a .45 caliber handgun, probably a Luger. Helpern set aside a number of slugs and bullets for further testing by the NYPD's ballistics bureau.

The NYPD's narrative about Malcolm's murder was simple. The slaying was the culmination of an almost yearlong feud between two black hate groups. The NYPD had two priorities in conducting its investigation: first, to protect the identities of its undercover police officers and informants, like Gene Roberts; and second, to make successful cases against NOI members with histories of violence. Its hasty and haphazard treatment of forensic evidence at the crime scene suggested that it had little interest in solving the actual homicide.

From the outset, the NYPD focused its attention on Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson, the two NOI lieutenants they believed had participated in the shooting of Benjamin Brown in the Bronx. The department's hypothesis in the Malcolm killing was that Butler was the second gunman along with Hayer. Johnson was supposedly the shotgun shooter, despite that he was about four inches taller and fairer complexioned than the very dark, stocky Willie Bradley. Still, the police's suspicions were not entirely without merit. Several OAAU and MMI members placed either Butler or Johnson in the Audubon on the day of the shooting. George Matthews, a member of both groups, informed an NYPD detective that "Butler looks like one of the men who had been engaged in the argument but that he would not swear to this." An "unspecified number" of other eyewitnesses viewed Butler in lineups, and two claimed that he had been inside the Grand Ballroom on the day of the shooting.

Yet the most intriguing piece of evidence against Butler came from Sharon 6X Poole, the eighteen-year-old OAAU secretary with whom Malcolm had been secretly involved in the previous weeks. Only minutes after the shooting, she told a news interviewer that one of the assassins was definitely a member of Harlem Mosque No. 7. Sharon had been sitting in the first row when the shooting began, and had fallen to the floor like nearly everyone else. She was still able to identify one of the assassins, she claimed, as a man wearing a brown suit who was an NOI member from Harlem.

On February 26 police arrested Butler at his home and drove him to a station house to be questioned, prompting the *Times* and newspapers across the country to assert that the NYPD was solving the case. The next day, without being contacted by the police first, Sharon 6X phoned the NYPD and presented what appeared to be a convincing story. Again, she explained that she had been seated in the front row when the shooting started. She

“observed Malcolm get shot, place his hands across his chest, and then fall backwards.” One of the shooters who sprinted past her with a gun in his hand looked like “the pictures of Norman Butler” she had seen in newspapers. She described Butler as “thirty-five years, five foot eleven inches, or six foot, medium build, 170 pounds, brown skin. . . . [The] subject was firing his gun in all directions in an attempt to get out of the premises.” Sharon 6X also told the police that MMI “guards were all ordered not to have any guns, that is all except Reuben Francis.”

Her statements focused attention on Harlem Mosque No. 7, yet police never examined Sharon’s possible connections with Newark mosque members. After entering the Grand Ballroom on the afternoon of the assassination, Sharon 6X had sat in the front row next to Linwood X Cathcart, an NOI member from New Jersey whose presence perturbed the MMI members who recognized him. The seating arrangement may have been a coincidence, but subsequent evidence concerning Sharon and Cathcart makes this hard to believe. More than forty years after the assassination, Cathcart and Sharon 6X Poole Shabazz live together in the same New Jersey residence, and Shabazz has maintained absolute silence about her relationships with both Malcolm X and Cathcart.

A grand jury was impaneled on March 1, and the New York district attorney’s office vigorously presented its theory that only three men—Hayer, Johnson, and Butler—had committed the murder. Johnson was arrested on March 3. He, too, was placed in the Audubon by eyewitnesses. Photojournalist Earl Grant divulged important details to the NYPD about the murder that had been confided in him by a fellow MMI member, Charles X Blackwell, one of the rostrum guards during the assassination. On March 8, Grant told police that Blackwell observed one assassin “fleeing from the chair area to the ladies room located on the east side of the ballroom.” Blackwell “feels that this person [Thomas Johnson] was arrested for this crime—he knows Johnson from previous meetings.” Blackwell also identified “another person who he knows as Benjamin from Paterson or Newark seated about the third row on the left side.” Although the police were pleased that Johnson was placed at the crime scene, the fact that Blackwell had identified Ben X Thomas of the Newark mosque, one of the actual assassins, was not further investigated. On March 10 the grand jury ruled that Hayer, Butler, and Johnson had “willfully, feloniously and of malice aforethought” killed Malcolm X.

The police were well aware that New Jersey Muslims might have been involved in the murder. MMI guards had mentioned the presence of Lin-

wood Cathcart in the Grand Ballroom, and he was interviewed by the NYPD on March 25, 1965; Robert 16X Gray, a member of the Newark mosque, had already been interviewed three days earlier. However, the police did not systematically investigate Hayer’s ties to the Newark mosque, or endeavor to explain how he might have hooked up with Butler and Johnson, two Harlem-based NOI officers more senior than himself. They apparently did not consider that NOI protocol would never have allowed enforcers from the Harlem mosque to murder Malcolm in broad daylight, because such men almost certainly would have been recognized by many in the crowd. The NYPD file for Joseph Gravitt is empty, indicating perhaps that any evidence obtained from the Mosque No. 7 captain had been destroyed years ago.

Within Malcolm’s organizations, suspicion quickly rose over the truth of the NYPD’s assertion, and murmurs could be heard about the possibility of an inside job. Since the day of the murder, some inside the MMI had started to revise their estimation of Reuben X Francis as the day’s hero, for shooting Talmadge Hayer. If the NYPD had been asked to relocate their detail outside the Audubon to a location several blocks away, there were only two individuals, other than Malcolm, who had the authority to negotiate a pullback: James 67X and Reuben. In addition, many began to wonder why Charles X Blackwell and Robert 35X Smith had been assigned to guard Malcolm that day when neither man had much experience in a forward defensive position, and when a usual rostrum guard, William 64X George, was present but assigned to guard the door. Reuben’s position as Malcolm’s head of security, responsible for both communicating with the police and arranging Malcolm’s guard detail, had some brothers believing that he might have been involved in the killing.

Gerry Fulcher was convinced that Reuben Francis “was *the* guy. He organized it. And he wanted to get out of Dodge when he knew things were going to get hot. It would come back to him.” The key question for Fulcher was whether Francis was an informant for either the FBI or the NYPD. If Francis had been involved, Fulcher believes, “he had to have contacts within the agency [FBI], or with our office.” But Francis’s role remains uncertain; even the police records are unclear because BOSS and the FBI rarely shared important information about undercover operatives. “The last thing the FBI would ever tell BOSS,” Fulcher said, “is that Francis was an informant.”

Francis began telling others that things were too hot to stay in New York. Released for bail of \$10,000, he began expressing fears that New York district attorneys intended to prosecute him for the Hayer shooting, so he decided

to flee the country. Anas Luqman, who had also been dragged in by police and then released, thought this made sense, and the two men hatched a plot to drive to the Mexican border and hide out in the desert. Francis recruited three other men with NOI connections who, for different reasons, also wanted to leave the United States. Luqman insisted that one of them, a seventeen-year-old boy, be left behind. "So we started driving," Luqman recalled more than forty years later, and after several days on the road the group crossed the border.

Whether or not Malcolm's own men played a role in his death, nearly all Malcolmites were convinced that law enforcement and the U.S. government were extensively involved in the murder. Peter Bailey, for example, charged in a 1968 interview that the NYPD and the FBI "knew that brother Malcolm's destiny was assigned for assassination." Bailey believed that both Thomas Johnson and Norman Butler were innocent. Although he himself did not witness the shooting—he was waiting downstairs for the arrival of Reverend Galamison—he developed a strong theory on how the assassination had occurred. "I think that brother Malcolm was killed by trained killers," he said, not "amateurs." Bailey doubted that "the Muslims were capable of doing it." Consequently, most OAAU and MMI members decided not to be cooperative with the police. What they failed to understand was that there was intense competition and mistrust between the NYPD and the FBI. Even within the NYPD itself, BOSS operated largely above the law, shielding its own operatives and paid informants from the rest of the police force. Consequently there was no unified law enforcement strategy in place to suppress the investigation of Malcolm's death. In the end, cooperation with police detectives might have increased the likelihood that Malcolm's real killers would have been brought to justice.

Ultimately, the police's version of events gained credibility from the media's sensationalizing of Malcolm's antiwhite image. A *New York Times* news article, for example, was headlined "Malcolm X Lived in Two Worlds, White and Black, Both Bitter." In its editorial, the *Times* described Malcolm as "an extraordinary and twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose. . . . Malcolm X had the ingredients for leadership, but his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement and the overwhelming majority of Negroes. It also marked him for notoriety, and for a violent end." The editorial implied that Malcolm's break from the NOI was due to jealousy rather than political or ethical differences. It also suggested that black nationalist extremists, whether in the Nation or in some other group, had been respon-

sible for the murder. "The world he saw through those horn-rimmed glasses of his was distorted and dark," the editorial concluded. "But he made it darker still with his exaltation of fanaticism. Yesterday someone came out of that darkness that he spawned, and killed him."

Several days later, *Time* magazine left no doubt regarding its interpretation: "Malcolm X had been a pimp, a cocaine addict and a thief. He was an unashamed demagogue. His gospel was hatred." The magazine also concurred with the NYPD's theory of the assassination. "Malcolm's murder [was] almost certainly at the hands of the Black Muslims from whom he had defected." But it was not enough just to condemn Malcolm on ideological grounds; *Time* went on to invent a story to ridicule his character. The Sunday afternoon program at the Audubon had started late, the magazine declared, because "characteristically [Malcolm] had kept his followers waiting for nearly an hour while he lingered over tea and a banana split at a nearby Harlem restaurant."

Other publications expressed similar sentiments. The *Saturday Evening Post's* obituary was more sensitive than most, but expressed frustration and confusion over the murdered black leader. "The ugly killing of Malcolm X prompted many people to attempt an assessment of this violent and baffling young demagogue. Was his death an inevitable part of the struggle for Negro equality?" the obituary asked. "His death resembled a martyrdom less than a gangland execution. But Americans have had too much of assassination, too much of the settlement of conflict by violence."

The *New York Herald Tribune's* initial headline story on Malcolm, printed that Sunday evening but dated as the first edition of February 22, read "Malcolm X Slain by Gunmen as 400 in Ballroom Watch: Police Rescue Two Suspects." An accompanying article stated that Hayer had been "taken to the Bellevue Prison Ward and was sealed off by a dozen policemen. The other suspect was taken to the Wadsworth Avenue precinct, where the city's top policemen immediately converged." Several hours later, in the *Herald Tribune's* late edition, the subhead of the article was changed: "Police Rescue One Suspect." References to a second suspect being taken to the Wadsworth Avenue police precinct were deleted. Black nationalists and Trotskyists would subsequently charge that the NYPD "covered up" its own involvement in the assassination by suppressing evidence and witnesses, including the capture of one assailant who may have been a BOSS operative. The NYPD and mainstream journalists such as Peter Goldman ridiculed such speculations. Goldman attributed the confusion to the fact that reporters debriefed Officer Thomas Hoy "at the scene and Aronoff at the station

house," not realizing they "were talking about the same man. . . . [T]he confusion lasted long enough to create a whole folklore around the 'arrest' of a mysterious second suspect—a mythology that endures to this day." However, Herman Ferguson's 2004 account of a second man who had been shot being taken away by the police lends some credence to the "second suspect" theory. If an informant or undercover operative of the FBI or BOSS had been shot, or was part of the assassination team, the police almost certainly never would have permitted his role to become public. Another possibility was the presence of more than one assassination team in the Grand Ballroom that Sunday. Although Ferguson and many eyewitnesses saw three shooters, some observers, including FBI informants, claimed that there were four or even five.

Within twenty-four hours of the assassination, nearly every national civil rights organization had distanced itself from both Malcolm and the bloody events at the Audubon. To Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, Malcolm's assassination "revealed that our society is still sick enough to express dissent through murder. We have not learned to disagree without being violently disagreeable." The NAACP leader Roy Wilkins deplored Malcolm's "gunning down" as a "shocking and ghastly demonstration of the futility of resorting to violence as a means of settling differences." Speaking on behalf of SNCC, the young desegregation activist Julian Bond informed the *New York Times*, "I don't think Malcolm's death or any man's death could influence our deep-seated belief in nonviolence."

From London, James Baldwin responded by linking the crime to the involvement of the U.S. government. "Whoever did it," he speculated, "was formed in the crucible of the Western world, of the American Republic." Much more explicit was CORE's James Farmer, who was well aware of Malcolm's metamorphosis and had expressed doubts that the leader's murder was the product of a feud with the Nation of Islam. "I believe that his killing was a political killing," he declared. It was hardly "accidental that his death came at a time when his views were changing [toward] the mainstream of the civil rights movement." Farmer's demand for a "federal inquiry into the murder," however, found virtually no support. To the public, the Nation of Islam was evidently responsible for the shooting.

Malcolm's death set off a chain reaction of violence and intimidation that kept his supporters in fear and left his organizations crumbling. On the night of the murder, a fire ignited in Muhammad Ali's Chicago apartment,

but the fire was later determined to have been accidental. Ali informed the press that Malcolm had been his friend "as long as he was a member of [the Nation of] Islam. Now I don't want to talk about him." Perhaps still suspicious about his apartment fire, Ali protested, "All of us were shocked at the way [Malcolm] was killed." Ali denied that Elijah Muhammad, or others in the NOI, had any involvement in the murder.

Two days later, early in the morning on February 23, unknown parties ascended to the roof of a building next door to Mosque No. 7 and tossed Molotov cocktails into the mosque's fourth floor, igniting a fire that soon raged out of control, with flames soaring as high as thirty feet. The fire quickly spread next door to the Gethsemane Church of God in Christ, and soon seventy-five firemen were working frantically to put it out. As a section of the mosque's wall collapsed, five firefighters and a civilian were injured. Within an hour the entire building was gutted. The Fruit of Islam was mustered, and soon about three hundred people were watching the fire blaze away. As the crowd grew and emotions surged, the police became worried and called in reinforcements. In the frigid night air, Larry 4X Prescott huddled next to Captain Joseph, who had begun to weep. Larry was shocked to see the almost stoic, deeply private Joseph now overwhelmed with grief.

The destruction of the mosque greatly increased public perceptions that an open gang war was imminent. The NYPD policed the Nation's Brooklyn mosque and the ten businesses it owned in the surrounding neighborhood; the mosque in Queens was similarly protected. In Chicago, squads stood an around-the-clock vigil to protect the life of Muhammad, still cloistered in his Hyde Park mansion. Captain Joseph characterized the Harlem firebombing as "a vicious sneak attack. . . . The worst thing a man can do is tamper with your religious sanctuary."

The Nation would exact its revenge not in Harlem's streets, but in Chicago at the Saviour's Day convention. In preparation, administrators worked closely with the Chicago police to carry out extraordinary security measures around the convention hall. A police bomb squad thoroughly checked the facility; attendees were processed through police barricades before entering. Elijah Muhammad himself "will not make a move unless accompanied by at least six members of his security force, the Fruit of Islam brigade," reported the *Chicago Tribune*. Twenty-five hundred members were present as the convention began on February 26. The event was orchestrated as a triumph of the victors. "Malcolm was a hypocrite who got what he was preaching," Elijah Muhammad proclaimed. "Just weeks ago he came to this

city to blast away with his hate and mudslinging. He didn't stop here, either, but then went around the country trying to slander me."

The audience was treated to the spectacle of Wallace Muhammad and Malcolm's brothers, Wilfred X and Philbert X, walking out onstage to ask forgiveness and to pledge fidelity to the Messenger. Wallace claimed that he had been confused, that it had been wrong to leave the Nation and his father. In tears, he announced that "only God was in a position to judge a figure so exalted" as Elijah Muhammad. Reading texts that had been prepared for them, both Wilfred and Philbert denounced their dead brother for "his mistakes" and made it clear they would not attend his funeral. Wilfred declared to the convention, "We must not let our natural enemy, the white man, come between us [to] get us to kill each other. I was shocked to hear the news of my brother's death but from my heart I ask Allah to strengthen me as a follower of Elijah Muhammad."

Back in New York, there were by now serious questions about how Malcolm was to be buried. By Islamic standards, the autopsy itself had represented a desecration of his body. Muslim tradition also requires the prompt burial of the deceased, and on the opening day of the Saviour's Day convention Malcolm's corpse was lying in state for the fourth day at Harlem's Unity Funeral Home, dressed in a Western-style business suit. Since Tuesday, about thirty thousand people had come to pay their respects. During the week Betty and others close to her had contacted more than a dozen Harlem churches, including Adam Clayton Powell's Abyssinian Baptist, to host Malcolm's last rites; all declined, fearing Nation of Islam retaliation. Finally, the Faith Temple Church of God in Christ, on Amsterdam Avenue in West Harlem, agreed to make its auditorium available. Within hours, the church received a series of bomb threats, but the ceremony went forward without incident. Just before the funeral, Sheikh Ahmed Hassoun prepared and wrapped Malcolm's body in a *kafan*, a traditional Muslim burial sheet.

More than a thousand people packed the Faith Temple Church on Saturday, February 27, to bear witness to Malcolm's funeral. There were a small number of movement leaders—Bayard Rustin, James Farmer, Dick Gregory, and SNCC's John Lewis and James Forman—but the majority stayed away, probably fearing violence. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., was not present, nor were most of Harlem's civic leaders. Betty had asked Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee to preside over the program, and the two read out dozens of notes of condolence from a range of dignitaries, including King, Whitney Young, and Kwame Nkrumah. But it was Davis's soliloquy on the meaning of Malcolm's life to the black people of Harlem that captured the public's imagina-

tion, and in subsequent decades would dwarf everything else that occurred that day. Using notes scribbled at his kitchen table, Davis spoke these words:

Many will ask what Harlem finds to honor in this stormy, controversial, and bold young captain—and we will smile. . . . And we will answer and say unto them: Did you ever talk to Brother Malcolm? Did you ever touch him, or have him smile at you? . . . And if you knew him you would know why we must honor him: Malcolm was our manhood, our living black manhood! . . . 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.

Following Davis's eulogy, Betty walked to the coffin to view her husband a final time. Accompanied by two plainclothes police officers, she bent down and kissed the glass cover that had been placed over his body. She then collapsed in tears. The funeral cortege, which included three family cars, twelve police vehicles, and eighteen mourners' cars, headed north to Westchester County. About twenty-five thousand people braved the freezing weather along the route to the cemetery. Only two hundred people, including media representatives, were allowed at the gravesite. After the last prayers, the coffin was lowered into the grave. There was still time for a final moment of controversy, one that in many respects illustrates the dilemma Malcolm faced at the end of his life. Several MMI and OAAU brothers noticed that the cemetery workers waiting to bury the coffin were all white. No white men, they complained, should be allowed to throw dirt on Malcolm's body. The workers were persuaded to surrender their shovels, and under a drizzling rain the brothers proceeded to bury Malcolm themselves.

During the weeks after the mosque firebombing and the funeral, Malcolm loyalists feared for their lives. The Nation was convinced that die-hard Malcolmites were responsible for the fire, and that their actions merited fierce retribution. On March 12, Leon 4X Ameer, mostly recovered from the savage beating he had suffered at the hands of Clarence Gill and his men back in December, spoke to a meeting of Boston Trotskyists, claiming he had evidence that the U.S. government was involved in Malcolm's death. The next day his body was found in his room at the Sherry Biltmore hotel. A medical examiner ruled that Ameer's death was caused by a coma from a sleeping pill overdose. Another victim was Robert 35X Smith, one of Malcolm's rostrum guards at the assassination. "Karate Bob," as he was called, died when he either jumped or was pushed in front of a speeding subway car. When questioned years later about the death, Larry 4X Prescott curtly

explained, "He got killed in the subway. They claimed that we pushed him off the subway [platform] or something, which I don't believe."

Neither the OAAU nor MMI had cultivated procedures of collective decision making, and without Malcolm, the weak bonds that had held the groups together came apart. Leaders worked on a volunteer basis out of personal devotion to Malcolm, and his death did more than deny them his physical presence: it froze their universe. He had become the cutting edge for rethinking black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and their own home-grown version of Islam, and often his devotees stumbled behind him—even at times suppressing his letters because his shifts in ideology were too disturbing. Without the architecture of his expanding social vision, they found it almost impossible to build upon his legacy. Trust soon evaporated between most members, as people renounced their ties.

In retrospect, Max Stanford said, "the OAAU was trying to put [itself] together too fast." Collective leadership was the desired goal, but in reality "most people were mesmerized by Malcolm." Even when Stanford expressed disagreements with Malcolm, he admitted, "Malcolm would mesmerize me. He was further developed" politically and intellectually than nearly all his followers. Consequently, when Malcolm became "a mass spokesman who's world-acclaimed," there was no one after the assassination prepared to assume his leadership mantle. At first, James 67X thought he might be up to the task. Several days after the assassination, he met with Revolutionary Action Movement members Max Stanford and Larry Neal. According to Stanford, James said that "Malcolm had formed a RAM cell somewhere in Muslim Mosque, Inc. and had said that if anything happened to him, I would know what to do." RAM's representatives agreed to work with James and other MMI activists. "The agreement was for [James] to continue to go internationally and around the country like Malcolm," Stanford recalled, "because he could sound like Malcolm." Yet James soon had his hands full simply trying to keep both groups alive. Because of the long-troublesome divisions between the MMI and the OAAU, there was no one in either group who could inspire the trust and confidence of members in the other group. The secular-oriented activists, moreover, had little interest in the MMI's Islamic spiritual agenda. Given the absence of administrative resources or even a permanent office, neither organization could be sustained.

As the core of Malcolm's supporters disappeared or fell away, James alone was left to deal with Betty Shabazz. Even within hours of Malcolm's

murder, her relationship with the MMI and the OAAU had become confrontational. She blamed Malcolm's supporters for his death; in her bitterness and anger, she instructed several OAAU members to dump into the garbage many of her husband's important papers, all of which had been moved for safety to the Wallaces' home. She demanded that James forward to her all MMI correspondence unopened, including letters addressed to Malcolm, allowing her to review everything first. James refused. "She was a grieving widow, a hero's widow," he explained, but one who had at best a limited comprehension of the MMI and OAAU's work.

The care and security of Betty and the children were largely assumed by Ruby Dee, Juanita Poitier, and other female friends, most of them celebrities. These women established the Committee of Concerned Mothers to provide support. Percy Sutton, James Baldwin, and John Oliver Killens also became actively involved. Within several weeks, over six thousand dollars was raised, including a five-hundred-dollar contribution from Shirley Graham Du Bois. In August, the committee organized a benefit concert that attracted a thousand people and generated another five thousand dollars for the purchase of a home. Malcolm's core constituency, the black poor and working class, never abandoned Betty. She received many envelopes with small amounts of cash, sent either to the Hotel Theresa or to the MMI's post office box. James 67X wrote to many of Malcolm's international contacts requesting funds. Advertisements were placed on New York radio stations. Several aggressive MMI brothers even visited Harlem merchants and demanded cash and merchandise "contributions" for Betty and the children. Yet some Malcolm loyalists found Betty's behavior at this time disturbing. To them, she seemed to be rejecting her husband's poor and working-class black constituency, favoring instead overtures to the black bourgeoisie. Ferguson put Betty's elitist politics in the context of Malcolm's "Message to the Grassroots" speech: "She moved from the field slaves to the house slaves."

As James 67X's most trusted allies dissipated, and the difficulties of working with Betty grew more apparent, he recalled his promise to Malcolm to work for him for twelve months. Mid-March 1965 marked the end of that obligation, and he now began considering other options. He was exhausted, and Charles Kenyatta's scurrilous rumors also had a poisonous effect; some MMI members wondered why James had left the Audubon for nearly an hour following the shooting, and questioned his cordial relations with the Marxists in RAM. So when Ella Collins contacted James, demanding the

right to take over the MMI and OAAU based on her blood tie with Malcolm, he at first resisted, but soon agreed to resign his post. Ella was also given the incorporation papers for Muslim Mosque, Inc., becoming the effective leader of both groups.

On March 15, Ella held a press conference at OAAU and MMI headquarters. Described in the *New York Times* as “an ample figure in black skirt and large-buttoned blouse,” Collins was “terse and cryptic in speech,” a far cry from her charismatic brother. Collins’s claim to leadership was based on her questionable assertion that she had been executive director of Boston’s OAAU chapter since June 1964. She also asserted that Malcolm himself had appointed her as “his successor” on February 20, 1965. Collins generally expressed conservative views. She said that she had “no desire to fight against” Muhammad or the Nation of Islam; she attributed the firebombing of Malcolm’s Queens home to forces “much bigger than the Black Muslims”; and when asked whether the OAAU would reject “leftist or communist” support, Collins responded, “I believe so.” Within days, Collins’s reactionary politics—when compared to Malcolm’s—and her belligerent behavior drove out the few remaining veteran activists. Soon after, James 67X informed RAM that he planned to abandon all future political activity. At perhaps their final meeting, James announced mysteriously “that he was going to disappear, and that the initial cadre that was with Malcolm were going to go under[ground].” When RAM representatives suggested that youth organizing might offer new possibilities, James laughed, saying that they “were crazy” and “the youth were crazy.” And then, recalled Max Stanford, “he disappeared.”

James had decided to go underground because both the OAAU and MMI quickly fell apart without Malcolm. The best—and worst—example was Charles Kenyatta. Within days of the assassination, he insinuated to the press that the killing was an inside job, carried out by Marxists and the Revolutionary Action Movement. He talked extensively with the NYPD, and on March 15 was interviewed by the FBI. He pointed out that it was “very odd that Malcolm X’s bodyguards were not beside him on the stage.” Nor had he recognized any of Malcolm’s bodyguards in the rear of the hall. He further claimed that he and Malcolm “were very close friends” and that they had frequently discussed “certain matters pertaining to the NOI and the MMI.” Kenyatta then proceeded to trash Malcolm’s most faithful supporters. Although the FBI report is redacted, it is clear that he told the FBI that James 67X was “not a Negro nationalist but a Marxist Communist,” and that Malcolm had deliberately lied in claiming that scholarships

would be made available for MMI members to study in Cairo; this was “only stated by Malcolm to make him look important.” In summary, Kenyatta warned FBI agents he “may be next in line to be assassinated.”

The trial of Hayer, Butler, and Johnson began the following winter, on January 12, 1966. The district attorney’s office was represented by veteran prosecutor Vincent J. Dermody. The judge was seventy-one-year-old Charles Marks, a law-and-order jurist who was personally responsible for sentencing one-fourth of all the prisoners on New York State’s death row. The case against Hayer was open and shut, because he had been shot attempting to flee the murder scene; in his pocket had been found an ammunition clip that matched the .45 caliber bullets taken from Malcolm’s body. In the cases of Butler and Johnson, however, there was of course no physical evidence connecting them with the murder. Both men had alibis for that Sunday afternoon, and there was no tangible connection between them and Hayer, beyond their NOI membership. There was also the problem of the chain of command: the police had no clue who had actually given the order to kill.

The prosecution’s star witness was Cary 2X Thomas (also known as Abdul Malik). Born in New York City in 1930, by his mid-twenties he had become a heroin addict and narcotics dealer. For years he was in and out of jail on drug charges, and in early 1963 was assigned to Bellevue Hospital after a nervous breakdown. In December of that year he joined Mosque No. 7, but soon left, siding with Malcolm in the split. Thomas’s extremely short tenure in the Nation meant that he knew relatively little about the organization, or the reasons for Malcolm’s separation. After detectives interviewed him, the district attorney’s office decided to arrest him as a material witness. For almost a year he was held in protective custody. On one occasion, highly disturbed, he set fire to his jail mattress.

In his original testimony to the grand jury, Thomas was one of the few OAAU members who claimed to have seen all three men—Hayer, Butler, and Johnson—at the murder. He explained that Butler and Johnson were the two who had tussled with each other while Hayer attacked Malcolm with the sawed-off shotgun. Since Hayer bore absolutely no physical resemblance to the shooter, the prosecutors and police persuaded Thomas to revise his testimony. At the 1966 trial, he was better prepared, insisting that Johnson, not Hayer, had wielded the shotgun; Hayer and Butler were the two handgun attackers. But he continued to make minor mistakes that undermined his testimony, for example, identifying Hayer as a member of

- 410 *access to penal institutions.* MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 17, 1965; FBI—OAAU, Memo, Chicago Office, February 4, 1965, and February 18, 1965; MX FBI, Teletype, Chicago Office, January 31, 1965; MX FBI, Memo, Chicago Office, February 4, 1965, and February 18, 1965.
- 410 *large draw for the group.* MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 2, 1965; and FBI—OAAU, Enclosure, New York Office, February 2, 1965.
- 410 *of the Nation under arrest.* James Booker, "Malcolm X Speaks," *Amsterdam News*, February 6, 1965; and Steve Clark, ed., *February 1965: The Final Speeches* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992), pp. 17–19.
- 410 *Malcolm again escaped unharmed.* Booker, "Malcolm X Speaks," *Amsterdam News*, February 6, 1965; and MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 9, 1965.
- 411 *"we're waiting for the other."* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 20–22.
- 412 *the South within a few weeks.* "Stop Demonstrations," *Chicago Defender*, February 6, 1965; Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 23–28; and MX FBI, Teletype, New York Office, February 4, 1965. A few weeks later, Malcolm gave a very different interpretation of his experience at Selma. In his February 15, 1965, lecture at the Audubon Ballroom, he criticized "my good friend, the Right Reverend Dr. Martin [laughter] in Alabama, using school children to do what the federal government should do. . . . School children shouldn't have to march." One of King's assistants did not want Malcolm speaking with young people involved in the protest. "The children insisted that I be heard. . . . Many of the students from SNCC also insisted that I be heard. This is the only way I got a chance to talk to them." See Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 138–39.
- 412 *"do not support the U.S. war."* MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 2, 1965; MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 8, 1965, and February 9, 1965; and MX FBI, Memo, Tokyo Office, February 19, 1965.
- 412 *"than Moise Tshombe," he declared.* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 32–33.
- 412 *to look "like a criminal."* *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 413 *"well have been locked up."* *Ibid.*, pp. 34–41; MX FBI, Cablegram, Paris Office, February 11, 1965; MX FBI, New York Office, February 10, 1965, and February 11, 1965; and "France Bars Malcolm," *Chicago Defender*, February 10, 1965.
- 413 *"determine why this incident took place."* Malcolm X to Dean Rusk, February 10, 1965, MXC-S, box 3, folder 4.
- 413 *"human rights for the black man."* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 42–44.
- 414 *"forms of segregation," he insisted.* *Ibid.*, pp. 46–65.
- 414 *"he's losing his control."* *Ibid.*
- 415 *"start off a bloody battle."* "Aid to Malcolm X by BBC Assailed," *New York Times*, February 14, 1965; "Malcolm X Pays Smethwick Call," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1965; and "Malcolm X On Tour," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 14, 1965.
- 415 *"want to follow Malcolm X."* Gene Sherman, "Malcolm X Stirs Up Resentment in Britain," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1965.
- 415 *"They are all the same."* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 69–72.
- 416 *"From Washington," Malcolm replied.* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, p. 222.
- 416 *late into the night in his study.* *Ibid.*
- 416 *"how great his strength was."* *Ibid.*, pp. 222–24; "Malcolm X's Home Is Bombed," *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 1965; "Three Fire Bombs Hit Home of Malcolm X," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1965; "Malcolm X, Kin Flee Bombing," *New York Daily News*, February 15, 1965; "Who Bombed Malcolm X's Home?" *New York Post*, February 15, 1965; "Malcolm X Denies He Is Bomber," *Amsterdam News*, February 20, 1965; and "Malcolm X Accuses Muslims," *New York Times*, February 16, 1965.
- 417 *"firebombing [of the] house."* Thomas 15X Johnson interview, September 29, 2004. Since Johnson's death, Malcolm X researcher Abdur-Rahman Muhammad has also confirmed that NOI members were responsible for firebombing the Shabazz home.
- 417 *into an almost uncontrollable rage.* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 222–24.

Chapter 15: Death Comes on Time

- 418 *Freedom Now Party in Michigan.* MX FBI, Memo, W. C. Sullivan to J. F. Bland, February 1, 1965; MX FBI, Memo, Detroit Office, February 14, 1965, and February 17, 1965; and Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 75–107.
- 418 *usual sharpness had abandoned him.* Rev. Albert Cleage, "Myths About Malcolm X," *International Socialist Review*, vol. 28, no. 5 (September–October 1967), p. 33.
- 419 *"power structure that's so corrupt."* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 75–107.
- 419 *"We sure didn't bomb it."* "Malcolm X's Home Is Bombed," *Chicago Tribune*; "Three Fire Bombs Hit Home of Malcolm X," *Los Angeles Times*; and "Malcolm X's Home is Fire-Bombed," *Washington Post*, February 15, 1965.
- 419 *"house. That was the government."* "Malcolm Accused Muslims of Blaze; They Point to Him," *New York Times*, February 18, 1965; "Malcolm X Promises Names of Bombers," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 18, 1965; "Malcolm X Denies He Is Bomber," *Amsterdam News*; and "Bottle of Gasoline Found on Dresser in Malcolm X Home," *New York Times*, February 17, 1965.
- 420 *"by the Ku Klux Klan."* Perry, ed., *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, pp. 111–49; "Malcolm Links Klan, Muslims," *New York Post*, February 16, 1965; FBI—Goodman, Summary Report, New York Office, February 17, 1966; and MX FBI, Memo, New York Office, February 16, 1965.
- 420 *"to suffer the consequences for."* Perry, ed., *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, pp. 124–26.
- 420 *discovered the house completely vacant.* "Malcolm X Averts Writ by Moving Out," *New York Times*, February 19, 1965.
- 420 *Hamer's Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.* James Booker, "Malcolm X Speaks," *Amsterdam News*, February 6, 1965.
- 420 *"resolved by death and violence."* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 266.
- 421 *"of living prevalent throughout Africa."* Martin Paris, "Negroes Are Willing to Use Terrorism, Says Malcolm X," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, February 19, 1965.
- 421 *"that I'm sorry for now."* Clark, ed., *February 1965*, pp. 240–42.
- 421 *"before they came to rallies."* Peter Bailey interview, September 4, 1968, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Library.
- 422 *would be promptly revealed to the NYPD.* Roger Abel, *The Black Shield* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2006), pp. 471–72.
- 423 *remaining there until the next day.* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, p. 225; and Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 267–68.
- 423 *Sharon 6X may have joined him.* Oral history with James 67X Warden, June 18, 2003; and interview with Abdur-Rahman Muhammad, October 4, 2010.
- 423 *confronted the men. They promptly left.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 268.
- 424 *the West and East Coasts.* *Ibid.*
- 425 *"I have to stand up for."* Michael Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992), p. 104; and Notes of Attorney William Kunstler, Case File 871-65, MANY.
- 426 *they were well-known "enforcers."* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 250–51.
- 426 *degree of civility impressed Johnson.* Thomas 15X Johnson interview, September 29, 2004.
- 427 *law enforcement and the courts.* *Ibid.*
- 427 *Shifflett resigned . . . as general secretary.* Oral history of Max Stanford, August 28, 2007; and interview with Abdur-Rahman Muhammad, October 4, 2010.
- 428 *"his face from all directions."* Mitchell, *Shepherd of Black-Sheep*, pp. 15–17.
- 428 *"paid for his radical pioneering."* *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
- 428 *better working relationship with Mitchell.* James 67X Warden interview, August 1, 2007.
- 428 *"work for it," Charles advised.* FBI—Morris, Summary Report, New York Office, March 1, 1965.
- 429 *vetoed by her husband, Ossie Davis.* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, p. 215.
- 429 *"caught me," he admitted to her.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 266.
- 429 *"Martin Luther King," her mother advised.* Angelou, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, pp. 8–11, 14.
- 429 *"brother should be more careful."* Herman Ferguson interview, July 24, 2004.

- 429 *the likelihood of impending murder.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 418.
- 429 *leader truly wanted to die.* James 67X Warden interviews, June 18, 2003, and August 1, 2007.
- 430 *struggle for freedom and justice.* Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, pp. 27, 120.
- 431 *"viewed him like the enemy."* Gerry Fulcher interview, October 3, 2007.
- 431 *the Rose and the larger Grand.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 261–62.
- 431 *"But I felt we was in accord."* *Ibid.*, p. 416; and Notes of Attorney William Kunstler, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 432 *his life to kill Malcolm.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 416–17; and Peter Goldman interview, July 12, 2004.
- 432 *"we knew he'd be."* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 417–18.
- 432 *next afternoon, Sunday, February 21.* Almustafa Shabazz, Offender Details, New Jersey Department of Corrections. Information can be found online using the New Jersey offender search (<http://www.state.nj.us/corrections/>). In the 1970s and 1980s, Bradley began calling himself Mustafa, or Almustafa Shabazz. His surname Shabazz indicates a continuing relationship to NOI.
- 432 *would not be frigid.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 268.
- 433 *"get ready and go see Daddy."* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 226–27.
- 433 *on the main ballroom's stage.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 269–70.
- 434 *at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital.* *Ibid.*, p. 269; and Peter Goldman interview, July 12, 2004.
- 434 *rear room behind the Grand Ballroom's main stage.* Peter Bailey interview, June 20, 2003.
- 434 *"should know better than that."* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 271; and James 67X Warden interviews, June 18, 2003, and August 1, 2007.
- 434 *he yelled, "Get out of here!"* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 271.
- 434 *almost at his "wit's end."* *Ibid.*
- 435 *"with their problems in mind."* Mitchell, *Shepherd of Black-Sheep*, p. 7.
- 435 *Audubon audience burst into applause.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 271; Transcript of address by Benjamin 2X Goodman, delivered at the Audubon Ballroom, February 21, 1965. Copy and audiotape recording in possession of author.
- 435 *booth close to the stage.* Betty Shabazz interview with NYPD, March 1, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY; and Jessie 8X Ryan interview with NYPD, no date, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 435 *"Minister Malcolm," Benjamin hastily announced.* Transcript of address by Benjamin 2X Goodman. Benjamin's subsequent reconstructions of his final remarks bore faint resemblance to what he actually said on February 21, 1965. To journalist/historian Peter Goldman, Benjamin recounted that he had introduced Malcolm with these stirring words: "I present . . . one who is willing to put himself on the line for you. . . . A man who would give his life for you." See Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 271–73.
- 436 *"Hold it! Hold it! Hold it!"* *Ibid.*
- 436 *the men from the rear.* Roberts responded to the disruption in the audience by moving forward from the rear of the ballroom. See Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 273.
- 437 *"hit the floor with a crash."* Herman Ferguson interview, June 27, 2003.
- 437 *"over chairs and people's bodies."* *Ibid.*
- 437 *he, too, "fell to the ground."* John D. Davis interview with NYPD, March 5, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 437 *he "did not see anything."* Charles 37X Morris interview with NYPD, no date, *ibid.*
- 438 *conspirators managed to escape.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 275–77.
- 438 *William would later recount.* William H. George, interview with New York District Attorney's office, March 18, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 439 *"alive! His heart's still beating."* Welton Smith, "The 15 Seconds of Murder: Shots, a Bomb, and Despair," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 22, 1965. Other detailed media accounts of Malcolm X's assassination include: John Mallon, "Gunned Down as He Addresses Rally; 3 Men Wounded," *New York Daily News*, February 22, 1965; Walter Blitz, "Gunmen Kill Malcolm X: Black Nationalist Is Shot at Rally in NY,"

- Chicago Tribune*, February 22, 1965; "There Are Three Who Will Remember," *New York World-Telegram*, February 22, 1965; and Richard Barr, "Malcolm X Slain—The Reason Why," *New York Journal-American*, February 22, 1965.
- 439 *because she was clearly hysterical.* Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 229–30.
- 439 *revive him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.* Jenkins, ed., *Malcolm X Encyclopedia*, pp. 471–72.
- 440 *camera and began taking photographs.* Earl Grant, "The Last Days of Malcolm X," in Clarke, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, p. 96.
- 440 *"to myself that he was gone."* Herman Ferguson interview, July 24, 2004.
- 441 *"knew as Malcolm X is dead."* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 278.
- 441 *"when it comes, it comes on time."* Benjamin Karim, with Peter Skutches and David Gallen, *Remembering Malcolm* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992), p. 190.
- 441 *"Don't hurry; come tomorrow!"* Mitchell, *Shepherd of Black-Sheep*, p. 20.
- 441 *"life go out of his body."* Abdullah Abdur-Razaq interviewed by journalist Gil Noble, *Like It Is*, ABC, June 7, 1998, New York City.
- 441 *"shoot [Captain] Joseph" in retaliation.* *Ibid.* In this 1998 television interview Abdur-Razaq insisted, "There's no question in my mind Malcolm was executed. He was not assassinated. When you assassinate someone, you are concerned with the manner and the audience that see this. And you have an authority behind you when someone is executed. . . . There is no question in my mind that the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Special Services of the New York Police Department [were] in cohort with those who pulled the trigger," stated James.
- 442 *main stairwell into the street.* Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 274.
- 442 *dispatched to the crime scene.* Investigation Timeline, February 21, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 442 *reaching the emergency room.* *Ibid.*
- 442 *"the pen for immediate use."* *Ibid.*
- 443 *"told him I had been hit."* Willie Harris interview with NYPD, February 21, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 443 *Malcolm's was the sole fatality.* William Parker interview with NYPD, February 21, 1965, *ibid.*
- 443 *"their hands in their pockets."* Grant, "The Last Days of Malcolm X," p. 96.
- 443 *"this wasn't nothing but coincidence."* Smith, "The 15 Seconds of Murder: Shots, a Bomb, and Despair."
- 444 *gangs feuding against each other.* In a 2004 interview, Goldman sharply posed the question "What should the police have done? . . . They should have taken the threat very seriously. They should not have said in the press that the firebombing, for instance, was a publicity stunt. They should have been more aggressive in trying" to stop the assassination. To Goldman, the FBI was far more responsible for triggering Malcolm X's murder than the NYPD, because it had "inflamed the civil war" between Malcolm's followers and the NOI. Peter Goldman interview, July 12, 2004.
- 444 *"seated in the Audubon Ballroom."* Abdur-Razaq, *Like It Is*, June 7, 1998.
- 444 *"Mr. Warden stopped talking."* James Warden interview with the New York Assistant District Attorney Herbert Stern and NYPD, February 21, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 444 *"nothing of any further value."* Reuben Francis interview with Herbert Stern and NYPD, February 21, 1965, *ibid.*
- 445 *light of the recent firebombing.* Peter Goldman interview, July 12, 2004.
- 445 *as advertised, at seven p.m.* DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, pp. 271–72.
- 445 *fired four or five shots.* FBI "Informant Report," unnamed, February 22, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY. Author's note: The FBI maintained numerous open files on Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, and other NOI leaders, at FBI headquarters and at different field offices throughout the United States. Each individual document, even relevant newspaper clippings pertaining to the subjects, were individually cataloged. For several relevant FBI documents, both redacted and unredacted, that are available in the New York District Attorney's case file on the murder of Malcolm X, I have simply identified the document by its contents and date.

- 445 "the front of the room." Jasper Davis Report, Teletype, New York Office, February 23, 1965, in District Attorney's Files, *ibid*.
- 445 ran "out [through] the ballroom." Teletype, New York Office, February 22, 1965, *ibid*.
- 446 "stated, 'We are at war.'" *Ibid*.
- 446 FBI informant Ronald Timberlake. Teletype regarding Ronald Timberlake, New York Office, February 22, 1965, *ibid*.
- 446 the two shooters he had seen. Ronald Timberlake interview with NYPD, February 22, 1965, *ibid*.
- 446 grandson and other NOI subordinates. Clegg, *An Original Man*, p. 228.
- 447 "total extent of Sister Betty's funds." Alex Haley to Paul Reynolds, February 21, 1965; and Alex Haley to Paul Reynolds, February 27, 1965, Anne Romaine Collection, UTLSC, series I, box 3, folder 24.
- 448 abruptly canceled the contract. Kenneth McCormick to Alex Haley, March 16, 1965; Haley to McCormick, March 22, 1965; McCormick to Bob Banker, April 7, 1965; and McCormick to Haley and the Estate of Malcolm X, sometimes called Malik Shabazz, April 19, 1965, all in Anne Romaine Collection, UTLSC, series I, box 3, folder 23. In early March 1965, Nelson Doubleday, owner of Doubleday and Company, ordered his senior editor Kenneth McCormick to cancel the agreement. Doubleday had paid up to then over \$15,000 in royalty advances to Haley and Malcolm X. McCormick would later write Haley that "the hardest thing I ever had to do was to call Paul Reynolds and ask him to show *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* to other publishers. In a policy decision at Doubleday, where I was a minor, contrary vote, it was decided that we could not publish the book." See McCormick to Haley, March 16, 1965.
- 448 neighbors in his building, and so on. Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination*, p. 36; and Norman 3X Butler interview, December 22, 2008.
- 448 chair and continued watching television. Evanzz, *The Judas Factor*, pp. 282, 303.
- 448 "John Ali made it known." Thomas 15X Johnson interview, September 28, 2004.
- 448 "those living that're in trouble." DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, pp. 274-75.
- 449 "the OAAU, and Malcolm was dead." Angelou, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, pp. 24-25.

Chapter 16: Life After Death

- 450 participated in fifty thousand others. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 287.
- 450 was taken, which revealed "no abnormalities." Autopsy of Malcolm X, Dr. Milton Helpen, February 22, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 451 by the NYPD's ballistics bureau. *Ibid*.
- 451 "he would not swear to this." George Matthews interview with NYPD, April 8, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 451 an NOI member from Harlem. Sharon 6X Shabazz interview at Audubon Ballroom, February 21, 1965, in documentary film produced by Omar Shabazz, *Inside Job: Betrayal of the Black Messiah*, May 19, 2010.
- 451 NYPD was solving the case. Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination*, pp. 34-37.
- 452 "is all except Reuben Francis." Sharon 6X Shabazz interview with NYPD, February 27, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 452 relationship with both Malcolm X and Cathcart. Abdur-Rahman Muhammad interview, November 4, 2010.
- 452 "third row on the left side." Earl Grant interview with NYPD, March 8, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 452 "malice aforethought" killed Malcolm X. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 305-7.
- 453 NYPD on March 25, 1965. Linwood X Cathcart interview with NYPD, March 25, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 453 interviewed three days earlier. Robert 16X Gray interview with NYPD, March 22, 1965, *ibid*.
- 453 captain had been destroyed years ago. Joseph Gravitt file, empty, no date, *ibid*.

- 453 "that Francis was an informant." Gerry Fulcher interview, October 3, 2007.
- 453 decided to flee the country. Peter Kihss, "Mosque Fires Stir Fear of Vendetta in Malcolm Case," *New York Times*, February 24, 1965.
- 454 "were capable of doing it." Peter Bailey interview, September 4, 1968.
- 454 "White and Black, Both Bitter." Philip Benjamin, "Malcolm X Lived in Two Worlds, White and Black, Both Bitter," *New York Times*, February 22, 1965.
- 455 "he spawned, and killed him." "Malcolm X," *New York Times*, February 22, 1965. National press coverage and editorials throughout the United States were, with few exceptions, similar to the *Times*. The *Los Angeles Times*, for example, declared that "for a dozen years, the name of Malcolm X has been almost synonymous with hatred of the white race." Even "after the break" with the Nation, "he made it clear that he still hated whites, whom he called 'white devils.'" See "Hatred for Whites Obsessed Malcolm X," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1965.
- 455 "at a nearby Harlem restaurant." "Death and Transfiguration," *Time*, March 5, 1965.
- 455 "settlement of conflict by violence." "Malcolm X (1925-1965)," *Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 238, no. 6 (March 27, 1965), p. 88.
- 455 "city's top policemen immediately converged." Jimmy Breslin, "Malcolm X Slain by Gunmen as 400 in Ballroom Watch: Police Rescue Two Suspects," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 22, 1965 (first edition printed February 21, 1965).
- 455 Avenue police precinct were deleted. *Ibid*.
- 455 have been a BOSS operative. See George Breitman, Herman Porter, and Baxter Smith, eds., *The Assassination of Malcolm X* (New York: Pathfinder, 1976).
- 456 "that endures to this day." Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 276.
- 456 "our deep-seated belief in nonviolence." Douglas Robinson, "Rights Leaders Decry 'Violence,'" *New York Times*, February 22, 1965.
- 456 "world, of the American Republic." "What They're Saying," *Afro-American*, March 6, 1965.
- 456 the Nation of Islam was evidently responsible. Fred Powledge, "CORE Chief Calls Slaying Political," *New York Times*, February 24, 1965.
- 457 any involvement in the murder. Remnick, *King of the World*, p. 304.
- 457 worried and called in reinforcements. "Muslim Mosque Burns in Harlem; Blast Reported," *New York Times*, February 23, 1965; Walter Bilitz, "See Fire as Reprisal," *Chicago Tribune*, February 23, 1965; and "NYC Mosque Destroyed in Blast," *Chicago Defender*, February 24, 1965.
- 457 deeply private Joseph now overwhelmed. Larry 4X Prescott interview, June 9, 2006.
- 457 cloistered in his Hyde Park mansion. Kihss, "Mosque Fires Stir Fear," *New York Times*. The NOI mosque in San Francisco was also firebombed.
- 457 "tamper with your religious sanctuary." Paul L. Montgomery, "Muslims Enraged by 'Sneak Attack,'" *New York Times*, February 24, 1965.
- 457 "brigade," reported the Chicago Tribune. Thomas Fitzpatrick, "5,000 Muslims Meet Today in Security Vise," *Chicago Tribune*, February 26, 1965; and Thomas Fitzpatrick, "Heavy Guard Readied for Muslim Chief," *Chicago Tribune*, February 25, 1965.
- 458 "country trying to slander me." Thomas Fitzpatrick, "Muslim Sect Hears Chief Hit Malcolm," *Chicago Tribune*, February 27, 1965.
- 458 "a follower of Elijah Muhammad." *Ibid*.; "Muhammad Passes Up Session of Convention," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1965; and Thomas Fitzpatrick, "Elijah's Men Maul Foe, 30, at Sect Rally," *Chicago Tribune*, March 1, 1965. About 7,500 people attended the three-day convention. Muhammad Ali also took the stage to repledge his loyalty to the patriarch.
- 458 a traditional Muslim burial sheet. Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 242-52.
- 458 King, Whitney Young, and Kwame Nkrumah. *Ibid*., pp. 252-53.
- 459 "because he loved us so." Malcolm X and Haley, *Autobiography*, pp. 461-62; and Ossie Davis interview, June 29, 2003.
- 459 the brothers proceeded to bury Malcolm themselves. Malcolm X and Haley, *Autobiography*, p. 462; and Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 254-55.
- 459 from a sleeping pill overdose. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 308.
- 460 "something, which I don't believe." Larry 4X Prescott interview, June 9, 2006.

- 460 to assume his leadership mantle. Max Stanford interview, August 28, 2007.
- 461 for Betty and the children. Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 255–65.
- 461 “field slaves to the house slaves.” *Ibid.*, pp. 268–70.
- 462 Collins responded, “I believe so.” James 67X Warden interviews, July 24, 2007, and August 1, 2007.
- 462 “the youth were crazy.” Max Stanford interview, August 28, 2007.
- 463 “in line to be assassinated.” FBI—Morris, Memo, New York Office, June 4, 1965.
- 463 New York State’s death row. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 318.
- 463 Hayer, beyond their NOI membership. *Ibid.*, pp. 310, 318–20, 329–33.
- 463 fire to his jail mattress. Robert L. Jenkins, “Cary Thomas,” in Jenkins, ed., *Malcolm X Encyclopedia*, pp. 531–32.
- 464 hands of Butler or Hayer. Friedly, *Malcolm X: The Assassination*, pp. 42–43; and Cary Thomas interview with NYPD, March 3, 1965, and March 12, 1965, Case File 871-65, Series I, MANY.
- 464 “go look for nobody else.” Norman 3X Butler interview, December 22, 2008.
- 464 order to free his coassassins. Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 335–39, 348–53.
- 464 I never trusted Kenyatta—never.” *Ibid.*, pp. 339–40; and Thomas 15X Johnson interview, September 29, 2004.
- 464 an NOI “hundred-man enforcing squad.” Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 339–40.
- 465 to disregard Betty’s off-stand statements. *Ibid.*, pp. 333–35.
- 465 “when the jury convicted me.” Thomas 15X Johnson interview, September 29, 2004.
- 465 “here that history will support.” Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, pp. 357–59, 373–74.
- 465 political philosophy of black nationalism. Marable, *Living Black History*, p. 197; and Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, p. 155.
- 465 “of the black nationalist movement.” Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, p. 64.
- 465 “the New Super Bop Fire.” Amiri Baraka (also known as LeRoi Jones), “Jazz Criticism and Its Effect on the Art Form,” in David Baker, ed., *New Perspectives in Jazz* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1986), p. 66.
- 465 “artist of the spoken word.” Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, p. 383.
- 465 “its relevance cannot be doubted.” Eliot Fremont-Smith, “An Eloquent Testament,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1965.
- 466 “the most painful of truths.” Truman Nelson, “Delinquent’s Progress,” *Nation*, November 8, 1965, pp. 336–38.
- 466 “his burning ambition to succeed.” Bayard Rustin, “Making His Mark,” *Washington Post*, November 14, 1965.
- 466 “members of the black bourgeoisie.” *Ibid.*
- 467 sold worldwide exceeded six million. Eric Pace, “Alex Haley, 70, Author of *Roots*, Dies,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1992.
- 467 with Malcolm X for decades. See FBI—Morris file.
- 467 “have taken all five assassins.” Karim, Skutches, and Gallen, *Remembering Malcolm*, p. 191.
- 468 “valuable assistance to the Bureau.” FBI—Goodman, Memo, New York Office, April 27, 1966.
- 468 went back to New York City. *Ibid.*
- 468 or anywhere else—has emerged. Langston Hughes Savage interview, September 6, 2008.
- 468 “of Malcolm’s birth and death.” Remnick, *King of the World*, p. 240.
- 468 as remote as another world. *Ibid.*, pp. 253–56.
- 469 of nearly all the Nation’s operations. On Wallace Muhammad’s rise to power in the NOI, see Clifton E. Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims: The Resurrection, Transformation, and Change of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in America, 1930–1995*, second edition (London: Scarecrow, 1996), pp. 101–11, 157–71; Clegg, *An Original Man*, pp. 98, 162, 181–83, 206–7, 273–74, 282; “Son Will Succeed Elijah Muhammad,” *Amsterdam News*, March 1, 1975; “There Is No Power Struggle Among Black Mus-

- lims,” *Amsterdam News*, March 22, 1975; and “An Interview with Elijah Muhammad’s Successor,” *Amsterdam News*, April 9, 1975.
- 469 a few whites actually joined. “New Muslim Leader Invites Contributions from Whites,” *Amsterdam News*, April 23, 1975; and “Muslims to Accept White Followers,” *Amsterdam News*, June 25, 1975.
- 469 distinguish himself from his father. “W. Deen Mohammed: A Leap of Faith,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 2002.
- 469 “for the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.” Marsh, *From Black Muslims to Muslims*, pp. 103–6.
- 470 in 1977, was to excommunicate him. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–10.
- 470 Marie Muhammad (born March 30, 1960). “Suit Charges Late Muslim Leader’s Estate Misused,” *Jet*, March 26, 1981.
- 470 “get in the front of the civil rights movement.” Larry 4X Prescott interview, November 7, 2007.
- 471 a wife and thirteen children. “Muslim Slain in Jersey,” *Amsterdam News*, September 8, 1973.
- 471 subsequently found four miles distant. Evanzz, *The Messenger*, p. 377.
- 471 just barely missing his secretary. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
- 471 causes, on December 18, 2003. Illinois Deaths, Raymond Sharrieff, U.S. Social Security Death Index, Family Search Internet (www.familysearch.org, June 19, 2010).
- 471 six sons, and eight daughters. Richard Goldstein, “Jabir Herbert Muhammad, Who Managed Muhammad Ali, Dies at 79,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2008.
- 471 Council on American-Islamic Relations. Margaret Ramirez, Many Brachear, and Ron Grossman, “Imam W. Deen Mohammed, 1933–2008,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 10, 2008; and Patricia Sullivan, “W. D. Mohammed: Changed Muslim Movement in U.S.,” *Washington Post*, September 10, 2008.
- 472 “not a good influence on him.” Bill Cunningham and Daniel Golden, “Malcolm: The Boston Years,” *Boston Globe*, February 16, 1992.
- 472 passed away on August 6, 1996. *Ibid.*
- 472 “wanting to help my daughter.” Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 359–61, 364–66, 437–39, 505–13.
- 472 “to uplifting women and children.” Emanuel Parker, “Nation Mourns Loss of Betty Shabazz,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 26, 1997.
- 472 District of Columbia representative Eleanor Holmes Norton. *Ibid.*
- 473 not those of her father. Rickford, *Betty Shabazz*, pp. 536–45.
- 473 “stories straight. You’re out, kid.” Gerry Fulcher interview, October 3, 2007.
- 473 before resigning from the force. *Ibid.*
- 474 “allegedly received from the FBI.” Les Matthews, “Malcolm X Killer Talks; Names 4,” *Amsterdam News*, April 29, 1978.
- 474 “have been sure to notice.” Charles Kaiser, “2 Held Not Guilty in Malcolm Case,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1978.
- 474 to grant a new trial. “Federal Hearings Asked into Malcolm X Murder,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1979.
- 474 of the Black Panther Party. *Ibid.*; and “Probe Requested in Malcolm Death,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 20, 1978.
- 474 died on August 4, 2009. Robert Fleming, “Khalil Islam; Wrongly Convicted of Killing Malcolm X, Dies,” *Black Star News*, August 7, 2009.
- 475 serious to permit his release. Jennifer Peltz, “Thomas Hagen, Only Man to Admit Role in Malcolm X Assassination, Is Freed on Parole in NYC,” Associated Press, April 27, 2010.
- 475 associated with the Newark mosque. See Zak Kondo, *Conspiracys: Unraveling the Assassination of Malcolm X* (Washington, D.C.: Nubia, 1993).
- 475 They escaped with over \$12,500. *United States of America v. James Henry Moore and William Bradley*, Title 18 U.S.C. Secs. 2113(d) and (D.N.J. 1699); and “Livingston Bank Is Held Up,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1968.
- 475 charged with the bank robbery. *United States of America v. James Henry Moore, appellant, and William Bradley*, 453F.2d 601 (3d Cir. 1971).