

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 13: MINISTER MALCOLM X

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

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



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



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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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



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

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



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

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



CHAPTER 14: BLACK MUSLIMS

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

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



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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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



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



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



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

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

CHAPTER 15: ICARUS

As Malcolm continues to speak for the Nation of Islam, he receives more and more mail, overwhelmingly from white people. Besides the random threats, most of the letter writers are concerned with two things: whether or not God will destroy their civilization for oppressing black people, and Malcolm's thoughts on interracial couples. Malcolm also tries to clarify in his public speeches that when criticizing the "white devil," he is criticizing society as a whole, every not individual white man.

One of Malcolm's brothers from the mosque gets ahold of a confidential sociological report on the "Black Muslims" in Harlem and shows it to him. In it, he finds lots of complicated language about how Malcolm essentially doesn't understand the "Harlem sub-culture." Malcolm says reports like this are examples of how educated black people work against the interests of black people at large.

The white man, Malcolm says, is extremely clever and good at getting his enemies to work against each other so that he can advance his own economic and political interests. However, a superiority complex also keeps him from seeing that he acts in a racist way towards non-whites. As proof, Malcolm cites the Japanese American internment camps of World War II, while German Americans were largely left alone.

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



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



Malcolm has a complex relationship with individual white people. He describes receiving letters from many whites who think similarly to him, and also clarifies that his critique is a societal critique, not an indictment of individuals. This idea continues to be misinterpreted today in various social justice spheres—an oppressed group condemning their oppressors as a whole doesn't mean they hate or scorn every individual member of that group, but are simply expressing righteous anger and pointing out systemic oppression in society as a whole.



The first half of Malcolm's autobiography was intended to serve as evidence that he has an intimate understanding of "Harlem's sub-culture," so any assertion to the contrary is now seen by the reader as absurd.



The example from World War II illustrates two things. First, white society imposed racist policies of segregation and oppression in the very recent past against other racial minorities. Second, society didn't see its own hypocrisy in not also interning German Americans.



The year is 1963, and Malcolm is continuously dealing with the press, who frequently turn his statements inside out so that his original words are never printed as he said them. While he feels attacked by other civil rights leaders, he feels he should still support their efforts, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and he says so in his statements. During this time, he becomes very strategic and adept with his interview skills, learning to have prepared answers to typical questions and arguments.

Malcolm states publicly that he feels the Northern Freedom Riders efforts in the South to be ridiculous, as many Northern cities have just as many problems with segregation and racial equality as the South. While they could be doing more for racial justice in the North, they instead go South. His comments draw the ire of Northern liberals, who do not see themselves as implicit in a racist system. Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad see the honest and upfront racism of Southerners to be much easier to combat than that in the North, where people talk about equality and democracy but rig the system behind the scenes.

Malcolm sees “integration” as a concept that doesn’t really mean anything. While a small number of black people want to live amongst white people, most prefer to live in communities that share their own ethnic and cultural background. The truth is, says Malcolm, that white people and black people are just *different*, and those differences should simply be acknowledged and accepted, rather than ignored.

Until World War II, Malcolm says, there was virtually no honest dialogue between the black and white communities. That’s why when black people started to rise up in civil rights disputes, white communities were so caught off guard that anything was amiss. Rather than true communication, white business and political leaders in cities across America had only talked with black leaders they themselves picked and who didn’t speak for the community.

Malcolm believes that an uprising against Western countries and the governments they control is happening worldwide in the Third World. And while the West exports its ideas about equality and democracy, the violence and repression against blacks in America stands as evidence of the West’s hypocrisy.

During this period, Malcolm becomes a “professional” at dealing with the press, and this professionalization may have been a contributing factor in his estrangement from the Nation. The Nation’s other leaders may have seen him as too good at his job, as if he were more interested in confrontation and debate than preaching.



This passage should remind the reader of Malcolm’s first “long distance” trip to the South. It was suggested that Malcolm sees the South as practically another country; here, he says something similar. While he supports desegregation efforts in the South, he also thinks that Northerners should deal with their own problems, rather than simply demonizing racists in the South (and considering themselves innocent in comparison).



While the claim that Malcolm is “racist” against white people is nonsensical, it is fair to say that he has an essentialist view on race, meaning that he sees people from different races or ethnicities as essentially or intrinsically different—and not just in their experience of or treatment by society.



In Malcolm’s view, true leaders spring from among the people, rather than being chosen and imposed from the outside. If a black leader was too friendly with white leaders, then this proved he could not possibly be representing the true interests of the African American community.



In the early 1960s, multiple revolutions and rebellions against European powers had either recently happened or were ongoing in formerly colonized countries, and these movements often supported each other.



Instead of trying to integrate, Malcolm wants the black community to focus on pulling itself up. Through the creation of locally owned businesses and initiatives to lower drug and alcohol abuse, among other things, the black community needs to build up its self-respect. Malcolm says there are a few African Americans who have lots of wealth and spend it all at fancy, white-owned restaurants in an effort to seem white and cultured—but he holds this group in contempt.

The only real integration, Malcolm says, would be intermarriage, an idea that he opposes. With so much racism in the world, mixed-race couples are just asking to not be welcomed in either community and to create a complicated situation for their children to navigate. He sees the separation of races as the only way for them to preserve their own culture and heritage. An example of how integration has failed, he argues, is the Jewish Holocaust in Germany. While Jews were major contributors to every part of the German economy and culture, and many had married into ethnically German families, they were nonetheless targeted and killed en masse.

Another example of shallow integration politics is what Malcolm calls the “Farce on Washington.” At the time a largely leaderless, young, and angry movement is growing nationwide in both the countryside and the city centers. Fearing that such a group could pose a serious threat to the government in D.C., the White House asks national civil rights leaders to stop the march, but they aren’t in charge. So in order to quell the tension and defuse the radical demands of the March, the White House publicly endorses the March. Then, the “Big Six” civil rights leaders are offered funding by a white philanthropist if they will begin to direct the March’s organizing process. As they portray themselves as the leaders of the March in the media, the people planning to participate shift from a predominately poor, black group to a mixed-race, middle class group. Instantly the political atmosphere of the March is completely changed. Meanwhile, according to a poll, not even one Congressman changes their position on civil rights post-march.

A month before the March on Washington, The New York Times reports that Malcolm is the second most sought after speaker throughout the country’s universities. Many schools have made Lincoln’s book, *The Black Muslims in America* required reading, spreading the Nation’s fame. Overall, Malcolm enjoys speaking to colleges, as he finds the debates with faculty members and objective questions from curious students to be exhilarating and a way for him to continue improving his own arguments.

Malcolm does not have an egalitarian belief system; he is not opposed to the idea of some people gaining wealth and rising above others. However, he is opposed to middle- and upper-class African Americans who don’t use their wealth to lift up other African Americans who have been less fortunate.



Malcolm presents his argument from a pragmatic point of view. Mixed-race couples are a bad idea because they pretend that racism simply doesn’t exist around them and only make life harder for themselves and their children. Furthermore (at least as Malcolm sees it), the minority partner in a mixed-race couple can more easily forget that they have fewer privileges in society, which could lead to a catastrophe like the Jews being caught off-guard by Nazi persecution.



This is a very different history of the March on Washington than the one the reader is probably familiar with. Malcolm complicates the March’s history by describing its class background. The poor are always the ones in society who suffer the most from social inequality, so they are also the ones most likely to pose radical demands for change in the political dialogue. Because of this, the white “power structure” used more mainstream black leaders, who represented the middle classes, to redirect the tone and atmosphere of the march. It then became largely a symbolic gesture, rather than a revolutionary occupation of the nation’s capital.



Later, Malcolm will say that his one regret is not having a university education. This regret and his admiration for college students’ open minds reflects his respect for the power of universities to shape people’s minds and perhaps even change the world.



Contentiously, Malcolm asserts that he can tell when a question is coming from a Jewish audience member just by its content. According to Malcolm, Jews tend to ask very subjective questions that concern how they may be affected by Malcolm's beliefs. Malcolm does not begrudge them this attitude, as Jews have been the subject of persecution for centuries, so they are naturally defensive. However, he also believes that this insular view means that Jewish business owners in black ghettos tend to care more about their profits than about the good of the community.

While some black people may defend society as good overall when in mixed company, Malcolm asserts that no black person has ever challenged his accusations against white society when it is an all-black audience. While they may want to gain favor by denouncing Malcolm around white people, they all are perfectly aware of the crimes committed by white people, such as slavery, segregation, and lack of rights.

Malcolm tells Elijah that these speaking tours allow more people, especially those in elite universities, to hear their message, which is good for the Nation. At the time, Elijah doesn't seem to be supportive of these events, something Malcolm doesn't understand. But later, he learns that Elijah is secretly jealous of Malcolm's ability to handle such intellectual and educated debates.

While audiences are generally surprised to hear Malcolm talk about Jesus, he explains that he is one of the central Prophets of Islam, along with Moses and Muhammad. However, the message of love preached by Jesus has been largely ignored by Christianity and Western imperialist nations.

Malcolm tells the story of a young white college student who came to him at the Muslim restaurant in Harlem after having heard him speak. Clearly from the South, she asks if he believes there are any good white people, and if there is anything she can do. He replies no, and she runs out crying.

When Malcolm is invited to speak at Harvard Law School, he suddenly realizes that he is near to his old burglary ring's hideout. At that moment, he sees how much he's changed and grown, thanks to the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad. This awareness makes him more grateful than ever for how Elijah has led him through that darkness.

Malcolm (and the Nation in general) has been accused of anti-Semitism, but he denies this charge here and throughout the book. Instead, he asserts that Jewish culture simply has certain aspects which he can recognize in Jewish people. This goes back to his essentialist views on race, which largely reduce individuals' actions and attitudes to being attributable to their ethnic background.



This is part of the reason why Malcolm supports the Nation as an all-black organization. It is always difficult to talk about racism, but if black people are going to confront racism even in sympathetic whites, then they first need to have solidarity before complicating the dialogue.



Once again, the question of whether to trust Malcolm's explanation comes up. Malcolm certainly does have quite a reputation as a public speaker and debater, but it's his word against Elijah's whether his skill inspired jealousy or pride.



One of Malcolm's key strategies is to surprise his audience. While they always expect a simple message of racial antagonism, he always presents a more complex point.



Malcolm's harsh response to this one girl reflects his attitudes on confronting racism in general. He will later come to regret this interaction, but it accurately reflects his feelings at the time—since white people were created as "devils," none of them can truly be "good."



Harvard Law is the oldest and most prestigious institution in the country, and its proximity to Malcolm's criminal hideout is thus an instance of ironic juxtaposition. Malcolm's speech there represents an apex of his speaking career, and he recognizes that he owes so much to Elijah for helping him to reach this point.



Then the Greek myth of Icarus flashes through Malcolm's mind. In the myth, Icarus's father makes him artificial wings so they can fly away together (and escape prison). His father warns him not to go too high, but Icarus, enjoying himself so much, keeps going higher. Finally, the beeswax holding his wings together begins to melt in the sun, and Icarus goes crashing into the sea. Malcolm vows to himself to always remain humble and remember that his wings were given to him by Islam, not through his own merit or greatness.

Malcolm's vow unfortunately appears to come too late. He has already risen all the way to the halls of Harvard Law, and now he vows to be humble. His "father," Elijah, gave him his wings to rise up, but has been left far behind Malcolm/ Icarus's ascent. His eventual fall thus appears all but inevitable—though in his case it is not necessarily his own fault, but more as if Daedalus (Icarus's father) had grown jealous of his son and pulled him down himself.



CHAPTER 16: OUT

As Elijah Muhammad's bronchial condition begins to grow worse in 1961, he misses several major rallies and subsequently moves out to Phoenix. As Elijah needs to rest, Malcolm's workload continues to increase, but he's still very satisfied. After years of working to build up the Nation's mosques and to spread its messages throughout the media and into U.S. universities, Malcolm couldn't ask for anything more. His happiness, he says, is tied exclusively to serving Elijah and the Nation of Islam.

According to Malcolm, he does not wish to take Elijah's place as the figurehead of the Nation. However, he does feel that it is his obligation and duty to Elijah to take over the functions that Elijah's health will no longer allow him to fulfill, and doing so also happens to give him great pleasure.



Privately, Malcolm has one regret, and that is that the Nation has gained a reputation as being all talk and no action. With so many civil rights demonstrations and protests happening across the country, Malcolm feels that Muslims should be allowed to participate and show their solidarity with other black people. But beyond this, he has no complaints.

This private regret highlights that Malcolm is beginning to think about black solidarity as extending beyond the Nation of Islam. Not only would this be good for all black people, but it could possibly increase the Nation's own numbers.



Ever since Malcolm has taken on a more public role in 1961, he has heard rumors that some people in the Nation see him as power-hungry and prideful. He pays them no concern, as he remembers that Elijah had prophesied to him that his work would inspire jealousy; instead, he places his faith in Elijah to stand by him should he ever hear such talk.

Even while Malcolm's reputation is being attacked, he does nothing to defend himself. Instead, he places all his eggs in one basket, so to speak, and assumes that Elijah will always stand up for him.



Outside of the Nation, it is said that Malcolm is becoming rich from his engagements. This is clearly not true to anyone who knows him, though, as he owns no property of his own and makes no money. The Nation of Islam has loaned him a car and a house to live in and they pay his expenses, but that's it.

Not only is Malcolm's reputation completely dependent on the goodwill of the Nation and Elijah, but he has no financial security beyond the generosity of the Nation.



The only fight Malcolm ever has with Betty is about his lack of foresight regarding money. While she believes that he should make some money on the side to secure his family, he believes that the Nation will always provide for Betty and their kids should anything ever happen to him. That faith, it will turn out, is poorly misplaced.

Malcolm mentioned earlier that Betty was one of the only women whom he ever trusted. This is one of those moments when he did not trust her judgment, and it will cost their family dearly in the future.



Malcolm receives a lot of credit publicly and privately from people who see him as the face of the Nation of Islam, or as the “Number Two Muslim.” This praise makes him feel very uncomfortable, and he does everything he can to direct the attention and praise towards Elijah Muhammad instead. For example, Malcolm passes out photos for reporters to use of Elijah instead of himself, and he urges them to go visit Elijah and interview the Messenger in person.

Around 1962, Malcolm notices that he no longer appears in the “Muhammad Speaks” newspaper that he himself founded. Now run by one of Elijah’s sons, the staff has been given orders to run as little as possible about Malcolm. The Chicago headquarters also grows chilly with Malcolm, even asking him to no longer hold any rallies on his own. They have lost sight of their collective mission in spreading the Nation of Islam to as many African Americans as possible.

However, by 1963, Malcolm consciously starts to try and mitigate others’ jealous comments. He stops appointing new ministers from among his followers and he refuses several major interview requests. He sees these as losses for the Nation and black people in general rather than losses for himself. Nonetheless, Malcolm still has every reason to believe that he enjoys Elijah’s support. In 1963 at a rally in Philadelphia, Elijah embraces Malcolm, makes him National Minister and praises him as his “most faithful, hard-working minister.”

Morality and specifically chastity have been major parts of Malcolm’s personal life and preaching since he joined the Nation. The Muslim’s strict moral code is seen as the bedrock of their strength. Nevertheless, in 1963, Malcolm starts to avoid preaching about morality and only talk about social doctrine. He has just learned that Elijah Muhammad himself has broken their moral code.

In 1963, Elijah Muhammad faces paternity suits from two of his former secretaries, both of them in their twenties. Malcolm has heard rumors about Elijah’s infidelity since 1955, but he absolutely refused to pay them any heed. It is impossible to reconcile his total faith in Elijah as the moral, perfect head of the Nation with someone who has committed adultery, an offence that normally leads to expulsion from the Nation.

Malcolm remembers how he had rejected his brother Reginald because he had been “isolated” from the Muslim community for a sexual affair. He had put the Nation and faith in Elijah above even the ties of family, a decision that he now finds deeply troubling.

While Malcolm’s humility and efforts to keep the spotlight on Elijah Muhammad are admirable, it is easy for the reader to see that they were doomed to fail. No reporter will ever prefer talking to a man a thousand miles away or using his picture when there is a live star right in front of them.



While the intended effect may have been to limit coverage of Malcolm, the paper under-mines its own mission by excluding important stories about the Nation that happen to feature him. A similar paradox is at work in the Chicago office, as they ask Malcolm to lead fewer rallies—which means that rallies have smaller crowds.



Ever since he joined the Nation, Malcolm has always been “full steam ahead,” and has often been reprimanded for being too enthusiastic. Instead, he now finds himself hesitating and holding off from doing things that he feels would help the Nation. Despite his hesitant feelings, he takes heart in Elijah’s apparent show of support.



Malcolm shocks the reader by announcing out of the blue that Elijah has not been a spotless example after all. This rhetorical tool allows the reader to experience and empathize with Malcolm’s own astonishment.



Malcolm presents the problem as a logical puzzle. Directly at the top of the Nation is someone who actually represents an example of someone who should be expelled according to the rules spelled out by that leader himself—a contradiction which Malcolm can’t work out.



While he doesn’t say so explicitly, Malcolm’s doubts in the Nation are now causing him to feel guilty for his zealous rejection of his brother.



By 1962, the rumors have already begun to spread throughout the Chicago black community, leading many Muslims to leave the mosque. Thankfully, the rumors spread more slowly to New York and the rest of the country. Malcolm begins having nightmares of the scandal this news will cause when it hits the major press. Yet he still can't admit the situation to himself. When people ask him "if he'd heard the rumors," he acts completely ignorant, not wanting to admit it to himself or to them.

Malcolm finally decides to act. He first flies to Chicago, where he meets with Wallace Muhammad, one of Elijah's sons. He instantly understands why Malcolm has come, and they begin to discuss what should be done. Wallace does not think Elijah will want any large effort to defend him publicly.

From there, Malcolm seeks out three of Elijah's former secretaries to hear the story directly from them. They all say that Elijah is the father of their children. Further, they tell Malcolm that Elijah would praise Malcolm in public, but tear him down in private, saying that he would one day leave Elijah behind. Malcolm is very hurt by this.

Feeling disloyal through his inaction, Malcolm decides to write a letter to Elijah, telling him about the rumors that have been circulating about him and asking for guidance. Elijah promises they will discuss it the next time he sees him. Meanwhile, Malcolm and Wallace begin to prepare a "defense" of Elijah's sin. They will teach the Nation that, like the Biblical figures of Moses, David, and Lot, Elijah's accomplishments in service of Allah outweigh his human weaknesses.

In April 1963, Malcolm flies to Phoenix to see Elijah. They embrace, and then Malcolm tells Elijah about the content of the rumors and how he and Wallace can teach that this is actually prophecy. Elijah immediately jumps on the idea, claiming that he is indeed like King David and Noah.

In order to prepare for the moment when the rumors go public, Malcolm decides to tell six other ministers about them and about his planned teachings. However, this move is then recast by the Chicago headquarters as Malcolm spreading rumors about Elijah, rather than as him trying to defend him. The plan, apparently, is to unite Muslims around blaming and hating Malcolm, rather than seeing Elijah's sin.

Malcolm realizes how absurd it is to pretend ignorance of something that he clearly knows—but he cannot help himself. It's as if he has partitioned off and repressed the part of himself that knows about Elijah's affairs, while nevertheless remaining aware of that psychic split.



Malcolm's meeting with Wallace is mysterious—while Wallace supports Malcolm and clearly doesn't want the Nation to suffer, he also doesn't offer any solutions or ways forward. Wallace (later known as Warith) is presented as diverging from his father in many ways, and indeed when he inherited control of the Nation after Elijah's death, he disavowed many of his father's teachings and turned the Nation towards traditional Sunni Islam instead.



Malcolm (and the reader) now has a view on a part of Elijah's life that he's never known before. In his most private circles, he shares that he does not fully trust Malcolm, and his trust has previously been Malcolm's most prized possession.



Malcolm and Wallace's proposed defense entails admitting that Elijah has indeed sinned, but while also elevating him to the status of a Biblical Prophet. His weakness will actually be used to make him appear even more holy.



Malcolm does not confront any of his feelings of betrayal in his conversation with Elijah. Instead, he buries them and proposes a tactical approach to the issue as if he hasn't also been personally hurt by this.



Once again, Malcolm is betrayed by his willingness to trust other people. By gathering a small circle of people around him in order to save the Nation, he creates the conditions for others to accuse him of doing the exact opposite.



As he grows more and more tired and feels more estranged from the Nation of Islam, Malcolm begins to have contact with a few white reporters. This is huge, as he hasn't had friendly relations with any white person since becoming a Muslim. But one reporter in particular seems very sincere, and they discuss history and archeology together for nearly two hours, giving Malcolm a welcome distraction from his worries.

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. The Nation of Islam sends out a directive telling all ministers to make no public comment on the assassination. A few days later, Malcolm goes to an event to speak in Elijah's place, and he delivers a prepared speech on how white America will reap the hate it has sown. When asked about JFK, he calls it "a case of the chickens coming home to roost."

Malcolm then flies out to see Elijah, where he feels that something bad is going to happen. Elijah brings up Malcolm's comments about JFK, which are in all the major newspapers. Elijah then says that Malcolm will be "silenced," or barred from public speaking, for the next ninety days to allow this to cool down. Shocked but humble, Malcolm submits to the order.

The Chicago headquarters swiftly informs the press of Malcolm's silencing, and they then put out the word to the Muslim community that he will be reinstated "if he submits." Malcolm clearly reads their implication and feels they are trying to set him up. Finally, he hears that people have begun to loosely talk about how he should be killed for what he's done, a serious threat which he feels could only occur with Elijah's approval.

Under great psychological stress, Malcolm reaches out to his friend Cassius Clay, who invites him and his whole family to come stay with him in Miami as Cassius trains to fight Sonny Liston. While they are no longer friends, Malcolm says, he is extremely grateful for Cassius's hospitality and support at the time.

Malcolm meets Cassius in 1962, when he comes into the Muslim restaurant in Detroit before Elijah is about to speak in the mosque. A handsome, likeable person, Cassius and his brother make quite an impression on Malcolm and all the other Muslims present. After that, Cassius continues to pop into various mosques around the country.

Throughout the book, Malcolm generally does not discuss personal anecdotes, especially after his conversion. This makes these conversations seem all the more touching and important to him. In it, the reader can see a foreshadowing of Malcolm's increasingly complex and accepting views.



As Malcolm recounts it, this incident was simply a case of unfortunate timing and an insensitive comment, but not particularly different from his past statements. He limits his culpability and tries to convince the reader in advance that any criticism of his words will be overblown.



Malcolm is caught off guard, as he did not feel that his comments were truly incendiary. However, he still wants to show his respect for the chain of command, despite the doubts he has been gathering about Elijah.



Malcolm discusses two levels of discourse related to his punishment. There are the official communications coming from headquarters, and there are the gossip and rumors flying around amongst the Muslim community, which both point to a coordinated campaign against him from above.



Having had his voice "removed" from the discourse around him, Malcolm then physically removes himself from the poisonous atmosphere in New York, giving himself the space to think and recover.



Malcolm takes great care to portray Cassius as an imposing figure in both his personality and his physical stature. These details show not only his respect for Cassius, but a tender affection.



Cassius's infectious and genuine personality really touches Malcolm, and he invites him to his home to meet his family, who all love him. They discuss many things together, including how Cassius intentionally acts cocky in public, hoping to psyche out and trick Sonny Liston into coming to the fight underprepared.

Back in 1963, Malcolm is at his wits' end both emotionally and psychologically. He compares his sudden estrangement from the Nation to suddenly being asked for a divorce. Malcolm goes around Cassius's training camp, talking with people and with the press, but he's mostly not paying attention. Instead, he's thinking through the last twelve years, trying to come to grips with this "divorce," as he is more and more certain that after ninety days, he will not be reinstated. Instead, he will probably be suspended indefinitely, and then either isolated or assassinated.

For one of the first times, Malcolm emphasizes how important Betty is to him. As a loving, supportive, and strong wife, she holds him up in this difficult period, and she understands exactly what he is going through. While this surprises him, he feels reassured by her support.

Malcolm is still trying to convince himself that Elijah's mistakes were actually divine prophecy, and therefore not really mistakes. But he cannot deny that Elijah has not stood up and either admitted his mistake or maintained it was prophecy; instead, he has chosen to hide behind the scandal being created around Malcolm. That lack of bravery then destroys Malcolm's faith in Elijah as a nearly divine figure. And finally, after so many years of blindly following Elijah, Malcolm begins to think for himself.

Malcolm briefly returns with his family to New York, but he wants to support Cassius in his fight, especially as Cassius is now a Muslim. So he flies back to Florida to be his spiritual advisor. There, Malcolm tells Cassius that this fight is a modern crusade, and Allah is on his side against the Christian Liston, who represents a religion which has oppressed people of color for centuries.

For Malcolm, Sonny Liston represents the class of wealthier black individuals who move to white neighborhoods and try to integrate into their communities. Cassius, on the other hand, loves to take evening walks through the black neighborhoods, a trait he shares in common with Malcolm.

Here Malcolm testifies to the intelligence of his friend, who is often criticized within the media as just a big mouth. Those boasts, he tells us, are actually strategic and said with intent.



Malcolm's difficult emotional break with the Nation of Islam illustrates how the Nation had become much more than simply his faith organization. Rather, the Nation had been his family. It is also important to note that the Christian Church is often called the "Bride of Christ," so Malcolm's metaphor is actually a classic religious image.



It is extremely interesting that Malcolm professes his love for his wife right after describing his split with the Nation as a "divorce." Breaking with one "spouse" allows him to truly appreciate the other.



Elijah's mistake is essentially two-fold. First, he doesn't admit his sin, and everyone must be able to ask for forgiveness and admit their shortcomings. Second, he uses Malcolm as a scapegoat to cover up his cowardice. These mistakes point to deep character flaws, which are even more serious than his original sinful relationships.



Both Sonny Liston and Cassius Clay are African American men. However, Malcolm has maintained that Christianity is a means for brainwashing black people to support white society. Therefore, in Malcolm's view, only Cassius is truly fighting for himself and for other people of color.



According to Malcolm, Sonny's rejection of black society becomes complete when he earns more money and chooses to leave black neighborhoods in order to appear more "white."



The night of the fight comes, and Malcolm and Cassius stand at the back of the Convention Hall, watching Cassius's younger brother in his first professional fight. Cassius is extremely calm and collected, dressed in a black tuxedo. After his brother wins, Cassius goes to prepare for his own fight. Malcolm and Cassius pray together to Allah, and then it's fight time.

Cassius takes on a truly heroic aura before the fight. Dressed in a smart tuxedo, calm and praying to Allah, he is not only a modern crusader, but a modern Greek hero, nearly a demigod. His victory seems inevitable. (And indeed, his continued legendary status even many decades later affirms this view.)



Malcolm rather drily describes the fight as going "according to plan." From his point of view, this was essentially an intellectual fight, in which Cassius knew that Liston would get tired quickly, and then he would have the advantage.

Malcolm's brief description of the fight reflects his attitude that Cassius's victory was never in doubt, but it also reflects the Nation of Islam's doctrinal rejection of sports.



That night, Cassius and a few friends come over to Malcolm's motel. There, they simply talk while Cassius eats ice cream. After Cassius the "boyish king" feels sleepy and takes a nap, he decides to go back home.

While Cassius previously appeared godlike, now he is childlike. In fact, Malcolm's tender description could even have been about his own child.



The next morning at breakfast, Cassius tells the press in simple terms that he is a follower of Islam. A media uproar is created at the idea of a Muslim holding the heavyweight title. Malcolm sees this as ridiculous, especially when Floyd Patterson, another African American boxer, declares that he wants to fight Cassius as a Catholic.

To Malcolm (at this point at least) unity amongst all African Americans is more important than a confrontation between Christianity and Islam. Malcolm believes that Floyd Patterson should support Cassius regardless of his religion.



An official at Mosque Seven orders one of his underlings to rig Malcolm's car to explode. However, as the assistant is aware of how faithful Malcolm is to the Nation, he cannot do it and instead goes to Malcolm with the news. Afterwards, Malcolm begins to see Muslim men following him everywhere. These threats finally allow him to begin his "psychological divorce" from the Nation.

This is the first explicit claim Malcolm makes that the Nation of Islam wants to kill him and has the means to do so. However, the propaganda machine set up against him cannot undermine the solid reputation he has been building up for years.



Assessing his position, Malcolm recognizes that he has a huge microphone and that anything he says will be picked up by the news. He also notes that he has quite a following of non-Muslims in New York, who started to respect him after the confrontation with the police years back. Furthermore, his knowledge of the streets and their slang lets him get much closer to the people, especially the poor, than is possible for other black leaders. And finally, he understands that the "most dangerous black man in America was the ghetto hustler."

While he may have been silenced within the Nation of Islam, Malcolm has an audience that extends far beyond the mosques. In fact, he not only has the ability to speak to the black community at large, but he has a responsibility to continue to be a leader for that community.



Hustlers have no professional skills and no money to fall back on. They must make their entire living constantly feeding off working people through various criminal activities. However, this constant struggling also makes them very frustrated, and with no ethics or religion, this frustration can quickly bubble up into violence.

Malcolm first became aware of this potential for violence at a rally in Harlem. Malcolm felt he had been used by the other leaders to draw a crowd, and so he walked off stage. This caused a lot of young people to get upset, and the rally had the potential to explode into a riot any minute. Malcolm jumped up on a car and was able to calm the crowd down; the papers later said he was the only black man in the country who “could stop a race riot – or start one.”

Malcolm reflects that a lot of this anger has been caused by more or less forcing blacks into urban ghettos where there are then no avenues for them to make a stable life for themselves. That anger and resentment has been bubbling across America, and the riots of the summer of 1964 are just a taste of how bad it could be, if something isn’t done.

Malcolm’s task seems clear. He knows that he already occupies a leadership position in the ghettos and that the people trust him. So, he must build an organization that is committed to raising them up and curing them of their various “sicknesses.”

According to Malcolm, the black population is mentally sick from accepting white culture as good, spiritually sick from Christianity’s false promise of brotherhood, and economically sick from a lack of black-owned businesses that could support the local economy. Above all, it is politically sick from allowing white men to divide them up between Republicans and Democrats, when neither group helps them. In order to wield any political power, the black population must learn to vote in a bloc for their own interests.

As Malcolm begins to gather a picture in his mind of his planned organization, he calls a meeting in the ballroom at the Theresa Hotel. More and more Muslims from Mosque Seven have broken with the Nation to come with Malcolm, and he has increasing support from non-Muslims across class boundaries. The news of the upcoming meeting generates a huge outpouring of support from across the country, as many people wish to get involved.

Malcolm is describing the situation of hustlers that he sees around him, but he is also referencing his own life and experiences, of course.



There are a few takeaways from this episode. First, Malcolm does not want to start riots, hence why he stopped one. Second, the masses respect him and will follow his leadership. And finally, he may not be advocating for violence, but without changes in the current oppressive system, it can emerge at any minute.



This description sounds very similar to Malcolm’s description of hustlers. Like hustlers who must struggle to survive every day, the black community at large must struggle with no long-term way out.



Notice how “Messianic” Malcolm can seem at times. In other words, he almost presents himself as the only one who can save Black America.



The scope of Malcolm’s new organization goes beyond the goals of the Nation of Islam. While the Nation had emphasized increasing social awareness, starting black-owned businesses, and accepting its brand of Islam, Malcolm also recognizes the need to push into electoral politics to assert the demands of the black community to the nation.



At the outset, Malcolm’s new project appears very promising. He has gathered exactly the kind of coalition he hoped for: Muslim and Non-Muslim black people across class boundaries. Perhaps, however, it will be too good to be true.



Malcolm calls a press conference and announces that he is starting a new mosque called Muslim Mosque, Inc. The mosque will serve as the spiritual basis for a larger movement meant to represent and work for the interests of the African American community.

Malcolm continues to be aware that he is being followed and that the Muslim brothers intend to kill him. He knows this because he himself taught them to follow Allah's will, which may include killing an enemy of the Nation.

However, Malcolm does not feel prepared to start a new mosque without first preparing himself spiritually. He travels to Boston to once again ask for the help of his sister, Ella. He tells her he wants to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, a spiritual requirement for all Muslims at least once in their lives. She agrees to help immediately.

CHAPTER 17: MECCA

"The pilgrimage to Mecca, known as Hajj, is a religious obligation that every orthodox Muslim fulfills, if humanly able, at least once in his or her lifetime." As the Nation of Islam is very different from what Malcolm calls "orthodox Islam," he has generally been quite hostile when other Muslims suggested he make the Hajj and learn more about the religion. But now that he's broken with the Nation, he wonders if he should expand his thinking and religious knowledge, an idea which Wallace Muhammad supports as well.

Often, Arab Muslims urge Malcolm to talk with Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, a professor from Cairo and a well-respected scholar. One day, they are introduced by a newspaperman and proceed to have a very cordial conversation. Dr. Shawarbi makes quite an impression on Malcolm.

Malcolm also feels inspired by his sister Ella, who has freely broken with the Nation of Islam. Instead, she's joined an orthodox mosque and opened a school for teaching Arabic. After talking all night, she firmly believes that Malcolm should go on the Hajj, using the funds she had been saving to make the trip herself. Her independence and generosity have both been very important factors in Malcolm's life, and he is very grateful to her.

The new organization reflects Malcolm's changed values. Religion still serves as his base, but the organization's responsibilities go beyond matters of faith.



When Malcolm served the Nation blindly, he inadvertently set up the mechanism for his own death if he were ever to leave the Nation.



Malcolm has never had any financial resources of his own since he left prison, so he must ask humbly for help. Ella's generosity reflects their deep bond and her awareness of his social calling to lead.



Malcolm's exit from the Nation of Islam allows him to expand his thinking not just politically, but also spiritually. By becoming more independent, he also becomes more willing to listen to opposing views and perspectives, rather than simply rejecting them as hostile towards his own view.



This interaction stands in contrast with Malcolm's previous interactions with orthodox Muslims, which were normally hostile and unproductive.



Ella has always been an independent character, unafraid to break ties that are no longer good for her. Early in his life, Malcolm respected her for having "broken" with two husbands who were unable to keep up with her and for establishing her own business, as she has done once again.

