

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.



When applying for a visa, Malcolm is told that he will need approval from Dr. Shawarbi—a fact Malcolm takes as a sign of Divine Providence. Dr. Shawarbi readily approves, and also gives Malcolm a book by Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam, an Egyptian intellectual who wished to send this copy specifically to Malcolm. Dr. Shawarbi also gives Malcolm the contact information for his own son in Cairo and for Abd's son, Omar Azzam, who works in Jedda.

The beginning of Malcolm's trip is marked by surprising instances of friendliness from strangers, like his two Muslim seatmates on the flight to Frankfurt or the white boy from Rhode Island in the airport men's room. Malcolm notes that the shopkeepers in Frankfurt are more "humane." Many pilgrims of all nationalities are also there on their way to Cairo (and then on to Mecca).

Once he arrives in Cairo, Malcolm encounters people of all races in what is a festive and friendly atmosphere. He parts ways with his new flight friend, who gives him his number and promises to get Malcolm in contact with an English-speaking group that would be headed to Mecca soon. After spending a couple of days sightseeing in Cairo and having a lovely dinner with a very intelligent couple, Malcolm meets up with the Hajj group, who speak English perfectly and welcome him warmly.

At the Cairo airport, thousands of pilgrims are entering the state of Ihram, "a spiritual and physical state of consecration." In this state, all pilgrims don two simple white towels, a pair of sandals, and two small bags for carrying their papers and money. Then they call out, "Labbayka!" (Here I come, O Lord!) to demonstrate their enthusiasm for the journey.

On the plane, Malcolm sees people of all races, ready to make the Hajj together. He feels a profound sense of fraternity and equality. Meanwhile, word spreads that he is an American, and the captain comes to meet him. Malcolm is taken to see the cockpit, where another dark-skinned man is in the co-pilot's seat. Surrounded by Muslims treating him like a brother and watching black men fly a plane, the experience begins to feel surreal, or as Malcolm puts it, "Brother, I knew Allah was with me."

The plane lands in Jedda, where the airport is even more packed than in Cairo. The airport has only three kinds of people: pilgrims, their guides (known as Mutawaf), and the airport officials. The airport resounds with the sound of chanting and praying as Malcolm's group makes their way slowly towards customs.

Malcolm insists throughout his journey that his good fortune is a sign of Divine Providence. This proves that of all the experiences he has undergone in life, this one will be the most formative and the most important.



As soon as Malcolm leaves the United States, he feels integrated in society in a way he never has before, even with white people from America.



It is important for the reader to keep in mind the environment that Malcolm has just left – a hostile New York full of racist white authorities and black Muslims gossiping about his disloyalty and threatening to kill him. His friendly reception in Cairo is therefore all the more stunning and soothing.



The pilgrims' garb reflects their humility as they prepare to enter the Holy Land. Before God, all pilgrims are now equal.



On his journey, Malcolm has entered something like a parallel universe, where he is treated as an honored guest, rather than a second-class citizen, and where black men can be pilots. It's almost as if he is in a mystical or dream-like haze.



At the airport, Malcolm enters in a mass of people who all share the same state of mind. He is no longer one man on a journey, but a part of something larger than himself.



Malcolm is nervous, as he knows an American passport will raise questions. Sure enough, the customs official protests in Arabic, and despite the objections from the others in his group, he is told that he must go before the Mahgama Sharia to determine whether or not he is an authentic Muslim, before he can enter Mecca. Sadly, and with much concern, his friends are forced to continue on their journey without him.

Feeling very alone, Malcolm is taken by a Mutawaf to a dormitory above the airport to await his hearing the next day. While the other pilgrims in the room watch them, his guide shows him the proper Muslim prayer postures. Now Malcolm feels very embarrassed that as a minister of Islam, he has never learned these before, and his body's lack of flexibility struggles to perform them.

When the sun rises and the other Muslims in his room wake up, they all watch each other attentively. Malcolm takes particular note of the multi-use nature of rugs in Arabic culture. Individual rugs are used for praying, while large communal rugs are used for eating, talking, sleeping, settling disputes, and teaching. He finally realizes why the rugs he once stole in Boston were so intricate and beautiful, given their cultural origins.

One of the others in the room tries to talk with Malcolm, and Malcolm begins to teach him English. When Malcolm says "Muhammad Ali Clay," the whole room perks up, as they believe he is Muhammad Ali. Malcolm soon learns that Ali is a hero to the entire Muslim world.

When the Mutawaf from earlier returns, he takes Malcolm down to the mosque for morning prayer. Malcolm knows that before prayer come ablutions, but even these he doesn't perform correctly. Then, inside the mosque, he does his best to copy his guide's movements and to quietly mumble along to the Arabic prayers.

Back in his dormitory, Malcolm is offered food and tea by many of his roommates, but he politely refuses. Partially he does not want to impose, but he is also wary of the communal, utensil-less style of eating. So he decides to go exploring for food of his own. Malcolm finds a restaurant, orders a whole roasted chicken, and then proceeds to eat it with his hands just as everyone around him does. On another exploration, he meets two English-speaking Muslims, but they are just about to leave, making Malcolm feel alone again.

Malcolm's detention is largely because of his country of origin, which is not known to have a large population of Muslims. However, it also embodies his own questioning of his legitimacy as a Muslim after years spent in the sect-like Nation of Islam.



As Malcolm tries to perform the prayer postures, his body betrays him; not only does he not know them, but he cannot physically perform them. This certainly creates doubts in his mind and in the reader's as to whether he will be able to pass his hearing.



In this moment Malcolm makes a connection to his past, when he was less educated and less cultured. But even now he has only come to realize how complex these rugs are within their social setting, which mirrors his growing appreciation of the complexities of Arabic culture at large.



Here the specter of Malcolm's friend is raised, bringing interest and care from those around him. In a way, Clay is still helping Malcolm along his journey.



To a certain extent, the reader may believe that Malcolm is indeed a fraud and shouldn't be admitted to the Holy Land, or they may see his behavior as following the advice, "Fake it 'till you make it."



Malcolm's journey through the Holy Land is a constant education in learning to adjust to different customs and ways of being. As eating is one of the most fundamental parts of the day, his discomfort with Middle Eastern dining habits stands in for his general discomfort as he slowly adapts to an entirely new culture.



That evening after prayer, Malcolm suddenly gets a wave of inspiration and remembers that he has Omar Azzam's phone number, and that he lives in Jeddah. Malcolm rushes downstairs and asks a group of airport officials to please call Omar for him. Seeing that he is an American, they agree. Omar then shows up within half an hour, a very warm man whose only concern is that Malcolm didn't reach out to him sooner. He promptly has him released and brings him to his home.

Malcolm is blown away by the hospitality shown to him by Omar, a civil engineer, and by his father, Abd, who is an extremely well-respected scholar at the United Nations. While it is quite late when they arrive at Omar's home, everyone is waiting for him and treats him like a brother. Abd is also quite outraged that Malcolm was made to stay at the airport for a whole day, and goes to make a phone call.

Malcolm is then ushered into a car and brought to the Jeddah Palace Hotel. Omar leaves him in his father's suite, while Abd spends the night at his son's house. Malcolm says that he would have protested this arrangement, but by the time he knew what was going on, he was alone in the beautiful suite.

That morning, Malcolm reflects on the significance of Abd's generosity. Here was a white-complexioned man with international influence and family relations to the rulers of Saudi Arabia, and with nothing to gain by treating Malcolm so well, and he nonetheless gave up his suite simply for Malcolm's comfort. This forces Malcolm to reassess his views on the "white man." Rather than racism being tied primarily to complexion, he says, it is actually a set of attitudes towards whiteness and those perceived as not white.

After writing in his notebook and praying multiple times to thank Allah for protecting him, Malcolm sleeps for several hours. When he receives a call from Omar informing him that he will come to collect him for dinner, Malcolm gets dressed and goes to the lobby of the hotel, where the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who lives down the hall, is being received by the press.

At dinner, Malcolm is once again blown away by Abd's hospitality and intelligence; he has a command of many topics of conversation and world affairs. He also teaches Malcolm how the idea of color superiority is an idea that originates and dominates in the West.

Omar feels that Malcolm has made a "mistake," but it is not a normal one. Rather, he feels hurt that Malcolm did not think to reach out and depend on him sooner for support. Malcolm's time in the Holy Land will teach him to expand his level of trust in and dependence on others who care about him.



These men, whom Malcolm does not know and who have nothing to gain from a poor, scandal-mired Nation of Islam preacher, nonetheless treat him as a brother, something Malcolm cannot even say about his "brothers" in the Nation of Islam.



Malcolm is overwhelmed by their generosity and selflessness. In fact, one may say that he at first failed to understand his situation because he couldn't even imagine such generosity coming from strangers.



While the contemporary reader may find it odd that Malcolm identifies Arabs as "white," rather than as people of color, this identification allows Malcolm to make a split between "light-complexioned people" and inherent or built-in racism. In other words, this man's behavior proves that light skin doesn't necessarily lead to racism.



Malcolm's actions at first seem to reflect a strange paradox. On the one hand, he is humble before Allah as he thanks and praises him. On the other, he notes the grandeur of his fellow guests, which may seem like bragging, but actually underlines Abd's generosity.



In some ways, Abd takes on the role of teacher and father figure recently abandoned by Elijah. He temporarily guides Malcolm's new ways of thinking.



The next morning, Malcolm goes before the judge of the Hajj Committee Court. The judge is very kind as he enquires into Malcolm's sincerity as a Muslim. Once he confirms that he is indeed a true Muslim, he gives Malcolm two books on Islam, and says that he hopes he becomes a great preacher in America one day.

After having lunch at the Hotel and then once again sleeping, Malcolm is awoken by a call from the Saudi Prince Faisal's office, saying that a car has been commissioned to take him on the Hajj after dinner. The car breezes through all the checkpoints, and Malcolm is astonished by such star treatment.

Mecca is an ancient city filled with winding streets and thousands of pilgrims headed for the Great Mosque. There, Malcolm performs the ablutions with a Mutawaf, and then enters the mosque, which is being renovated by Omar Azzam. Thousands of pilgrims are praying, chanting, and walking in seven circles around the Ka'ba, a large black stone at the center of the mosque. After his seventh time around, Malcolm prostrates himself to pray while his Mutawaf protects him from being trampled.

Over the next few days, Malcolm's Mutawaf takes him through the other essential rituals of the Hajj journey. They drink from the well of Zem Zem, run between the Safa and Marwa hills, and climb Mount Arafat, where they give thanks to Allah. Malcolm's state of Ihram has ended.

Sitting with other Muslims who have also just finished the Hajj, Malcolm tells them about the contrast between the brotherhood he experienced here with the racism found in America. They seem shocked at the terrible plight of black men in America. Malcolm, meanwhile, is grateful for the feeling of oneness with others and with God.

Malcolm writes a letter to his wife Betty, explaining that Allah has allowed him greater insight into the truth of Islam. Muslim society is essentially color-blind, and he has found great solace here. He is positive that Betty will instantly understand and join him in his newfound perspective.

Malcolm then writes more versions of essentially the same letter to his sister Ella, Dr. Shawarbi, Wallace Muhammad (who had advocated for the Nation to move towards orthodox Islam) and to his assistants at the new Muslim Mosque, Inc. He asks the latter to distribute his letter among the press. Malcolm is himself astounded at the profound shift in his mentality. And yet, his "whole life had been a chronology of – changes."

After all of Malcolm's fears and self-doubts, he finds that the judge is as friendly and supportive as the other Middle-Eastern Muslims that he has so far encountered.



Malcolm always emphasizes that he feels humbled by the generosity others show to him, but this may make the reader question if Malcolm is a little blind to his own fame and star power.



This experience overwhelms Malcolm with the majesty of the mosque and the piety and unity of the thousands of Muslims, walking together around the Ka'ba. As before, he joins a living community that makes him one of many.



It is important that the Ihram had a clear starting point (in the Cairo airport) and a clear end point; these mark off the in-between time as something truly special.



Malcolm, of course, can never forget where he comes from and what drives him. Even in this moment of oneness, he has an internal pull to discuss and spread the truth about oppression in America.



Malcolm takes for granted that Betty will understand his conversion. This could reflect his respect for her intelligence, or it could mean that he simply assumes she will always follow him.



Each of the changes in Malcolm's life has been accompanied by a kind of education. Now, he has learned about the possibility of a race-blind society of brothers and sisters united in a common faith, which pushes him to be more open-minded and hopeful.



In his letter, Malcolm recounts what he's experienced on the Hajj, and especially emphasizing the sense of communion and brotherhood he felt with men of all colors and races, including the whitest of men, as they worshipped the same God together. He believes that it is up to the younger generation to see the destructive nature of racism and turn towards the "spiritual path of truth" in order to avoid disaster. Finally, he contrasts the way he has been treated with the utmost dignity and honor by the relatives and servants of Princes to how in America, he is simply "a Negro." Malcolm signs the letter, "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, (Malcolm X)."

When Reginald came to visit Malcolm in prison, he asked him to reflect on how every white person in his life had treated him as worthless. Now, Malcolm has experiences of the exact opposite, and these new experiences force him to begin to see a new path forward. In short, self-examination leads to change. Malcolm then makes that change very tangible by identifying himself with a new name ("El-Hajj" being an honorific for one who has completed the Hajj, and "Shabazz" being an ancient African Islamic name that Malcolm had actually used briefly before taking the "X").



CHAPTER 18: EL-HAJJ MALIK EL-SHABAZZ

Prince Faisal has declared Malcolm an official guest of the state and loans him a car and a chauffeur to take him around Mecca. Along with seeing the sites, he is able to participate in several special prayer rituals. While he is learning the Arabic prayers, his ankles still hurt from the difficult positions.

Malcolm has now been recognized by Saudi Arabia as a royal guest, which is an even higher honor than the hospitality shown to him thus far.



Meanwhile, Malcolm has grown to be very comfortable with Arab culture, including eating and drinking from the same pots and glasses and washing from the same pitcher. While sleeping under the stars he observes that everyone snores in the same language.

Malcolm's growing ease with the cultural norms around him shows that he is becoming less suspicious of all strangers and more mature in his education towards a more communal style of living.



Never before has Malcolm felt as helpless as he did in the Middle East without any knowledge of Arabic. He wishes to have a basic understanding of the language by the next time he comes on the Hajj. Thankfully, he has had the support of many English-speaking people who have translated for him and guided him along. At the same time, he recognizes that Muslims do not speak the "American language" very well – that is, the language of modern advertising. With a more proactive effort, he thinks, they could have millions more converts to Islam.

As always, Malcolm sees himself as someone who accepts a given method and then devotes himself to and improves it. He has found fulfillment in traditional Sunni Islam, so now he sees it as his responsibility to use his skills to more effectively spread this system of belief throughout the United States.



Wherever he goes, Malcolm is asked about the system of racial discrimination in America. For his part, he never wastes an opportunity to spread the news of the plight of African Americans. He has conversations with both regular pilgrims from all over the world and with learned religious leaders, such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Often he gives public lectures within the lobby of the Jeddah Palace Hotel, where he experiences solidarity with other people of color.

Many of Malcolm's listeners in other countries are often shocked to learn about the racial oppression within the United States. Malcolm is therefore starting a dialogue, which will hopefully open other people to support his movement from around the world. It also gives him (and, ideally, his readers) an important new perspective that race relations don't have to be the way they are in America.



In order to be effective leaders in the United States, Malcolm believes black people should first travel extensively in non-white parts of the world to form bonds of solidarity and to learn new ways of looking at and overcoming oppression. These leaders would then have the ability to start thinking internationally, possibly even coordinating within the United Nations to demand equal rights for African Americans.

After praying that it would happen, Malcolm is invited to have an audience with Prince Faisal. The prince strikes Malcolm as a dignified yet humble man who is very warm with him. Faisal clearly condemns the Nation of Islam as having the wrong idea about Islam, to which Malcolm explains that he now wishes to discover “true Islam.” The Prince approves, saying there is “no excuse for ignorance.”

From Mecca, Malcolm flies to Beirut to address the faculty of the American University of Beirut. He receives an extremely supportive and emotional response from the African student body who clamor to hug him. Then, while walking the streets, he notes the more liberal dress of women in public, which he attributes to French influence. He wonders how material progress and morality can possibly be combined.

Arriving in Nigeria, Malcolm is invited to dinner by a professor whom he previously met in the United States. At the dinner, the other guests ask him if he knows anything about a recent murder in Harlem by a group called the Blood Brothers—which has been linked to Malcolm. While Malcolm knows nothing of the murder, he tells them that he is not surprised by the media using him as a scape-goat.

At Ibadan University, Malcolm speaks about the need for a Pan-African movement that would unite African Americans and Africans in the fight for civil rights and justice. He receives very sharp and intelligent questions from the students, and when one man stands up to denounce him, he is run off by the crowd. Afterwards, Malcolm is made an honorary member of the Nigerian Muslim’s Student Society and given the name “Omowale” – “the son who has come home.”

While in Nigeria, Malcolm speaks with Peace Corps members, makes radio and television appearances, and meets with local government officials. The latter describe how the US Embassy tries to give the impression that the “race issue” in the US will soon be solved, while the whole world knows otherwise.

Malcolm’s thinking and influence has clearly expanded to focus on strategies that are no longer about simply passing out fliers on the street corner, but about making international alliances that can hold sway over America’s politicians.



Malcolm’s humble tone and description of the Prince shows his admiration for him, and he chooses to take Faisal’s light reprimand in stride. In fact, Malcolm’s lifetime spent learning reflects his agreement with the Prince’s feelings.



To a certain extent, Malcolm still views European society through the lens of the Nation of Islam. The closer a country is to Europe, the more likely it is to have been morally polluted by Europe’s more “liberal” societies.



During his time away from the U.S., Malcolm is taking the time to learn and grow. However, the forces within the American media (and perhaps the Nation) use his absence and silence as an opportunity to slander him publicly, further corrupting his image back home.



Malcolm’s interactions with Pan-African thought began when he was just a child, listening to his father lead meetings on Marcus Garvey’s philosophy. Now, he has come full circle and is himself advocating for a Pan-African movement.



The first step to creating solidarity has always been to first spread the news that there is a problem which needs fixing. In this case, Malcolm is confronting the United States government’s propaganda that there is no “race issue.”



From Lagos, the journey continues on to Ghana, the birthplace of the Pan-African movement. Yet Ghana is also full of American businessmen, intent on extracting its resources. These men smile and pretend to not be racist, yet Malcolm sees them as just as bad as the violent bigots in America.

Julian Mayfield leads a group of African-American ex-patriots living in Ghana, which includes figures such as Maya Angelou, who have been anxiously awaiting Malcolm's arrival; they even created the "Malcolm X Committee" to organize his speaking schedule. At this dinner, where he is regarded as the symbol of a militant black struggle, he is heartened by their support for that very movement.

The local press, meanwhile, sees Malcolm as a hero in the fight for racial justice and has also been anticipating his arrival as the beginning of an international struggle. At his first press conference, he is inevitably asked about his split with the Nation, which he attributes to political differences, while affirming Elijah's very important message for African Americans. He is also firmly corrected from using the word "Negro" in favor of "Afro-American," the preferred term in Ghana.

The Malcolm X Committee keeps Malcolm extremely busy with press conferences, dinners, and visits to Embassies, including with the Algerian and Chinese Ambassadors, both of whom he finds to be perceptive men committed to a militant struggle against oppression.

At the University of Ghana, Malcolm addresses a large crowd of both white and black people. He denounces the false manner in which whites treat Ghanaians nicely while only wanting to take their minerals. Meanwhile, they treat Afro-Americans terribly back home.

One night, Malcolm is invited to meet most of the top officials in Ghana's government, where he is entertained with as much honor as when W.E.B. Du Bois came to Ghana. A few days later, he addresses the Ghanaian Parliament, calling for them to support Afro-Americans the way they support blacks in South Africa, a speech which receives a warm reception.

These colonialist businessmen plan to extract resources, enacting violence against the Earth and taking advantage of the local population by not properly sharing the profits, mirroring racist exploitation at home.



In Ghana, Malcolm is seen as a hero and a leader by these other well-known African-American figures. This solidarity helps to give him confidence, even while things are turbulent back home.



Despite the threats on his life and the negative press generated about him, Malcolm still refuses to talk poorly about Elijah. This restraint reflects how he still sees the Nation as generally a force for good, even if he cannot be a part of it any longer.



Malcolm continues to interact with people who have participated in or supported militant insurrections, which shows the range of possibilities he is considering for the future of his own struggle.



Malcolm connects global capitalist expansion with racial oppression back home—an insightful if controversial view, which the reader may agree with or see as an unfair indictment of these individual white business people.



It is very interesting that Malcolm draws a parallel between the situations in America and South Africa, given that South Africa was internationally denounced throughout the years of apartheid, while the U.S. was not.



Malcolm then meets with the president of Ghana, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who had once studied in the United States and was therefore very aware of the African American struggle. They both agree that Pan-Africanism would be the most effective strategy going forward for all those of African heritage. Malcolm calls this meeting his highest honor while in Ghana.

Malcolm addresses another group of students committed to continuing “Ghana’s intellectual revolution,” when an African American man stands up, offering a defense of white America. He is quickly booed into silence and regarded as an agent of the CIA, while others call for him to join them and learn something.

The Chinese Ambassador holds a dinner in Malcolm’s honor, followed by a film screening. From there, he is taken to a lively party at the Press Club where he calls on everyone to enjoy themselves, but to not forget all those still struggling for freedom, like Nelson Mandela (who was recently arrested for blowing up a power station).

Malcolm attends a luncheon hosted by the Nigerian High Commissioner the next day, who speaks to his own experiences of racism in America. Then, while holding up a photo of Malcolm and an illustration of a royal Nigerian Muslim from four hundred years ago, he declares them to be brothers. As a symbol of their brotherhood, he gifts Malcolm a beautiful robe and turban like the one worn in the picture.

Afterwards, Malcolm is taken by Shirley Graham Du Bois to see the home of her late husband, the great writer W. E. B. Du Bois. She tells him about how he had a very close personal relationship with President Nkrumah.

As Malcolm prepares to leave Ghana, he runs into Cassius Clay, who has been in the country for a few days. As Cassius is still aligned with Elijah and the Nation, they barely speak, but Malcolm does sincerely wish him well.

Malcolm is decried as a “reverse racist” and fanatic in the U.S., but his warm receptions by world leaders abroad attest to the bias and one-sidedness of these charges.



In the United States, it was common for African Americans to disagree with Malcolm’s harsh statements and defend white Americans, but that kind of talk here is regarded with suspicion, as this audience hasn’t been as indoctrinated into the racist hierarchy of American society as all Americans—even black Americans—have been.



Nowadays Mandela is generally seen as a symbolic, heroic, and relatively uncontroversial figure, but it is important to remember that Mandela was widely considered a terrorist in his time, making Malcolm’s comment of support for him far more radical.



An important component of his travels throughout Africa has been the opportunity for Malcolm to create a personal and cultural connection to Africa. This gift symbolizes that Malcolm is part of a lineage that makes him a “brother” in both race and religion.



This visit is something like a miniature pilgrimage, but this time it’s to go see the home of an “American saint,” a man who fought for racial equality on Malcolm’s home turf.



This broken relationship weighs heavy on Malcolm’s heart, as he and Cassius had been as close as family, a situation which recalls Malcolm’s rejection of his brother, Reginald. (And in a tragic echo of Malcolm’s sentiments regarding Reginald, Muhammad Ali would later say that turning his back on Malcolm was one of the things he most regretted in life.)



The entire Malcolm X Committee meets Malcolm in the lobby and accompanies him to the airport. As they say their goodbyes, five Ambassadors arrive to personally wish him well – an honor leaving him speechless.

This gesture is a final acknowledgement of Malcolm's international standing, despite his controversial reputation in America.



Malcolm then travels quickly through Liberia, Dakar, Morocco, and finally to Algiers, Algeria. There, he talks with ordinary people who hate America for having supported the French colonizers, and he admires these revolutionaries' courage.

To Malcolm, the Algerian citizens who have overthrown colonialism are a view of what African Americans could be like if racial oppression in America ever ended.



When Malcolm's plane touches down at JFK Airport on May 21, 1964, he is met by the largest press contingent he's ever seen. While he's been gone, lots of violence and the formation of African American Rifle Clubs has been blamed on him, and they now want to hear his comments. Instead, he tries to argue why African Americans could make a case against the US government for a "denial of human rights."

When Malcolm arrives back in the United States, it is as if he and the press no longer speak the same language. The press is caught up with the current local rumors, while Malcolm is swept up in his new religious feelings and theorizing about possibilities of international action and solidarity.



The reporters then shift to asking Malcolm about his "Letter from Mecca." He elaborates on how his thinking has been broadened to see the possibility of brotherhood between whites and blacks, and he no longer believes all whites to be evil. And yet, he says, the reality is that America is still governed largely by racism, which means that brotherhood is not yet possible on a massive scale. Furthermore, that same racism has been directed at many different people of color, leading to an international movement among oppressed people against white colonizers, like the Vietnamese struggle against the French and Americans.

The press's unease with Malcolm's new ideas may reflect an innate awareness that a real Pan-African movement could cause great social upheaval within the U.S., and so they try to control the narrative and direct Malcolm to focus on the newfound ideas of tolerance he talked about in his letter.



CHAPTER 19: 1965

Malcolm's new political strategy revolves around two main points: an international perspective on the struggle of African Americans in America, and a turn towards orthodox Islam. Unfortunately, there is not much enthusiasm for an international approach, and orthodox Islam is too foreign to catch on in America's black Christian communities. Therefore, Malcolm tries to focus more on a broad social justice approach, but his audiences largely take a "wait-and-see" attitude towards his stance.

Malcolm has always touted his ability to connect with regular black people on the streets of America's cities as one of his strengths, but that time may have finally come to an end. His message has become too foreign for others who have never traveled abroad to jump at the idea of following him.



While in the Holy Land Malcolm had felt whole for the first time in his life, like he was truly standing before the Creator. In that space, he had recalled many memories from his childhood, along with all the time he had spent in solitary confinement, envisioning large crowds before him. He also thought back over his time serving Elijah Muhammad in the Nation and how he had believed in him as a divine figure, rather than just as a man.

By saying that the Holy Land made Malcolm feel "whole," the text already starts to allude to his imminent death. If his life has been made "whole," then it must be nearly "complete" temporally as well.



In short, Malcolm had come into his own as a thinker and felt ready to address African Americans' issues from his own enlightened perspective. Yet the mainstream press now largely ignores his more nuanced views and simply blames him for the unrest happening in many urban ghettos in the summer of 1964. And while he rejects responsibility for that unrest and doesn't endorse physical violence, he sympathizes with the rioters' anger, which gets him labeled as "the angriest Negro in America."

Malcolm continues to try and clarify his position as not being against all white people but as only against white racists. He says that he is for violence only if there is no other solution, and says that non-violence in that case would be a non-solution. Yet by saying that white people have committed crimes against black people that might provoke violent responses, he is labeled "a revolutionist."

Malcolm then quotes Martin Luther King, Jr. (without naming him) who spoke about how "our nation was born in genocide" against the native population. This violence is upheld as a righteous conquering of the land, while any violence that goes against white society is condemned.

According to Malcolm, Christianity may have been founded in the Middle East, but once it spread through Europe, it became entangled with ideas of empire and white supremacy. Under the banners of the Crusade and then later under Christian colonialism, Europeans invaded and dominated Africa by force. Instead of force, Malcolm believes true leadership and love spring from the "spirit."

Reflecting on the spread of Christianity throughout the world, Malcolm now sees the rise of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism as rejections of European society and colonialism. In America, he believes that only Islam can unite black people, as Islam has a long history of confrontation and successful rejection of European imperialism.

Now, Malcolm sees the decline of Christianity's influence and its spiritual emptiness in America as signs of the end of Western civilization. He sees the biggest reason for this decline as Christianity's inability to recognize or combat racism. This may be Christianity's last chance to repent for the sins committed under its name, including slavery, rape, and murder. Unfortunately, he does not think white society is prepared to ask for forgiveness and find a way to remedy its effects.

Malcolm increasingly finds himself in a "Bermuda triangle" of media coverage. Everything bad happening within America's cities is blamed on him, while all of the messages he sends out are simply swallowed into the void. His righteous anger is seen as just the typical behavior of a stereotypical poor, angry black man.



After having met so many real "revolutionaries" while traveling abroad, Malcolm is certainly open to the idea of violence as a last resort, but his rejection of the label "revolutionist" is an act of humility and respect to those real revolutionaries.



Violence is not a concrete term that applies equally to everyone in society's discourse. This discrepancy in the way we discuss violence is a perfect example of the double standard within a racist society (an idea that still certainly applies today, when breaking shop windows during a riot is seen as "violence" while attacking unarmed Native and Black Americans is not).



Malcolm is no longer simply critiquing white Christian society as responsible for racial oppression. Instead, he is now trying to imagine a new way to organize society around values other than conquest, power, and domination.



When he talks about these religions rejecting Western values and colonialism, Malcolm is referencing the political revolutions and decolonizing projects happening throughout the Third World at this time.



In his analysis of Christianity in the West, Malcolm agrees with the opinions of many conservative Christian ministers that the West is in moral decline. But Malcolm sees this as an opportunity for the creation of a new society that is free of ideas of domination and exploitation—ideas that have become inextricably linked to Western Christianity.



After returning to America for a while, Malcolm again goes abroad for 18 weeks, in which he meets many foreign and religious leaders. While abroad, he has a conversation with an American ambassador who tells him that he only sees and prejudices on race when he's in America. Malcolm asks if he thinks this is because of the "American political, economic and social atmosphere," and the ambassador says yes.

While abroad, Malcolm is well aware that he is being followed by a US intelligence agent. So one morning while at breakfast, he gets up and confronts this man, asking if there is anything he would like to know. Their conversation quickly turns ugly as the agent accuses Malcolm of being un-American and possibly a Communist, not to mention a "Black Muslim." Malcolm tells the "super-sleuth" that he has changed his religious affiliation.

Then, on a hunch, Malcolm guesses that the man is of Jewish heritage. He tells him that while Jews have been very vocal supporters of civil rights, they have also played negative roles in African American communities by exploiting poor blacks in their business practices. Not only that, but when blacks move into white neighborhoods, the Jews in the community are always the first ones to leave.

During Malcolm's time abroad, the 1964 presidential election is in full swing, and reporters constantly ask him for his opinion. While he says he has no preference between Barry Goldwater and President Johnson, he does "commend" Goldwater for his honesty. Goldwater is openly against civil rights, whereas Johnson presents himself as pro-civil rights, but has many segregationist friends in the South.

Now conceiving of his movement as a Black Nationalist movement, Malcolm describes his continuing troubles with getting it off the ground. He has gravitated towards Black Nationalism as a multi-religious movement with an emphasis on black solidarity, but his previous affiliation with the Nation continues to hinder his efforts.

The issue, Malcolm writes, is a human one, in which both whites and blacks must do what they can. Whites must combat the racism of other white people, while black people must become aware of how they have been hypnotized into inaction by a racist society. This presents a stark contrast to the attitude he took with the white female college student years back (who asked him what she could do).

This interaction with the ambassador shows how much Malcolm has grown. He not only is willing to have an extended conversation with a white man on racism, but is willing to agree that racism actually a societal (rather than in ethnic or biological) problem.



Unlike his previous interaction with the ambassador, Malcolm's discussion with the agent doesn't go anywhere. The agent is unwilling to rationally discuss things with him, and instead simply throws accusations in his face—showing the consistently antagonistic relationship the U.S. government maintained towards most black leaders during the Civil Rights era.



This passage is an example of why Malcolm has been accused of being anti-Semitic. While he takes care to avoid racial stereotypes, he nonetheless attributes responsibility for certain behaviors to all Jews.



Malcolm's response shows a contempt for electoral politics, which he sees as more of a show than not. If both candidates are probably racist, he reasons, then at least one of them is honest about it. This reflects his otherwise stated ideas about the American North vs. the South, or liberals vs. conservatives—both are racist, but one group hides it better than the other.



Unfortunately, all those years he spent with the Nation of Islam now make it very difficult for Malcolm to start building the broad coalition group he has been imagining.



In this new approach, everyone (including white people) has a responsibility and a role to play in creating a just society. Everyone who is willing to take on that responsibility should be encouraged, rather than turned away or demonized.



In regards to his new organization, Malcolm does not want to allow whites to join. On the one hand, they would be more effective at working within white organizations to combat racism. On the other, after seeing how whites in New York used to fetishize black culture and black bodies, Malcolm has an inherent distrust of white people who rush to surround themselves with black people. Not only that, but black organizations that welcome white people inevitably end up being led by those whites, which blunts their political message of black empowerment.

The most important factor in ending oppression for Malcolm is a commitment to “humanism and moral responsibility.” Otherwise, the riots and unrest will simply continue. He sees himself as having the same goal as Martin Luther King’s non-violent movement, even if their strategies and discourses vary. Either way, he does sense the impending threat of violence hovering over both movements.

Since he was a boy and saw his father and uncles die by violence, Malcolm has always had a feeling that his life would end similarly. This does not trouble him, he says, as he sees it as simply inevitable given his hot-headed temperament and fervent beliefs. But this does make him see his current actions as urgent.

Malcolm has poured his time into this book so that it might act as a testimony on American society. His time in prison, given the social factors stacked against him, was simply inevitable. He hopes that the reader will understand how he came to see the white man as a devil, and how then he grew to have different views.

Malcolm believes that in his early life, he fell as far as anyone can within American society, but that his fall also led to his eventual joy and happiness in Islam. He has fought as best he could for the black community. His biggest shortcoming, in his opinion, has been his lack of education. With the right opportunities, he might have become a great lawyer, or he might have been able to learn many different languages, including Arabic and Chinese. Even at this point in his life, Malcolm’s greatest personal desire is to have the opportunity to learn and study.

As previously stated, Malcolm is aware of the death threats against him and regards every day as a borrowed day. This death may come from the Nation of Islam or from white racists. Either way, Malcolm makes a powerful prediction: when he’s gone, the press will identify him with hate, which will conceal all the truth he’s been trying to spread.

As he has said, Malcolm would like to coordinate efforts with white organizations to combat racism. However, the power dynamics and racist history within American society means that integrated organizations may be less effective (or less equitable) than partnered but parallel organizations.



Throughout the book, Malcolm has always avoided criticizing other black leaders by name, but King and his non-violent movement has always been one of Malcolm’s implied targets. Now Malcolm aligns himself with King, or at least finds something they have in common.



Malcolm’s stoicism before his death, at least the way it is presented here, taps into a long tradition of writing about martyrs, and it particularly brings to mind the calm acceptance of Jesus Christ before his death.



This passage, made especially poignant in light of his death, is Malcolm’s formal “apology” or explanation for the book: essentially saying, “Please forgive my faults and use my story for good.”



Here Malcolm ties together his love of learning and his decades-long fight for racial equality. His knowledge has allowed him to fight for black America on a variety of levels, and his only wish would be to have studied more so that he could have been even more effective.



Malcolm’s prediction about the media’s treatment of his memory will be proven correct. However, this book itself stands as a counterargument against those who would reduce him to simply “violence and hate.”



Malcolm acknowledges that he has enjoyed confronting white society while trying to spread the truth. When he felt resistance to his ideas, he felt closer to the truth. And if one day it turns out that he has contributed to destroying racism in America, then he attributes all the credit to Allah, and all the failures to himself.

At the end, Malcolm shows his mischievous side by admitting to having enjoyed fighting the good fight, but he also makes himself into a sacrificial subject by taking all of his works' failings entirely onto himself.



EPILOGUE: ALEX HALEY

After 20 years in the Coast Guard, Alex Haley hears about a new religion called the Nation of Islam, which is only for black people and is led by Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X. While visiting the Muslim restaurant in Harlem, Alex proposes to Malcolm the idea of doing a piece on the Nation for Reader's Digest, but Malcolm reacts with skepticism for mainstream news outlets. He agrees to think about it, though, while Alex gets to know some of the very religious members of the group.

Before even beginning the project Malcolm had agreed that Haley could write an epilogue to the book, but the fact that this epilogue was written after Malcolm's death makes it all the more poignant, as well as crucial to a full understanding of the book. In Malcolm's view, if the American government and society are generally oppressive to black people, then a black man should not join the military, which protects that government and society. By serving in the Coast Guard for so long, then, Alex is a suspicious figure, or even a potential traitor to his race.



Finally, Malcolm suggests Alex go to Chicago to ask permission from Elijah. Elijah talks primarily of being under government surveillance while "sizing up" Alex. When Alex returns to Harlem, Malcolm is much more cooperative, but answers all of Alex's questions guardedly. He then sends him to visit other Temples throughout the country.

Early on Haley alludes to the strict hierarchical structure of the Nation. When unsure how to respond or move forward, Malcolm always defers to Elijah's judgment and then follows it wholeheartedly.



Alex publishes his piece, entitled, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks", and he is praised by Elijah and Malcolm for writing an objective piece, as promised. Malcolm then agrees to give Alex an interview for Playboy magazine. Much to his surprise, Playboy publishes his words just as he said them.

Malcolm clearly had bad experiences with the mainstream press which have made him very suspicious, but Alex continues to gain his trust by keeping his word.



Malcolm has now begun to trust Alex as a viable outlet to mainstream news. Then, in 1963, Alex's agent proposes that he ghost write Malcolm's autobiography, but Alex realizes that he knows almost nothing personal about Malcolm, other than that he apparently has a crime-ridden past and is now a very strict Muslim.

In public, Malcolm only presents himself as a servant of the Nation and Elijah Muhammad. These early impressions support Malcolm's self-image as a humble servant, rather than a power-hungry usurper.

