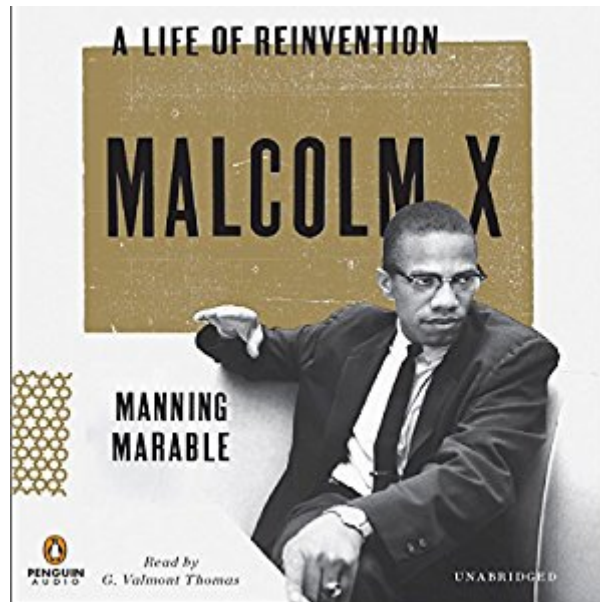


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Malcolm X: A Life Of Reinvention



Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize, History, 2012 Years in the making, this is the definitive biography of the legendary black activist. Of the great figures in 20th-century American history, perhaps none is more complex and controversial than Malcolm X. Constantly rewriting his own story, he became a criminal, a minister, a leader, and an icon, all before being felled by assassins' bullets at age 39. Through his tireless work and countless speeches, he empowered hundreds of thousands of black Americans to create better lives and stronger communities while establishing the template for the self-actualized, independent African American man. In death, he became a broad symbol of both resistance and reconciliation for millions around the world. Manning Marable's new biography of Malcolm is a stunning achievement. Filled with new information and shocking revelations that go beyond the Autobiography, Malcolm X unfolds a sweeping story of race and class in America, from the rise of Marcus Garvey and the Ku Klux Klan to the struggles of the civil-rights movement in the 50s and 60s. Reaching into Malcolm's troubled youth, it traces a path from his parents' activism through his own engagement with the Nation of Islam, charting his astronomical rise in the world of Black Nationalism and culminating in the never-before-told true story of his assassination. Malcolm X will stand as the definitive work on one of the most singular forces for social change, capturing with revelatory clarity a man who constantly strove, in the great American tradition, to remake himself anew.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have to preface this review with a little information about my own background. At one time my parents were members of the Nation of Islam. Their active involvement with the Nation had ceased by the time I was four or so, which was also around the time that my parents separated, so I have very little memory of any direct experience with the Nation's activities. Nevertheless, the Nation's teachings affected my life in subtle and profound ways. Although I didn't understand it at the time, my father's involvement with the Nation was one of several factors that contributed to the deep tension between him and my grandmother, who is a staunch Baptist. Oftentimes, perhaps most of the time, that tension was palpable, as my grandmother lived with me and my father for a good portion of my childhood, and was deeply involved in my upbringing. His experience with the Nation also fueled his deep inner turmoil to a great extent, although I didn't understand that at the time either. It wasn't until I got older and began to study the history of the Nation of Islam that my father's paranoid ramblings about FBI bugs in our house and recordings of my mother's voice being played on television, which completely mystified me as child, were put into context. That history also helped me to make sense of the divergence between my mother's and my own views on race when I was an adolescent. Studying that history helped me to make sense of my upbringing and my place in a world in which I often felt, and at times still do feel, alienated and displaced. So naturally, as I grew up, I eagerly devoured whatever I was able to understand about the Nation. And most of what I learned was and is centered in the figure of Malcolm X. When Spike Lee's "X" was first released, I think I saw it at least three times in one week.

Whether you're just getting to know this giant and enigmatic figure of the civil rights "movement" - or in Malcolm's case revolution - or you were on the street in the day, Manning Marable's biography is worth your valuable time. In addition to being a wide and deep examination of how Malcolm Little became Malcolm X and how Malcom X became a universal advocate for the oppressed, especially of African heritage, Marable fills in gaps with his singular access to records and sources, as well as his sustained effort over a decade in producing this biography. But, perhaps most importantly, the voice that Malcolm X raised in defense of those being oppressed carries a message especially important in our time. We should listen. Marable examines Malcolm's life from many angles, in many contexts, which are necessary given that he manifested himself in appearances that ranged from hustler and angry voice from the ghetto to social activist and pragmatist willing to work within the American "system." And this broad appeal largely defines Malcolm X's appeal according to Marable: "Malcolm's journey of reinvention was in many ways centered on his lifelong quest to discern the

meaning and substance of faith. As a prisoner, he embraced an antiwhite quasi-Islamic sect that nevertheless validated his fragmented sense of humanity and ethnic identity. But as he traveled across the world...Malcolm came to adopt true Islam's universalism, and its belief that all could find Allah's grace regardless of race." (p.12) To black audiences, "what made him truly original was that he presented himself as the embodiment of the two central figures of African-American folk culture, simultaneously the hustler/trickster and the preacher/minister...

Manning Marable's book, *Malcolm X, A Life of Reinvention*, is an informative if unexciting read that adds important details to the story of the still-fascinating African-American revolutionary. Having read the famous Autobiography several times, I was still unaware, for example, at how much Malcolm travelled overseas, as well as his impact on foreign audiences. (Unfortunately, Mr. Marable's book plods exasperatingly in those chapters, as he includes far too much trivia. If you must know when Malcolm had a sandwich in Sussex or met 3 students at a Liberian airport, Marable has those details.) Information about Malcolm's rocky relationship with his powerful sister Ella, his troubled marriage and further details about the split with the Nation of Islam illuminate both the private and public figure. And the information about previous back to Africa groups is fascinating, as are the sections on Marcus Garvey and the formative days of the Nation of Islam. Marable is also insightful--if scathing, writing about Malcolm's co-author, Alex Haley. Marable's portrayal of Haley is a brutal picture of the free lancer as a sycophantic hustler. Where Marable's runs into trouble is in his constant editorializing (he takes every opportunity to show exactly how much he disapproves of his subject's politics) and with some rather questionable lapses in logic and fact-gathering. I, for one, would have liked more information about the formation of the Nation of Islam's religious enforcement squads, the funding for Malcolm's foreign trips after the split with the NOI and what Marable was able to glean from police and government surveillance files. Marable makes some strong charges against those he feels were involved in the assassination and the charges are not always backed up with factual detail.

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