

MAINTAINING THE ORDER OF WHITE AMERICA:
The Rhetorical Sacrifice of Malcolm X

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A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Communication
of Boston College

May 2007

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Chapter 1 Introduction

America has been a slave-holding land longer than it has been a free nation. The true order that underlies American society's daily existence is one of white privilege and thus institutionalized racism. Throughout Malcolm X's life—as is seen in his *Autobiography*—he has been a part of challenging that order. To maintain the racialized order, the cause of pollution must be sacrificed. This study examines Malcolm X's life as told to Alex Haley in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and its correlation to Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of rebirth and hierarchy.

In being critical of a work as rhetorically powerful as Malcolm X's *Autobiography*, it is of the utmost importance to be both inwardly critical and outwardly critical of the society in which the rhetorical import is found. Throughout this study, the polarity of “White” and “Black” in American society can be strongly worded, but the wording is necessary in understanding the importance of Malcolm X's life; it would be an injustice to alter the wording to be more acceptable in the eyes of a White reader. Being a White male, writing this paper, it is difficult not to be inwardly hateful of the infectiously racist society in which I both live and constantly benefit from. For that reason, the humanity found in Malcolm X throughout his autobiography is incredibly rhetorically powerful to White readers.

Inherent in the process of rebirth is the presence of a definite hierarchy. Hierarchy is defined by Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2001) as, “...*bureaucracy; the ladder: a sense of order*”; or “any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms

of which things, words people, acts, and ideas are ranked.” Hierarchy deals with “the relation of higher to lower, or lower to higher, or before to after, or after to before” and concerns the “arrangement whereby each rank is overlord to its underlings and underlings to its overlords” (206). The process of living in this hierarchy provides that, “Those on the lowest rungs of hierarchy fear slipping to even lower rungs, and those at the top fear they will be surpassed....Others do not actually have to reach higher positions to be satisfied—they may rise vicariously by being used in some way by those in higher positions” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 206). Throughout the application, the pollution that Malcolm X and Black Americans suffer from is derived from this inherent American hierarchy of White dominance.

The victimization that Malcolm X—criminal, prisoner, follower, leader, father, husband—suffers from in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides meaning for the distorted reality of the racial equality. This distortion is something that our society falsely convinces itself of each day. The application depicts the rebirth of Malcolm X, but displays the inability for America’s guilt-ridden, hierarchical order to be reborn.

The following sections will address the theory stated above. Chapter two, “An Attempt to Reconstruct Centuries as a Slave-Holding Nation,” discusses the historical implications of the Civil Rights Movement and the racism that is inherent in the foundations of American society. Chapter three, “Chronology of his Life,” provides the reader with an account of Malcolm X’s life. Chapter four, “Review of Literature,” addresses other research in the Communication field that

is related to Malcolm X. Chapter five, “Rebirth and Hierarchy,” touches upon the theories applied to the *Autobiography*—rebirth and hierarchy. Chapter six, “Finding Meaning in his Prophetic Words,” applies these two theories to the actual text of the *Autobiography*. Finally, chapter seven, “So What? He’s Dead,” attempts to address the implications of Malcolm X’s life in light of this research.

Chapter 2

An Attempt to Reconstruct Centuries as a Slave-Holding Nation

Alex Haley—a biographer, scriptwriter, and novelist—is most noted for his 1976 work, *Roots*. However, *Roots* was published in 1976, twelve years after the Civil Rights Act, eleven years after Malcolm X's violent shooting, and eight years after Dr. King's tragic death. Haley's 1965 work, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was published in the midst of the most controversial era in the twentieth century of American history. Haley documented the story of a man born in Omaha, Nebraska on May nineteenth, 1925—sixty years after the cessation of the Civil War and thirty years before the consummation of the Civil Rights Movement. Needless to say, the rhetorical implications found in documenting the life story of one of the most controversial civil rights leaders of the century in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement are incredibly powerful.

As will be discussed in the following section discussing the chronological events of Malcolm X [as discussed in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*], Alex Haley began interviewing Malcolm for the book a few months before he would be silenced by the Nation of Islam for comments he made regarding the death of President Kennedy. This was an incredibly transitional phase for Malcolm and can be seen in Haley's depiction of Malcolm's evolution of philosophy. In order to understand the life of Malcolm X, one must first evaluate the events and importance of the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights Movement began when the first African slave arrived in North America. As European indentured servants began gaining land in the colonies, the necessity for labor became a great concern. A demand for slavery in

North America occurred because there was an abundance of land but a shortage of labor. The slave trade began to put an importance on the emerging colonies instead of just depending upon the West Indies. The importation of Africans to America was so voluminous that James and Louis Horton (2001) wrote in their book, *Hard Road to Freedom: The Story of African America*, “Figures are disputed, but the best recent scholarship estimates the total number of Africans brought to the Americas at something under fifteen million” (23).

Two decades after the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock on November twenty-first, 1621, the colony of Virginia passed Act X stating “All persons except Negroes are to be provided with arms and ammunitions or be fined at the pleasure of the governor and council” (Cornell law, <http://www.law.cornell.edu>). This law institutionalized race and barred Africans from being recognized by the government. Shortly after, Maryland followed suit with the first ever colonial anti-amalgamation law stating, “That whatsoever free-born [English] woman shall intermarry with any slave. . . shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free-born women, so married shall be slaves as their fathers were”. This negative perspective towards “race-mixing” was solidified in a 1691 Virginia law that would banish any woman who dared to marry a “Negro, Mulatto, or Indian”. Finally, in 1667 Virginia, it was legalized in Act III that Christianity could not even save the human recognition of slaves, “Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children that are slaves by birth. . . should by virtue of their baptism be made free, it is enacted that baptism does not alter the condition to the person as to his bondage or freedom; masters freed from

this doubt may more carefully propagate Christianity by permitting slaves to be admitted to that sacrament”.

Although the first of these laws originated almost three centuries before Malcolm X’s birth and well before the national recognition of the “Black Muslims” of the Nation of Islam, it is important to recognize the institutionalized, systematic racism that has been rooted in American politics long before we became the United States. We have been taught since the birth of this country that we believe in “liberty and democracy for all”. However, the hero and villain archetypes provided in our history books skew this false reality in America. One may look to deny the institutionalization of a racial hierarchy within the foundation of the United States because the above laws were created prior to our independence. However, many of our Founding Fathers believed in and owned slaves themselves. Of course, this is overlooked in our history texts and may come as a shock to most of U.S. citizens [one of the reasons that Malcolm X’s dictations were perceived as violent and hate-mongering instead of as truths], but the main author of the Declaration of Independence—Thomas Jefferson—owned over 200 slaves.

In order to reassert the pivotal role institutional racism played on the independent America, I will cite three articles of the original Constitution. These are laws still found in the Constitution that was drafted on September seventeenth, 1787 and can still be found in unedited versions of the Constitution. Article I, Section II, Clause III states:

Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons (Cornell Law, <http://www.law.cornell.edu>).

This law is denying the humanity of slavery, allotting only three-fifths of human dignity to slaves. The trend continues with Article I, Section IX, Clause I:

The migration or importation of such persons as any of the states now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each person.

This law legally protects the slave trade up until the year 1808 (more than twenty years after the Constitution was completed). According to our nation's foundation, Congress cannot discuss the trading of persons until 1808 [of course, this will continue legally until the end of the Civil War in 1865]. Finally, Article IV, Section II, Clause III states:

No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.

This portion of the Constitution gives slave owners the Constitutional order to claim their “property”, even if found in a state that does not promote slavery.

Another important factor to discuss is the implications that various civil rights cases in the Supreme Court had on the United States. Matt Rathbone (2004) in his article, “The US Supreme Court and Civil Rights,” analyzes each of these cases, highlighting the most influential and rhetorically important regarding America’s views on race. In 1876 *USA v. Reece* the court recognized the right of states to impose voting qualifications, thus legalizing the discrimination of blacks in voting. In the famed *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896, the Supreme Court legalized the segregation of public transportation. Not until the Scottsborough Case of 1932 and 1935 are the rights of African-Americans in legal cases established. In the 1936 *Grovey v. Townsend* case, the legality of all-white primary elections are upheld, not to be reversed until the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* case. The validity of denying admission to law school on the grounds of race is upheld in the 1938 *Gaines v. Canada* case (later reinforced in the 1950 *Sweatt v. Painter* case).

Finally, the Supreme Court begins to re-evaluate certain blatantly racist legal decisions in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case. This decision declared segregation in education unconstitutional. In the second version of this case in 1955, the order to desegregate schools “with all deliberate speed” was made. This of course, sparked the Civil Rights Movement and caused incredible amounts of racial tension across the country. In that same year, the *Naim v. Naim* Supreme Court decision upheld Virginia’s law banning inter-racial marriage as

constitutional. The 1956 incident sparked by Rosa Parks caused the *Browder v. Gail* decision declaring Montgomery, Alabama bus segregation as unconstitutional. In the 1962 *Baker v. Carr* case, the Supreme Court decided to prevent racial gerrymandering of electoral districts. Finally, in 1964, the *Katzenback v. McClung* case outlawed segregation in restaurants (Rathbone 46). The following year, Malcolm X was assassinated.

All of this legal importance put on race is pivotal in analyzing the life of Malcolm X. The passionate, angered remarks that Alex Haley recorded from 1963 to 1965 are rooted in all of these examples of the systematic racism inherent in American life since the landing of Columbus upon the Americas. Malcolm was born into a world of hatred, personified in the countless overt examples of systematic racism [i.e. lynching] and the more covert examples cited throughout Haley's recounting of Malcolm's tumultuous life. The deep history of African people was demolished once the Europeans began shipping the youth of a continent across an ocean and imperialistically colonizing centuries-old civilizations. The United States erased the history of the African in order to mold the African-American—a blank slate filled with untrue and skewed historical “fact” about Western civilization imparting vast knowledge upon various “savage” cultures. For example, James W. Loewen (1995) wrote that, “The Americas were new only to Europeans. The word *discover* is another part of the problem... [American history's approach] is to portray whites discovering nonwhites rather than a multiracial, multicultural encounter” (Loewen, 1995, 71).

This form of reconstruction is necessary to understand the way in which Malcolm X's life is retold through the conversations he had with Alex Haley.

Chapter 3

Chronology of his Life

To understand the theory being applied to Malcolm X's life a brief history of Malcolm's life is necessary. The history is taken out of the historically confirmed events in his life documented in the Autobiography. Malcolm was born to Reverend Earl Little and his wife Louise on May 19, 1925 in Omaha Nebraska. Malcolm was their fourth child, and his youngest brother, Reginald, was born in 1927 after the family had moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1931, Malcolm's father, Earl, was beaten and killed by a local White hate group, the Black Legion [although the murder was not proven to be at the hands of these men, they are referenced by historians as the culprits of this brutal crime].

Following their father's murder and financially struggling the family moved to Lansing, Michigan. By 1939, Malcolm's mother, Louise, was committed to the State Mental Hospital in Kalamazoo and the children—including Malcolm—were placed in various foster care situations. Following a prank he played on his teacher, Malcolm was put in a juvenile home. Here, Malcolm recognized the fact that he could never be equals with his White counterparts, and after various patronizing comments from his teachers and caretakers, he began to disconnect himself from White America.

In 1941 Malcolm dropped out of school and moved to Boston to live with his half-sister, Ella Collins. Here Malcolm worked various menial jobs but had his eyes opened to the immediate rewards of the criminal world. At this point, Malcolm gains the nickname of "Red" through his introduction to the "hip" culture thanks to newfound friend Shorty. While in Boston, Malcolm becomes

romantically involved with a White woman, Sophia [who would later be the reasoning for Malcolm's unwarrantedly long jail sentence].

After a few years in Boston, Malcolm begins to live in Harlem due to his job as a worker on the Yankee Clipper—a train with service from Boston to New York and back. This job as a railroad employee also allowed Malcolm to avoid being drafted. After becoming a waiter at the criminally friendly Small's Paradise, Malcolm's criminal exposure and drug use became unavoidable. Malcolm's most prominent activity was his playing of the "numbers," a lottery system that was responsible for sapping the money from the poor Black people of Harlem. After a dispute with numbers legend West Indian Archie, Malcolm was forced to retreat back to Boston to avoid being murdered.

While in Boston, desperate to maintain his lifestyle and drug habits, Malcolm began robbing houses with Shorty, Sophia, and Sophia's sister (who became romantically involved with Shorty). This activity eventually got the four arrested in 1946, and Malcolm and Shorty were convicted of larceny, breaking and entering, and carrying a weapon. They both received eight to ten years of imprisonment, mainly because of the White institutionalized racist view that a Black man with a White woman is of the utmost disgust.

While in prison, Malcolm began to slay his drug habits and began educating himself through the prison library. After a visit from his brother, Reginald, Malcolm was introduced to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. Malcolm was then transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts which included an extensive library. This was in 1948, and Malcolm first began

his education as a debater though his arguments over the Nation of Islam with other inmates. In 1952, after six years of prison, Malcolm was released.

After meeting Elijah Muhammad in Chicago in 1952 [the Temple Malcolm attended, Detroit Temple Number One visited Elijah Muhammad's Temple in Chicago] Malcolm received his "X" signifying his official inclusion into the Nation of Islam [this was also in 1952]. By 1953, after living closely with Elijah Muhammad, the FBI opened a surveillance file on Malcolm. In 1953, 1954, and 1955 [respectively], Malcolm became the Minister of Temple Number Eleven in Boston, Temple Number Seven in New York, and Temple Number Twelve in Philadelphia. Malcolm marries Betty X [Sanders] in January of 1958 and their first of six daughters [only four were born in his lifetime, Betty gave birth to twins later in 1965 after Malcolm's death], Attallah, is born in November.

After being named the National Spokesperson for the Nation of Islam in 1962 as well as the first National Minister, Malcolm discovers that Elijah Muhammad is an adulterer. From this point on, Malcolm was slowly forced out of the Nation of Islam by the man he had devoted his life to, Elijah Muhammad. Following President Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Malcolm's comment of the "chickens coming home to roost" is deemed as reason for his ninety day silencing by Elijah Muhammad. After he is forced to resign from the Nation of Islam, in 1964 Malcolm forms the Muslim Mosque, Inc. in New York.

Also in 1964, Malcolm performs a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Here, Malcolm sheds the final layers of propaganda Elijah Muhammad imposed upon him and first begins to think for himself. Malcolm discovers true Islam, and

is reborn into humanity as a man of pure devotion and commitment to the betterment of global social structures. Malcolm achieved the highest clarity, admitting his guilt and misdirection; something neither American institutions nor Elijah Muhammad were willing to do. Also in this year, Malcolm travels throughout Africa and discovers the interconnectedness of the problems that cause Africans and African-American to suffer. Malcolm then forms the Organization for Afro-American Unity, an organization embracing the desire for African American acceptance.

In 1965 Malcolm's house is firebombed early on the morning of February 14th. A week later, seconds after his initial words of a speech given in the Audubon Ballroom (the headquarters of Muslim Mosque, Inc.), Malcolm is shot several times and pronounced dead on February 21, 1965. That day Malcolm officially became a martyr, expressing to Alex Haley in his autobiography that he welcomed and expected his own death. "“Brother,” he said to me, “do you realize that some of history’s greatest leaders were never recognized until they were safely in the ground!”” (Haley, 1965, 424). This paper depicts Malcolm as this great leader through the application of rebirth and hierarchical theory to Malcolm's life.

Chapter 4

Review of Literature

The amount of scholarly work devoted to the life of Malcolm X as well as his far-reaching global influence is vast. Analyses and critiques are documented in the fields of sociology, psychology, history, and communications. The communication texts examined for this paper reveal the rhetorical implications of Malcolm X from general analysis to specific an analysis looking at single speeches of Malcolm X.

In Finley C. Campell's (2003) article, "Voices of Thunder, Voices of Rage: A Symbolic Analysis of a Selection from Malcolm X's Speech, 'Message to the Grass Roots'", he analyses the various thematic conditions in which Malcolm X delivered this speech. Key to this analysis is the setting, in which the, "external is given by the editor the King Solomon Baptist Church (place), in Detroit, Michigan (geo-political area), in 1963 (time), at the Grass Roots Conference (the rationale of the setting)" (Campell, 2003, 103). Though examining this specific speech, Campell inductively uses other thematic elements to typify Malcolm X's speech as that of a black speaker. "It is such analysis which shows us his [X's] grounding in the main stream of the black American's oral-aural tradition and his peculiar use of that ambience which gives to the black speakers their special authority and charisma: Power to the People" (Campell, 2003, 110).

Conversely, both Mary G. McEdwards (1968) and Aaron D. Gresson (1977) in their respective articles use Malcolm X's rhetorical influence as one example in deductively examining agitative rhetoric and minority epistemology. McEdwards, in her paper titled, "Agitative Rhetoric: Its Nature and Effect"

attempts to prove agitator's presence in society an absolute necessity. Through her analysis of Malcolm X's fiery speech and various picketing incidents,

McEdwards validates the societal dependence upon these harsh dissenters.

Like any organism from the amoeba up, we do not enjoy being prodded, especially on a sore spot on the body politic, but that prodding is the very necessary purpose of agitative rhetoric. The agitator must use the jagged word, the snarling word, the insulting word; he cannot clothe his ideas in euphemistic cotton wool to spare our sensibilities (McEdwards, 1968, 43).

Through Gresson's (1977) use of examples ranging from Malcolm X's turbulent trials as a public figure to excerpts from *The Annotated Alice* in his paper,

"Minority Epistemology and the Rhetoric of Creation", Gresson analyzes the foundations of oppressed minority rhetoric. Gresson writes:

I have argued, it must be recognized that in settings of oppression what seems "rational" to rhetors presenting the oppressed or subordinate elements of a macro-system is unlikely to appear "rational" if judged by the social cosmology of the dominative elements. The "qualitative" values of one element are unlikely to generate rhetorical context and methods appropriate to the other (Gresson, 1977, 261).

Thus, when these minority voices are compared to the white-dominant foundation, they will appear as arbitrary and irrational.

Philip Wander and Steven Jenkins (2003) in their article, "Rhetoric, Society, and the Critical Response", view Malcolm X's rhetorical consequence in

a similarly deductive method as the two above authors have done. They analyze the rhetoric of Malcolm X as being viewed in two ways, "...for some Malcolm X stands as an emblem of the demonic urging war against the "white devils"; for others he approaches the divine" (Wander & Jenkins, 2003, 444). Using this example, they argue that communication critics possess the safest key to placing meaning as opposed to the harmfully skewed social and political spheres. This is reiterated by, "The critic, as orator, is to assist us in discovering a vision more at one with truth than the vision imposed on us by our social and political institutions" (Wander & Jenkins, 2003, 445).

The remaining articles discussed with regards to the review of literature are much more specific in their analysis of Malcolm X. John Louis Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit (1990) examine the narratives of both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X and their contributions to the transformation of the American ideological perspective of equality in their paper, "Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal and Counter-Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision". They examine the rhetorical structures of the "Anglo-American commitment to <equality>" in order to understand King and X's roles in redefining equality in America. Lucaites and Condit diagnose King's narrative as being culturetypal and Malcolm X's as being counter-cultural in terms of their rhetorical implications. This leads to the critical conclusion that, "

Malcolm X and King, articulating together separate black visions, thereby produced the components of the "African-American" vision which was to follow, a vision that offers cultural uniqueness and political amalgamation,

perhaps, indeed, replacing America's "melting pot" with "a brightly patterned quilt".... By following this lead we may gain the basis for a critical understanding of the creative capacity for change (Lucaites & Condit, 1990, 20).

Whereas Lucaites and Condit (1990) diagnosed Malcolm X's narrative as counter-culture, David R. Novak's (2006) report, "Engaging Parrhesia in a Democracy: Malcolm X as a Truth-Teller", places Malcolm X's rhetorical implications in a completely different context. Novak explains that to partake in the ancient Greek parrhesia is to operate as a truth-teller. Novak writes, "...the five elements of parrhesia remain constant yet context-specific: frankness, danger, criticism, duty, and truth" (Novak, 2006). In his study, Novak attempts to refute Foucault's (2001) claim that real parrhesia cannot exist in a democracy. Novak (2006) cites countless rhetorical examples reinforcing Malcolm X's possession of each of the above five elements of parrhesia, proving its existence within a democracy. Novak concludes, "Thus, parrhesia is not just a concept of truth-telling that is lost to the ages, but a living, contextual standard by which we can judge those who enter into public dialogue" (Novak, 2006, 41). He continues by alluding to the broader consequences of his research, "In a process of constant development, parrhesia emerged over time in Malcolm's speech, and he can serve, even in this day and age, as a model for those of us who strive to change this world" (Novak, 2006, 41).

The most prominent study found analyzing mass media perceptions of Malcolm X is Kimberly Powell and Sonja Amundson's (2002) study, "Malcolm

X and the Mass Media: Creation of a Rhetorical Exigence”. By using Kenneth Burke’s (1957) cluster analysis, the two authors highlight the printed press coverage of Malcolm X from 1963 through 1965 [the height of the Nation of Islam’s and Malcolm’s exposure] to uncover the negative shadow cast on the prominent leader. In their findings, Powell and Amundson write, “[a cluster analysis] reveals the media created Malcolm X as a *powerful, violent, extremist desperado*. In doing so they were successful in creating an exigence so great that it continues to need “correction” today. This study of the exigence of Malcolm X’s image reveals the media’s power in image creation” (Powell & Amundson, 2002, 42). The negatively created rhetoric of the print media during the life of Malcolm X is not only the cause for constant uncovering of Malcolm X’s true identity, but also responsible for the creation of this research.

Another study that critically examines the faulted identity of Malcolm X is Bill Yousman’s (2001), “Who Owns Identity? Malcolm X, Representation, and the Struggle Over Meaning”. Yousman begins his study very prophetically, writing, “...iconicizing Malcolm X as an American hero in the mold of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson [both slave owners], and Babe Ruth represents an ironic turn from the days when he was one of the central demons of mainstream American culture” (Yousman, 2001, 1). He continues with, “The central concern of this study is the continuing power of Malcolm X to function as a signifier for opposing ideological purposes long after his physical death” (Yousman, 2001, 1). The main point of conflict in this study is between *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) and Bruce Perry’s (1991) biography, *Malcolm X: A Man Who Changed*

Black America. Yousman (2001) questions whether it is acceptable “for suggesting that others may *correct* an individual’s representation of his/her life” (Yousman, 2001, 5). Yousman concludes by stating that no person can answer what Malcolm X’s image really means. He critically attacks those who oppose this by writing, “Those, like Perry (1991), who attempt to do so are merely appropriating his image for their own economic and ideological purposes. Malcolm X’s meaning is being constantly constructed, torn down, and reconstructed...to find definitive meaning in Malcolm X is simply not possible” (Yousman, 2001, 16).

The remaining studies being examined all study the shifts in Malcolm X’s own use of rhetoric. For example, Bill Eadie (2000) examines the shifts in Malcolm X’s rhetorical choices with regards to the audience addressed in “Blue-Collar Workers; Shifts in Malcolm X’s Rhetoric”. This paper discusses a speech Malcolm X gave to a Rochester, New York audience. This speech is significant because “Malcolm shifted his focus from the domestic to the international for the first time in public” (Eadie, 2000, 15). Having recently parted with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm had to create a new identity for himself and “By clearing a space between the domestic struggle for Civil Rights and Black power and the international struggle for human rights...Malcolm hoped to place himself in a position to proclaim emancipation for non-whites worldwide” (Eadie, 2000, 15). Eadie concludes by writing, “In this space, he could also travel between the domestic and international when it was rhetorically convenient for him to do so” (Eadie, 2000, 15).

Much of the information Eadie uses comes from Robert E. Terrill's (2000) article, "Colonizing the Borderlands: Shifting Circumference in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X". Terrill uses Malcolm's *Rochester Address* as his only text examined. Throughout the study, Terrill addresses Malcolm X's desire to amass the border area between a domestic and global audience. The border is described as, "...a site of potential symbolic emancipation that achieves form through the invitational rhetorical action of Malcolm's discourse" (Terrill, 2000, 68). Terrill emphasizes this border area as something no other movement has attempted to address, and concludes by writing:

Though various individuals and movements have gathered themselves under Malcolm's mantle in the decades since his death, none continues to work toward the borderlands in the way that I have suggested that Malcolm's rhetoric does. This is neither disjunction nor paradox, but a coherent consequence of Malcolm's thorough rejection of codified ideology (Terrill, 2000, 79).

Similar in the sense of mapping Malcolm X's rhetorical shifts, Robert James Branham (1995) traces Malcolm X's debating shifts in his study, "I was Gone Debating: Malcolm X's Prison Debates and Public Confrontations". In this study, Branham analyzes Malcolm's style of debate while behind Norfolk prison bars, during the impetus of his public career [debating in the streets in an effort to recruit members for the Nation of Islam], debates with Civil Rights leaders, and debates on college campuses. Branham states in his conclusion, "Whether in explicit debates on stage with other speakers, or in the direct challenges and

rebuttals posed in his individual speeches against absent interlocutors, Malcolm X saw in debate a means by which to redirect the battle for human rights toward new assumptions and new alliances” (Branham, 1995, 17). Branham ends with the line, “Throughout his public life, Malcolm X maintained a belief in the possibility of personal and social change and in debate a form of address through which such transformation might best be initiated” (Branham, 1995, 17).

The final study focusing on Malcolm X’s rhetorical shifts is another piece by Robert E. Terrill (2001) entitled, “Protest, Prophecy, and Prudence in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X”. In this study, Terrill compares, “...the rhetorical potential and limitations of prophecy and prudence as modes of protest discourse, using speeches by Malcolm X as touchstones” (Terrill, 2001, 26). Terrill argues that prior to Malcolm X’s withdrawal from the Nation of Islam, African American protest was prophetic in the sense that prophecy is defined as “both a part and apart from the dominant culture...acknowledges the unrealized potential of that culture and promises its eventual earthly consummation” (Terrill, 2001, 26). Following his parting with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X’s discourse, “...was not prophetic, but prudent. Prudence “is required precisely when one is no longer safely within a realm wholly determined by one art, one subject, one group, one objective,” which describes closely the rhetorical situation of the post-NOI Malcolm X” (Terrill, 2001, 33). Malcolm X’s shift to prudence caused a transition from complicated bodies of knowledge and propositions to a position concerned “with action-in-the-world, social action” (Terrill, 2001, 43).

The final study to be considered in this review of literature is Thomas W. Benson's (1974), "Rhetoric and Autobiography: The Case of Malcolm X". Within this study, Benson examines the different dialectics of Malcolm X as seen through *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and synthesizes them into one symbolic rhetorical act. Benson's study is very similar to this study being read because of the consummation of Malcolm's countless character portrayed in his autobiography into an omnipotent rhetorical force. Benson protects Malcolm X from being discharged due to one of his many character flaws discussed in the autobiography by, "...suggesting the presence in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* of a dialectical rhetoric, in which a dram of enlargement saves Malcolm from being dismissed as a fanatic, a charlatan, or an existential anti-hero, and instead renders his life as the embodiment of a principle of rhetorical action" (Benson, 1974, 12). By applying the dialectic rhetoric, one is "...able to see the *Autobiography* as a synthesizing act which resolves and transcends the fractions, producing a fully rhetorical action to which Being (and becoming), Knowing, and Doing contribute equally" (Benson, 1974, 13).

Although these texts examine various rhetorical effects of Malcolm X, they do not address Burke's concept of the rhetoric of rebirth. For this reason, it is necessary to explore, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), in the light of Burke's theory. Although similarities can be seen in each of the above communication studies of Malcolm X's rhetorical impact, this study is unique in its attempt to apply Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of rebirth. Kenneth Burke would

agree that throughout Malcolm X's life there was pollution in American society and the ultimate scapegoat was the "negro".

Chapter 5 Rebirth and Hierarchy

The rhetorical implications of Alex Haley's, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, will be addressed by using Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric of rebirth and the concept of the rhetorical victim/scapegoat. In his book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke (1969) describes rhetoric as "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond by symbols" (43). Burke continues, later in the book, by coming to the conclusion that, "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning,' there is persuasion" (126). By using Burke's definition of rhetoric, the book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, fits in this mold quite easily.

Continuing with Burke's rhetoric of rebirth, Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Robert Trapp (2001) state in their book titled *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* that, "...this function [rebirth], involves movement through three steps- pollution, purification, and redemption" (194). The authors continue to explain pollution as the "initial state of guilt" (or sin), purification as the movement towards cleansing, and redemption as the final act of forming a "new state- whether physical, spiritual, or psychological" (194).

We as human beings wish to be in a state of order with a lack of pollution. The introduction of any sort of pollution (defined as being guilt or sin) leads us into a state of disorder. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2001) pose that the state of disorder is inevitable by writing, "The setting up of any kind of order, then, automatically makes individuals transgressors who experience guilt, a phenomenon summarized by Burke in one of his poems: 'Order leads to Guilt/

(for who can keep commandments!)” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 95). Robert E. Rosenthal (2005), in his article, “*Born on the Fourth of July: The Search for Meaning*,” also uses Burke’s rhetoric of rebirth/victimage and writes, “When faced with disorder, we wish to return quickly to an ordered state. To this end, a victim may be found to function as a societal scapegoat...” (28).

Order leads to pollution which produces disorder. Reinstatement of normalcy requires that a victim be found to act as the scapegoat, or what Burke (1941) describes in his book, *The Philosophy of Literary Forms: Studies in Symbolic Action*, as the “‘vessel’ of certain unwanted evils, the sacrificial animal upon whose back the burden of these evils is ritualistically located” (34). In relation to Malcolm X’s life as described in his autobiography, Burke’s (1941) concept of the rhetoric of rebirth is used to depict Malcolm X as a societal scapegoat for the sense of disorder he projects upon the ‘ordered’ image of the America’s racially hegemonic foundations. Throughout certain points of his life, Malcolm X embodies the legalistic scapegoat, what Burke (1941) describes in *Philosophy* as “making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he “deserves” what he gets” (40). Conversely, in later years, Malcolm X embodies the fatalistic scapegoat, described again by Burke (1941) as “when we so point the arrows of the plot that the audience comes to think of him as a marked man, and so prepares itself to relinquish him” (40).

The final process that Malcolm X goes through before his redemption is mortification. Mortification is described by Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2001) as “the process in which we make ourselves suffer for our guilt or sins. Mortification is

self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials and restriction designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, pg.197). This mortification is personified in the symbolic suicides Malcolm X commits throughout his life, which lead to his continual rebirth, and thus, restoration of order. However, these stages that Malcolm X is forced to undergo (order to pollution to disorder to scapegoating to mortification) are lifelong because he is constantly shedding those characteristics that society has guilted him into bearing.

Inherent in the process of rebirth is the presence of a definite hierarchy. Hierarchy is defined by Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2001) as, “...*bureaucracy; the ladder: a sense of order*; or “any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms of which things, words people, acts, and ideas are ranked.” Hierarchy deals with “the relation of higher to lower, or lower to higher, or before to after, or after to before” and concerns the “arrangement whereby each rank is overlord to its underlings and underlings to its overlords” (206). The process of living in this hierarchy provides that, “Those on the lowest rungs of hierarchy fear slipping to even lower rungs, and those at the top fear they will be surpassed....Others do not actually have to reach higher positions to be satisfied—they may rise vicariously by being used in some way by those in higher positions” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 206).

The victimization that Malcolm X—criminal, prisoner, follower, leader, father, husband—suffers from in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides meaning for the distorted reality of the racial equality that our society falsely

convinces itself of every hour of every day. The application depicts the rebirth of Malcolm X, but displays the inability for America's guilt-ridden, hierarchical order to be reborn.

Chapter 6 Finding Meaning in his Prophetic Words

Studying Kenneth Burke's rhetoric of rebirth provides immense amounts of rhetorical consequence for all of Malcolm X's life and is not only applicable to his words as told to Alex Haley (1965) in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The stages of pollution, purification and redemption are apparent through an intense study of his documented and undocumented life. Even the chapter titles of his autobiography—"Hustler," "Trapped," "Caught," "Satan," "Saved," "Savior," and "Out"—allude to the dominance of the conceptual rebirth experienced by Malcolm X.

Examining *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* has provided four main transitions to be highlighted in the context of Burke's rhetoric of rebirth. Although a more extensive study could inspect the rhetorical consequence of something as minuscule as the chapter titles, this study examines the four redemptive lives of Malcolm X. Beginning with his youth as Malcolm Little, following his Bostonian and Harlemit life of as "Red", analyzing his formation as a follower of Elijah Muhammad, and ending with his Islamic revelation as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, the redemptive cycles of Malcolm X's life depict a story of continual disorder and pollution. Although the disorder experienced in each of these four timeframes seems to legitimate Malcolm X as the legalistic scapegoat for specific incidences of guilt loaded upon him, the final analysis admonishes the fatalistic role that Malcolm X played in being sacrificed for the perpetuation of institutionalized White racism. In studying Malcolm's words as dictated to Alex Haley, there is an obvious connection to Burke's redemptive cycle, especially

seen in the continually guilt or pollution that Malcolm struggles with his entire life—until finally, he is reborn as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. As discussed later in this chapter, Malcolm’s life story provides insight into the transformation from the legalistic scapegoat—a man who seemingly deserves the guilt and punishment loaded upon himself—to the fatalistic scapegoat, a man who is sacrificed because he is too good for the world he is living in.

Malcolm Little

Born as Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, in an Omaha hospital as the seventh child of Reverend Earl Little (a Baptist minister) and the fourth child from the marriage of Earl and Louise Little, Malcolm entered the United States as society was in the midst of beginning a bloody battle for the definition of equality. In the highly racialized state of Nebraska, the Little family embodied Kenneth Burke’s (1941) legalistic scapegoat by making the family “an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he “deserves” what he gets” (Burke, 1941, 40). As a follower of Marcus Garvey, head of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Reverend Earl Little created a sense of disorder in the sense that American society was founded on the crutch of slavery. The U.N.I.A. advocated a return of the Black-race to their ancestral homeland of Africa. After three centuries of using the African youth to fund America’s White institutions, these institutions saw in this theory a way to end White dominance over the separated Black citizens.

Not only did Reverend Earl Little and his family made scapegoated for their following of Marcus Garvey but also for the Reverend’s desire to be a store

owner. This violated yet another facet of morality in the white dominated system for it put the Black man in a position of ownership—contradictory to the very foundations of slave society. This can be seen in the words of Malcolm X as recorded by Alex Haley (1965):

He [his father] had begun to lay away savings for the store he had always wanted to own when, as always, some stupid local Uncle Tom Negroes began to funnel stories about his revolutionary beliefs to the local white people. This time, the get-out-of-town threats came from a local hate society called The Black Legion. They wore black robes instead of white. Soon, nearly everywhere my father went, Black Legionnaires were reviling him as an “uppity nigger” for wanting to own a store, for living outside the Lansing Negro district, for spreading unrest and dissention among “the good niggers” (Haley, 1965, 3).

This passage dictates that the only “acceptable” Black people were those who shed visions of equality in order to submit to their segregated positions within the White ordered society. Burke’s theory of hierarchy is very appropriate for the experiences of the Little family due to both the Black and White reactions, “Those on the lowest rungs of hierarchy fear slipping to even lower rungs, and those at the top fear they will be surpassed.... Others do not actually have to reach higher positions to be satisfied—they may rise vicariously by being used in some way by those in higher positions” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 206). For this reason, the Little family personified disorder and thus were overloaded with offending guilt, making them obvious legalistic scapegoats—deserving what they get. Also

apparent in this passage is the sense of division within Black American society that is purposely perpetuated by the White dominated thought. Through the division of Burke's lower rungs of hierarchy, the "overlords" are able to attain their power over those below them. The Little family's actions caused a sense of pollution within the White order because their attempt at ownership challenged the foundations of the White hierarchic principles. This purposeful division is discussed throughout the *Autobiography*, and is a source of the scapegoating that follows Malcolm throughout his life.

The legalistic scapegoating of Malcolm did not only come from outside of his family, but also came from within his family during his earlier years. The importance and repercussions of "Whiteness" within Black society is another aspect that haunted Malcolm X throughout his periods of rebirth. He highlights in the opening pages of the *Autobiography* that his father, Baptist Reverend Earl Little, had a short temper with his children but would always be more lenient with Malcolm. Although Malcolm dictates the belligerence of his father towards the children, Malcolm pointed that:

Nearly all my whippings came from my mother. I've thought a lot about why. I actually believe that as anti-white as my father was, he was subconsciously so afflicted with the white man's brainwashing of Negroes that he inclined to favor the light ones, and I was his lightest child. Most Negro parents in those days would almost instinctively treat any light children better than they did the darker ones. It came directly from the

slavery tradition that the “mulatto,” because he was visibly nearer to white, was therefore “better” (Haley, 1965, 5).

With his reddish hair and lighter complexion, Malcolm was caught in the middle of an American society that is defined by race. His Blackness made him worthy of being a victim in White society, but his lightness made him punishable by Black society for embodying the very aspect of their torturer that made them worthy of torture.

In 1931, after a fight between Earl and Louise, Earl walked away from their home. Later that night, police found Reverend Earl Little:

My mother was taken by the police to the hospital, and to a room where a sheet was over my father in a bed, and she wouldn't look, she was afraid to look. Probably it was wise that she didn't. My father's skull, on one side, was crushed in, I was told later... he was attacked, and then laid across some tracks for a streetcar to run over him. His body was cut almost in half. He lived two and a half hours in that condition.... I can remember a vague commotion, the house filled up with people crying, saying bitterly that the white Black Legion had finally gotten him. My mother was hysterical. In the bedroom, women were holding smelling salts under her nose. She was still hysterical at the funeral (Haley, 1965, 10).

From this point on, the Little family would slowly be broken apart by the White institutions. Malcolm's “country” lifestyle would soon end and he would enter a

new stage, shedding the guilt-laden characteristics of Malcolm Little for a new persona that would be equally guilt-laden by White society.

Early in his life, Malcolm X retells in the *Autobiography* of instances that personified the rhetorical guilt he continually suffered from at the hands of institutionalized racism:

In the summertime, at night, in addition to all the other things we did, some of us boys would slip out down the road, or across the pastures, and go “cooning” watermelons. White people always associated watermelons with Negroes, and they sometimes called Negroes “coons” among other names, and so stealing watermelons became “cooning” them. If white boys were doing it, it implied that they were only acting like Negroes. Whites have always hidden or justified all of the guilts they could by ridiculing or blaming Negroes (Haley, 1965, 16).

Even as a young boy, doing things that young boys of any background would do in the countryside, Malcolm suffered from the unjustified guilt laden upon him by White dominance. There had to be a differentiating factor for stealing watermelons based on race, for how could even the childish act of stealing watermelons be seen as a similarity between White people and Black people? This would cause disorder; in order to preserve order, a differentiation had to be made to maintain the falsified gap of human evolution between the two races.

As Malcolm’s mother continued to suffer from the loss of her husband—both financially and mentally—the state began to sink its teeth deep into the Little family. Following Earl’s death, the family had moved to Lansing, Michigan, and

was forced to live off of meager resources and welfare regulations. Malcolm was sent to live with nearby friends, the Gohannases, and visited his family often. However, as state representatives began to frequent the Little house, they began to break the family apart:

Soon the state people were making plans to take over all of my mother's children. She talked to herself nearly all of the time now, and there was a crowd of new white people entering the picture—always asking new questions. They would even visit me at the Gohannases'.... Eventually my mother suffered a complete breakdown, and the court orders were finally signed. They took her to the State Mental Hospital in Kalamazoo. It was seventy-some miles from Lansing, about an hour and a half on the bus. A Judge McClellan in Lansing had authority over me and all of my brothers and sisters. We were "state children," court wards; he had the full say-so over us. A white man in charge of a black man's children! Nothing but legal, modern slavery—however kindly intentioned (Haley, 1965, 21).

The White state representatives had full power over defining a healthy family, and the Little family morally violated this ordered vision of a family and thus deserved to be broken apart.

After living with the Gohannases, Malcolm acted up in school and was sent to a reform school. Here he met a White woman, Mrs. Swerlin, and Duane and Lucille Lathrop, who were also White. Although they took care of Malcolm and treated him kindly, Malcolm saw himself as a "mascot" [the title of the

chapter] in their eyes. Some of the most profound statements from this portion of Malcolm's youth are recorded with regard to this relationship:

They didn't give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect, and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognize in a white boy in my position. But it has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren't considered *of* them. Even though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me*. . . . I don't care how nice one[a white person] is to you; the thing you must always remember is that almost never does he really see you as he sees himself, as he sees his own kind. He may stand with you through thin, but not thick; when the chips are down, you'll find that as fixed in him as his bone structure is his sometimes subconscious conviction that he's better than anybody black (Haley, 1965, 28).

The order of White society is maintained so that regardless of the amount of kindness given towards a Black person, that person will never be qualified as equally deserving of the rights and human classification as his or her White counterpart.

Malcolm challenged this protocol when he entered Mason Junior High School. He was elected president of his class and had some of the top marks among his White classmates. However, a conversation Malcolm had with his English teacher—Mr. Ostrowski—changed his character. When asked about what career he wished to pursue, Malcolm responded by presenting his wishes to

become a lawyer. Mr. Ostrowski's response is rhetorically symbolic in its strong reference to an analysis of the legalistic scapegoating that Malcolm had suffered his whole life [as dictated through a textual analysis of the *Autobiography*]; because he was a Black man, his career interests were a moral injustice against the White institutionalized racism and thus he deserved to be mortified:

He [Mr. Ostrowski] kind of half-smiled and said, "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you *can* be. You're good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you'd get all kinds of work." The more I thought afterwards about what he said, the more uneasy it made me. It just kept treading around in my mind. What made it really begin to disturb me was Mr. Ostrowski's advice to others in my class—all of them white. ... They all reported that Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged what they had wanted. Yet nearly none of them had earned marks equal to mine. It was a surprising thing that I had never thought of it that way before, but I realized that whatever I wasn't, I *was* smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes, to become whatever *I* wanted to be (Haley, 1965, 38).

The first portion of Malcolm's life abruptly comes to an end at the words of a White, racist teacher. Malcolm's words as dictated to Alex Haley contain an

overpowering evidence of the pollution that Malcolm suffered from undeservingly. The passages chosen above are textually analyzed to expose these signs of guilt that afflicted Malcolm through his earlier years. He would soon abide by what he believed to be a “new order,” but finds that this new order contains as much institutionalized White racism that he had experienced as Malcolm Little.

Red

At this exact point in his life, Malcolm—for the first time—can be analyzed as mortifying himself for the guilt loaded upon his shoulders because he is a Black man; he is the most notorious legalistic scapegoat. Mortification is “the process in which we make ourselves suffer for our guilt or sins. Mortification is self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self” (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2001, 197). Through self-sacrifice, the character is able to commit a symbolic suicide and slay the characteristics that have punished the character. Although Malcolm cannot change his race, the interaction with Mr. Ostrowski opened his eyes to the inequities of the racist American society. A new character emerged from this interaction, and this is where Malcolm’s exposure to reality instilled within him the first inklings of anger for the inequities he had experienced his whole life. Following his conversation with Mr. Ostrowski, Malcolm committed his initial symbolic suicide and left Michigan to start a new life with his half-sister [from Earl’s first marriage], Ella, in Boston:

It was then that I began to change—inside. I drew away from white people. I came to class, and I answered when called upon. It became a physical strain simply to sit in Mr. Ostrowski’s class. Where “nigger” had slipped off my back before, wherever I heard it now, I stopped and looked at whoever said it.... I’ve thought about that time a lot since then. No physical move in my life has been more pivotal or profound in its repercussions. If I had stayed in Michigan, I would probably have married one of those Negro girls I knew and liked in Lansing. I might have become one of those state capitol building shoeshine boys, or a Lansing Country Club waiter, or gotten one of the other menial jobs which, in those days, among Lansing Negroes, would have been considered “successful”—or even become a carpenter.... All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I did. If I hadn’t, I’d probably still be a brainwashed black Christian (Haley, 1965, 38-40).

Malcolm shed his past life and accepted a new one in Boston. Once again, Burke’s hierarchy is exposed, which is explained as, “any kind of graded, value-charged structure in terms of which things, words, people, acts, and ideas are ranked” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 205). The ordered system of hegemonic White power was able to maintain its order, but would soon be challenged again by Malcolm. However, it would be a challenge of a completely different nature.

A very rhetorically powerful image and experience that Malcolm X highlights throughout the *Autobiography* is the process of “conking” [a painful process in which chemicals are run through hair to straighten it]. Within a few

months of living in Boston with his half-sister Ella, Malcolm quickly became friends with the local personality, Shorty. Shorty set Malcolm up with a job shining shoes outside of the Roseland State Ballroom. It was at the ballroom that Malcolm began his hedonistic lifestyle that would soon lead to yet another transformation. In order to “beat” the system that had kept Malcolm down for so long, he began buying material possessions on credit in order to change his image from the clueless Mason, Michigan country Negro to the hip city Negro. However, in his reflections on his first conk, he eluded to the fact that he was playing into the very system that he was trying to rise up against. The process of conking is extremely painful, and this can be seen in the words of his *Autobiography*. The rhetorically important part of this act, however, was Malcolm’s reaction upon seeing his newly straightened hair:

The mirror reflected Shorty behind me. We both were grinning and sweating. And on top of my head was this thick, smooth sheen of shining red hair—real red—as straight as any white man’s. How ridiculous was I! Stupid enough to stand there simply lost in admiration of my hair now looking “white,” reflected in the mirror in Shorty’s room. I vowed that I’d never again be without a conk, and I never was for many years. This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are “inferior”—and white people “superior”—that they will even violate and mutilate their God-

created bodies to try and look “pretty” by white standards (Haley, 1965, 57).

In an effort to destroy the guilt Malcolm had laden upon him for being Black, he physically punished himself in an attempt to rid himself of his Black guilt; the guilt forced upon American Black society by the White structures that have physically and mentally enslaved a formerly free people for centuries. This guilt and shame can be seen in a following line, “But I don’t see how on earth a black woman with any race pride could walk down the street with any black man wearing a conk—the emblem of his shame that he is black” (57).

Without knowing it at the time, Malcolm was walking down a path that personified the disorder within the White society: that the Black man has no place as equals. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (2001) wrote about this in their definition of the legalistic scapegoat, “The greater the internal inadequacies, the more evils a rhetor is likely to load upon the back of “the enemy” or “scapegoat”” (196). The inadequacies of the White race were handed down to the “inferior” black race, so that Malcolm deserved to be punished for his Black skin, even if he was light-skinned.

After establishing himself as a regular at the Roseland State Ballroom and amassing somewhat of a name for himself, Malcolm quickly became a personality with his zoot suits and red conk. His nickname, “Red,” became commonplace among the nightclub scene throughout Beacon Hill. Malcolm left his shoe-shining job to become the fourth-cook [as he described it, the “dishwasher”] aboard the Yankee Clipper with service from Boston to New York. Malcolm got this job to

avoid the draft, a reasoning described in the *Autobiography* as “Shorty felt about the war the same way I and most ghetto Negroes did: ‘Whitey owns everything. He wants us to go and bleed for him? Let him fight’” (Haley, 1965, 74). However, through his use of the credit system and his hedonistic lifestyle, he would soon discover that he was in fact bleeding for him on the streets of Boston and New York, fulfilling the White American order of subjugating the Black man. This invisible battle can be seen in Malcolm’s description of his job as the “sandwich man” on the Yankee Clipper [no longer the fourth-cook]:

It didn’t take me a week to learn that all you had to do was give white people a show and they’d buy anything you offered them. It was like popping your shoeshine rag. The dining car waiters and Pullman porters knew it too, and they faked their Uncle Tomming to get bigger tips. We were in that world of Negroes who are both servants and psychologists, aware that white people are so obsessed with their own importance that they will pay literally, even dearly, for the impression of being catered to and entertained (Haley, 1965, 78).

Soon, Malcolm began to frequent the night scene in Harlem, appreciating the music and lifestyle of a Harlemiter. After leaving his job and becoming a waiter at Small’s nightclub, Malcolm soon established a name for himself in Harlem. He played the numbers, frequented the drug scene, and satiated his immediate needs. Although he speaks of the raucous and hedonistic lifestyle during his time in Harlem, a reflection on the inside of Small’s dictated the spurious impression that this lifestyle was a completely conscious choice. “...we

were huddled in there, bonded together in seeking security and warmth and comfort from each other, and we didn't know it. All of us—who might have probed space, or cured cancer, or built industries—were instead victims of the white man's American social system" (Haley, 1965, 93). Although at the time Malcolm believed he had chosen to live this falsely luxurious lifestyle, it was in fact one of few options left to him by the White social structures. America's Black population was and in still ways is given inadequate avenues to achieve a decent lifestyle, and is thus set up to fail the order. The hierarchy that Burke discusses is apparent in this sense; the "overlords" pile their own internal faults onto the backs of those below them, in a sense rationalizing that the "Black criminals" deserve their substandard treatment. The Black man is the White man's legalistic scapegoat, and thus loaded with the internal inadequacies of the dominant race.

Although openly disdainful of their White counterparts, Malcolm and his compatriots propagated the ordered image of social hierarchy. In attempts to deny their own race, some Black men in Harlem turned to White women. A long-time girlfriend of Malcolm's, Sophia, played an important role in his lifetime as "Red":

Even among Harlem Negroes, her [Sophia's] looks gave me status. They were just like the Negroes everywhere else. That was why the white prostitutes made so much money. It didn't make a difference if you were in Lansing, Boston, or New York—what the white racist said, and still says, was right in those days! All you had to do was put a white girl anywhere close to the average black man, and he would respond. The

black woman also made the white man's eyes light up—but he was slick enough to hide it (Haley, 1965, 96).

Even subconsciously, Malcolm conformed to his forced hatred of his own skin, succumbing to the ordered system of White supremacy. However, he would soon see that his relationship with a White woman would be seen as a moral injustice by the White dominated legal system, and thus deserving of punishment [i.e. legalistic scapegoat].

Prior to Malcolm's eventual spiral downwards into the purgatory of the American prison system, his numbers business [the lottery discussed previously] put him in contact with West Indian Archie. After spending some time in New York's infamous Sing Sing prison, Malcolm became one of his clients. Malcolm speaks in the *Autobiography* of Archie's incredible photographic memory. Again, as a victim of White America, Archie did not have access to legal means in which to harness his incredible memory. Malcolm touched upon this, "I've often reflected upon such black veteran numbers men as West Indian Archie. If they had lived in another kind of society, their exceptional mathematical talents might have been better used. But they were black" (Haley, 1965, 120). By illegally running a numbers racket, Archie was unknowingly perpetuating the very system that did not allow him full access to "liberty and justice for all."

Desperate to entertain his drug habit and frivolous lifestyle, Malcolm returned to Boston. He had to leave New York because he and Archie had disagreed about the winnings owed in one of the numbers Malcolm played. Malcolm reunited with Shorty and his girlfriend Sophia [along with Sophia's

sister and a man named Rudy] to rob the rich White houses of Boston. Eventually, Malcolm and his accomplices were caught—with the exception of Rudy—and a trial date was set. Malcolm's legal crimes were within ordered White society—a poor Black man stealing? That's what the system is programmed to sustain—however, his and Shorty's relationships with two White women were a source of pollution, and created disorder. For this reason, the social workers, police officers, and judges scapegoated Shorty and Malcolm for infecting these women with their immoral race:

The girls weren't so-called "tramps," or "trash," they were well-to-do upper-middle-class whites. That bothered the social workers and the forces of law more than anything else. How, where, when had I met them? Did we sleep together? Nobody wanted to know anything at all about the robberies. All they could see was that we had taken a white man's women. ...Even the court clerks and the bailiffs: "Nice white girls...goddam niggers—" It was the same even from our court-appointed lawyers as we sat down, under guard, at a table, as our hearing assembled. Before the judge entered, I said to one lawyer, "We seem to be getting sentenced because of those girls." He got red from the neck up and shuffled his papers: "You had no business with white girls!" Later, when I had learned the full truth about the white man, I reflected many times that the average burglary sentence for a first offender, as we all were, was about two years. But we weren't going to get the average—not for *our* crime (Haley, 1965, 153).

Malcolm and Shorty would not get the average, “I got ten years. . . . This was February, 1946. I wasn’t quite twenty-one. I had not even started shaving. They took Shorty and me, handcuffed together, to the Charlestown State Prison” (Haley, 1965, 155). Malcolm’s time as “Red” was coming to a close. He had found his role in ordered White society, no matter how firmly he believed he was fighting the system, as a drug-addicted criminal. The legal employment options available to him were unable to provide an enjoyable youth, so he turned to the only other available position: crime. However, the source of his guilt and punishment was not prescribed from his illegal activity, but from his moral violation of keeping a relationship with a White woman.

This crime, unwritten in our Constitution but written in the minds of White society, made Malcolm a legalistic scapegoat by, “making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he “deserves” what he gets” (Burke, 1941, 40). The chapter following Malcolm’s conviction is entitled “Satan,” and personifies the purgatory that Malcolm is placed in for the pollution he presented upon the White order. In prison, Malcolm will begin his mortification, and eventually become Burke’s (1941) most perfect fatalistic scapegoat, “in making him worthy by a subtle kind of poetic justice, in making the sacrificial vessel “too good for this world,” hence of the *highest* value, hence the *most perfect* sacrifice” (Burke, 1941, 40). The reason Malcolm is able to become the most perfect sacrifice is because of his admittance to his own faults and guilt. In so doing this, he becomes too good for the White order—which is unable to admit its own incredible guilt—and must relinquish Malcolm for posing a threat to the order.

Following Elijah Muhammad

I want to say before I go on that I have never previously told anyone my sordid past in detail. I haven't done it now to sound as though I might be proud of how bad, how evil, I was.

But people are always speculating—why am I as I am? To understand that of any person, his whole life, from birth, must be reviewed. All of our experiences fuse into our personality. Everything that ever happened to us is an ingredient.

Today, when everything that I do has an urgency, I would not spend one hour in the preparation of a book which had the ambition to perhaps titillate some readers. But I am spending many hours because the full story is the best way that I know to have it seen, and understood, that I had sunk to the very bottom of the American white man's society when—soon now, in prison—I found Allah and the religion of Islam and it completely transformed my life (Haley, 1965, 153).

Malcolm, up until his transformation in prison, had been continually reintegrated into the ordered White system of dehumanizing the Black race. Never, even when he began to question White society after his conversation with Mr. Ostrowsky, had Malcolm consciously and deliberately acted to disrupt this order. Whenever he had embodied the disorder causing pollution, he was mortified into submission. However, the teachings of Islam, beginning with Malcolm's introduction to Elijah Muhammad, produced a means for Malcolm to attempt a reordering.

Malcolm's transformation begins with his first true steps towards mortification, defined as, "the process in which we make ourselves suffer for our guilt or sins. Mortification is self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2001, 197). This process begins when Malcolm's little brother, Reginald, visits him in prison. When Reginald visited the prison, he told Malcolm:

“You don’t even know who you are,” Reginald had said. “You don’t even know, the white devil has hidden it from you, that you are of a race of people of ancient civilizations, and riches in gold and kings. You don’t even know your true family name, you wouldn’t recognize your true language if you heard it. You have been cut off by the devil white man from all true knowledge of your own kind. You have been a victim of the evil of the devil white man ever since he murdered and raped and stole from your native land in the seeds of your forefathers....” (Haley, 1965, 164).

Despite the criticism and unsettled reactions this may create among White readers, there is more truth in these few lines than anything anyone had told Malcolm previously. Was Malcolm’s origin of an ancient civilization in Africa? Most likely yes, anthropologists and historians are finding more and more evidence that civilization began in the continent of Africa. Does Malcolm Little know his true family’s name? No, because his father came from Georgia, born from a slave family stripped of their native name when they first boarded the ship that would eventually bring them to their eternal imprisonment. Had Malcolm been the victim of murdering and raping White men? Yes, there are countless direct accounts describing the brutalities of slave life in the colonies. Even the major author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, had six children with his slave, Sally Hemmings. The facts that Reginald brought to his brother, however controversial, are historically relevant and of significant import.

For the first time in his life, Malcolm received knowledge that the color of skin was not a justifiable subordinating factor. He was, in fact, truly human and deserving of dignity, confidence, and self-reliance; three facets of life unattainable up until this point in his life. Reginald proceeded to tell Malcolm—as Reginald visited his older brother in prison—about Elijah Muhammad, “The Messenger of Allah.” The story of his prophetic existence was described to Malcolm, “He was, they said, “a black man, like us.” ...He had moved with his family to Detroit, and there had met a Mr. Wallace D. Fard who claimed was “God in person.” Mr. Wallace D. Fard had given to Elijah Muhammad Allah’s message for the black people who were “the Lost-Found Nation of Islam here in this wilderness of North America”” (Haley, 1965, 164). Malcolm’s entire family was Muslim, most living in Detroit following Elijah Muhammad.

Reginald explained to his brother, Malcolm, that “pork was not eaten by those who worshiped in the religion of Islam, and not smoking cigarettes [a habit that Malcolm picked up as “Red”] was a rule of the followers of The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, because they did not take injurious things such as narcotics, tobacco, or liquor into their bodies” (Haley, 1965, 165). Eliminating these habits was Malcolm’s origin of mortification; his cleansing and purification of the guilt loaded upon him. Pollution is described as the “initial state of guilt (or sin), purification as the movement towards cleansing, and redemption as the final act of forming a ‘new state—whether physical, spiritual, or psychological”” (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2001, 194). Malcolm had finally entered a true form of cleansing

purification, and thus began his rebirth. He saw the wrongs in White America's order, and would no longer be an apathetic scapegoat for the injustices:

I have since learned—helping me to understand what then began to happen within me—that the truth can be quickly received, or received at all, only by the sinner who knows and admits that he is guilty of having sinned much. Stated another way: only guilt admitted accepts truth. The Bible again: the only people whom Jesus could not help were the Pharisees; they didn't feel they needed any help. The very enormity of my previous life's guilt prepared me to accept the truth.... I was going through the hardest thing, also the greatest thing, for any human being to do; to accept that which is already within you, and around you (Haley, 1965, 167).

Malcolm X was able to admit his guilt, and thus open his eyes to a truly just order. American society, as discussed in the implications section, had not admitted its guilt, and thus is not submitting itself to a new order. Without true acceptance of guilt, rebirth is impossible, and because of this, Malcolm X's new view of the racialized paradigm caused pollution within American society. From this point on in his life, Malcolm X will be fatalistically positioned as the sacrifice for the United States, the sacrifice for all the sins that the White institutions have yet to admit. Similar to Malcolm X's ensuing sacrifice, "Christ's sacrificial death—neither his life nor his preaching—is key, and "[a]t the heart of salvation were the metaphors of retributive justice; at the center was a symbol of torture and death" (II:4)" (Ehrenhaus & Owen, 2004, 278). Malcolm X was tortured

throughout his life by the White ordered society, the very society that could not admit that it was the cause of the pollution placed on the backs of America's overburdened Black men and women. The Burkean hierarchical society could not survive when a man like Malcolm X admitted his own guilt and sins and could truly purify himself. Therefore, as with Christ, Malcolm X eventually died for the sins of White American society.

It is important not to confuse Elijah Muhammad's teachings with the true facets of Islam; Malcolm X discovers true Islam only after he parts with Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam and makes his pilgrimage to Mecca. Malcolm's initial acceptance of Elijah Muhammad was the first step of a life-long process of rebirth. Without Elijah Muhammad there would be no discovery of true Islam, just as there would be no Elijah Muhammad without living the criminal lifestyle Malcolm lived while in Boston and New York. Throughout the *Autobiography*, Malcolm inserts lines that project this exact sentiment, and this can be witnessed in the conclusion of the "Satan" chapter:

I was to learn later that Elijah Muhammad's tales, like the one of "Yacub," infuriated the Muslims of the East. While at Mecca, I reminded them that it was their fault, since they themselves hadn't done enough to make real Islam known in the West. Their silence left a vacuum into which any religious faker could step and mislead our people (Haley, 1965, 171).

While in the Norfolk Prison Colony, Malcolm began reading constantly, continuing the education he had left when he began his life as "Red". Malcolm wrote daily letters to Elijah Muhammad and began recruiting brothers for the

Nation of Islam while in prison. “I have to admit a sad, shameful fact. I had so loved being around the white man that in prison I really disliked how Negro convicts stuck together so much...in my guilt and shame I began to catch every chance I could to recruit for Mr. Muhammad” (Haley, 1965, 185). The society that Malcolm had previously lived in divided his own race, creating a lack of unity among Black America—another important facet of the White dominated society.

Upon Reginald’s final visit to the Norfolk Prison Colony, Malcolm had been informed that Reginald was suspended from the Nation of Islam for having “improper relations” with the secretary of the New York Temple. Although this action would later provide Malcolm with justification for the false deification that Elijah Muhammad practiced, Malcolm was unshaken from his commitment to the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm agreed with Elijah Muhammad. “That struck me. Reginald was not leading the disciplined life of a Muslim. And I knew that Elijah Muhammad was right, and my blood brother was wrong. Because right is right, and wrong is wrong. Little did I then realize the day would come when Elijah Muhammad would be accused by his own sons as being guilty of the same acts of immorality that he judged Reginald and so many others for” (Haley, 1965, 190). Although it would later be corrected, Malcolm’s blind following of this newfound “truth” would be the final characteristic shed to complete his rebirth.

Malcolm was released in 1952 and immediately moved to Detroit in order to live with his older brother Wilfred’s family and to attend the Nation of Islam’s

Detroit Temple Number One. Here he got a job in a furniture store and adamantly followed the rituals of the Nation of Islam. On Labor Day of 1952 the Detroit Temple Number One Muslims went in a motor caravan to visit Chicago Temple Number Two to hear Elijah Muhammad speak. Here Elijah Muhammad called upon Malcolm as an example of the power of faith. Returning to Detroit, Malcolm had an invigorated passion and asked his Temple's leader, Lemuel Hassan how he could expand the Nation of Islam. Hassan's response was, "'Go after the young people,' he said, 'Once you get them, the older ones will follow through shame'" (Haley, 1965, 203). Shortly after committing himself to the recruitment for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm received his "X", the official acceptance to the Nation of Islam.

The Muslim's "X" symbolized the true African family name that he never could know. For me, my "X" replaced the white slavemaster name of "Little" which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears. The receipt of my "X" meant that forever after in the nation of Islam, I would be know as Malcolm X. Mr. Muhammad taught that we would keep this "X" until God Himself returned and gave us a Holy Name from His own mouth (Haley, 1965, 203).

Malcolm had slain yet another characteristic of himself, thus performing yet another deliberate act of mortification. Similarly, as written by Tonn, Endress, and Diamond (1993), "Central to the rite of confession is recognition of the choice to act, which presumes the agent is morally responsible" (169). Although Malcolm is unquestionably following Elijah Muhammad, he has made the first

concrete choice to act in saving himself. He quickly became an avid spokesperson for his Detroit Temple Number One where he said such famous lines as ““We didn’t land on Plymouth Rock, my brothers and sisters—Plymouth Rock landed on *us!*”” (Haley, 1965, 205). One of the most rhetorically powerful lines signifying the disorder inherent in the White American society is, ““Do you know *why* the white man really hates you [to his congregation]? It’s because every time he sees your face, he sees a mirror of his crime—and his guilty conscience can’t bear to face it!”” (208). The guilt that America feels is placed back upon those causing the guilty conscience.

While recruiting for the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X also confronted the obvious concerns about following the Nation’s strict moral code. He dictated that this mortification is the ultimate sacrifice for reordering racist White society—a society that has been a slaveholding society longer than it has been part of a free nation:

I knew that our strict moral code and discipline was what repelled them the most. I fired at this point, at the reason for our code. “The white man *wants* black men to stay immoral, unclean and ignorant. As long as we stay in these conditions we will keep on begging him and he will control us. We never can win freedom and justice and equality until we are doing something for ourselves!” (Haley, 1965, 225).

Redemption can only be found by applying “self-imposed denials and restrictions” on oneself, and this is what Malcolm X advocated for his race. In Burke’s hierarchy, those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy, “do not actually

have to reach higher positions [within society] to be satisfied—they may rise vicariously by being used in some way by those in higher positions” (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 2001, 206). Malcolm X believes that the American Black people should become agents of their own struggle to attain equality without relying on “those in higher positions” to allow them to rise.

In 1958, Malcolm X married Sister Betty X. He had learned a new type of love, which furthered his transition towards rebirth. Malcolm’s prior encounters with women revolved around passion and physical attraction [i.e. Sophia]. However, he reordered his vision of love, as can be seen by a passage in the *Autobiography*:

The Western “love” concept, you take it apart, it really is lust. But love transcends just the physical. Love is disposition, behavior, attitude, thoughts, likes, dislikes—these things make a beautiful woman, a beautiful wife. This is beauty that never fades. You find in your Western civilization that when a man’s wife’s physical beauty fails, she loses her attraction. But Islam teaches us to look into the woman, and teaches her to look into us (Haley, 1965, 237).

This passage can be analyzed as a definite transition from Malcolm X’s past life. He has purified himself of his past life of hedonism.

After helping to greatly expand the Nation of Islam greatly [Malcolm X was responsible for taking the Nation of Islam from a localized group to a highly nationalized and publicized group], as well as starting Temples across the country, Malcolm became the national spokesperson for the Nation of Islam. As the 1960s

began, the Nation of Islam became known as a radical, “hate-speaking” group. This, Malcolm pointed out, was just another sign of the guilt that White America felt towards the Black man and was scapegoating the Nation of Islam for fostering hatred [although that is not at all what the NOI stands for]. “One funny thing—in all that hectic period, something quickly struck my notice: the Europeans never pressed the “hate” question. Only the American white man was so plagued and obsessed with being “hated.” He was so guilty, it was clear to me, of hating Negroes” (Haley, 1965, 244). When Malcolm was asked by a reporter, “Mr. Malcolm X, why do you teach black supremacy, and hate?”, he responded with this passage from the *Autobiography*:

“The white man so guilty of white supremacy can’t hide *his* guilt by trying to accuse The Honorable Elijah Muhammad of teaching black supremacy and hate! All Mr. Muhammad is doing is trying to uplift the black man’s mentality and the black man’s social and economic condition in this country. The guilty, two-faced white man can’t decide *what* he wants. Our slave foreparents would have been put to death for advocating so-called ‘integration’ with the white man. Now when Mr. Muhammad speaks of ‘separation,’ the white man calls us ‘hate-teachers’ and ‘fascists’! The white man doesn’t *want* the blacks! He doesn’t *want* the blacks that are a parasite upon him! He doesn’t *want* this black man whose presence in this country expose the white man to the world for what he is!” (245).

Malcolm X, labeled as a “hate-monger” by the White media, is the legalistic scapegoat for all of the guilt that White society possesses for their continued crime against humanity.

Malcolm and the Nation of Islam also established a narcotics cure program that rivaled any government funded program. By reflecting upon this program, Malcolm tells of his life-long journey that will lead to his sacrificial suicide. “That’s a powerful combination for a man who has been existing in the mud of society. In fact, once he is motivated no one can change more completely than the man who has been at the bottom. I call myself the best example of that” (Haley, 1965, 266). As stated earlier, “Christ’s sacrificial death—neither his life nor his preaching—is key, and “[a]t the heart of salvation were the metaphors of retributive justice; at the center was a symbol of torture and death” (II:4)” (Ehrenhaus & Owen, 2004, 278). Malcolm had been physically and mentally tortured by the life he had previously lived, forced by the ordered society to live in ill-repute. He is now demanding justice for all of those who have suffered by being accused as the legalistic scapegoat of American society. Although his vision is somewhat blurred through his undisputed devotion and commitment to Elijah Muhammad, his final vision of what the new ordered society should look like embodies his sacrificial suicide. The sacrificial suicide is the point where the agent slays themselves of all characteristics responsible for the pollution. In analyzing the *Autobiography*, Malcolm X consciously commits this act through his admittance of his past sins, and gains a universal perspective of humanity. However, this will not occur until after he has parted with the Nation of Islam.

In the *Autobiography*, Malcolm points out that the August, 1963 March on Washington was in fact useless and once again corrupted by White institutions. Although this may be hard to believe, as the March on Washington has become a rhetorical symbol in America as the bastion of success for the Civil Rights Movement, the original march had a much different vision than the actual March on Washington:

The idea of a mass of blacks marching on Washington was originally the brainchild of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' A. Philip Randolph. For twenty or more years the March on Washington idea had floated around among Negroes. And, spontaneously, suddenly now, that idea caught on. Overlapped rural Southern Negroes, small town Negroes, Northern ghetto Negroes, even thousands of previously Uncle Tom Negroes began talking "March!" Nothing since Joe Louis had so coalesced the masses of Negroes. Groups of Negroes were talking of getting to Washington any way they could.... They envisioned thousands of black brothers converging together upon Washington—to lie down in the streets, on airport runways, on government lawns—demanding of the Congress and the White House some concrete civil rights action. This was a national bitterness; militant, unorganized, and leaderless. Predominantly, it was young Negroes, defiant of whatever might be the consequences, sick and tired of the black man's neck under the white man's heel (Haley, 1965, 284).

This was the original foundation for the March on Washington. However, after an \$800,000 donation from “the white head of a philanthropic agency”, the quickly organized “big six” [James Farmer, Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young, Jr.] became symbols directed by those who financed the march (285). The actual march that occurred in August of 1963—that has so much importance in our American history of the Civil Rights Movement—was described as:

In the subsequent press poll, not one Congressman or Senator with a previous record of opposition to civil rights said he had changed his views. What did anyone expect? How was a one-day “integrated” picnic going to counter-influence these representatives of prejudice rooted deep in the psyche of the American white man for four hundred years? The very fact that millions, black and white, believed in this monumental farce is another example of how much this country goes in for the surface glossing over, the escape ruse, surfaces, instead of truly dealing with its deep-rooted problems. What the March on Washington did do was lull Negroes for a while. But inevitably, the black masses started realizing they had been smoothly hoaxed again by the white man. And, inevitably, the black man’s anger rekindled, deeper than ever, and there began bursting out in different cities, in the “long, hot summer” of 1964, unprecedented racial crises (287).

What had originally been a source of pollution for the American order was transformed by the White institutions to maintain the very order that the march

aimed to challenge. The original facets of the march were viewed as a source of pollution because it would disrupt the hierarchical authority that White institutions had over the lower rungs of Black society. In order for the march not to be a disruption, it was conducted to be in accord with the hierarchical structures of America; White society controlled the march and warped it into an acceptable, integrated walk.

In late 1963, Malcolm was named the Nation of Islam's first National Minister. This would be one of his last appearances with Elijah Muhammad. On July 3, 1963, a wire service story appeared in newspapers across the United States. The story told of two paternity suits against Elijah Muhammad from two of his former secretaries [adultery, the very crime against the Nation of Islam that excommunicated Malcolm's brother, Reginald]. Although Malcolm fervently defended Elijah Muhammad, he was soon scapegoated as responsible for spreading the story. Malcolm highlighted this sentiment by stating in the *Autobiography*, "Hating me was going to become the cause for people of shattered faith to rally around" (Haley, 1965, 306). In order to maintain his order within the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad had to punish Malcolm for the sins that Elijah himself had committed. Malcolm was being legalistically scapegoated by Americans as a proponent of "hate-speech" while at the same time being scapegoated by the very organization he would die for.

. On November 22, 1963 President Kennedy was assassinated. When Malcolm was asked, "What do you think about President Kennedy's assassination? What is your opinion?", Malcolm stated in his *Autobiography*:

Without a second thought, I said what I honestly felt—that it was, as I saw it, a case of “the chickens coming home to roost.” I said that the hate in white men had not stopped with the killing of defenseless black people, but that hate, allowed to spread unchecked, finally had struck down this country’s Chief of State. I said it was the same thing as had happened with Medgar Evers, with Patrice Lumumba, with Madame Nhu’s husband. The headlines and the news broadcasts promptly had it: “*Black Muslims’ Malcolm X: ‘Chickens Coming Home to Roost.’*” (Haley, 1965, 307).

Malcolm was then ordered to meet with Elijah Muhammad, who silenced him for ninety days. Malcolm willingly submitted, although the impression spread throughout the Nation of Islam’s temples was that Malcolm had rebelled. At this moment, Malcolm X began the questioning that would lead to the final stage of his rebirth:

...the first word came to me that a Mosque Seven official who had been one of my most immediate assistants was telling certain Mosque Seven brothers: “If you knew what the Minister did, you’d go out and kill him yourself.” And then I knew. As any official in the Nation of Islam would instantly have known, any death-talk for me could have been approved of—if not actually initiated—by only one man (Haley, 1965, 309).

Having all started with the charges of adultery, Malcolm realized the similarities in the ways both the White institutions and Elijah Muhammad dealt with disorder:

What began to break my faith was that, try as I might, I couldn't hide, I couldn't evade, that Mr. Muhammad, instead of facing what he had done before his followers, as a human weakness or as fulfillment of prophecy—which I sincerely believe that Muslims would have understood, or at least they would have accepted—Mr. Muhammad had, instead, been willing to hide, to cover up what he had done (Haley, 1965, 312).

Just as America hid its guilt and imperfections on the backs of Black men, Elijah Muhammad placed his guilty conscience on the overloaded back of his most trusted disciple.

For the first time—to Malcolm and the world—it would be apparent that Malcolm X had transcended his role as the legalistic scapegoat. With the following lines from the *Autobiography*, Malcolm X would become the most special fatalistic scapegoat, what Burke (1941) describes as, “in making him worthy by a subtle kind of poetic justice, in making the sacrificial vessel “too good for this world,” hence of the *highest* value, hence the *most perfect* sacrifice” (Burke, 1941, 40):

That was how I first began to realize that I had believed in Mr. Muhammad more than he believed in himself. And that was how, after twelve years of never thinking for as much as five minutes about myself, I became able finally to muster the nerve, and the strength, to start facing the facts, to think for myself (Haley, 1965, 313).

Malcolm had been trapped by an overbearing order his entire life, and in finally shedding himself of the shackles that had contained him for over thirty years, he was ready to make his symbolic suicide. Malcolm became the acting agent over his own life, and thus rose above the racist order he had been born into.

El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

Upon leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm created and headed a new mosque in New York City—Muslim Mosque, Inc. The headquarters would be in the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. Shortly there after, Malcolm—after being funded by his sister, Ella—made his first pilgrimage to Mecca. It was here, in Saudi Arabia, that Malcolm would shed the final characteristics that were holding him back from his symbolic suicide.

While waiting to be approved to make the holy journey to Mecca, Malcolm had gotten in contact with a man Dr. Abd-Al-Rahman Azzam, a man of incredible power and import in Saudi Arabia. Dr. Azzam allowed Malcolm to use his hotel room while he waited to gain approval for the pilgrimage. It was the first morning in that hotel room that Malcolm began shedding the last shackles that kept him from being the most perfect sacrifice. He realigned his beliefs to gain a higher understanding of true society, a society without the hierarchical order of America:

That morning was when I first began to reappraise the “white man.” It was when I first began to perceive that “white man,” as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, “white man” meant specific attitudes and actions toward the

black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been (Haley, 1965, 340).

Following his trip to Mecca, Malcolm reflected, “I said, “The *brotherhood!* The people of all races, colors, from all over the world coming together as *one!* It has proved to me the power of the One God” (345). He continued with the revelation that “I had been blessed by Allah with a new insight into the true religion of Islam, and a better understanding of America’s entire racial dilemma” (345). This understanding, representing Malcolm X’s symbolic suicide, is encapsulated in a letter he wrote to his “loyal assistants” at the Muslim Mosque, Inc. in Harlem:

“Each hour here in the Holy Land enables me to have greater spiritual insights into what is happening in America between black and white. The American Negro never can be blamed for his racial animosities—he is only reacting to four hundred years of the conscious racism of the American whites. But as racism leads America up the suicide path, I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the *spiritual* path of *truth*—the *only* way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to. ... (Haley, 1965, 348).

This letter was signed, “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz,” and personifies the slaying of all the imperfections and pollution Malcolm had been exposed to his

entire life. He was washed clean of all disorder within himself, and this illumination was seen as a source of disorder in the America he returned to. Although he continued his trips by traveling through Africa—further exposing himself to an enlightened worldly view—the introspective American order could not survive with this enlightened man. As discussed in the implications, Malcolm described the acceptance of his assassination frequently with Alex Haley. El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz had become too perfect for the American world, of “the *highest* value,” “the *most perfect* sacrifice,” and the order had to admonish him. Although Malcolm made no reference to Burkean concepts in his life, through the textual analysis of the Autobiography, the connections to the rhetoric of rebirth and hierarchical structures is undeniable. His life must be viewed as of the utmost rhetorical import or the United States will live in a constant state of falsified order.

Chapter 7

So What? He's Dead Now

Randall Robinson (2001), in his book, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, wrote that, “This then is the nub of it. America’s contemporary racial problems cannot be solved, racism cannot be arrested, achievement gaps cannot be fully closed until Americans—all Americans—are repaired of their views of Africa’s role in history” (16). When Malcolm X wrote in his letter from Mecca, “But as racism leads America up the suicide path, I do believe, from the experiences that I have had with them, that the whites of the younger generation, in the colleges and universities, will see the handwriting on the wall and many of them will turn to the *spiritual* path of *truth*—the *only* way left to America to ward off the disaster that racism inevitably must lead to. ... (Haley, 1965, 348),” he put the power and responsibility unto the generation of young, educated White society. The “spiritual path of truth” is an admittance of our crimes against humanity, the crimes that Robinson believes need to be corrected.

The history that is taught to the youth today is slanted and maintains the hierarchical structuring of White privilege. Christopher Columbus is still seen as “discovering” America and is given a holiday in America instead of brought to justice as a supporter of genocide and the culprit of slave introduction to the Americas. James W. Loewen (1995), in his book, *Lies my Teacher Told me: Everything your American History Textbook got Wrong*, discussed Columbus’ true accomplishment by writing, “Christopher Columbus introduced two phenomena that revolutionized race relations and transformed the modern world: the taking of land, wealth, and labor from indigenous peoples, leading to their

near extermination, and the transatlantic slave trade, which created a racial underclass” (60). Being a White privileged male, it is my responsibility, as prophesized by Malcolm X, to further my understanding of the truth buried within the foundations of American society. Just as Malcolm was reborn after he accepted his sins and became a conscious agent over his own life, American society can be reborn through its own acceptance of guilt.

Malcolm X must be studied not as the Civil Rights radical opposite of Martin Luther King, Jr.; Malcolm X must be studied and understood as a survivor of White America’s most venomous fangs of racism—a man who found himself in perpetuated disorder. As a member of White society, it is easy to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and be flabbergasted at the countless references to the “White devil.” Although we would gawk at anyone uttering the term White devil, “nigger” still slides carelessly over countless hegemonic White tongues. This paper is not judging White America—how can I judge the very society from which I am consistently benefiting—the paper is inspecting the timeless lessons White America could learn from Malcolm X. His speeches and leadership is historically important, but it is his ability to discover unabated humanity in the face of blatant racism that is inspiring. This paper takes the words of Malcolm X—as dictated to Alex Haley—to analyze America’s perpetuated disorder in the face of racism.

In the epilogue of the *Autobiography*, Alex Haley writes of a conversation Malcolm had with him about his days in the Nation of Islam:

“That was a bad scene, brother. The sickness and madness of those days—I’m glad to be free of them. It’s a time for martyrs now. And if I’m to be one, it will be in the cause of brotherhood. That’s the only thing that can save this country. I’ve learned it the hard way—but I’ve learned it...”

(Haley, 1965, 436).

Malcolm, just as Christ had done, commits a symbolic suicide in the name of brotherhood. We can no longer let victims die for our sins, it is in our hands to change the evil created by racism and admit to our sins. Unless we admit America’s true history—a history of European imperialism and slavery—we will never be able to accomplish our rebirth.

Chapter 8 In Closing

This paper provides a textual analysis of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and connects the text to Burke's hierarchical structures and rhetoric of rebirth. The importance of this study to take a critical eye towards a man's life that is too often an archetype for the radical nature of the Civil Rights Movement. This study and countless others do not label Malcolm X as simply one character—it is not in our authority to label another human—it examines the life of another man and alludes to the importance in studying his past. The life that Malcolm X led is incredibly rhetorically potent. He can be viewed as a scapegoat of both a legalistic and fatalistic manner and his rebirth into El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz is inspiring. This study does not end here; it ends once the racist foundations of America are discovered. It ends when White society truly understands the responsibility Malcolm X imparted upon us when he told us to see the writing on the walls. It ends when we admit to our past and current involvement with propagated racist institutions. It does not end.

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