

**Fighting the American Narrative: Malcolm X, the Press, and the Origin of the
‘Divided Metaphor’”**

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my fellow graduates.

May we always have the courage to question the state of our society and even more so, the courage to change ourselves to improve it.

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Acknowledgements

Most likely a result of my looming college graduation, I have recently begun to critically examine my college education. Though several fears and insecurities have entered my mind, the one that seems to dominate is “what have I really learned?” The truth is, I have learned that in the grand scheme of things, I am rather insignificant. I have learned that while I may cringe at the thought of reading a 300 page book about Malcolm X and the FBI, someone else, someone with a higher degree, had to read *much* more to write that book. Essentially, I learned that I have a lot left to learn. You might wonder what my life reflections have to do with my senior thesis (a completely valid consideration), but in reality, it is these reflections that have inspired me to write one. I will not leave Boston College with any particular expertise, but rather with a critical eye and an independent mind.

Since my entry into the American school system, I have been required to take courses in history. Beginning with an elementary school play about the first Thanksgiving, I have been taught to believe in the justice of American democracy, but what fascinates me is that every year, the history evolved, slowly revealing scars of injustice. Now I stand, appalled at my country’s violent history, but more appalled at the naivety of my fellow Americans. How can these atrocities and misconceptions remain so hidden and why is knowledge of their existence restricted to the most educated members of society?

It is through these rather grave contemplations, that I first became aware of the field of public memory. My sophomore year I was assigned the book The Autobiography of Malcolm X. I had heard of Malcolm X before, but honestly had no idea who he was or

what cause he advocated. I did not even know that he was assassinated. Needless to say, I was instantly captivated by the book. I felt that I had discovered an artifact lost and forgotten throughout the years. How had I not known about him sooner? I was particularly enthralled by the relevance his words still carry toward modern White society. His statements are hard to hear, but they force me to be honest with myself and critically examine my White privilege. I feel we, as a society, still have a great deal to learn from Malcolm X. X's discourse is still applicable today as American society is ill-suited to accommodate much social mobility, particularly among people of color.

I would also like to note, that while I admire X's abilities as a rhetor, I readily admit that he also has many flaws. This acknowledgment is essential to all Malcolm X discourse as he was, above all, a human, not a myth. He was at times a drug addict and at times a racist, but regardless of what he was, he mastered the ability to improve. He provided a concrete example that men are capable of change. To idolize him without accepting his faults would rob him of his ethos and credibility.

I would first like to thank my wonderful friends and family. Without your love and support, I would never have been able to write this thesis. I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Morris, for his patience and assistance throughout this process. Lastly, I would like to thank my former professor, Thaddeus Ostrowski, for both introducing me to Malcolm X and opening my eyes to a wealth of knowledge that continues to inspire me.

Introduction

“When I am dead—I say it in that way because from the things I know, I do not expect to live long enough to read this book in its finished form—I want you just to watch and see if I’m not right in what I say: that the white man, in his press, is going to identify me with ‘hate.’

“He will make use of me dead, as he had made use for me alive, as a convenient symbol of ‘hatred’—and that will help him to escape facing the truth that all I have been doing is holding up a mirror to reflect, to show, the history of unspeakable crimes that his race has committed against my race.”

-Malcolm X in The Autobiography (1965, p. 389)

On February 21, 1965, America lost one of the most controversial humanitarians it had ever known. Malcolm X had barely spoken a full sentence when he was shot dead by followers of Elijah Muhammad in Harlem’s Audubon Ballroom. During his lifetime, American Whites, and even a significant number of American Blacks, feared X’s “By any means necessary” philosophy which advocated self-defense against racial violence; however, despite his divisive public image, Malcolm X’s unconditional commitment to the elevation of his race attracted a significant portion of the Black urban poor. These Blacks idolized X as a fearless leader, willing to give his life for the good of his people. What makes Malcolm X even more intriguing is that less than a year before his assassination, X allegedly shifted his views toward a humanitarian focus and began embracing traditional Islamic ideals like universal brotherhood. Many scholars have debated the degree of this conversion, but unfortunately he did not live long enough to provide a definitive case either way. America’s ambivalent perception of Malcolm X has manifested itself into his modern, post-assassination, public memory. Malcolm X scholar, Michael Eric Dyson comments “He has become a divided metaphor: for those who love him, he is a powerful lens for self-perception, a means of sharply focusing

political and racial priorities; for those who loathe him, he is a distorting mirror that reflects violence and hatred” (Dyson, 1992, p. 2).

In many ways Malcolm X’s prediction of his post-death public memory appears prophetic. Following his assassination, the White press appeared highly ambivalent toward X’s blunt criticism of American society. It generally portrayed him as a tragic victim of the ghetto, often attempting to both discredit and separate him from the larger Civil Rights Movement. A significant portion of White America still associates Malcolm X with hatred. X has received a minimal role among American history books as the universally accepted King has assumed the dominant role of Civil Rights symbol (Howard-Pitney, 2004, p. 21). Despite his valid critique of White America, Malcolm X made no predictions about his image among the Black press. Though the Black press still perceived X as controversial, it expressed remorse at the loss of a leader determined to fight oppression at any cost. Even those who disagreed with Malcolm X admired his bravery to speak his mind amidst the ever present threat of violence.

Almost forty years after his death, his image has resurged among popular culture and entertainment (Howard-Pitney, 2004, p. 22). X’s image lives among America’s Black youth, emerging on tee-shirts, baseball caps and even in rap lyrics (I. Perry, 1996). X’s divided legacy has sparked a feud over control of his memory. Last spring, Columbia University, who currently holds the rights to the Audubon Ballroom, announced plans to convert the site to a Malcolm X memorial, but the museum is generating just as much debate as X himself. Herman Ferguson, co-founder of the Organization of Afro-American Unity and chairman of the Malcolm X Commemoration Committee, is among those skeptical of Columbia’s proposal. “I wouldn’t want to see

him compromised by the establishment being involved in any choice of a memorial honoring Malcolm X. [...] Unless the people who were around Malcolm a long time are involved, it will not be a cut-and-dried issue.” Ferguson has reason to worry. In 1985, Columbia announced plans to turn the Audubon into a biomedical research center; however, they cancelled due to public protest (as cited in Russell, 2005, para. 5).

This thesis examines the origin of the “Divided Metaphor” that has evolved following Malcolm X’s assassination. Articles appearing in prominent White and Black newspapers up to one month following his death, reveal that while the White press took great strides to trivialize X’s credibility as an agent of social change, the Black press, though still wary of his politics, mourned the loss of a seemingly fearless truth teller, undeterred by White hegemony. Based on the larger framework of public memory, this thesis argues that the media’s ambivalence following Malcolm X’s assassination played a large and important role in constructing his competing legacies among White and Black culture.

Chapter 1: Malcolm X—The Making

From its initial “discovery,” to its successful revolution, to its current status as a world power, the United States has always been a diverse nation due to its constant flux of immigrants. Attracted by what is commonly referred to as the “American Dream,” immigrants flock to the U.S. with the hopes of creating a better life among a democratic society. Children across the country are taught about our founding fathers and their relentless fight for freedom. They are taught about Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and America’s vindication of democracy during the World Wars; however, especially in recent years, more and more minority groups are protesting this unilateral approach to American history, raising a very important question: In a country known for its diversity, is it possible to have one all-inclusive, but still accurate history? Moreover, who gets to decide what society chooses to remember and what it chooses to forget? Questions like these lay the groundwork for the rapidly expanding field of public memory. This chapter seeks to provide a basic understanding of public memory as well as an analysis of the specific role the media has in generating a public identity. In addition, it includes a general discussion of other commemorative factors such as race and assassination.

Public memory is ultimately the result of society’s desire to be moral. In order to be deemed moral, society must have a chaste and exemplary past; hence, public memory derives from society’s want to positively remember its own history. Public memory scholars tend to differentiate history from memory on the grounds that history is a factual or objective account of the past, free from contextual bias (Schwartz, 2000, p. 10). Memory, on the other hand, is much more subjective as it refers to “the way ordinary people conceive the past” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 10) and reflects the societal concerns and

values of its specific context. In the words of Harold Pinter: “The past is what you remember, imagine you remember, convince yourself you remember, or pretend you remember” (as cited in Zelizer, 1995, p. 235). Put this way, while there can be many competing memories, there is generally only one history (Phillips, 2004, p. 2). Public or collective memory refers to recollections of the past that are shaped by a group and that particular group’s identity rather than the memories of an individual (Zelizer, 1995, p. 214). Its implementation, often in the form of commemoration, reminds future generations about their group identity and values (Schwartz, 2000, p. 10).

In reality, the control of public memory is more dependent on power and politics than historical accuracy. As John Bodnar (1992) notes in his book Remaking America, public memory is what results when cultures compete to exert their cultural expressions. He divides society into two primary groups: official culture and vernacular culture. The official culture tends to refer to the dominant societal group and is heavily characterized by patriotism or a general loyalty to the status quo. It seeks to unify conflicting memories and conceal any flaws within the nation state’s collective memory. On the other hand, vernacular culture deals primarily with the consciousness of ordinary individuals with specialized interests. Members of the vernacular culture seek to define their identity based on first-hand experience rather than on national ideals. Because it is not dependent on patriotism, vernacular culture often threatens official culture as it could potentially expose flaws within the dominant narrative. It is also important to note that because of their specialized interests, there are often several vernacular cultures with different social realities (Bodnar, 1992); hence, public memory is not only a contest over what gets remembered, but also who gets to do the remembering (Browne, 1999).

Public memory scholars focus on *why* a society constructed a public memory as it tends to reveal more about present society than past (Zelizer, 1995, p. 217). Bodnar (1992) comments:

Public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meanings of its past and present. . . Its function is to mediate the competing restatements of reality these antinomies express (p.14).

Although it attempts to reconcile conflicting realities, public memory eventually favors one interpretation over another, generally emphasizing official culture over vernacular culture. Official culture often invokes patriotism or national pride as a form of social control by stressing admirable societal values and behavior. Official culture ultimately attempts to restate the contradictions of society in a modified, more acceptable form.

Public memory can manifest itself in tangible commemorative sites like the Washington Memorial or can exist in an intangible intellectual form. Michael Schudson (1997) conducts a thorough analysis of non-commemorative acts of public memory. He declares that the past seeps into the present personally, culturally and socially whether or not it is institutionalized. To begin with, people personally carry their own memories from their life experiences. For example, a person might receive a tattoo to remember a loved one lost in September 11th or a person might opt to join the armed forces to avenge the terrorists who conducted the attack. Public memory also appears socially, generally as an attempt to learn from the past. Social public memory often takes the form of legislation. Schudson notes the Watergate scandal as an example. After President

Richard Nixon violated the public trust, legislation such as the Ethics in Government Act began appearing. Finally, public memory enters public consciousness culturally, primarily through language. Shudson points out that words such as “gerrymander” and “boycott” became part of the English vocabulary after specific historical events. “Gerrymander” originated from the election strategies of politician Elbridge Gerry, while “boycott” derived from the name of an Irish captain.

In the present day and age, public memory is beginning to emerge in popular culture as well. More and more Americans are getting their history lessons from movies (Ehrenhaus & Owen, 2001). While it can be argued that movies have taken history to a new level because of the vast audience they are able to reach, historians are angry about this educational shift rather than pleased. Marouf Hasian, Jr. and A. Cheree Carlson (2000) comment:

Film makers, especially, have increasingly blurred the lines between “setting the record straight” and spinning a good yarn. Once eyewitnesses to historic events die, media representations often become the only source for the recreation of memory. . . In an age where Hollywood producers claim that they are not only entertaining, but educating, we need to be wary of cinematic representations that claim to be accurate representations of the past (p. 43).

Peter Ehrenhaus and A. Susan Owen (2001) have also identified that this brewing feud between historians and filmmakers is another example of a public memory confrontation. Historians are ultimately upset because pop culture is essentially usurping their role as primary story teller. This anger is also associated with the modernist assumption that “history is record—factual, non-positional and ideally comprehensive” (p. 653).

Ehrenhaus and Owen's study primarily focuses on directors Steven Spielberg and Oliver Stone; however, they make excellent points about the relationship between film and public memory. They note: "Stone's accusers neither recognize nor acknowledge that the shading of historical fact into speculation is emblematic of a more general political condition in which information is power, access to information is control, public memory is a site of struggle, and acceptance of narrative frame is the ultimate prize" (p. 654).

Ehrenhaus and Owen mention, but do little to examine, the relationship between journalism and public memory. Americans tend to view journalists as the uncontested spokespeople of reality. Kimberly Powell and Sonya Amundson (2002) note, "The media is a dominant element of popular culture and has the ability to set the agenda, what people think and think about" (p.31). The media has emerged as a dominant authority of public memory, yet, across history, several incidents have occurred which should have shaken the American public's unconditional trust of news media (Yousman, 2001, p. 2). Despite its flaws, the public still perceives the news media as an impartial "watch-dog" that exposes the fallacies of society. In reality, the media is just as affected by culture as the public itself. For example, notable changes occurred in journalism during the "hands-on" environment of the sixties (Zelizer, 1990). An article in *Esquire* magazine comments, "no longer were there observers, only participants. This was especially true of journalists. They were part of the problem, part of the solution, and always part of the story" (as cited in Zelizer, 1990, p. 19). The media plays a particularly important role in regards to race and public memory.

The recent commemoration of the Civil Rights Movement, and other similar attempts to diversify American history, exemplifies a new phase in public memory.

Negative commemoration has arisen as a result of a collective guilt or shame for historical acts of prejudice, often committed against minority groups. These negative commemorations appear as a symbolic apology as they function as a public expression of regret (Schwartz, 2000, p. 10). The Vietnam Memorial and the Washington D.C.

Holocaust Museum provide excellent examples of negative commemoration.

Unfortunately, guilt can also result in cases of societal amnesia where a person or event is *not* remembered, or is manipulated to a more convenient, less threatening interpretation.

As I previously discussed, public memory is generally the result of official culture's triumph over vernacular or, for the purposes of this study, minority culture. Several scholars have examined this display of authority and its resulting effects on vernacular interpretation. Stephen H. Browne (1999) considered the commemoration of Crispus Attucks, the first American killed in the Boston Massacre. Attucks, who many believed to be an escaped slave, held no reputation prior to the Massacre. Some historians have argued that he was nothing more than a drunken mob leader, yet a statue stands in Boston Common commemorating him as an early revolutionary. Through close analysis, Browne reveals that, prior to his formal commemoration, Attucks was widely celebrated among minority populations as a symbol of African-American pride. He served as means through which African-Americans could contest white hegemony and assert their own culture into the American narrative. In order to calm racial tensions in Boston, the official culture integrated Attucks into the dominant narrative, thereby removing his racial charge and adopting him as an *American* hero. Browne comments:

What is lost by writing Attucks' story into the narrative of American independence is of course that other story of difference, resistance, and change; as

he becomes a bona fide martyr, he becomes thus American; and the more American he becomes, seemingly, the less African American he remains (p. 181). Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (2006) also examine this strategy of manipulation. Romano and Raiford analyze the public memory of the Civil Rights Movement as whole, declaring “The movement [has] a ‘familiar storyline’ that excised African Americans from their own struggle, isolated the crime as that of a small group of brash, ignorant white men, and effectively froze the events and actors in a forty-year-old past” (p. 3). David Howard-Pitney (2004) expressed similar sentiments when discussing the public memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. Pitney specifically addresses official culture’s collective amnesia regarding King’s post-1965 criticisms of American society. Pitney writes:

King’s magnificent ‘I Have a Dream’ oration at the March on Washington has imprisoned King, in the nation’s dominant image and memory, as he existed in 1963. . . Powerful parties prefer to promote this mild, unchallenging hero over the mature *inconvenient* King who challenged more than celebrated society and disturbed more than soothed its conscience. It is as though King, in memory, has suffered a second assassination—that of his last five years” (pp. 24-25).

For the purposes of this thesis, it is also necessary to include a brief discussion about post-assassination discourse. To begin with, assassinations tend to generate a shock among communities that many individuals do not know how to cope with. Barry Schwartz (2000) further examines this concept, originally credited to Emile Durkheim, in his analysis of the post-assassination rituals for President Lincoln. He notes that humans often look to associate their emotions with ritual; hence, “if an impressive ritual is

dedicated to a particular man, then people will believe that man to be the ritual's object. But they will be wrong. The majesty of society itself . . . is what the ritual really affirms" (Schwartz, 2000, p. 64). Hence, in moments of tragedy, like the assassination of Lincoln, the public often reacts according to dominant culture mandates. Lincoln held many competing personas among the public; however, official culture compelled the nation to mourn their late president by constructing one of the most elaborate funeral processions the country had yet seen. Consequently, the public has preserved Lincoln's memory and he has achieved mythic status.

Newspaper eulogies are an especially vital component in post-assassination discourse and the ensuing public memory it creates. Newspaper eulogies help the public cope with the loss of national public figures and restore a sense of structure amidst chaos. Most importantly, they dictate both how and which individuals will be remembered. Steven R. Goldzwig and Patricia A. Sullivan (1995) identify several key characteristics of post-assassination newspaper editorial eulogies. A fusion of epideictic and deliberative discourse, post- assassination eulogies seek to provide a public sphere for catharsis, celebrate individual virtues, reknit communal bonds and call the public to action. Editorial eulogies often elevate public figures to mythic proportions and integrate the deceased individual into the American narrative. Eulogies help to ease public shock by transforming the individual into a *historical* figure. Eulogies are ultimately a form of mass mediated crisis intervention as they ensure that order will prevail. They serve to restore societal structure and identity and enhance journalistic and governmental authority.

For the purposes of this thesis, public memory provides an excellent framework through which to study Malcolm X's legacy in the wake of his assassination. As an authority of societal expression, the journalism industry has its own official and vernacular culture representative of American society as a whole; hence, articles and eulogies may differ drastically depending on the public figure and the newspaper's target audience. By applying the public memory framework to dominant newspapers of the White and Black Press, one can see the formation of X's divided public image among modern day America.

Chapter 2: Malcolm X—The Man

In order to understand Malcolm X's public memory, it is first necessary to gain a basic knowledge of his life and philosophy as well as his public image while he was alive. Malcolm X, originally Malcolm Little, was born on May 19, 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska. His parents, Earl and Louise Little, were avid followers of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). This union was most known for its "Back to Africa" philosophy that preached racial self-help and black unity and advocated emigration to Africa. Earl Little was a well-known preacher of the Garveyite philosophy. According to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (or *The Autobiography*), when his mother was pregnant with X, area Ku Klux Klan members allegedly advised Earl Little to leave Nebraska as they perceived his black pride discourse as threatening. Although the validity of this statement has been the subject of much debate, for one reason or another, the Little family moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1926, before finally settling in Lansing, Michigan in 1928 (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965).

Malcolm X was exposed to racism at an early age as his home was set aflame in 1929. His father, who had continued preaching the UNIA philosophy, moved his miraculously unharmed family to the outskirts of East Lansing, Michigan. Evidence indicates that as a young child X was very familiar with the Garveyite doctrine as Earl Little often took Malcolm X with him when he was preaching; however, his time with his father was cut short as he was killed in 1931 when X was only six years old. Earl Little was run over by a street car, most likely an act of racial violence; although some scholars have recently suggested his death was accidental (Perry in Dyson, 1992). Louise Little, now the primary caregiver for eight children, struggled to keep her family together during

the Great Depression. X recalled his mother boiling dandelions for dinner. It was during this period that he first began stealing. Unable to control her children, his mother suffered a nervous breakdown in 1939. She was declared legally insane and committed to the State Mental Hospital, where she remained for twenty-six years. Her children were dispersed to various foster facilities across the area (Dyson, 1992; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965).

At first Malcolm X thrived both at his new foster home and in school. He was even voted president of his eighth grade class; however, he first began to fall victim to racism after a meeting with his teacher, Mr. Ostrowski. X allegedly expressed his desire to become a lawyer, at which Mr. Ostrowski responded, “A lawyer—that’s no realistic job for a nigger” (as cited in X, 1965, p. 38). X lost his academic aspirations and began acting up in class. When the school year ended, he was placed in a juvenile home upon the recommendation of a social worker. X lived in a series of foster homes then moved to Boston to live with his sister Ella in February of 1941 (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965). This move marked a pivotal milestone in X’s life because it gave X his first glimpse of black poverty and ensured his separation from the black bourgeoisie. X commented:

I’ve often thought that if Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged me to become a lawyer, I would today probably be among the city’s professional black bourgeoisie, sipping cocktails and palming myself off as a community spokesman for and leader of the suffering black masses, while my primary concern would be to grab a few more crumbs from the groaning board of the two-faced whites with whom they’re begging to “integrate.” All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I

did. If I hadn't I would probably still be a brainwashed black Christian (1965, p. 40).

Over the next five years, X grew consumed with the drug and hustling culture of the urban poor, even finding himself in Harlem, the center of Black poverty in America. He was eventually incarcerated for his involvement in a crime ring responsible for countless burglaries across the Boston area. The crime ring consisted of his close friends from the street and two White girls, one of whom was X's lover. In 1946, the court assigned Malcolm X to an eight to ten year sentence which he served at three different penitentiaries (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965).

Malcolm X was first exposed to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI) during his time in prison. X befriended an articulate inmate named Bimbi who encouraged him to take advantage of the prison library. Shortly after, he began taking correspondence courses in English and Latin. Prior to these courses, X's letters had been both incoherent and illegible. As his letters home began improving, his family, several of whom had become members of the NOI, began approaching him to join. The NOI had two primary principles. First, it preached that all White men are devils. Second, it urged the complete separation of the Black and White communities with the hope that an independent Black nation could be built within the U.S. X was particularly intrigued by the concept of the White devil, who he learned had systematically oppressed and brain-washed the Black race. Malcolm X read so much in prison that he strained his eyesight, leading to the purchase of his signature eye-glasses. He began corresponding with Elijah Muhammad and became a minister for the NOI upon his parole in 1952. The NOI encouraged him to drop his former last name, Little and

adopt a new last name to represent the name that slavery took from him. Hence, Malcolm Little officially became Malcolm X and the NOI had created their most influential member (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965).

As Malcolm X was rising to power within the NOI, America was undergoing a great transformation of its own. The Civil Rights Movement was in full swing and X yearned to be a part of it. Under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Black citizens began engaging in protests of civil disobedience in order to gain equal rights. This movement led to such events as the 1954 overturning of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, ending segregation in public schools, and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. King's integration movement was most beneficial to the Black southern middle class. It did little for the southern poor and even less for the northern urban Blacks who were left impoverished and unemployed by deindustrialization and capitalism (Dyson, 1995; Cone, 1991). Throughout the movement, Malcolm X had become a very popular speaker for the NOI. His charisma was evident right away as he began recruiting followers, providing the NOI with a new visibility in the public sphere. By June of 1954, X became a minister of Harlem's Temple Seven and by 1957 he had become Elijah Muhammad's National Representative (Houck, 1993). By 1960, he had brought a hundred thousand followers to the NOI and established forty churches around the country (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965). His angry, sharp discourse attracted the urban poor who, in the words of Dyson, "were ethically impoverished by the white racist neglect of their most fundamental needs: the need for self-respect, the need for social dignity, the need to understand their royal black history, and the need to worship and serve a black God" (Dyson, 1995, p. 9). X declared:

The real criminal is the white man who poses as a liberal—the political hypocrite. And it is these legal crooks, posing as our friends, [who are] forcing us into a life of crime and then using us to spread the white man’s evil vices among our own people. Our people are scientifically maneuvered by the white man into a life of poverty. You are not poor accidentally. He maneuvers you into poverty . . .

There is nothing about your condition here in America that is an accident (as cited in Cone, 1991, p. 89).

His “by any means necessary” philosophy became highly controversial as it encouraged self-defense against racial violence.

Malcolm X became the voice for a population that could not speak for itself by vehemently stating issues of Black rage that formerly had been silenced. X became the antithesis of King, as they opposed on every issue, from integration to violence. To him, King was a traitor disguised as a hero, secretly deceiving his people (Dyson, 1995; X, 1965). He pronounced:

White people follow King. *White* people pay King. *White* people subsidize King. *White* people support King. But the masses don’t support King. King is the best weapon that the white man, who wants to brutalize Negroes, has ever gotten in this country, because he is setting up a situation where, when the white man wants to attack Negroes, they can’t defend themselves, because King has put this foolish philosophy out—you’re not supposed. . .to defend yourself (as cited in Cone, 1991, p. 108).

Unfortunately for X, his prosperity in the NOI proved to be short lived.

Cone (1991) asserted: “Malcolm’s fanatic commitment to the liberation of the black poor alienated him not only from most whites and many persons in the black middle class, but also, as it turned out, from his own religious community and from Elijah Muhammad as well” (p. 183). In 1959, the American public first became aware of Malcolm X and the NOI. In a five-part CBS documentary entitled *The Hate that Hate Produced*, Mike Wallace interviewed X as a representative of the Black Muslims. The broadcast horrified Whites because X revealed the NOI teaching that the serpent in the Garden of Evil was actually a White man. Whites were further disturbed when they learned that the University of Islam in Chicago taught the White devil theory to students of all grade levels (Jenkins, 2002). This interview also sparked tensions between X and Elijah Muhammad as X was becoming more powerful within the Nation. That same year, X accompanied Muhammad on a pilgrimage to the Mecca; however, Muhammad forbade X from entering the Holy City. In addition, the public was beginning to criticize the NOI for their aggressive talk and lack of action against American racism. Many scholars (Cone [1991]; Houck [1993]; Brietman [1965]) have argued that X wanted to be a part of the Civil Rights Movement, but that Elijah Muhammad instructed his followers not to engage in any form of political activism (Houck, 1993). X expressed this frustration in one of his most frequently referenced quotes:

The Messenger has seen God. He was with Allah and was given divine patience . . . He is willing to wait for Allah to deal with this devil. Well, sir, the rest of us Black Muslims have not seen God. We don’t have this gift of divine patience with the devil. The younger Black Muslims want to see some action! (as cited in Houck, 1993, p. 288)

James Cone (1991) asserts that the conflict came from the fact that many Black Muslim leaders considered the NOI to be a religious group competing with Christian churches. He comments, “The Nation of Islam was not a political organization in that it did not participate in the political options provided by the white American government. It was political in the sense that it views religion as speaking to the whole person—to the economic, social, political, and spiritual well-being of blacks” (Cone, 1991, p. 179). The NOI also preached separatism and therefore saw no need for involvement in the Civil Rights Movement (Jenkins, 2002, p. 157). X, on the other hand, saw the Nation as a religio-political organization that had the capability and responsibility to fight Black oppression in America. X commented in his *Autobiography*:

I was convinced that our Nation of Islam could be an even greater force in the American black man’s overall struggle—if we engaged in more *action*. By that, I mean I thought privately that we should have amended, or relaxed, our general non-engagement policy. I felt that wherever black people committed themselves, in the Little Rocks and the Birmingham and other places, militantly disciplined Muslims should also be there—for all the world to see, and respect, and discuss (1965, p. 297).

The discovery of Elijah Muhammad’s infidelity also devastated Malcolm X. Muhammad had fathered the children of multiple NOI secretaries. All these factors combined to create a state of heightened tension between X and the NOI, particularly between X and Elijah Muhammad. X had few options as leaving the Nation could cost him his primary fan base. X’s infamous “Chicken’s coming home to roost” comment in reference to

President Kennedy's assassination, provided the perfect opportunity for Muhammad to silence X. He first sentenced X to a ninety day suspension from the Nation, barring him from any public appearances; however, this temporary sentence became indefinite and on March 8, 1964, X publicly announced his split from the NOI in a press conference (Houck, 1993).

Malcolm X's declaration of independence jeopardized X's political career and credibility. Houck (1993) writes "Aside from the threats on his life, Malcolm's immediate problems were principally rhetorical" (p. 289). He could not renounce the doctrine of Elijah Muhammad without losing his only base of political support. Yet Malcolm had to create enough distance between himself and the NOI to attract political, as opposed to strictly religious, "converts." X needed to change his public image, but that required establishing a relationship with the Civil Rights leaders he had previously condemned as "Uncle Toms" (Houck, 1993). X first reached out to build an audience and support base abroad, beginning his new mission to internationalize American civil rights struggles by reclassifying them as human rights violations. X hoped to expose American hypocrisy and "embarrass the self-declared leading advocate of human rights in its own backyard" (Houck, 1993, p. 289). X was specifically trying to gain support from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), but his association with the flawed doctrine of the NOI, provided yet another barrier. Orthodox Islam did not accept the NOI philosophy of the White devil; it preached universal brotherhood. This discrepancy was a key factor in X's decision to convert to orthodox Islam (Houck, 1993).

There is evidence that suggests that Malcolm X doubted Elijah Muhammad's doctrine long before his official split. Houck (1993) asserted that this knowledge may have come as early as 1959 on his first voyage to Mecca with Elijah Muhammad. Houck states "Following this trip, Malcolm still publicly identified all whites as devils, but he privately acknowledged the contradiction in Elijah Muhammad's teachings" (p. 290). Even X's *Autobiography* mentions his intrigue with orthodox Islam. X himself states, "In the privacy of my own thoughts . . . I did question myself: if one was sincere at professing a religion, why should he balk at broadening his knowledge of that religion" (1965, p.325). Publicly challenging the Nation's teachings would have damaged the credibility of the NOI and revoked X's only support base. Despite this debate, the important point is that Malcolm X *did* convert to orthodox Islam in March of 1964, prior to his second pilgrimage to Mecca (Houck, 1993).

In order to make the pilgrimage, X first needed approval from Dr. Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, the Director of the Federation of Islamic Associations in the United States and Canada. Allegedly after engaging in an enlightening discussion with Shawarbi, X privately converted to orthodox Islam and Shawarbi approved X's request to make a pilgrimage (Houck, 1993). X failed to acknowledge this conversion in his *Autobiography*. He mentioned meeting with Shawarbi, and ultimately stated that he did convert; however, he never clarified when the conversion occurred (X, 1965). When he left for his pilgrimage, X made a series of public relations moves. He wrote letters detailing his journey to everyone he knew, even titling some "for publication to the

world” (as cited in Houck, 1993, p. 291). These letters described his conversion to orthodox Islam and mentioned his new human rights initiative. Houck (1993) writes:

Malcolm’s mission abroad proved highly rhetorical: it showed the world that he had outgrown the white devil theory by announcing his conversion to orthodox Islam; and, he lobbied support for his United Nations project. While seemingly distinct missions, upon closer inspection they appear highly interrelated; one could not effectively happen without the other (p. 291).

In his letters home X stressed the Islam’s concept of universal brotherhood. This seemingly simple fact was actually a brilliant rhetorical move. By publicly asserting this brotherhood, traditional Muslims and the OAU in particular, were forced to accept the new and changed Malcolm. In addition, converting to orthodox Islam, allowed X to add the credibility of the Koran to his rhetoric. Houck (1993) writes;

The *hajj* had done for Malcolm what mere words could not do: namely, to transform his identity without the *appearance* that he was simply changing his mind out of political expediency and political self-interest. Malcolm’s *hajj* and his corresponding public relations campaign, functioned to “de-radicalize”

Malcolm, underscoring his total rejection of black separatism and black racism as preached by Elijah Muhammad and the NOI (p. 293).

Malcolm X changed his definition of White from a biological to a social trait. “We were all *truly* the same (brothers) -- because their belief in God had removed the ‘white’ from their *minds*, the ‘white’ from their *behavior* and the ‘white’ from their *attitude*” (as cited in Lowe, 1996, p. 167). He also expressed the possibility for American Whites to improve their behavior. X commented, “I could see from this, that perhaps if Americans

could accept the Oneness of God, then perhaps, too, they could accept in *reality* the Oneness of Man—and cease to measure, and hinder, and harm others in terms of their ‘differences’ in color” (as cited in Lowe, 1996, p. 167). He also began promoting a universal brotherhood among Blacks throughout the world, connecting the Blacks in America to the African poor. When he returned, X founded two organizations, one religious, the Muslim Mosque, and the other social, the Organization for Afro-American Unity (OAAU) (Dyson, 1995; X, 1965).

Malcolm X lived only fifty weeks after his return from Mecca. He was assassinated in Harlem’s Audubon Ballroom on February 21, 1965, during an OAAU speech rally. X barely made his opening remarks when three assassins, Talmadge Hayer (also known as Thomas Hagan), Norman 3X Butler and Thomas 15X Johnson gunned him down. The assassins were eventually convicted of the murder and sentenced to life in prison. Though all three men were members of the NOI, there is still no concrete evidence that Elijah Muhammad had any direct involvement with the murder. Several conspiracy theories suggest that the FBI was involved. In 1985, the assassins were all released for good behavior (Dyson, 1995; Gallen, 1994; X, 1965). Following the assassination, his blood was wiped from the stage that very day, so as not to disrupt the previously scheduled evening event (Kihss, 1955a).

It is important to note that while Malcolm X was an influential leader, he was not without fault. He emphasized Black power through Black masculinity. He was a known misogynist and anti-Semite who adhered to the Black Nationalist philosophy that women were weak, deceptive and inferior to men (Dyson, 1995; Frady, 1992; Jenkins, 2002). Before his pilgrimage he was often quoted with sexist assertions such as “You never can

fully trust any woman...whatever else a woman is, I don't care who the woman is, it starts with her being vain"(as cited in Frady, 1992, 285). He later married Betty X, formerly Betty Sanders. It is rumored that his viewpoint changed, but like many aspects of Malcolm's life, there is much debate about the extent of this transformation.

Regardless of the interpretation, around the time of his death, he expressed sentiments toward the subordination of women, asserting that their inferiority stemmed from their regressive societies (Dyson, 1995; Frady, 1992; Jenkins, 2002).

Chapter 3: Malcolm X—the Militant

Because Whites perceived Malcolm X to be such a threatening figure and also because of his sudden and premature death, X's legacy is still contested. To some he was a figure of hate, to others a revolutionary prophet and to many he still remains relatively unknown. The following chapter addresses this division and examines how media coverage of Malcolm X following his assassination influenced his public memory. This chapter focuses specifically upon coverage of the assassination in the White press. As he initially built his reputation through the Nation of Islam, many Whites only associated Malcolm X with the White devil theory (Cone, 1992, pp. 100-104). Many Whites were unaware of his humanitarian shift after his pilgrimage to Mecca and even if they were, they were often conflicted in their perception of X. Malcolm X focused most of his energies on building up his own people, so it follows that many Whites had little or no direct exposure to him. The news media was the primary means through which X indirectly reached out to White America. Unfortunately the White press did little to promote his good qualities.

Post-assassination articles in the *New York Times* generally portrayed Malcolm X in a negative light, often describing him as a militant cult leader; however, it is extremely important to note that a small percentage of journalists and editorialists praised X's good qualities or at least referenced his humanitarian shift. The appearance of these articles indicates that many Whites felt ambivalent about X; he was not universally perceived as a creature of hate. Though not significant in number, or even in substance, these articles provide excellent insight into X's current perception among White America. By portraying Malcolm X with indecision and trivializing his role as Civil Rights leader,

these articles ultimately ensured that X would have little to no importance in the dominant narrative of American history.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to examine post-assassination articles dealing with Malcolm X as they appeared for one month following his murder. I have chosen to specifically focus on those articles appearing in the *New York Times* due to its high rate of circulation. Most of the articles portrayed X in a very negative and one-dimensional fashion. They described him as a militant extremist, obsessed with power. The front page story from February 22, 1965, the day following his assassination, described Malcolm X as “a slim six-footer with a gift for bitter eloquence against what he considered white exploitation of Negroes” (Kihss, 1965a, p.10). Another article asserted, “Malcolm founded a black nationalist organization which was completely dominated by his personality and power. He was an authoritative leader who did not share his power” (“Nationalist Group Left Leaderless by Murder,” 1965, p. 10).

These descriptions varied drastically from typical post-assassination discourse as they did not express any real shock or remorse; they rather asserted that Malcolm X had fallen victim to his own dogma of hate and violence (Goldzwig and Sullivan, 1995, p. 131). An editorialist commented:

The life and death of Malcolm X provides a discordant but typical theme for the times in which we live. He was a case history, as well as an extraordinary and twisted man, turning many true gifts to evil purpose. . . Malcolm X had the ingredients for leadership, but his ruthless and fanatical belief in violence not only set him apart from the responsible leaders of the civil rights movement and the

overwhelming majority of Negroes. It also marked him for notoriety, and for a violent end (“Malcolm X”, 1965, p. 20).

Though this article did reference X’s charisma, the author turned this praise against him, proclaiming X as a waste of potential. Journalist Peter Kihss similarly portrayed X when he wrote: “Malcolm was credited with an ability of ‘almost exciting to riot and then pulling the string very quickly’ to avoid confrontation with the police” (Kihss, 1965c, p.18).

This “he had it coming” sentiment was closely correlated with the media’s attempt to downplay X’s significance as a Civil Rights Leader. Rather than mourning or celebrating X’s life, another article drew to a close by commenting, “At 7:15 P.M. the police left the ballroom. Three cleaning women scrubbed blood off the stage, and overturned chairs were cleared away. Musical instruments were placed on the stage and a dance sponsored by the Metro Associates, of 230 Tompkins Avenue, Brooklyn went on as scheduled at 11 P.M.” (Kihss, 1965a, 10). This closing implied that X’s death attracted little attention and that he was ultimately disposable to society. Another article expressed similar sentiment when it stated, “For some inexplicable reason the A.B.C. news department found it necessary to break into ‘Swan Lake’ with a bulletin about the murder of Malcolm X. Surely, the announcement could have waited another 10 minutes until the program’s end” (Gould, 1965, p.41). Here again, X is trivialized and deemed un-newsworthy.

In addition to downplaying his credibility as a leader, the White media also separated Malcolm X from the larger context of the Civil Rights Movement. Many articles stressed that X’s philosophy did not represent the views of the typical African

American. One story noted, “The Black Muslims and other black nationalist groups, a numerically small segment of the Negro movement, have had an impact far out of proportion to their strength” (“Malcolm and Muslims,” 1965, p. E1). The press also invalidated the Nation of Islam, of which he had recently split, by describing it as a fanatical cult reaching out to the lowest members of civilization. One article featured a national poll conducted by *Newsweek* magazine that reported that only five percent of African Americans favored the Black Muslim movement. The article also included results from a recent *New York Times* questionnaire that found that only six percent of African Americans believed that Malcolm X was “doing the best for Negroes” compared with Martin Luther King Jr.’s stunning seventy-three percent. The piece further criticized the Black Muslim followers harshly. It stated: “Reliable investigators elsewhere, who cannot be named, held the Black Muslim movement had been ‘imprisoned’ within itself by a racial-segregationist and hate-white philosophy that ‘had to have ignorant persons to begin with’ and to carry its heavy financial demands” (Kihss, 1965c, p. 18). Many journalists were quick to point out Elijah Muhammad’s lavish life-style, which sharply contrasted from the lives of his followers. They provided a detailed description of the interior of Muhammad’s mansion (NOI headquarters) as Whites were traditionally banned from entering. One article even referred to the NOI as a form of “Black Fascism” (Wehrwein, 1965c, p. 72).

The White media further trivialized Malcolm X by constantly alluding to his alleged “power struggle” with Elijah Muhammad. The press constantly differentiated the two leaders on the grounds that X advocated violence, while the NOI embraced pacifism. One article reported, “[Elijah Muhammad] also reiterated his assertion that Malcolm,

who was killed last Sunday, 'got just what he preached.' It is Muhammad's contention that Malcolm broke with the Black Muslims because Malcolm wanted to advocate violence" (Wehrwein, 1965b, p. 10). The press was also quick to note that X's assassins were Black and followers of the NOI ("News Summary and Index," 1965c, p. 27). It seemed that both X's followers and the NOI were part of a radical faction separate from the Civil Rights Movement, characterized by violence, corruption and internal chaos. One article commented "The murder of Malcolm X is an example of the mounting pattern of violence in the Black Muslim movement" (Lipsyte, 1965a, p. 10). Some stories also alluded to other power struggles within the NOI itself, mentioning the early political battle between Elijah Muhammad and NOI founder W. D. Fard. Fard ultimately disappeared and Muhammad assumed complete control of the NOI. The press portrayed Malcolm X and the Black Muslims as an example of what could happen should the integrationists fail to succeed. One story noted, "The failure of men like Malcolm, or even less militant spokesmen for black supremacy, to establish a rapport with Southern Negroes points up how well established and accepted the non-violent method, with its goal of assimilation rather than estrangement, has become" (Herbers, 1965, p. E4). This statement is particularly interesting as it was the presence of "violent" men like Malcolm X who made non-violent leaders seem more appealing to White America (Dyson, 1995, p. 26).

Perhaps more significant than the White media's emphasis on the NOI's fanaticism was its premonition of future violence in the name of Malcolm X. Multiple articles referenced X's sister, Ella Mae Collins, saying, "Whether it is through justice by law or divine justice, he will be avenged" ("Stores Prodded to Hail Malcolm," 1965, p.

15). Countless stories reported violent or destructive acts allegedly conducted in reaction to X's murder. For example, two NOI mosques were firebombed in the time period directly following X's assassination. One headline read, "Mosque Fires Stir Fear of Vendetta in Malcolm Case" (Kihss, 1965b, p. 1). Other articles even indicated that violence had spread internationally. One piece about anti-American protests in Indonesia reported, "The students said they were demonstrating over the assassination of Malcolm X. They described him as a 'a Moslem murdered by Americans'" (Reuters, 1965, p. 4). Many articles noted that violent threats were received by both the church where Malcolm X was eulogized and the funeral home where his body was temporarily held. Leon 4X Ameer, another prominent Black Muslim who had left the NOI, also attracted considerable press. He warned America about violence among Black communities and against White America in the wake of X's death. Ameer commented, "If the white power structure thinks this is all going to be just another case of colored killing off other colored and they're going to sit back safely and watch it happen, they're in for a terrible surprise" (Lipsyte, 1965a, p. 10).

Other news reports reflected the strong anti-communist sentiment dominating the country by alluding that Malcolm X held Marxist beliefs. The *New York Times* reported on the X assassination from the perspective of other communist nations like China. One statement read "Communist China blame 'United States reactionaries' today for the murder of Malcolm X and said it was 'a debt in blood' that should be repaid with 'revolutionary violence. . . A Peking newspaper . . . said: 'Malcolm was murdered because he fought for freedom and equal rights'" ("Peking Urges Violent Reply," 1965, p.30). Another article quoted Jemmin Jihpao, an official organ of the Chinese

Communist party saying, “The blood of Malcolm X will not have been shed in vain. American Negroes will undoubtedly realize from his murder that in dealing with imperialist oppressors violence must be met with violence, as Malcolm X himself taught” (“China Reds Say Malcolm X was Slain by ‘Imperialists,’ 1965, p. 18). Perhaps the most powerful quote came from the Federation for Independent Political Action, who said:

Without question, the brazen bombing of North Vietnam and the intervention in the civil war in South Vietnam by the United States Government, the militaristic support of the lackey Tshombe by the United States Government, the denial of the right of the Cuban people to self-determination. . . set the stage for the vicious killing of Brother Malcolm X (as cited in “Stores Prodded to Hail Malcolm,” 1965, p. 15).

Associating Malcolm X as a communist during one of the countries most prominent red scares did little to give Whites a positive perception of the fallen leader.

Coverage of Malcolm X’s funeral indicated a sense disbelief among White America because he was eulogized as a humanitarian. The cover story read, “Malcolm X, a black nationalist who had told Negroes they must meet violence with violence, went to his grave yesterday eulogized as a man who died believing in the brotherhood of man” (Arnold, 1965, p. 1). Despite its incredulity, the article went on to include positive quotes from X’s eulogies. Television summaries indicated that the funeral service was broadcast on T.V. as well as on loudspeakers so that people outside could hear. Many reporters seemed stunned by the flux of visitors who went to see X’s body before the church service. Over 22,000 mourners went to pay their respects to the slain leader.

Though the majority of the *New York Times* articles portrayed Malcolm X negatively, it is important to note that a small percentage at least mentioned his ideological shift prior to his assassination. In addition, some included positive perceptions of Malcolm X, indicating a confusion and ambivalence toward his true philosophy. A few articles commented on his pilgrimage to Mecca, stating, “There, he said, he had been impressed by the ‘brotherhood, the people of all races, all colors coming together as one’” (Benjamin, 1965, p. 10); however, some of these stories went on to portray his conversion as insincere. For example, a later article stated:

There were differing views of Malcolm’s departure from the Black Muslims—either as a clash over power or his recognition that the movement needed broader appeal. One report was that some Middle East leaders had given financial aid to Malcolm and made possible his trip last year to Cairo, Mecca and African capitals. This was held to have been in hope of converting him to orthodox Mohammedanism, and Malcolm in fact declared he had come to know good white people while abroad. But these patrons were reported to have backed away when Malcolm, on his return here, once again began denouncing whites (Kihss, 1965c, p.18).

This statement is highly characteristic of many of his post-assassination articles as X is not directly quoted. He was almost always spoken for and rarely received the privilege of speaking for himself.

Following his funeral some articles featured quotes from famous Black Americans. Ossie Davis, the actor and playwright, was quoted saying “Malcolm was our manhood, our living black manhood. In honoring him we honor the best in ourselves.”

Davis later added, “Malcolm had become an Afro-American, and that’s what he wanted all of us to be. . . A prince—our own black shining prince who did not hesitate to die because he loved us so” (as cited in Arnold, 1965, p. 1, 72). The Freedom Fighters of Ohio, Inc., called Malcolm X, “the most misinterpreted, misunderstood man in America” (p. 72). Though other Civil Rights leaders were asked to comment on X’s assassination, most of their statements expressed a genuine sadness at the violent act rather than his political and ideological significance. The Civil Rights leaders tended to use the assassination as proof of the futility of violence and thus further stressed the appeal of their method of peaceful integration. One piece quoted Civil Rights Leader Bayard Rustin warning, “Malcolm X-ism is here to stay unless the nation is ready to revolutionize its spirit and its institutions” (as cited in Bigart, 1965b, p. 15). The article continued noting:

Mr. Rustin, who espouses nonviolent techniques in achieving civil rights, defended Malcolm, the murdered black nationalist leader, as an inevitable product of injustice. . . ‘Violence is inevitable, fighting in the streets is inevitable,’ Mr. Rustin continued, unless the nation eliminated ghetto slums, segregated schools and other symptoms of injustice (p. 15).

Finally, it is important to note that no stories included any comments from Martin Luther King, Jr., perhaps the most well-known Civil Rights Leader among White America (Howard-Pitney, 2004, p. 23).

The *New York Times* also published two editorials that not only defended Malcolm X, but criticized White America for their role in his assassination. The first, written by James Loomis, celebrated Malcolm X for his courage to always speak the

truth. Loomis clarified that X was not a violent man, but an honest man, who understood that America's racial issues must be solved *before* a violent revolution ensues. Loomis states, eloquently and rather prophetically, "He was the first to give his life for what he believed, and I value his gift with that of Martin Luther King. He clarified the necessity of King's work, much as the Old Testament laid the foundation for the New Testament" (Loomis, 1965, p. 24). Another editorial written by George T. Fuller, a writer who identified himself as a White reverend living in Harlem, also held an extremely high opinion of the late Malcolm X. Fuller declared:

Malcolm X . . . spoke for a far greater percentage of the Negro American community than you are capable of imagining. I find Malcolm's description of the position of the Negro American to be far too true, and more clearly stated than most other civil rights leaders have put the case. In fact, I feel that other civil rights leaders have relied on his freedom of expression to say what. . . they could not speak (Fuller, 1965, p. 32).

Fuller asserted that X's position on violence was in a period of transition in the months preceding his assassination. He claimed that X's violent death was a result of the sad state of our society, a society which did not understand the needs of its African American citizens. He further commented, "I deny that Malcolm did not fit into society. He fit perfectly and inevitably into a society which had little ease to offer him" (p. 32). These editorials prove that Malcolm's negative image was not universal, even among White America.

In order to understand the legacy of Malcolm X's death it is first necessary to include a brief discussion of the public memory of Martin Luther King Jr. Every year on

the third Monday of January, Americans observe Martin Luther King Day. An accomplishment shared by only two other individuals: George Washington (now observed as Presidents' Day) and Christopher Columbus. School children across the country recited his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and the motel where he inhaled his last breaths has been preserved in the exact condition it was left on the night of his 1968 assassination. Construction is currently well underway to establish his national memorial in Washington. Among the dominant American culture, the Civil Rights Movement is most associated with the integration philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King. Scholar Milton Viorst notes, "To many Americans, the March on Washington in August of 1963 was the civil rights movement" (as cited in Pauley, 1998, p. 320). But among the Black community, Malcolm X has become their dominant cultural hero. This statement is not to say that Black Americans do not respect King, it is meant to distinguish the differing legacies left by the two men. The official White culture has taken the public memory of King from the Black community and transformed him into an *American* hero (Dyson, 1995; Russell, 2005).

America celebrates King, but avoids confronting those who opposed him. Dominant culture emphasizes his heroic qualities while simultaneously downplaying the racist society from which he emerged in an effort to avoid assigning guilt. Howard-Pitney comments:

A . . . reason for [X and King's] portrayal as opposites—chiefly, then and now, created and perpetuated by the white-controlled media—resides in widespread white phobias about blacks' feeling toward whites. Part of slavery's psychological inheritance in America is whites' (sometimes repressed) guilty

knowledge that their kind has done abominable things to African Americans.

This knowledge makes many whites fearful that blacks hate them and wish to take revenge on them. Alternately, whites yearn to believe that, notwithstanding past and present oppression, blacks forgive and accept them. . . King and Malcolm appear as symbols of these two opposite black response toward whites, Malcolm representing an avenging angel, spewing hatred, and King as a saintly figure who would lovingly correct and forgive whites” (2004, p. 17).

Furthermore, King’s commemoration has served as a way to avert future issues of racism. It is as if, by giving him a holiday, the government and the dominant American society can no longer be accused of perpetuating an unjust society (Dyson, 1995; I. Perry, 1996; Reyes, 2004).

Both Malcolm X and King wanted a society that advocated racial equality; however, the two men went about this goal in incredibly different ways. Dominant public memory has given us the illusion that during the Civil Rights Movement, integration was both inevitable and well perceived. In reality, King’s discourse was extremely radical when it first emerged especially because it was coming from a reverend (Cone, 1991, p. 138). But his Christian theology fit well with the dominant White culture and influenced a style of Biblical discourse many Americans could relate to. The emergence of “violent” leaders like Malcolm X caused many White Americans to move toward King (Cone, 1991; Dyson, 1992; Dyson, 1995). In his famous “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” King warned America of the possible consequences of their racism. He wrote about the increasing divide in Black Americans between those who supported his concept of agapic love and those who were growing restless with their

oppression and now seeking other solutions. He said this about the new, frustrated faction:

The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable "devil." . . . I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss us as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" that those of us who are working through the channels of nonviolent direct action and refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare (as cited in Washington, 1986, pp. 296-297).

Malcolm X's discourse was a sharp contrast to King's. X's condoning of violent resistance shocked the American public and generated a sense of fear in many Whites. X appeared to be the tragic result of American racism; his "angry" rhetoric seemed to verify the validity of King's warnings. He once stated:

The late President has a bigger image as a liberal, the other whites who participated have bigger liberal images also, and the Negro civil rights leaders have now been permanently named the Big Six (because of their participation in

the Big Fix?). . . but the black masses are still unemployed, still starving, and still living in slums. . . and, I might add, getting angrier and more explosive every day (as cited in Cone, 1992, p. 118).

Throughout the Civil Rights movement, he gained press so long as he was opposed to King. By becoming the lesser of two evils, King slowly became a more translatable figure to White America (Cone, 1991; Dyson, 1992; Dyson, 1995). Though the media often pitted the two against one another, a letter from Malcolm X to Coretta Scott King, indicates that Malcolm had developed respect for King (Dyson, 1995; Marable, 2002; T. Perry, 1996). The letter states “I want Dr. King to know that I didn’t come to Selma to make his job difficult. I really did come thinking I could make it easier. If the white people realize what the alternative is, perhaps they will be more willing to hear Dr. King” (as cited in Dyson, 1992, p. 3).

As indicated in the *Times*, White America’s ambivalence toward Malcolm X’s assassination is especially important in regard to his public memory. Like President Lincoln, whom I previously discussed, Malcolm X held many competing personas among the public; however, dominant culture compelled the nation to mourn their late president by constructing one of the most elaborate funeral processions the country had yet seen. As is indicated by his harsh criticisms, Malcolm X received the converse treatment as Lincoln; official culture made little to no effort to celebrate his life or to publicly mourn his death. Public mourning functions to affirm unity, regardless of the true nature of the individual (Schwartz, 2000, p. 49). Hence, it follows that by discouraging public mourning, the articles appearing in the *New York Times* and other mediums of dominant culture discourse ensured X’s lack of commemoration among White society.

In addition, the White Press trivialized Malcolm X's role in the Civil Rights Movement. It depicted him as a sad product of racial violence and took extra measures to ensure to White Americans that X's views were not emblematic of the majority of Black America. As a predominately White newspaper, *The New York Times* is ultimately an expression of official culture. The post-assassination articles that appeared in the *Times* express dominant culture's desire to forget Malcolm X. X's rhetoric blatantly attacked White hegemony and made Whites address their guilt; therefore, it was to the advantage of dominant culture to discredit him, rather than allow him to threaten its privilege. So, in closing, the White press played a direct and significant role in dictating Malcolm X's legacy among dominant culture. By publishing negative and non-celebratory articles, as well attempting to ostracize Malcolm X from the larger Civil Rights Movement, in the period immediately following his assassination, the White press ultimately prevented X from entering the American master narrative that adopted other Civil Rights leaders like King.

Chapter 4: Malcolm X—The Truth Teller

Because Malcolm X based his ideology on promoting his own race, rather than appealing to White society, it follows that the Black Press covered his assassination much differently than the White press. This chapter seeks to examine the Black media's depiction of Malcolm X. Post-assassination articles appearing in the *Chicago Defender* newspaper reveal that though the Black press did not depict X as a saint, they did portray him much more positively than the articles appearing in the *New York Times*. The Black Press played a key role in the creation of X's divided public image as it served as a vehicle for vernacular cultural expression. The Black Press not only provided African Americans with factual news, but it created a forum where *Blacks*, not Whites, could voice their opinion about Malcolm X.

For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to analyze the *Chicago Defender* because of its high readership rate and general respect among the national Black community. In addition, the *Defender* provides interesting insight as it was not flooded with news about the Malcolm X or the Nation of Islam (NOI), despite its close proximity to the Nation's headquarters or its affiliation as an African American newspaper (Jenkins, 2002, pp 147-148). I have again focused on the time period for one month following his assassination in order to stay consistent with my *New York Times* analysis. It is important to note that the majority of articles that appeared in the *Defender* did not name a specific journalist, but rather came from the United Press International (UPI); however, this piece of information does not discredit the significance of these articles, as the *Defender* still held the ability to choose which pieces it wanted to include. Also, most of the UPI articles

dealt with facts regarding the Malcolm assassination, rather than opinions or sentiments regarding the fallen leader.

To begin with, while the majority of *New York Times* articles described Malcolm X as “militant,” most articles in the *Defender* chose the word “controversial” even when criticizing his politics. The front page story following his assassination described the murder as follows: “Malcolm X, the controversial Negro leader who was ousted by the Black Muslims and set up a rival organization, was shot and killed by assassins at a rally of his followers. At least seven bullets ripped into the body of Malcolm, who preached violence against whites in the civil rights struggle” (“Malcolm X Killed At N.Y. Meeting,” 1965, p.1). Another article commented on his “violent” approach, stating: “Malcolm, who espoused the ‘eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ philosophy, was gunned down by at least three men who fired pistols and shotguns [*sic*], striking him more than 15 times” (“Tensions Mount As Revenge Rumors Grow,” 1965, p. 16). By differentiating his policy from his character, the *Defender* took strides to humanize Malcolm X. Many articles expressed grief and shock about his murder despite their personal positions on his “radical” philosophy. For example, one text noted: “Whatever the views of the late Black Nationalist leader, dissent should not be engraved in blazing lead. At 39 years of age, Malcolm X was a young man, a husband and father. It is to be hoped that the bitterness which led to his death will not result in greater loss of life” (“Onion For The Day,” 1965a, p. 3). In addition, many other stories expressed sympathy for X’s widowed wife and children. An editorialist commented:

Since [the NOI] claim that all people are brothers under the skin and one of these skin-brothers has just ‘rubbed out’ Malcolm X leaving a poor, destitute, homeless

widow with five little children to raise and support, let them prove that charity begins at home by financially helping this widow who is now all in, down and out (Homes-X, 1965, p. 13).

The *Times* articles made little to no mention of X's widow and children.

The *Defender* devoted a considerable amount of press to criticizing Malcolm X's estranged teacher Elijah Muhammad. While the *Times* did not portray Muhammad particularly positively, it tended to treat him rather indifferently and focused more scrutiny on the NOI as an institution. A few articles in the *Defender* assumed this strategy, but significantly more verbally attacked Muhammad. One journalist described him as "a deceptively gentle man. . .[whose]. . . 'Fruit of Islam' body guards tower over him like protective sheep dogs about a newborn lamb. . . He speaks in a soft croak and his words come forth as if the effort was all but beyond him, but the words are venom at times." The same article quoted the Chicago Police Department stating: "He can whip his audiences into the type of followers seldom witnessed since Hitler" ("Elijah Muhammad- Forceful Leader- Rules With Iron Hand," 1965, p. 11). The *Defender* also published an interview with Habieb Al Mahabubali, a former member of the NOI who allegedly resigned because he felt Muhammad was immoral. Mahabubali commented: "Brother Elijah is not teaching from the Koran. What he is really teaching is violence" ("Cuts Tie With Black Muslims," 1965, p. 10). One particularly odd article depicted Muhammad as clinically insane. Journalist Stanley Scott, reported:

Muhammad confided to his followers that 'Allah takes pictures of people on Mars. They're tall and skinny, they're about seven to nine feet tall, not intelligent as we are.' He talked about life on the moon: 'No human being can live on the

moon. They may go there but they'll never return. Don't let any of that stuff on the moon rub off on you. It will pop out your eyeballs . . . I can't help but tell the truth. . . I love my people and I want them to know'" (Scott, 1965e, p. 10).

Bill Weathersby provided the most grounded insight into Muhammad's character when he made an obvious, but surprisingly overlooked observation. Weathersby commented: "Why was it necessary for Brother Elijah and Brother Malcolm to build and train the magnificent fruit of Islam? No other religion needs body guards" ("Bill's Beat," 1965, p. 16).

The one area that both the *Times* and the *Defender* covered relatively evenly was the ensuing feud between Malcolm X avengers and the NOI. Many articles described the feud as a "vendetta" and reported that at least a half a dozen X followers were on their way to Chicago to kill Muhammad ("Tensions Mount As Revenge Rumors Grow," 1965, p. 16). In addition, several reporters included the "he will be avenged" quote from Malcolm's half-sister, Ella Collins and the threat of "maximum retaliation" from possible UNIA heir, Leon 4X Ameer ("Say Malcolm X's Followers Are on Reprisal March," 1965, p. 10). These quotes and others of a similar nature were also heavily referenced in the *Times*.

Despite their similar coverage of the NOI- Malcolm X feud, the *Defender* diverged from the *Times* as it contained editorials and articles condemning the press for sensationalizing the conflict. One article quoted Ella Collins clarifying: "The death of Malcolm X would be avenged either by the law or God, not by members of the OAAU" ("Sister To 'Take Reins' Of Malcolm's Organization," 1965, p. 2). Worded in its entirety, this statement casts her earlier revenge comments in a different, less threatening

light. Editorials provided the most insightful protest. Edward L. Smith wrote: “I feel there has been entirely too much news coverage on the threats and retaliations of the Black Muslim groups. I urge the readers of your paper to evaluate news stories and attempt to analyze the truth before drawing a conclusion” (Smith, 1965, p. 9). Another editorialist expressed similar sentiment in a much angrier fashion. Bertina Plumb asserted:

Is it a pleasure to see our people (Negroes) killing one another and threatening to take one’s life in their own hands? . . . White racists enjoy seeing Negroes fight among themselves and killing one another and the press coverage on the recent race hatred preached by the Black Muslims didn’t help the civil rights struggle in the least (Plumb, 1965, p. 9).

The *Times*, however, indicated no protests and continued to dramatize the affair.

The *Defender* also included quotes and comments from several prominent Blacks both in and out of the Civil Rights Movement. The mere fact that these statements exist gives X credibility as a Civil Rights activist. The paper interviewed distinguished individuals such as Eslanda Robeson, Jackie Robinson, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and John Lewis. Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader John Lewis commented that X “gave to the oppressed and downtrodden black people of this country a new sense of pride and a new sense of dignity” (“SNCC States Malcolm Gave Negroes Pride,” 1965, p. 5). Not all interviewees agreed with his philosophy; Jackie Robinson wrote:

I have met Malcolm in debate and exchanged spirited letters with him in which he stuck to his guns and I to mine. Many of the statements he made about the

problems faced by Negro people were nothing but the naked truth. However, we were often far apart in our opinions of how these problems should be faced (Robinson, 1965, p. 8).

The *Defender* even included statements from one of the nation's most prominent Civil Rights leaders and X's alleged political antithesis, Martin Luther King Jr.

It is important to note that the *Times* did not publish any statements from King following X's assassination. If the two men were mentioned in the same article, X was used as living, or rather deceased, proof that integration was the proper path in the Civil Rights struggle. This practice exemplifies White America's ensuing shift toward King for fear of the emergence of more "radical" alternatives like Malcolm X. In addition, this practice functioned to further ostracize X from the Civil Rights Movement and trivialize his role as a leader. As opposed to the *Times*, the *Defender* immediately quoted King in the front page article that appeared directly following the assassination. King's statement read:

I am deeply saddened and appalled to learn of the brutal assassination of Malcolm X. This evil act must be strongly condemned by all people of good will. We must face the tragic fact is that Malcolm was murdered by a morally inclement climate. It reveals that our society is still sick enough to express dissent through murder (as cited in "Malcolm X Killed at N.Y. Meeting," 1965, p. 8).

King's statement reveals a larger trend within the articles appearing in the *Defender*; many reports accredited both his "angry," controversial beliefs and his assassination to the violent nature of American society. Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director of the National Urban League declared:

Take 15,000,000 seeds, cultivate them with the calloused hand of indifference, nurture them with despair, water them with injustice, and [a] misshapen human flower is certain to blow. . . In the broader sense, Malcolm X, the man, is our victim. We are as guilty and responsible for his death as we are for the death of a President. It will not do to condemn the violence which killed him, or the violence he espoused, until we have wiped out the misery and ignorance which produces violence (Young, Jr. 1965, p. 9).

Another article further criticized White America, proclaiming:

Historians of the present racial scenes may not pass too harsh a judgment on Malcolm X. The American spirit that tolerates the Ku Klux Klan, the White Citizens Council and their homicidal excesses. . . surely can find room to accommodate Malcolmism which is an off-shoot of that theology of intolerance and racial hate (“Malcolm X,” 1965, p.11).

Hence, though the Black press did not hesitate to criticize Malcolm X’s politics, it portrayed him in a much more sympathetic light than the White press because his politics were viewed as a result of American racism.

The *Defender* articles indicate that the Black press felt an ambivalence of its own regarding Malcolm X; however, its sentiment differed from that of the White press. Several stories indicate that while many Blacks did not agree with his policies and tactics, they simultaneously admired his brutal honesty and courage in the threat of violence. In a sense, X derived his ethos from his efforts to protect vernacular culture. Jackie Robinson wrote:

When they murdered Malcolm, they murdered not only a man but the precious freedom to talk, to speak one's mind, to disagree. Many times I have been on record in this column and elsewhere as being opposed to Malcolm's philosophy. But I have always respected the man as one who said what he believed. The courage to do that is, in my mind, one of the most vital qualities a human being can possess" (1965, p. 8).

Another article quoted a Reverend who went so far as to compare Malcolm X to Christ. Gleason said, "Most of our leaders are talking from outside the ghetto. Malcolm didn't care what City Hall felt, as Jesus was not concerned with what [*sic*] the political power structure in his age felt. They worked for and spoke for the masses of people they were concerned about" (as cited in "Likens Malcolm X, Christ," 1965, p. 1). Gladys M. Johnson indicated her own conversion toward Malcolm X by revealing a personal experience she had with the slain leader. Johnson had once covered a story at Jackson prison in which several Muslim prisoners refused food, transformed their bed sheets into turbans and insisted on praying facing east all day. The warden phoned Malcolm X to ask for help with the prisoners. After X privately spoke with the inmates, the demonstrators removed their turbans and stopped the protest. Johnson recalled:

On the way back home, we asked Malcolm what he said to them. . . As I recall, he had said to them there was the threat of violence in peaceful protest. . . That Muslims were NOT violent (he didn't say non-violent). . . That they must go back to their cells and observe the rules of the institution. . . He had meant, they were not to be violent since no violence had been levied against them. . . I had lost his meaning in my own translation of what I thought he meant (Johnson, 1965, p. 12).

These articles indicated the early formation of X's modern public image among vernacular culture. Black America replaced X's controversial political image with that of a dedicated, fearless truth teller willing to sacrifice his life for the good of his people.

His iconic formation can also be seen as the Black press also alluded that X's murder brought more people to the Civil Rights movement. An editorialist wrote, "When conversing with people I find that the killing of Malcolm X is making many think about the Negro and the rights movement, who haven't given any thought to it before" (G. Montgomery, 1965, p. 9). Eslanda Robeson expressed a similar observation in "Views on Malcolm X," a series of four special columns that appeared in the *Defender* following the assassination. She stated:

Whoever plotted and carried out this assassination made a grave mistake. They did not silence the voice of Malcolm X. They did not create the predicted chaos, confusion and division among the Negro People. They did not dampen down the spirit, nor slow up the momentum of the Negro movement. On the contrary. Many Negroes who disagreed with Malcolm X, many who had paid no attention to him, are now seriously thinking about what he said and wrote and did, and what he meant to our continuing struggle for freedom, equality and justice in our country (1965, p. 4).

The *Defender* articles also illuminate the beginning of a general frustration among the Black public with integration. The articles still praise King and his philosophy; however, they indicate the ensuing disillusionment that ultimately led to the radicalization of the Civil Rights Movement and paved the way for new ideologies like Black Power. One article stated: "While Rev. King's great moral imperative of non-

violence has moved mountains in this nation, at base it is totally foreign to our heritage, as a free, individualistic, two-fisted people” (Calhoun, 1965, p. 4). An editorialist expressed similar sentiment in a much angrier fashion, declaring “the law isn’t protecting demonstrators as they should and I feel the demonstrators should start protecting themselves. . . Maybe Malcolm X was right when he said ‘an eye for an eye.’ I’m really in favor of fighting back” (Rambo as cited in “Inquiring Photographer,” 1965, p. 17).

Defender journalist Eddie Ellis, another featured writer in the “Views on Malcolm X” series, predicted X’s legacy rather prophetically when he stated:

The world may little note nor long remember the death of Malcolm X, with the magnificent splendor of pop and ceremony by which it has honored the great leaders of the past decade who have died. His name may not be etched indelibly in secret records in the archives of history, but Malcolm X will live on forever in the hearts and minds of many black people of America and throughout the world (Ellis, 1965, p. 4).

The articles appearing in the *Chicago Defender* in the period following Malcolm X’s assassination laid the ground work for his public memory among Black America. They served as an expression of vernacular culture and gave X a new public image, separate from that of White America. While his views were not universally accepted, he was ultimately viewed as a fearless truth teller who gave his life for his cause. His assassination generated a response indicative of the radical forthcoming shift in the Civil Rights Movement.

Conclusion: 'The Divided Metaphor'

The effects of the contrasting media accounts of Malcolm X's assassination can be found in his modern legacies among White and Black America. X's public memory has evolved very differently from Martin Luther King's as official culture chose to integrate King into the master narrative. King therefore became a universal, *American* icon. Ironically, Malcolm X's absence in the American narrative and among White culture in general has made him a *stronger* icon among Black society. Manning Marable comments, "As a black student put it to me several years ago: 'Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., belongs to the world, but Malcolm X belongs to us'" (as cited in Marable, 2002, p. 49). X's rhetoric outlived him because it attacked the roots of the White power structure to such a degree that his words continue to hold relevance today. For example, the American justice system still disproportionately prosecutes minority populations. In 1996, Black males accounted for only 13% of the population; however, they accounted for 31% of the nation's arrests, 49% of the prison population and 42% of prisoners sentenced to death row (*Crime and race*, 2003). Malcolm X has reached the Black youth through atypical mediums such as Hollywood movies and rap songs, the most notable example being Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X*. Paraphernalia from the movie has become a trend among Black youth. Though some criticize his motives as economically driven (Dyson, 1995; I. Perry, 1996; Reyes, 2004), Lee can be commended for helping to revamp Malcolm X's positive cultural influence on the Black population. X has become a cultural icon for a new generation of African Americans. His legacy provides an incentive for Black youth to stay in school, avoid drugs and continue to fight their oppression.

Some scholars dismiss the new X followers as a generation merely swayed by rap music and Hollywood movies. While famous rap artists such as Lauren Hill and Public Enemy have adopted Malcolm X, many scholars believe this is more than a pop culture fad. Imani Perry (1996) recalls:

Last summer I had an argument with a 27-year-old Black man who said, ‘These are the same kids who wear marijuana on their hats a week later.’ He saw a contradiction in those two symbols. To me they make sense. They both are signs of rebellion against the rules of American society and both are symbols of a desire to escape the current moment of desperation and/or dispossession. When one reflects on the social role of Malcolm, it becomes clear that Malcolm is effectively illegal or prohibited as a spiritual and political leader. We generally cannot learn about him in school, but then again, nor can we celebrate a holiday to him without an intensely negative reaction (p. 184-185).

In addition, it makes sense that X would emerge in rap music as his discourse was characterized by his ability to relate his rhetoric to his audience. Drawing from his experience on the streets he used a direct, straightforward delivery that ignited compassion within the urban poor (Asante, 1993; Marable, 2002; I. Perry, 1996). Molefi Kete Asante comments:

He was not a spokesman by virtue of his official status within the African-American community but spokesman because he actually spoke what was in our hearts the way we would have spoken it if we had been so eloquent. . . Culturally, Malcolm tapped the most creative aspect of African-American life, drawing upon the proverbs, the folklore, the nuances, the syntax, and the grammar of the

people's creation to make his own discourse . . . he spoke and when he spoke he took the words right out of our mouths (Asante, 1993, p. 30).

Malcolm's rhetoric did not simply interest his audience; it forced them to reevaluate their role in American race relations. He scolded his people like he scolded White society, but he scolded them out of love. He wanted his race to wake up and acknowledge their oppression. He once declared:

You don't want to believe what I am telling you, brothers and sisters? Well, I'll tell you what you do. You go out of here, you just take a good look around where you live. Look at not only how *you* live, but look at how anybody that you *know* lives—that way, you'll be sure that you're not just a bad-luck accident. And when you get through looking at where *you* live, then you take you a walk down across Central Park, and . . . take yourself a look down there at how the white man is living! And don't stop there. . . Go right on down to the tip of Manhattan Island that this devilish white man stole from the trusting Indians for twenty-four dollars! Look at his City Hall, down there; look at his Wall Street! Look at yourself! (as cited in Cone, 1992, p. 172)

He was angry with American society for both making his people feel inferior and making them act accordingly. He dared his people to view stop viewing themselves through to White lenses and find pride in the culture Whites had taken from them (Asante, 1993; West, 1996).

Among White culture, Malcolm X remains relatively unknown (Cone, 1992, p. 289). Public schools typically favor King as many teachers are afraid to teach Malcolm X. Numerous scholars attribute this fear to the White guilt previously discussed by

Howard-Pitney (2004). Because X is so relevant in today's race relations, by studying him, Whites are not just studying history; they are studying social justice issues of the present. Robert Lowe addresses this challenge in *The Perquisites of Whiteness*. Lowe speaks on behalf of the *Autobiography*, as it is so widely read and the most likely of all Malcolm X discourse to have reached a White audience. Most American Whites, whether consciously or not, believe that racism, for the most part, no longer exists. In this sense, racism is defined as segregation, thus, because everyone legally has an opportunity, everyone is therefore equal. These Whites have not delved further into the issues of race relations. They have not ventured into the economic inequalities that leave entire populations in a vicious cycle of drugs and poverty. Many privileged Whites have remained ignorant to the poor communities that surround them. In America, racism has become taboo, but that has only made race relations more difficult to approach (X, 1965; Ignatiev, 1996; Lowe, 1996). Teaching Malcolm X forces Whites to critically examine their White privilege. Lowe comments, "He turns the table on whites, allowing them to see themselves as others in the eyes of African Americans" (p.164).

Analysis of newspaper articles following the assassination of Malcolm X reveals that the White and Black press covered the death very differently. As a site of public memory, the press played a significant role in X's post-assassination image construction. While the White press attempted to trivialize Malcolm X and ensure his prohibition as a national figure, the Black press expressed a general remorse at the loss of the controversial leader. Following his assassination, the Black press replaced X's provocative political image with that of a dedicated, fearless truth teller willing to sacrifice his life for his people. The contrasting coverage of Malcolm X's assassination

between the White and Black press ultimately gave X a divided public legacy that is still manifest today. Among White society, X remains relatively unknown and ill-remembered; however, among Black society he has evolved into a dominant cultural hero, widely celebrated by new generations of Black youth.

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