

Collecting to the Core — Malcolm X

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Column Editor's Note: The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

Malcolm X (1925-65) is an iconic political figure in African American history. At the time of his death, fifty years ago this month, he was widely reviled by the mainstream media and the general public as a purveyor of hate and violence, adored by a small following of activists, and largely alienated from a maturing civil rights movement. Yet within a few years of his death he was lionized by the growing Black Power movement, which belatedly recognized him as a prophet. In 1992 he was the subject of a **Spike Lee** film, and by 1999 he was honored by having his image placed on a U.S. postage stamp. Together, he has left a compelling and complex legacy.

Malcolm was born in the Midwest and moved to the East Coast as a young adult, where he lived the life of a low-level criminal. He spent six years in prison, where he converted to Islam as taught by **Elijah Muhammad** and joined the **Nation of Islam (NOI)**, which preached a version of Islam that was rooted in the African American experience and demonized whites, advocating for the separation of African Americans from white society. Released in 1952, he began his public ministry and quickly rose to prominence as the most well-known spokesperson of the NOI. During **Malcolm's** tenure the NOI grew exponentially, and he came to some prominence in the mainstream and African American press. His public activities and debates with civil rights leaders increasingly led him toward a political form of black nationalism — much to the chagrin of the NOI. In December 1963 **Malcolm** was "silenced" for ninety days by the NOI, an event attributed to his controversial comments on the assassination of **President John F. Kennedy**. In March 1964, **Malcolm** left the NOI and immediately founded a religious organization, the **Muslim Mosque Inc.**, and visited the Middle East and Africa. On his visit to the Middle East he renounced the fervently anti-white rhetoric of the NOI and proclaimed himself an advocate of interracial brotherhood and a continued believer in black nationalism and Islam. On his return to the U.S. he founded a secular organization — the **Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU)** — and pronounced his intention to "join" the civil rights

movement. However, in February 1965 he was assassinated while speaking at an OAAU meeting in Harlem.

Most of the scholarly interest in **Malcolm's** life has been focused on the eleven months between March 1964 when he left the NOI and his death in February 1965. His early life, while interesting from a biographical perspective, is not that unusual. His time in the NOI, with a few exceptions, yields little distinction between his thought and the eschatology of the NOI — other than showcasing his charismatic ability to communicate and capture public and media interest. Within those critical eleven months, researchers have concentrated on the circumstances surrounding his separation from the NOI, his travels abroad and their effect on his beliefs, the controversies surrounding his assassination, and speculation on his ultimate political influence.

The beginning point for collections on **Malcolm X** is the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, written with **Alex Haley**.¹ This title has become a classic and was for many years a staple on college reading lists. It provides a compelling description of **Malcolm's** poverty-stricken childhood, frequent encounters with racist violence and discrimination, and his transition to petty crime and imprisonment, where he was introduced to the teachings of the NOI. The *Autobiography* yields insights into **Malcolm's** transformation from criminal to religious leader, the disappointment with and dissolution of his relationship with NOI leader **Elijah Muhammad**, and his decision to establish new religious and political organizations. The *Autobiography* was released shortly after **Malcolm's** death, with **Alex Haley's** final editing. Decades after **Malcolm's** assassination, a diary he kept chronicling his travels abroad in 1964 was found in a surviving family member's possession. The diary, which was published in 2013, provides an interesting chronicle of his trips, contacts, and public events while in Africa and the Middle East.²

The first substantial biography was **Peter Goldman's** *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*.³ **Goldman**, a liberal journalist, reported on **Malcolm** during his life and had interviewed him several times. **Goldman's** book fills many gaps in the latter section of the *Autobiography*, using interviews to add depth and detail, particularly in the areas of **Malcolm's** relationships within the NOI, his travels abroad, his attempts to change political direction, and his assassination. The next significant biography was **Bruce Perry's** *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America*.⁴ Through original research, **Perry** exposed nu-

merous inconsistencies in the *Autobiography*, especially concerning **Malcolm's** youth and young adulthood. **Perry** also relied extensively on interview sources, including over 400 accounts. While thoroughly researched, **Perry's** biography was also criticized for some controversial conclusions, including speculations about **Malcolm's** sexual behavior. The third major biography of **Malcolm X**, which will likely remain unsurpassed for many years, is **Manning Marable's** *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.⁵ **Marable's** work, which won the 2012 **Pulitzer Prize** in history, was the result of more than thirty years of research. He used the *Autobiography*, previous biographies, an exhaustive list of interviews, government investigative reports, and **Malcolm's** diary — which had just become available but not yet published. Importantly, **Marable**



placed **Malcolm's** life narrative in context with the democratic struggle of African Americans. Despite wide praise, **Marable's** posthumous work raised criticism from some scholars and activists. However, **Marable's** detailed research on **Malcolm's** life leaves little room for another complete biography — short of some unknown archive becoming available. Finally, PBS broadcast an "American Experience" episode on **Malcolm's** life, *Malcolm X — Make It Plain*, which is the most useful video on this topic, although it doesn't provide many details on his assassination, discuss the discrepancies of the *Autobiography*, or address subsequent research.⁶

Because **Malcolm X** wrote very little, much of his political thought is examined through transcribed public speeches. The first collection, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, was published shortly after his assassination.⁷ It contains one interesting speech from his time in the NOI ("Message to the Grassroots"), which signals **Malcolm's** evolution from religion-based ideology to a philosophy aligned more with black nationalism and Pan-Africanism. It also includes the text from the press conference announcing his departure from the NOI; letters from his travels abroad; his first post-NOI speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," wherein he states his political claim to black nationalism and Pan-Africanism; and various speeches from his weekly OAAU meetings. The second major collection, published as *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches*, includes several speeches at predominantly white universities, a few interviews, and two speeches during the last week of his life — one at an OAAU meeting and another at an African American church in Rochester, New York.⁸ Finally, there is *February 1965: The Final Speeches*.⁹ This collection attempts

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to uncover all of **Malcolm's** public events during the last month of his life. It includes speeches, press conferences, and interviews, together presenting the most complete picture of **Malcolm's** evolving beliefs.

Two excellent analyses of **Malcolm's** life and thought are found in **Joe Wood's** *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image* and **Robert Terrill's** *Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X*.¹⁰⁻¹¹ **Wood's** collection includes essays by **Amiri Baraka**, **Angela Davis**, **Cornel West**, and **John Edgar Wideman** and covers topics such as the *Autobiography*, sexuality, black nationalism, and cultural politics. **Terrill's** compilation includes more prominent scholars on topics including conservatism, the Black Arts movement, masculinity, feminism, and Afrocentricity. **James Cone's** *Martin and Malcolm and America* was the first substantive attempt to provide a serious analysis of **Malcolm's** political thought.¹² **Cone's** work compares **Malcolm** and **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, concluding that although they are often counterposed, they are actually complementary in their vision for racial justice. **William Sales' From Civil Rights to Black Revolution** is the only book-length study of the **OAAU**.¹³ **Sales** locates the **OAAU** in the context of a new type of civil rights organization and also examines **Malcolm's** political thought.

For quick reference, the *Malcolm X Encyclopedia* contains short entries on nearly all aspects of **Malcolm's** life and political activities.¹⁴ Each signed entry contains short bibliographies, and the encyclopedia also includes a chronology of **Malcolm's** life and several introductory essays on his main speeches, relation to the **NOI**, and his assassination.

Malcolm X: A Research Site endeavors to be a comprehensive site on the life and legacy of **Malcolm X**.¹⁵ Launched by **Abdul Alkalimat**, professor of African American studies at the **University of Illinois**, it includes the text of two out-of-print bibliographies on **Malcolm** and listings of books, articles, dissertations, films, a webiography, and photos.

Malcolm X remains a captivating public figure, perhaps due in part to his polarizing

and complex history. Works covering his experiences and ideological output may be found in collections supporting history, American studies, African American studies, literature, politics, and more. For students and readers seeking primary and secondary materials, the titles discussed here represent some of the most significant works on **Malcolm X** and provide insight into his life, thoughts, and legacy. ☞

Endnotes

1. **X, Malcolm.** *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.*
2. **Boyd, Herb,** and **Ilyasah Al-Shabazz** (eds). *The Diary of Malcolm X: El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, 1964.* Chicago, Third World Press, 2013.
3. **Goldman, Peter Louis.** *The Death and Life of Malcolm X.* 3rd edition. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013.
4. **Perry, Bruce.** *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed Black America.* New York: Station Hill Press, 1991.
5. **Marable, Manning.** *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention.* New York: Viking, 2011.*
6. *Malcolm X: Make it Plain.* Directed by **Orlando Bagwell.** Videorecording. Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1994. VHS.
7. **Breitman, George** (ed.). *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements.* New York: Pathfinder Press, 1965.
8. **Perry, Bruce** (ed.). *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches.* New York: Pathfinder Press, 1989.
9. **X, Malcolm.** *February 1965: The Final Speeches.* New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992.
10. **Wood, Joe.** *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
11. **Terrill, Robert E.** *The Cambridge Companion to Malcolm X.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
12. **Cone, James H.** *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991.*
13. **Sales, William W.** *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity.* Boston: South End Press, 1994.
14. **Jenkins, Robert,** and **Mfanya D. Tryman** (eds). *The Malcolm X Encyclopedia.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
15. **Alkalimat, Abdul** (ed.). *Malcolm X: A Research Site.* University of Toledo and Twenty-first Century Books, <http://www.brothermalcolm.net>, 1999-.

Editor's note: An asterisk () denotes a title selected for *Resources for College Libraries*.

A Website Review — The World Bank eLibrary

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With the growing trend of libraries shifting from print to electronic materials, *The World Bank eLibrary* (<http://elibrary.worldbank.org/>), provides an invaluable electronic tool to subscribers looking for a comprehensive and current collection of literature on economics, business trends, and news from all over the world.

The World Bank eLibrary is broken up into five clean, well-organized sections. There is the home page which features new books, journal articles, and working papers, as well as a column featuring the most popular items in the library and current news. From the home page, as with all five pages, there is a conveniently located and intuitive search bar where you can search by full text, keyword, title, author, and more. There is also an advanced searching option with Boolean operators and limiters such as publication type



(book, journal, report, paper, and study type), topic, region, country, and publication date. Another convenient element is an automatic search history record that is created from past searches and the option to save searches.

Three of the five main sections, Regions, Topics, and Collections, offer different ways to search or browse *The World Bank eLibrary* collection. The Regions Page gives you the option to browse six world regions for literature: Africa; Europe & Central Asia; the Middle East & North Africa; East Asia & Pacific; Latin America & Caribbean; and South Asia. If you want more region-specific literature, you can browse over 300 alphabetically organized countries and economies.

The Topics page is broken up into twenty-eight categories from Agriculture to Gender to Transport, to name a few. Each of the topic browsing pages can be

organized by title or date. For researchers looking for the most current information on specific topics, this interface will be very convenient.

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