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# THE ASSASSINATION OF MALCOLM X

Government and NYPD Conspiracy?

Shortly after 3 p.m. on Sunday February 21, 1965, Malcolm X walked onto the stage of the Audubon Ballroom at 166th Street and Broadway in New York City. The audience of some 200 blacks and a half-dozen self-conscious whites stirred in anticipation. At the podium Benjamin

**REPORT BY ERIC NORDEN**

Goodman, an officer of Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity, wrapped up his introductory speech. "And now, brothers and sisters, I present to you a man who would give his life for you!"

The applause was thunderous. Malcolm walked slowly to the rostrum. His face was strained, tired, and his step lacked its usual spring. He held up his right hand. "As-salaam alaikum," he said in a hoarse voice. "Peace be unto you."

"Wa-alaikum salaam," some 200 voices responded in unison. "And unto you peace."

The tense silence awaiting Malcolm's opening words was suddenly shattered by a scuffle in the audience. "Get your hands out of my pocket, man!" someone shouted. Malcolm stepped out from behind the podium, and walked to the front of the stage. "Now, now, brothers, break it up," he said in a weary voice. In the back of the ballroom there was a soft *crump!* as a small incendiary device was triggered. Smoke spiraled into the air, and a woman screamed.

In the fourth row on the left-hand side of the ballroom a man stood up with a sawed-off .12-gauge J. C. Higgins shotgun. There was a muffled roar as he fired both barrels into Malcolm's chest. Simultaneously, two men in the first row jumped up—one with a Luger in his

hand, the other with a 45 automatic.

"They just stood up in front of me, coolly took aim and shot, just like a firing squad," a woman eyewitness in the third row reported. Malcolm stood erect for a few seconds under the hail of bullets and then crumpled to the floor.

"He just seemed to melt into the stage," another eyewitness, Mrs. Patricia Russell, a psychiatric social worker from New Rochelle, later recounted. "It seemed to me to take minutes, like a slow-motion film." As Malcolm lay on the stage, the gunmen in the first row emptied their weapons into his prone body.

In the audience pandemonium broke loose. Women threw themselves on top of their children. Men fell to the floor or scrambled for cover under the literature tables. Malcolm's wife, Betty, attending the meeting with the couple's four children, ran toward the stage, screaming hysterically: "They're killing my husband! They're killing my husband!"

One of Malcolm's aides rushed to a phone in the lobby and called Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center for an ambulance. The hospital was directly across the street from the ballroom, but 15 minutes later an ambulance still had not arrived. Several of Malcolm's guards ran out on foot and brought a stretcher back to the stage. Surrounded by sob-

bing men and women, they carried Malcolm across the street to the hospital. He was taken to the emergency operating room, where a team of doctors cut through his chest to massage his heart.

It was too late. Malcolm had 21 bullet wounds in his body. His heart was pulped by seven shotgun slugs from the initial blast, the aorta was destroyed, both lungs were punctured, and his spine was shattered. At 3:45 in the afternoon a hospital spokesman addressed the knots of milling blacks keeping vigil on the sidewalk: "The person you know as Malcolm X is dead."

It is now almost 14 years since Malcolm X was gunned down on the stage of the Audubon Ballroom. He died at the age of 39, barely a year after his final break with Elijah Muhammad's black-separatist sect, the Nation of Islam, popularly known as the Black Muslims. The last months of his life had been ones of personal and political upheaval, as Malcolm abandoned his old racist philosophy and moved tentatively toward a strategy of black-white alliance in the struggle for radical social change. Many observers believe that, had he lived, Malcolm would eventually have forged an alliance with his old rival, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—a coalition uniting Malcolm's natural constituency in the turbulent northern ghettos with the burgeoning civil-rights movement in the South. There were many black intellectuals and activists who envisioned such a united front as the only hope of bringing together the disparate elements of the black community into a potent political force.

But there were others, primarily within the intelligence establishment of the United States government, who viewed Malcolm as a subversive menace. These forces were determined, in the words of a secret FBI memo released under the Freedom of Information Act, to "prevent the rise of a messiah who could unite and electrify the militant black-nationalist movement." (This policy was institutionalized in FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's notorious and often-illegal counterintelligence program, COINTELPRO, and subsequently characterized by Dr. King's associate, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, as "a mandate to commit murder.")

Both those who loved Malcolm and those who feared and hated him were united on one point: He was the most charismatic and dynamic leader ever to spring from the black ghettos of

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## MALCOLM X ASSASSINATION

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America, and the one man who might eventually command the loyalty of that dispossessed black underclass that even Martin Luther King could not reach, much less galvanize into mass political action. Thus, Malcolm X's assassination was one of those pivotal historic turning points—like the murders of John and Robert Kennedy and of Dr. King himself—that have drastically altered the evolution of American society. It is therefore all the more disturbing that the actual circumstances of Malcolm's death have received so little attention in the media, and the very real possibilities of a conspiracy have been so rigorously excluded from public consideration.

Back in 1965, of course, most white Americans reacted predictably to Malcolm's death. It was generally assumed, before the actual assassins were even identified, that he had been murdered by the Black Muslims, his bitter enemies ever since his defection from the sect in early 1964. There was a comforting corollary to this theory, echoed in the press: Malcolm had preached "hate," and hate, of the Black Muslim variety, had in turn struck him down.

The idea that other, more powerful forces might have been involved was

simply unthinkable. This was, after all, three years before the King assassination and seven years before Watergate and the subsequent investigations into criminal activity by the CIA and FBI.

At the time of the shooting few American blacks, however, endorsed this automatic assumption of Muslim guilt. It was well-known that the Muslims feared and hated Malcolm, and would welcome his death, but they were not alone. Powerful forces, including the U.S. State Department, the CIA and the FBI, had been deeply alarmed by Malcolm's growing impact—particularly by his efforts to internationalize the American racial question by bringing it before the United Nations under the Human Rights Declaration.

It was not the Muslims who tapped Malcolm's phone, kept him under 24-hour surveillance in the U.S. and followed him coast-to-coast through his trips to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. If the Muslims had their reasons for wanting Malcolm dead, so did Washington—and American blacks knew it. Certain aspects of the assassination itself, and the events immediately preceding it, heightened doubts among politically sophisticated blacks that the attack had been a Muslim operation.

When Malcolm broke with the Black Muslims as a result of profound personal

and political differences, he formed a new movement, the Muslim Mosque, Inc., and another, broader group, the Organization for Afro-American Unity. The latter was a secular, politically oriented outfit open to the participation of religious and nonreligious blacks alike. Malcolm was breaking the chains of Muslim separatism and was headed on a course of political activism. He was already a household word in America, nationally known as the most radical of black leaders—a bogeyman for complacent whites and "Establishment" Negro forces, but a symbol of freedom and independence to a growing number of ghetto blacks.

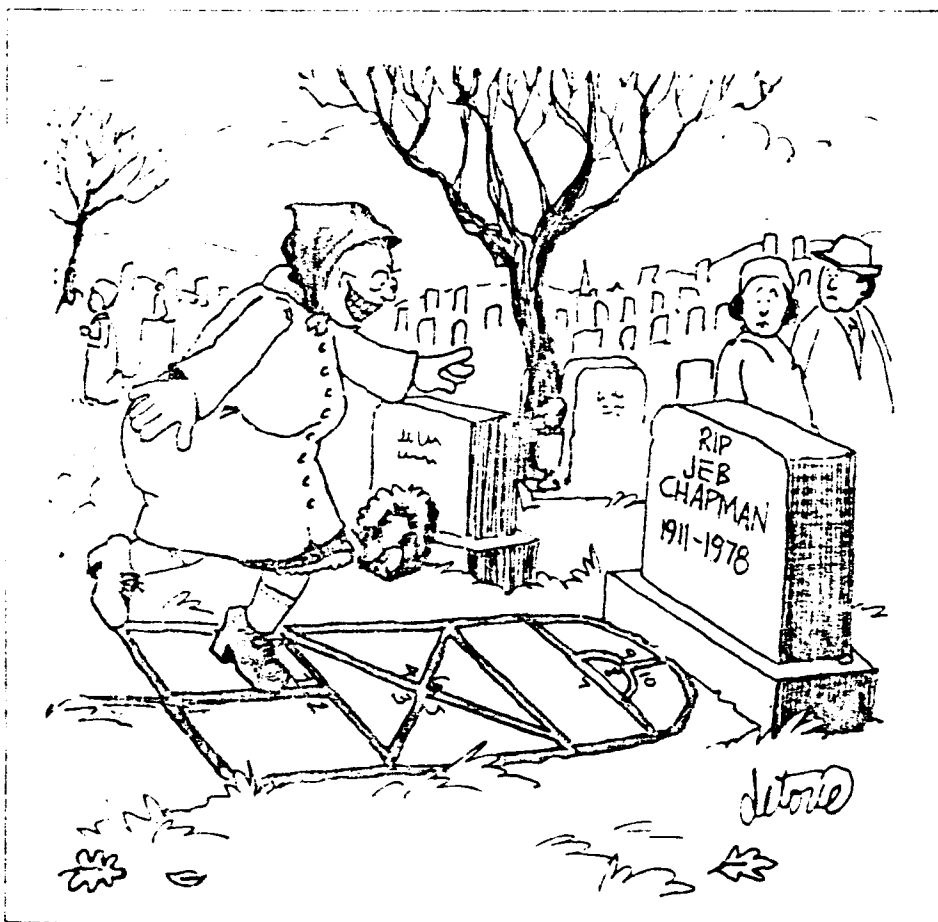
Somewhat to his own surprise, he soon discovered that his reputation was not confined to the United States. In April 1964 Malcolm made a pilgrimage to Mecca, where he was greeted in the Holy City as a major world figure, entertained by King Faisal and introduced to leading Islamic religious authorities and Saudi government officials. His experience in Mecca was one Malcolm would never forget. His contact with other, nonblack, Moslem pilgrims completely changed his views on racism and the possibility of black-white brotherhood.

In a long, passionate letter to his aides at the Muslim Mosque he expressed his new viewpoint: "I have never before seen *real* and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color. . . . In the past, yes, I have made sweeping indictments of *all* white people. I never will be guilty of that again—as I know now that some white people *are* truly sincere, that some truly are capable of being brotherly toward a black man. The true Islam has shown me that a blanket indictment of *all* white people is as wrong as when whites make blanket indictments against blacks. . . ." Malcolm's emphasis.

But Malcolm's expanding horizons did not assuage the anxieties of those in Washington who viewed him as a dangerous demagogue. They recognized that his new attitude was not only more humane but also infinitely more sophisticated. Apart from the moral and religious aspects of the problem, Malcolm was now saying that racism was an inherent component of the American system. Instead of scattering his shots at all whites, Malcolm was beginning to train his sights on the political and economic administration of the United States.

The alarm in Washington became especially acute late in April 1964 when Malcolm flew from Mecca and began a tour of several African countries. One

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... he was astonished by the warmth of his reception.

In the summer of 1964 he made another, more extended trip to Africa, spending 18 weeks touring the continent and conferring with African leaders. Malcolm visited Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Guinea and Algeria. He met with President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Prime Minister Milton Obote of Uganda, Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, President Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania, President Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, President Kwame Nkrumah of

Ghana and President Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea.

Washington was deeply alarmed by Malcolm's African activities. His biting denunciation of the U.S. government's inactivity on civil rights, coupled with his growing attacks on "American imperialism," was stirring up anti-U.S. sentiment across Africa. Particularly resented was his maneuvering to bring the racial question before the United Nations—a move that, if successful, could have been Washington's most humiliating cold-war propaganda reversal since the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961.

In a domestic context Washington saw Malcolm as a long-range threat: He was widely popular with the black masses, but plagued by organizational and recruiting problems that reduced his political effectiveness. But in foreign affairs Malcolm was an imminent and serious danger; more than any other single factor he was responsible for the growing suspicion and fear with which many African countries viewed Washington's intentions.

Washington did not accept this threat to its Third World relations with equanimity. Malcolm X had become a marked man.

Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, collaborated on Malcolm's autobiography. He reports that "in Washington, D.C., and New York City powerful civic, private and governmental agencies and individuals were only interested in what Malcolm X was saying about and were speculating upon what he would say, and possibly do, when he returned to America. In upstate New York, I received a telephone call from a close friend who said he had been asked to ask me if I would come to New York City on an appointed day to meet with [a very high government official] who was interested in Malcolm X.

"I did fly down to the City. My friend accompanied me to the offices of a large private foundation well-known for its activities and donations in the civil-rights area. I met the foundation's president, and he introduced me to the Justice Department Civil Rights Section head at the time, Burke Marshall. Marshall was chiefly interested in Malcolm X's finances, particularly how his extensive traveling since his Black Muslim ouster had been paid for."

While Malcolm was in Cairo to request the African summit conference's backing of his U.N. move, the *New York Times*' M.S. Handler reported from Washington: "The State Department and the Justice Department have begun to take an interest in Malcolm's cam-

paign to convince African states to raise the question of persecution of American Negroes at the United Nations. . . . This issue, officials say, would be of service to critics of the United States, Communist and non-Communist, and contribute to the undermining of the position the United States has asserted for itself as the leader of the West in the advocacy of human rights. . . ."

Black attorney and civil-rights activist Milton Henry, who accompanied Malcolm on his second African trip, remembers: "We were trailed wherever we went. There was one agent especially who irritated Malcolm. We couldn't eat without him being at the next table."

Malcolm himself observed on his return: "Throughout my trip I was, of course, aware that I was under constant surveillance."

Henry warned Malcolm that his move to internationalize the domestic racial situation by bringing up the question at the U.N. could invite the most terrible retaliation. "In formulating this policy," Henry says today, "in hitting the nerve center of America, he also signed his own death warrant."

There is a strong possibility that Malcolm's pursuers did not restrict their activities to surveillance. In July 1964 Malcolm was in Cairo to address the African summit conference. In a memorandum to the conference he violently attacked Washington's domestic and foreign policy. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo engaged in delicate behind-the-scenes negotiations to have Malcolm barred from addressing the conference, but its efforts were coldly snubbed by both the Egyptian government and the conference organizers. Washington's efforts to silence Malcolm then appear to have passed from the diplomatic to the intelligence apparatus. Their efforts came closer to success.

On July 23, 1964, the day before he was to deliver his speech to the summit conference, Malcolm dined in the Hilton's main restaurant. Shortly after dinner Malcolm collapsed in his hotel room, suffering from severe abdominal pains. He was rushed to a hospital where his stomach was pumped.

Analysis of the contents disclosed a "toxic substance." Its nature was undisclosed, but food poisoning was ruled out. Malcolm was hospitalized for a day and a half, but against his doctor's advice he managed to attend the closing sessions of the summit conference. He was shaky for several days afterward. According to Milton Henry, Malcolm believed someone had deliberately poisoned him. Malcolm tried to find the

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waiter who had served him, but he had disappeared. In discussing the incident with Milton Henry, Malcolm stressed the fact that CIA men were all around him in Cairo." He later told Henry: "Washington had a lot to do with it."

After Malcolm returned to the United States he continued to cultivate his overseas contacts, and by the fall of 1964 his plan to haul Washington before the international bar of justice was in high gear. He had established close working relationships with the U.N. delegations of several African nations, and was a familiar figure in the Delegates' Lounge.

In November 1964, when the U.S. intervened in the Congolese civil war by dropping Belgian paratroops into Stanleyville, Malcolm took the lead in whipping up opposition to the intervention. George Breitman, in a speech entitled "Malcolm X, the Man and His Ideas," said: "The State Department credited him, or rather blamed him, for a good part of the strong stand against U.S. imperialism taken by African nations in the United Nations at the time of the latest atrocities in the Congo. As he knew, the CIA and similar agencies take an interest in what the State Department doesn't like."

As his anti-Washington activities grew more widespread and effective, a few of Malcolm's associates and relatives began to warn him of the danger of government retaliation. He had been under surveillance since he broke with the Muslims, but now there were as many as three different agents shadowing him at one time. His phones were tapped—"On my home telephone, if I said 'I'm going to bomb the Empire State Building,' I guarantee you in five minutes it would be surrounded"—and the homes of such associates as Alex Haley were bugged.

Malcolm tried to take the situation in stride, and even joked about it. He began to open his meetings with the words: "Honored guests, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies; also ABC and CBS and FBI and CIA." But he knew that powerful forces were after him. His widow Betty told this author, "He believed that the power structure in Washington wanted him dead. He once said, 'If anybody kills me, it'll be the police surrounding this house.' He was followed wherever he went: it was a constant thing."

As Malcolm's U.N. plan moved toward fruition, his sister, Mrs. Ella Collins, asked him if he knew to what lengths Washington might go to stop him. "I asked him if he really recognized the importance of his attempt to go to the United Nations," Mrs. Collins

told this author. "He said to me, 'You know, Ella, maybe I haven't fully realized how vital this thing is to the government.' I told him that to take a step of this kind he needed protection, real protection, that he felt secure with. But he couldn't even trust his own bodyguards. I've been informed by reliable sources that there were CIA agents right in the organization, and I've been given their names. Malcolm knew the dangers, but he said he had to go ahead."

One of the agencies most active in its pursuit of Malcolm was J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, which by the mid-'60s was also conducting a secret and vicious vendetta against Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—a smear-and-sabotage campaign that many observers believe led directly or indirectly to King's assassination in 1968. [Editor's Note: See Mark Lane's report on the murder of Dr. King in November's HUSTLER.]

Malcolm was a prime target of Hoover's COINTELPRO program, which officially sanctioned burglaries "black-bag jobs" in bureau parlance. COINTELPRO's aims were set forth in a memo from Hoover: "FBI agents in the country: 'The purpose of this counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit or otherwise neutralize the activities of black-nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership and supporters....'"

Under COINTELPRO, FBI agents were instructed to "exploit through counterintelligence techniques the organizational and personal conflicts of the leadership of the groups" and whenever possible to "capitalize upon existing conflicts between competing black-nationalist organizations." Primary aims of the program were to "prevent the coalition of militant black-nationalist groups," to "prevent militant nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability" and to frustrate the plans of such groups to "consolidate their forces or recruit new or youthful adherents."

Malcolm frequently tried to tell friends in the press—white and black alike—about the extent of the government's surveillance of him, but most were skeptical, and not a few secretly feared he was succumbing to paranoia. The counterintelligence program against King, Malcolm and other black leaders and organizations was still a closely guarded FBI secret in the mid-'60s, and the CIA's assassination plans against Cuba's Fidel Castro and the Congo's Patrice Lumumba would not be

public knowledge for another decade. The more Malcolm muttered about government agents and informers, the less he was heard. And when Malcolm hinted darkly that the CIA or FBI might have launched a plot that would lead to his death, he elicited in response only raised eyebrows and embarrassed evasions. This, after all, was *America*. Could Malcolm be cracking up?

Despite his misgivings, Malcolm persisted in his efforts to galvanize international support for his move to indict Washington before the United Nations. Early in February 1965 he flew to London to deliver the closing address at the first conference of the Council of African Organizations. From London he was scheduled to fly to Paris to speak before the Congress of African Students. When his plane landed at Orly Airport on February 9, Malcolm was told he could not disembark. The French government had branded him "an undesirable person," and he was ordered to leave the country immediately.

Malcolm had visited France just three months earlier without experiencing any difficulty, and he was baffled by the expulsion order. In a transcript of a tape-recorded telephone call between Malcolm in London and the Paris student group, made available to this author, Malcolm said: "I was surprised when I arrived in Paris and was prohibited from landing. I thought that if there were any country in Europe that was liberal in its approach to the problem it was France. This is why I was shocked when they told me I couldn't land. They didn't give me any excuse for it. I believe the [U.S.] State Department is responsible."

In view of the State Department's unrelenting hostility to Malcolm, his assumption of its culpability is understandable. But President Charles de Gaulle's government was hardly noted for its receptivity to State Department *dicta*. Furthermore, information that has subsequently come to light points a finger in quite another direction.

In April 1965 my interest in Malcolm's death was intensified by a highly placed North African diplomat. This official, who insisted on anonymity, said his country's intelligence apparatus had been quietly informed by the French Department of Alien Documentation and Counter-Espionage that the CIA planned to murder Malcolm X, and France feared he might be liquidated on its soil. The diplomat's country, which enjoyed close relations with France, was so informed because Malcolm had visited it on prior occasions and might possibly have flown

there for his expulsion from France.

"Now the CIA is beginning to murder its own citizens now," the diplomat told me privately.

On Saturday, February 12, 1965, Malcolm arrived at New York's Kennedy International Airport from London. Ten hours later, at 2:45 a.m. Sunday morning, as he and his family slept in their modest home in East Elmhurst, Queens, firebombs were hurled through the windows. The four bombs were carefully distributed so as to seal off any escape exit, but one glanced off a window pane and exploded harmlessly on the front lawn. The house was gutted, but Malcolm and his family narrowly escaped.

Subsequent to the bombing came a thinly veiled attempt by the New York Police Department to show that Malcolm had firebombed his own home "as a publicity stunt." For some reason the police did not want the public to take the threat to Malcolm's life seriously, and police officials insinuated to reporters—"off the record"—that it was all a hoax staged by Malcolm himself.

The only evidence for this claim was a whisky bottle full of gasoline found in a bedroom—and, in fact, pointed out to the police by Malcolm's wife after the fire. Malcolm suspected that the police had planted the gasoline to discredit him and also to abort press and public demands that he be placed under tight security protection in order to avert another attack on his life.

"When they planted the gasoline, I knew it was no longer the Muslims," Malcolm's sister Ella told this author. "Only the police could have planted it, because as the fire died down the neighbors went into the house to get some clothes for the children from their rooms—what hadn't been burned. And none of them saw this jug of gasoline when they took things from the baby's dresser. And then the police squad arrived and took over the house, and then they produced the gasoline."

Malcolm's widow corroborates her sister-in-law's version of events. "Only someone in the uniform of a fireman or policeman could have planted the bottle of gasoline on my baby's dresser," she told me. "It was to make it appear as if we had bombed our own home."

Malcolm's suspicions were confirmed by a black fire marshal who secretly met him at Rochester Airport after a speaking engagement and confirmed that "a man in a police uniform" had been seen by firemen bringing the bottle into the house after the bombing. Malcolm promptly called a press conference at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem and told

reporters. "We are demanding an immediate investigation by the FBI of the bombing. We feel a conspiracy has been entered into at the local level, with some local police and firemen." Malcolm continued, "The police in this country know what is going on—this conspiracy leads to my death." He also charged that Washington knew what was going on, and revealed that he had sent a telegram to Secretary of State Dean Rusk lodging an official protest, charging that the government "had no intention to help me or protect my life."

The firebombing and the peculiar circumstances of the planted gasoline convinced Malcolm that forces far more potent than the Muslims were on his trail. A few days before the assassination he spoke to Alex Haley for the last time. "His voice was hoarse and he seemed agitated," Haley recalls. "It was obvious that he was under a great strain. He wanted to tell me something. He said that there were other groups and interests beside the Muslims who were seeking his death." Malcolm said to Haley, "I know what [the Muslims] can do and what they can't. I trained them. Things have gone beyond the Muslims."

Ella Collins told me: "On the day before his death, which was a Saturday, we spent the day together. He discussed the fact that the way his house was bombed and his being barred from France led him to believe that the plotters of his death were much bigger than the Muslims." She again warned her brother to leave the country while he could. She reports that Malcolm reluctantly agreed, primarily in order to safeguard his family.

"I said to him then, and I believe now," Mrs. Collins said, "that his move to take the race issue to the U.N. would cause his death. . . . To take the American black problem into the United Nations, after gaining respect from the Afro-Asian and European world, this would have brought about a day of reckoning for the United States government. And this was why he was killed. Had he not mentioned going into the United Nations, they would have allowed him to live, maybe later finding some way to incriminate him and send him to jail to get him out of the way."

His last words to his sister were: "You pray for me, Ella, because I firmly believe now I need it more than I've ever needed it before. So you ask Allah to guide me, because I feel they may have me doomed for this day."

"Not this day," his sister told him.

"Yes, this day," Malcolm said quietly.

Four hours later he was dead.

As the police investigation of Malcolm's murder got under way, there was a bizarre sequel to the assassination. Leon 4X Ameer, Malcolm's New England representative, traveled from Boston to New York immediately after the shooting to confer with Malcolm's aides. He charged that Malcolm had been killed by "the power structure" and urged that a mediator confer with Elijah Muhammad and members of Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) to bring the two organizations closer together. There were some indications that Ameer might be Malcolm's successor in the OAAU. (A week before his death Malcolm had warned, "If my life is worth three cents, then Leon's is worth two cents.")

On March 13, 1965, Ameer delivered a scathing speech before the Boston Militant Labor Forum, a branch of the Socialist Workers Party. "I have facts in my possession as to who *really* killed Malcolm," he told the meeting. "The killers aren't from Chicago [Muslim headquarters]. They're from Washington." He promised to hold a press conference in the near future to reveal evidence proving the "power structure" responsibility, including documents and tape recordings he had been given by Malcolm before his assassination.

"Nobody believed Malcolm X when he said his life was in danger," Ameer claimed, "and now I'm in the same predicament. I know my life is worth nothing." The next morning his body was discovered by a chambermaid in his room at Boston's Sherry Biltmore Hotel. He had died of strangulation.

The police initially announced that the cause of Ameer's death was an epileptic seizure. But Ameer's widow revealed that her husband had had a complete medical checkup just one month before his death and that "there was no hint of epilepsy." On the basis of this new medical evidence the Boston police promptly changed its story. Ameer, the police now claimed, had actually died of an overdose of Doriden, a powerful sedative. It was, "obviously," a suicide.

Ella Collins, who lives in Boston and who knew Ameer well, told me: "I firmly believe that Leon Ameer was assassinated. In Boston everything was kept very quiet. The police hushed it all up." Mrs. Collins added, "I spoke to his wife on the telephone. She said that she'd been married to him for eleven years, and he'd never had an epileptic fit of any kind. But that's what the police kept telling her did it."

The death of Leon Ameer was an object lesson to Malcolm's other aides.

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Earl Grant, who had in his possession most of Malcolm's tapes and files, fled with them to Ghana. James Shabazz, his number-two man, dropped out of sight. Reuben Francis, his secretary, who had been indicted for shooting one of the alleged assassins, went into hiding. Eight months later Francis was arrested by the FBI while the trial of Malcolm's three alleged murderers was in progress, but he was never allowed to testify despite the vital importance of his evidence. After the trial he dropped out of sight; his present whereabouts, and the disposition of the charges against him, are a complete mystery. For those who had been close to Malcolm, and who possessed inside knowledge of the events surrounding his death, silence seemed equivalent to survival.

The trial of Malcolm's three accused assassins raised more questions than it answered. One of the defendants, Talmadge Hayer, also known as Thomas Hagan, was captured on the spot after he was shot and wounded by Reuben Francis. Hayer had a prior police record but no known links to the Nation of Islam or to any other black-nationalist group.

Two Black Muslim activists, Thomas

15X Johnson and Norman 3X Butler, were also arrested and indicted for the murder. Both men were members of the Harlem Mosque. Johnson, a burly unemployed house painter, belonged to the Fruit of Islam, the movement's private army. Butler, a tall, muscular karate expert, was a lieutenant in the Fruit of Islam and the Mosque's chief enforcer. Six weeks before Malcolm's murder he and Johnson had been arrested for shooting another Muslim defector, Benjamin Brown, through the back.

From the inception of the case against Hayer, Johnson and Butler, serious questions were raised as to the conduct of the police and prosecution—questions that bear directly not only on the course of the trial but also on the circumstances of Malcolm's death. One of the most disturbing facts to emerge from the tangled skein of events surrounding Malcolm's murder was that he could not have been killed without the assistance of the New York Police Department. Whether that assistance was rendered through gross negligence or was the result of a deliberate conspiracy can only be determined by a new and impartial investigation.

Police hostility toward Malcolm, and its indifference to the attacks on his life, have always disturbed Malcolm's

associates. His biographer, Peter Goldman, has written that "the authorities in New York and Washington did consider him a dangerous man and... few tears were spilled in government at any level when he died." Goldman found "unsettling elements in the behavior of the police toward Malcolm during his lifetime—their constant and intrusive surveillance and their extraordinary detachment in the face of sound intelligence that his life was in imminent danger." Regardless of whether the police refusal to offer Malcolm adequate protection stemmed from dereliction of duty or had a more sinister origin, it led directly to his death.

During all previous meetings at the Audubon Ballroom the building had swarmed with police, assigned both to protect Malcolm and to stave off any clashes between his followers and those of Elijah Muhammad. But at the meeting on Sunday, February 21, one week after Malcolm's house had been fire-bombed, the usual police detail was nowhere in evidence.

The police had also refused to give Malcolm even the most rudimentary protection in the weeks before the assassination. Ordinarily when a man's house is bombed and he and his family are almost incinerated, police protection is automatic and unsolicited. Except, of

court when the man is someone such as Malcolm X. As Alex Haley has commented, "During the week preceding the assassination, Malcolm X complained repeatedly that the police would not take his requests for protection seriously."

If there were no uniformed policemen to protect Malcolm, there were at least three plainclothesmen in the audience—members of the Bureau of Special Services and Investigation (BOSS), the NYPD's top-secret "countersubversion" squad. The role of BOSS in the assassination and the events preceding it deserves special scrutiny.

As Peter Goldman has revealed, "Malcolm had become a job for the men from BOSS... a secret intelligence unit whose operations were unknown even to the rest of the department." According to Goldman, "BOSS's heart was in its clandestine-operations section. Like any intelligence agency, BOSS used paid informants but understood their limitations, among them the possibility that they might make up information to keep their wages coming in. It vastly preferred its own undercover operatives—who were commonly recruited out of town, secretly inducted into the force, equipped with a cover address, job and identity, and set afloat to establish themselves in the community. There was nothing to identify them as policemen even to other policemen; their folders and ID photos were held secretly at BOSS headquarters, and they never set foot in police stations unless they were arrested in the line of duty."

One of those undercover operatives was Gene Roberts, ostensibly a Bronx clothing salesman, who infiltrated Malcolm's organization early in 1964. According to Goldman, "The charter of the BOSS agent was to work his way inside the target group, make himself constantly available, volunteer for the nastiest jobs and get as close to the center as he could; the extent to which this required participating in and even promoting precisely those activities the department was worried about was left to his discretion and his daily covert contacts with his control. Roberts succeeded admirably in his mission; the brothers got to calling him 'Brother Gene' and admitted him to the circle of two-dozen or so true believers who served Malcolm as staff, advance men and bodyguards."

Roberts stayed close to Malcolm until the very end—deepening suspicions about possible police complicity in the assassination. As a BOSS spokesman revealed while defending the department against charges of negligence:

"We did have our guy near him, Roberts, and I'm sure he was armed—an automatic or a Derringer, maybe, not a police weapon." In fact, a photograph published in *Life* magazine reveals Roberts bending over Malcolm immediately after the shooting, apparently giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Intriguingly, there is an obvious bullet hole in Roberts's jacket, and a gunlike bulge in one pocket. "We all almost fainted when we saw that," the BOSS spokesman later remarked. "However, the hole may have been caused by a stray bullet from one of the assassins' guns."

Almost 14 years after the murder Roberts's role was discussed by none other than Watergate bagman and Nixon "dirty tricks" expert Anthony "Tony U" Ulasewicz, who in 1965 was a top operative in BOSS. "I had guys in everywhere," Ulasewicz revealed. "You know that [*Life* magazine] picture of the Malcolm X assassination? Well, the black who was giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was my plant. That's the way we did it in those days. We infiltrated." From the Audubon Ballroom to Watergate...

On the basis of eyewitness identification, Roberts was subsequently brought in for questioning by the regular New York police detail investigating Malcolm's murder, but was released after intercession by BOSS headquarters. "We really took him over the coals," one detective recalled. "I don't mean physically, but we were putting pressure on the bodyguards, and we put pressure on him. And then the next thing you know we get a phone call, and we found out who he was. So we couldn't put pressure on him anymore." Peter Goldman, who won the confidence of the cops working on the Malcolm X case, wrote, "Some of the police were puzzled that the other brothers never figured Roberts out after that—never guessed why he seemed suddenly immune when they were being called in repeatedly. [The police] were equally puzzled about how oddly fuzzy Roberts seemed to be about detail, given that he was a cop..."

Another mysterious aspect of Roberts's behavior involves the disappearance of a vital piece of evidence in the case—one of the murder weapons, a Luger pistol abandoned at the scene. Charles X Blackwell testified before the grand jury that he had handed the gun over to Malcolm's trusted aide "Brother Gene"—Gene Roberts. From that point on the murder weapon disappeared, and was never introduced into evidence at the trial. If BOSS was acting to protect

Roberts's cover, it succeeded, but at the price of obstructing justice. Some of Malcolm's associates suspect that something far more sinister was involved in the Luger cover-up.

Despite the vital importance of his eyewitness testimony in the trial of Hayer, Johnson and Butler in January 1966, Gene Roberts was never called to the stand by either the prosecution or defense, and as one detective later stated, "Nobody else from BOSS was ever brought forward" either. Roberts's cover remained intact for another four years, until he surfaced in 1970 as the star witness against 13 New York Black Panthers accused of conspiring to blow up Bloomingdale's and Macy's department stores, the Bronx Botanical Gardens and other selected targets. Roberts had apparently infiltrated the Panther as successfully as he had Malcolm's organization.

There was one embarrassing moment for Roberts in the course of his testimony at the Panther trial, when defense attorney Gerald Lefcourt inquired if the witness had been at the scene of Malcolm's assassination. Roberts replied that he had, and Lefcourt abruptly asked him: "Did you do it?"

"No, I did not," Roberts, obviously flustered, replied.

"Isn't it a fact that you helped murder Malcolm X?" Lefcourt persisted.

"No, it isn't," Roberts replied. From that moment on he appeared shaken and oddly defensive, and the Panthers' attorneys had a relatively easy time discrediting his testimony. The defendants were eventually acquitted, and Roberts returned underground. His whereabouts today are unknown.

Throughout the trial of the three alleged assassins the New York Police Department and the District Attorney's Office collaborated effectively to prevent the introduction of any evidence that would raise the possibility of complicity in the assassination on the part of BOSS or federal intelligence agencies. Their task was made difficult by the fact that while the case against Hayer was virtually ironclad—when arrested at the scene he had in his pocket a clip of .38-caliber bullets that matched one of the murder weapons, and his thumbprint was found on the remains of the diversionary incendiary device—the case against Johnson and Butler was far less convincing. Both men had unsavory records as Muslim "enforcers" and could reasonably be expected to have wished Malcolm dead. But there was no material evidence linking either man to either the murder scene or the murder weapons, and the case against them



...ed... of... witnesses...  
testimony... and... circumstances...  
... evidence. There was also another  
problem for the prosecution, even granting  
the guilt of all three men—the  
whereabouts of the missing assassin or  
assassins.

The prosecution contended that Butler and Hayer had created the diversion in the center of the auditorium, while Johnson was the man firing the shotgun. Butler and Hayer then were supposed to have run toward the stage, firing with pistols at Malcolm's prone body.

However, all reliable eyewitness evidence indicates that at least *four* men were actually involved—one who caused the diversion in the middle of the ballroom but who didn't fire a shot, another who fired a shotgun from the fourth row, and two men in the first row who emptied their pistols into Malcolm as he fell to the stage.

There was one way to conclusively determine the actual number of assassins: Peter King reported in the *New York Times* on February 25, 1965, that "the police were in possession of motion picture... that had been taken at the Auditorium Ballroom... when the killing took place." These films would have been invaluable evidence—but there has been no further mention of them by the press or police. They have dropped out of sight as suddenly and thoroughly as the fugitive entrusted to the safekeeping of BOSS agent Gene Roberts.

According to Peter Goldman, there is "ground for believing that the case was tidied up for trial—that, since only three suspects had been arrested, the official scenario of the assassination was streamlined to include only three participants... At the trial, for symmetry's sake, the state made the case that Hayer, Johnson and Butler by themselves murdered Malcolm and that nobody else was involved: nobody, that is, except whoever commissioned them to do it. None of the investigators believed this. Their guesses at the number of men actually involved in the execution ranged from six to seven—three guns, plus one or two people to create diversions and maybe get in the way of the bodyguards, plus one or two getaway drivers... The obvious profit in a tidying-up... was that the authorities would be spared the embarrassment of acknowledging that at least one member of the team that murdered Malcolm had got away and was—is—still at large."

Throughout the Hayer-Johnson-Butler trial the "official version" of the assassination was further undermined

by the police and prosecution's tactical manipulation of witnesses and active suborning of perjury. They had little choice. To avoid the implication of a larger conspiracy it was vital to paint all three defendants as fanatical Black Muslims engaged in a religious vendetta. The trouble was, there was no evidence introduced at the trial to indicate that Hayer was a Muslim, although he had once attended a karate demonstration at the Newark Mosque. And the case Assistant District Attorney Vincent Dermody presented against Johnson and Butler was incredibly weak.

No material evidence linked them to the crime; their guilt rested solely on the testimony of ten witnesses who appeared to have been carefully handpicked by the District Attorney's Office from among the 119 people interviewed by the police. Four of these witnesses identified Johnson and six identified Butler. The testimony of every one of these prosecution witnesses was riddled with evasions, distortions and outright lies. Moreover, it appeared as if they had all been manipulated on the witness stand throughout by the District Attorney's Office, and those most important to the D.A.'s case had been arrested on a variety of trumped-up charges prior to their testimony. Out on bail at the time of the trial, such witnesses knew that their fate depended on how closely they cooperated with the prosecution.

The most telling of the witnesses against Johnson and Butler were Cary 2X Thomas and Charles X Blackwell, both of whom corroborated the prosecution's case in every detail. In the chaos that accompanied the shooting both Thomas and Blackwell claimed to have seen everything happen just as the prosecution said it did and identified Hayer, Johnson and Butler as the three assassins. Thomas and Blackwell also perjured themselves repeatedly and were forced to admit it when confronted with their earlier, and contradictory, grand-jury testimony.

But the strongest witness for Johnson and Butler was their own co-defendant, Talmadge Hayer. On February 28, 1966, Hayer took the witness stand and, in a dramatic move, confessed his guilt and absolved Johnson and Butler of any involvement in the murder. Hayer told a stunned courtroom he had "decided to tell the truth" after a brief conversation with his two co-defendants in the "bullpen" adjacent to the courtroom. When the judge asked Hayer why he had decided to confess, the defendant replied simply, "I just want the truth to be known—that Butler and Johnson didn't have anything to do with this

crime. Because I was there, I know what happened and I know the people who were there."

Hayer revealed that he had been promised a couple of thousand dollars for the job by a go-between who approached him in Harlem and who "was not a Muslim." When Assistant District Attorney Dermody scornfully asked Hayer why he did not reveal the name of this paymaster, he replied that "If Mr. Williams [Joseph Williams, a court-appointed defense attorney] had kept asking me on one point, he would have found out." Dermody dropped his questioning like a hot potato and—incidentally—Williams did not backtrack and try to elicit the specific question or area of questioning that had somehow touched on the identity of the organizer of the assassination, a point crucial to the fate of his client.

According to Hayer's testimony, there were four people involved: "Two people sitting in the front row, man with the shotgun—short dark man with the beard—sitting around the fourth row from the front; man in the back; one man starts commotion, says 'Get your hand out of my pocket'; guards from the stage go after this man, man with shotgun shoots Malcolm; two men in the front row shoot pistols."

Hayer testified he had known the man with the shotgun for about one year at the time they participated in the assassination. He said the man was dark-skinned, very husky and had a beard; Johnson, who has been accused of firing the shotgun, has a very light complexion. Hayer explained he was willing to describe the man because he had already been described by Ernest Greene, an earlier defense witness.

Hayer's confession is all the more convincing because his account of the assassination is the only one advanced at the trial that corresponds to the initial press reports and to the testimony of reliable eyewitnesses. Unlike the prosecution's case, which artfully twisted evidence to conform to its own thesis, Hayer's account of the murder is fully consonant with the facts as reported by eyewitnesses and newsmen at the murder scene.

It also answers the major question pertaining to Johnson's and Butler's guilt—how could two men, well-known "enforcers" for the Muslim Mosque, enter an auditorium closely guarded by their former comrades-in-arms who had defected with Malcolm? Why were they not recognized and ejected, or at the very least frisked for weapons? Incredibly, this simple question, vital to Johnson's and Butler's defense, was

never once asked of any of the witnesses by attorneys for the two defendants.

Thomas Hayer, of course, supplied the answer—neither Johnson nor Butler was ever in the Audubon Ballroom.

Hayer's testimony, by denying Muslim guilt, undermined the prosecution's theory that Malcolm's death had resulted from a pure and simple religious feud. At one point Dermody asked, "This person who approached you and others to do this assassination—was this person, to your knowledge, a member of the Black Muslims?"

Hayer replied, "No, he was not."

Near the end of his questioning Dermody asked, "What was your motive?"

Hayer said "Money."

Despite Hayer's dramatic confession and the testimony of defense witnesses that Johnson and Butler had been in their homes at the time of the murder, the jury chose to accept the D.A.'s case, and on March 11, 1966, Hayer, Johnson and Butler were found guilty and were later sentenced to life imprisonment.

There is no conclusive proof linking American intelligence agencies to Malcolm's murder. But a pattern of persistent government hostility toward Malcolm emerges throughout the last year of his life, a pattern that demands serious investigation.

George Breitman, one of the most perceptive white analysts of Malcolm's career and author of *The Last Year of Malcolm X*, believes that the assassination was the result of secret collaboration between the federal government and BOSS. According to Breitman, "If the New York police were involved in the assassination, and nothing said or done at the trial or in the 11 years since the crime has absolved them of this charge, that involvement could not have been on their own initiative, but must have resulted from the decision and direction of the government in Washington. . . ."

Malcolm X's assassination, indeed, may have set the stage for the elimination three years later of his one-time rival, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There was a strong possibility that the continued political evolution of the two might have brought them together as leaders of a powerful black mass movement aligned with the antiwar forces that were destined to convulse the nation.

As Jesse Jackson commented about the previously mentioned FBI COINTELPRO memo, it constituted official sanction for a clandestine "search-and-destroy mission" against militant black leaders. Jackson strongly believes the

murders of both Malcolm X and Dr. King "were consistent with the stated purpose of the memo to prevent the rise of a messiah."

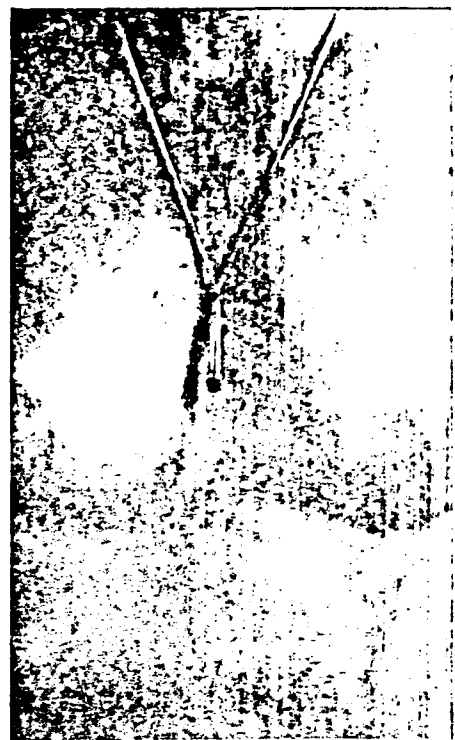
Before the FBI reluctantly released that particular document under the Freedom of Information Act, it carefully censored the names of groups and individuals targeted for attack. As Baxter Smith indicated in his article "The FBI Plot Against the Black Movement," by word-count and spacing it is easy to fill in the deleted letters. Thus, in the "black messiah" memo, written some time after Malcolm's assassination, the vital line would read: "[Malcolm X] might have been such a 'messiah'; he is the martyr of the movement today." The following sentence would then read: "[King could] be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed 'obedience' to 'white, liberal doctrines' [nonviolence] and embrace black nationalism." This memo was written four weeks before King's assassination on April 4, 1968.

Malcolm X has been dead for almost 14 years. M. S. Handler of the *New York Times*, who knew him well, has observed: "I've met all kinds of people—people of power, people who shape people's minds. Malcolm was the only man of genius in public life I ever met. He believed the only way to move the country was to understand the dynamics of change. No cultist understands this. Only a political man does."

Malcolm X's murder was a political murder. Its true authors are still unknown. The roles of the New York Police Department, the FBI, the CIA and the U.S. State Department all demand impartial investigation, either by an expanded House Select Committee on Assassinations or by an independent panel of jurists. The verdict may absolve the authorities of direct complicity or condemn them as co-conspirators. But in the absence of a new probe, the doubts and suspicions that have persisted since 1965 will continue to fester, and further poison the political and racial atmosphere.

Malcolm X never received justice in life. He demands it in death.

At press time, Thomas Hayer (a.k.a. Thomas L. Hagan) had signed an affidavit claiming that Thomas 15X Johnson and Norman 3X Butler were not part of the Malcolm X assassination team. Instead, Hayer named four other men as the killers. William Kunstler, counsel for Johnson and Butler, submitted the affidavit along with other papers in an attempt to seek a new trial for his clients.



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