

The Second Assassination of Malcolm X: A Critical Review of Manning Marable's Biography

by

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Abstract

Despite the wealth of information and detail it delivers, Manning Marable's biography of Malcolm X contains segments which are shocking, indecent, slanderous and, for the most part, false. While the author has attempted to undermine the integrity and dignity of Malcolm X in many regards, his most outlandish allegations revolve around assertions that the African American activist was a homosexual, an adulterer, and a cuckold. Considering the gravity of such claims, one would have expected the biographer to base himself on sound sources. However, as this following critical review shall demonstrate, Marable's case against Malcolm is based more on fantasy than on fact. Since the publication of Marable's biography, over 100 articles have appeared in print, repeating the biographer's libelous allegations that Malcolm X was a misogynist, a gay prostitute, and the unfaithful husband of an unfaithful wife. These slanderous accusations have also been seized upon by the mass media as a whole which, with rare exception, has blindly accepted them as true without ever questioning their authenticity. By failing to follow the most fundamental of academic standards, and by circumventing the peer-review process, Marable has done a great deal of damage not only to the image of Malcolm X, but to the biographer's own scholarly reputation.

After great anticipation, the long-awaited release of Manning Marable's (1950-2011) biography of Malcolm X (1925-1965) has finally arrived, producing deep disappointment as opposed to critical acclaim. Titled *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-670-0220-5), the prodigious 594 page product contains 16 chapters, along with a prologue and an epilogue, with titles drawn mostly from quotations, including: "Up, You Mighty Race!," "The Legend of Detroit Red," "Becoming 'X,'" "They Don't Come Like the Minister," "Brother, a Minister *Has* to be Married," "The Hate that Hate Produced," "As Sure as God Made Green Apples," "From Prayer to Protest," "He was Developing Too Fast," "The Chickens Coming Home to Roost," "An Epiphany in the Hajj," "Do Something About Malcolm X," "In the Struggle for Dignity," "Such a Man is Worthy of Death," "Death Comes on Time," and "Life After Death."

Marketed as Manning Marable's "magnum opus" and the "definitive biography" of Malcolm X, the work is filled with more fantasy than fact. Herb Boyd, the author and journalist, stated that he found more than 25 major mistakes in the book, some of which were "absolutely egregious." In reality, the work is littered with masses of mistakes ranging from typos and incorrect page numbers in references to false or questionable information. Karl Evanzz, the author of *The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad* and *The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X* had denounced the work as an "abomination," a "fraud and a failure," as well as "a cavalcade of innuendo and logical fallacy." Rather than rely on trustworthy sources, the biographer makes all sorts of unsubstantiated allegations about Malcolm X based on rumors and gossip from the most specious of sources.

One of the most objectionable aspects of Marable's work is his allegation that Malcolm X was a homosexual. Considering the gravity of the matter, one would expect a serious scholar to provide a strong case based on positive proof. Marable, however, provides nothing more than circumstantial evidence to support his claims (66). According to Marable, Malcolm X worked as a "butler and occasional house worker" for William Paul Lennon, a wealthy 56-year-old white man (66). While working as Lennon's "male secretary," the author alleges that "something deeper than an employer-employee relationship developed" (66). To be blunt, the author asserts that Malcolm X became sexually involved with Lennon (96) and that "he participated in ... paid homosexual encounters" (66). While Malcolm does mention the "powder sessions" that took place at the home of a rich white man in his *Autobiography*, Marable claims that he "falsely attributed them to a character named Rudy" (66). In short, Marable alleges that "Rudy" was a fictitious character that Malcolm invented in order to disassociate himself with the homosexual activity he described and that "Malcolm was probably describing his own homosexual encounters with Paul Lennon" (66). However, as all authoritative accounts explain, "Rudy" appears to be the nickname that Malcolm created for Francis "Sonny" Brown to protect his identity in the same way that he employed the name "Sophia" as a cover for Bea Caragulian, his Armenian lover. According to Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis, Sonny did indeed exist (46). Whether he was "Rudy" cannot presently be confirmed. Jarvis also mentions that a certain "John R" belonged to their crew (46). Perhaps the "R" was short for "Rudy." In any event, the existence of "Rudy" can hardly be questioned. He was certainly not Malcolm's homosexual alter-ego.

Although Marable admits that "[t]here is no evidence from his prison record in Massachusetts or from his personal life after 1952 that he was actively homosexual" (66), he suggests that Malcolm suppressed his sexual orientation for the rest of his life. In fact, this allegation serves as a narrative thread throughout his biography. The author claims that Malcolm wrote several letters to Lennon while in prison (72, 73), and suggests that his gay white lover may have visited him during his incarceration (75).

Since Malcolm had stated in a letter that Lennon could give him a “home and a job,” Marable suggests that his “choice of words...implies more than a business association” (96), positing that “Perhaps the physical intimacies between the two men created a bond” (96). The author also states that, after being released from prison on August 7th, 1952, Malcolm visited a Turkish bath to get the physical feeling of prison taint off of himself (97-98), knowing full well that, in the imagination of most readers, such bath-houses are bastions of homosexuality.

Rather than focus on the public Malcolm, the voyeuristic Marable attempts to peep into the most intimate aspects of his subject’s private life in search of evidence to support his theory that he was a sexually repressed homosexual. Seeking to spice up his biography with sexually suggestive imagery of man-on-man action, Marable writes that “While physical contact between genders was prohibited, male-to-male contact, especially within the martial arts context, was routine” (146) in the Nation of Islam. “It was not a surprise to Malcolm, therefore, when some brothers at Temple No. 7” looked at Malcolm as if he had “betrayed them” (146). Marable also reiterates the allegations of homosexuality that Bruce Perry made about Malcolm in his 1991 book without ever once questioning the credibility of his highly suspect sources (506, note 65).

In *Malcolm: The Life of a Man who Changed Black America*, Perry claims that, as a junior high school student, Malcolm X forced a fellow schoolmate named Robert to fellate him (29; 396, note 29). He suggests that, as a teenager, Malcolm slept with Willie Mae, a transvestite known as “Miss Jones” (77). Perry also claims that, during his Detroit Red days, homosexual men used to pay Malcolm to fellate him (77). He also asserts that it was Malcolm, and not only Rudy, who used to massage William Paul Lennon until he climaxed (83). Perry, like Marable, ignores the fact that, according to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, the man in question was so sensitive that the mere application of talcum powder was sufficient for him to reach climax (140). As Evanzz has pointed out,

[T]here is nothing in Malcolm X’s far superior work to suggest that there was any touching of genitalia, let alone oral or anal sodomy. In fact, Malcolm X’s autobiography clearly shows (in the chapter titled “Caught”) how amusing he found the strange things that made white ‘johns’ reach orgasm. One man, he wrote, ejaculated by sitting outside a bedroom door listening to a black couple making whoopee.

Perry would even have us believe that Malcolm steered two of his cash-struck Michigan friends from the merchant marine to a homosexual john. In return for performing fellatio on the two heterosexual friends, “Reverend Witherspoon” paid them one week’s rent and a first-rate chicken dinner (77). The allegation simply does not make sense. Since when do straight sailors sell themselves to gay men for food and lodging? When sailors are in port they do not prostitute themselves. On the contrary, they avail themselves of the service of prostitutes. Assuming that this bizarre scenario had substance, what could possibly motivate a person to admit such a thing? If anything, it seems that Perry got played by his paid sources. The individuals he consulted seem to have had a fine time feeding him tall tales in exchange for financial compensation.

Showing a complete and total lack of sensitivity and an absolute lack of understanding of his subject, Perry states that Malcolm sold himself like a prostitute, not out of need, but out of choice (83). As street-wise persons are aware, and academic studies have shown, it is women, not men, who turn to prostitution when put out on the streets. The only men who become homosexual prostitutes are those who were not tough enough to make it as thugs, thieves, and dope-dealers. Since Malcolm X was six foot three inches, and an excellent boxer (Jarvis 39) who could stand his own against any adversary, he does not fit the profile of a man who would turn himself out for tricks. On the street, where one's reputation is all that one has, a homosexual criminal does not stand a chance. Had Malcolm been a queer, he would have lost all of his street credibility. On the street, one is a predator or one is a prey: one takes from others or one gives of oneself.

While Perry presents all these salacious details as if they were fact, they are based on sources completely lacking in credibility. While this might escape the average reader, who might subsequently be misled into believing that such allegations were true, the notes speak for themselves. The claim that Malcolm forced a schoolmate to fellate him comes from Bob Bebee, a childhood friend, and his younger brother, Ray. It should be noted that neither of these two boys witnessed the act and Perry failed to find Robert, or even determine his last name, to confirm the claim. The claim that Malcolm has sex with Willie Mae Jones is conveniently based on "[t]wo confidential sources" (412). The allegation that Malcolm X prostituted himself to homosexuals also comes from confidential sources, as well as the testimony of a single supposed friend: Johnny Davis Jr.

As further evidence of Perry's erroneous approach, the only proof he presented regarding Malcolm's alleged involvement with Lennon comes from Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis (83, 413, 414). A former friend of Malcolm from his hustler days, Shorty served as one of Perry informants. As much as he claims that his post-prison association with Malcolm was "spiritually-based, not monetarily based" (132) and that money was not his concern when it came to anything pertaining to Malcolm X, Jarvis admits that Perry, whom he does not mention by name, had promised to pay him \$500 to answer his questions (134). "From the names I was called," writes Jarvis, "you'd think I tried to rob the Brinks" (134). Had Jarvis been paid \$500,000.00 to share spurious stories about his "best friend" people might have understood. Shorty, however, sold out his homeboy for a promised \$500 that never materialized. As much as he claims to have collaborated with Perry "out of the goodness of my heart and a deep, abiding respect for Malcolm X and all he advocated" (134), one wonders how any true friend could make the type of accusations that he did. Jarvis points out that he was called all kind of names as a result of the allegations he presented to Perry: "I was called 'a damn fool and an ass,'" he writes (134). Although he admits that, "Well, maybe I was" (134), he insists that "my intentions were honorable" (134).

Supposing that Jarvis was right, and Malcolm did give a hand-job to a gay man when he was a young man, where is the honor in exposing a friend's secret from decades past? While he was quick to condemn Malcolm when promised money, and perhaps even anonymity, Jarvis refrained from similar attacks in his memoirs. While he was prepared to indict Malcolm in what he probably believed were private communications with Perry, he did not stand behind his story when he was provided with a public forum: his own memoirs. In reality, Jarvis had no first-hand knowledge that Malcolm was physically involved with Lennon. If Jarvis could not get Lennon's name correct, how could he get his facts correct? Since Malcolm was a pimp, who provided both female and male prostitutes to his clients, it is possible that he was Lennon's purveyor of male partners. As much as he insisted otherwise, Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis appears to have been upset at the negative image that was projected of him by Alex Haley and Spike Lee. As he admits, he wrote *The Other Malcolm* was "to set the record straight" about the personality and character of Malcolm "Shorty Jarvis." As much as he cared about his own portrayal, he manifested little consideration for the portrayal of Malcolm X. As talented a jazz musician as he may have been, Jarvis may have been jealous of the meteoric rise of his former friend and marred by his own personal failures.

Rather than examine the sources employed by Perry, Marable seeks to strengthen them by stating that "other evidence has surfaced that supports his general assertions" (506). He writes that "Malcolm revealed details to Ella Collins 'about a business deal he and Malcolm Jarvis had with an elderly, wealthy, white millionaire, named Paul Lennon, who would pay them to rub powder over his body'" (506). Although the project was commenced by Ella Collins in the late 1960s, it was completed by her adopted son, Rodnell Collins, the nephew of Malcolm X, in 1998. Since the poorly written book, which A. Peter Bailey played an important role in producing, is based primarily on Rodney's memories of what his mother told him that Malcolm X told her in the mid 1940s, it comes as no surprise that it is filled with factually incorrect information.

To cite a few examples, Collins claims that Francis "Sonny" Brown was arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned (45-46) when all sources, including Malcolm X himself, assert that he eluded the authorities (X 149; Marable 67). He asserts that Lennon was a millionaire when Marable has shown that there is no evidence that he ever became truly wealthy (65). The description of Malcolm's last night that is provided by Collins is demonstrably false. He claims that Malcolm put the children to sleep between midnight and 12:30 a.m., lay down with them and Betty for some time, spoke privately with Ella and Rodney in his car, expressed annoyance at Betty's obstinate position against moving from New York, drove off, and only arrived at his hotel in Queens, near the Kennedy Airport, many hours later (Collins 194). Ilyasah Shabazz, Malcolm's daughter, however, wrote that her father only stayed briefly at the Wallaces, checked on the children, climbed in his car and drove away (Shabazz 12). She makes no mention that he stayed in his car talking to Ella and Rodney (Shabazz 12).

Furthermore, as Rodney stresses himself, Malcolm was extremely nervous and concerned about an eminent assassination attempt (Collins 193). If, as Rodney claims, Ella would not even let Malcolm fetch his briefcase from his car out of fear for his safety (Collins 193), why would she and her son have a conversation with him in his car like sitting ducks? Collins' claim that Malcolm X spent his last night at a hotel in Queens, near Kennedy Airport (194), is certainly strange as all sources agree that he stayed at the Hilton in midtown Manhattan, a fact confirmed by numerous sources, including the eye-witness testimony of a judge. Collins' claim that Malcolm was at the Wallaces until approximately 1:00 a.m. or later simply does not make sense as he had dinner at the Hilton's Old Bourbon Steak House (Goldman 268; Perry 359; Marable 423). It was at approximately 10 pm, after Malcolm had returned to his room, that several Black Muslims appeared asking for his room number and were asked to leave by security (Goldman 268; Perry 360; Marable 423).

Due to the fact that it contains many discrepancies, echoes of the feud between Ella Collins and Betty Shabazz, and strong signs of editorial interpretation and recreation, *Seventh Child: A Family Memoir of Malcolm X* cannot be considered an entirely accurate and authoritative account of the life of Malcolm X. Since the author admits that he was encouraged to write the book to help provide for his family, his motivations were monetary, and nothing sells more than scandal. Consequently, *Seventh Child* should only be approached with a critical eye.

Besides failing to adopt a critical methodology, Marable appears to manipulate utterly innocent sources when explicitly incriminating ones are absent. At one point in his book, Marable mentions that Peter Goldman, the author of *The Death and Life of Malcolm X*, had described himself as belonging to a relatively small target group that Malcolm wanted to seduce (219). The sense of the word is clear from the context. Malcolm wanted to convince people of the rightful nature of his cause. He wanted to attract them to his beliefs. By italicizing *seduce* in the citation, Marable suggests the second meaning of the word which means "to entice into sexual activity." Such a reading is not only unwarranted; it is simply sick. In fact, the entire work is saturated with such homosexual innuendo. If anyone were foolish enough to follow in Marable's footsteps, there would be no end to such insanity. After all, Goldman admitted in his "Foreword" that he "liked" Malcolm (xvi). For a man like Marable, this might suggest that Goldman had homosexual feelings for Malcolm X. In the minds of many readers, such unwarranted readings manifest the mentality of a middle-schooler or, even worse, a dirty old man.

As history has taught us, smear campaigns against revolutionary leaders have always revolved around accusations of homosexuality, bestiality, adultery, cuckoldry, and brutal behavior of all sorts, towards both family members and friends. Such was the case with Karl Marx, Che Guevara, General José de San Martín, the Liberator of Argentina, Chile, and Peru, from Spanish rule, as well as Eva Perón, among scores of other victims. In the United States, virtually every African American leader or role model has suffered the same fate.

The objective of smear campaign strategy is to lower everyone to the same level of immorality so as to prove that nobody has the moral authority to speak truth to power. This is an old tactic employed by secret service agencies in order to damage or destroy the reputation of a political opponent.

In order to support his thesis of the *Maricón* Malcolm, Marable goes to great length to demonstrate that Malcolm had little interest in marriage (144-145), that he was virtually pushed into proposing to Betty, that he had difficulty expressing love (164), and that he suffered from sexual problems throughout his marriage (147-150; 164; 194). Although Malcolm earnestly complained to Elijah Muhammad about problems with performance in a March 1959 letter, such heart-rending confessions do not suggest that he was a homosexual. On the contrary, they are indicators that Malcolm was merely a man who suffered from the same sort of problems that millions of heterosexual men suffer from. Considering that his sexual experience had been limited to prostitutes and women of ill-repute like Sophia, the hustler Malcolm had only contented himself with seeking his own pleasure as opposed to granting it to others.

If Malcolm refrained from marriage for many years, it was because of his deep devotion to the Nation of Islam. His religious and political activities were the focus of his existence and occupied all of his waking hours. As he explained in his *Autobiography*, “I had always been very careful to stay completely clear of any personal closeness with any of the Muslim sisters. My total commitment to Islam demanded having no other interests, especially, I felt, no women” (225). Although many Muslim sisters were interested in the attractive and charismatic Malcolm, he made it clear to them that he was too busy (225). [I suppose that Marable-minded scholars will now question my own sexuality for acknowledging that Malcolm was a good-looking man]. Malcolm also admits that he had personal reasons for not marrying (226): none of which had anything to do with homosexual inclinations. As Malcolm explained, his problem was not lack of experience with women, but an excess of experience with the worst kinds of women (226). Having talked to too many prostitutes and mistresses, he had unresolved issues of trust (226). Furthermore, Elijah Muhammad himself had encouraged him to remain single so that he could devote all of his energies to spreading the Nation of Islam throughout the country (226).

Even after he married, on his own initiative, Malcolm was perpetually traveling, sleeping only two to three hours per night, subsisting on a single meal per day, while fueled with innumerable cups of coffee. Malcolm X was also plagued by a host of health issues triggered from his poor diet in prison and lack of competent medical attention. Considering that he was malnourished, suffered from severe stress, heart palpitations, and exhaustion, and that his wife was perpetually pregnant, a turn-off for most men, it makes perfect sense that Malcolm’s sexual performance was not always up to par. If Malcolm and Betty had some problems at some point, it does not mean that they were permanent.

Marable's allegations that Malcolm was a homosexual seem inconsistent with his subject's writing on the issue. As the author points out, Malcolm denounced the "homosexual perverts" he came across in prison and who got "job changes whenever they wish to change or acquire new 'husbands'" in a letter he wrote to the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Corrections in 1950 (95). It is also completely incompatible with the ideology he embraced, espoused, and devoted his life to disseminating. As Malcolm X was well-aware, homosexuality is explicitly outlawed by the Qur'an, the *sunnah*, and the *shari'ah*.

If Malcolm X was truly a homosexual, why did the Nation of Islam fail to mention this fact when they attempted to expose him as a hypocrite in *Muhammad Speaks*? Considering that he was under constant surveillance by the police, the FBI, and the CIA, and that authorities were determined "to do something about Malcolm" and destroy the "demagogue" that they so despised, it is inconceivable that they would have failed to obtain evidence regarding his alleged homosexuality. As Marable himself admits, the FBI "was frustrated in their attempts to find Malcolm's weaknesses" (182). As one FBI agent made clear, Malcolm was a man of impeccable integrity and high moral character (139).

Even if Malcolm had some sexual contact with members of the same sex as a teenager, and there is no convincing evidence that he did, one could argue that he was not a homosexual for, in order to be so, one needs to be attracted to the members of one's own sex, and to have acted upon it on numerous occasions. It is not unusual for young people to have some sort of contact with members of the same sex nor is it odd for drug-addicted hustlers to seek any means to survive. As far as Islam is considered, the sin is in the action. Even when acted upon, homosexuality is only proven in the *shari'ah* through confession or the testimony of four witnesses to the actual act. Since individuals who make false accusations of homosexuality, adultery or fornication are subject to eighty lashes according to Islamic law, biographers should be careful not to impugn the honor and dignity of their Muslim subjects without compelling conclusive evidence. Finally, if the claims made by Perry and Marable could be proven, and they seem to be as solid as ashes in the wind, they would not alter anything for, as far as Islam is concerned, whatever happened prior to one's conversion is fully forgiven. This, of course, is simply conjecture for, as has been shown, there is not a shred of credible evidence confirming that Malcolm X was a homosexual.

As Clayborne Carson stated in the *Malcolm X Files*, "the reliability" of Perry's book "cannot be determined until its sources--particularly transcripts of interviews with Malcolm's associates--are made available to other researchers" (49, note 3). In the collection of essays titled *In Our Own Image*, Arnold Rampersad also pointed out that "Perry's way of weighing and using information is sometimes questionable" (121). According to Kenneth H. Williams, "the critical reviews that Perry's book has received note that his sometimes bizarre interpretations of Malcolm combined with a lack of documentation limits the book's value to serious Malcolm X scholarship" (Jenkins 441).

In *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X*, Michael Eric Dyson stated that “Perry’s portrait of Malcolm’s sex life forms a rhetorical low blow, simply reinforcing a line of attack against an already sexually demonized black leadership culture” (58-59). Because Perry is white, Dyson questioned whether he had the ability to interpret black experience (59). Since Perry demonstrated “neither sensitivity to nor knowledge about complex black cultural beliefs regarding gender and sexual difference” (58), Dyson dismissed the former’s psychobiography of Malcolm. When the very same claims were made by a black man like Manning, however, Dyson poured out praise for his biography. Such a *volte-face* can only be described as racially-motivated self-revisionism. For all intents and purposes, Marable’s biography of Malcolm is, in many regards, as reprehensible as the one produced by Perry. As Gregory P. Kane wrote in his 1991 review, “The line between a critical biography and a hatchet job is indeed a thin one. Bruce Perry may have crossed it.” It is thus disconcerting that a man like Marable would regurgitate the allegations that were so gullibly reported by Perry. People remember things wrong. Memories fade and falter. Falsehood, in the form of gossip, remains untrue, even if it has been repeated for more than half a century.

As if accusing Malcolm X of being a homosexual did not suffice, Marable alleges that he was unfaithful to his wife: with women of all things! The author intimates that Malcolm remained emotionally attached to Evelyn Williams, a former girlfriend, while he was married to Betty. Citing Louis Farrakhan as his source, Marable claims that “Evelyn was never far from his mind. At times, his unhappiness with Betty was so profound that he considered reestablishing his love affair with Evelyn” (233). The author also writes that allegations that Malcolm was sleeping with Lynne Shifflett, the leader of his secular Organization of Afro-American Unity, “may have been grounded in truth” (393). Marable also suggests that, while in Geneva, Malcolm committed adultery with Fifi, a UN secretary and Swiss national with whom he had worked in Cairo (385). According to the author, “She met him at his hotel, chatting with him for hours and truly surprising him by saying that she ‘is madly in love with me and seems willing to do *anything* to prove it’” (385). When he returned to his hotel, at about 9 pm, Malcolm wrote that “Fifi was knocking on my door as I came up the stairs” (385). As Marable explains,

She joined him in his room and left a couple of hours later. Uncharacteristically, Malcolm did not record in his diary what transpired between the two of them; based on the diary, Fifi appears to be the only female he admitted to his private space during his entire time abroad. After her departure, Malcolm subsequently left the hotel and took a brief walk in the rain, ‘alone and feeling lonely...thinking of Betty.’ (385-86)

Although there is no evidence that any adulterous encounter took place, Marable concludes that “Malcolm’s hesitant diary entries about the night spent with Fifi in Switzerland suggest the possibility of a more intimate involvement” (393). Considering that Malcolm carried his diary around with him at all times, and knowing full well that his wife could and would have access to it, it makes little sense that Malcolm would have mentioned matters that could have incriminated him.

Remember, this is the very detailed travel journal that Malcolm hoped to have published as a second book. If he wrote about Fifi's meeting in his bedroom, it was because it was simply that: a business meeting. Furthermore, men who sleep with women in the late evening take a shower and go to bed. They do not wander in the rain, return to their rooms, and write in their diaries how lonely they feel and how much they miss their wives.

If anything, Malcolm's diary entries indicate just how faithful he was to his "beloved Betty" (v), the woman to whom he dedicated his autobiography. Despite claims that their relationship was merely a marriage of convenience, and that he viewed his wife as a "nuisance," Malcolm made his sentiments clear: "I love Betty. She's the only woman I ever thought about loving. And she's one of the very few--four women--whom I have ever trusted" (*Autobiography* 232). As Betty and her older daughters fondly recall, Malcolm was a warm, loving, and devoted husband and father (Clarke 132-143).

Marable also states that, during his last weeks, Malcolm had been "secretly involved" with Sharon 6X Poole, the eighteen-year old OAAU secretary (451). After returning from his trip to Africa, the author alleges that "Malcolm appears to have begun an illicit sexual affair with an eighteen-year-old OAAU secretary named Sharon 6X Poole. Little is known about her or about their relationship except that it appears to have continued up to Malcolm's death" (394). He even alleges, without an atom of evidence to support his claim, that "Sharon 6X may have joined him in his hotel room" at the New York Hilton on the night before his assassination (423). Although Malcolm X had denounced Elijah Muhammad for committing adultery with his young secretaries, and was involved in a court case against him, Marable suggests that he was a hypocrite who was engaging in the very same activity himself. If Sharon 6X did meet Malcolm, and it seems virtually certain that she did not, it was to talk business as Malcolm did all of his business from hotel rooms. It was in a room at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem that Malcolm headquartered the Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. However, Marable's chronology may not be entirely accurate. In fact, there are serious discrepancies in the various accounts of Haley, Grant, Goldman, Gallen and Grimes, as well as Perry, Clark, Marable and Collins, among others.

According to Marable, Malcolm dropped Betty off at the house of the Wallace family, stayed there for several hours, checked into the New York Hilton, paid for a single room, ate dinner at the hotel's restaurant, and returned to his room where he remained until the next day (222-423). As Russell J. Rickford relates in *Betty Shabazz*, Malcolm did indeed drop Betty off at the Wallaces, where he spent a few hours talking quietly. During that time, he apologized to his wife for the hardship she had suffered and vowed that change was coming: "We'll all be together. I want my family with me. Families shouldn't be separated" (226). He also promised that he would no longer take long trips without her. Although Malcolm did check into the Hilton, where he put together his notes and rested for the rally at the Audubon Ballroom, Rickford claims that Malcolm spent the later part of the evening with James Campbell at the OAAU office in the Hotel Theresa (226).

Although Malcolm was tense, he proudly announced that Betty was pregnant again and boasted that “Every time I look at her she gets pregnant” (226). If Malcolm worked late that night at the Hotel Theresa, it seems highly unlikely that he would have met Sharon 6X at the Hilton to swing on the chandeliers. Malcolm’s words and actions that evening do not reflect those of a man who was about to commit adultery on the eve of his own death.

When I contacted Rickford regarding his chronology, he regretted being unable to clarify my questions beyond the details he provided in the biography. As Rickford explained, “I am too far removed from the research at this point to recall those details or even to suggest where those answers might lie.” If, however, his chronology is correct, it would make the possibility of an adulterous encounter all the less likely. Even if the traditional chronology is correct, namely, that Malcolm left his wife and children at the Wallaces, went to the Hotel Theresa for a meeting, checked into the Hilton, sat down for supper at approximately 10 p.m., returned to his room, where he completed his answers for *al-Muslimoon*, spent the night, and checked out early next afternoon, the possibility of an erotic escapade seem highly implausible considering that his room was under constant surveillance for security reasons. According to Grimes, Malcolm remained locked in his room for the rest of the night (171). Although Marable was Rickford’s advisor and mentor, and he supports the book as “an important contribution to our understanding of Malcolm’s life and politics,” even he admits that his academic elder was mistaken: “I agree that his recounting of the rumor that Malcolm was joined by an aide in his hotel room in that final night was perhaps improper and largely unnecessary.”

Besides the many missteps he made regarding Malcolm, Marable made another major *faux-pas* dealing with Sharon 6X Poole Shabazz and Linwood X Cathcart. In his biography, Marable claims that Sharon and Linwood were involved with each other at the time of Malcolm’s assassination. Since he claims that the Newark branch of the Nation of Islam was responsible for organizing Malcolm X’s murder, he suggests that Sharon 6X and Cathcart may have been in on the plot. As explosive as this murder allegation may be, Marable failed to follow up on his lead hoping, perhaps, that law enforcement would act upon his allegations and examine the connection the pair had with Malcolm. So far, the only response he received from his allegations is a \$50 million dollars lawsuit against his estate, the book’s publisher, Viking Press, and Columbia University launched by Linward X Cathcart, a former Minister of the Nation of Islam. Besides misspelling his name as “Linwood” instead of “Linward,” Marable is accused of deliberately ignoring the fact that, at the time of the murder, Poole was simply renting an apartment in the home of Cathcart, and that both were married to other people. Since accusing individuals of adultery is sufficient grounds for a defamation action, Marable should surely have sought to substantiate his claims prior to making such allegations.

Considering the gravity of Marable's allegations, namely, that Cathcart and Shabazz were involved in Malcolm's murder, and its serious legal ramifications, it is astonishing that the editors and attorneys working for the Viking Press allowed them to be published. Considering the amount of information available regarding Shabazz, and especially Cathcart, Marable could at least have attempted to present a more compelling case. He could have stressed the fact that Sharon supposedly sat down next to Cathcart on the fateful day and feigned not to know him despite evidence to the contrary. He could have insisted on how strange it was that Malcolm's secretary was actually closely collected to Nation of Islam loyalists. Marable could also have pointed out that Cathcart was reported to have grinned and laughed while Malcolm was being shot. According to Evanzz, the FBI's investigation indicated that "Linwood X" was involved in the murder of Malcolm X and that he was identified by a number of witnesses to the murder (492). The fact that he remains closely connected to both Sharon 6X Shabazz and Louis Farrakhan to this very day is also suggestive. I am not, like Marable, making any allegations that these two individuals were involved in any way in the assassination of Malcolm X. I am simply showing that Marable failed to exercise due diligence in making his case.

If we are to believe Marable, and it is becoming increasingly clear that we cannot, Malcolm was not only a homosexual and an adulterer, he was also a cuckold. When discussing the paternity suits brought against "the Final Messenger of Allah," Marable observes that: "All were the progeny of Elijah Muhammad, who had taken advantage of the weeklong Chicago MGT tutorials--such as the one Betty had attended--to select attractive and talented young women for service in the national headquarters' secretarial staff" (181). The author appears to imply that it was not only Malcolm's love interest, Evelyn Williams, who had been seduced by Elijah Muhammad, but Betty as well. After all, Elijah Muhammad had approved of Malcolm's marriage to Betty, saying that she was "a fine sister" (144). While Marable only implies that Elijah Muhammad claimed the privilege of *prima noctis* with Betty, he explicitly claims that she attempted to seduce his bodyguards, that she was having sex with Charles Kenyatta, Malcolm's right-hand man, who was also known as Charles 37 (379, 380, 393). According to Marable, Malcolm was aware that his wife was "tripping the light fantastic" and, although people were prepared to put Charles to death, Malcolm prevented his followers from terminating him (393). In the eyes of Marable, Malcolm was a perpetual pimp. Two decades before his break with the Nation, "he had posed as a pimp, hustling prostitutes in Harlem. Now, unwittingly, he had been maneuvered into becoming Elijah's pimp, even bringing the woman he had loved to be violated" (234). Like Perry, who failed to consider the credibility and motivation of their sources, Marable blindly accepted the allegations of individuals who had axes to grind.

Besides his apparent obsession with the thought that Malcolm might have been a homosexual, an adulterer, and a cuckold, Marable makes endless allegations about all aspects of his subject's life. In "The Legend of Detroit Red," the author sets out to prove that Malcolm was not the hard-core criminal that he portrayed himself to be. The entire argument is pointless. What is the standard for a hustler, a criminal, and a thug? Did Malcolm have a B.A. in Criminology?

Did he have an M.A. in Misdemeanors? Perhaps, he had a Ph.D. in Pimping? How, one may ask, can Marable question Malcolm's claims over sixty years after the fact when Ted Poston, the veteran black journalist, failed to turn up anyone from Detroit Red's old street crowd while the man was still alive? In the late 1960s, Peter Goldman, an investigative journalist, also failed to uncover anything of substance about Malcolm's hustler years. Players come and go and are soon forgotten. Since he was his partner in crime, the testimony of Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis does have weight in the matter. As Jarvis has shown in *The Other Malcolm*, Detroit Red was indeed a notorious criminal (35-52). Marable also alleges that Malcolm betrayed his fellow crewmembers for which reason Shorty supposedly started to call him the "Green-Eyed Monster" (67, 71). Although he is not the most reliable person on the planet, Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis corroborated the version of events related by Malcolm X. As Jarvis explained, "After his initial arrest, Malcolm was taken to Boston Police Headquarters. In his possession were two guns and two address books. While he was being photographed and fingerprinted, his address books were looked through and the names of the three girls and me were revealed" (52). Contrary to Marable's unfounded claims, Malcolm did not sell-out his friends.

In "The Hate That Hate Produced," Marable alleges that Malcolm was "uncritical" of Elijah Muhammad's contact with white supremacists (179). As his family members and close associates have confirmed, Malcolm X was always opposed to Elijah Muhammad's association with the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party. Considering the precarious position in which he found himself during his last years in the Nation of Islam, Malcolm was simply not in a position to openly challenge Elijah Muhammad. As Ella and Rodnell Collins have confirmed, Malcolm was outraged at NOI contacts with white supremacists (128). He urged his friends, the Alexanders, to publish an editorial attacking white supremacy to give pause to NOI officials who wanted to deal with them (128). Malcolm also wanted to leak a letter written by J.B. Stoner, the Imperial Wizard of the KKK, which discussed dealings with officials from the Nation of Islam. According to Rodnell Collins, "Malcolm wanted this letter published as part of an effort to possibly shame them from dealing with white supremacists" (128). Malcolm himself acknowledged that he had represented Elijah Muhammad in secret negotiations with the Ku Klux Klan in 1960 (Clark xi; *The Final Speeches*, 117) and virulently attacked the Nation of Islam for its close association and cooperation with white supremacists (*The Final Speeches* 117-18, 128, 174, 181).

Marable also intimates that Malcolm only turned against Elijah Muhammad when he learned that Evelyn Williams, a woman with whom he had been engaged at one point, had been impregnated by so-called prophet (181; 233). Citing his subject's travel diary, Marable points out that Malcolm had wine with dinner while in Kenya (372), had a rum in Coke in Ghana, in an attempt to wake up (383), and went to a nightclub in Guinea, where he stuck to coffee and orange juice "because Guinea was an overwhelmingly Muslim country" (385). The accuracy of these statements is entirely unclear. Malcolm had a great sense of humor and may have punctuated his travel diary with jokes.

Since he only had a superficial understanding of Islamic law, his travels in the Arab world, where many Muslims unfortunately drink alcohol, may have misled him to believe that it was not prohibited. Due to the severe stress and strain he was under, it is also conceivable that he consumed alcohol for medicinal reasons. In any event, these tiny tantalizing tidbits are tossed into the dish to spice things up. It is surprising that Marable did not seize the opportunity to denounce Malcolm as a habitual masturbator. After all, the man spent 12 years without having sex, and, according to Marable, only occasionally cheated on his wife after he married. Facetious remarks aside, many critical readers may conclude that Marable's main objective was to undermine the integrity of his subject, to soil his name, and to drag him in the dust.

As a historian, Marable is entitled to present a complete profile of Malcolm. The author's aim to "go beyond the legend" (12) suggest that Malcolm has somehow been idealized. While many Muslims view Malcolm as a martyr, they do not view him as a religious scholar or a saint. Malcolm was an organic intellectual and a political activist who had a limited understanding of Islam. He had been a mainstream Muslim for less than one year before he was assassinated. As most of his Muslim admirers will admit, Malcolm had many shortcomings. Although he had his faults, as all of us do, Malcolm was a man of many admirable qualities and virtues, not to mention singular talent. As Peter Goldman put it, "he was neither saint nor sinner but a good and gifted man" (xvii). Unlike others, who keep their past under lock and key, Malcolm was an open book, a man who put everything on the table, who courageously confessed his shortcomings, and admitted to his mistakes. He readily admitted and duly detailed the illegal and immoral activities in which he had been involved prior to joining the Nation of Islam. As Steven Clark has said, Malcolm's speeches, interviews, and statements, manifest his "incorruptible honesty and revolutionary integrity" (xix). Or, in the words of Malcolm X: "my sincerity is my credentials" (*Malcolm X Speaks* 20).

While Marable is entitled to present evidence regarding Malcolm's personal life, he has the professional responsibility to ensure its accuracy. In this respect, Marable has fundamentally failed to adhere to the scientific method and the most basic of scholarly standards. Despite the enormous financial resources that were available to him, Marable made little to no effort to contact many of the key players in Malcolm's life in order to confirm his allegations. There is no evidence that he attempted to track down Malcolm's alleged adulterous lovers such as Lynn Shifflet, Fifi, and Sharon 6X Poole for verification. It is both irresponsible and unprofessional to blindly cite information without evaluating its authenticity. Sources need to be scrutinized. Claims need to be confirmed. References need to be cross-checked. And allegations need to be verified. Many of the sources used by Marable are dubious. He treats open enemies of Malcolm X as reliable witnesses. He was particularly proud of the fact that Louis Farrakhan granted him an extraordinary nine-hour meeting, after which he granted him access to the Nation of Islam's archival material on Malcolm X (12).

Farrakhan, as most individuals are aware, was Malcolm's very nemesis. Even Elijah Muhammad viewed him as duplicitous (Clegg 340, note 11). It was Farrakhan himself who decreed that Malcolm was "worthy of death" (398). He viewed him as a "Judas" and a "hypocrite" and even depicted him as a devil (Strickland 175, Magida 83-85, Levinsohn 75-78, Curtis 58-59). Due to his ties to the NOI mosques in Harlem, Boston, and Newark, it comes as no surprise that "The name of Minister Louis Farrakhan surfaced during the murder investigation as a leader with ties to all three mosques" (Evanzz 491). In a 1971 speech, Farrakhan is reported to have stated that Malcolm X should be dug up and killed again for having slandered Elijah Muhammad. In a vitriolic speech, recorded on January 22, 1972, Farrakhan celebrated the murder of Malcolm X, praised his murderers as "fearless men," and ridiculed the "cowardice" of the helpless crowd who attempted to flee the Audubon Ballroom. In his infamous 1993 "Savior's Day" diatribe, the leader of the Nation of Islam appeared to boast about his involvement in the assassination of Malcolm X: "Was Malcolm your traitor or ours? And if we dealt with him like a nation deals with a traitor, what the *hell* business is it of yours? A nation has to be able to deal with traitors and cutthroats and turncoats." As Farrakhan himself admitted in 2009, he created the conditions that lead to the murder of Malcolm X. If Farrakhan provided such a long testimony to Marable, and granted him access to archival information from the Nation of Islam, it was certainly because he had ascertained that the author had no intention of presenting Malcolm in a positive light.

There are, of course, a few valuable contributions made by Marable. For example, he provides many details about Malcolm's parents and childhood which are not well known. He debunks Bruce Perry's assertion that Malcolm and his father Earl had both fire-bombed their own homes. He details Malcolm's travels through the Muslim world and discusses his contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon, Egypt and Gaza, as well as the PLO. The author conveys the sincerity of Malcolm's conversion to orthodox Islam and his rejection of Elijah Muhammad's racist teachings. He also confirms that Shaykh Akbar Hasan, the rector of Al-Azhar University, gave Malcolm an *ijazah* authorizing him to teach Islam on August 15th, 1965 (365), and that the same institution provided him with a certificate establishing his credentials as an orthodox Muslim on September 16, 1965 (369). The most intriguing aspect of the work is Marable's suggestion that Malcolm consciously attempted to emulate the example of Imam Husayn. Unlike Marable, who failed to follow up on this fascinating lead, I have explored the issue in depth and prepared a peer-reviewed study on the subject for the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, to which I refer any interested readers.

Despite occasional insight, and a few facts here and there, Manning Marable's biography provides little new information on the life of Malcolm X and is mainly reinvented from previous works. Had the work been properly edited, with all the gossip and rumors removed, the work would have made a contribution to scholarship in the field. Since the work seems to have been rushed into print, without any proper peer-review having been conducted, certain segments of the work are as reliable as the *The Inquirer*.

Although it is Marable that is under attack as the author of the book, it really makes one wonder whether he actually authorized the inclusion of unverified rumors and gossip in an academic book. According to Ilyasah Shabazz, the daughter of Malcolm X, “Zaheer ‘Ali,” Marable’s chief research assistant, “didn’t know that these kinds of things were going to be included in that book” (Martin).

Since, in some regards, the work resembles more sensationalism than scholarship, Marable’s work has mainly benefited the enemies of Malcolm X who have eagerly seized upon his slanderous statements. These very enemies are having a field day spreading the falsehood they were fed by Marable and his predecessor Perry. Articles accusing Malcolm of being a homosexual, a rapist, an adulterer, a cuckold, and a misogynist have proliferated in the media and on the internet without their authors ever questioning the validity of these all too convenient accusations. The most vicious of these, titled “Malcolm X Exposed as a Homosexual Rapist and Prostitute,” is published by the Jewish Task Force of Fresh Meadows, New York, which claims to be “Fighting to Save America and Israel from Islamic Terrorism.” Some scholars and authors have even suggested that, were Malcolm alive, he would have become a leading gay rights activist. Honestly, now: Malcolm X at the head of gay pride parade? Considering his political history, it would be unrealistic to imagine Malcolm assuming any such role. Increasingly, it seems that even the gay community wants to claim the complicity of the handsome red-headed Muslim revolutionary and internationalist on the basis of hearsay from admittedly unreliable sources with questionable agendas.

While the mass media has printed dozens of articles and reviews praising Marable’s arguably biased biography, these very media outlets have refused to print works which are critical of the biographer’s methodology and unverified claims. Such was the case with Karl Evanzz scathing review which was rejected by *The Root*. As Jared A. Ball has suggested, far from being a “meticulous...portrait” and “definitive” biography, “*Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*” is itself a reinvention, or worse.” For Todd Stevens Burroughs, the book seems to have been written by a committee, lacks sufficient primary research, and appears to have been hastily completed as Marable’s condition deteriorated (Prince).

While the case against Malcolm is as soft as sand, the case against Marable is as solid as steel. Were both the biographer and his subject alive today, Malcolm X would certainly be able to take Manning Marable to court on the grounds of slander, libel, and defamation of character. Although Malcolm X will long be remembered by Muslims and human rights activists, how, then, will Marable be remembered? Will he be remembered as an Ivory Tower academic who went too far in his attempt to humanize his subject? Or, will he be remembered as an Uncle Tom academic who took a perverse pleasure in emasculating a martyred man? For Karl Evanzz, the judgment is already in. As he eloquently expressed, Malcolm X was “a black panther of a man.

By contrast, Marable was just another paper tiger.” As for the allegations that Malcolm X was a homosexual, an adulterer, a cuckold, and a misogynist, among other atrocious accusations, I do not believe it and I do not buy it. And that is precisely what I would advise other academics to do: borrow the book; do not buy it. Like Bruce Perry’s *Malcolm: The Life of a Man who Changed Black America*, Manning Marable’s *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* represents the second assassination of Malcolm X: an assassination of character.

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"Malcolm is a man who would give his life for you," said a speaker in February 1965 at a rally for the Organization of Afro-American Unity. A couple hours later, his words would prove sadly true. Like this gallery? Malcolm X was revered as a critical thinker and outspoken critic of America's epidemic of racism. Getty Images. 10 of 34. Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's wife, leaves the morgue at Bellevue Hospital in New York after identifying the body of her husband. Associated Press video covering the assassination of Malcolm X and his subsequent funeral. One of the assassins was Talmadge Hayer, better known as Thomas Hagan, who was a member of Temple Number 7 in Harlem, a Nation of Islam temple that Malcolm once led. Manning Marable's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Malcolm X: A Life Of Reinvention*, is being adapted as a television series. Also planned is a subsequent documentary on the ongoing legacy of Malcolm X. Critical Content is represented by WME. Matthews is represented by WME and Anonymous Content. UTA represented the Marable Estate in the deal on behalf of The Cheney Agency. [Subscribe to Deadline Breaking News Alerts](#) and [keep your inbox happy](#). [Read More About](#)