

*“Ironies of the Saint”
Malcolm X, Black Women, and the
Price of Protection*

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This essay grows out of two concerns: First, the re-rise of what I want to call a “promise of protection” as a more progressive counter discourse to elements of misogyny in black popular culture; second, my feeling that the emergence of Malcolm X as an icon of younger African Americans requires a serious and sustained examination and engagement of all aspects of his legacy. Malcolm X has not been the subject of a black feminist critique in the way that Richard Wright or Miles Davis have been. When I looked to black feminist thinkers who have written on Malcolm, few of them were as critical of his views on women as I had expected. Patricia Hill Collins, Barbara Ransby, and Tracye Matthews are among the few to call attention to Malcolm’s gender politics.¹

Black women are reluctant of being critical of Malcolm X: theirs is a reluctance born from the desire not to have such a critique co-opted by those who already hold him in contempt and disdain and a reluctance grounded in the genuine love, respect, and reverence that many black women have for Malcolm. I must admit that even as I write this essay, I share this reluctance, for there are few black male leaders whom I hold in as much esteem as I do Malcolm. Nonetheless, while I recognize Malcolm to be a man of his times and a man with tremendous capacity for growth, I am disturbed by any tendency to uncritically adopt his political and rhetorical stance, particularly around gender.

In this essay I will articulate some of the reasons why so many black women, even black feminists, appreciate and revere Malcolm

and his legacy. Then I hope to offer a reading of his position on women, not as a means of discrediting the esteem in which we hold him, but as a means to move us beyond the oppressive gender politics embedded in his rhetoric. Malcolm X offered black women a promise of protection, an acknowledgment of the significance of white racist assaults on black beauty and an affirmation of black features, particularly hair and color. In the remainder of this essay, I will examine these two important aspects of his legacy.

The Promise of Protection

Her head is more regularly beaten than any woman's and by her own man; she is the scapegoat for Mr. Charlie; she is forced to stark realism and chided if caught dreaming; her aspirations for her and hers are, for sanity's sake, stunted; her physical image has been criminally maligned, assaulted, and negated; she's the first to be called ugly, yet never beautiful, and as a consequence is forced to see her man . . . brainwashed and wallowing in self-loathing, pick for his own the physical antithesis of her. . . . Then to add insult to injury, she . . . stands accused as emasculator of the only thing she has ever cared for, her black man. . . . Who will revere the black woman? Who will keep our neighborhood safe for black innocent womanhood? . . . black womanhood cries for dignity and restitution and salvation. black womanhood wants and needs protection and keeping and holding. . . . Who will keep her precious and pure? Who will glorify and proclaim her beautiful image? To whom will she cry rape?

—Abbey Lincoln²

Malcolm X's appeal to a broad range of black women lay first in his courage and commitment to black liberation and second in his attempt to address the call sent out by Abbey Lincoln and cited above; a call that had been voiced many times prior to Lincoln's articulation of it: "Who will revere the black woman? Who will keep her precious and pure? Who will keep our neighborhoods safe for innocent black womanhood? Who will glorify and proclaim her beautiful image?" The terms "precious," "pure," "innocent," "beautiful," and "revere" were (and in many instances, continue to be) particularly important to African American women. Each of these terms has been equated with white womanhood and thereby with femininity—both privileged spheres in

our society; spheres where black women have historically been denied access. Poor and working black women, and dark-skinned black women especially, have been excluded from the discourse of the precious, pure, and protected.

However, as appealing as the promise of protection and the guarantee of purity are, they are also intensely problematic: These are the very same terms used by white American men, particularly white Southern men, to repress white women and to systematically brutalize black men—all in the name of protection and (race) purity.

My term “promise of protection” is influenced by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s term, “rhetoric of protection.” Hall uses the phrase to describe the discourses of a pure and protected white womanhood in the American South. According to Hall, “the rhetoric of protection [was] reflective of a power struggle between men.” She continues, “the right of the southern lady to protection presupposed her obligation to obey.”³ I have chosen not to use the word “rhetoric” because I want to avoid the implications of the word that suggest a discourse lacking in conviction or earnest feeling. Malcolm’s desire to “protect” black women grew out of a sincere concern for their emotional, psychic, and physical safety; it was also reflective of the power struggle between black and white men and black men and women. Furthermore, the pure and protected black woman of his vision was also obligated to obey her protector—the black man. The exchange is as follows: The woman gets protection; the man acquires a possession.

Nonetheless, many black women were willing to accept the terms of this contract. Barbara Omolade explains, “The extremes of American patriarchy, particularly under slavery, pushed black women outside traditional patriarchal protection.” Consequently, the promise of patriarchal protection was certainly much better than the methodical abuse suffered by black women throughout much of their history in the New World. As had been the case a century earlier with their recently freed foremothers, the assurance of their safety was a very appealing vision for many black women: It stood in direct opposition to the degrading images that bombarded them on a daily basis and the harsh reality of many of their lives. Omolade notes, “Most black women accepted traditional notions of patriarchy from black men because they viewed the Afro-Christian tradition of woman as mother and wife as personally desirable and politically necessary for black people’s survival.”⁴

Malcolm X's promise of protection comes from a long tradition in African American writing and organizing. The National Association of Colored Women was formed in 1896 in part to protect the name and image of black women. Leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Alexander Crummell both called for the protection of black women from rape, physical abuse, and economic poverty.⁵ Large numbers of the urban women to whom Malcolm X spoke were the daughters of or were themselves women who fled the South in an attempt to escape the threat of rape from white males. Black women also found themselves the victims of economic exploitation, unfair employment practices, medical experimentation, and domestic violence. Who was deemed better to play the role of protector than black men? This, of course, is a role that had been denied black men throughout history.

Malcolm's promise of protection assumes a stance of victimization on the part of those who need to be protected without allowing much room for their agency in other spheres. It places the woman in the hands of her protector—who may protect her, but who also may decide to further victimize her. In either case her well-being is entirely dependent on his will and authority. Note Malcolm's words upon hearing the dynamic Fannie Lou Hamer speak of her experiences in Mississippi:

When I listen to Mrs. Hamer, a black woman—could be my mother, my sister, my daughter—describe what they have done to her in Mississippi, I ask myself how in the world can we expect to be respected as *men* when we will allow something like that to be done to our women, and we do nothing about it? How can you and I be looked upon as men with black women being beaten and nothing being done about it? No, we don't deserve to be recognized and respected as men as long as our women can be brutalized in the manner that this woman described, and nothing being done about it, but we sit around singing "We shall overcome."⁶

Later, when introducing her at the Audubon, Malcolm would refer to her as "the country's number one freedom-fighting woman." However, the predominant tone of this passage refers to Hamer only as victim in need of protection—not the protection afforded to citizens by their governments (which the South and the nation at large did not provide) but the protection of a black man. Hamer's victimization makes black men the subject of Malcolm's comment. When read

closely, the above statement is not a paragraph about Fannie Lou Hamer but about the questionable masculinity of black men, particularly those black men of the southern Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King. If black men protected “their” women, then Ms. Hamer would not be a victim of such abuse. Nor would she be a freedom fighter—that would be a position monopolized by black male protectors.

According to Malcolm in his *Autobiography*, “All women by their nature are fragile and weak: they are attracted to the male in whom they see strength.”⁷ This assertion of the nature of black women leaves little room for women like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ida B. Wells, or Angela Davis.

Malcolm’s general understanding about the nature of women was acquired in childhood through witnessing the abusive actions of his father as well as from his days on the streets of Boston and New York. While the discourse of protection emerges from the Nation of Islam, it does not challenge Malcolm’s earlier notions of women’s nature. Instead, the Nation provides him with a framework that still accepts women’s nature as fragile and weak, that also sees women as manipulative, but that encourages men to protect and respect instead of abuse them. Malcolm’s mentor Elijah Muhammed shared his sense that the protection of the black woman guaranteed black men their manhood: “Until we learn to love and protect our woman, we will never be a fit and recognized people on earth. The white people here among you will never recognize you until you protect your woman.”⁸

In all of the instances cited above, women are subordinate to men whether as the objects of abuse or protection. In the *Autobiography*, Malcolm notes:

Islam has very strict laws and teachings about women, the core of them being that the true nature of man is to be strong, and a woman’s true nature is to be weak, and while a man must at all times respect his woman, at the same time he needs to understand that he must control her if he expects to get her respect.⁹

Protection is not in and of itself a bad thing. Patriarchal societies such as ours foster misogyny from which all women need protection. A racist patriarchal society is particularly dangerous for black women. However, protection need not be equated with possession. Of course, until the day arrives when we no longer live in a patriarchal society,

women need to be protected from misogyny and paternalism; however, instead of fighting simply to protect women from misogyny, we must all engage in the fight to eradicate patriarchy as well as racism. This dedication is nowhere apparent in Malcolm's writing. Finally, it is one thing to protect an individual so that she may actually live with a greater degree of freedom, that is, make our streets safe so that women may walk alone at night. It is another thing entirely to "protect" someone and in so doing to limit their freedom and mobility. We must be careful to distinguish offers of protection that are made in a context that places limitations on women's freedom.

In a brilliant Afro-centric feminist critique of African American nationalism, "Africa on My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African-American Nationalism," E. Frances White argues that "black nationalism is an oppositional strategy that both counters racism and constructs utopian and repressive gender relations."¹⁰ Herein lies the paradox of Malcolm's promise of protection. When considered only in contrast to the external discourse of white supremacy, Malcolm's proposal of protection seems to offer a radical stance on black womanhood. However, if we consider what his discourse shares with white sexist discourse, we see something altogether different. Again White warns:

In making appeals to conservative notions of appropriate gender behavior, African-American nationalists reveal their ideological ties to other nationalist movements, including European and Euro-American bourgeois nationalists over the past 200 years . . . European and Euro-American nationalists turned to the ideology of respectability to help them impose the bourgeoisie manners and morals that attempted to control sexual behavior and gender relations.¹¹

Malcolm X's promise of protection falls under the rubric of the "ideology of respectability." The protected woman is the "respectable" woman. The man who protects her is the respected man.

The Affirmation of Black Beauty

I knew he loved me for my clear brown skin—it was very smooth. He liked my clear eyes. He liked my gleaming dark hair. I was very thin then and he liked my black beauty, my mind. He just liked me.

—Betty Shabazz¹²

In addition to the promise of protection, Malcolm X also offered all black people, and black women in particular, an affirmation of black features and physical characteristics. In so doing, he followed the lead of Marcus Garvey and Elijah Muhammad. To many this may seem unimportant or shallow, but when considered in light of constant white supremacist assaults on notions of black beauty, it is of profound significance. From the minstrel caricatures to “serious scientific” studies, black difference has always been predicated on black bodies. Big black lips, nappy black hair, large black thighs and derrieres, black black skin, “oversized” black genitals.

Though African Americans always fought such assaults by establishing and maintaining their own sense of their humanity, dignity, capability, and beauty, perhaps in no realm have our oppressors been more successful than in convincing us of our own ugliness. Throughout our history on this continent, black Americans have accepted and revised white standards of beauty. Yet for large numbers of black women these standards continue to be oppressive, particularly when they are upheld by other African Americans. In 1925, Walter White observed: “Even among intelligent Negroes there has come into being the fallacious belief that black Negroes are less able to achieve success.”¹³ The color tension between Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois is legendary. Garvey questioned Du Bois’ credibility as a leader by accusing him of wanting to be “everything but black” and Du Bois referred to Garvey as “fat, black, and ugly.”¹⁴ Du Bois’ comment is something of a floating trinity in black America. Like the floating blues lyric that appears in diverse songs and contexts, so too does the phrase, “fat, black and ugly”—readily available as an all too familiar taunt. Or, witness Colin Powell’s statement in an interview with Henry Louis Gates—“I ain’t that black.”¹⁵

If black men have used color and features as weapons against each other, the impact of a color hierarchy on black women has been especially devastating. In a heterosexist society, standards of beauty always impact upon women more harshly than upon men. Because black women were always compared to “the white woman”—the standard bearer—in the eyes of mainstream society and in the eyes of far too many black men, they fell short of this ideal.¹⁶

By the time Malcolm X began speaking to black audiences, black women had suffered centuries of “humiliating and detested images of [them]selves imposed by other people.”¹⁷ Pages of black magazines

were filled with advertisements for hair-straightening and skin-lightening products; most black sex symbols were café au lait at best: Lena Horne, Dorothy Dandridge, Eartha Kitt. As Malcolm gained notoriety, black audiences would see the emergence of darker beauties like Abbey Lincoln, Cicely Tyson, and Nina Simone, but these would still be rare. It is in this context that we must be aware of the appeal of Malcolm's affirmation of black features and color. Also, we must remain cognizant of the class connotations of a color hierarchy in black communities.

When Malcolm X spoke out against racist hierarchies of beauty, black women heard an admired and respected leader who finally took seriously an issue that had affected them profoundly—an issue that is often not given serious attention by black leaders and thinkers because it is not considered "political" and because it calls for a self-critique that few leaders have been willing to endure. This was not the case with Malcolm X: "Out in the world, later on, in Boston and New York, I was among the millions of Negroes who were insane enough to feel that it was some kind of status symbol to be light-complexioned—that one was actually fortunate to be born thus."¹⁸

Many black people, particularly women, welcomed Malcolm's willingness to break the silence around "the color thing." The issue of colorism, of distinctions based on grade of hair and keenness of features, tears at the very fabric of who we are as a people. In the way that certain feminist critiques of the nuclear family uncovered the sexist aspects of that institution, so too do critiques of white standards of beauty and desirability reveal hidden dimensions in black family life. Malcolm exposed this when he said, "I actually believe that as anti-white as my father was, he was subconsciously so afflicted with the white man's brainwashing of Negroes that he inclined to favor the light ones. . . . Most Negro parents . . . would almost instinctively treat any lighter children better than they did the darker ones."¹⁹ With humor and pathos Malcolm taught black people to see the way they came to hate their color, their hair, their features. He also connected this understanding with their political awakening.

You know yourself that we have been a people who hated our African characteristics. We hated our heads, we hated the shape of our nose, we wanted one of those long dog-like noses, you know; we hated the color of our skin, hated the blood of Africa that was in our veins. And in hating our features and our skin and our blood, why we had to end up hating ourselves.²⁰

While contemporary black critics like Lisa Jones and Kobena Mercer²¹ challenge the adequacy of the notion of self-hatred for understanding the personal aesthetics of African Americans, Malcolm still has much to teach us about the way we have often uncritically adopted white supremacist standards. Although the black church has also been a sight of affirming black beauty, Malcolm went a step further and suggested that we rid ourselves of all remnants of the white supremacist legacy, including straightened hair. It is quite ironic that other members of the Nation would later charge the organization with its own brand of colorism. In a CBS documentary on Malcolm X, one member even claimed that Malcolm's ascendancy to a position of leadership was aided by his fair coloring.²² In fact, Malcolm X is even somewhat oppositional from the official Nation of Islam stance on issues like hair and color in his celebration of unstraightened black hair.²³

For black women in Malcolm's audience, greetings like "My beautiful black brothers and sisters" with which he opened some of his talks, must have come as rare and welcome salutations.²⁴ In February 1992, *Essence* magazine ran a special issue on "Honoring Our Heroes." Malcolm was on the cover and one of the featured articles was an as-told-to narrative by his widow, Betty Shabazz. Audrey Edwards and Susan Taylor opened the narrative with the following: "He has come to embody the best in black men: strong and uncompromising, clear—committed to securing power 'by any means necessary.'"²⁵ In that quotation, Malcolm's wife Betty Shabazz recalls her own feeling of affirmation in Malcolm's aesthetic appreciation of her blackness.

Black women cherished Malcolm's willingness to affirm them as worthy of respect, love, and admiration. All hierarchies of beauty are ultimately oppressive. And yet in a context where black women have been constructed as ugly just because they are black, it has been necessary to affirm them by acknowledging the beauty of blackness in all of its various guises. Still, our challenge isn't to reverse this hierarchy but to redefine beauty while questioning it as the most important characteristic for a woman to possess. Finally, our goal ought to be to dismantle all such oppressive hierarchies altogether.

The appreciation of the variety and diversity of black beauty is nowhere more evident than in black nationalist movements. However, this affirmation of black beauty rarely leads to a progressive gender politics. In fact, nationalist movements of all sorts also have been characterized by their patriarchal ambitions. At best black

women can expect to be called black queens and we all know that where there are queens there are kings: a pairing that is rarely an equal one (not to mention the class and antidemocratic implications of such titles).

During his time, Malcolm's promise of protection and affirmation of black beauty were welcome and needed. However, even then they held evidence of a very problematic gender politics. Our task is to scrutinize this aspect of his legacy with a critical eye. Of course we must hold on to and value that which sought to affirm black women, but we must rid ourselves of and revise all elements of his philosophy that might be detrimental to them.

Womanist Malcolm?!

do not speak to me of martyrdom
of men who die to be remembered
on some parish day.
i don't believe in dying
though i too shall die
and violets like castanets
will echo me.

—from "Malcolm" by Sonia Sanchez

It is quite significant that in spite of the profound sexism of some of his writing, Malcolm X continues to be a hero for many black women, even many black womanist critics, theorists, and artists, myself included. Most black women who had the opportunity to hear Malcolm never flocked to cover their bodies and hair, walk two steps behind their men, and join the Nation of Islam. Nevertheless, many of them appeared to have voiced their admiration and respect for his vision and for his commitment to black women and families. In my classes, it is most often white women who are the first to raise concerns about the sexist moments in the *Autobiography*, while many of my black women students immediately jump to Malcolm's defense, claiming him as a hero.

Black women thinkers like Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Alice Walker have all acknowledged his impact on their intellectual development and politicization. Davis and Walker have sought to rescue

his legacy from the misogyny of those black leaders who followed him. hooks applauds his affirmation of blackness in the midst of a society that despises all that is black. Patricia Hill Collins is one of the few contemporary black feminist thinkers to provide a sustained critique of Malcolm's gender politics in an effort to make black nationalism more accountable to black women.²⁶ Perhaps Collins is able to launch such a critique because she shares Malcolm's black nationalist politics.

If black women critical thinkers have been reluctant to forward a critique of the sexism inherent in much of Malcolm's legacy, black women creative writers, particularly our poets, have praised him in terms that celebrate the very patriarchy of his masculinity and held that up as his value to us as a people. Sonia Sanchez, Lucille Clifton, Margaret Walker Alexander, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Alice Walker are all among the women who have written poems in honor of Malcolm X. In 1968, Brooks published "Malcolm X":

Original.

Ragged-round.

Rich-robust.

He had the hawk-man's eyes.

We gasped. We saw the maleness.

The maleness raking out and making guttural the air
and pushing us to walls.

and in a soft and fundamental hour

a sorcery devout and vertical

beguiled the world.

He opened us—

who was a key,

who was a man.

Brooks's Malcolm is the one who is loved and revered by many black women: A BLACK MAN, MALE, MALCOLM who could protect us and "open" us as he was a key. The "us" of this poem is a feminized black people who are in need of a very masculinized black leader.

Some black women have pinned their hopes on "What might have been the direction of Malcolm's thinking on questions of gender had he not been so cruelly assassinated?" For some sense of this, we all

turn to one statement in particular that has come to represent a kind of beacon light for us:

One thing that I became aware of in my traveling recently through Africa and the Middle East in every country you go to, usually the degree of progress can never be separated from the woman. If you're in a country that is progressive, then woman is progressive. If you're in a country that reflects the consciousness toward the importance of education, it's because the woman is aware of the importance of education. But in every backward country you'll find the women are backward, and in every country where education is not stressed it's because the women don't have education. So one of the things I became thoroughly convinced of in my recent travels is the importance of giving freedom to the woman, giving her education, and giving her the incentive to get out there and put that same spirit and understanding in her children. And frankly I am proud of the contributions women have made in the struggle for freedom and I'm one person who's for giving them all the leeway possible because they've made a greater contribution than many of us men.²⁷

This is the comment that leads some black women to say that Malcolm began to reconsider his stance on women, their nature, and their role in the black freedom struggle. It is seen as part of the overall growth and change he experienced following his travels through Africa and the Middle East. Patricia Hill Collins has pointed out that even here, women are not agents. They are given freedom and education so that they may better act upon their roles as mother.²⁸

By the end of his life, it appears Malcolm not only changed his opinion about women's position in society, but he also began a much needed self-critique. In the important essay "Black Popular Culture and the Transcendence of Patriarchal Illusions," Barbara Ransby and Trayce Matthews cite the following excerpt from a letter Malcolm wrote to his cousin-in-law in 1965:

I taught brothers not only to deal unintelligently with the devil or the white woman, but I also taught many brothers to spit acid at the sisters. They were kept in their places—you probably didn't notice this in action, but it is a fact. I taught these brothers to spit acid at the sisters. If the sisters decided a thing was wrong, they had to suffer it out. If the sister wanted to have her husband at home with her in the evening, I taught the brothers that the sisters were standing in their way; in the way of the Messenger, in the way of progress, in the way of God himself. I did these things brother. I must undo them.²⁹

If Malcolm himself came to be aware of the need to “undo” the work of his teachings about women, certainly we must recognize this need as well. Beyond wondering how Malcolm’s view of women might have changed, we are left with the task of critiquing and revising what he left us. The re-emergence of his popularity with young black people, the use of his discourse by present-day nationalist leaders requires us to provide a systematic critique of those elements of his thought that place limits on black women. Angela Davis suggests we concern ourselves with “the continuing influence of both those who see themselves as the political descendants of Malcolm and our historical memory of this man as shaped by social and technological forces that have frozen his memory, transforming it into a backward imprisoning memory rather than a forward looking impetus for creative political thinking and organizing.”³⁰

Just as there are some who want only to preserve the racial politics of the pre-Mecca Malcolm, so too are there those persons who want to freeze his pre-Mecca statements on women. We must move from Abbey Lincoln’s call for a Malcolm-like black man who will revere and protect us in the traditional sense of these words. And we must imagine the possibility that Malcolm’s legacy might lead to a celebration of the Malcolm X of Alice Walker’s poem, “Malcolm”:

Those who say they knew you
offer as proof
an image stunted
by perfection.
Alert for signs of the man
to claim, one must believe
they did not know you at all
nor can remember the small, less popular
ironies of the Saint:
that you learned to prefer
all women free
and enjoyed a joke
and loved to laugh.

—Alice Walker³¹

Walker’s Malcolm is a man who “learned to love all women free.” A mythical Malcolm, yes (for perhaps the real ironies of the Saint are that he loved black women—yet could not imagine them as equal partners and in this way he is no different than most men of his time),

but no less mythical than the one who fuels contemporary images of him in popular culture and nationalist discourses.

Malcolm's tremendous capacity for self-reflection, growth, and revision can serve as an example for us. A serious and critical engagement with his words and thought leads us to the understanding that we must respect and acknowledge his continuing importance and significance while moving beyond the limitations of his vision.

NOTES

1. See Barbara Ransby and Tracye Matthews, "Black Popular Culture and the Transcendence of Patriarchal Illusions," in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 526–35; and Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning to Think for Ourselves: Malcolm X's Black Nationalism Reconsidered," in Joe Wood, ed., *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 59–85.

2. Abbey Lincoln, "Who Will Revere the Black Woman?" *Negro Digest* (September 1966), reprinted in Toni Cade, ed., *The Black Woman* (New York: Signet, 1970), 82–84.

3. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Mind That Burns in Each Body": Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 335.

4. Barbara Omolade, "Hearts of Darkness," in Snitow, *Powers of Desire*, 352

5. See Alexander Crummell, *Destiny and Race: Selected Writing, 1840–1898*, edited by Wilson Jeremiah Wilson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); and W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Damnation of Women," in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920), 164–85.

6. George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965), 107.

7. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1990).

8. Again, here as with Malcolm, protection is really about manhood. It is quite significant that the editorial from which this statement is taken was recently republished in an edition of *The Final Call* devoted to black women. Reprinted in *The Final Call*, July 20, 1994, 18.

9. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 226.

10. E. Frances White, "Africa On My Mind: Gender, Counter Discourse and African-American Nationalism," *Journal of Women's History*, 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 76.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Betty Shabazz, "Loving and Losing Malcolm," *Essence* (February 1992): 107.
13. Walter White, "Color Lines" *Survey Graphic* VI (March 1925): 682.
14. For an exploration of the color debate between Garvey and Du Bois, see V. P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African American Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 122–25.
15. See Henry Louis Gates, "The Powell Perplex," in *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Random House, 1997), 84.
16. Even today, more than twenty years after the "black is beautiful" sixties and the Afro-centric nineties, colorism continues to thrive among African Americans. As recently as 1994, psychologist Midge Wilson of DePaul University asserted, "Studies show that successful Black men are particularly likely to marry light-skinned women." Karen Grisby Bates, "The Color Thing," *Essence* (September 1994): 132. See also Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).
17. Editor's Statement from the first issue of *Essence*, April 1970.
18. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 4
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Malcolm X on Afro-American History* (New York: Pathfinder, 1967), 86.
21. See Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions on Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Lisa Jones, *Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex and Hair* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).
22. See "The Real Malcolm X: An Intimate Portrait of the Man," CBS News Video, 1992. Executive Producer Andrew Lack, Producer, Brett Alexander.
23. See E. Frances White, "Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism" *Radical America*, 7–25.
24. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography*, 201.
25. Betty Shabazz as told to Audrey Edwards and Susan Taylor, "Loving and Losing Malcolm," *Essence* 22, no. 10 (February 1992): 50.
26. See bell hooks, "Sitting at the Feet of the Messenger: Remembering Malcolm X," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 87; Angela Y. Davis, "Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X" and Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning to Think for Ourselves: Malcolm X's Black Nationalism Reconsidered," in Joe Wood, ed., *Malcolm X: In Our Own Image* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 36–47, and 59–85.
27. Paris interview, November 1964.
28. Collins, "Learning to Think for Ourselves," 79.
29. I am grateful to Tracye Matthews for calling my attention to this letter. Letter cited in Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire*, 530. It originally appeared in

an unpublished manuscript by Paul Lee, "Malcolm X's Evolved Views on the Role of Women in Society."

30. Davis, "Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X," 44–45.

31. Alice Walker, "Malcolm," in *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems 1965–1990 Complete* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 291.