

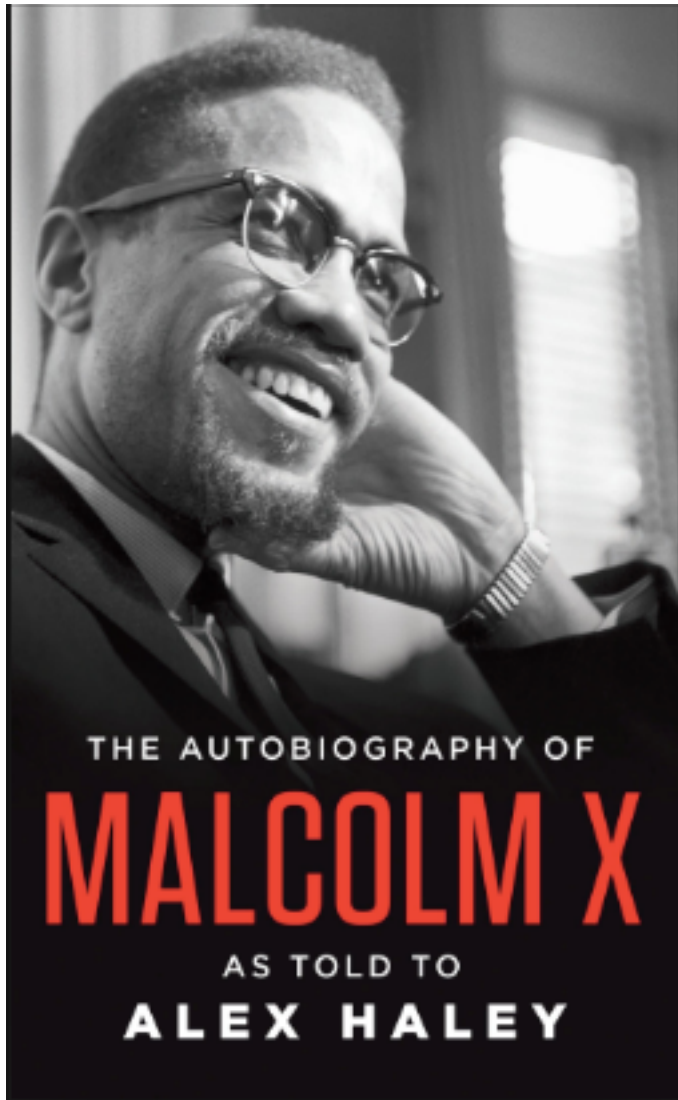
## #86: The Autobiography of Malcolm X

#books

#books/rating/★★★★★

#books/type/non-fiction

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### Overview

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The Autobiography of Malcolm X is the most powerful book I've read this year, about an amazing man with a truly extraordinary life. That an 8th grade dropout, who educated himself while in prison for armed robbery, could go on to debate and influence and speak to millions of people and countless national and world leaders, speaks to his intelligence, character, and persistence.

Alex Haley says it best in the Introduction:

"No man in our time aroused fear and hatred in the white man as did Malcolm, because in him the white man sensed an implacable foe who could not be had for any price—a man unreservedly committed to the cause of liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into that society." (pg. xxvi)

"American autobiographical literature is filled with numerous accounts of remarkable men who pulled themselves to the summit by their bootstraps. Few are as poignant as Malcolm's memoirs. As testimony to the power of redemption and the force of human personality, the autobiography of Malcolm X is a revelation." (pg. xxx)

## Book Notes

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### FOREWORD

"He read so much that he had to begin to wear glasses." (pg. xv)

### INTRODUCTION (by Alex Haley)

- "No man in our time aroused fear and hatred in the white man as did Malcolm, because in him the white man sensed an implacable foe who could not be had for any price—a man unreservedly committed to the cause of liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into that society." (pg. xxvi)
- "The forces in a developing social struggle are frequently buried beneath the visible surface and make themselves felt in many ways long before they burst out into the open. These generative forces make themselves felt through the power of an idea long before their organizational forms can openly challenge the establishment." (pg. xxvi)
- "It is the merit of European political scientists and sociologists to give a high priority to the power of ideas in a social struggle. In the United States, it is our weakness to confuse the numerical strength of an organization and the publicity attached to leaders with the germinating forces that sow the seeds of social upheaval in our community." (pg. xxvi)
- "American autobiographical literature is filled with numerous accounts of remarkable men who pulled themselves to the summit by their bootstraps. Few are as poignant as Malcolm's memoirs. As testimony to the power of redemption and the force of human personality, the autobiography of Malcolm X is a revelation." (pg. xxx)

## CHAPTER 1 - NIGHTMARE

- On rabbit hunting...

It was the beginning of a very important lesson in life—that anytime you find someone more successful than you are, especially when you’re both engaged in the same business—you know they’re doing something that you aren’t.” (pg. 21)

## CHAPTER 2 - MASCOT

- His 8th grade English teacher told him that becoming a lawyer wasn’t realistic: “Why don’t you plan on carpentry?”

“It was surprising that I had never thought of it that way before, but I realized that whatever I wasn’t, I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes, to become whatever I wanted to be.” (pg. 38)

## CHAPTER 3 - “HOMEBODY”

## CHAPTER 4 - LAURA

## CHAPTER 5 - HARLEMITE

## CHAPTER 6 - DETROIT RED

- **The Numbers** - players would bet on, “the last three figures of the Stock Exchange’s printed daily total of U.S. domestic and foreign sales.”; hundreds of thousands of people would play every day; a penny hit won \$6 (pg. 87)

## CHAPTER 7 - HUSTLER

- “She knew from personal experience how crime existed only to the degree that the law cooperated with it. She showed me how, in the country’s entire social, political, and economic structure, the criminal, the law, and the politicians were actually inseparable partners.” (pg. 119)

## CHAPTER 8 - TRAPPED

## CHAPTER 9 - CAUGHT

## CHAPTER 10 - SATAN

- “Any person who claims to have deep feeling for other human beings should think a long, long time before he votes to have other men kept being bars—caged. I am not saying there

shouldn't be prisons, but there shouldn't be bars. Behind bars, a man never reforms. He will never forget. He will never get completely over the memory of the bars." (pg. 155)

## CHAPTER 11 - SAVED

- On prayer...

"But bending my knees to pray—that act—well, that took me a week. You know what my life had been. Picking a lock to rob someone's house was the only way my knees had ever been bent before." (pg. 173)

- Writing letters was how he, "happened to stumble upon starting to acquire some kind of a homemade education." (pg. 174)
- "I saw that the best thing I could do was get hold of a dictionary—to study, to learn some words." (pg. 175)
- He eventually went on to copy the entire dictionary into his own notebook; "between what I wrote in my tablet, and writing letters, during the rest of my time in prison I would guess I wrote a million words."

"I could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying. Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk." (pg. 176)

"No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened to me, of being able to read and *understand*." (pg. 177)

"I have often reflected upon the new vistas that reading opened to me. I knew right there in prison that reading had changed forever the course of my life. As I see it today, the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive." (pg. 182)

"My homemade education gave me, with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America." (pg. 182)

"Every time I catch a plane, I have with me a book that I want to read—and that's a lot of books these days." (pg. 183)

"I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did. In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently

and I had attended college.” (pg. 183)

“In prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was as exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been.” (pg. 187)

## CHAPTER 12 - SAVIOR

## CHAPTER 13 - MINISTER MALCOLM X

## CHAPTER 14 - BLACK MUSLIMS

“I’ve always been blessed in that if I can watch something being done, generally I can catch onto how to do it myself. Quick “picking up” was probably the number one survival rule when I’d been out there in the streets as a hustler.” (pg. 241)

“The greatest miracle Christianity has achieved in America is that the black man in white Christian hands has not grown violent. It is a miracle that 22 million black people have not *risen up* against their oppressors—in which they would have been justified by all moral criteria, and even by the democratic tradition!” (pg. 251)

## CHAPTER 15 - ICARUS

## CHAPTER 16 - OUT

## CHAPTER 17 - MECCA

“It was when I first began to perceive that “white man,” as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions...in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been.” (pg. 340)

“You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to *re-arrange* much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth.” (pg. 347)

## CHAPTER 18 - EL-HAJJ MALIK EL-SHABAZZ

- On Cassius Clay...

"Even children knew of him, and loved him there in the Muslim world....At that moment in young Cassius' career, he had captured the imagination and the support of the entire dark world." (pg. 349)

- "The American black "leader's" most critical problem is lack of imagination! His thinking, his strategies, if any, are always limited, at least basically, to only that which is either advised, or approved by the white man. And the first thing the American power structure doesn't want any Negroes to start is thinking *internationally*." (pg. 353)

## CHAPTER 19 - 1965

"My father and most of his brothers died by violence—my father because of what he believed in. To come right down to it, if I take the kind of things in which I believe, then add to that the kind of temperament that I have, plus the one hundred per cent dedication I have to whatever I believe in—these are ingredients which make it just about impossible for me to die of old age." (pg. 386)

"I have given to this book so much of whatever time I have because I feel, and I hope, that if I honestly and fully tell my life's account, read objectively it might prove to be a testimony of some social value." (pg. 386)

"My greatest lack has been, I believe, that I don't have the kind of academic education I wish I had been able to get...You can believe me that if I had the time right now, I would not be one bit ashamed to go back into any New York City public school and start where I left off at the ninth grade, and go on through a degree." (pg. 387)

"I would just like to study. I mean ranging study, because I have a wide-open mind. I'm interested in almost any subject you can mention." (pg. 388)

"You see, most whites, even when they credit a Negro with some intelligence, will still feel that all he can talk about is the race issue; most whites never feel that Negroes can contribute anything to other areas of thought, and ideas. You just notice how rarely you will ever hear whites asking any Negroes what they think about the problem of world health,

or the space race to land men on the moon.” (pg. 388)

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

“You watch. I will be labeled as, at best, an “irresponsible” black man. I have always felt about this accusation that the black “leader” whom white men consider to be “responsible” is invariably the black “leader” who never gets any results.” (pg. 389)

“Yes, I have cherished my “demagogue” role. I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help to destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America—then, all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine.” (pg. 389)

## EPILOGUE (ALEX HALEY)

- On listening well...

“There’s an art to listening well. I listen closely to the sound of a man’s voice when he’s speaking. I can hear sincerity.”

“You know, why I have been able to have some effect is because I make a study of the weaknesses of this country and because the more the white man yelps, the more I know I have struck a nerve.” (pg. 423)

“You know, this isn’t something I’m proud to say, but I don’t think I’ve ever bought one gift for my children. Everything they play with, either Betty got it for them, or somebody gave it to them, never me. That’s not good, I know it. I’ve always been too *busy*.” (pg. 43)

“White folks do not need anybody to remind them that they are men. We do! This was his one incontrovertible benefit to his people. Protocol and common sense require that Negroes stand back and let the white man speak up for us, defend us, and lead us from behind the scene in our fight. This is the essence of Negro politics. But Malcolm said to hell with that! Get up off your knees and fight your own battles. That’s the way to win back your self-respect. That’s the way to make the white man respect you. And if he won’t let you live like a man, he certainly can’t keep you from dying like one.” – Ossie Davis (pg. 465)

