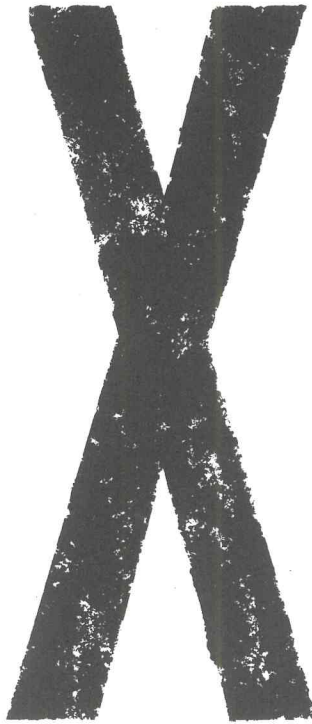


X

The Life  
and  
Times  
of  
Malcolm X

Libretto



# **The Life and Times of Malcolm X**

**Libretto by Thulani Davis**

**Music by Anthony Davis**

**Story by Christopher Davis**

**World Premiere: New York City Opera  
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Reporter: "And just what is the cost of freedom?"

Malcolm X: "The cost of freedom is death."

For

El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Malcolm .....	Baritone
Elijah .....	Tenor
Betty .....	Mezzo-Soprano
Ella .....	Mezzo-Soprano
Reginald .....	Bass Baritone
Louise .....	Soprano
Street .....	Tenor
Player/Inmate/Youth/Muslim .....	Tenor
— Social Worker/the Blonde/Girlfriend/Reporter .....	Soprano
Garvey preacher/Father/Player/Inmate/orator/Muslim .....	Baritone
Queen Mother .....	Mezzo-Soprano
Policeman/Guard/Pilgrim/Reporter .....	Tenor
Blind man/Salesman/Player/Inmate/Numbers runner/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Bass
Neighbor/Preacher/Player/Inmate/Youth/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Baritone
Neighbor/Player/Inmate/Boyfriend/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Baritone
Neighbor/Player/Inmate/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Tenor
Neighbor/Musician/Inmate/Youth/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Tenor
Neighbor/Laborer/Inmate/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Tenor
Neighbor/Bootblack/Player/Inmate/Paper peddler/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Tenor
Neighbor/Church woman/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Mezzo-Soprano
Neighbor/Beautician/Mother/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Soprano
Neighbor/Malcolm's sweetheart/Teen/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Soprano
Neighbor/Businesswoman/Muslim/Pilgrim .....	Mezzo-Soprano
— Policeman/Guard/Pilgrim/Reporter .....	Tenor

~ Policeman/Guard/Pilgrim/Reporter . . . . . Tenor  
Young Malcolm Little [10 years old] . . . . . Soprano  
Young Reginald Little [younger]/Muslim boy . . . . . figurant  
Yvonne Little [youngest]/Muslim girl . . . . . figurant  
Hilda Little [oldest]/Muslim girl . . . . . figurant  
Clothes salesman/Dope fiend/Muslim . . . . . figurant  
Teen/Dancer/Student/Muslim . . . . . figurant  
~ Policeman/Guard/Pilgrim/Photographer . . . . . figurant  
Teen/Dancer/Student/Muslim . . . . . figurant  
Young woman/Dancer/Muslim . . . . . figurant

ACT ONE (1931-1945)

Scene 1. Lansing, Michigan  
Scene 2. Boston  
Scene 3. Prison

*Intermission*

ACT TWO (1946-1963)

Scene 1. Prison  
Scene 2. 125th Street, Harlem  
Scene 3. 125th Street, Harlem  
Scene 4. Muslim Mosque

*Intermission*

ACT THREE (1963-65)

Scene 1. Velvet Drive, Phoenix  
Scene 2. Mecca  
Scene 3. Riot  
Scene 4. A Hotel in New York City  
Scene 5. Audubon Ballroom, Harlem

Act I  
Scene I

1931, Lansing, Michigan. The home of Reverend Earl Little and his wife, Louise, and four of their children. It is a farmhouse with Depression-era furnishings. This evening there is a meeting of the local following of Marcus Garvey's Universal Improvement Association, led by Rev. Little, but he is late. Mrs. Little has been uneasy all day. Members of the group go on with the meeting; tensions are high because everyone is concerned about two active white supremacist groups terrorizing blacks in the area. A visiting organizer is recruiting for Garvey's Black Star Line, ships being fitted to take blacks back to Africa.

The guest speaker leads the meeting as young Malcolm and the other children watch. Louise, now very frightened that Earl has not returned, slips into her memories of the terror that has stalked their family. She forgets the others in the room. Strange lights move in the distance. Shadows move near the house and pass. A policeman arrives and announces that there was an accident. Rev. Little was cut in half by a streetcar. The neighbors say a white mob attacked the man and left him on the tracks. Louise becomes distraught, hysterical, sings to herself, and after a time, becomes unreachable.

A social worker comes to the home and declares the children wards of the state. Malcolm tries to get his mother to help him. Finally, Ella, Malcolm's older half-sister arrives to take him to her home in Boston.

Louise [To children]  
Malcolm, Reginald,  
I see you mumbling something.  
You know what your father  
said. Speak up and say your  
part. Mumble and the devil  
will say. Go see if your  
mother comes.  
Go see.

Postman  
Is the Reverend back yet?

Louise  
He'll be along. [To children] Go see.

Garvey Preacher  
It's a mean time.

All  
Yes, brother.

Garvey Preacher  
Nothing left to call mine.

All  
Yes, brother. Yes, brother.

Neighbor  
We didn't have much before the crash.

Men  
Now they're going to take the last.

All  
Yes.

Garvey Preacher  
We'll be heading out soon.  
Taking the Black Star home.

All  
||: Takin' the Black Star home!||  
We'll leave this white man's land  
Crushing us like the devil's hand.  
Garvey has shown us—Marcus!—

Garvey has told us—  
Garvey has shown us, home!  
||: No more "darkie," no more "Rastus":||  
||: No more "nigga" when we see Africa:||

Men  
We'll be black men again.  
||: We'll be black men again.:||

Postman  
Hang his picture high,  
Ethiopia's prophet,  
Marcus, man who says  
"Africa for Africans"

Garvey Preacher  
Sign up now. Put your name where your heart is.  
We have a zion across the the sea!

All  
	: "Africa for Africans":	
	: Yes, Africa's time has come:	
	: Africa's time has come:	
	: Like a thundrin' storm:	

||: We've been waiting for a prophet:||

Louise [Thinking aloud, gazing out]  
Earl should have been home by sunset.  
His day ended hours ago.  
When he left today  
I tried not to fret or worry,  
but when Earl is away  
the air seems thin and fragile,  
like it cannot carry the day.  
my body quakes with fear  
he will not return.  
In these twilight hours  
every shadow moves,  
every light is a fire.

I remember so clearly  
the terror of night riders,  
horses coming closer  
riding down our lives.

When Malcolm came  
the Klan came  
white hoods, thunder hooves  
hooting, howling, slashing  
galloping horsemen.

A boy born in terror,  
marked by our fear.  
Not four,  
not ten,  
so many men,  
rushing in  
a black man's night.

All  
Not four,  
not ten,  
so many men,  
rushing in  
a black man's night.

Louise  
When Yvonne came  
the Klan came  
silently, without sound  
burned our house to the ground.  
||: Smoking, smoldering, burning:||  
||: Shots:||  
fired by white men.  
A girl born in terror,  
marked by our fear.

All  
Riding closer, riding closer, white hoods

Louise  
Not four,

not ten,  
so many men,  
rushing in,  
a black man's night.

I remember so clearly  
the terror of night riders,  
horses coming closer  
riding down our lives.

Policeman  
[Comes to door, does not enter, speaks to the room]  
A man was on the tracks.  
A streetcar ran him down.

[Word passes among the group]  
All  
||: A man was on the tracks.:||  
||: A streetcar ran him down.:||

Men  
Rev'rend Little is dead.  
He says that Earl was on the tracks;  
He says a streetcar ran him down.

A white train cut him down,  
cut him down, cut him down.  
Some white men cut him down.  
They pushed him on the tracks.

Louise  
The air seems thin and fragile.  
In these twilight hours,  
every light is a fire.

Men  
These devils hunt us down  
like cursed dogs.  
They want to kill us all  
without a fight.  
They killed his brothers too,  
Those devils dressed in white.

Louise  
Now mine tonight,  
Now mine tonight.

Men  
Hung one high in Georgia,  
Shot one dead up North,  
Murdered one low in the night,  
And Earl tonight.  
Some white men cut him down.  
These devils hunt us down  
like cursed dogs.

Louise  
The air seems thin and fragile.  
In these twilight hours,  
every light's a fire, fire.

[She screams, runs. Returns. Collapses into a sitting stillness that cannot be broken by the confusion and hysteria of the others. The children keep trying to shake her out of it; she does not see them. Neighbors try to decide what to do about the children. One by one some turn to reach for a child. The children reach for each other. After a while a white social worker appears at the door. She intrudes directly into the living room.]

Social worker  
What is going on here?  
What is going on here?  
The father is dead.  
The mother is mad.  
The children are out of control.

[Directed at no one and everyone, apologetic, but determined.]

No one's in charge.  
It's out of hand.

These Negroes are living like strays.  
Make them wards of the state.  
Make them wards of the state.

All  
Brother, Sister  
The father is dead.  
The mother is mad.

[Social worker grabs the children, hands them over to one adult and then another. Malcolm keeps coming back to his mother.]

Malcolm  
Momma, help me.  
Momma, help me.  
I was good in school,  
The best in the class.  
They tell me to get some tools,  
I'll have to work with my hands.  
Momma, help me.  
Momma, help me.  
What do I do?  
The teachers tell me  
That what's wrong with you  
Will never be right.  
Momma, help me.  
Momma, help me.  
Momma

[Malcolm sits staring at his mother. A neighbor tries to rouse him, but fails. Finally Ella arrives and reaches out for him with the opening lines of her song.]

ACT I  
Scene II

About 1940, Boston. Malcolm comes to live with his sister Ella in the Roxbury section. He is still very much of a country boy, an inexperienced adolescent discovering the lights and movement of a big city. But he is by no means giddy, he rarely laughs. He lights up most when someone mentions music—this is his passion. Otherwise he finds that to say nothing is his best defense against looking uncool or ignorant. Ella introduces him to "the hill," where middle-class blacks live, and the rest of the area where others who have come looking for work are moving about on the street.

Malcolm then meets up with Street, who schools him in the afterhours life of the community. Street leads him to a ballroom, scene of black dances, the great big bands of the era and "the Life."

Ella  
Come with me, child. Come with me.  
Come with me, child. Come with me.  
Your sister Ella will care for you.  
You know me and I know you.  
Come with me, child,  
You're my special one,  
a child like me  
with darting eyes.  
I can remember  
the time you smiled.  
You told some tales,  
fantastic tales,  
of Arab lands and kings.  
Come closer my special one  
You know that you are mine.

Come child, come with me.  
The whole big city waits  
for you to see.  
My side of town,  
they call "the hill,"  
it could be the "bottom,"  
the South Side or Harlem.  
It's always bustling and sprawling

but it's still like a home.  
We call the streets  
by our very own names.  
We Negroes don't leave a place  
quite the same.

Men on the street

We make a town dance  
with our sways and our glances.  
We're taking our chance  
on some midnight romancing.  
We make a town dance  
with our sways and our glances.

||: We're taking a chance.:||  
||: taking a chance, taking a chance.:||

Ella

Some men are bootblacks or doctors,  
Some are lawyers or cobblers,  
We're all kind of family,  
Almost next of kin.  
We're just tryin' to make it  
From where we've been.

[She lets him go off to walk past some of the sights. He wanders into a pool room. People stand in the shadows watching a game. Street speaks first to his opponent.]

Street

Shoot your shoot.  
Just forget your job,  
play the dice that you got.  
Shoot your shot.  
Just forget your job,  
play the chance that you got.

Ella

Some men are strivers  
with dreams of their own;  
and some are believers  
who help a dream along;  
and some speak of prophecy,  
of Garvey, slavery,  
of nations, visions and hope.  
They make the street their church,  
make a soap box perch.

Street

Shoot the shot,  
cut the talk,  
admit the two bits are mine.  
You'll be next to me next time  
before you get out from behind.  
Hey there! Take a look at it, it's a country boy  
up from the farm.  
I once had a look at these  
but now they're their work done,  
	: they come to me.:	
	: They come to see.:	
	: All come to me.:	

Players

||: Sweet Street, Sweet Street.:||

Ella

Stay away from trouble,  
the users and the foolish.  
Never be careless.

Street

The "life" is a game  
like this green felt table—  
you die broke or win  
if you're good and able.  
Shoot your shot,  
or gimme the dough.  
You ain't got a lot  
from the white man to blow.

Play the game,  
don't fool with a job.  
A job is a slave,

it will leave you robbed.  
Doctors waitin' tables,  
farmers carryin' loads.  
They say they're in shippin',  
or other fables.  
They're just helpless losers  
Liftin' totin' fools.  
The white man takes  
while the black man breaks.

Play the game,  
get into the "life."  
Don't mess around  
with the white man's strife.

[Spoken]

If you try and change things  
they'll take your life.

Players

||: The white man takes.:||  
||: while the black man breaks.:||

	: Play the game.:	
	: Get in the "life.":	
	: Don't mess around.:	
	: with the white man's strife.:	

	: Play the game.:	
	: be smart like the Man.:	
	: Get in the "life.":	
	: Get your heaven while you can.:	

[Malcolm and Street shift to a ballroom. A shoeshine stand is at one side. Players congregate there, styling. They "signify" like they are the sax section of the Ellington band.]

Street

[To be rapped]

But wait.  
How about those clothes?  
I mean your sartorial condition is curious.  
Son, your future is dubious.  
If you ever hope to be one of the cats  
who has a chance to dance the dance  
in this rude rat race  
You need a little dash  
to get some cash.  
To meet the girl of your dreams,  
you've got to be clean.

[Sung]

You need a zoot suit, a conk, and a pad.  
A hustler can't go 'round  
lookin' poor, lookin' sad.  
Work for no one but yourself,  
keep your feelings  
right on the shelf.

Players [Joining in]

Shoot the craps  
and make a big deal—  
but you gotta be cool  
or be someone's fool.

	: If you want more, take it.:	
	: If you don't know, fake it.:	
	: Take more, Make more.:	
	: Play the Game.:	
	: Get in the "life.":	

Street

Play the game  
Don't be afraid—  
Make like you're shinin' shoes,  
Sell them reefers and tips,  
and dates with fast gals.  
When you're in your suit  
Stand real still/Stay cool  
Point your fingers to the floor,  
keep your feet wide apart

throw back your head,  
like you're not lookin' at all.

[Pause]

Just stand real still,  
just stay real cool.  
The hustler gets them all.

[During this sequence Malcolm picks up Sweetheart, leads her to the dance floor and back. He then spots the Blonde cruising him, grabs her as she comes close, twirls her and starts to exit. She has another idea in mind. Malcolm and Street come up with a plan to pull off a heist. They exit. While they are off-stage the ensemble does a fantastic rendition of a crowded hot dance, in half-time.]

Street

Once in a while  
you dance the bop,  
show the lames  
you can Lindy Hop.  
Here's where it is,  
my side of town.

[Players join in]

But they all come down—  
they're blonde or brown,  
they all come round  
my side of town.  
Let the ladies come to you.

Players

||: The player gets them all.:||  
||: The hustler gets them all.:||

Street & Players

You know what to do.  
||: Let them come to you.:||

[Street, Blonde, enter with silver, furs and other valuables. A crowd gathers to buy the goods.]

[Policemen enter, billy clubs in hand.]

Officers

I see some nigras been  
on the wrong side of town,  
robbing leading citizens,  
instead of earning their own.

[To other officers]

Round up those hoods. [Indicating Malcolm and Street]  
Put them away.  
A white man's home  
isn't safe anymore.  
Niggers like you  
break in the door.

Men [Mocking]

A white man's home  
just isn't safe anymore  
||: just isn't safe anymore.:||

Officer

Put them away.  
[To the Blonde] You're no common goods,  
What are you doin' here?

Women [To the Blonde]

White women ought to know  
where they belong.  
They might be sold real low  
and go wrong.

Officer

[To other officers, indicating the Blonde]  
Take her too.  
Take them all. [All exit]

ACT I  
Scene III

Malcolm appears alone, handcuffed, under a glaring light. A chair sits stage center. He seems to be talking to interrogators, maybe in the shadows, maybe not there at all.

Malcolm

I would not tell you  
what I know.  
You would not  
hear my truth.  
You want the story  
but you don't want to know.  
My truth is you've been on me  
a very long time,  
meaner than I can say.  
As long as I've been living  
you've had your foot on me,  
always pressing.

My truth is white men  
killed my old man,  
drove my mother mad.  
My truth is rough,  
My truth could kill,  
My truth is fury.

They always told me  
'You don't have a chance,  
'You're a nigger, after all.  
'You can jitterbug and prance,  
'but you'll never run the ball.'  
My truth told me,  
quit before you start.  
My truth told me,  
stayin' alive is all you've got.

I've shined your shoes,  
I've sold your dope,  
hauled your bootleg,  
played with hustler's hope.  
But the crime is mine  
I will do your time,  
so you can sleep.  
I won't be out to get you  
on the street at night  
but I won't forget  
any evil that's white.

My truth is a hammer  
coming from the back.  
It will beat you down  
when you least expect.  
I would not tell you  
what I know  
You want the truth,  
You want the truth,  
but you don't want to know.

[Lights out.]

ACT II  
Scene I

1946–48. Malcolm broods angrily in jail, left alone by the others. Malcolm's brother Reginald comes to visit him and teach him about Elijah, the Messenger of Allah. Malcolm doubts everything Reginald says. Gradually he comes to a point of initial acceptance of this new idea. Reginald leaves Malcolm in jail as Elijah's voice is heard off-stage. Malcolm spends time studying the Holy Koran and books on black history. He has to begin wearing glasses because of his habit of reading in poor light late at night. He becomes a serious and a more hopeful man. Malcolm X is born.

1952. The jail recedes as Malcolm hears, and

eventually sees, Elijah. It is as though the word removed the bars. They come face to face. Elijah embraces Malcolm like a son and tells him he has much to learn. He tells him to obey the Law and to spread Allah's word. Malcolm is sent to start temples in the eastern states.

Prisoners  
	: In the devil's grip:
	: the black men mourn:
	: the slaver's whip:
	: Black men, wake:
	: from your living graves:
	: before it's too late:

[Reginald comes to visit Malcolm. They sit opposite one another in the day room.]

Reginald  
It has been so long.  
Malcolm  
Longer than you can know.  
You don't count time where I've been.

Reginald  
You got my letter?  
Read what I said?

Malcolm  
I just can't understand.  
What's the game?

Reginald  
I've changed.  
I've found a new way.  
I'm clean,  
starting out new.  
I met a man  
who showed me the truth.

Malcolm  
You talk in riddles  
about truth and a man.  
Don't try and kid me  
when I need a plan.  
They're riding me hard,  
trying to make me break.  
They're ready to nail me  
if I make one mistake.

Prisoners  
If he makes one mistake

Malcolm  
I thought you had a way.

Reginald  
Have you ever met a man  
who knows all things?

Malcolm [Incredulous]  
No, brother.

Reginald  
He knows who you are,  
where you've been.  
He knows your future.

Malcolm  
I can't understand

Reginald  
Your past was stolen,  
taken from you,  
your children tortured,  
your women taken too.  
Black is your skin,  
the fate that's in your hands.

Malcolm  
Brother, I know no such man.  
Is he a god?  
I can't understand.

Prisoners  
I can't understand.

Reginald  
Black is your skin—

Malcolm  
I can't understand

Reginald  
Who once was king—

Malcolm  
Is he a god?

Reginald  
You're now a slave

Malcolm  
I don't understand  
what you say

Reginald  
Listen to me  
the devil's got you in jail.  
The white man left you  
judged on a scale.  
This man taught me things—  
A nation we are,  
all of us.

Prisoners  
A nation we see.

Malcolm  
God does not know me,  
the hustlers or players.  
On the fast track I see  
only winners or losers.

Reginald  
This man taught me things

Malcolm  
God knows the good ones—  
He betrays them.  
We're out there alone;  
God does not know me.

Reginald  
But God is a man  
His name is Allah.

Malcolm  
We're out there alone.

Reginald  
He came to this land.

Malcolm  
God does not know me.

Reginald  
He told Elijah.

Malcolm  
We're out there alone.

Reginald  
He told a black man

Malcolm  
Who is Elijah?

Reginald  
His own divine plan.

Malcolm  
How can God be man?  
Allah.  
What a strange sound.

Men [Chorus]  
||: Allahu-Akbar:|

Reginald  
Elijah is the Messenger,

the Messenger of Allah.

Malcolm  
Allah. Allah.

Reginald  
Say His name again and again.  
The rest will come in time.  
To say His name is to praise Him. [Exits.]

Malcolm  
Allah.  
What does it mean  
to say His name?

All [Chorus]  
ALLAH!

Malcolm  
Does He know I steal,  
lie and take dope?

All  
Allah. Allah.

Malcolm  
To say His name  
is to praise Him.  
Soon I will ask Him  
how empty it feels  
to be God of an empty man  
like me.

Elijah [Slowly appears in the back light]  
You are not empty

Chorus  
Malcolm!

Elijah  
nor are you lost.

Chorus  
Malcolm!

Elijah  
You're Malcolm,  
cold and just,  
no fear of loss

Chorus  
Malcolm!

Elijah  
You are not empty  
nor are you lost.

Malcolm  
Allah. Allah.  
From Africa like me  
A God black men will praise.  
I can say His name.

Reginald & Chorus  
Allah. Allah.

Elijah  
You are not empty,  
but full enough to cry aloud.

Chorus  
Allah! Allah!

Malcolm  
I hear the shudders of slavers

Elijah  
Your rage He will claim

Chorus  
Allah!

Malcolm  
The sound that shakes the walls

Elijah  
Malcolm!

Malcolm

It bangs against the cells,  
A name without fear.

Elijah  
Who have you been?

Malcolm  
A power gathers I can hear.  
To say His name  
is to praise Him! Allah!

[Malcolm leaves prison, and comes to meet with Elijah.]

Elijah  
Malcolm,  
who have you been?  
Malcolm,  
from where do you come?  
Why are you so thirsty and worn?  
Who would you be?

Malcolm  
I came from a desert  
of pain and remorse,  
from slavery, exile,  
from jail's brute force

Elijah  
Who would you be?

Malcolm  
I would just be a man  
who knows right and wrong,  
who knows the past  
was stolen away.

Elijah  
A life we see.  
A reason to be.  
But who will you be?

Malcolm  
My name means nothing.

Elijah  
An "X" you must claim

Malcolm  
My name means I was a slave

Elijah  
An "X" you must claim  
for what was lost—  
your African name,  
an ocean crossed.  
An "X" will stand  
until God returns  
to speak a name  
that will be yours.  
Come, Malcolm X,  
let me teach you.  
Allahu-Akbar  
Allah is the greatest.  
Let me teach you.

Chorus  
An "X" will stand  
for what was lost.  
An "X" will stand  
until God returns.  
Allahu-Akbar.

Elijah  
As Salaam-Alaikum,  
Peace be unto you.

Malcolm  
Wa-Alaikum-Salaam,  
and unto you  
be peace.

Elijah  
We join all others



who love Allah.

All [Chorus]

||: Allahu-Akbar!:

*[Elijah shows Malcolm how to pray in the manner of the Nation of Islam during the early 1950s, standing, as opposed to kneeling, facing East, palms out.]*

Elijah

We seek Freedom,  
Justice,  
Equality.  
But to know these things  
You must know history.  
And you must know  
Armageddon comes.  
I carry its word.

All [Chorus]

||: Freedom, justice, freedom:|

||: Equality:|

||: Allahu-Akbar:|

||: Allahu-Akbar:|

||: Freedom, justice, freedom:|

||: Equality, freedom, justice:|

||: Freedom, equality:|

Malcolm

Dark is our history,  
A flame is our prophecy.  
Allah's Messenger  
carries His word.

Elijah

We have been blind,  
the white man's tool.  
For four hundred years,  
we've been made his fools.  
He laughs at us  
who once were kings.  
He has us beg  
and call him boss,  
then he gives us his God  
to keep us downtrod.  
We've sunk so low,  
we can't let him go.

Malcolm

We've sunk so low,  
we can't let him go.

Malcolm and Elijah

Let our eyes see  
We can set our lives free.

Malcolm

I wanted to fight—

Elijah

You did not know how.  
It's your time now. *[Embraces him]*  
Spread His word!

All

||: Allahu-Akbar:|

ACT II

Scene II

1954-63. Malcolm begins his ministry, helping to found temples in Boston, Philadelphia, Springfield, Hartford, Atlanta, and New York.

This scene spans a considerable number of years in telescopic fashion. This is the time of the landmark Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education. It is the era in which Rosa Parks refused to sit in the back of a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, thus sparking a long boycott organized by black working women which

integrated the buses and brought to the public the name of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The period closes at the time of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Malcolm is seen on the corner of 125th Street and Seventh Avenue, in front of Micheaux's National Memorial African bookstore, "The House of Common Sense, Home of Proper Propaganda." The front of the store is a tall montage of placards bearing black nationalist slogans from all over the globe and decades gone. "Repatriation Headquarters—Back to Africa movement, Register Here"; "Black Man's God." Portraits of African princes, ex-slaves, Americans such as W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson abound. It's like the secret attic of J.A. Rogers, author of *World's Great Men of Color* and one of Malcolm's teachers.

A woman street preacher is holding forth on a soapbox as Minister Malcolm approaches. She is dressed in a long, sparkling African garb with a cloth wrapped around her head. She is trying to get people interested in her group, which promotes the adoption of African lifestyles. The general point is that blacks may return to their former greatness by returning to their former ways: religious practices resembling those of the Yoruba religion, communal living, polygamy, matriarchal family lines. She is followed by a Garvey speaker. Malcolm and several Muslims listen and wait for their moment to get the attention of the crowd. Later, as Malcolm takes to the soapbox, his comrades reach out for passersby and work up the crowds.

[Rally #1]

Woman preacher

We are an African people,  
we must live as Africans here.  
We are not from this place.  
We've only been ruined by its ways.  
Black men hide from the social worker,  
afraid to claim their children,  
cause they ain't got a job.  
Your ancestors didn't need money,  
why, they dug gold out of the ground,  
and grew their own food.  
They had many wives.  
Let's go back to our old ways,  
find a land for our dreams.

Garvey Speaker *[Interrupting]*

We can go back, back to Mother Africa! *[Spoken]*

All

Take us back

Garvey Speaker

You were once kings of Mali,  
Dahomey and Songhay  
Your prince now is Haile  
Selassie I *[I pronounced "eye"]*  
The Lion of Judah

Malcolm

Where are we now, brother?  
20 million kings of Mali?

*[Crowd laughs and turns toward Malcolm, who strikes a formidable pose at the rear, smiling, head high, like a boxer waiting to climb in the ring. He moves forward a few feet, feeling the crowd is with him.]*

Malcolm

Where are we now, brother?  
20 million sad and sorry? *[Laughter]*

Muslim

Speak it, speak it!

Malcolm

I'm just trying to pull your coat, brother.

Muslim

Let the man speak!

*[Malcolm moves to the front and takes over as the Garvey speaker relinquishes his spot.]*

Malcolm

Yes, we had it once,  
now we got nothing to lose.  
When I was little  
they called me "nigger,"  
they called me "nigger" so much,  
I thought it was my name. *[Laughter]*  
Now the chickens they sent out  
are coming home to roost. *[Laughter]*

Malcolm & Crowd

20 million

Malcolm

kings of Mali,

Malcolm & Crowd

20 million

Malcolm

so-called Negroes,

Crowd

asking the white man for mercy.

Malcolm

Imagine that! *[Laughter]*  
The white man tricked the Negro,  
used the Negro,  
made him a fool,  
till the Negro woke up!

We have awakened!  
Allah is all-wise,  
the true and living God.  
I come to say His praise.  
I come to tell the history.  
I come to tell the past,  
of the black man's bondage.

Muslims

It may sound bitter,  
may sound like hate,  
but it's just the truth.

Crowd *[Joining in]*

||: It may sound bitter:|

||: may sound like hate:|

||: but it's just the truth:|

Malcolm

We don't hate the white man—  
his world is about to fall.  
May sound like hate,  
but it's just the truth.

ACT II

Scene III

*[Stage freezes for a second, then goes into motion. People who were at the rally exit. One Muslim hands Malcolm a briefcase, another hands him a suitcase. One picks up a paper, the other grabs a bunch of leaflets to distribute. With everything in motion, they begin all over. While his fellow travelers continue to "fish" in the crowd, and hand out flyers, Malcolm speaks. Sometimes he is preceded on the "rostrum" by another Muslim who warms up the crowd—in mime.]*

*Malcolm always smiles when he speaks, not broadly, but he is happy to do what he does and enjoys the audiences. He likes to lead the crowd along a train of thought for a while and then surprise them. He also likes to shock. He is physically reserved, not demonstrative, but a trace of the swagger of Big Red is there in his bearing. Men and women like to be around him, find him charismatic.*

*One or two more people in the crowd appear to be Muslims at each new rally, until finally, they are the majority. Once the group becomes largely Muslim, women stand or sit on one side, men on the other. This separation should not appear planned, but should just happen. Women who appear in Muslim attire in the beginning must be moving through and not linger in the street. One or two Muslims frequently return to Elijah to make reports on Malcolm's work.]*

*[Just before Rally #2 Elijah comes to advise Malcolm on his responsibilities.]*

Elijah

Malcolm, I hear you speak—  
I see the Nation's  
power growing stronger.  
Your gift of fire—  
once it is lit,  
it burns an unquenchable flame.  
The more it breathes,  
the wilder it grows.  
Do not go to sleep, my son.  
When you speak,  
you speak for me.  
I am the eyes of the Nation;  
and I see what will be.

[Rally #2]

Person in the crowd

Say your piece, brother, teach.

Malcolm

If we are going to be free,  
it will be done by you and me.  
And we won't turn the other cheek,  
we won't turn the other cheek  
to get our freedom.  
We are ready to die,  
to get our freedom.  
We will use any means—  
whatever means necessary—  
to stand for ourselves,  
to live for ourselves,  
or keep catchin' Hell.

Person in the crowd

Teach, brother, teach.

*[Scene freezes for a second, then everyone moves. People at rally exit, perhaps leaving a policeman and a vendor.]*

[Rally #3]

*[Muslims enter and set up rostrum. People gather as if for an expected speech at a given time, others are passersby who stop.]*

Muslims

All praises to Allah,  
the All-merciful, the All-wise.

Malcolm

Allah does not teach us  
to suffer more and more.  
Allah does not teach us  
to fight the white man's wars.  
Allah does not teach us  
to stay as slaves  
after four hundred years

*[Spots a young man in the audience, singles him out]*

||: Jones is not your name:|

||: it's a slave name:|

||: Smith is not your name:|

||: it's a slave name:| *[Crowd joins in]*

What are you gonna do with a slave name?  
You need a good name,  
you need a holy name,

a name that praises you and God—  
a name like Malik, Amilcar.

All

[Crowd laughs, then whispers rhythmically]

||: Toussaint, Toussaint,;||  
||: Kenyatta, Kenyatta, Kenyatta:;||

Malcolm

Lumumba [Broad smile], Nkrumah, Ny-er-e  
[Short satisfied laugh]

All

	: Lumumba, Lumumba,;	
	: Nkrumah, Nkrumah, Nkrumah,;	
	: Nyere!;	

[Scene freezes, then everyone exits.]

[Rally #4]

[A large crowd gathers. Malcolm is now facing the audience at a podium downstage center, with people on stage appearing to be at the sides and front of the rally. He speaks into a microphone directly to the audience. After he finishes, he takes Betty by the arm as he moves to next location.]

Malcolm [Spoken]

We're not askin' Massa to sit at a lunch counter.  
We want self-determination.

We want to get our people off of dope,  
off alcohol, off the welfare rolls.

We must rebuild the black family,  
and our communities, ravaged by despair.  
We need to look to our brothers in Africa  
taking back their plundered countries,  
tellin' Massa what time it is.

We need to work, we need jobs,  
and we have to create them.

But we know if whites are forced

to give us their jobs,  
there'll be war, [Sung] a bloody race war.

We want freedom, justice, equality.

All

||: Freedom, justice, equality.:||

Malcolm [Spoken into microphone]

Down south blacks sit in

and red necks sic dogs on them, bomb their churches.

Now, who are the law-breakers, who are the violent ones?

Muslims don't expect anybody

to give our people freedom.

We want to stand up against racism,  
all black people together!

All

||: Freedom, justice, equality:;||

## ACT II

### Scene IV

[Muslims gather at a mosque, Elijah comes in, greets Malcolm and then various people in audience, exits to position at the rear.]

Malcolm

As-Salaam-Alaikum

All

Wa-Alaikum-Salaam

Malcolm [Sung]

We are a nation,  
trapped inside a nation.

We are a nation,  
dying to be born.

Betty, Elijah, Reginald

We are a nation,  
trapped inside a nation.

We are a nation,  
dying to be born.

Malcolm

We dream of our land,  
our own land.

We dream of our home,  
a black zion.

It is our will to be,  
our will to be free.

A black zion.

All

We are a nation  
trapped inside a nation.

We are a nation,  
dying to be born.

Malcolm, Betty, Elijah, Reginald

Chains took the lives of our young,

took the blood of the old,

and yet we go on,

Elijah

and still we are one.

Malcolm & All

We will only know peace

Malcolm & Reginald

in a land that is free.

Malcolm

a black zion

All

We are a nation,  
trapped inside a nation,  
dying to be born.

[Muslims break into hurried organized activities, setting up stands to sell goods, running classes. Minister Malcolm X oversees the production of the Nation of Islam newspaper, Muhammad Speaks; as he exits the mosque, he is greeted by the news reporters and TV cameras that frequently follow him. The Nation of Islam is the subject of much public attention and surveillance by police, who should be obvious.]

As Malcolm is finishing a speech before a large gathering of Muslims, whispers of horror begin to fly through the crowd. A Muslim sent by Elijah brings a message to Malcolm. News is passed that President John F. Kennedy has been murdered in Dallas, Texas. Reporters first approach Elijah for comment and are rebuffed, they then press to the front of Malcolm's meeting to ask questions.]

Reporter [Spoken]

Mr. X, what do you make of the recent tragic events in Dallas—President Kennedy's assassination?

Malcolm [Spoken]

America's climate of hate is coming back on itself. Not only are defenseless blacks killed, but now it has struck down the chief of state. That hate struck down Medgar Evers. That hate struck down Patrice Lumumba. In my view, it's a case of the chickens coming home to roost.

Reporter [Spoken, arrogantly]

Thank you.

[Flashbulbs go off in his face. Reporters act astounded at what they've heard, huddle, exit. One or two Muslims quickly carry word to Elijah, who reacts angrily to news of Malcolm's remark. Malcolm exits with his men.]

Reporters

||: The chickens come home to roost.:||

||: The chickens come home to roost.:||

Elijah [To two of his men]

Now Malcolm disobeys the Messenger!

I do not know this Malcolm X!

I sent word to all the ministers:

Do not talk about the president,

do not talk about his death.

Do not make enemies for the Nation;

We have enemies enough.

Do not make enemies for black men;

Black men have enemies enough!

[Orders the men out. Lights out.]

## ACT III

### Scene I

1963. Malcolm is called to see Elijah, who is incensed that Malcolm has possibly jeopardized the situation of the Nation of Islam by making his remark concerning Kennedy's assassination. He is also concerned that his chief spokesman may have already become too powerful, within the Nation and outside as well. He is worried that perhaps he will no longer be able to control his minister. Malcolm comes with his own misgivings about the Messenger's leadership. Muhammad censures Malcolm by silencing him for three months, even extending this to his teaching at Malcolm's own Mosque #7 in Harlem.

Muslim community people are milling about, and waiting outside of the Messenger's home. Many are Fruit of Islam (FOI), Muhammad's army. An FBI agent can be seen, as well as one or two reporters. As Malcolm passes through this crowd they begin to mumble and whisper; their sounds become a kind of drone.

All

||: Betrayal is on his lips.:||

||: Is it truth or lies?:||

Muslims

Malcolm brings us down  
with his talk.

He spreads poison.

He has a loose tongue.

The Nation is betrayed

by the Messenger.

Does he come to judge

or be judged?

Elijah

As-Salaam-Alaikum, Brother Malcolm

Malcolm

Wa-Alaikum-Salaam, Mr. Muhammad.

Elijah

An uproar is all around us.

It's a bad time

for us all.

You disobeyed.

You have a loose tongue.

Malcolm

It's a bad time.

Have I not served,

have I not served you?

Spread Allah's teaching across the land?

Elijah

You disobeyed.

Your fame helped us once,

now it only does harm.

||: Fame is a double-edged sword.:||

Malcolm

Look into my heart.

I am here to serve,

I am here to serve the Nation,

the Messenger, the Law.

I could still be in Hell,

in the streets.

For that I will believe.

Elijah

Is betrayal on your lips, my son?

Malcolm

Betrayal flies around us.

It haunts the air we breathe.

I hear things I cannot believe;

they say the Messenger

has his own law.

Elijah

You speak so freely,

you speak to me of law.

Do you come to judge

or be judged?

They say you have grown too big  
for the Nation.

Malcolm

This talk consumes our Nation.

We must stand up strong.

We must reach the people,

and bring change,

by whatever means.

Elijah

Are you revolution,

whirling forward

without Allah's wisdom?

The white man has used you

to bring us down.

This is when your chickens

come home to roost.

Malcolm

I am a servant of the Nation,

and that is all.

Elijah

They say you have grown too big

for the Nation.

Malcolm

Liars and betrayers cut me down—

it is not true.

Elijah

You spoke against the Nation;

you spoke against my word.

Do you come to judge

or be judged?

Malcolm

Liars and traitors cut me down.

I'm a just man.

Elijah

You kick the dead

while the country weeps!

You will be silent!

You will say nothing!

Malcolm

I bow to your will.

I will not speak.

[Malcolm bows to Elijah, exits through crowd, which divides with a small number falling out of the Muslim ranks to follow Malcolm. Those who do not, pick up mumbling chorus.]

Chorus

||: Betrayal is on his lips:;||

||: The chickens come home to roost.:;||

Act III  
Interlude

The Nation becomes divided, and although many Muslims come to follow Malcolm, he is in deep turmoil over the division and feels he must search alone for some answers. He feels betrayed by his mentor and many of his brothers in the movement. He tires of being constantly surrounded by other people—followers, reporters, people trying to warn him of various dangers ahead.

Behind him is the devastated landscape of Harlem, forbidding, isolating, a grey vacantness similar to the open spaces of his childhood, yet crowded with structures. He goes to his family and is consoled by his wife and confidante, Betty. Two of their young girls are present. She hands him an envelope, and urges him to go to make the *Haji*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, of an orthodox Muslim, knowing that Allah somehow is with him and will help him.

Betty

[At first addressing their daughters]

When a man believes,  
you can see in his eyes,  
and know where he goes  
to hide his fears.  
When a man believes,  
do the stars die  
for a night,  
or does the city  
hide them  
in its glare—  
alone with his dreams  
in a light seldom seen.  
When his journey is done  
he will find us here  
in peace God will give.

[To him]

When a man believes,  
he'll find his God inside.  
He'll see it takes one step,  
and keep believing.

Malcolm

Allah made me and left me here.  
Life is what He gave me,  
now I must ask His help  
to give a life back to God.

[Embraces them and exits]

ACT III  
Scene II

[When Malcolm appears again he is making a pilgrimage to Mecca. He has abandoned his western clothing for a simple white cloth, as all pilgrims must. Where he waits many other pilgrims pray, eat, and sleep on rugs they have brought with them. Being unprepared, he has a space on the bare floor. At the first sign of dawn, a call to prayer is heard and the pilgrims rise to say their first prayers. Malcolm has not slept. The pilgrims face East and make the motions of ablutions and prayer.]

Pilgrims

||: *Bismillah hirrahman-irrahim*:||  
[I begin with the name of Allah,  
the Merciful, the Compassionate.]

Muezzin

||: *Ash-hadu an la ilaha*:||  
||: *il-Allah*:||  
[I bear witness that there is  
no God but Allah.]

	: *Ash-hado anna*:	
	: *Muhammad-ar*:	
	: *Rasul-ullah*:	

[I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah].

[Malcolm has made an attempt to follow the movements of those around him, but he has never learned the orthodox prayer ritual and now finds it is difficult to recreate what the pilgrims are doing. He gives up for a moment, watches them, speaks.]

Malcolm

I have come so far, among so many.  
I have never been so alone.  
No one knows who I am.  
Perhaps the high court  
will not believe I am true.  
I am waiting for a message.  
Mecca!

Here I hear so many tongues speak.  
Allah is praised by all men.  
I watch and I bow and pray,  
I'm tied in a silence unknown, alone,  
so alone.

[Interlude]

My name is Shabazz  
El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz,  
a name for one reborn.  
El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz,  
a name for one who has heard  
the universe make but one sound.  
It moves as one force,  
a whirling desert storm.  
Each of us a cloud of sand  
flying round the silent eye.

I have seen both black and white men  
all bow and pray before God.  
El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz  
has found a new way.  
Praise!

	: I bow and pray.:	
	: Praise!:	
	: New born today.:	
	: Praise Allah!:	

[At the closing of the song he returns to making the motions of prayer, stubbornly trying at least to approximate them. After all, this will be how he must live the rest of his life. Finally, he succeeds in getting his knees to really bend, his head to touch the floor.]

Pilgrims

||: *Bismillah hirrahman-irrahim*:||

ACT III  
Scene III

1964-65. Just before Malcolm returns from his sojourn to the Near East and Africa a riot breaks out in Harlem. It starts when a white police officer accuses a black youth of stealing. One or two people on the street try to get into the matter. A scuffle ensues and the young boy tries to escape. He is shot by the policeman. People attack the policeman, seriously injuring him, and rioting breaks out in the area. As sirens are heard, people scatter.

Malcolm returns a deeply changed man, but outwardly he appears the same. He is greeted by reporters who wish to question him about the rioting. He is warned of death threats against him. It is Malcolm's plan to go to the U.N. with the grievances of black Americans. Some of those with Malcolm are wearing dashikis and other African garb popular in the mid-'60s. One or two wear traditional Muslim garb, such as Malcolm would have

seen in Cairo or Jedda. As before, he is constantly observed.

Malcolm is not concerned with the fear so evident all around him. Still, he takes some precautions for his safety. Later, as he begins a speech before his own newly formed group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, he is gunned down.

Reporters

||: Mr. X—, Mr. X—:||  
||: Malcolm X—, Malcolm X—:||

Malcolm

The name is Shabazz.  
El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz  
What do you want to know  
that you've not been told?  
We have explained ourselves [Indicating blacks around them]  
so many times.

You always ask  
what you already know.  
You wonder why  
there is revolt—  
A violent land  
breeds violent men.  
The slaver breeds a rebel,  
not a slave.  
Can't you see at all?  
Do your eyes tell you lies?

It has begun  
and I am no more its cause  
than any one here.  
I do not stand alone  
against your foolish blows.

Malcolm's Allies

||: It has begun, a rising tide.:||  
||: There is no time to wonder why.:||

Malcolm

Men pursue me  
every step I take,  
and yet they don't see  
the brothers behind them.

Allies

||: brothers behind them:||

Malcolm

Men of 50 nations  
lead their people on.  
We throw off the tyranny of states,  
the slaver's greedy hand.

A tide rises at your back  
and sweeps you in its path.  
Can you see at all?  
Do your eyes tell you lies? [Exits with friends]

Reporters

||: Is he not the one?:||  
Is he not the one  
||: who sent the youth:||  
into our streets?  
||: Is he not the one?:||  
Is he not the one  
who called us devils,  
who preached black hate?  
||: Mr. X—, Mr. X—:||

[Malcolm turns his back and exits.]

ACT III  
Scene IV

[Malcolm proceeds to a hotel room where he meets with his close allies to tell them of his plans.]

Malcolm [Sung]

I have learned so much in Africa.  
We're a part of something so big,  
a movement spanning the globe.

[Spoken]

I met with freedom fighters from  
Mozambique, Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe,  
even from South Africa.  
This is no race revolt,  
it is the end of colonialism,  
it is revolution,  
among African peoples.  
It is time for our new organization,  
the Organization of Afro-American Unity  
to bring these ideas to our people,  
all our people—African-Americans.  
Once our people have seen  
how the master plays,  
offers us crumbs, small reforms;  
once blacks have seen  
our fight is human rights,  
our action will begin.  
We must first teach.  
We must teach by going to the U.N.  
To show the denial of our human rights.  
We must teach that we have  
a right to self-defense,  
that political self-determination  
comes from ballots or bullets.

[Sung]

We must aim well  
for freedom. [Exit.]

Reporters

America is a house of glass,  
anyone can see the violence inside.  
Bricks fly to the walls.  
The roof shatters.

Elijah & Fruit of Islam

The Nation is a house of cards,  
men like Malcolm push too hard.  
Men like Malcolm light the match,  
||: cards teeter and fall.:||  
The house collapses.

[Sound of explosion. Reginald, Malcolm and others enter hotel room.]

Reginald

Who set the bomb,  
destroyed your home?  
Men are hunting you down.  
Where will you go?

Malcolm

We've been hunted before

Reginald

We've been hunted before

Malcolm

by men who hid in darkness.  
There is nowhere to hide.

Allies

Nowhere to hide

Malcolm

We do not know  
which mask evil wears.  
These men don't wear white hoods,

revised

but hide on the street in suits.

~~Allies~~ Louise

Who set the bomb,  
destroyed ~~our~~ home?  
Men are hunting you down.  
Where ~~will~~ you go?  
can we

Two Women

Where will you go?

Allies

Have you heard the news?  
Bricks and glass fly in Harlem.  
Have you heard the word?  
Your life is marked  
say the streets.

	: First a car bomb.:	
	: then a fire bomb.:	
	: They'll get you.:	
	: hunt you down.:	
	: They'll keep coming.:	
	: Some say it's police.:	
	: Some say it's hired hands.:	
	: Some say FBI:	

	: First a car bomb.:	
	: then a fire bomb.:	
	: They'll get you.:	
	: hunt you down.:	
	: They'll keep coming.:	

Malcolm

They can call me names,  
call me trouble.  
They can kill Malcolm X,  
but blacks will stand up  
because we have rights.  
We want our freedom  
at any cost.

[Moving away from the others]

They do not know

El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz  
is a man of peace,  
a man already free.  
Allah has set me free. [Goes to make prayer]

ACT III  
Scene V

[The stage is in motion once again as members of the movement begin to rearrange the scene to set up the Audubon Ballroom.

*The scene is a meeting of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, February 21, 1965. Chairs are set up for the meeting, but the arrangement will also be a mirror of the Garvey meeting in Act I. A crowd slowly assembles—men, women, children of various backgrounds. Cops gather outside the ballroom, where they will remain. The assassins gain entrance to the meeting, followed by reporters.*

*A member of the OAAU warms up the audience as Malcolm tries to free himself from people stopping him to speak as he approaches. He enters after everyone is seated and listening to the first speaker. This other speaker quickly wraps it up and sits. Malcolm goes to the podium.]*

Malcolm

As-Salaam-Alaikum

[A scuffle stirs up in the back, but those causing it are part of the assassins' group. Two men in the front row with handguns and a third behind them with a sawed-off shotgun, rise and shoot Malcolm.]

[Lights out.]