

*Louis Lomax's Relationship with Malcolm X and
Its Role in the Evolution of the Nation of Islam's
Popularity and Lomax's Philosophy*

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If I see that rascal Lomax running somewhere, I'll grab my hat and get behind him, because I know he's onto something.

—Malcolm X¹

C. Eric Lincoln, one of nation's foremost scholars of black religion, recounted a story of Malcolm X and Louis Lomax eating at a Harlem restaurant. "In the course of the conversation Lomax, who wrote the book on the Muslims called *When the Word Is Given*, said to Malcolm, he said, 'Look, Malcolm, why don't you stop all that Mr. Muhammad shit? Why don't you start your own movement and lead your own movement? You got the brains.'" Malcolm was incredulous. He "leaped up from the table as if he had been stuck with a hat pin—I had never seen a man so furious—as if he was going to attack Lomax on the spot, but we were all friends, and he said, 'Lou Lomax, don't you *ever* say that to me again. Mr. Muhammad is responsible for everything that I am today. He

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1. Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York, 1964), 461.

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brought me from nowhere to where I am and as long as I live I will be loyal to him, and I don't want to hear that anymore.'"²

Louis Lomax was a provocateur. And he was, for most of his public career, an advocate of integration as a means of securing African American equality. Lomax was a journalist, a producer, an author, and a pitchman for much of the ideological ferment of the 1960s. Though he lived that decade in New York and Los Angeles, he was a southerner from Valdosta, Georgia. He married several times. He was not religious. And yet one of his closest confidants and allies was Malcolm X. The two had a relationship built on the reciprocal benefits they could provide each other, one the ideological foil for the other at various moments, but they were also real friends, and Lomax's classical southern understanding of integrationist civil rights evolved over the years because of his proximity to Malcolm, the Nation of Islam (NOI), and black nationalist thinking. Meanwhile, at so many crucial points in the life of Malcolm X, Lomax was there. He introduced Malcolm and the NOI to a national audience in 1959 in his documentary series *The Hate That Hate Produced*. He helped found *Muhammad Speaks*. He also introduced Malcolm and the Nation to important New York media figures like photographer Eve Arnold to help them spread their message. He was Malcolm's opening act for his seminal "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech in Cleveland in 1964. He advised his ally on breaking with Elijah Muhammad. He was on the phone with Betty Shabazz the night of Malcolm's assassination.

Malcolm X, of course, had other close relationships with other journalists and authors outside the Nation of Islam. The aforementioned Lincoln was a confidant whom both he and Lomax shared. Alex Haley would also become dramatically important to Malcolm later in his life. He also had alliances with figures like E. U. Essien-Udom, Haywood Burns, and Elombe Brath. But the latter were ideological fellow travelers—Essien-Udom and Brath Garveyite Pan-Africanists, Burns a Black Power nationalist. Burns's book on the NOI appeared in 1963. Haley's *Autobiography of Malcolm X* appeared the following year. Beginning in 1959, none of these relationships had the public benefit for

2. David Gallen, *Malcolm X, as They Knew Him* (New York, 1992), 67. Despite the close alliance between the two, there is no surviving written correspondence between them. See Correspondence, box 3, Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948–1965, Sc MG 721, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; and Louis E. Lomax Papers, 82–30, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno (hereafter cited as Lomax Papers). Lincoln was a friend and ally of both Malcolm and Lomax. His sociological study of the Nation of Islam, published in 1961, was the academic version of Lomax's more popular 1959 national introduction to the group, *The Hate That Hate Produced*, and its comprehensive analysis has made it far more important to our body of knowledge on the faith. See C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (1961; Trenton, NJ, 1994).

Malcolm X that his relationship with Lomax had. And none saw the reciprocal shaping of their own ideological positions in response to that relationship.³

The association between Lomax and Malcolm is often mentioned parenthetically as part of the narrative of the latter's life, and the relationship of Lomax to black nationalist thought is almost universally ignored. Lomax, however, was key to the rise of Malcolm, Muhammad, and the Nation. According to Aubrey Barnette, a disillusioned former NOI official turned journalist, Lomax "has probably had closer contact with the [Black Muslim] movement than any other Negro writer."⁴ His relationship to the movement, then, needs more extensive examination. Lomax was an unlikely but indispensable cog in the media wheel that gave the Nation its influence. Just as important, he was an influential civil rights journalist who wrote several bestselling books—two of them dealing directly with Malcolm and the NOI—hosted a syndicated television talk show and a syndicated radio show, and had an outsized voice in creating ideological positions in his readers, watchers, and listeners. His relationship with Malcolm fundamentally altered his thinking and, thus, the message he provided to hundreds of thousands of people. Lomax's ideology underwent a philosophical bell curve in response to the gravitational pull of Malcolm, moving from the nonviolent integrationism that dominated the civil rights narrative in the late 1950s and early 1960s to a more nationalist position that framed white supremacy as more complicated and violent than mainstream integrationist remedies. He was, to be sure, an opportunist who often used his relationship with Malcolm to provoke, and Lomax never completely abandoned integrationism during that period. In fact, he often used it as a public foil for his counterpart's message. But while in Malcolm's orbit, Lomax acknowledged both an argumentative complexity in movement strategy and the violence inherent in all racist transactions. Finally, after Malcolm's death, he began a return to his original stand for nonviolence, while retaining vestiges of Malcolm's influence.

Such is not to say that Malcolm's ideology remained a static lodestar for correspondents like Lomax. As Patricia Reid-Merritt has explained, the NOI leader "exhibited an exceptional ability to grow, develop, and transform himself" over the course of his life. Malcolm had his own lodestars, none more influential

3. See W. Haywood Burns, *The Voices of Negro Protest in America* (New York, 1963); E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism: A Search for Identity in America* (Chicago, 1962); Lincoln, *Black Muslims in America*; Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*; and Elombe Brath, *Selected Writings and Essays*, ed. Herb Boyd (New York, 2018). For more on the general historiography of the Nation of Islam, Black Power, and Pan-Africanist thinking, see n. 20.

4. Aubrey Barnette with Edward Linn, "The Black Muslims Are a Fraud," *Saturday Evening Post*, August 27, 1968, 26.

than the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, but “American racism produced Malcolm X, both as a political and religious being.” While this article is not about Malcolm’s ideological evolution, it is important to note that his was a kinetic ideology that evolved over time (fig. 1).⁵

Their relationship began in 1959, as a small-time but hustling journalist contacted the NOI about a potential television special. Lomax had grown up in segregated Valdosta, in the deepest of the Deep South, raised by a Baptist minister and educator, the principal of the town’s black high school. From there he attended Paine College in Augusta before leaving school to pursue a journalism career in Washington, where he worked predominantly for the *Afro-American*. Beginning in June 1945, Washington radio station WWDC gave Lomax a weekly forty-minute program, *The Negro Speaks*, to air on Sunday nights. “It will mark the first time,” explained the *Chicago Defender*’s Charlie Cherokee, that “a Negro has written and presented dramatic skits over the air in DC.”⁶ From there, he traveled to Chicago, where he worked at the *Chicago Herald-American*. Hired in 1948, he became the first black journalist to write for a Hearst newspaper.⁷ Chronically short on funds, however, Lomax began making ends meet by renting cars and then selling them as used to dealerships, a scam that landed him in prison until 1954.⁸ He picked up with his journalistic career in early 1956, traveling to Mississippi in the wake of the state’s acquittal

5. Patricia Reid-Merritt, “Malcolm X: What Measure of a Man?—Assessing the Personal Growth and Social Transformation of Malcolm X from an African-Centered Social Work Perspective,” in *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable’s Malcolm X*, ed. Jared A. Ball and Todd Steven Burroughs (Baltimore, 2012), 32. Also making that case is Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua in “A Life of Revolutionary Transformation: A Critique of Manning Marable’s Malcolm X; A Life of Reinvention,” in Ball and Burroughs, *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable’s Malcolm X*, 157–86; and Iyaluua Ferguson and Herman Ferguson, “Evolution of a Black Nationalist Revolutionary,” in *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X, Real, Not Reinvented: Critical Conversations on Manning Marable’s Biography of Malcolm X*, ed. Herb Boyd, Ron Daniels, Maulana Karenga, and Haki R. Madhubuti (Chicago, 2012), 107–20. These essays appear in two collections responding critically to Manning Marable’s 2011 biography of Malcolm X, a volume used in this study for factual claims. Critiques of the work are valid but emphasize Marable’s speculation and unprovable assumptions. Those elements of the Marable manuscript are not used, in deference to the justifiable critique of the scholars collection in the two cited works.

6. *Chicago Defender*, June 30, 1945, 11; and L. B. Nichols to M. A. Jones, February 2, 1956, file no. 62-102926, Louis Lomax, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as FBI).

7. *Chicago Defender*, June 15, 1963, 12; *Chicago Herald-American*, April 3, 1948, 4; and “Author Louis Lomax Dies in Auto Crash,” box 17, series 8, folder 4, Lomax Papers.

8. FBIHQ Investigative and Administrative Files, file no. 26-15499, NARA-26-HQ-134264, FOIA, National Archives and Records Administration; and “Witness Memorandum to Clerk,” *Illinois v. Louis Lomax*, Case no. 49CR-2439, 49CR-2440, 49CR-2441, Files of the Criminal Court of Cook County, Office of the Clerk of Court, Chicago.



Figure 1. Two influential friends, each with his own constituency, carry on a discussion while posing for photographs. Photo housed in the Louis Lomax Collection at the special collections of the University of Nevada at Reno.

of Emmett Till's murderers to cover the tense race relations that followed, then moved to New York to try to find greater exposure and make up for lost time.⁹

After contacting the Nation of Islam in 1959, Lomax then pitched a big scoop to Mike Wallace, host of *Newsbeat* on New York's WNTA. As Malcolm

9. *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 24, 1956, 1, 2; May 19, 1956, 1, 3; July 28, 1956, 5; August 11, 1956, 20; August 18, 1956, 6, 7, 13; August 25, 1956, 1, 6; and *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1956, 4; August 9, 1956, 7.

told it, Lomax “asked me one morning whether or Nation of Islam would cooperate in being filmed as a television documentary program.” He was receptive, telling the journalist that “anything like that would have to be referred to The Honorable Elijah Muhammad.”¹⁰ So Lomax flew to Muhammad’s headquarters in Chicago and convinced the NOI leader to participate. Muhammad was, like Lomax, from a small Georgia town, the son of a Baptist minister, born a generation before Lomax in 1897.¹¹ It was the promise of publicity, however, that convinced Muhammad to go along with the plan.¹²

Press materials for the show demonstrated that “Wallace retained Lomax to follow through on the story and he put the resources of the *Newsbeat* staff at Lomax’s disposal.” He began attending meetings and tape recording various events before “four weeks of negotiations” finally resulted in the NOI giving Lomax “permission to film their Washington, DC rally. There was also a tentative promise that [Elijah] Muhammad would consent to an interview after the meeting. That interview materialized.”¹³

Lomax would interview many of the subjects for *Newsbeat*. Others he interrogated as preparation for Wallace’s on-camera interview. “I practically had to live with some of them,” he said. “Those papers Mike held during the sessions had everything on them. The questions were printed in lower case, the answers were in caps. If the answer he got on the show didn’t match the one written down, there was trouble. I made a pact with the Good Lord that if I ever got through that chicken wire I would remember everything I learned with Wallace.”¹⁴ Jackie Robinson and Roy Wilkins, two of Lomax’s later sometimes foes, participated in the project, and Robinson provided blurbs for the publicity campaign. That campaign described the Nation of Islam and James Lawson’s United African Nationalist Movement as “Black Supremacy” groups—sometimes referring to the organizations as cults—that were “anti-white, anti-Christian, anti-semitic and anti-integration,” groups that posed “a serious threat that will amaze Negro and white.” Lomax, explained a press release, “has been covering this strange story with a special camera crew for the past two months.” The documentary “was the result of a joint investigation” by Lomax and Wallace.¹⁵

10. Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 271.

11. Malcolm X, too, was the son of a Baptist minister, something all three had in common.

12. Peter Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (Urbana, IL, 2013), 62.

13. “Mike Wallace’s ‘Newsbeat’ Uncovers Major Anti-White Crusade,” box 4, series 2, subseries 1, folder 1, Lomax Papers.

14. *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1965, C18.

15. “Tonight at 8:00 p.m. a ‘Must See,’” and “Mike Wallace’s ‘Newsbeat’ Uncovers Major Anti-White Crusade,” box 4, series 2, subseries 1, folder 1, Lomax Papers.

On June 13, 1959, the first episode of Lomax's collaboration with Wallace appeared. Called *The Hate That Hate Produced*, the five-part documentary series was an introduction to the Nation of Islam. The show featured interviews with the leader with gratuitous clips of him calling white people "devils." It was a presentation that frightened many that summer, with the final installment airing on July 17.¹⁶

The opening episode started with Wallace delivering a scathing editorial on "a group of Negro dissenters" preaching a "gospel of hate" while "city officials, state agencies, white liberals, and sober-minded Negroes stand idly by." The NOI was "the most powerful of the black supremacist groups," a frightening example of "organized hate." Malcolm described the white man as the embodiment of the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden. As Graeme Abernethy explains, the Black Muslims "were framed as the realizable inversion of King's contemporary demands for justice and equality for African Americans by non-violent means. The sizable African American minority appeared, as if more clearly than ever before, as a potentially murderous revolutionary mass."¹⁷

Lomax was not only an interviewer for *The Hate That Hate Produced*. He was also a credited producer and wrote the show. After the production, Lomax continued to do interviews and special interest segments for Wallace's program. Still, both the title and editorial commentary were Wallace's. Lomax compiled all of his footage then delivered it to Wallace. Wallace then edited the reels and added narration specifically to sensationalize the coverage for maximum impact, and the NOI understood that. The Nation of Islam held a New York City rally later in the month of the documentary's debut. Mike Wallace was banned from the event, as were all white journalists. Lomax, however, attended the rally and maintained his good relationship with the group. There he watched as Elijah Muhammad charged that Wallace was trying to destroy the NOI. "Does he classify the truth as Hate?" asked Muhammad. "No enemy wants to see the so-called American Negro free and united. He wants to use you as a tool." Lomax, however, managed to escape Muhammad's blame.¹⁸ Later that year, for example, Malcolm began publishing an early version of *Muhammad Speaks*, the newspaper of the faith, and Lomax, who had come to television

16. Karl Evanzz, *The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X* (New York, 1992), 76-77; "Report of [Redacted], 67C, 17 November 1959," NY 105-8999, BUFILE 100-399321 (pt. 6 of 38), Malcolm X file, FBI; and *New York Herald Tribune*, July 12, 1959, D6.

17. Louis A. DeCaro Jr., *On the Side of My People: A Religious Life of Malcolm X* (New York, 1996), 134; and Graeme Abernethy, *The Iconography of Malcolm X* (Lawrence, KS, 2013), 44-45.

18. "The Hate That Hate Produced, WNTA-TV, New York, 22 July 1959," box 4, series 2, sub-series 1, folder 1, Lomax Papers; *Amsterdam News* (New York), November 28, 1959, 15; Marable, *Malcolm X*, 161; and DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 135.

journalism from print sources like Baltimore's *Afro-American*, helped him collect news stories and layout the first issues. The galleys for that early attempt, called *Mr. Muhammad Speaks*, a precursor to the larger paper, were edited by C. Eric Lincoln.¹⁹

Muhammad's denunciation of Wallace was to be expected. The newsman's commentary was incendiary, and he made a convenient representation of white bitterness toward the NOI. But the documentary was a sensation, as were its subjects. While Elijah Muhammad liked neither the emphasis on Malcolm X nor the emphasis on "hate," the program actually spurred growth in the faith. Three weeks after the first episode, for example, the group's Los Angeles mosque inducted 500 new members, with similar membership increases across the country. Malcolm complained about the negative reaction to the series, as well, but he understood that all publicity was beneficial. As Abernethy explains, the documentary "initiated the mass media campaign that Malcolm would sustain" until his assassination. "More than any other single factor, Malcolm's iconic emergence was accelerated by" the documentary. The Anti-Defamation League's Arnold Forster even claimed that Wallace exaggerated the group's size and influence, giving it an "importance that was not warranted." After the program appeared, exposés on "black supremacy cults" appeared in newspapers throughout the nation. An extensive dive into the organization of the Nation of Islam by *US News and World Report* and an endorsement of the program by Jackie Robinson in his syndicated column provided additional coverage nationally. *Time*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Reader's Digest*, and the *New York Times* all followed with their own exposés. The *Detroit Free Press* also launched an independent investigation of the hometown NOI chapter. Letters and telegrams poured in to WNTA from around the country praising the coverage.²⁰

That coverage was light on the Nation of Islam's place in the long history of black nationalist thinking, thanks largely to the editorial work of Wallace, but it also neglected the kinetic nature of Malcolm's ideation as he grew as a

19. Despite the fact that the NOI became hypervigilant about the kinds of exposure it received, the year after the documentary, C. Eric Lincoln, a graduate student, got access to the group for his doctoral dissertation, later published as *The Black Muslims in America*. See Evanzz, *Judas Factor*, 93; Goldman, *Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 61; Marable, *Malcolm X*, 162–63; and Graeme Abernethy, *Iconography of Malcolm X* (Lawrence, KS, 2013), 26.

20. Abernethy, *Iconography of Malcolm X*, 44–45; "'Black Supremacy' Cult in US—How Much of a Threat?," *US News and World Report*, November 9, 1959, 112–14; DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 134; *Detroit Free Press*, August 14, 1959, 1–1; August 15, 1959, 2–1; and "Media Scrapbook: The Hate That Hate Produced," box 4, series 2, subseries 1, folder 1, Lomax Papers. Despite the controversy that surrounded the series, everyone involved benefited. Wallace received an offer to host the 1960 presidential campaign, which he ultimately parlayed into hosting the CBS morning news by 1963. From there, he joined the team of *60 Minutes*; see Marable, *Malcolm X*, 161–62.

thinker. His “gospel of hate” was necessarily tethered to the society in which he lived and which created the need for such revolutionary ideologies in the first place. It created an understandable call-and-response pragmatism that left Malcolm adjusting his views as new manifestations of white supremacy appeared in response to black agitation. *The Hate That Hate Produced* was unwilling to convey such nuances. Nuance, in fact, was the opposite of its intent. But it did make a sensation of Malcolm, Elijah Muhammad, and the faith.²¹

The sensation grew the faith, but it also came with attendant negativity that would ultimately encourage greater governmental scrutiny and harassment. The tension between the need for publicity and the inherent negativity of the presentation of the organization in the white mainstream would continue to afflict the NOI, as well as later groups like the Black Panthers, such coverage minimizing the positive good of those groups in favor of sensationalism that distorted their messages. Lomax played a role in creating that distortion. Muhammad and Malcolm clearly saw his work on *The Hate That Hate Produced* in a positive light and welcomed the NOI’s arrival on the national stage, but Lomax’s effort also helped produce some of the scarlet letters that the group carried with them into their newfound popularity.

The documentary was a Rubicon to be crossed by the NOI, but it was also Lomax’s biggest success. He had hustled to convince Wallace and *Newsbeat* that he had an inside angle on these groups. He sold the concept. He spent two months preparing interviews and footage. He wrote and produced the program. It was a triumph of self-promotion and would set the standard for much of his developing career. Along with introducing Malcolm to the country in *The Hate That Hate Produced*, Lomax also, the following year, introduced Malcolm to photographer Eve Arnold, who was commissioned by *Life* magazine in 1961 to photograph the Black Muslim leader. The shoot produced a famous picture,

21. For more on the Nation of Islam and its place in the history of the African American relationship with Islam, see Martha F. Lee, *The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement* (Syracuse, NY, 1996); Edward E. Curtis IV, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation, and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY, 2002), and *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960–1975* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006); Dawn-Maries Gibson, *A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2012); Richard Brent Turner, *Islam in the African American Experience* (Bloomington, IN, 2003); and Samory Rashid, *Black Muslims in the US: History, Politics, and the Struggle of a Community* (New York, 2013). For more on black radicalism and the Black Power movement, see William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago, 1992); John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia, 1992); Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore, 2005); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York, 2007); and Kehinde Andrews, *Back to Black: Retelling Black Radicalism for the 21st Century* (New York, 2018), among many others.

actually published in *Esquire* instead of *Life*, of Malcolm in profile, hand behind his neck, hat slightly cocked. It was a stylish portrait, one that helped make Malcolm's name, and one that was facilitated by Lomax.²²

At the advent of the 1960s, the NAACP had continuously demonstrated to many younger, more radical activists that the movement had passed it by. When the North Carolina A&T students who initiated the sit-in campaign sought legal aid from the group, the NAACP declined. The shift between the old and new guards was growing, and as historian Osha Gray Davidson has noted, Lomax "was one of the first to understand the dimensions of this shift and to describe its significance." He demonstrated that understanding in "The Negro Revolt against 'The Negro Leaders,'" an article he published in the June 1960 *Harper's*. "This revolt," wrote Lomax, echoing the critique of his friend Malcolm, "swelling under ground for the past two decades, means the end of the traditional Negro leadership class."²³

In May 1960, syndicated columnist Harry Ashmore examined black leadership in the north, using as his guide Lomax's article, to be published the following month. He argued that Lomax's piece was "an epitaph for the National Assn. of Colored People" to coincide with "the prior demise of the Urban League." The proof of such deaths came with the sit-ins, which demonstrated that younger activists were no longer taking their cues from more conservative, calculating civil rights hierarchies. "This revolt, swelling underground for the past two decades" wrote Lomax, "means the end of the traditional Negro leadership class." Ashmore agreed. "Local organization leaders were caught flat-footed by the demonstrations; the parade had moved off without them." Lomax articulated a belief that while there would be further black leadership, "there will never again be another class of white-oriented leaders such as the one that has prevailed since 1900." Ashmore was less confident in that conclusion, noting the moral compromises of leaders like Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph, and Martin Luther King Jr. and what he saw as the failed legislative agenda of "phony liberals" like Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Still, it was Lomax's work that allowed white commentators like Ashmore a jumping-off point to critique black civil rights leaders.²⁴

22. Eve Arnold, *In Retrospect* (London, 1996), 62–63; and Abernethy, *Iconography of Malcolm X*, 59. Historian Peter Goldman argued that Malcolm liked Lomax "for his energy and his endless line of black gossip" (*Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 62).

23. Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South* (1996; Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 102–3.

24. Louis Lomax, "The Negro Revolt against 'The Negro Leaders,'" *Harper's* (June 1960), reprinted in *Voices in Our Blood: America's Best on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Jon Meacham (New York, 2001), 268–80; Ashmore analysis in *Boston Globe*, May 20, 1960, 19; and *New York Herald Tribune*, May 20, 1960, 11.

In March 1961, with Lomax's profile growing, he and Malcolm X debated the problems in black America and their potential solutions on New York's WINS radio program *Open Mike*. In April, they debated at Yale. Lomax defended integration as a viable civil rights strategy and nonviolence as a method, though he continued his critique of movement conservatism. Though the two were on different sides of the lectern, however, the events both grew their alliance and influenced Lomax's thinking. In the April 1961 edition of the new magazine *The Urbanite*, for example, Lomax published a scathing piece titled "The Act and Art of Being a Negro," in which he argued that black America had so long presented itself as whites expected that many black individuals eventually bought into the charade. Black nationalist thinking offered a potential answer. "What a sweet shock it is for a Negro who has been imbued with a sense of inferiority all of his life suddenly to hear a doctrine which holds that he, the black man, is superior, of God's own choosing" and that the white man, "the serpent who lost his legs through sin" is inferior, "lost, doomed, living on borrowed time." Lomax's article wondered, "Could it be as the black nationalist charges that your mind has been enslaved?" It was the inherent danger in Du Bois's notion of "double consciousness" that the less authentic self would win out, leaving only that consciousness to the detriment of a legitimate fighting spirit. Only a rekindling of that original authenticity could provide real momentum in the civil rights effort, and black nationalism provided at least one useful method of rediscovery.²⁵

The following year, in 1962, those original ideas became a monograph. *The Negro Revolt* was published by Harper, again raising Lomax's profile. Lomax's early work in *The Negro Revolt* was in many respects in line with Malcolm's thinking. The book takes the "old guard" of rights workers—his principal target is the NAACP—to task for watching as a more activist contingent passed it by. In the process, his analysis clearly described the divisions within black life. "First, there were the traditionally free Negroes versus those who had once been slaves," he wrote, "then there were the former house slaves versus the former field slaves; while among those who had always been free there were the aristocrats versus the common men." Describing the social stratification of black life in the context of failed rights efforts or, at the very least, an unwillingness to adapt to new methods of advocacy, was a rag well worn by Malcolm as well. Just months after the publication of *The Negro Revolt*, Malcolm spoke at Michigan State University and gave his famous comparison of house Negroes and field Negroes. "So you have two types of Negro," he said. "The old type and the new type. Most of you know the old type. When you read about him

25. *Amsterdam News* (New York), March 11, 1961, 17; *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 29, 1961, A2; and Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York, 2011), 188.

in history during slavery he was called 'Uncle Tom.' He was the house Negro. And during slavery you had two Negroes. You had the house Negro and the field Negro." Malcolm's analysis would go much farther than Lomax's. Lomax, for example, saw the bureaucracy of the NAACP as a problem, but he never considered Roy Wilkins to be a so-called Uncle Tom. And Malcolm's focus remained on those who were actively benefiting from the status quo, but the language of the two allies was resonant.²⁶

That resonant language had several potential consequences. First, though Lomax's version of the metaphor appeared first in the public sphere, that doesn't mean he was not cribbing ideas he learned from Malcolm. The NOI leader was such a dramatic influence on Lomax's thought, and the proximity of such uses was so close, that the history of their relationship augurs that Lomax is echoing Malcolm, not the other way around. Second, the differences in their interpretation would also lead them in different argumentative directions. "Whatever hope there was that Negroes would inherit a separate world was destroyed by the reign of terror and injustice visited upon that world by white people," Lomax wrote in *The Negro Revolt*. It was the language of Malcolm, but it brought Lomax to a different conclusion. "The clear determination to make us the white man's servant rather than his brother rendered every Negro father a weakling before his son, a limp reed in the eyesight of his wife. These—more than segregation per se—were the moral flaws that made the Negro world an anathema; and because of these moral flaws we embraced integration, thereby changing the social history of this nation." That the notion of integration was built on moral flaws would meet with Malcolm's approval, but Lomax makes the case that it does change American social history, and that it is the only option left to a people suffering under a "reign of terror."²⁷

That said, *The Negro Revolt* also criticized school desegregation "as the cornerstone of a civil rights policy," arguing that it presented "a tight little drama carried out by a few Negro actors while a white mob throws bricks and epithets. Yet each of the embattled towns have thousands of Negro citizens who must become involved if total desegregation is to become a reality." It also took an inordinate amount of time, Lomax argued. It provided no relief for those finished with school and threatened to hurt the careers of black school teachers. Whereas Malcolm's critique of integration ended in renouncing the validity of the concept, Lomax's ended in a desire for a more holistic approach.²⁸

26. Louis Lomax, *The Negro Revolt* (New York, 1962), 43; and Malcolm X, "The Race Problem," January 23, 1963, African Students Association and NAACP Campus Chapter, Michigan State University, East Lansing.

27. Lomax, *Negro Revolt*, 52–53.

28. *Ibid.*, 112–15, quote from 113.

Lomax devoted a chapter of his *The Negro Revolt* to the Black Muslims. The group was part of the Negro revolt but aimed in a different direction. They “represent an extreme reaction to the problem of being a Negro in America today,” he wrote, “turning their backs” on mainstream society instead of working to improve it. “Their one positive aspect is that they work to make Negroes proud of being Negro.” He even worried that the failure of integrationist civil rights groups could turn the Black Muslims into “a potent and dangerous force.” This would be a common trope for Lomax, praising and damning the Nation of Islam at the same time. Later, for example, when praising Whitney Young—someone who he saw as a fellow academic, an honest broker in the effort to end employment discrimination—Lomax argued that “Black Muslim leader Malcolm X is the only Negro I have met in recent years who knows the soul of Negroes as well as Young does.” Theirs was disagreement about ends coupled with an agreement about the state of race relations and a genuine admiration.²⁹

In April 1963, the new author traveled to Los Angeles, where he appeared on a televised panel with Malcolm X and Norman Houston. That show carried with it little preparation on the part of Lomax. Throughout that Saturday, Louis and Betty Lomax were the guests of honor at a daylong party hosted at the home of James and Laura Hardon, a prominent family in the city’s black community. Their daughter, Nira Hardon, was there for the day as well, a law student and public school teacher who would go on to become the director of equal opportunity programs for USAID and later chairwoman of the board of trustees for the University of the District of Columbia. The Hardons called it a “Pot Shot” party, where friends had a chance to ask Lomax questions about, as reported by the *Los Angeles Sentinel*’s Jesse Mae Brown, “why his claim to fame has to be built from criticizing leaders, churches, NAACP, etc.” Lomax “answered with ease,” before leaving the party temporarily to make the television appearance. The remaining guests watched the panel discussion on television; Lomax then returned with Malcolm, and they continued to field questions “into the wee small hours.”³⁰

29. By comparison, Lomax also saw King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as part of the Negro revolt. While he agreed more with the group’s integrationist ends, he saw SCLC as overbearing, often criticized by younger, more mobile and radical groups for swooping into local areas and stealing thunder from local officials, only to leave without shoring up final settlements; *Negro Revolt*, 177, 219.

30. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 4, 1963, C2; and *Washington Post*, March 31, 1997, B4. Lomax also discussed the pot shot party in *When the Word Is Given*. In Lomax’s telling, a woman asked Malcolm why he prefaced his statements with “The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches . . .” Malcolm responded with a comparative analogy to ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his dummy

The panel, part of *The Ben Hunter Show*, was itself a significant moment. Historian Louis A. DeCaro has argued that it was during the panel that Malcolm first “emphasized the traditional view of the submitted life according to Islam rather than the central tenets of Elijah Muhammad’s black religion of separation.” He also “equated Allah with the divinity of Christianity and Judaism, claiming that only the names for God are different.” Such was the early onset of Malcolm’s turn to a more traditional view of Islam. Still, he also, in another segment of the show, parroted Elijah Muhammad’s teaching that “the white race is a race of devils and what a white person should do if he is not a devil is prove it.” At the end of the night, Malcolm and Lomax left the studio together, where Malcolm was confronted by a group of Arab students from UCLA who challenged his “white devil” assertions. In Lomax’s telling, Malcolm countered by arguing that it was pragmatism that made it necessary to “wake up the deaf, dumb, and blind American Negro.” The students were unsatisfied, leaving a frustrated Malcolm to get into the car with Lomax, never to mention the incident again. The turn away from the NOI would come later, but DeCaro sees *The Ben Hunter Show* and its aftermath as an early indicator of Malcolm’s own future philosophical change.³¹

In May 1963, Alex Haley interviewed Malcolm X for *Playboy*, noting that Lomax had said, “Eighty percent, if not more, of America’s 20,000,000 Negroes vibrate sympathetically with the Muslim’s indictment of the white power structure. But this does not mean we agree with them in their doctrines of estrangement or with their proposed resolutions of the race problem.” Malcolm agreed with the general estimate, placing black sympathy with Nation of Islam’s cause at roughly 90 percent but disagreed that there was a foundational difference between the group’s indictments and proposed resolutions. “A Muslim to us is somebody who is for the black man,” he told Haley. “I don’t care if he goes to the Baptist Church seven days a week. The Honorable Elijah

Charlie McCarthy, with himself as the dummy. “Mr. Muhammad is everything, and I am nothing.” Lomax, *When the Word Is Given*, 80–81.

31. DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 159–61; and Louis Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man* (Los Angeles, 1968), 93–94. The visit was not Malcolm’s first to Los Angeles. The previous year, officers of the Los Angeles Police Department shot seven members of the Nation of Islam, paralyzing one and killing another. Malcolm made the trip to investigate the murder, and biographers have credited his frustration with the broader faith’s inaction as an early cause of Malcolm’s initial frustration with Muhammad and his eventual split from the organization. See Frederick Knight, “Justifiable Homicide, Police Brutality, or Governmental Repression? The 1962 Los Angeles Police Shooting of Seven Members of the Nation of Islam,” *Journal of Negro History* 79 (Spring 1994): 182–96; Bruce Taylor, “Black Radicalism in Southern California, 1950–1982” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1983), 312; Bruce Perry, *Malcolm: The Life of a Man Who Changed America* (New York, 1991), 191–94; and “Los Angeles Shooting Incident,” NY 105-8999, Malcolm X file, FBI.

Muhammad says that a black man is born a Muslim by nature. There are millions of Muslims not aware of it now. All of them will be Muslims when they wake up; that's what's meant by the Resurrection."³²

Whether such a formulation made Lomax a Muslim or not, in July, he joined Elijah Muhammad, John O. Killens, Evelyn Cunningham, and others in committing to a planned trip to Cuba for a celebration of the tenth anniversary of Fidel Castro's July Revolution, where he would cover the event for *Harper's*. Lomax was among fifteen Americans and 200 total outsiders invited by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People for a twenty-day-long visit to the island nation. The only other black journalist to make the trip was Charles Howard, former publisher of the *Iowa Observer* newspaper and the National Negro Publishers Association correspondent to the United Nations.³³ In response to concerns that Castro was intentionally trying to curry favor with the black population, Lomax argued that "some white writers were also invited" and that the vast majority of those invited were white. Castro was, however, despite Lomax's protests, trying to curry favor with his American contingent. The group was feted around Havana and invited to lavish parties, with each delegate given the opportunity to talk several times with Castro himself.³⁴

32. Alex Haley, "An Interview with Malcolm X: A Candid Conversation with the Militant Major-Domo of the Black Muslims," *Playboy*, May 1963, reprinted in *Voices in Our Blood: America's Best on the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Jon Meacham (New York, 2001), 220–21. Alex Haley remembered that Malcolm "felt that his greatest safety lay in really trusting only a few people—and those few only to certain degrees. The late author Louis Lomax and I used to laugh about how we didn't discover until much later that once Malcolm had visited and given each of us interviews in different rooms in the same hotel, with never a mention to either about the other, although he knew well that Lomax and I were good friends." Alex Haley, "Alex Haley Remembers," in Gallen, *Malcolm X, as They Knew Him*, 247.

33. Charles P. Howard began his career as a Des Moines attorney. His three sons worked for the *Observer*, too, and the efforts of the family grew the paper in its first year, 1939, to develop two additional efforts, the *Waterloo Observer* and the *Tri-City Observer*. He used his paper to fight for civil and human rights, becoming more and more involved over the years in progressive politics. In 1950, he attended the World Peace Conference in Poland. It was a communist sponsored event, so when he returned to Iowa in 1951, he was disbarred as a consequence. With no law practice, Howard began focusing all of his attention on journalism, reporting often from Africa on anti-colonial fights on the continent before becoming a United Nations correspondent later in his life. Howard would die in 1969. See *Atlanta Daily World*, August 6, 1939, 1; October 16, 1939, 6; January 22, 1940, 3; July 25, 1940, 6; May 31, 1941, 4; July 18, 1941, 6. See also Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC* (New York, 1969); Paula Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990); and David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941–1946* (Urbana, IL, 2014).

34. *New York Times*, July 7 1963, 22; *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1963, 3; *Amsterdam News* (New York), August 10, 1963, 9; and *Boston Globe*, August 25, 1963, 35.

The State Department endorsed the trip for most but warned that both Muhammad and Lomax did not have their passports validated for travel to Cuba and could be prosecuted upon their return. Lomax did eventually have his passport validated and made the trip to Castro's Cuba, but that did not mean that the government fully approved of the venture. (Muhammad's passport was not validated. He did not make the trip.)³⁵ With no direct travel to the island, Americans first traveled to Mexico, the only nation in the hemisphere that had regular flights to and from Cuba, applied for a transit visa, then used that as a key to the kingdom. During Lomax's time on the island, however, the Mexican consul in Havana announced that he was delaying transit visas for American reporters for at least forty days. The US embassy in Mexico City announced that it had "no authorization to intercede with the Mexican government on behalf of American correspondents seeking Mexican transit visas out of Cuba," then added that the agency had, in fact, been ordered not to intercede. Lomax, stuck in Havana and waiting for his visa, sent a public telegram railing against the decision and "the treatment accorded me by the Mexican government allegedly at your [the United States] request." It was suggested that the State Department was using the delays targeted at American journalists to further discourage such travel and thereby to continue to isolate Castro and Cuba.³⁶

The government denied the charge, publicly explaining that it had helped in every way it could and blaming any problems on officials in Mexico. "Contrary to what Mr. Lomax alleges," said a State Department spokesman in an August 1963 press briefing, "the Department of State in no way hampered his return travel. Indeed, the facts demonstrate that the Department assisted Mr. Lomax in every practical way."³⁷ Whoever was telling the truth, Lomax's charges against the government moved him into an argumentative line with Muhammad and Malcolm, presenting the federal government as the activist cause of racial animosity rather than the potential solver of such problems, and using a seemingly more equalitarian communist government as a comparative

35. Muhammad was also a vigorous anti-Communist, arguing that its refusal to recognize God was an abomination. When Malcolm and Castro met at the United Nations in 1960, Muhammad was outraged. That said, however, he also saw communism as a tool that existed "to destroy the whites," and thus never launched a public assault against it; see Claude Andrew Clegg III, *The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997), 156.

36. *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1963, 6. For more on the Nation of Islam and efforts overseas, see Saladin Ambar, *Malcolm X at Oxford Union: Radical Politics in a Global Era* (New York, 2014).

37. Press accounts, UPI-173, UPI-51, and Confidential report, September 27, 1963, file no. 62-102926, Louis Lomax, FOIA, FBI; and Department of State, "On the Record Unless Otherwise Indicated Transcript of Press and Radio News Briefing," August 9, 1963, Warren Commission Document 1462, Mary Ferrell Foundation, Ipswich, MA.

model to make the case. At this point, Lomax did not argue for armed self-defense, though he would eventually get there, but his affinity for Castro's Cuba was telling.

More pressing upon his return home, however, was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In August 1963, more than a week before the March, Lomax held a press conference in San Francisco and charged the Taconic Foundation with donating one million dollars to the event, with the goal of "defanging" the "original purpose of the march." He argued that the movement's original plan was to have half a million "rough and tumble Negroes" descend on the Capitol Building for a sit-in that would "bring the government to a screeching halt." It was after the Taconic gift that the new plan became a march to the Lincoln Memorial for a simple ceremony far from the Capitol. Founded by financier Stephen Currier, the Taconic Foundation was dedicated to promoting social equality through nonviolent means. Lomax's claim seemed misdirected. That year, the organization had given funds to CORE and the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund, and it had previously provided grants to SNCC in 1961 while that group was engaged in the very sit-ins that Lomax claimed Taconic was trying to stop. That said, the group gave far more money to more conservative groups like the Southern Regional Council that were critical of militant activism. Regardless, Taconic refuted the charge as "completely erroneous." A spokesman for the New York charity claimed that "not one cent of Mr. Currier's personal funds or of foundation money has gone for the march in any way, shape or form."³⁸

Regardless, the criticism put Lomax out front with Malcolm as public black opponents of the event, though both of them privately saw value in what the SCLC and others were planning. Malcolm saw the march as "a part of history that we should be a part of," though publicly he demeaned the event as an ineffective farce organized predominately by white people. Later that year, in his seminal "Message to the Grass Roots," delivered in Detroit to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, Malcolm argued that white fear of effective grassroots activism in Birmingham led white leaders to attempt to co-opt the movement. "They said, 'These Negroes are doing things on their own. They're running ahead of us,'" said Malcolm. "And that old shrewd fox, he

38. Quotes from *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1963, 1; *Washington Post*, August 20, 1963, A4; Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1960-1961, 1965, box 142, folder 1413, series 1: Grants; NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund: General, 1961-1966, box 81, folder 816, series 1: Grants; and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE): Special Purpose Fund, 1963, 1966-1967, box 33, folder 341, series 1: Grants; Southern Regional Council: General Program, 1958-1964, box 139, folder 1372, series 1: Grants; Southern Regional Council: Voter Education Project, 1963-1964, box 141, folder 1397, series 1: Grants, Taconic Foundation Records, FA407, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York.

said, "Well If you all aren't in it, I'll put you in it. I'll put you at the head of it. I'll endorse it. I'll welcome it. I'll help it. I'll join it." He specifically called out Currier for using his money to convince civil rights activists to organize the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership, then place himself as its cochairman. "Once they formed it, with the white man over it, he promised them and gave them \$800,000 to split up between the Big Six; and told them that after the [March on Washington] was over they'd give them \$700,000 more. A million and a half dollars—split up between leaders that you've been following, going to jail for, crying crocodile tears for." Malcolm's criticism again seemed to directly echo Lomax's, though as with house Negroes and field Negroes, the trajectory of influence probably moved in the other direction.³⁹

Either way, the rhetorical similarities of both in 1962 and 1963 demonstrated a close and ideologically significant relationship. Lomax actually attended the March on Washington with Malcolm X. Journalist Peter Goldman described being led by Lomax, "all busy mystery," to a hotel room the night before the march, where Malcolm "was holding court, not trying to convert or to wound anybody but making gentle fun of the whole occasion." Malcolm watched the rally from the Washington Mall, and Manning Marable has estimated that several hundred Nation of Islam members followed him to the Capitol despite the organization's official stance against the march.⁴⁰

Lomax, for his part, would continue his criticism of the March on Washington in early September while in Washington. He said he was surprised by the turnout but disappointed in the "festive" atmosphere that did not demonstrate the righteous anger needed to influence policy. He complimented the speeches given by King and John Lewis and claimed to be proud of their effort, but saw it as ineffective. "I hope I'm wrong, but I don't think it changed a thing." Another March on Washington was going to be necessary for the certain filibuster of the coming civil rights legislation, and this one needed to be aimed at the Capitol. "Next time," he said, "we will have to go back to the other end of town."⁴¹

After the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, that grim exclamation point on the sentence that was Birmingham 1963, the Committee of Artists and Writers for Justice sponsored a memorial service at New York's Town Hall, with proceeds from the collection to be used for gravestones for the recently deceased. Lomax served as a public spokesman for the group and

39. Malcolm's "Message to the Grass Roots" was delivered November 10, 1963; see Malcolm X, "Message to the Grass Roots," in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York, 1965), 3-17.

40. Goldman, *Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 104-5; and Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York, 2011), 255-58.

41. *Amsterdam News* (New York), September 7, 1963, 33.

spoke, along with James Baldwin and John O. Killens, at the service. Musicians Ruby Dee, Carol Brice, and Odetta performed. Killens argued that the bombing had made him doubt the efficacy of the strategy of nonviolence. Baldwin denounced Kennedy and American society more broadly as being complicit in the killings. It was a memorial, but the event also sent a radical message.⁴²

The night before, however, Lomax spoke at a Harlem meeting of James Lawson's United African Nationalists. He joined Adam Clayton Powell Jr., James Farmer, Dick Gregory, Lewis H. Michaux, James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, and others to speak at a Harlem Square rally sponsored by the Pan-African National Association in the Americas and the Human Rights Political Association. Flyers for the September 19 event announced, "The United States racial pot is boiling! White America's democracy and Christianity is on trial. Is race hatred, white racism, brutality, murder, lynchings, bombings, rapings, all to go unpunished, forgotten, forgiven, or repaid? Compensated? Justified?" They reminded black Manhattan that "Kennedy said nothing about the six children in Bombingham Alabama, which is an insult to 30 million black people, but we will!"⁴³ It was not an audience predisposed to be receptive to Lomax's message. He did not have a specific constituency, per se, but he had never been confused for a separatist, and Lomax was vigorously booed and heckled for arguing for integration and an expanded place for the black population in American society. "Regardless of how much you want to go back to Africa," he told the crowd, "you're not going." The booing was such that he was forced to end his speech before its conclusion.⁴⁴ It was a strange display for someone who often argued against integration, almost as if Lomax's desire to provoke superseded his desire to create beneficial alliances.

Regardless, the day after the memorial service, the Committee of Artists and Writers held a press conference at the Astor Hotel and announced a boycott of Christmas shopping to protest the events in Birmingham. Lomax, Baldwin, Killens, and Dee argued that Americans "have no right to celebrate Christmas this year" and said that they had contacted major civil rights organizations asking for their participation. "On Christmas morning," said Dee, "mothers and fathers will say to their children, Santa Claus didn't come because bombers came to Birmingham." The group predicted that a successful boycott could reduce holiday revenues by up to two billion dollars. When 15,000 protesters

42. *New York Times*, September 17, 1963, 26; September 21, 1963, 8; *Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1963, A9; and *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 28, 1963, 8.

43. "The Black Revolution—What Next?" flyer, 1963, box 3, folder 8: Political and protest flyers, Eric Steele Wells Papers, 1855-1986, Amistad Research Center, Tilton Hall, Tulane University, New Orleans.

44. *New York Times*, September 20, 1963, 21.

marched in Washington to protest the Sixteenth Street bombing, Dick Gregory told the assembled crowd that he would participate in the boycott.⁴⁵

Not all saw the benefit of such a move. The *Pittsburgh Courier's* Izzy Rowe described the litany of civil rights leaders rejecting the boycott plan. "Some of them said that the well-known author-newsman had a heck of a nerve asking leaders to join forces with him after giving the back of his 'write' hand in magazine and daily newspaper articles," wrote Rowe. "Any number of the civil rights heroes have been trying to avoid Mr. Lomax." Though Malcolm made no attempt to avoid Lomax, however, he didn't endorse the boycott effort.⁴⁶

It was clearly unsuccessful, never achieving any national momentum. Christmas sales were up nationally and in major markets across the country.⁴⁷ Lomax, however, was clearly moving in a more radical direction, associating the actors in Birmingham not with the excess of Bull Connor or the white culture in the South, but instead with the "white power structure" that made Birmingham representative of the entire country, as a microcosm of what black Americans dealt with everywhere. It was a national indictment, as was the attempted boycott. Manning Marable has described Lomax uncritically as "an integrationist," but such is obviously not an adequate description of his growing ideological awakening.⁴⁸

In October 1963, Lomax published *When the Word Is Given: A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Black Muslim World*, a study of the rise of the Nation of Islam. Lomax's alliance with Malcolm X and his closeness to many in the organization provided him access that was relatively unprecedented. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in particular was concerned about the publication because it noted that John X Ali, formerly John Simmons, had worked with the FBI prior to joining the NOI in 1957 and had a palpable influence on Elijah Muhammad, even maneuvering to gain more power in the organization. The Bureau was fearful that one of its plants would be exposed in the book. Though Lomax would not reveal his sources, internal agency memos

45. *New York Times*, September 22, 1963, 1, 72; *Chicago Defender*, October 2, 1963, 5; *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 5, 1963, 11; and *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 5, 1963, 14.

46. Such was not the case with King, however, as he broke with the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership and supported the boycott. Then the Chicago chapter of CORE broke ranks and also decided to support the boycott; see *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 26, 1963, 17.

47. There were local efforts at Christmas boycotts, but they too were unable to meet the mark they set for themselves. In Jackson, Mississippi, boycott efforts did prompt the mayor and other officials to create incentives for downtown shopping, which at least demonstrated an acknowledgment of the boycott, but those incentives also largely ended it. There was limited success in Danville, Virginia; Cambridge, Maryland; and in Birmingham; see *Washington Post*, January 2, 1964, A6.

48. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 163.

made it clear that some of his information came from the FBI. Lomax was not alone in receiving information from the Bureau about the Nation, as the former sought to influence narratives about the latter to exacerbate its more radical elements by passing selective information to black press reporters. Lomax, however, had clearly discovered more than they were willing to give. Along with his Bureau sources, Lomax was also friends with Balm Leavell, publisher of the *New Crusader*, one of the first journalists to discover that FBI informants occupied high-level positions in the Nation of Islam. Leavell shared his information with Muhammad, who was disturbed by the news, and Lomax, who used it in his book. After publication, Ali confronted Lomax, asking him why he wrote about his FBI connection. Lomax told him that he had based his reporting on reliable sources.⁴⁹

When the Word Is Given fully demonstrated the duality of Lomax's thought. On one hand, he seemed to disapprove of the Nation's black separatism and default to something resembling race supremacy. At the same time, however, Lomax endorsed the majority of the Black Muslims' premises. "I know white people are frightened by Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad," wrote Lomax. "Maybe now they will understand how I felt all my life, for there has never been a day when I was unafraid; we Negroes live our lives on the edge of fear, not knowing when or how the serpent of discrimination will strike and deprive us of something dear." Their activism was the result of, if not "white devils," then to be sure white people doing devilish things. It was the qualified endorsement of the academic, though the book was not an academic tome. While *When the Word Is Given* made nods to a sociological analysis of the NOI's actions and theory, it predominantly limited itself to surface descriptions that introduced Malcolm, Muhammad, and their contemporaries and worldview to a nation of curious novices.⁵⁰

"Chilling though it may be," Lomax admitted in the book, "the Black Muslims have erected their teaching on a group experience common to all American Negroes. Few of us concur in their conviction and sentencing of the white

49. The National Memorial African Bookstore held a party on November 2 for the book's debut, featuring Lomax, Baldwin, and Killens, among others. "Fresh African coffee from the Gold Coast will be served," went a bookstore advertisement for the event: "So take a tip and be present at the party's sip . . . it will be worth your trip"; see *Amsterdam News* (New York), November 2, 1963, 15; and Evanzz, *Judas Factor, 197-201, 207*. Manning Marable described Lomax as an integrationist, but one who always treated the NOI and Malcolm fairly. Marable praised *When The Word Is Given* as "the single best resource about the NOI's inner workings prior to Malcolm's split from the sect," noting that he "tried to present a balanced, objective critique of the NOI's strengths and weaknesses. He correctly identified the malaise among working-class blacks that several years later would feed the anger beneath Black Power" (*Malcolm X*, 163).

50. Louis E. Lomax, *When the Word Is Given* (1963; New York, 1969), 9.

race. But none of us can question the accuracy of the indictment on which that conviction rests." He made the case that Malcolm and the NOI grew from the same ferment that spawned the Birmingham activism in 1963. "They both emerged from a growing Negro consensus that old paths have led nowhere." They were both symptoms of his "Negro revolt."⁵¹

This provided more publicity for the NOI, and publicity without the overreaching Wallace editorializing, again a clear progression away from Lomax's thinking in the late 1950s. But historian Peter Goldman has argued that the book's publication created a greater rift between Malcolm and Elijah Muhammad. "Malcolm's picture on the front jacket and Mr. Muhammad's on the back; Chicago was said to have been furious." In addition, the book featured the first public instance of Malcolm breaking with Muhammad. He told Lomax that Muhammad had a direct relationship with God. "He was with Allah and was given divine patience with the devil. He is willing to wait for Allah to deal with the devil," he said. "Well, sir, the rest of us Black Muslims have not seen God, we don't have this gift of divine patience with the devil. The younger Black Muslims want to see some action." It surprised Lomax, and it was a significant moment in Malcolm's initial pivot away from the Messenger.⁵²

An ideological move toward a new radicalism also opened Lomax to new criticism. Early in 1964, James L. Hicks of the *Amsterdam News* questioned the role of black leadership and the place of media personalities like Lomax in that category. Any black leader who dared to question white people and not show deference and gratitude was branded "a 'new' kind of Negro," and then everyone so labeled was deemed a "Negro" leader. "Thus James Baldwin and Louis Lomax wrote a couple of books and essays giving white people more Hell than they have ever received before from Negroes and the white press, radio and TV immediately branded them as 'leaders.'" The same, he argued, was true of Malcolm X. "But ask a Negro if Baldwin is his leader, and he will immediately ask you 'leader of what?'"⁵³

Just months after the publication of *When the Word Is Given*, Lomax made perhaps his most famous appearance in 1964, when an April 3 CORE symposium in Cleveland, Ohio, featuring him and Malcolm X produced one of Malcolm's signature addresses, "The Ballot or the Bullet." The FBI's intelligence concerning the event demonstrated a clear confirmation bias, substantially misquoting the speech but correctly estimating the crowd at roughly two thousand.

51. *Ibid.*, 41, 60.

52. Goldman, *Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 111; Lomax, *When the Word Is Given*, 179; and George Breitman, *The Last Year of Malcolm X: The Evolution of a Revolutionary* (New York, 1967), 18–19.

53. *Amsterdam News* (New York), January 18, 1964, 9.

The day after the speeches, Malcolm and Lomax appeared together on KYW television in Cleveland, expanding on themes they had developed at the CORE symposium.⁵⁴

Prior to the event, in February 1964, Lomax and Alex Haley were with Malcolm in Chester, Pennsylvania, organizing groups for the Boston public school boycott in response to continued segregation and congressional delay on the Civil Rights Act. On March 7, 1964, Malcolm X met Lomax for lunch to discuss the schism in the Nation of Islam and the dangers it posed. "Somebody in the Chicago office is out to get me," said Malcolm. He was talking about John X Ali, about whom Lomax had warned Malcolm more than a year prior. Lomax had come into contact with Ali while researching *When the Word Is Given* and had learned about his history from FBI interviews for the same project. He told Malcolm to contact the NYPD and FBI and to keep an official record if something were to happen.⁵⁵

Later that month, Lomax and Malcolm joined up on Boston's WBZ radio program *Contact!*, hosted by Bob Kennedy. Malcolm X had just left the Nation of Islam prior to their discussion on Boston radio. He would make the hajj after the event but would again team with Lomax upon his return. After Malcolm left the NOI, Lomax was confident he would have success. "Malcolm X articulates for the majority of Negroes," he told Bob Kennedy in Boston. "He is much more of a threat to the white power structure now that he has become an activist," and he "will be more readily acceptable as a leader in the civil rights movement."⁵⁶

Before the Cleveland debate with Malcolm, Lomax traveled to Louisville for a speech, where he echoed his friend in more resonant tones than he had achieved prior. The white assumption was that "the antithesis of nonviolence is violence. Not so. The antithesis of nonviolence is self-defense. And the black man is now the only American who does not have the right of self-defense." Nonviolence, in Lomax's new paradigm, was the description of a response to violence, a form of passive defense. Violence, as an action fundamentally offensive, could be neither synonym nor antonym. Self-defense, then, was an active response to violence. It was the opposite of nonviolence but, perhaps more importantly, was categorically different from violence as an offensive strategy. It

54. "Appearance of Malcolm X with Louis Lomax at a CORE Sponsored Meeting on April 3, 1964 at Cleveland," Memorandum, April 7, 1964, Malcolm Little (Malcolm X), FBI Central Headquarters file, 100-399321, FOIA, FBI.

55. Evanzz, *Judas Factor*, 209-10, 229-30.

56. *Boston Globe*, March 24, 1964, 8, 27; Evanzz, *Judas Factor*, 213; and "Muslim Mosque, Incorporated," Memorandum, April 30, 1964, Malcolm Little (Malcolm X), FBI Central Headquarters file, 100-399321, FOIA, FBI.

was Lomax's version of Malcolm's defense of self-defense as the appropriate response to white supremacy.⁵⁷

Thus, the Cleveland event came less than a month after Malcolm's split with the Nation of Islam and in the middle of the fight for the Civil Rights Act. The evening at the Cory Methodist Church began with Lomax, in the words of historian Manning Marable, "presenting a pro-integrationist civil rights message that won respectful applause from the audience." It would, however, be forgotten as the opening act for "The Ballot or the Bullet." Malcolm advocated using the power of the vote but warned that it could not be seen as a cure-all for black America. Malcolm X famously challenged Lyndon Johnson to fight to pass the Civil Rights Act. "If he waits too long, brothers and sisters, he will be responsible for letting a condition develop in this country which will create a climate that will bring seeds up out of the ground with vegetation on the end of them looking like something these people never dreamed of. In 1964, it's the ballot or the bullet." That press for urgency and inherent threat of more radical protest would be echoed in the coming weeks by Lomax. But in the moment, Lomax took the more moderate position. "Nothing could be more fatal," he argued, than the Negro revolt "to split white versus black." It was an issue that "goes to the moral root of the decay of Western civilization," but Lomax was uncharacteristically optimistic. "This Nation under God will have a new birth of freedom," he told the crowd. "White men and black men will one day settle their differences."⁵⁸ It was Lomax playing the foil for Malcolm. He had clearly moved away from such a position in the previous two years but understood the inherent juxtaposition that would make the event, and Malcolm's message in particular, more effective.

Cleveland was a hotbed of radical organizing in 1964, and Malcolm had close relationships with many of the activists there. Lomax did not. He was there because of his relationship with CORE and his history of engaging events with Malcolm. Such, however, did not diminish the radicalism of the event. Activists in Cleveland were there for Malcolm X, and his speech pushed Lomax's out of the most radical minds in the crowd. Lewis Robinson, for example, planned his announcement of the formation of the Cleveland-based self-defense organization the Medgar Evers Rifle Club on the night of "The Ballot or the Bullet" event.⁵⁹

57. *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 4, 1964, 1.

58. *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 18, 1964, 3; Marable, *Malcolm X*, 303; and Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York, 1965), 23-44.

59. David M. Swiderski, "Approaches to Black Power: African American Grassroots Political Struggle in Cleveland, Ohio, 1960-1966" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst,

Rioting broke out in Cleveland in the aftermath of the symposium, not because of anything specifically said by Lomax or Malcolm, but instead because protests of the building of a new public school in a black neighborhood of the city led to violence. As a minister stood behind a bulldozer, protesting the building of temporary facilities for black students specifically intended to keep them from enrolling in white schools, the bulldozer ran over him. The incident appeared to be an accident, but in the hypertense climate of Cleveland, citizens responded by taking to the streets. Malcolm, still in town, went on local radio and urged black resistance to what had become a typical police response. Crowds finally began to disperse only after thirteen injuries and twenty arrests had occurred (fig. 2).⁶⁰

Malcolm made the hajj later that month. While he was away, Lomax was the featured speaker at the Bronx Club of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs annual awards luncheon, where he also received their Achievement Award. His speech, however, was not a typical women's club address. Lomax rose to the podium and promised to make "the most important statement I will ever make in life," before launching into a fierce political tirade. "Roy Wilkins failed, James Farmer failed. Martin Luther King failed. Whitney Young failed. And Lyndon Baines Johnson failed," said Lomax, despite the fact that the Civil Rights Act had already passed the House and was making its way through the Senate; despite his friendship with King and his earlier praise of Young. "We haven't been able to achieve a thing. Martin Luther King wrapped his dream in love, and while it was ricocheting between Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tenn. and the Gulf of Mexico, it turned into a nightmare." White leaders, he charged, assumed black passivity as long as key black figures were kept in check, but black Americans "will no longer listen to the voices of moderation." He argued that nationally there would be "bloodshed and chaos" as a newer, more radical movement replaced the moderate black leadership in the face of the white "conservative power structure." He clearly took up the radical mantle in Malcolm's absence while reverting to a more traditional counterargument while he was around.⁶¹

On May 23, 1964, for example, Lomax and Malcolm held a debate moderated by Irving Kupcinet at Chicago's Civic Opera House. Advertisers sold the debate like a boxing match. "Debate of the year," read the ads. "See history made as the Rebel clashes against the Intellectual in the most controversial debate of our time." Backstage, Malcolm told Lomax to expect members of the

2013), 147, 235; *Cleveland Call and Post*, April 11, 1961, 1; and *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 5, 1964, 1.

60. *Amsterdam News* (New York), April 11, 1964, 1.

61. *Amsterdam News* (New York), April 11, 1964, 25; and *Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1964, 5.



Figure 2. Louis Lomax and Malcolm X discuss the politics of race on an April 4, 1964, program titled *Walk in My Shoes* on a Cleveland television station. The event served as a coda to the speeches of the two the night prior at a CORE symposium at the Cory Methodist Church. Malcolm's speech became known as "The Ballot or the Bullet." Photo housed in the Louis Lomax Collection at the special collections of the University of Nevada at Reno.

NOI in the audience, telling him, "They are out to kill me." When Lomax stepped on stage, he saw, among others, John X Ali.⁶²

"I propose," Malcolm said during the debate, "we lift the issue of civil rights to the level of human rights by bringing it before the United Nations." He argued that separation and integration, whatever their debits and credits, were "merely methods toward his real end—respect and recognition as a human being." He described his multiracial awakening on his hajj. "In the past, I committed myself to the indictment of all whites. But no longer do I subscribe to a sweeping indictment of any race." Malcolm had fundamentally changed his message. "Separation is not the goal of the Afro-American," he said, "nor is integration his goal. They are merely methods toward his real end—respect

62. *Chicago Tribune*, May 10, 1964, F10; May 17, 1964, F10; May 22, 1964, B9; Evanzz, *Judas Factor*, 207; and Goldman, *Death and Life of Malcolm X*, 193.

as a human being.” Lomax seemed surprised. “I hate to admit this, Malcolm,” he said, tongue in cheek, “but you’ve become a moderate.”⁶³

But not too moderate. Goldman remembers that Lomax pressed Malcolm on his earlier “white devil” claim. “Are all white men immoral, Minister Malcolm? Is there not one good one?”

“I haven’t met all of them,” Malcolm responded. “Those whom I have met are the type I would say are insincere. Now if there are some sincere whites somewhere, it’s those that I haven’t met yet.”

“How about the woman,” asked Lomax, “who took you in when you were a little boy and put you on the road to learning something,” referring to the white foster family who took in Malcolm after the murder of his father. “My presence in that home was like a cat or a parrot or any type of pet that they had,” said Malcolm. “You know how you’ll be around whites and they’ll discuss things just like you’re not there. I think Ellison calls it the *Invisible Man* and Baldwin calls it *Nobody Knows My Name*. My presence in that home was not the presence of a human being.”

“But she did feed you.”

“You feed your cat.”

“She clothed you.”

“You clothe any kind of pet that you might have.”

“And you impute to her no humanitarian motivation?” Lomax asked.

“No. Not today.”⁶⁴

In February 1964, Lomax attended an event at Southern California’s Pomona College, where he spoke along with CORE’s James Farmer and John Doar of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “The FBI has been quite adept at catching kidnappers, train robbers, and bank bandits,” Lomax argued, “but why can’t it run down church bombers or other violators in civil rights cases?” Doar did his best to defend the Bureau, and Farmer gamely defended nonviolence, but Lomax castigated both. “Nonviolence is downright un-American,” he argued, holding down a radical position in a way he didn’t do when playing the foil for Malcolm. “One of the reasons you don’t respect me and you call me ‘boy’ is that I don’t defend myself.” White violence would be a constant, as would foot-dragging by law enforcement, but sometime soon, he argued, “the Negro will hit back when he is hit.”⁶⁵

63. Marable, *Malcolm X*, 332; Evanzz, *Judas Factor*, 239–40; and *New York Times*, May 24, 1964, 61.

64. Peter Goldman, “Malcolm X: Witness for the Prosecution,” in Gallen, *Malcolm X, as They Knew Him*, 215.

65. Just as with the Howard-Till affair, Lomax’s Pomona speech again earned him the attention of the FBI. SAC, Los Angeles to Director, FBI, February 29, 1964, file no. 62-102926, Louis Lomax, FOIA, FBI; and *Los Angeles Times*, February 29, 1964, 3.

It was a theme he would continue throughout the year, again staking out Malcolm's ground in his absence. Lomax was part of an organization called the Association of Artists for Freedom—similar to the Committee of Artists and Writers for Justice—along with writers like Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, John O. Killens, and LeRoi Jones and actors like Ossie Davis. “We meet from time to time to talk and argue,” said Davis. “It grew out of the Birmingham bombings. We talk of what we as artists can do, how we can express the anguish for the moral situation we find in this country.”⁶⁶ In June 1964, members of the Association debated a group of white liberals including David Susskind, *Fortune* editor Charles Silberman, and *New York Post* editor James A. Wechsler at Town Hall. The topic was “The Black Revolution and the White Backlash,” and while the opinions of the various artists were by no means uniform, the one unifying theme of their remarks was an assumption that white liberals were part of the problem facing black America rather than part of the solution. Silberman himself had described the problem in his book, *Crisis in Black and White*, published that year. “When the struggle for Negro rights moves into the streets, the majority of liberals are reluctant to move along with it.” A frustrated Hansberry responded, “We have to find some way with these dialogues to show and to encourage the white liberal to stop being a liberal and become an American radical.” But it was just that kind of frustration that whites feared. Wechsler, for example, claimed at the forum that the group was “ambushing captive white liberals.”⁶⁷

Flogging white liberal apathy was a common conceit, but it did not often happen in a room filled with white liberals. The debate was described at length by Harold Cruse in his influential *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. Cruse saw such rejection as a consequence of the bifurcation between theory and praxis. The artists, he argued, failed to recognize that any group determined to do more than talk about racial equality would of necessity need to form pragmatic alliances with white groups to succeed. They were, in his mind, paying lip service to black rights without understanding the work involved to achieve them. That said, Cruse was sympathetic to such rejections, rehearsing the historical progression of the white left's often self-serving relationship with black activists. It created a paradox that was, in fact, the crisis of the Negro intellectual. Much of Lomax's professional life, particularly through the rest of the 1960s, would occupy that liminal space between theory and praxis, between

66. *New York Times*, June 15, 1964, 1.

67. Silberman quote from Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York, 1964), 217; Hansberry quote from Lorraine Hansberry, *Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words: To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, ed. Robert Nemiroff (New York, 1995), 237; Wechsler quote from Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York, 1967), 206; and see *Village Voice*, July 9, 1964, 1.

ideological purity and the pragmatic compromise of action. He would become, in his own way, the embodiment of the black intellectual in crisis.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the same month, June 1964, Malcolm announced the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Lomax was never part of the organization, though he had long supported Malcolm's split with Elijah Muhammad. He had a strong relationship with Peter Bailey, who edited the group's newsletter and would go on to edit *Ebony* magazine in 1968. He was also close with John Henrik Clarke and fellow author John O. Killens and would participate in a variety of author panels and events with each of them both before and after the OAAU's dissolution.⁶⁹

In October, speaking to a meeting of the Luther League of the American Lutheran Church in Detroit, Lomax explained that "69 bombings, 23 of them churches, have occurred against my people in the South in the past four years—J. Edgar Hoover hasn't found a cotton-pickin' one of them, yet he's found the Communists in the Civil Rights Movement. Bully for him!" The following month, Lomax gave a speech to sociology students at Emory University wherein he claimed, "If the Negro gets his freedom through non-violence, it will be the first time in history it has happened. Everything you have gotten in America has been in blood."⁷⁰

This new language understandably led to criticism. In early September 1964, Reverend John Porter, leader of Chicago's newly organized Englewood chapter of the SCLC, was critical of Lomax and Malcolm X, who had made similar speeches earlier in the summer. "They're fooling the white folks," he argued. "Malcolm is fine in New York, but let him go to Mississippi," seemingly unaware that Lomax himself had recently been to Mississippi.⁷¹

Lomax himself would use Mississippi as a point of analogy, his reference instead in defense of Malcolm. On December 7, 1964, Lomax appeared on a National Educational Television documentary interviewing Elijah Muhammad titled *The Messenger from Violet Drive*. It was a far more complimentary account of the Nation than was *The Hate That Hate Produced*, one that sought to make Muhammad into a viable national civil rights leader—not one from the mainstream,

68. For a broader description and critique of position of the representatives of the Association of Artists for Freedom, particularly in relation to the Town Hall debate and the rejection of white liberalism, see Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 193–224.

69. Garrett Felber, "'Harlem Is the Black World': The Organization of Afro-American Unity at the Grassroots," *Journal of African American History* 100 (Spring 2015): 199–225; and William W. Sales Jr., *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity* (Boston, 1994), 97–132.

70. [Redacted] to J. Edgar Hoover, October 16, 1964, and UPI-39B, file no. 62-102926, Louis Lomax, FOIA, FBI.

71. *Chicago Defender*, September 12, 1964, 5.

but one who was culturally and nationally relevant nonetheless. Lomax was a critical voice in that narrative. "Dissention took place within the Muslim movement, and I think Malcolm was being forced out," he said. "Malcolm had become the most articulate spokesman. After all, the Muslims had been around since 1930, nobody heard about them until, of course, Malcolm X got out of jail."⁷²

"It is my own prediction," said Lomax, "that now that Malcolm is out of the movement, that they will return soon to the oblivion from which they came." He told a story of attending a rally at the Audubon Ballroom, where Elijah Muhammad was to speak along with his son, then a student in Cairo. His son appeared in a white robe, with a white formal turban. "And an old Negro from Mississippi sitting behind me said, 'My God, he looks just like the Ku Klux Klan to me.' The point is, no white man, or black man for that matter, draped in a white sheet, will ever sell the American Negro anything."⁷³

Still, despite his relationship with Malcolm, Lomax remained close to Muhammad, as well. "We the American Negro are the residual effect of five hundred years of slavery and segregation. It was inevitable I suppose, or I know, that one day the Negro would produce a man who would come along and say, 'My god is bigger than your god, and he can slay your god, even if he can't slay your god, he will not bow down and serve your god,'" Lomax explained. "You have to kind of be buggy to be black and to be sane in America. And the great thing about Elijah, about eating at Elijah's table, is that this sort of buginess, this is what America has done to us, this is what America has made us . . . Elijah is what America made him."⁷⁴

Much of that goodwill faded two months later, however. On February 21, 1965, Lomax's weekly television discussion program *The Louis Lomax Show*, debuted in Los Angeles. It was the first hour-long syndicated talk show hosted by a black man, another in a long line of firsts from a precedent-setting journalist, but it was a debut that was ultimately overshadowed, on that same day, by the assassination of Malcolm X in New York. After word of the killing reached Los Angeles, Lomax began a desperate attempt to reach Betty Shabazz, Malcolm's widow. After all attempts to revive the leader had been exhausted, Betty returned to the home of Tom Wallace, brother of Ruby Dee, member of the

72. *The Messenger from Violet Drive*, written, produced, and directed by Richard Moore, National Education Television, 1965, <https://youtu.be/NdMv-a4pSrQ>; *Amsterdam News* (New York), November 28, 1964, 17, and December 5, 1964, 19; *Chicago Defender*, December 7, 1964, 20; *New York Times*, December 7, 1964, 71; and *Washington Post*, December 7, 1964, B9.

73. Moore, *Messenger from Violet Drive*.

74. Such is not to say that Lomax did not still have a taste for the poison pen. "Elijah Muhammad has really come up with nothing new," he said. "You take the first five books of the Old Testament and everywhere it says, 'Jew,' you write, 'Negro,' you get Elijah Muhammad" (Moore, *Messenger from Violet Drive*).

Organization of Afro-American Unity, and close friend of the family, where she was staying. Lomax finally got through after a series of failed calls. Betty was understandably distraught. “The niggers *did it*, Lomax,” she told him. “The niggers *did it*! I didn’t believe they would; but the niggers *did it*.”⁷⁵

“Man, I’m looking for real trouble now,” Lomax said in response to Malcolm’s death. “There will be fear and panic within the Muslim movement, I believe.” He claimed that during Malcolm’s final trip to Los Angeles, he and a friend were followed at high speeds by a black limousine, that Malcolm carried a “zip-gun ball point pen” so as to “take one with him when he went.” Malcolm stayed at the Statler Hilton, where he received threatening calls. “There were mysterious men standing on the street outside the hotel, too,” said a grieving Lomax. “I respected his integrity and his ability.”⁷⁶

In August 1965, months after Malcolm’s death, Lomax put himself in the middle of the Watts uprising. He publicly urged the federal government to send in mediators to facilitate talks between black leaders and city officials and compared the riots to the French Revolution. “The whites think they can just bottle people up in an area like Watts and then forget all about them. It didn’t work.”⁷⁷ On his television program, Lomax interviewed residents of the devastated neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. “The tragedy of Watts is not that the Negroes burned it down,” said Lomax, “but that the white community plans to build it back just like before without assessing the real needs and without addressing themselves to their solution.” He described a “pathology of failure” in black Los Angeles, created largely because the infrastructure to help residents succeed was not in place.⁷⁸

It was a far more nuanced argument from Lomax, clearly influenced by the broader message of Malcolm’s OAAU. At the same time, however, the radical

75. Lomax’s show came about after Lomax appeared on the Joe Pyne program to discuss an article he had published in *Ramparts* magazine. Lomax so dissected the right-wing hate-monger that KTTV offered him his own show at a salary of \$25,000 per year. He took the deal and moved to Los Angeles. *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1965, A5, A12; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 16, 1967, A1; and quote from Russell J. Rickford, *Betty Shabazz, Surviving Malcolm X: A Journey of Strength from Wife to Widow to Heroine* (Naperville, IL, 2003), 232–33. See also Rosemary Mealy, “An Incomprehensible Omission: Women and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s Ideological Development in Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention—a Brief Criticism,” in *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable’s Malcolm X*, ed. Jared A. Ball and Todd Steven Burroughs (Baltimore, 2012), 119–24.

76. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 25, 1965, A1.

77. *New York Times*, August 15, 1965, 81. As the *Sentinel*’s AS “Doc” Young explained years later about Watts, “Many of the people actually involved never had a single intellectual thought about the uprising.” As evidence, he remembered Lomax’s interviews with some of the rioters. “Civil rights couldn’t have been farther from their minds” (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 5, 1980, A7).

78. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 18, 1965, A7; and *New York Times*, March 20, 1966, 1.

turn in the Civil Rights Movement dramatically affected Lomax, particularly after the loss of Malcolm. He was shaken by the violence in Watts, and, speaking at the Vernon branch of the Los Angeles City Library, he circled back around to one of his more original arguments. He called Black Power a response to such infrastructure failures “immoral and impractical,” as the black population was a substantial minority, and “Negroes do not produce a bullet, a gun or a stick of explosive.” Lomax encouraged his audience not to “get trapped into violence. There is nothing the Klansmen or the Birchers would rather see you do—it would give them the chance to shoot you down.”⁷⁹

That return to his original position, that slow drag away from Malcolm's intellectual orbit, demonstrated itself in other ways as well. In November 1967, Richard Zanuck announced that Twentieth Century Fox had hired Lomax to write an original screenplay on the life of Malcolm X, to be based on Lomax's *When the Word Is Given*. It was news that garnered Lomax new press attention, including an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor* about his position on Black Power. It was an important inquest given the author's new assignment. Lomax was not an advocate of black nationalist thought, which made him a unique choice for the Fox biopic. “Mr. Lomax regards himself as a Negro to whom certain ‘black-power’ leaders will still listen,” the *Monitor* explained. But two and a half years after Malcolm's death, “he thinks they're wrong.”⁸⁰

Describing Black Power, the man who also authored *The Hate That Hate Produced* told his interviewer, “It's partly a fad, and it's partly a philosophical twitch.” At the same time, he did credit the movement with generating grassroots leadership. “Rather than having somebody in New York speaking at a cocktail party for the Negro, now you have ghetto people themselves doing the talking.” When asked in response about “the ghetto problem,” Lomax proposed a national guaranteed annual wage and massive infrastructure investment into impoverished black neighborhoods. Even with such radical proposals, he remained frustrated with misguided “black Jacobins” on college campuses who wanted to boycott the 1968 Olympics and create networks of black militants to mobilize at a moment's notice. “The Negro is a total product of America—biologically, philosophically, politically,” he said. “He must integrate with America. He has no choice.”⁸¹

79. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 14, 1966, A1, July 28, 1966, C15.

80. “20th Inks Lomax for Malcolm X Script,” *Hollywood Reporter*, November 29, 1967, 1; and “Life of Malcolm X Used as Basis for Film Script” (undated article); and Kimmis Hendrick, “Lomax Sizes Up ‘Black Power,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 28, 1967, box 4, series 2, sub-series 2, folder 6, Lomax Papers.

81. That said, when Harry Edwards held his December 1967 news conference announcing his Olympic boycott, Lomax was there next to him. He had, in fact, arranged the event; see Hendrick, “Lomax Sizes Up ‘Black Power’”; Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics*

Columbia Pictures, meanwhile, owned the rights to Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and planned to produce a movie based on a script written by James Baldwin, another sometimes confidant of Malcolm.⁸² The Columbia film was never made, nor was Lomax's. By April 1968, both efforts had been abandoned.⁸³

The quiet deaths of the films came in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. that month. Lomax had been personally devastated by Malcolm's assassination, but he had been driven to paranoia by King's. In response to the death, he began a conspiracy investigation that took him from Los Angeles to New Orleans, tracing potential government collusion with assassin James Earl Ray. The denouement of Lomax's assassination investigation was the publication of *To Kill a Black Man*, but it was in no way a work of paranoia. It was instead an account of "the shocking parallel in the lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr." The book describes the obvious similarities between the two fallen leaders—their religious backgrounds, their impact on

and the Making of the Black Athlete (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, MN, 2002), 143–44; and Arnold Hano, "The Black Rebel Who 'Whitelists' the Olympics," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, May 12, 1968, 39.

82. Malcolm X's family lived largely off royalties from the *Autobiography*, though there were other sources. Historian Russell Rickford explains that Lomax speculated that Malcolm "had become a political and financial beneficiary of Algeria's and Ghana's revolutionary leaders, and that this 'Ben Bella-Nkrumah axis' had funneled him cash to sustain his family and spotlight American imperialism." There was no evidence of such payment, but significantly, Lomax, a chronic exaggerator, was not alone in such speculation. See *New York Times*, March 8, 1968, 49; *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 18, 1968, B11; and Rickford, *Betty Shabazz, Surviving Malcolm X*, 285.

83. The quick death of both efforts led historian Karl Evanzz to speculate that it was Hoover's FBI that killed them both. The Bureau used informants to follow the progress of the films and determined that both presented the FBI in a bad light. There are no documents that prove that Hoover used his influence to end the projects, but, as Evanzz notes, "It is enough to note that two films with tremendous box office potential, given the enormous interest in Malcolm X in 1969, were never produced" (*Judas Factor*, 318). Gil Noble's documentary on Malcolm, for example, was a popular feature around the nation in 1970. Baldwin, Alex Haley, and Elia Kazan, had originally agreed to make *The Autobiography* into a play. That effort never happened, and producer Marvin Worth bought the rights to the book and planned to produce it for Columbia. See James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Dial, 1972), 91; "Malcolm X to Be Subject of Two Films," box 4, series 2, subseries 2, folder 6, Lomax Papers; [Redacted] to WC Sullivan, March 26, 1968, Malcolm Little (Malcolm X), FBI Central Headquarters file, 100-399321, FOIA, FBI; *Amsterdam News* (New York), February 10, 1968, 22; *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1968, B1; and *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 18, 1968, D2. J. Edgar Hoover was interested in both scripts, ordering the Bureau's Los Angeles office to obtain advance copies to discover whether or not they were critical of the FBI. Both Baldwin and Lomax had suggested that the Bureau had played a role in Malcolm's murder; see Karl Evanzz, "Black Hollywood and the FBI," *Black Film Review* 64 (Winter 1987/88): 19; Albany Special Agent in Charge to J. Edgar Hoover, August 5, 1968, COINTELPRO-Black Extremism, FBI Central Headquarters file, 100-448006, FOIA, FBI; *Atlanta Daily World*, November 18, 1979, 10; and *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 24, 1979, 11.

society, and their diminishing popularity late in life. He comes to the conclusion that “the men arrested may have pulled the trigger, but they by no means acted alone; American society was not only in concert with the assassins but there is every evidence that they were hired killers.”⁸⁴

To Kill a Black Man was an intellectual biography of Malcolm and Martin, with elements of personal memoir that were a part of all of Lomax's books. He tells the story of the rise and impact of both leaders, with particular attention to his own role in their stories. He described his close relationship with Malcolm from 1959 to 1965, and growing up in Georgia with Martin. Along with its biographical description, it was a lament for the lives of both; and for all of his obsessed investigating, the talk of conspiracy was limited to the book's final chapter.⁸⁵

As a eulogy of sorts, Lomax spent much time in the book emphasizing and defending Malcolm's ideology. “Integration for most of us meant nothing more than total equality of education and opportunity,” he explains. But for Malcolm and those outside of the South, integration could never be the path to those goals. American racism, particularly in northern urban industrial hubs, “is designed to drive black people insane.” In a Kafkaesque existence with no real chance of escape and issues fundamentally different from those talked about in civil rights reports on television, Malcolm's message was more pressing and vital to a great many. Black militants like Malcolm realized that “the black man must manipulate the American machinery—by nonviolence or by violence—and cause it to work in his behalf.” Lomax's conspiracy theories aside, his defense of the radical position so soon after King's assassination is a telling demonstration of the lasting impact of Malcolm's thought on his own ideology. Though he moved back closer to his original ideological position after Malcolm's death and the tumult of Watts, he never completely lost the radical influence of Malcolm. “History,” after all, Lomax explained in *To Kill a Black Man*, “teaches that freedom belongs to those who have the power to take it.”⁸⁶

84. Historian Louis A. DeCaro has compared Lomax's sensationalistic *To Kill a Black Man* and its treatment of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. to James Cone's *Martin and Malcolm and America*, which he sees as a much more nuanced critical appraisal of the religious views of the two; see DeCaro, *On the Side of My People*, 298; and James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY, 1991). Authors such as George Breitman were wholly dismissive of *To Kill a Black Man*: “Louis Lomax's book about Malcolm X (and Martin Luther King) is worthless as biography, history, or anything else” (“More Than One Way ‘To Kill a Black Man,’” in George Breitman, Herman Porter, and Baxter Smith, *The Assassination of Malcolm X*, ed. Malik Miah [New York, 1976], 136).

85. Lomax, *To Kill a Black Man*.

86. *Ibid.*, 9, 12–18, 60–64, 249–55; and Perry Adams, Review of *To Kill a Black Man*, by Louis E. Lomax, Probe (January 1969), Harold Weisberg Archive, Digital Collection, Hood College, Frederick, MD, <http://jfk.hood.edu/Collection/White%20Materials/Security-CIA/CIA%200212.pdf>.

Lomax's thought, then, underwent a philosophical bell curve, beginning at a position critical of black nationalist thought, then moving much closer to that line as he was dragged into the gravitational pull of Malcolm's personality and the theoretical soundness of anti-integrationist rhetoric, before moving back toward his original position after Malcolm's assassination without completely abandoning the learned radicalism of his time in the NOI's orbit. He never completely relinquished his integrationist position, but through his various efforts at public provocation he instead reframed his thinking on the inherent violence of racism and the kinds of measures he considered acceptable to combat it. In that sense, Lomax served not only as a culture-making journalist but also as a representation of the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement itself. And that play of Malcolm on Lomax also worked in reverse, with the journalist being there with Malcolm at his most seminal and career-defining moments. He helped introduce him to a national mainstream audience in 1959 and to culture makers in the early 1960s. He hyped Malcolm's message in print, radio, and television. He was there when Malcolm broke from the Nation of Islam, and he was the opening act for "The Ballot or the Bullet." He was comforting Betty Shabazz on the night of Malcolm's assassination and defended his message after his passing. It was a reciprocal relationship that benefited Lomax's ideology and Malcolm's publicity, with lasting historical effects for both.

Lomax would move on to a teaching position at Hofstra University in 1969, where he worked with frustrated and radicalized black students on a predominantly white campus. He would not, however, remain in the post for long. After traveling through much of California for a lecture tour after his first academic year at Hofstra and five years after Malcolm's assassination, Lomax died in a one-car accident on Interstate 40 twenty-six miles east of Santa Rosa, New Mexico. He was 47, eight years older than his ally and sparring partner Malcolm X had been at the time of his own premature death.