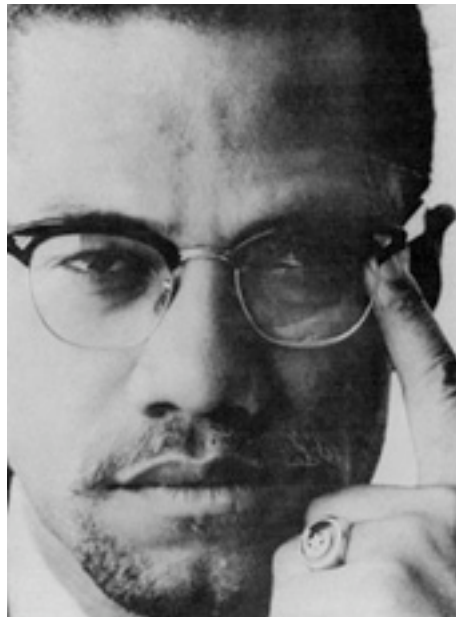*Malcolm X*
Constructing Black Manhood in Public Memory

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Malcolm X
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"And if you knew him you would know why we must honor him: Malcolm was
our manhood, our living, black manhood! This was his meaning to his people.
And, in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves. . . . And we will know him
then for what he was and is--A Prince--our own black shining Prince!--who didn't
hesitate to die, because he loved us so."
<div align="right">

--Ossie Davis - Eulogy for Malcolm X
</div>

Slowly the flag becomes consumed with fire. We are left only with the burning image of

a cross, not the cross of a Christ, nor the burning cross of the Klan, but rather the cross as

change, as the creation of new identity. Forged from the fabric of American society, this is the

cross of the X, Malcolm X. Prior to this emblazoning, we have witnessed the same flag

juxtaposed with images of the Rodney King beating and the Los Angeles riots filling the screen.

Thus begins Spike Lee's controversial film on the life of Malcolm X. It seems many see

Malcolm X as an important film primarily because of its cultural and commercial impact. Who

could have missed the proliferation of merchandise sporting the "X" logo? In 1992, the "X" was

ubiquitous--critics mused that Lee was far more a genius at marketing than filmmaking

(Jacoby). The "X" was on baseball caps, T-shirts, jewelry, posters, sunglasses, board games,

bumper stickers, books, mugs, and even potato chips (Sullivan). The marketing blitz began over

a year before the much anticipated release of the film. Many credit Lee with single-handedly

resurrecting the image of Malcolm X, but this isn't quite true. Malcolm X had been growing in

popularity over the years leading up to the film's release, particularly in the lyrics of young

rappers and hipp-hopp singers (Simpson). If anything, Lee caught on early to the makings of a

trend, and capitalized upon Malcolm's popular resurgence. This was the first time a major studio

had given this much creative control to a black director, or provided a film about a black

American with a substantial budget, $20 million--the film eventually cost $34 million

(Marable).

The real importance of *Malcolm X*, however, lies in its drastic and dramatic reconstruction of the character of Malcolm specifically for an audience living in the early nineteen-nineties. *Malcolm X* was unique, it was unlike any other "biopic." One might assume that it belongs to the genre of *JFK*, *Gandhi*, and *Nixon*, but *Malcolm X* is unquestionably a Spike Lee Joint. Unlike *JFK* , with its obsession with assassination and conspiracy, *Gandhi,* with its epic exotic philosophical sweep, and *Nixon* with its exploration of Shakespearean tragedy, *Malcolm X* was more truly an "autobiography." Autobiography, in this case being a slippery term, and one of much concern herein.

Malcolm X is an intriguing case study in the construction of public memory, and I rely on the literature of public memory for my critical perspective. John Bodnar, in *Remaking America,* sees public memory as played out on a grand scale between the opposing voices of the vernacular and official. According to Bodnar, the official voice represents that of the state, concerned with constructing a national, patriotic image (13), while the vernacular is the voice of the people, interested in localized, experienced memories and remembrances, often times at odds with the official version (14). Bodnar's primary concern is that the official version tends to triumph over the vernacular, suggesting:

> [A]lthough public memory is constructed from discourse, the sources of cultural and political power are not simply diffuse. They are also unequal. Public memory came to be what it was in the United States because some interests exerted more power than others in the discussion and actually distorted public communication to an inordinate extent. Thus, distortion took place not through simple coercion but through a more subtle process of communication which Leslie Good suggests involves the "prevention" of certain statements being made in public in a meaningful way. (19)

It may seem strange to consider the film *Malcolm X* as a part of the same public memory as, for example, the Lincoln Memorial, the Gateway Arch, the Vietnam War Memorial, and the

Gettysburg battlefield, but truly it is as much concerned with developing, and celebrating a version of public memory as any of these places. Unlike these sites of memory, the site which *Malcolm X* occupies is far less contestable, far less material. Even more so than a painting, photograph, or book, *Malcolm X* is fluid and transitory. As a film, it can be turned off, not shown, edited, censored, or one can simply leave the theater. It exists only for a time, and then it is gone, except in the memory of the viewer. Yet even the site of its display was contested in some areas over concern for public safety. In fact copies were issued to local theater owners and police so they could be ready for any violent activity--none of which occurred (Crowdus). As it now exists safely as a stream of bits and is relegated to viewing within the home, it is a site that can be personally celebrated, reviled, or ignored.

Malcolm X presents a case which Bodnar's theory doesn't account for well. Truly, there are forces at work to decide on what version of Malcolm to present, but these forces are conspicuously non-official. One might easily assume that the voice of the studio represents the official voice, but this is not the Hollywood of the "Why We Fight" years (Sklar 214). Currently the government has rather loose ties to the media corporations. Robert Sklar sees this as a time of rebellion against the Reagan year's attempt to obliterate history, and as a return back to a more historical cinema (356). But who's version of history? The voice present in the construction of *Malcolm X* cannot truly be seen as vernacular either. True, there are many voices present in the process of production, but in the end, *Malcolm X* represents Spike Lee's idealized vision of Malcolm X. "This is the movie I wanted to make," stated Lee (Crowdus 20). Spike Lee doesn't exist within the official or vernacular tradition but is evidence of a growing group of persons powerful enough to directly create national public memory. Recently director Ava DuVernay's film *Selma* (produced by Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt) also trod a tense line between the official, vernacular, and independent representation of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Lyndon Johnson's relationship and leadership concerning the civil rights march in Selma and Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Davidson). Many official sources preferred to laud the

work of LBJ as on par with that of MLK but DeVErnay's version refuses to allow this equivocation. Although one might view Lee's voice as anti-official, this wouldn't be true either-- Lee is somewhere in the middle, at times because of choice, and at others because of positioning within the studio system. Bodnar's strict model doesn't work in a growing number of cases. There is a need to see the process as somewhat more flexible, laden with unresolved tensions between the official, vernacular, and independent voices. I have chosen the term "independent" loosely to represent figures such as Lee who have a great deal of resources at their command and have no allegiance to the official or vernacular voices. This of course does not mean that they have complete agency, and therefore do not rely on others to attain their goals, but rather that they precisely do have personal connections to capital, policy, and influence.

The film *Malcolm X* presents itself as a particularly ripe artifact in which to observe this independent voice at work. I will first survey the critical literature concerning *Malcolm X*, then examine the production of the film, and lastly I will look at the film itself as containing evidence of the tense "fine line" in which the independent voice operates.

Critical reviews do not, in themselves, produce public memory, but they are involved in the reception and acceptance of the public memorial. It was largely critical praise that elevated the once controversial Vietnam War Memorial to an acceptable position in public memory. With all of the hype preparing the way for *Malcolm X,* it is not surprising that it has been reviewed extensively, and by some of the best critics in the business. Consistently, the reviews were mixed, there were those that championed the film, and those that despised it, but even the harshest critic or strongest supporter found both fault and merit in it. One of the most consistent observations by critics was how closely the film followed *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as told to Alex Haley. Richard Corliss in *Time* comments, "the story is a lavish, linear, way-too-long storybook of Malcolm's career, the movie equivalent of an authorized biography, a cautious primer for black pride" (64). Many see Lee's clear devotion to Malcolm as getting in the way of a more critical and powerful film. Shelby Steele of *The New Republic* questions, "How will the

new epic movie of his life--yet another refracting text--add to his prominence? Clearly it will add rather than subtract. It is a film that enhances the legend, that tries to solidify Malcolm's standing as a symbol of identity. To this end, the film marches uncritically through the well known episodes of the life" (30). "More Crucially, Lee lets his reverence for Malcolm sterilize the facts. There is no allusion, for instance, to the more extreme views of the Black Muslims. And Lee ignores the animosity between Malcolm and Martin Luther King, Jr.," observes Ralph Novak of *People Weekly* (18). And finally, Steele, again, asserts, "It was Spike Lee's unthinking loyalty to the going racial orthodoxy, I believe, that led him to miss more than he saw, and to produce a film that is finally part fact, part fiction, and entirely middlebrow" (30).

John Simon of the *National Review* expressed concern over the film's conservative tone, "I can safely say that Lee has not turned out a hagiography, neither has he gone into the particularly spiky aspects of Malcolm's history" (45). Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* expressed similar concerns for the film's PG-13 worldview. Because of his allegiance to the Malcolm X's autobiography, many saw Lee as burying new research that contests Malcolm's mythical past. Shelby Steele calls into question Lee's dismissal of Bruce Perry's recent study, *Malcolm: A Life of the Man Who Changed Black America*:

> Against Lee's portrayal of Malcolm's father as a stalwart Garveyite killed by the Klan, Perry reveals a man with a reputation for skirt-chasing who moved from job to job and was often violent with his children. Lee shows the Klan burning down Malcolm's childhood home, while Perry offers considerable evidence to indicate that Malcolm's father likely burned it down himself after he received an eviction notice. Lee offers a dramatic scene of the Klan running Earl Little and his family out of Nebraska, yet Malcolm's mother told Perry that the event never happened. The rather heroic cast that Malcolm (and Lee) gave to his childhood is contradicted by Perry's extensive interviews with childhood friends, who portray

> Malcolm as rather fearful and erratic. Lee's only response to Perry's work was
> simply, "I don't believe it." (30)

Malcolm's racially victimized past was necessary to build the case for his eventual anger at the white establishment. Had Lee shifted this to Perry's perspective, it is assumed, the audience might not be as sympathetic to Malcolm's radical ideas. Beyond the autobiography, there are inconsistencies in the historical record, for instance Elijah Mohammed is shown in the movie as being on his deathbed at the time of Malcolm's assassination, but in truth, he didn't die until some ten years later. Adolph Reed has charged that Lee used this device to distance Elijah Mohammed from the lethal rhetoric surrounding Malcolm when he left the Black Muslims. Reed in the *Progressive* suggests that the film skips Malcolm's strongest influence which was the five years following his death which saw the rise of Black Power, the Black Panthers, black opposition to the war in Vietnam, local organizing, and the fight for welfare rights. Reed further sees the film not only as historically inaccurate, but politically harmful:

> Lee's Malcolm points to a fundamental error of the high-toned Malcolmania that
> exhorts us to "learn from" Malcolm: We can't learn anything from a heroic
> allegory except "timeless wisdom," and timeless wisdom is just platitudes. . . .
> The film highlights in a particularly striking way five key problems that have
> gotten progressively worse since the civil-rights era: 1) an ahistorical and
> ultimately quietistic way of thinking about politics; 2) a cloudiness about purpose
> and a related tendency to rely simplistically on race as the central category of
> political and historical analysis; 3) a reluctance to confront and analyze
> intraracial conflict; 4) a romantic notion of leadership, and 5) powerful
> tendencies to reduce politics to catharsis or theater. (19)

The didactic and atemporal nature of *Malcolm X* has been noted by many critics. "Scholars will argue about the accuracy of the presentation of Malcolm and his ideas and they should," stated Richard Blake in *America*. "More to the point, however, is that this film is a 1992 interpretation

of events that occurred more than 30 years ago. It is made by a contemporary artist for a contemporary audience. It offers little clarity on the issues, because the nation as a whole understands so little of this history." The bookends of the film make clear the film's "educational" intent. "In the pre-title sequence, we get the videotaped beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police; at the very end, we watch black schoolchildren jumping to their feet one after another in a classroom to shout: 'I am Malcolm X!' At such times, an otherwise dignified work stoops to agit-prop," lamented Simon.

Other directorial decisions by Lee were also called into question. Blake suggests, "Spike Lee has presented the issues well, but as an artist he makes unnecessary demands on his audience. He remains a promising director who has yet to deliver on his talent because of self-indulgence. At three hours and 20 minutes, *Malcolm X* becomes tedious where it should be taut" (503) Tamar Jacoby in *Comment* saw the film as "a big letdown, both as entertainment and as politics. . . . The error is one of style and pace: determined to produce an epic, Lee has overwhelmed his subject, substituting costumes, crowd scenes, and fancy undercutting for virtually all real human drama." (27) Many critics found the opening Harlem Jitterbug sequence far too lengthy and of little importance. Richard Alleva in *Commonweal,* observed that it was in this first sequence where Malcolm is a pimp and hustler that Lee really seemed to connect. After his "salvation" in prison, the pace quickens and Alleva suggests it is then that Lee loses touch with the film, "[T]here is something about *Malcolm X* that resists the black film-maker Spike Lee. And that something is the unrelenting puritanism of the man. You don't hire a hipster, no matter how talented, to make a movie about Savonarola." (20)

In life, Malcolm X frightened whites. As I have mentioned earlier, police were alerted to possible violence and riots at the movies premier. Lee's own promotion created quite a stir, but when the film eventually came out the surprise was that the film was, indeed, quite conservative. Jacoby suggested that, "as in his writings and in interviews, Lee seems to want to have it all ways, to look just "bad" enough to appeal to blacks but also reasonable enough not to repel white

moviegoers. Putting a new spin on an old ghetto tradition, he wants at once to shock whites and to win their film prizes." Dismissing Lee's bravado, Jacoby doesn't see Malcolm X as a proper role model for out times, "But the fantasy only reminds one how sad and desperate is today's drive to beatify the old Malcolm X. Almost 30 years after his death, much of black America is still looking for pride and self-worth in the dead-end notion of defiance for defiance's sake" (31). Steele takes this line of thought further by stating that:

> Malcolm is back to conceal rather than to reveal. He is here to hide our fears as he once hid his own, to keep us separated from any helpful illumination. Had the real Malcolm, the tragic Malcolm, returned, however, it would have represented a remarkable racial advancement. . . . Malcolm's real story was, in truth, a tragedy. And the understanding of this grim truth would have helped the film better achieve the racial protest it is obviously after. (31)

Contrary to the naysayers, some reviewers saw great promise in Lee's work. "Lee and company have performed a powerful service: they have brought Malcolm X very much to life again, both as man and myth," raved David Ansen of *Newsweek*. Joseph Cunnean of the *National Catholic Reporter* saw the film as a memorable event. And, Peter Travers reacted against the negative press by affirming:

> Those who deride Lee as a self-promoter merely out to sell X hats and T-shirts and turn Malcolm into another manageable martyr for the white Hollywood Establishment just aren't paying attention. From the opening image of an American flag burning over the infamous video of the Rodney King beating in L.A. to Nelson Mandela's final eulogy, the film is a tribute to Malcolm's living, fighting spirit. Spike Lee has accomplished something historic in movies: a rousing, full-sized epic about a defiantly idealistic black hero whose humanism never extends to turning the other cheek. (192)

Cineaste ran a "symposium" on the *Malcolm X* phenomenon. Nine critics including: John Locke, Manning Marable, Jacquie Jones, bell hooks, Julius Lester and Jesse Rhines, tackled *Malcolm X* from various perspectives, such as adaptation of the autobiography, cultural myth, black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, sexism, the Nation of Islam, anti-Semitism, and economics. These are not evaluative essays, but rather they look beyond whether the film was good or bad, and into its representations and uses. I will not delve into each essay here, but will instead make a summative statement that each essay stays quite narrowly within its sphere of inquiry, none of which examine public memory.

Although many of the articles surveyed above express concerns over the Malcolm portrayed in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X,* none of them specifically look into his construction. There are obviously many aspects of the film discussed that would bear heavily on an analysis of public memory such as the adaptation of the autobiography; the tension between pleasing black or white audiences; between being too conservative or too radical; between representing factual history or depicting human drama; between creating a film well situated in history or one didactically created to reach an audience in 1992; between the conventions of the epic filmmaking genre and idiosyncratic artistic license; between criticism of the old Malcolm or revelry in the new. In light of the deficiencies in the current literature concerning the construction of *Malcolm X* as public memory, and considering the inadequacies of Bodnar's theory to account for individuals such as Spike Lee, I will now turn to an analysis of the production of *Malcolm X.*

Spike Lee ostensibly hijacked the film from director Norman Jewison. *By Any Means Necessary: The Trials and Tribulations of the Making of Malcolm X* recounts Lee's self assessed difficulties in making the film. Marvin Worth had bought the film rights to Malcolm's story from Betty Shabazz and Alex Haley, and had been shopping the project around Hollywood for over 25 years (Simon). Lee expressed much public concern over a caucasian directing a film as important to the black community as *Malcolm X,* Jewison eventually resigned, and Lee

assumed his directorial position. In an interview, Lee explained why he felt that the change in directors was necessary:

> The Story of Malcolm X belonged to Black film, and there was no other way to look at it. Too many times have the lives of the Martin Luther Kings and Nelson Mandelas ended up as made-for-TV movies. Too many times have the Steven Bikos ended up minor characters in feature films that were supposed to be about them. Too many times have white people controlled what should have been Black films. (Lee 11)

In *By Any Means Necessary,* Lee further stated that he knew he was just the director for the job:

> Everything I've learned up until now made me feel able, ready to do what needed to be done. *Malcolm X.* Big in scope. Big in scale. Blow it up to 70 millimeters, put it on a thousand plus screens. And no doubt about it, big problems, big headaches to go along with it, but in the end, still a Spike Lee Joint, sho-nuff, a film that's gonna be right on top of you, right in your face every minute, frame by frame. I'd always done small stories, but this story had to be more. Much more. I knew it had to be done by an African-American director, and not just any African-American director, either, but one whom the life of Malcolm spoke very directly. And Malcolm has always been my man. I felt everything I'd done in life up to now had prepared me for this moment. I was down for it, all the way. (2)

Lee portrays himself as being at war with Warner Brothers. They had promised him a budget of $20 million, but Lee wanted a budget on par with rival Oliver Stone's *JFK*. The film ended up costing $34 million and at one point Lee was under threat of losing his film to the loan company he had borrowed from to finish the project. Lee had already invested a sizable amount of his fee. Lee was in trouble, and Warner Brothers wasn't budging--Lee went to his friends. Lee called on prominent African-Americans--Oprah Winfrey, Bill Cosby, Magic Johnson,

Michael Jordan, and others. It is no coincidence that Lee called upon the very people, who, like himself, could be seen as independent voices within society. Each entertainer and sports figure had substantial capital resources, and each made a gift to Lee so that he could finish his film. Had Lee gone to "the people," like a modern day George Bailey, or to the official NEA, the finished film would likely have been quite different.

During the course of filming, Lee had to deal with the Black Muslims, and their concerns over the depiction of their founder Elijah Mohammed--if Reed is correct, concessions were made. Not only that, but the Black Muslims provided the on set security. Lee also negotiated with the widow of Malcolm X over merchandising rights. There is no doubt that Lee made concessions to get his film made, but the final voice, the final shaping of the film, is Spike Lee. One of the most influential factors in determining concessions was the need to have a crossover audience. That is, Warner Brothers put the numbers together, and for *Malcolm X* to make a profit it had to draw the white, as well as the black moviegoing audience. This need, not to scare whites too much, and to make Malcolm more palatable, would seem to be the strongest divergent influence upon Lee's initial vision. The primary need for this was, again, economic--if only blacks went to see the movie it would be a financial bust.

One can, of course, not dismiss the voices of those who actually made the film--the cinematographers, the editors, the actors, and scriptwriters. The script itself was a hodgepodge of scripts that predated even Jewison's involvement. The scripts were strewn together and enhanced by Lee. Even Denzel Washington had a strong influence on the makeup of the script, particularly on which speeches were chosen. The postmodern perspective tells us there is no "one voice," but rather everything is pastiche. As much agency as there can be in a man, such can be seen in Spike Lee, for if there is a voice to the film *Malcolm X* it is Lee's voice.

Spike Lee's film, *Malcolm X,* is an exercise in public memory executed in four parts. Here I offer a close analysis of a single scene from each of the film's four acts: As the burning embers of the "X" fade from the screen, we enter Harlem during the war years--Harlem's golden

age. The tracking shot from the train to the shoe shine boy, coupled with nostalgic images of the street, and the upcoming jitterbug dance sequence, reminds one of past epic films, such as those by David Lean. The colors are brighter though, the zoot suits flamboyant, and all presented in a golden wash of longing. The barber shop, where we follow Malcolm, is pure Norman Rockwell, albeit a black version. The mood is comedic as Malcolm gets his first conk (hair straightening). Spike Lee plays Shorty the barber and Malcolm's friend. After a torturous burning of the scalp, Malcolm takes off the towel around his head and exclaims, "looks white don't it!" Shorty and Malcolm head out on the town with swagger and style--then the image freezes. Lee has chosen to present Harlem as it was, or is remembered, in its heyday. But the image is way too sterile, the ravages of drugs and prostitution are absent from this version. Although Lee claims to have relied heavily on the autobiography, there are things that are left out or glossed over. The frozen image of Malcolm fades to memory as he describes the torching of his childhood home by Clansmen. The scene is wonderfully mythologized with white sheets, and a ghostly white moon on the horizon. Here, denying recent research suggesting otherwise, Lee sticks to Malcolm's embellished memories. The case must be made for victimization if we are to find Malcolm sympathetic in his later hate rhetoric. Lee also is seen as a strong and virile man who wins the lust of a very attractive blond haired, blue eyed, white lover.

In the second phase of the movie Malcolm is imprisoned for stealing, and convicted, Lee suggests, because he was sleeping with a white woman. Not long after arriving in prison, Malcolm again conks his hair. In the shower he is confronted by Baines, an older convict and Black Muslim, who gives him a fix for his drug habit and teaches him the ways of Islam. Baines is a fictional character who will, along with several other ministers, betray Malcolm. It was not this strong willful man that brought Malcolm to enlightenment, but rather his sister. Malcolm's sister is never mentioned in the film, but is a primary character in the autobiography. True to Lee's attempt to construct a strong black manhood, he has chosen the male role model of Baines over Malcolm's feminine and familial sister. bell hooks sees this as a particular problem with

Lee's Malcolm X. He is far too much like Malcolm himself to see his faults. Lee in his movies, and Malcolm with his strong Islamic beliefs, are seen as sexist.

After his conversion to Islam and release after six-and-a-half years from prison, Malcolm begins to speak for the Nation of Islam. In one of the films finest scenes, the camera pans across the audience to Malcolm as he delivers a fiery speech aimed at whites. The camera work exerts Spike Lee's presence with exagerated angles and shots from above, but they also work to decenter Malcolm, at times obscuring him altogether, making the point that this was a movement, not just a man. As Malcolm speaks a composite of several speeches, we are shown televised images of vicious violence as perpetrated by the police against black demonstrators. The haunting strains of John Coltrane flow underneath the fiery sermon and the disturbing images. Here is encapsulated the speeches of Malcolm X, and Washington does a fine job of performing them. Here Malcolm attacks, albeit indirectly through images, his rival Martin Luther King. The sequence proceeds without explanation, and many of the political figures are unrecognizable to todays moviegoing population. We are forced to wonder at Malcolm's expressions as he connects with his wife through shared viewing of current events facilitated by the medium of television. The introduction of Betty into the montage inserts an element of family, and responsibility, again, tempering Malcolm's vehement words. Here is portrayed a black man that stands up to the white establishment, and is not afraid. Without the justification of family, and the images of white violence, Malcolm's words would likely alienate the white viewer. Lee has found just the right mix to provoke, yet not offend, his audiences, both white and black.

In the final and shortest sequence, Malcolm has broken with the Nation of Islam over it's founder Elijah Mohammed's vices. Malcolm goes on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, and returns with a much enlightened, more peaceful rhetoric. Whether there was really that much of a shift in Malcolm's policy is questionable. In the end he is murdered by his own group, the Nation of Islam. His wife cries and the crowd is enraged as the film cuts to actual black and

white images of the real Malcolm X. Over these images are spoken the Eulogy for Malcolm by Ossie Davis. Here, again, his manhood, his strength, is foregrounded. Interspersed with these images are scenes from Seweto, South Africa. Then we are in a classroom in the U.S., and the teacher announces "Malcolm X day." The children rise, one by one, and proclaim "I am Malcolm X!." The children shift from the U.S. to South African children, and Nelson Mandela offers a speech on Malcolm X's dignity and meaning. The film closes with an actual clip of Malcolm stating his famous "by any means necessary." Lee's didactic attempt to please all audiences, to teach the young, has created a rather impotent Malcolm X in the end. This is not the Malcolm whites were terrified of. This is a Malcolm for the nineties--Malcolm as self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence, and self-assertion. As critics have noted, this ahistorical, apolitical Malcolm fulfills more the archetypal hero role than acting as a "real world" role model for today's youth. In the end, Lee's Malcolm X suffers from negotiating the other vernacular and official voices, from its pandering to all audiences. Although Lee proclaims that this is the movie he wanted to make, it seems, rather, this is the movie he could make.

The independent voice is, of course, not independent in the end but it is a voice different from the official and vernacular. It has its own set of exigencies and constraints. Bodnar's theory would do well to open up space for new positions--not everything can be reduced to a struggle between the official and vernacular voices. Even if this was possible, much of the nuanced nature of discourse and public memory would likely be lost. There are new voices emerging, and voices unaccounted for--likely all voices exist on a spectrum of power and influence--the state no longer being the exception. The production and text of *Malcolm X* offers a starting ground for exploration of these matters.

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