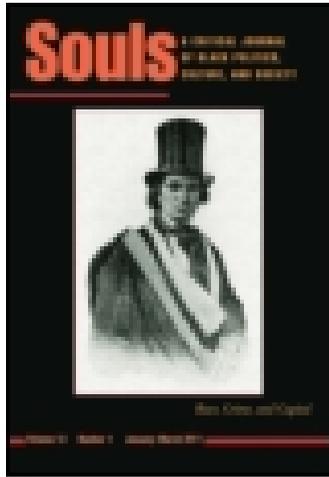


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### Introduction

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# Introduction

**Garrett A. Felber**

Scholarship on Malcolm X has been erratic, its height surrounding the emergence of Malcolm as a cultural icon in hip-hop, fashion, and film in the early 1990s. Although Malcolm X has remained central to the imagination of artists and writers, as well as a ubiquitous presence in the terrain of Black politics and global Islam, scholarship has been sparse at times due to a paucity of information. Significant collections such as the Malcolm X Collection at Emory University were available to the public only briefly; others, such as author Alex Haley's papers at University of Tennessee, are governed by strict usage restrictions. Finally, the papers of Malcolm X held by the Shabazz family had not been organized and released until long after his latest renaissance. However, rescued from auction in 2002, the Schomburg Center's collection of Malcolm X's letters now represents the single largest source of related primary materials. Furthermore, the decade-long efforts of the Malcolm X Project at Columbia University have recorded dozens of oral histories from individuals who knew Malcolm X through the Nation of Islam, Muslim Mosque, Inc., and the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Some of these reminiscences have already been made available online, along with a web-based multimedia version of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and all will be made accessible within the next year at Columbia's Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

This issue, the first of two, provides yet another chapter in the scholarship on Malcolm X and marks a resurgence of new scholars utilizing these sources. The following articles seek not only a fuller

understanding of Malcolm X, but examine classic interpretations and representations in a new light. Imām Al-Hājj Tālib ‘Abdur-Rashīd traces African Muslim presence in New York from the mid-nineteenth century, establishing the historical narrative to which Malcolm X and Mosque No. 7 were inextricably tied. Jasmin Young examines the extent to which Black radical Detroit, through figures such as James and Grace Lee Boggs, Milton Henry (Gaidi Obadele), Max Stanford (Muhammad Ahmad), and Rev. Albert Cleage, both informed and transformed Malcolm X’s political development and his understanding of grassroots organization. The remaining articles investigate representation; in film, literature, and theater, Malcolm X has been interpreted, reinvented, and reified in the public imagination. In his ideologically incongruous relationship with Alex Haley, his depiction in Anthony Davis’ 1986 opera, and the quarter-century-long journey from James Baldwin’s script to Spike Lee’s controversial 1992 biopic, Malcolm X has been represented in a variety of ways, many of which say as much about the time in which they were produced as the man himself. My article, as well as those of Leon Bynum and Keith Corson, examines the artistic representations which have created some of the most prevalent conceptions of Malcolm X held today. In the spirit of previous interpretive renewals, this issue seeks to usher in new understandings of a man whose relevance never seems to wane, and whose next reinvention is always about to begin.