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Middle Class Black

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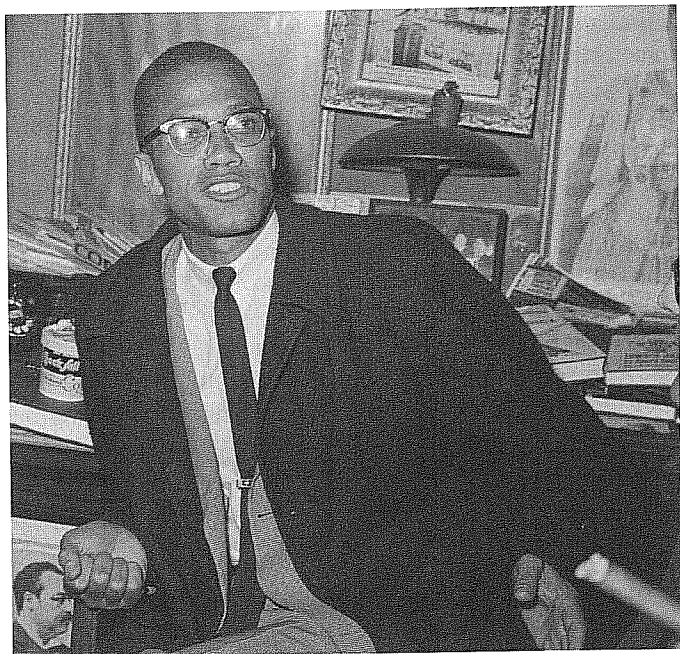
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Malcolm in the Harlem bookstore of his close friend, black nationalist Lewis Michaux. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

D.C. encounter between Michaux and Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm and Elder Michaux had no further dealings.

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Robert L. Jenkins

MICHAX, LEWIS H. Lewis Michaux was a black nationalist who owned the National Memorial African Bookstore (known in Harlem* simply as Michaux's) and headed as president the African Nationalist Council in America. In the 1930s and 1940s he supported Marcus Garvey* and later led an organization called the African Nationalists in America. His bookstore, begun on April 1, 1930, with only 5 books, eventually contained over 200,000 titles by and about black people. Michaux's philosophy was contained in the motto painted on a sign hanging above his store's front: "Knowledge is power; you need it every hour. Read a book." Outside this store at the intersection of 125th St. and 7th Avenue (Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* Boulevard), the area Michaux called Harlem Square, was the site for most black nationalist public activities.

Malcolm X often spoke here, and he frequented the bookstore. Michaux con-

sidered Malcolm a close personal friend and urged Elijah Muhammad* to use moderation in treating Malcolm's suspension from the sect. Though his brother Solomon Lightfoot Michaux* was a noted evangelist and Lewis Michaux had been a deacon in his church, he came to oppose religion and, unlike Malcolm, couched his black nationalism* in secular terms. He narrowly missed witnessing Malcolm's assassination because he arrived late for the meeting to which Malcolm had invited him. Instead of anger, he urged black unity. Michaux stated that Malcolm's death was similar to that of Patrice Lumumba* in the Congo.* He urged blacks not to fight but to come together.

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John F. Marszalek

MIDDLE-CLASS BLACKS. Malcolm held considerable disdain for the black middle class. He frequently referred to them as "house" and "yard" servants, anxious to do the bidding of the "Good massa." His contempt probably began while growing up in Lansing, Michigan.* He later spoke of "complacent and misguided" middle-class blacks whose idea of status was simply to integrate with whites. This class of blacks in Lansing was actually waiters and bootblacks, who thought of themselves, and were often regarded by many other blacks, as economically "successful."

In Boston, Malcolm once worked as a soda fountain clerk waiting on middle-class blacks. He later called them "Hill clowns," mocking their phony accents and snobbery. They believed themselves more dignified than their ghetto brethren, when they were actually menial workers and servants, claiming status by working for whites. In an interview for the New York journal the *Liberator*,* Malcolm in his role as a militant black leader criticized the black middle class for coveting the crumbs from the white man's table.

He referred to many intellectuals, though he counted numerous ones as his friends, as Uncle Toms* and castigated them for being in a position to lead their people but being too preoccupied with achieving "white" success. The most misguided of the black intellectual middle class were the civil rights* leaders, for whom Malcolm spewed the most public contempt. No other subject so dominated Malcolm X's speeches and autobiography as did his spurn for this group of people, the black middle class, except for his views of racist whites.

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MIDDLE EAST. Malcolm X's sojourns in the Middle East exposed him to, and opened his eyes concerning, orthodox Islam* as opposed to the Nation of