



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Malcolm X: The FBI File. by Clayborne Carson; David Gallen
David J. Garrow

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the elite liberal mind circa John F. Kennedy's election in much the same way that Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1992) presents an almost unretouched depiction, not of Kennedy's assassination, but of the paranoid radicalism of the late 1960s.

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Malcolm X: The FBI File. By Clayborne Carson. Ed. by David Gallen. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1991. 514 pp. Cloth, \$23.95, ISBN 0-88184-751-8. Paper, \$12.95, ISBN 0-88184-758-5.)

Clayborne Carson correctly observes in his introductory commentary that Malcolm X has been the subject "of remarkably little serious biographical and historical research," a gap that only very recently has begun to be filled with the publication of significant but extremely different books by James H. Cone (*Malcolm & Martin & America*, 1991) and Bruce Perry (*Malcolm*, 1991).

Most of this volume, however, consists simply of typeset selections from the individual Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) headquarters file on Malcolm X (file 100-399321), which was released by the FBI in 1978 pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). That release has been available both from the bureau and in a commercial microfilm edition for well over a decade and is accessible in a large number of university research libraries. In addition, the presentation of the selected serials in this volume generally does not allow a reader to identify each document's precise serialization number (for example 100-399321-1), the standard scholarly form for citation of FBI file materials.

Five years ago, in late 1987, the FBI also released the New York office file on Malcolm (file 105-8999), 333 pages of telephone wiretap notes and transcripts ("ELSUR logs" in FBI parlance) from a 1964 surveillance on Malcolm's home telephone, and began release of both the headquarters and New York office files pertaining to the two organizations that Malcolm created following his break with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1964, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. (MMI) and

the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU). This volume makes no reference to the New York file on Malcolm or to the now-unavailable files on MMI and OAAU and includes only eighteen pages of material drawn from the telephone logs. There is no discussion of the huge volume of FBI files on Elijah Muhammad and the NOI, nor any reference to the hundreds of likely Malcolm-Elijah telephone conversations that would have been collected in the FBI's surveillance of Elijah's homes and offices between at least 1957 and 1966. The possibility that these surveillance records might shed some light on Malcolm's 1965 assassination is hence also not discussed.

This volume's presentation of its selected FBI serials also introduces a number of explanatory or interpretive errors unlikely to be recognized by readers unfamiliar with FBI documents. In at least one instance, commentary on a document reporting a wiretapped telephone conversation speaks of "the informant's description" of the conversation, erroneously suggesting that the report came from a human rather than an electronic source. It also mistakenly identifies at least one document as being written *by* the FBI executive to whom it was addressed, and it mischaracterizes as "memos written by b7c informants" documents written by FBI agents whose names have been deleted pursuant to a privacy provision of the FOIA. The volume also offers little analysis of FBI deletions from the Malcolm documents, and it fails to offer translations of odd FBI abbreviations (for example, "UACB"—Unless Advised to the Contrary by the Bureau). Unfortunately the volume is also replete with typographical errors and misspellings, perhaps the most embarrassing of which is the multiple references to the "Schomberg" Center for Research in Black Culture.

Since *Malcolm* seems clearly to have been intended for a commercial rather than a scholarly audience, perhaps it may introduce some readers both to Malcolm and to the many interpretive challenges raised by the historical use of intelligence agency documents. However, it is not a notable addition to the regrettably small number of significant volumes concerning Malcolm X.

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