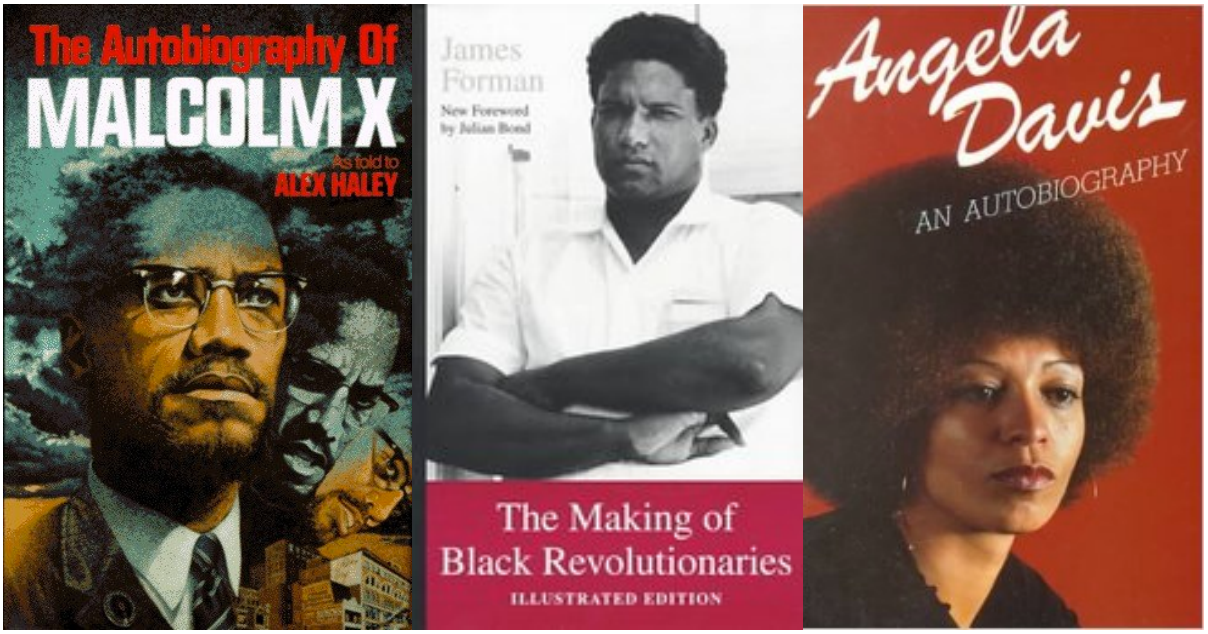
# Powerful Patterns of Persuasion: Reading the Activist Autobiography

*Social Movement Techniques and the African-American Literary Tradition in the Life Narratives of Black Nationalists Malcolm X, James Forman and Angela Davis, 1965-1975.*

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# Content

# Introduction

### *1. Political Autobiography*

> "When I decided to write the book […], it was because I had come to envision it as a political autobiography that emphasized the people, the events and the forces in my life that propelled me to my present commitment. Such a book might serve a very important and practical purpose. […] There was the possibility that more people – Black, Brown, Red, Yellow and white – might be inspired to join our growing community of struggle. Only if this happens will I consider this project to have been worthwhile." [1]

African-American social activist Angela Davis wrote these words in the preface of her autobiography, published in 1974. It were the heydays of a new, more radical group of activists in the postwar Civil Rights Movement of the United States. This fragment illustrates Davis' aspiration to mobilize people to join her political movement. But even more, it shows her specific ambition for her autobiography to function as an extension of this activism, to the point where she considered it failed if readers remained immobilized by it.

Building on this example, this research reveals the ways historical actors Malcolm X, James Forman, and Angela Davis, together with their publishers, intentionally used persuasive tactics in their autobiographies in their attempt to motivate more people to join the Civil Rights Movement. The goal of this thesis is to reveal a pattern of persuasive social movement tactics in the life narratives of activists, through textual analysis. In doing so, this approach clarifies underlying motivations of the activists, and their role in the organizations they were part of. New insight can be obtained into the ways in which the activists functioned and recruited. Overall, this thesis illustrates how autobiographies can be used as a means to study history.

In times of political turmoil, life writing has always been a popular form of protest and of social critique. It is much used by activists in different kinds of social movements. Such movements are defined by political science professor Gadi Wolfsfeld and professor of sociology William Gamson as "a sustained and self-conscious challenge to authorities or cultural codes by a field of actors."[2] The political life narrative can give voice to opponents of institutions and can offer

[1] Angela Y. Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers Co, 2013), xvi.
[2] William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media as Interacting Systems," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July 1, 1993): 115.

"counterhegemonic ways of knowing that repeatedly invite the reader to challenge their own assumptions and the level of comfort with this status quo."[3] In other words, autobiography can serve as a way of changing minds and creating awareness.

Davis calls her life narrative a 'political autobiography,' a term described by Stephen Butterfield, author of *Black Autobiography in America*, as having the goals to "teach, to exhort, to change opinion and behavior, and to organize."[4] African-American literature in particular has a rich tradition in this literary genre of activist writing, starting with the life narratives of former slaves. Slave narratives attempted to open the eyes of its readers and were able to mobilize white readers better than other anti-slavery discourse.[5] These autobiographies served as a means to write slaves into existence and to "turn them into people," whilst the white man considered them inhuman.[6] By writing about their experiences, these (former) slaves attempted to put something into motion; to gain support for the anti-slavery movement.

Writers of slave narratives used persuasive strategies from the African-American literary tradition to convince the reader of their sincerity and goals. Or, in the words of professor of English William L. Andrews, they "weave together multiple autobiographical traditions and voices to produce a sense of collectivized black identity."[7] In 1978, black literature critic Darwin Turner distinguished several elements that, according to him, were indispensible in traditional black writing. Although this is not a recent theory, it is still a much respected and used work in the field of African-American literature.

First, Turner claims all African-American authors have specific educational purposes for writing. They either want to teach *whites* about the condition and psychology of black Americans, or they want to educate the *black* audience to stand up for themselves.[8] Second, Turner elaborates on themes that distinguish black writing from white writing, such as liberation (also called the "most predominant, recurring, persistent, and obvious theme in black literature" by African-American literary critic Joyce A. Joyce.[9]), alienation, reaction against oppression, satiric portrayals of foolish blacks, and pride in blackness."[10] Third, Turner mentions reoccurring themes coined by fellow literary critic Sterling Brown, such as "a discovery of Africa as a source for race pride […], a use of negro heroes, and of heroic episodes from American history."[11] Fourth, Turner

[3] Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), xii.
[4] Stephen Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), 285.
[5] William L. Andrews, *African-American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1 edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Longman, 1992), 1.
[6] Laura Visser-Maessen, lecture "Slave Narratives" (Utrecht University, February 19, 2015).
[7] Andrews, *African-American Autobiography*, 206, 207.
[8] Darwin T. Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," *Black American Literature Forum* 12, no. 4 (1978): 144.
[9] Joyce A. Joyce, "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 18, no. 2 (1987): 339.
[10] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[11] Ibid.

discusses the importance of the church in African-American writing and the sermon rhetoric that is often used.[12]

A vivid example of the black literary tradition and of mobilizing tactics in a slave narrative is found in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* written by Harriet Jacobs and published in 1861. This narrative describes the youth, enslavement, escape, and further life of the former slave. In line with Turner's ideas on the black literary tradition, Jacobs had a clear educational purpose for writing: liberation from slavery by creating awareness amongst white people considering the living conditions of black people. To gain support for the anti-slavery movement, Jacobs directly addressed her audience and played on their guilt. "I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters that are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered."[13] Such anecdotes served as a means to encourage empathy and action amongst her readers.

Slave narratives such as that of Jacobs became increasingly focused on serving the political goals of race equality and anti-slavery.[14] Other, now famous accounts are for instance the earlier written, indispensible slave narrative of Olaudah Equiano, published in 1789, and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1845. According to Butterfield, the life stories of former slaves such as Jacobs, Douglass, and Equiano were "treated as an object lesson, and [the slave's] role in the book is to use himself as the text of a sermon, he is a minister or teacher, demonstrating how the moral and political obstacles he faced can be overcome by others in the same circumstance."[15] The reader of these activist autobiographies is thus handed an inspirational lesson in activism and is encouraged to join in the fight for equality.

Roughly a century after the slave account of Jacobs was published, activists in the Civil Rights Movement used the same black literary tactics to write their autobiographies for the purposes of respect and change. In the words of professor of civil rights history Kathryn L. Nasstrom, these activists "turned their life stories toward the political end of shaping a public understanding of the movement."[16] In other words, they used personal stories for political purposes. After the slave era, the civil rights era caused a boom in African-American autobiographical writing. Today, more than two hundred civil rights autobiographies have been published.[17] Professor of American Studies Albert E. Stone explains this boom by stating that this period was another "era of alienation," in which "the impulse to write historical autobiography

[12] Ibid., 146.
[13] Henry Louis Gates, ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Signet, 2012), 438.
[14] Audrey Fisch, *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.
[15] Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America*, 256.
[16] Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History: Autobiographies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Writing of Civil Rights History," *The Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 2 (2008): 335.
[17] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233.

was strong."[18] "[U]nprecedented global unrest," such as the fight for equal rights, indeed triggered activists to write autobiographies, scholars Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith argue in their article "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights."[19] They claim it "has called forth and called for repeated acts of remembering, through which people reclaim identities at home, in transit, and in new communities and nations."[20] The restless period of the Black Power movement thus brought forward many new life narratives that encouraged others to rethink their positions in the society they lived in.

### *2. The Autobiographies of X, Forman, and Davis*

Some of the activists that felt the need to write down their civil rights stories were Black Panther Party (BPP) leader Eldridge Cleaver (*Soul on Ice*, 1968) and H. Rap Brown (*Die Nigger Die*, 1969), 5th chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) between May 1967 and June 1968. Other autobiographies of activists in the Black Power movement were written much later or revised years after their first publication. The volume of former 'Honorary Prime Minister' of the BPP Stokely Carmichael (*Ready for Revolution*, 2003) was written long after the movement ended. Additionally, other female Black Power activists besides Davis have used autobiographies to communicate their experiences in the Black Power movement, such as former BPP member Assata Shakur (*Assata, an Autobiography,* 1989) and chairman Elaine Brown *(A Taste of Power*, 1992).

Part of this group of civil rights activist writers were Black Nationalists Malcolm X, James Forman, and Angela Davis, who respectively published their autobiographies in 1965, 1972, and 1974. They either laid the groundwork or were part of what is seen as the second phase of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s: the Black Power era.[21] The roots of this period lie in Black Nationalism, a rather radical philosophy with goals varying from returning to the 'African homeland,' to gaining political control over black communities or even a completely separate nation.[22] Its often separatist, militant style, or "uncompromising quest for social, political, cultural, and economic transformation," increasingly replaced the pacifist way of protest and the integration goals of the late fifties and early sixties, as civil rights activist Martin Luther King most famously preached it.[23]

Malcolm X is the best-known face of Black Nationalism. He ushered the way for the Black Power movement through his famous speeches, such as the "The Ballot or the Bullet," and

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[18] Albert E. Stone, "Patters in Recent Black Autobiography," in *African American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Longman, 1992), 176.
[19] Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights," *Biography* 27, no. 1 (2004): 1–24.
[20] Ibid., 5.
[21] E. Joseph Peniel, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 96 (2009): 751.
[22] Jessica C. Harris, "Revolutionary Black Nationalism: The Black Panther Party," *The Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (2001): 409.
[23] Peniel, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," 753.

his life narrative *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,*[24] written by journalist Alex Haley (About this collaboration, see 1.4: *Peritexts*).[25] X's autobiography is one of the earliest autobiographies on Black Nationalism. Just like Davis, he expressed his mobilizing goals in his life narrative: "I have given to this book so much of whatever time I have because I feel, and I hope, that if I honestly and fully tell my life's account, read objectively it might prove to be a testimony of some social value."[26] X's autobiography is known as straightforward and raw, which is the strength of the book, according to Stone. "[T]elling it like it is entails a variety of literary choices and techniques, [*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*] has astonishing power, [with] Malcolm X as the preacher-politician."[27] Stone here acknowledges the intentional choices and techniques in X's narrative. X's use of strong language is used to stir up the reader, which corresponds with the black literary tradition, and it is part of a pattern that is also claimed by Butterfield:

> "X's rhetoric is to produce a reaction in the audience; to flush the racism of the whites out to the surface, and steel the determination of the blacks to resist. [It] builds toward a climax, and variations of a single pattern are all there, generated from the political speech, the sense of talking directly to an audience which the speakers are trying to arouse."[28]

X developed a hatred and distrust of whites at a very early age.[29] Born in 1925 as Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, he grew up with a father who was a minister and a devoted Black Nationalist. His father died in what was said to have been a car accident, but X believed that white racists killed him. His mother was taken away by whites and placed in a psychiatric home. After this, X was forced to live in foster homes and attend reform schools, he started gambling and using drugs, and it did not take long before he went to prison, in 1946. While detained, X became acquainted with the Nation of Islam (NOI), a religious movement preaching black self-reliance. His distrust of whites connected with the Nation's philosophy of the discouragement of any form of integration of blacks in 'white society'. In 1952, X became a successful minister of the Nation, bringing in many new followers for over a decade. However, he was silenced after a dispute with the leader of the Nation, Elijah Muhammad. X eventually broke with the Nation in 1964, thereby creating many enemies within the organization. After this, he spent some time in Mecca, a trip that changed some of his radical views. At his return, X told the

[24] Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).
[25] Clayborne Carson, "Malcolm X," *American National Biography Online*, February 25, 2000, http://www.anb.org/articles/08/08-01846.html.
[26] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 386.
[27] Stone, "Patters in Recent Black Autobiography," 182.
[28] Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America*, 266–270.
[29] This thesis uses 'X' instead of 'Little' to refer to the activist.

press he no longer hated whites. His main focus was now "to bring together all elements of the African-American freedom struggle."[30] X meant to include whites in the struggle for equality. However, he could not put his new beliefs in practice long, for in 1965 Malcolm X was shot and killed by members of the Nation of Islam.[31]

A year after X's assassination, the phrase Black Power was coined by civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael. He, Angela Davis, and James Forman were associated with several organizations within this movement, such as SNCC and the BPP. What triggered Carmichael to come up with this new slogan was the shooting of protester James Meredith, on the second day of his 'March Against Fear.' A week later, Carmichael and Martin Luther King led hundreds of demonstrators in a march in support of Meredith, who was still recovering in the hospital. During the march, Carmichael shouted: "The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!"[32] It became the slogan of an increasingly radical black movement that demanded respect.

1966 was the year that marked a shift in sentiment in the Civil Rights Movement. Former non-violent civil rights organizations SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) adopted the ideas of Black Nationalism, accepted armed self-defense as a legitimate method, and the BPP emerged.[33] The BPP was founded with the goals of "black unity and black autonomy," and its members believed that the existing government "failed to meet the needs of the people," in the words of co-founder Huey P. Newton.[34] The Panthers therefore opened schools and hospitals, and provided breakfast in schools.[35] Additionally, the BPP organized self-defense groups for the black community, for they felt that the white police did not protect them.[36]

Autobiographer Angela Davis first joined SNCC and later the BPP. She partly wrote her political autobiography *Angela Davis, An Autobiography* while awaiting a prison sentence related to her activist operations.[37] Davis repeatedly mentioned writing for political purposes. "I attempted to *utilize* the autobiographical genre to evaluate my life in accordance with what I considered to be the political significance of my experiences," she wrote.[38] It is a life narrative that describes the Black Power story through the eyes of a young, female, black and leftist activist. Davis wanted "a society free of race and class oppression" by challenging the American political system.[39] She dreamt of a communist revolution without "a ruthless system which kept itself alive

[30] Carson, "Malcolm X."
[31] Andrews, *African-American Autobiography*, 1.
[32] Joseph E. Peniel, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 146.
[33] Akinyele O. Umoja, "The Ballot and the Bullet: A Comparative Analysis of Armed Resistance in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 4 (1999): 558.
[34] Huey P. Newton, "Panthers," *Ebony Magazine*, August 1969, 107.
[35] Unbylined, "Former Black Panthers Who Have Turned to Higher Education," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 21 (1998): 62–63.
[36] Harris, "Revolutionary Black Nationalism," 412.
[37] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 3.
[38] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, viii. Emphasis added.
[39] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 1.

and well by encouraging spite, competition and the oppression of one group by another."[40] Davis was born in 1944 in Alabama, to college educated and politically active parents who created an early awareness of black suppression with her. Eventually sexism and political disagreements drove her away from the BPP, after which she joined the Che-Lumumba Club of the Communist Party USA. Davis is still alive and she, among other things, works as a teacher of black feminist studies.[41]

The autobiography of James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries,* is a very detailed description of his time with SNCC and the BPP.[42] He wrote his autobiography because he felt it was his "duty to help make black revolutionaries."[43] He said: "If I could describe the realities of black life, that would be a form of action."[44] Forman was born in Chicago in 1928, and raised by his grandmother on a farm in Mississippi. At the age of 6, he went back to Chicago, he graduated high school with honors and studied at the University of Southern California. As an aspiring journalist, the 1957 events at Little Rock High School in Arkansas set off a spark in him. It was the first desegregated high school in the United States, yet it needed the National Guard to escort the African-American students into the building. Forman began to write about this event, started to protest, and became a full time member of SNCC. Forman's job in the organization was to present the struggle of the movement in the best possible way, and his autobiography can be considered an extension of this. Julian Bond, former American social activist and leader in the Civil Rights Movement, called him a "master propagandist" in the foreword of Forman's autobiography.[45] Forman helped develop a PR system for SNCC, which says much about the way he and SNCC thought not only about *what* they communicated to the outside world, but also *how* they communicated. When he was replaced in this organization, he moved on to the BPP, with which he stayed only briefly but within a leading function. James Forman devoted the rest of his life to mobilizing African Americans and fighting for equality, and died in 2005 of colon cancer at the age of 76.[46]

### *3. Theoretical Framework*

The use of autobiographies and other ego documents such as memoirs and oral history as a means to study history has always been controversial among historians. Or in the words of historian Jeremy D. Popkin: "Autobiography by its very nature is […] something of a scandal for the

[40] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 110.
[41] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 2.
[42] James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
[43] Ibid., 552.
[44] Ibid., 102.
[45] Ibid., xii.
[46] Douglas Martin, "James Forman Dies at 76; Was Pioneer in Civil Rights," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/12/obituaries/james-forman-dies-at-76-was-pioneer-in-civil-rights.html.

historian."[47] For example, famous German historian Leopold von Ranke, who became well-known for his use of primary sources at the end of the nineteenth century, rejected memoirs and all other "fiction, and stuck severely to the facts."[48] In his research, the historian merely focused on archival sources such as State papers and other official forms. Anything slightly subjective was rejected from his work. The written account of a personal life was seen as too one sided for historical research, or "partial, partisan and even self-justifying."[49]

Stone refutes this controversy when it comes to African-American life narratives. He emphasizes the highly valued black tradition among these autobiographers of writing the truth. Black writers of life narratives would try their best to write down their experiences as truthfully as they could, because they had a clear goal in mind. "[M]any black writers and readers agree that personal history as an honest, verifiable account of enslavement, oppression, resistance, escape, defeat, or transcendence, works ultimately for the liberation of black people. History reveals the self to the self and to other and serves as moral and political weapon."[50] In other words, only if written down correctly, the life narrative was believed to be an effective way of encouraging the reader to protest.

Nevertheless, Stone distinguishes this *attempt* of writing the truth from actually *achieving* it.[51] This leads to an important pitfall in the use of life narratives in historical research that often attracts criticism: memory. The famous historian W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about the difficulties of truthfully writing about one's history in one of his own life narratives:

> "Autobiographies do not form indisputable authorities. […] They are always incomplete, and often unreliable. Eager as I am to put down the truth, there are difficulties; memory fails especially in small details, so that it becomes finally but a theory of my life, with much forgotten and misconceived, with valuable testimony but often less than absolutely true, despite my intention to be frank and fair."[52]

This, however, does not invalidate autobiography as a means of understanding history. Memory is an interpretation of what one has experienced, but then again, how someone experienced a situation can still say much about a person, the situation, and the time at which it happened. That is, "even the omitted fact or outrageous assertion may possess historical

[47] Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians, and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 12.
[48] Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2000), 64.
[49] Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History," 327.
[50] Stone, "Patters in Recent Black Autobiography," 174–175.
[51] Ibid., 175.
[52] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois (The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois): A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

significance and a core of essential truth."[53] Whatever an autobiographical author leaves out, or exaggerates, can be an insightful look in their heads and thus an enrichment of the existing historical literature on this subject. Scholar Roy Pascal wrote about this in 1960, in his *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. "'True' is not everything that happened to an individual, but rather those events, relations, ideas, and feelings which in retrospect reveal significance by forming parts of a pattern or shape to life. The discovered design is the central truth of all autobiography."[54] This idea of a 'discovered design,' or a pattern, is the core of this study, which reveals the writers' intentionally repeated use of persuasive techniques for the mobilization of the reader.

Whereas black autobiographies have been considered controversial sources for historical studies, black literature as a whole has not been taken into account as literature at all for a long time, let alone as a historical source in academic study. Yet, scholars increasingly take both expressions seriously. Nasstrom claims that black life narratives are becoming more and more known as "one of the richest modes of individual and collective expression, dating back to the slave era and continuing today."[55] The first serious study of black life narratives is that of professor of English Rebecca Chalmers Barton and her *Witnesses for Freedom: Negro Americans in Autobiography*, published in 1948.[56] She studied "the negro point of view,"[57] and argued African-American literature should be taken serious because she found "vigor and versatility of expression that guarantees [the books] an integral place in American letters."[58] Additionally, Stone celebrates the study of black autobiography as activism in an article in 1978, when he says that "the sons and daughters of DuBois and Wright are beginning to receive the careful appreciation their work demands as deliberate creations."[59] Here, the word 'deliberate' is worth emphasizing, since it points to the authors' political goals with writing their books.

Black autobiographies as extensions of activism have recently become the subject of more studies. Schaffer and Smith claim the political character of black autobiography by stating that it "directed back to a past that must be shared and toward a future that must be built collectively. [It is] foundational to the expansion and proliferation of claims on behalf of human dignity, freedom, and justice."[60] The scholars attribute much power to black autobiography, by using the word 'foundational.' An example of a scholarly work that specifically analyzes the political autobiography is *Autobiography as Activism,* written by American Studies professor Margo V. Perkins, who studied the life narratives of Black Power activist women Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown. Perkins looked at how they "agitat[ed] for transformative action"

[53] Stone, "Patters in Recent Black Autobiography," 175.
[54] Ibid., 176.
[55] Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History," 329.
[56] Andrews, *African-American Autobiography*, 2.
[57] Rebecca Chalmers Barton, *Witnesses for Freedom: Negro Americans in Autobiography* (Oakdale: Dowling College Pr, 1977), xi.
[58] Ibid., 274.
[59] Albert E. Stone, "After Black Boy and Dusk of Dawn: Patterns in Recent Black Autobiography," *Phylon (1960-)* 39, no. 1 (1978): 20.
[60] Schaffer and Smith, "Conjunctions," 21.

through their autobiographies.[61] She based much of her research on that of English literature scholar Barbara Harlow and her 1987 book *Resistance Literature.* Within the same body of thought as Schaffer and Smith, Harlow claimed that the activist autobiography "participate[s] in national liberation and independence struggles."[62] The scholar acknowledged the strength of the political autobiography and is said to have been a pioneer in this study area.[63]

The increasing academic research on autobiographies reveals a shift in thinking amongst historians over the past two decades. Scholars such as Charles M. Payne (*Debating the Civil Rights Movement,* 1999), Emilye Crosby (*Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement,* 2011) and John Dittmer (*Local People: the Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, 1995) progressively studied the communities and stories of activists that worked in Martin Luther King's shadow. This new view replaces the well-known 'King focused' story of the Civil Rights Movement. The autobiographies of less-known activists challenge the master narrative; a "totalizing theory" that leaves out local stories of the Black Power movement.[64] In the words of Nasstrom, "history is under assault from autobiography." She argues that these life narratives of both famous and more obscure activists are "more accurate, more concrete, more compelling, and truer to the 'experience' of the movement."[65] The grand story of Black Power still predominantly consists of an unfavorable reputation, mostly picked up and spread by national media, deeming the movement "violent, angry, controversial, and anti-white."[66] Yet, this is merely a "rough draft of history," argues historian Jacqueline Hall, who claims autobiography looks beyond this version.[67] The bottom up, personal stories of activists such as Angela Davis and James Forman, and autobiographies such as that of the famous Malcolm X enrich and change the existing master narrative.

Writers of activist autobiographies were aware of ways to motivate their readers to participate in the movement, although some write about it more explicitly than others. Since social movement studies focus on what it is that drives people to protest for a certain cause, sometimes risking their lives, the autobiographers used ideas from these studies for their recruitment. Professor in Applied Social Psychology Bert Klandermans claims that

> "a social psychology of protest […] is about how people develop […] common social identities and come to believe that their situation is unjust; how people come to feel that the injustice done to them is illegitimate; and how

[61] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, xii.
[62] Feroza Jussawalla, "Review," *World Literature Today* 63, no. 1 (1989): 169.
[63] Ibid.
[64] "Grand Narrative - Oxford Reference," accessed September 26, 2015, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-509.
[65] Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History," 326–7.
[66] Peniel, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," 756.
[67] Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1234.

> they come to translate discontent into action rather than despair, because protest is staged by hopeful not hopeless people."[68]

A good example of the consciousness of the autobiographers of such psychology is found in Forman's life narrative. The author wrote that he "realized that people are motivated into action for many reasons – and one of them is that they get angry when they see their people suffering at the hands of their oppressors."[69] His idea is consistent with the social movement psychology of how shared grievances can strengthen the bond between people and activate them to protest.[70]

The academic field of the social psychology behind movement participation is broad. One of the best-known and first extensive research projects on activist behavior is the work of scholars Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian. Their *Collective Behavior* was published in 1957, and the scholars argue that participants in movements are motivated by various motives and feelings, instead of one unified reason. They called this differential expression.[71] Furthermore, studies on social movement psychology flourished mostly in the 1970s and 1980s because they were done by activists from the sixties turning their "activists aspirations to scholarly endeavors following the decline of the 1960's movements."[72] In this manner, in the eighties, sociologist Alain Touraine focused on how to create political awareness with activists through making them identify with the main goals of a movement. Likewise, professor of sociology Alberto Melucci focused on the creation of motivation among activists, introducing the term 'collective identity' in 1989 in his article "Nomads of the Present." This idea is specifically interesting for this thesis, since it describes how one comes to see himself as part of a group, and how being apart of a group increases the feeling that protest will be successful.[73]

Such protest psychology is studied by, among others, scholars Klandermans and Jacqueline van Stekelenburg, who give an overview of social movement theories in their article "The Social Psychology of Protest." Two overarching concepts discussed in the article are consensus mobilization, which is the motivator trying to get support for his political agenda, and action mobilization, the attempt to make people actually participate in protest.[74] Consensus mobilization covers gaining sympathy from people. "[It] implies a 'struggle' for the mind of people," whereas action mobilization means "a 'struggle' for their resources."[75] Eventually, it

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[68] Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (Cambridge: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 211.
[69] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 105.
[70] Bert Klandermans and Jacqueline van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," *Sociopedia.isa (e-Journal)*, 2010, 2.
[71] David L. Miller, *Introduction to Collective Behavior and Collective Action: Third Edition* (New York: Waveland Press, 2013), 31.
[72] John Lofland, *Social Movement Organizations: Guide to Research on Insurgent Realities* (Washington: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 16.
[73] Ron Eyerman, "Review," *Contemporary Sociology* 19, no. 3 (1990): 373.
[74] Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, 7.
[75] Ibid.

changes "sympathizers into active participants."[76] Another often-used concept is that of efficacy, based on the idea that participation depends on how effective an individual believes his protest actions are.[77] In its turn, efficacy is made up out of two concepts. First, group efficacy is "the belief that group-related problems can be solved by collective efforts."[78] Second, political efficacy is "the feeling that political actions can have an impact on the political process."[79] The latter has much to do with the concept of agency, a concept that is part of the African-American literary tradition, with which actors feel they have the power to bring about social change (read more on agency in chapter 2.2.2.).

***4 Research Question and Chapters***

To reveal the black literary traditions and social movement tactics (and their value for understanding black history) in the life narratives of Black Nationalists Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and James Forman, the thesis operates from the following primary research question: *In what ways did Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and James Forman use the black literary tradition and social movement techniques of consensus mobilization, action mobilization, and efficacy in their autobiographies in their attempt to influence the course of the Black Power movement of 1965-1975?* In other words, how did they attempt to stimulate protest, to get individuals to join in their movement through century old African-American literary traditions and through social movement psychology? The analysis of these writers' means of persuasion will illustrate the skills and psychology behind recruitment through autobiography. The objective is not to measure the success of these tactics, but merely to uncover them. In doing so, the thesis will bring an extra dimension to understanding and assessing historians' narratives of the Black Power movement.

The analysis is divided into two chapters that answer the main question. The first chapter covers consensus mobilization: the writers' attempt to win the sympathy and trust of the reader. This is important, because "when trust is built between people they are more willing to engage in cooperative activity through which further trust can be generated."[80] How did the activists write themselves into the heads and hearts of their readers? This chapter shows the activists' motivations and the origin of their activism. The second chapter is derived from the theory of action mobilization, and covers how the writers attempted to convince the reader of the group and political efficacy of their protest. First, X, Davis, and Forman tried to make their readers understand the strength of a strong community and the fact that readers together had the potential to change social structure. For this, the readers were made aware of African-American history and of recent shared hardships, since people who feel deprived both personally *and* as a group most

[76] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 8.
[77] Ibid., 3.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 6.

strongly feel the need to protest.[81] Second, the writers attempted to convince the reader that the movement's goals were achievable, which covers political efficacy. Together, these chapters answer the question of which techniques the autobiographers used to create new activists among their readership.

### *5. Methodology*

This thesis brings something new to the study of political autobiographies through the specific case studies and the combination of the focus on the black literary tradition as well as on concepts from social movement studies. Theories from both perspectives are used to identify the authors' mobilization tools, and they function as the backbone of the thesis. The research will show that these were deliberately deployed in the autobiographies of X, Davis, and Forman, and in which way. Themes from the black literary tradition are consistently woven through the thesis to emphasize the intentionality of these mobilizing tactics, since they are persuasive means that have been used by black American authors who lived and wrote centuries ago.

Furthermore, this study uses the social movement psychology concepts consensus mobilization, action mobilization, and efficacy to create a strong body for the literature analysis. Consensus and activation mark the two chapters of the thesis. Group efficacy and political efficacy in their turn divide the chapter of action mobilization into two parts. Although there are many other social movement theories, the thesis is focused on these concepts specifically, since these are most used in studies of protest psychology. Yet, it must be noticed that they are but a small part of the mobilization tactics used in black political autobiography. In order to get a more precise and adequate answer as to which other persuasive social movement tactics are found in the narratives, one must dig deeper in the corresponding studies.

Additionally, the works of these three writers are not representative for all Black Nationalist autobiographers, but the study combines their diverse stories to show an overlapping pattern of persuasion. This method used to collect data is justified for it does not pretend to cover every literary example. Instead, its goal is to uncover X's, Davis', and Forman's intentionally used techniques for recruiting. It focuses on these three authors, because all three activists are Black Nationalists who wrote their life narratives around the same time, with different approaches and messages, yet they used the same convincing tactics. The life narratives have all been written at either the turning point in the Civil Rights Movement when Black Power arose, or in the midst of this new era.

X's narrative was written shortly before Black Power was officially coined, and his work served as an inspiration for many of the Black Nationalist autobiographies that followed. Davis

[81] Ibid., 2.

and Forman wrote theirs in the heydays of the movement.[82] What differentiates the books, is that Davis writes from the female perspective, and James Forman and Malcolm X from the male point of view. Furthermore, both Forman and X are from the North, but Forman worked as an activist in the South and Davis was born in the South, yet also protested in the North. These latter facts are important since the Civil Rights Movement was mostly Southern based, and only there it was considered a truly heroic movement for race equality. Together, X, Davis, and Forman represent the different 'types' of Black Nationalist activists that historians tend to focus on, yet they lay bare similar persuasive tactics that served to motivate their readers to protest.

As for the sources used in this study, the research focuses primarily on the first editions of the autobiographies of X, Forman and Davis. This means that some peritexts, such as the foreword of X's daughter Attallah Shabazz, are left out of the analysis. This selection is made because new editions have appeared up until very recently, and the aim of this study is to focus on the persuasive tactics used by these authors during the Black Power movement. Additionally, a wide selection of supporting secondary work functions as the backbone of this thesis, with Turners themes from the black literary tradition, and the article of Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg about social movement psychology as leading sources. These are consistent with the used persuasive techniques of the autobiographers.

The study is embedded in discussions on the activist autobiography, on the African-American literary tradition, and on the psychology behind social movements. By doing so, the thesis covers an intersection of the fields of social sciences, literary studies, and historical studies. It aims to give insight into activist and movement behavior, and does this through an analysis of the written experiences of the authors. Overall, it will fight the traditional problematic nature of the autobiography as a historical source, showing how, when read in a certain way, autobiography can in fact be a revealing and reliable source for this study area. The thesis will reveal the intentions of activists in civil rights organizations such as the NOI, SNCC, and the BPP. It shows how these actors have used their autobiography as a tool in recruiting active followers.

[82] Ibram H. Rogers, "'People All over the World Are Supporting You': Malcolm X, Ideological Formations, and Black Student Activism, 1960-1972," *The Journal of African American History* 96, no. 1 (2011): 15.

## Chapter 1 – A Trust Pact

Malcolm X, Angela Davis and James Forman imagined a skeptical reader who needed to be convinced to read on. Their life narratives became a "'struggle' for the mind of people."[83] In order to recruit both their white and black reader audiences, the activist autobiographers first attempted to win their sympathy, based on the idea of consensus mobilization. Here, a trust pact between the autobiographer and the reader is essential, as argued by several social psychologists. For instance, Klandermans claims "when trust is built between people they are more willing to engage in cooperative activity through which further trust can be generated."[84] Smith and Watson agree the "persuasion to belief is fundamental to the pact between narrator and reader."[85] Similarly, anthropologists Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine found that people were much more inclined to join religious movements if they were approached by those whom they trusted.[86] Their study focused specifically on religious movements, yet it also illustrates the importance of this reader-writer relationship in activist recruiting. The autobiographers attempted to achieve this connection by framing stories of their childhood and youth, by proving that their memory is vivid, through a justification of their past, and through the use of peritexts.

### *1.1. Childhood and Early Awareness*

Generally all autobiographies start with the childhood or youth of the author. Yet, in the activist autobiography trust and sympathy is won by the authors through their *specific selection* of childhood and youth stories for the autobiographies, stories that are consistent with the message of their activism. "[I]t begins the history of the movement in family, childhood, and the formative experiences of growing up," argues Nasstrom, "and the memoirs help us comprehend the origins of activism on the individual level."[87] According to Perkins, most activist autobiographers use a teleological form: "[E]ach writer rereads the early years of her life in such a way as to illuminate how she arrived at her present circumstances."[88] She very clearly emphasizes that framing is an undeniable part of autobiographical story telling. "This narrative process involves selecting or privileging some events at the expense of others."[89] Perkins quotes writer Annie Dillard, who says, "that in simply recalling the past, one is also engaged in *creating* that past."[90] This introduces a very important distinction in this research, for it shows that the authors could select certain stories, and also leave out other stories from their past, and with this were able to create

[83] Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, 7.
[84] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 6.
[85] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 28.
[86] Bert Klandermans, "New Social Movements and Resource Mobilization: The European and the American Approach," *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 4, no. 2 (1986): 26.
[87] Nasstrom, "Between Memory and History," 388.
[88] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 41.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., 42.

their own history for, for instance, mobilization purposes. Or, as Perkins describes it, "[e]vents that may have had any number of meanings at the time are reduced to a single meaning that enables them to fit more convincingly into a narrative of development."[91] These scholars all claim that autobiographers often deliberately manipulate, or frame their text for their specific goals of writing.

Furthermore, life narrative scholar Kate Douglas "explored the ways in which autobiographies of childhood construct a relationship between the autobiographical child and adult reader."[92] She argues "the figure of the child […] has long been a cultural symbol of authenticity."[93] Similarly, Smith and Watson see the sharing of childhood experiences as "the basis on which readers are invited to consider the narrator a uniquely qualified authority."[94] Its importance becomes clear in the introduction of X's autobiography, written by M.S. Handler, a white news reporter who worked for *The New York Times*: "The Negroes have suffered too long from betrayals and in Malcolm they sensed a man of mission. *They knew his origins*, with which they could identify."[95] Sharing ones upbringing in autobiography leads to a trust pact between the reader and writer, and makes for identification and authentication.

An example of a framed childhood anecdote is Forman's story in which he claims his first sense of activism at the early age of seven, selling and reading the *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper. "More important than the sale of the papers was my reading them and developing […] a feeling that we as black people must fight all the way for our rights in this country."[96] He read the horrific stories of black people who were beaten and lynched, and subsequently "vowed over and over that someday I would help to end this treatment to my people."[97] This sense of early political activism made him reliable as the political actor he was at the time of writing the narrative, since it appeared that he was very steady and consistent in his beliefs. This idea of early political awareness is also found in X's autobiography. He, for instance, illustrated this through an anecdote about going fishing with his foster parents as a young boy: "Neither [my brother] or I liked the idea of just sitting and waiting for the fish to jerk the cork under the water – or make the tight line quiver, when we fished that way. I figured there should be some smarter way to get the fish."[98] Here, X showed the reader that from a very early age, he was not a passive boy that waited around, but one that sought for effective means to achieve his goals.

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Kate Douglas, *Contesting Childhood: Autobiography, Trauma, and Memory* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 67.
[93] Ibid., 45.
[94] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2001, 33.
[95] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, xxviii. Emphasis added.
[96] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 29.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 20.

Furthermore, X showed his early talent for organizing when he wrote about the day that he got a little plot in the garden of his parents when he was younger. This story shows that he was capable of leading a protest movement and able to take care of enemies:

> "I loved it and took care of it well […] I would patrol the rows on my hands and knees for any worms and bugs, and would kill and bury them. And sometimes when I had everything straight and clean for my things to grow, I would lie down on my back between two rows, and I would gaze up in the blue sky at the clouds moving and think all kinds of things."[99]

With this story, X attempted to convince the reader that he was capable of 'growing' good activists and taking care of them by getting rid of who ever came in the way. Forman's, and X's example of early awareness created a sense of believability with the reader, since it made the authors seem thoughtful and experienced. It suggested that what they became later in life was predestined, a logical outgrowth.

Additionally, all three authors first wrote about a youth full of struggles with - different levels of - violence and poverty, and used it as a tool to win the reader's sympathy. According to professor of English Carol Ohmann, X's autobiography clearly shows the story of a man who "move[d] from inexperience to sophistication, from ignorance to enlightenment, from obscurity to worldly prominence."[100] It were such coming of age stories that led to respect from the reader. X used such stories to show that he understood the readers who knew poverty or criminality:

> "I knew that the great lack of most of the big-named 'Negro leaders' was their lack of any true rapport with the ghetto Negroes. How could they […] when they spent most of their time 'integrating' with white people? […] I never left the ghetto in spirit […] And I could speak and understand the ghetto's language."[101]

With "big-named 'Negro leaders,'" X most likely referred to Martin Luther King, who never became a 'hustler' like X. Malcolm X praised himself for having the right kind of street credentials that, according to him, too many other black leaders did not have. Writer Haley confirms this idea of the sympathetic reader: "They know that he comes from the lower depths, as they do, and regard him as one of their own."[102]

To create identification with the readers who also struggled with poverty and criminality

[99] Ibid., 9.
[100] Carol Ohmann, "The Autobiography of Malcolm X: A Revolutionary Use of the Franklin Tradition," *American Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1970): 133.
[101] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 317.
[102] Ibid., 425.

the writers all described their poor childhoods. They used somewhat shocking examples of their every day young lives. For example, Forman wrote that his "life on the farm was literary dirt poor; I can remember eating dirt on the side of the road. It was supposed to be good for you; some said it contained vitamins. Whether it did or not, dirt was a staple for us and we were hungry all the time, all the time."[103] Additionally, X said his "family was so poor that we would eat the hole out of a doughnut" and "there were times when there wasn't even a nickel and we would be so hungry we were dizzy." [104] Davis described her childhood as having been less poor, yet still a struggle (see 1.3 Justification). Not only did these stories explain why the authors became activists, they also gave them some credibility by suggesting: I know, I understand, because I've been there.

Subsequently, the writers described how, despite their difficult childhood, they learned to become independent, strong and wise, the best example possibly being X, "the functionally illiterate hustler who educating himself in prison."[105] In the epilogue of the book, Hailey wrote about how, upon X's return from Mecca and his great change in personality, a journalist mumbled "Incredible! Incredible," and Hailey commented: "I was thinking the same thing. I was thinking, some of the time, that if a pebble were dropped from the window behind Malcolm X, it would have stuck on a sidewalk eight floors below where years before he had skulked, selling dope."[106] This is a good example of the progress X made and of his enlightenment. He not only told the reader that he was to be trusted again, but also that everyone could become a successful activist, even those with a hustler past.

### *1.2. Memory*

Since memory is often considered a weakness in autobiographical writing, the autobiographers attempted to persuade the reader to believe that what he or she was recalling was true to the facts. Perkins argues that "[a]ll autobiographers, to varying degrees, engage in self recreation. […] Even without intending to embellish the past as s/he remembers it, the limitations of memory alone make for an inevitable tension between fact and fiction in autobiographical writing."[107] Therefore, X, for instance, shared a childhood story that proves his good memory. He was taken to a reform school at the age of thirteen, where he met the "white cook-helper" of the school: "I recall – Lucille Lathrop (it amazes me how these names come back, from a time I haven't thought about for more than twenty years.)"[108] X proved to the reader that his memory was quite well, and that therefore, his stories could be considered true. Additionally, he emphasized the fact that he used information from the letters he wrote to family when he was young. "In a letter to Wilfred, Hilda,

[103] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 12.
[104] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 6.
[105] Bashir M. El-Beshti, "The Semiotics of Salvation: Malcolm X and the Autobiographical Self," *The Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 4 (1997): 361.
[106] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 421.
[107] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 88.
[108] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 27.

Philbert, and Reginald back in Lansing, I told them about all this."[109] These letters could be used to check the stories of X, and thus made his words more believable. This is similar with him writing "I quote from my notebook…"[110]

What added to the trustworthiness of X as an author was his story about "old mrs. Adcock," argues Kenneth Mostern, writer of *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics.* Adcock allegedly said: "Malcolm, there's one thing I like about you. You're no good, but you don't try to hide it. You are not a hypocrite."[111] Mostern claims that X intentionally used this anecdote for the purpose that "the reader should believe *everything* he has to say."[112] The scholar argues that X's stories of him being a hustler, a liar, a gambler, and a violent criminal, add to his believability as well. "The identitarian rhetoric of the book, inasmuch as it is addressed to an audience of potential political allies, comes to this: trust me because I represent your [...] untrustworthiness. I have known it and lived it."[113]

Similarly, Forman argued in his life narrative that there are simply "some faces and expressions that one does not forget."[114] Furthermore, he gave a detailed description of the schools in his neighborhood, which can be seen as a means to show that he knew his facts and that thus everything else he said must also have been true. "On the corner of Sixty-first and Michigan stood the Greek Orthodox Church and School; opposite it stood St. Anselm's Catholic Church and School. One block farther stood Betsy Ross Grammar School, the public school of my district."[115] These were all verifiable details that could easily be checked and they gave the author a sense of reliability.

### *1.3. Justification*

Another technique to win the trust of the reader was justification. Some of the writers' stories could have been shocking for the reader, such as X's drug dealing as a young hustler. Therefore, the narrators had to convince their readers of the underlying purposes for their actions. Why were these actions justified? What have the activists learned since? Other anecdotes might have been at odds with the writer's current politics or status, and could have thus damaged their image. For instance, Davis felt the need to justify her moving to the north of the country to study, instead of staying in the south where her help was most needed in the fight for race equality. Her autobiography hereby became a rehabilitating tool. Such stories of justification are referred to as 'modest disclaimers,' by professor of English Bashir M. El-Beshti. He gives an example from X's

[109] Ibid., 44.
[110] Ibid., 340.
[111] Kenneth Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144.
[112] Ibid., 145. Emphasis added.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 89.
[115] Ibid., 22.

autobiography, when X wrote: "I was a zombie then."[116] With the word 'then,' he distanced himself from the hustler he was growing up. At the same time, X wanted to avoid sounding idle: "I am not trying to make myself seem right and noble. I am telling the truth."[117] The latter is another plea for the reader's sympathy.

Whilst the youths of X and Forman were mostly described as very poor, the young Davis grew up amongst what she called "the-not-so-poor."[118] She got new shoes when the old ones were worn down and her family ate three meals a day, which differed much from the 'eating-dirt-stories' of Forman and X. If Davis had left her fortunate upbringing out of her autobiography, it would have made her story unreliable, since her past is part of public record. As a result, she felt the need to write about it and to prove that she indeed struggled, yet in other ways. Davis emphasized that her parents worked very hard for what they had, and she told the reader that her mother and father came from "a very humble background […] my father told us stories of walking ten miles to school each day."[119] Such anecdotes from her parents also enlarged Davis' believability as an activist.

Additionally, she wrote that the circumstances her family lived in where "all the shabbier when we compared it to the white school nearby."[120] Even though her family was wealthier than many other black families, at school "there were never enough textbooks to go around, and the ones that were available were old and torn, often with the most important pages missing."[121] Davis made sure that the readers understood that she was aware of the fact that she was privileged. "I had a definite advantage: my parents would see to it that I attended college, and would help me survive until I could make it on my own. This was not something that could be said for the vast majority of my schoolmates."[122] Similarly, X's youth was mostly described as poor, yet he nevertheless added, "at that time we were much better off than most town Negroes."[123] These are all examples that were used to make the reader sympathetic towards the author, and eventually more eager to agree with the author's politics.

Moreover, where the authors grew up, in the North or the South, and which school they attended was important for the respect of the reader. For instance, Forman specifically described his time in the South, in Mississippi, and the discrimination he came across there. This was a justification for the fact that he was born in the North, in Chicago, where blacks had more rights. By telling of his up Southern upbringing, Forman attempted to gain respect from his reader audience. Additionally, he felt the need to justify the choice of his parents, who sent him to a Catholic School at the age of seven: "You could say that, as working-class parents, they wanted

[116] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 437.
[117] Ibid., 299.
[118] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 89.
[119] Ibid., 89–90.
[120] Ibid., 90.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 93.
[123] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 6.

the 'best' for their son. On the other hand, they were strong for the African Methodist Episcopal Church and did not like the Catholic Church." [124] Here, Forman emphasized that his parents were loyal to "their people and faith."

Similarly, Davis chose to go to a high school in New York, in the North, where it was easier to live as an African American. She expressed her guilt in this decision, yet added examples of her joining in New York protest, for instance in trying to get the department store Woolworth to hire black workers. Yet, Davis emphasized that she did not believe it to be enough, in an attempt to take away some last doubt with her readers on her sincerity and commitment to the movement. "Although I was involved in the movement in that way I felt cheated: precisely at the moment I had decided to leave the South a movement was mushrooming at home."[125]

Stories about home, and specifically violent stories perpetrated by people they knew, were as well justified, by both Forman and Davis. For instance, Forman wrote that his grandmother used to beat his cousin Sonny, because he wet his bed as a young boy. He found this unfair, and justified it by saying that "she unleashed against his tender skin all the frustrations of living in a racist society."[126] Similarly, Davis justified how black children in her neighborhood hit each other. "They fought the meanness of Birmingham while they sliced the air with knives and punched black faces because they could not reach white ones."[127] Forman and Davis tried to prevent a bad reputation of family and friends, and of themselves. The problem was racism, they therefore said, and troublesome neighborhoods were the cause of oppression.

After more or less troublesome youths, all three writers became street gangsters, fugitives, and/or prisoners, and all felt the need to explain and justify these experiences. For instance, around the age of sixteen, after being expelled from high school, Forman joined the gang 'The Sixty-first Raiders'. He said about this: "But the gang scene had not become a way of life for me, a deep involvement. To a certain extent, I always stood back and looked at it like something foreign and even incomprehensible."[128] He distanced himself from gang life, claiming it was never his style. Forman even complimented himself for not getting into drug dealing and using, even though it was "a likely time" for all this.[129] Davis as well distanced herself from the criminal life. She wrote that, during the time she was a fugitive, she "hated what [she] was doing: the nighttime moves, the veiling of eyes, the whole atmosphere of stealth and secretness." Davis wrote that she thought of her behavior as "furtive" and "clandestine," expressing the dislike of her own actions and humanizing herself.[130]

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[124] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 22.
[125] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 112.
[126] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 28.
[127] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 94.
[128] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 33.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 8.

Forman's career took another illegal turn when he became what he called "a professional gambler."[131] His writing on the matter was rather ambiguous: on the one hand he seemed proud of it, on the other hand he felt the need to explain the motives behind this 'career.' "But I was tortured with questions of right and wrong, good and evil. I rationalized my 'professional' gambling with a half-baked superman theory. […] My possession of a higher purpose justified my taking money from those who had no special goal in life or use for their money."[132] Stating that it was a 'half-baked theory' shows that Forman believed himself to be naïve at the time, but also that he knew better at the time of writing the autobiography. For the reader audience, it was important to know that he had learned his lesson.

Forman also wrote that he was naïve when he joined the U.S. army as an eighteen year old. This shows that at the time of writing, he was ambivalent of the federal government and overly race conscious; a feeling that he tried to project upon his readers:

> "Today I would never volunteer for a segregated army […], nor would I take a seat at the back of a bus or in the front of a train. Those battles have been won; the struggle, once so focused on segregation because it was the most blatant form of racism, passed through that stage and now stands on a higher level. And I myself changed."[133]

X also expressed such shame, yet on a different subject. He wrote that he used to try to look 'white' by showing off a straightened hairstyle known as the 'conk:' "To my own shame, when I say all of this I'm talking first of all about myself, because you can't show me any Negro who ever conked more faithfully than I did."[134] He wrote that he afterwards saw conks as symbolic of the African-American's shame that he is black.[135] The straightened hairstyle was looked upon as betrayal in the black community. In consonance with the African-American literary tradition, X attempted to create a feeling of black pride with his readers and that they had something to fight for.

In her autobiography, Davis made much effort to convince the reader that she had met many people of different backgrounds and learned about different cultures. This was of essence for her white readers, since it showed that she did not simply judge whoever was not black. Similarly, X extensively attempted to defend his former anti-white rhetoric and his change of heart toward whites. Both autobiographers needed to gain sympathy from their white readers, who only knew their 'rough' and 'bad nigger' images (see chapter 2). With this in mind, Davis wrote

[131] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 67.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 59.
[134] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 57.
[135] Ibid.

that her mother tried to help her see that "it was possible for white people to walk out of their skin and respond with the integrity of human beings."[136]

Furthermore, she wrote of a summer in which she played with "Margareth, her older sister Claudia, and their friends, who were Black, Puerto Rican and white."[137] Here, Davis emphasized that she played with children of all backgrounds. Furthermore, she wrote that she read books from all kinds of writers. "For hours at a time, I read […] everything from Heidi to Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, from Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* to Frank Yerby's lurid novels."[138] These are all books from writers with different backgrounds and origins. With these examples, Davis attempted to convince the reader that she knew what she was talking about, because she had seen the other sides of the story.

### *1.4 Peritexts*

Besides the activists' written stories in their autobiographies, the cover, added photos, poems, the introduction, and epilogue contributed as well to the authors' and the book's trustworthiness an believability.[139] In the words of Gerard Genette, these so called peritexts "may appear to be 'neutral' aspects of the presentation of a text […] but they comprise a threshold that can dramatically affect its interpretation and reception by variously situated reading communities."[140] Although they blend in with the rest of the text, these peritexts influence the reception of the book. According to Smith and Watson, peritexts indeed "encourage certain kinds of audience responses and reading practices."[141] Therefore, they were an indispensible tool for X, Davis, and Forman, and their publishers to encourage the readers to join in their movement.

When focusing on the peritexts of X's narrative, there are persuasive techniques that stand out. Foremost, the story is not written by X himself, but told to Alex Haley, who made it into a book. This collaboration influences the persuasive nature of the book. Both men tried to prove their objectivity and independence from each other in several ways. Haley wrote the epilogue of the book; a text that he claimed was objective due to the fact that he first "asked [X's] permission that at the end of the book [he] could write comments of [his] own about him which would not be subject to his review."[142] This statement claims that X did not intervene with anything that is printed in this part of the book, which attributes to its truth level. Haley further described how the collaboration with X occurred. For instance, he wrote that upon X's return from his journey to Mecca, X promised Haley that he would not change what he had said earlier about his religion.[143]

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[136] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 79.
[137] Ibid., 82.
[138] Ibid., 95.
[139] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives, Second Edition* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2010), 99.
[140] Ibid., 100.
[141] Ibid., 248.
[142] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 394.
[143] Ibid., 421.

This suggests that the text has remained original, and was written during the events that are described.

Another important peritext in the original autobiography of X is the introduction by M.S Handler, a white news reporter who worked for *The New York Times.* His cooperation fits within the black literary tradition, for slave narratives were often "black messages that were authorized in white envelopes."[144] During the era of slave autobiographies, a white person often needed to testify about the worthiness of a book written by an African American. Many slave narratives included such testimonials from white abolitionists who claimed that the black authors indeed wrote the books themselves.[145] For a historian, Handler's contribution reveals what the position of black nationalists was in society at that time: they were still not regarded as trustworthy actors without the declarations of respected white men such as Handler.

Handler's addition to X's life narrative was important for X's credibility and the sympathy from the reader for two main reasons. First, X did not ask Handler to write his introduction; X's publisher decided this after he was murdered. Although Handler and X got along well, X could not have told him what to write in the introduction, or even read it and edit it before publishing.[146] Although asking Handler to write the introduction was a deliberate choice of the publisher, the reader could thus still see the journalist as a rather independent source.

Second, Handler gave both positive as well as negative critiques in his introduction, which makes his content more believable. For instance, Handler wrote that X impressed Handler's wife during a visit, because he "spoke in the courteous, gentle manner that was his in private."[147] Yet, he also wrote: "No man in our time aroused fear and hatred in the white man as did Malcolm, because in him the white man sensed an implacable foe who could not be had for any price."[148] Handler numerated many of X's radical thoughts, for instance X attributing the degradation of the black man to the white man, denouncing integration as a fraud, believing the white man would never approve of full integration, and arguing for separation of the black and the white community as the only way to improve the black man's life.[149] Yet, Handler also called him "a man of the people, who they felt, would never betray them."[150]

Furthermore, the back cover of X's life narrative holds several 'blurbs,' quotes from well-known people that functioned for the sake of creating trust in the author and his work. The first one reads: "A great book. Its dead level honesty, its passion, its exalted purpose will make it stand

[144] Visser-Maessen, lecture "Slave Narratives."
[145] Peter P. Hinks and John R. McKivigan, *Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition* (Portsmouth: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 618.
[146] This is evident in the afterword of the book, written by Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 407. Here, Haley says: "I was very happy when I learned that Handler had agreed to write this book's introduction; I know Malcolm X would have liked that."
[147] Ibid., xxvi.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., xxvii.
[150] Ibid., xxviii.

as a monument to the most painful truth."[151] This is a quote by Truman Nelson, a white, leftist historical novelist. Then a quote from the liberal, "white" newspaper *The New York Times*: "Extraordinary. A brilliant, painful, important book."[152] And last, a quote by I.F. Stone, a white investigative journalist: "This book will have a permanent place in the literature of the Afro-American struggle."[153] All three men were famous, white liberals or representatives of liberal newspapers, which could convince - especially white - readers that this book was worth reading, and was written by a man that could be trusted. Such a white men's intervention was needed to 'ease' the white reader into the story, because he was mostly skeptical and prone to accept the media's depiction of X as a demagogue.

Similarly, Davis used peritexts such as photographs and the dedication page in her life narrative to win the sympathy of her reader and to soften her tough image (See image 1.1). This is related to the use of pictures of slaves in slave narratives, on which they were often dressed in elegant western clothing, so that the reader audience would take them serious. Scholar Kate Douglas says the use of photographs on the cover or within autobiographies is the life narrative's "most arresting and persistent feature," since "[p]hotographs […] are commonly associated with truth and authenticity."[154] On the first page of her autobiography, Davis put a photograph of when she was a baby, one as a happy-looking teen, one with her sister, and one from her junior year in college. [155] In the pictures, she wears a bow on her head or a light colored, preppy dress; very soft images compared to her harsh image during her time with the BPP.

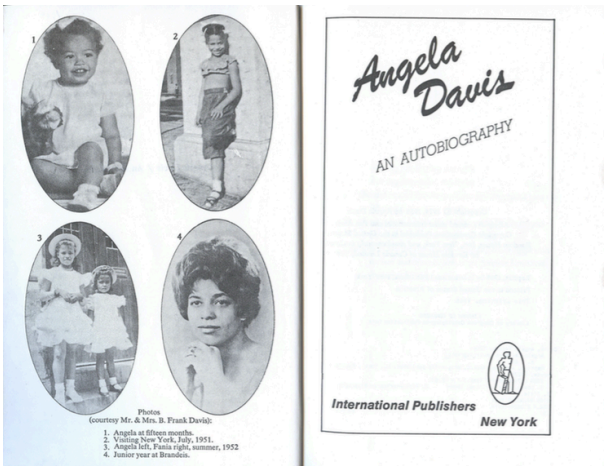
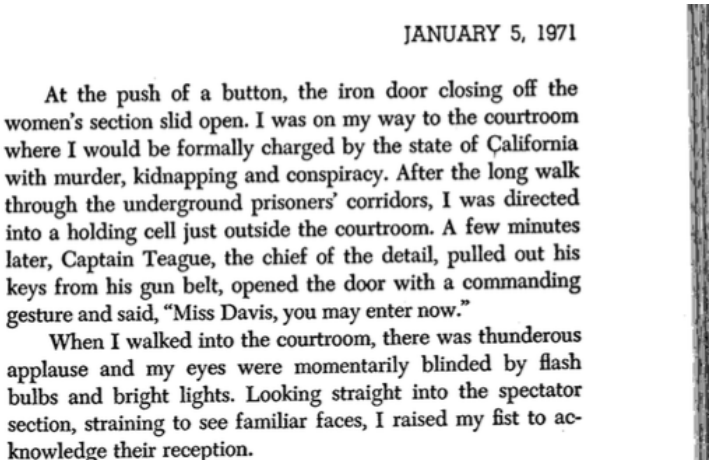



**Image 1.1**

Additionally, Davis wrote part of her autobiography in a diary-like style, with dates above the stories (image 1.2). [156] In the same way, Forman quoted from his diary (image 1.3) and from

[151] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Douglas, *Contesting Childhood*, 44.
[155] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*.
[156] Ibid., 291.

official SNCC papers.[157] This personal style made the readers feel like they read a very private diary, and why would one lie in that?

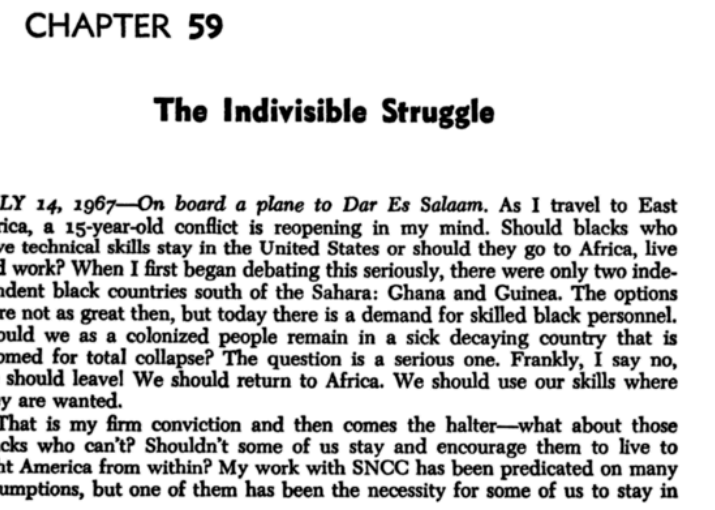


JANUARY 5, 1971

At the push of a button, the iron door closing off the women's section slid open. I was on my way to the courtroom where I would be formally charged by the state of California with murder, kidnapping and conspiracy. After the long walk through the underground prisoners' corridors, I was directed into a holding cell just outside the courtroom. A few minutes later, Captain Teague, the chief of the detail, pulled out his keys from his gun belt, opened the door with a commanding gesture and said, "Miss Davis, you may enter now."

When I walked into the courtroom, there was thunderous applause and my eyes were momentarily blinded by flash bulbs and bright lights. Looking straight into the spectator section, straining to see familiar faces, I raised my fist to acknowledge their reception.

**Image 1.2**



CHAPTER 59

## The Indivisible Struggle

*JULY 14, 1967—On board a plane to Dar Es Salaam.* As I travel to East Africa, a 15-year-old conflict is reopening in my mind. Should blacks who have technical skills stay in the United States or should they go to Africa, live and work? When I first began debating this seriously, there were only two independent black countries south of the Sahara: Ghana and Guinea. The options were not as great then, but today there is a demand for skilled black personnel. Should we as a colonized people remain in a sick decaying country that is doomed for total collapse? The question is a serious one. Frankly, I say no, we should leave! We should return to Africa. We should use our skills where they are wanted.

That is my firm conviction and then comes the halter—what about those blacks who can't? Shouldn't some of us stay and encourage them to live to fight America from within? My work with SNCC has been predicated on many assumptions, but one of them has been the necessity for some of us to stay in

**Image 1.3**

Furthermore, Davis dedicated the book to her family and to her other 'sisters and brothers:'

> For my family, my strength
> For my comrades, my light.
> For the sisters and brothers whose fighting spirit was my liberator.
> For those whose humanity is too rare to be destroyed by walls, bars, and death houses.
> And especially for those who are going to struggle until racism and class injustice are forever banished from our history.[158]

[157] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 481.
[158] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*.

Her last sentence also emphasizes the goal of her autobiography: motivating readers to continue her struggle. Here, she put her family right beside her readers, who she calls brothers and sisters as well. Forman did the same, in his dedication:

> TO MY SONS
> James Robert Lumumba
> And
> Chaka Esmond Fanon
> And
> ALL THE UNBORN REVOLUTIONARIES WHO WILL
> ACCELERATE AND INTENSIFY THE REVOLUTIONARY
> PROCESS[159]

Forman put his family on the same level as his audience; through the use of capitals he made both parties equally important. In doing so, he created a bond between him and the reader and motivated his audience.

Moreover, Forman quoted famous white authors and poets to tell his story. In using these white authors, Forman showed his white readers that he was smart and like them. He for instance made use of a poem by the white poet William Ernest Henley:

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.
> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud
> My head I bloody, but unbow'd.
> Beyond this place of wrath and tears
> Looms but the Horror of the shade,
> And yet the menace of the years
> Finds and shall find me unafraid.
> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul.[160]

Forman wanted to teach his white reader that he, and other African Americans, had the same values and goals as they did: being the master of one's life and soul.

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[159] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*.
[160] Ibid., 54.

Furthermore, Forman included a poem from the, among both African Americans and whites, highly respected black writer and poet Claude McKay:

> ENSLAVED
> Oh when I think of my long-suffering race,
> For weary centuries, despised, oppressed
> Enslaved and lynched, denied a human place
> In the great life line of the Christian West;
> And in the Black Land disinherited,
> Robbed in the ancient country of its birth,
> My heart grows sick with hate, becomes as lead,
> For this is my race that has no home on earth.
> Then from the dark depth of my soul I cry
> To the avenging angel to consume
> The white man's world of wonders utterly:
> Let it be swallowed up in earth's vat womb,
> Or upward roll as sacrificial smoke
> To liberate my people from its yoke![161]

This is a good example of the use of "negro heroes" in black writings, a theme in the African-American tradition that is mentioned by literary critic Sterling Brown.[162] These 'heroes' function as examples for the reader, as role models.

Aside from mentioning famous black people, Forman used several personal stories of less-know black people, which are detracted from letters or conversations with him. Many stories start with: "My name is…" followed by "Louise Goodin,"[163] "Lucretia Collins,"[164] "Mrs Williams,"[165] or "Mrs. Lee."[166] All of their stories focus on racist events and shocking suppression by whites, and become 'case studies' for the reader. For example, Mrs. Lee gave her account of a trip to a pool with her children:

> "I often think about that day, how we would have been outnumbered. There was, I guess, two thousands whites there. And they were getting angrier and angrier by the minute. The local police didn't make the whites move on or nothin'. […] That is the beginning of a time when I think of America at its lowest eb. No law and order. If law and order

[161] Ibid., 543.
[162] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[163] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 142.
[164] Ibid., 150.
[165] Ibid., 179.
[166] Ibid.

are not upheld in a country there will be no country."[167]

Personal stories were used to spark an emotion with the reader audience. Many white readers only heard about racist events through newspapers. These stories were either relatable for the black reader, or Forman gave the struggle a face for the white reader.

Similar to Forman's use of black heroes, X's autobiography holds a large section describing his time in Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts, where he had access to an extensive library that, besides respected white authors, included many well-known black authors. Here, X wrote that he decided on "some kind of a homemade education."[168] He wrote that he read books by black writer W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson's *Negro History*, and J.A. Rogers' three volumes of *Sex and Race.* Furthermore, X named well-known white writers, such as H.G. Wells and his *Outline of History* and Will Durant's *Story of Civilization.* The latter were books that showed "the early Negro struggles for freedom", X wrote.[169] This was proof for the white reader, that even white history books contained the hardships of blacks and that their circumstances could not be denied or hushed up. These examples were used in a persuasive fashion, to stir up both black and whites to protest.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, mobilization of the reader required a very personal approach and the formation of a reader-writer relationship was indispensable. Creating this 'trust pact' was an essential technique for recruiting, since social movement psychology proved that readers would only further the political agenda of the authors when this bond was achieved. Framed childhood stories, anecdotes that proved of a reliable memory, the justification of personal stories, and peritexts in the autobiographies of X, Davis, and Forman; all are examples of both implicit and explicit persuasive techniques to gain the reader's trust and sympathy.

The autobiographers attempted to recruit the reader by including comprehensive descriptions of the authors' childhood and youth. These stories were consciously framed with the aspiration to create recognition and a sense of shared sorrow with the readers. The anecdotes were aimed to convince them of the tough upbringing of the writers, to create respect and trust. The authors used seemingly neutral stories of their upbringing, yet they attached them to contemporary thoughts on their politics. By doing so, old anecdotes became tools for the mobilization of their readership, since X, Davis and Forman proved to the reader that their political aspirations were grounded.

[167] Ibid., 181.
[168] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 174.
[169] Ibid., 178.

Memory was seen as a challenged source in autobiographical writing due to the fact that remembering is limited. What is imprinted in one's consciousness can be damaged by time or point of view. Yet, what must be emphasized for the use of autobiographies in academic research, is that what is purposely left out by these activist writers, what is framed or forgotten, and what is remembered and how, can as well say much about a writer and the goals of his or her organization. Still, a questionable story could have been a problem for the reader. The autobiographers were aware of the pitfalls of life narratives due to memory, and they attempted to convince readers of the truthfulness of their stories with compelling and checkable facts, such as the names of places, people and events. Also, leaving certain memories out of the life narratives while they were part of the public record would have made the author unreliable. So the authors included them in such a way that it worked in their advantage. Eventually, the written down memories of X, Davis and Forman served as ways to learn about the writers' intentions and as a means to convince the reader of their knowledge.

In gaining the trust of their readers, the narrators attempted to explain some of their more controversial stories. Remarkably, these anecdotes of violence, stealing, and gang membership became promotional means as well and X, Davis, and Forman used these stories in their advantage. The mere mentioning that they had learned from their mistakes was used for redemption from the reader. Additionally, the stories gave them street credibility and the readership identified with the hardships.

Photographs, prefaces, poems, book covers, and dedications are all examples of promotional tools in the life narratives of X, Davis, and Forman that aimed to persuade the reader to become active in their movement. Photos represented authenticity, which added to the veracity of the book. And within the African-American literary tradition, the preface by a white journalist in X's account produced believability, just like the quotes on the cover of his book. Both Handler's addition to X's book as that of, for instance, the white poet William Ernest Henley to that of Forman, were an attempt to show white readers that the autobiographers were in fact not as different from them as might have been presumed. It created reasons for the white reader to become involved in the movement as well.

The dedications of both Davis and Forman involved the readers by directly addressing them and making them feel important in their struggle for equality. This technique made the reader feel part of the 'author's group' and capable of changing social structure. After the creation of a trust bond, these two factors were needed for the actual mobilization of the reader. The next question is: after consensus mobilization, how can the reader actually be motivated to move?

## Chapter 2 - Time for Action

"The people cried "amen, amen," for they were ready to move. You could feel it. And they began moving, a hundred of them."[170] – **James Forman**

X's autobiography tells the story of him going to Boston for the summer to spend time with his half-sister Ella. There, he finds himself in awe of the people he meets. "I didn't know the world contained as many Negroes as I saw thronging downtown Roxbury at night."[171] He tells of a feeling that he found hard to describe. "I know now that it was the sense of being a real part of a mass of my own kind, for the first time."[172]

What Malcolm X felt, is something called collective identity, the connection that one feels with a community, and it is part of the next step in the mobilization of the reader of the activist autobiography.[173] This reader may now have developed sympathy for the author and there is a trust bond, but he needs to be motivated to actually come into action and protest. This "conversion of sympathizers into active participants" is called action mobilization.[174] And "the more successful consensus mobilization has been, the larger the pool of sympathizers a mobilizing movement organization can draw from," argue Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg.[175] This means that the first step of creating trust between the author and the reader was indispensible for the actual recruitment to be fruitful.

There are several techniques of persuasion that are needed to get the reader to actually participate in the movement. Action mobilization is divided into two elements: group efficacy and political efficacy. Group efficacy is based on the principle that an activists cause can only be achieved through unity and group effort, and political efficacy illustrates that the activist first needs to believe that his actions can in fact change social structure.[176] In sum, the most important questions for the author in mobilizing his or her reader at this point are, first, how do I make the reader feel part of our group, and thus responsible for its goals? And second, when the reader feels part of the group, how do I convince him that his actions can bring about change?

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[170] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 297.
[171] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 36.
[172] Ibid., 37.
[173] Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "Collective Identity in Social Movements: Central Concepts and Debates," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 6 (2010): 394.
[174] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 8.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 3.

### *2.1. Group Efficacy*

With regard to group efficacy, autobiographers tried to convince the reader of the importance of unity. Group efficacy means "group-related problems can be solved by collective efforts."[177] In this spirit, X, Davis, and Forman attempted to convince the reader that only when united with others, he or she could make a difference. First, the authors emphasized the strength of a community and why the group was more important than the individual. Second, they created a sense of belonging through stories of African heritage, with the goal of making the reader feel part of the group that the author promotes. And third, the authors focused on a shared enemy to strengthen the feeling of shared grievances and unity.

#### *2.1.1 A Community*

Creating unity is not easy for autobiographers. Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg say that "for the perception of the possibility of change to take hold people need to perceive the group to be able to unite and fight for the issue."[178] This introduces a problem that Forman noticed within the African-American community: the disbelief among blacks that they could be well organized. According to Forman, the average black man's thoughts at the time were: "Well, black folks just can't stick together. We can never act as a unit, we can't unify to protest against this man."[179] Forman wrote that he tried hard to convince these people that they *could* get organized. "Some friends and I had spent hours and hours in the barber shops of Sixty-first street, trying to talk people out of these *self-destructives attitudes*, these self-fulfilling prophecies of 'we can't get together.'"[180] He wrote that he "became convinced that we needed a mass movement of blacks, a popular movement that would awaken our people, show them that 'niggers' can get together and create a desire to go on to the next step."[181]

X, Davis, and Forman all used different life examples to express their personal belief in the strength of group protest. For instance, in the preface, Davis spoke of her "overwhelming sense of belonging to a community of humans – a community of struggle against poverty and racism."[182] Furthermore, she emphasized what happened when someone protested alone through an anecdote. "On a few occasions, a small group of my schoolmates and I spontaneously decided to sit in the front of the bus to show our support of our sisters and brothers. […] Because there was no extensive organized movement at that time in Birmingham, some of [the other black people on the bus] were afraid of our audacity and implored us to do what the white man said."[183] Here, she illustrated that one could have good intentions for protesting, but that alone not much

[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 85.
[180] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[181] Ibid., 104.
[182] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, xvi.
[183] Ibid., 101.

could be achieved. Furthermore, Davis gave the example of a well functioning jail community that had come to exist within the prison in which she was detained. In this group, prisoners would name other inmates as their family members. "The family system served as a defense against the fact of being no more than a number. It humanized the environment and allowed an identification with others within a familiar framework."[184] For Davis, this community system was a way to survive in prison. For the reader, it showed that a strong group, even from within jail, could gain respect from an institutional force.

Furthermore, the autobiographers wanted to make sure that everyone who read the book felt included and responsible to join. Therefore, they spread their beliefs that *everyone* could join the movement. For instance, Davis made clear whom she was addressing by writing: "As the years passed, however, and the needs of the movement increased, it became necessary to incorporate every man, woman and child who was willing into all levels of protest activity."[185] Similarly, Forman wrote, "I saw standing beside me a dentist of the city, a man of the streets singing and smiling with joyful tears in his eyes, and beside him a mailman with whom I had become acquainted along with people form all walk of life. It was then that I felt, deep down within where it really counts a warm feeling, and all I could do was laugh out loud in the swelling of the singing."[186] He included people of all kinds of backgrounds in his image of an activist, broadening his audience and enlarging the change of recruitment.

*Familial language*

The feeling of collective identity, like X felt during his visit to Boston, is "frequently understood as something generated and created between individuals," claims Cristina Flesher Fominaya, who researched Melucci's famous theories on collective identity.[187] The words 'generated' and 'created' point to the active roles of the authors in constructing such feelings of unity. Fominaya says that "for Melucci, collective identity refers to a network of active relationships and he stresses the importance of the emotional involvement of activists."[188] In creating such emotional involvement and new supporters for a group, little is more convincing than imagining a connection that can exist between family members, as described by Davis during her prison time. The three autobiographers all used the words 'Brothers and Sisters,' to address the African-American reader. One example is found in the peritexts, where Forman and Davis put the reader on the same level as their own family, but Forman's autobiography has more examples of this technique. His book starts with the words "Letter to My Sisters and Brothers,"[189] and he called the

[184] Ibid., 53.
[185] Ibid., 102.
[186] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 247.
[187] Flesher Fominaya, "Collective Identity in Social Movements," 394.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, xxi.

second part "'A band of sisters and brothers,' in a circle of trust."[190] Additionally, Forman wrote: "[B]rothers and sisters, […] we must act. The time for talking is way past. Action."[191] This idea of making the reader feel part of a family-like group was a strong and convincing means to create a sense of unity with the reader.

This familial language was continued in the use of words such as 'us' and 'we' and 'my people.' For instance, when Davis thought about going abroad as a fugitive, she emphasized how important it was for her to stay around 'her people:' "[B]eing indefinitely exiled in some other country was even more horrible than the idea of being locked up in jail. At least in jail I would be closer to *my people*, closer to the movement."[192] Forman used the same words to claim fellowship. "Whatever I did with this education, I had to put it to work for *my people*,"[193] and: "Life seemed very short, and so much work had to be carried out for *my people."*[194] Throughout his autobiography, Forman put the words 'us' and we' in italic to give them more power. "I had read something about *us*, and the way *we* were treated."[195]

Looking at the background of the theme 'community' in African-American autobiography, the exploration of the 'self' versus the community is indispensible. Professor of English Robert Folkenflik even goes as far as describing "the relation between the individual and the communal" as "the foremost concern of African-American autobiographies."[196] He quotes Butterfield, from his *Black Autobiography in America:* "The 'self' of black autobiography […] is not an individual with a private career […] the self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to other members."[197] Butterfield emphasizes how membership of a community comes with duty. He says black autobiographies awaken "a sense of shared life, shared triumph and communal responsibility. The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self."[198] The life narratives of X, Davis, and Forman thus served as tools in transferring a strong feeling of group responsibility.

The idea of individual or group-centered leadership is a reoccurring subject in political autobiographies. Even though the NOI and BPP were very hierarchical organizations, many Black Power activists firmly believed in the strength of a group, not just that of a leader. For instance, after X learned the truth about the NOI's leader Elijah Muhammad, he wrote that he realized "how very dangerous it is for people to hold any human being in such esteem, especially to consider

[190] Ibid., 213.
[191] Ibid., 110.
[192] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 12. Emphasis added.
[193] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 3. Emphasis added.
[194] Ibid., 54. Emphasis added.
[195] Ibid., 47.
[196] Robert Folkenflik, *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 1993), 105.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America*, 3.

anyone some sort of 'divinely guided' and 'protected' person."[199] And Forman wrote that he felt relieved with SNCC using group-focused leadership, because "[t]his inclination toward group-centered leadership, rather than toward a leader-centered group pattern of organization, was refreshing indeed to those of the older group who bear the scars of battle, the frustrations and the disillusionment that come when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay."[200]

Forman continued to write about group effort coming before individual needs, using examples of his own experience. He joined SNCC and had certain ideas about his tasks, yet he said "this was a personal wish, and I had enough self-discipline to realize that when you are working with a revolutionary group, which I considered SNCC to be, you don't do what you alone want to, but what the group desires of you."[201] Here, Forman persuaded the reader to conform to a group level and to dismiss egocentrism. "Individual acts of protest are fine; the collective actions of people are more important," he said.[202]

Subsequently, Forman emphasized that leaving the work to the leaders would demotivate group members since they would then feel like "only a particular individual could save them." He called this the 'messiah complex,' saying that this "would make them not move on their own to fight racism and exploitation."[203] The activist also quoted the famous and popular civil rights activist Ella Baker, to underline his words. "She believes strongly in the organized will of the people as opposed to the power of a single leader."[204] The mentioning of Baker is another example of the use of "negro heroes" in the black literary tradition, as described by Brown.[205] By using a quote from Baker, Forman intensified his message.

Surpassing the idea of duty, authors Forman and X wrote how they believed that protesting was a matter of self-sacrifice in a group. "We all die. It's a question of how and when. Sometimes we cannot decide how we die, but we must defy death. It is the greatest acts of defiance, an act of defiance necessary to make a revolutionary."[206] And X wrote, "Anyone who wants to follow me and my movement has got to be ready to go to jail, to the hospital, and to the cemetery before he can be truly free."[207] In a convincing matter, the reader was told that self-sacrifice was considered the greatest act of resistance, and that this was the only way to achieve the goals of freedom and equality.

[199] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 373.
[200] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 218.
[201] Ibid., 234.
[202] Ibid., 106.
[203] Ibid., 255.
[204] Ibid., 215.
[205] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[206] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 196.
[207] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 424.

### *2.1.2. African Heritage: On Belonging*

> "Thousands of my ancestors had waited, as I had done, for nightfall to cover their steps, had leaned on one true friend to help them, had felt, as I did, the very teeth of the dogs at their heels. It was simple. *I had to be worthy of them*."[208] **– Angela Davis**

> "Twenty-two million black men! They have given America four hundred years of toil; they have bled and died in every battle since the Revolution; they were in America before the Pilgrims, and long before the mass immigrations – and they are still today at the bottom of everything." [209] **– Malcolm X**

Creating this sense of duty or self-sacrifice becomes evident in the authors' stories about African heritage. The above autobiographical quotes by Davis and X perfectly summarize how the feeling of historical duty could have motivated to protest. According to Smith and Watson, "the black writer did not and could not participate in an ideology of self that separated the self from the black community and the roots of its culture."[210] In other words: the black reader could not ignore his roots. Stories of African heritage in autobiography show what Butterfield calls "old spirits drawn to the new voices by the urgency of the occasion."[211] The Civil Rights Movement rekindled stories of earlier struggles, which urged the readers to continue this fight.

Through their autobiographies, X, Davis, and Forman struggled to convince the readers that it was their historical obligation to fight for the rights of 'their people.' The authors used stories and actors from black history to create a feeling of guilt, implying: if you do not move, you a betraying your people. Or, like Forman put it, "carry on the struggle." [212] Forman used historical actors from black history to tell the reader in whose footsteps they needed to follow. "Sing on, dear […] Sing on. Lift those lovely eyes upward, tilt that beautiful head back, and sing on with the spirit of our Zulu ancestors, with the determination of a Chaka, the tenacity of a Harriet Tubman, the sweetness of a Bertha Gober, the spirit of all fighting people."[213] With this example, Forman mentioned Zulu ancestors such as Chaka, he praised famous abolitionist Harriet Tubman, and he cheered for freedom singer Bertha Gober; all people that have fought for their freedom. Doing nothing would be like going back to slavery, according to Forman. To emphasize this for his

[208] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 5–6. Emphasis added.
[209] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 321.
[210] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 96.
[211] Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America*, 265.
[212] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 215.
[213] Ibid., 262.

readers, he quoted spiritual leader and civil rights activist Gandhi, who had said: "Before I see my people in perpetual slavery, I would rather see them fighting with arms."[214]

Forman hoped that more African Americans would become aware of their heritage. "As some of my generation were unaware of much that influenced our development, so there will be future generations unaware of all the forces of resistance that have determined their actions."[215] This is a problem that Davis tried to overcome in her first job as a teacher. In her life narrative, she wrote that she "urged the students to remain cognizant of the struggles which had carved out a place for them at that institution and to be willing, in turn, to add their own contributions to the ongoing quest for justice and equality."[216] Davis wanted to make the reader aware that they were part of an ongoing struggle and hoped to make them realize that they should continue it.

Additionally, X emphasized that the black reader was obligated to protest since it was in his blood. X uses a story of when he was at a party when he was younger, to illustrate what he thought was the value and power of his heritage. He wrote that he did not know how to dance at the party, yet that "it didn't take long to loosen up the dancing instincts in my African heritage."[217] X claims that the black reader's heritage is strong and inescapable. In line with this idea of shared blood, X wrote much about Pan-Africanism, the idea of a connection between all people of African descent. This "discovery of Africa as a source for race pride" is another theme that is named by Brown as an African-American literary tradition.[218] It is a theme that later appeared in X's autobiography, since he was first made aware of it by his brother, Reginald, when X was in prison. "You don't even know, the white devil has hidden it from you, that you are of a race of people of ancient civilizations […] You have been a victim of the evil of the devil white man ever since he murdered and raped and stole you from your native land in the seeds of your forefathers."[219] Following his brother's speech, X continued to write about a native land, trying to spark an awareness with his readers about this international connection, because it could make them aware of the historical bond between blacks everywhere:

> "The American Negro has no conception of the hundreds of millions of other non-whites' concern for him: he has no connection of their feeling of brotherhood for and with him. […] Physically we Afro-Americans might remain in America, fighting for our Constitutional rights, but […] philosophically and culturally we […] badly need […] to "return" to Africa –

[214] Ibid., 105.
[215] Ibid., xxi.
[216] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, ix.
[217] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 59.
[218] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[219] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 164.

> and to develop a working *unity* in the framework of Pan-Africanism." [220]

X asked his reader: "[C]an you imagine what can happen, what would certainly happen, if all of these African-heritage peoples ever realize their blood bonds, if they ever realize they all have a common goal – if they ever *unite?"*[221] Here, X put emphasis on the idea of blood bonds and the common goal that all people of African descend shared according to him: freedom from oppression. For the reader, the possibility of so many people uniting made it easier to believe that a strong unity could be created and that shared goals could be achieved.

### *2.1.3. A Shared Enemy: Careless Cops*

> "[D]riven away by the Klan, the police, the pigs, the press, the business establishment, and all other racists."[222] – **James Forman**

Creating a sense of urgency in the fight for equal race rights was at the root of mobilizing the reader. In this line of thought, Forman wrote that from "[g]rowing up in a racist society, you become accustomed to a certain way of life."[223] According to him, "part of the lack of group identification rested in the belief that there was no need for it." [224] Forman wrote that many of 'his people' believed that eventually God in heaven would have justice done, so why act before that? Therefore, urgency was inflamed by stories of the black communities' enemy,' who was presented in the shape of the policeman, the judge, the white neighbor, the jailer, the press. The writers attempted to make the reader aware of the growing importance of a strong, unified counter movement through examples of horrifying things that were done to them by these actors, and to the people they knew.

For example, following the assassinations of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by the FBI in 1969, their fellow BPP members organized tours to show the people in the community where the two men had been killed, so that the community could bear witness to the horrifying acts that had taken place on account of the American FBI. Such stories can be linked to stories of brutalities in slave narratives as examples of 'bearing witness'. Perpetrators who did not receive judgment of their crimes in white society were exposed in slave narratives. X, Davis, and Forman as well shared such stories of FBI and police brutalities in their autobiographies, which, according to Perkins, are similar acts of bearing witness.[225] The writers' awareness of this technique for mobilization becomes clear through a quote from Forman in his autobiography:

[220] Ibid., 352–357. Emphasis added.
[221] Ibid., 370.
[222] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 203.
[223] Ibid., 59.
[224] Ibid., 85.
[225] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 76.

"[H]opefully the witnessing of terror and police brutality would help create a mass consciousness that would eventually lead to more militancy and action for revolution on the part of the black people."[226] Additionally, Perkins gives the example of how Davis described her trial in her life narrative, saying that through recreating it, she showed where the U.S. justice system went wrong.[227] "[H]er trial experiences [...] shed light on the difficulty for Black people, particularly political prisoners, of securing a hearing that even approximates justice."[228] The life narratives filled the voids that emerged because of State neglect, and attempted to let justice prevail as yet.

For the autobiographers, the police were a very clear enemy of the black community, with only some exceptions. Several stories that are told to serve as 'awareness raisers' focused on the passive attitude of policemen at times when the authors needed help. In this manner, Forman described how, whilst working a night shift at a train station when he was younger, his superintendent held a gun up to his head. Afterwards, Forman told two police officers his story but they refused to speak with the superintendent. Forman then wrote: "See, that's why we hate you cops. […] When you want the cops to do something for you, they can't do it."[229] Here, he took his story as an example of black suppression and police negligence. To strengthen his case, he used profane language. "But somehow, somewhere, we had to deal with the police, pigs and hogs that they are."[230]

Forman continued to tell his reader about the unfairness and carelessness of the police. He wrote that he "remembered the cops who stopped us as youngsters in Chicago and searched us for nothing. I remembered the cops in Chicago who stood by silently as I went to them for help once."[231] It is a desperation that was as well emphasized by X, when he shared what he called his "earliest vivid memory" of a night in 1929. As a young boy, he saw that his house was lit on fire and "the white police and fireman came and stood around watching as the house burned down to the ground."[232] These are all examples with which the authors wanted to convince the reader that the police would not help them even in the worst cases. Such examples of police neglect were used to urge the readers to take matters into their own hands.

X used strong language in demonizing his enemies. His major anger towards whites was explained by the fact that whites had victimized both his parents. He wrote that whites murdered his father, and that they put his mother away in a mental institution. Franz Fanon explains his

[226] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 149.
[227] Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism*, 77.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 52.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid., 3.
[232] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 3.

violent rhetoric by saying that "violence becomes itself an expression of being human," and that it can be seen as "the prerequisite for obtaining respect as human beings."[233]

Additionally, violence is justified by real life examples of the authors that were familiar to the reader and with which the reader identified. Such identifiable incidents could have been the story of Mrs. Williams, written down by Forman. This is an example of when, according to Schaffer and Smith, "[a]ctivists enlist stories from victims as a way of alerting a broader public to situations of human rights violations. They package stories to attract readerships. The kinds of stories they choose – sensationalized, sentimentalized, charged with an effect- target readers in anticipation that they will identify with, contribute to and become advocates for the cause."[234] Forman's selected anecdotes functioned as tools to recruit the reader.

Forman quoted Mrs. Williams, who as well recalled a trip to the pool when whites rudely sent her away. "The way I feel now, all of the law enforcement officers are my enemies. All of the white people who would deny me my rights are my enemy. And to kill them would be no more to me than killing a snake who was threatening to bite me."[235] And in the same manner, Forman shares his own anecdote:

> "I will always remember the Los Angeles police, a bunch of filthy white pigs who put me in jail an beat the shit out of me. […] They are guilty of cruel and inhuman treatment, physical and mental torture. […] If I had my way […] I would personally put my finger on the trigger and with all the love for humanity that surges within me end the lives of those inhuman beings who make onstrous fun and games with the lives of young black people."[236]

With such examples, the writers impose "frames on stories that are designed to capture the interest, empathy, and political responsiveness of readers elsewhere."[237] Through these stories of discrimination and abuse, the step towards violent activism becomes smaller for the reader who identifies with the situation.

*The puppeteer*

Different from Davis and Forman, who made distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' white people, in most of X's life narrative he dismissed all whites as "devils."[238] This point of view is evident in the first part of the book, when he was still with the NOI. Later on, X became more nuanced on

[233] Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*, 148.
[234] Schaffer and Smith, "Conjunctions," 27.
[235] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 182.
[236] Ibid., 79.
[237] Schaffer and Smith, "Conjunctions," 14.
[238] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 165.

the matter. Davis introduced a problem that might come up with the oversimplified viewing of all white people as the enemy:

> "Because the masses of white people harbor racist attitudes, our people tended to see *them* as the villains and not the institutionalized forms of racism, which, though definitely reinforced by prejudiced attitudes, serve, fundamentally, only the interests of the rulers. When white people are indiscriminatingly viewed as the enemy, it is virtually impossible to develop a political solution."[239]

Here, Davis wanted the reader to understand that the bigger enemy was found in the shape of institutions, such as the courthouse, the police department, and the government.

All three writers eventually supported this idea of institutionalized racism. In the second part of his autobiography, X made distinctions between good and bad whites and blamed the white man's social system for the black man's misfortune. Even more, according to Mostern, in this second part of X's life narrative "white society" was no longer understood as racial, but as national: white society became 'America.' For instance, in a speech that is printed in his life narrative, X directly aimed his anger towards the whole country: "I came here to tell the truth – and if the truth condemns America, then she stands condemned!"[240] And he said "it isn't the American white man who is a racist, but it's the American political, economic, and social atmosphere that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man, […] the white man is not inherently evil, but America's racist society influences him to act evilly."[241]

X's change of heart was metaphorically described when he wrote not to "strike at the puppet, but strike at the puppeteer."[242] America was thus the new enemy who held the strings, and Mostern claims such language "contributes to the systemic critique rather than the critique of individual whites."[243] In other words, after reading these parts in the autobiographies, the reader was inclined to direct his hatred against the system as well, instead of to individuals.

In blaming institutionalized racism for his hardship, X even went as far as condemning the system for his hustling days, instead of him feeling responsible. Mostern says X expressed a "very specific sort of regret" when talking about his hustling time. "All of us – who might have probed pace, or cured cancer, or built industries- were, instead, black victims of the white man's social system."[244] According to Mostern, this shows that X believed he, and the other hustlers, could have become better, more successful people with proper jobs, in "another kind of

[239] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 150.
[240] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 362.
[241] Ibid., 378–379.
[242] Ibid., 424.
[243] Mostern, *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*, 157.
[244] Ibid., 145.

society."[245] X hereby demonized the system, and does not blame himself, or his fellow hustlers. For the reader, it was yet another example of how the state victimized the black man.

This demonization is further illustrated when X wrote about his mother, who was institutionalized by the State for insanity. According to Mostern, X is "unambiguous that […] the racist white state destroyed Louise Little."[246] X condemned all welfare people who to him were a symbol for collective white crimes. He had experienced how his family was separated, thus the welfare people were seen as the perpetrators of destroying families, who "plant seeds of division in 'our minds.'"[247] It is an autobiographical story that worked as a metaphor for the reader, who read that whites were aiming to divide blacks amongst themselves.

X's change of heart after his Mecca trip was important for his white readers, who were still more likely to believe that he was 'a white man hater' and that they were not whom he was addressing when he asked his readers for support. After his travels to Mecca, X returned to tell the press and everyone who wanted to hear it that:

> "In the past, yes, I have made sweeping indictments of all white people. I never will be guilty of that again – as I know now that some white people are truly sincere, that some truly are capable of being brotherly toward a black man. […] Yes I have been convinced that some American whites do want to help cure the rampant racism which is on the path to destroying this country!"[248]

Throughout the rest of the book, X tried to convince especially the white reader of his new standpoint and of the white man's responsibility to protest against racism. "[B]oth races, as human beings, had the obligation, the responsibility, of helping to correct America's human problem. The well-meaning white people […] had to combat, actively and directly, the racism in other white people."[249]

In Forman's and Davis' life narratives, their anger is specifically aimed at certain U.S. institutions. For instance, Forman's life narrative holds an example of the demonization of the American Armed Force. When he looked back on his time working there, Forman "began to see the Armed Force […] as a dehumanizing machine which destroys thought and creativity in order to preserve the economic system and the political myths of the United States. I decided we should

[245] Ibid., 146.
[246] Ibid., 149.
[247] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 17.
[248] Ibid., 369.
[249] Ibid., 383.

[…] save most of our energy for an organized struggle."[250] In other words: don't fight with the Armed Force, but fight for your rights.

Davis directed her anger at the American jail system. She wrote that she spent some time in a prison in NY, where she met other inmates. Davis called one of the young inmates "the most tragic of them all," and did not agree with the treatment of the girl by the guards. She said that the only officer that treated her nicely "was rarely there, and she was only one person *poised against an entire system* in which there was nothing to encourage concern for a prisoner who was being slowly, hopelessly engulfed by her desperation."[251] Davis urged the reader that one guard that went against the oppressive jail system was not enough, and that something needed to change. Furthermore, Davis told the reader to not have any mercy with those who worked in prisons. She was continuously transferred in jail without an explanation from the guards and she "realized that it was futile to try to understand the perverted logic of jailers."[252]

The autobiographers underline the rate of suppressive acts against them through repeatedly claiming that they saw it coming. This victimization is a reoccurring subject in political autobiography. "There was the white man and then there was *us*; he dehumanized us night and day,*"* Forman wrote.*[253]* To illustrate this 'inevitability,' he told the story of the first time he heard the word 'nigger.' As a young boy he went to a drugstore for a drink, and is told by the owner to have his coke in the back of the store, because he is a 'nigger'. After describing this experience, Forman emphasized that such stories were not unusual. "You could almost call it a cliché of the black experience, so often has it happened to our children in one form or another."[254] Forman universalized his story, drawing attention to the fact that it was no incident and that something must be done.

Furthermore, X wrote that upon the return of his travels to Mecca he "saw the crowd of fifty reporters and photographers, [and] honestly wondered what celebrity I had been on the plane with. But I was the 'villain' they had come to meet." With ironic quotation marks X underlined how he felt these people were preconceived in their thoughts about him. Later in the book he wrote that the media asked him "scapegoat-seeking questions."[255] In the same way, Davis emphasized her being mistreated by the courthouse by using the words 'exploit' and 'once more.' "No one needed to tell me that they would exploit the fact that my guns had been used in Marin in order to strike out at me once more."[256] Davis indicated that she was not the slightest bit surprised by her mistreatment, and that the reader should not trust the court system. She talks about 'manipulation' by the institution. The day after she was taken to prison, she wrote:

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[250] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 65.
[251] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 36. Emphasis added.
[252] Ibid., 40.
[253] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 104.
[254] Ibid., 20.
[255] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 368.
[256] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 6.

> "Knowing that my name was now familiar to millions of people, I felt overwhelmed. Yet I knew that all this publicity was not really aimed at me as an individual. Using me as an example, they wanted to discredit the Black Liberation Movement, the Left in general and obviously also the Communist Party. I was only the occasion for their manipulations."[257]

On the grounds of all that had been done to them, the writers urged the reader to demand change and fight for their rights under the constitution of the U.S. The autobiographers used terms such as "inhuman treatment" and "I am a citizen" and Forman sarcastically stated that he "knew that [the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence] did not apply to us, even when they were written, but I kept talking about my rights under the Constitution."[258] It is an example of a black writer who not only called for humane treatment, but also for his rights within his U.S. Citizenship, which is often done within the black literary tradition. In their narratives, slaves demanded agency and human treatment. For instance, former slave and author Frederick Douglass called upon his human rights in his life narrative by quoting poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier:

> What, ho! - our countrymen in chains!
> The whip on *woman's* shrinking flesh!
> Our soil yet reddening with the stains,
> Caught from her scourging, warm and fresh!
> What! Mothers from their children riven!
> What! God's own image bought and sold!
> AMERICANS to market driven,
> And barter'd as the brute for gold![259]

Douglass here emphasized his citizenship: "*Our* countrymen in chains" and "*our* soil", and capitalized the word 'Americans' to emphasize the cruelty against the country's own citizens. He attempted to make the white reader realize the insanity of slavery. In this same manner, Forman called directly upon the reader when he wrote:

> "[W]e got to know [the white man's] history and we

[257] Ibid., 25.
[258] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 7.
[259] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, 6th ed. (London: H.G. Collins, 1851), 233.

> certainly got to know ours. Tell him about his revolution 'cause he was being mistreated. We got a right to ours too. Tell him about his speeches for liberty and death. We can make ours too. Tell him about his documents talking about liberty and equality for all. Hell, we in the all, too, so shape up, baby."[260]

With this speech, Forman emphasized that black and white people should have the same rights, since they lived under the same constitution. He argued that the white man had fought for his rights in the U.S., and that blacks were doing exactly the same. He ironically pointed to the constitution, which claimed that liberty and equality supposedly was for 'all', yet that blacks were excluded. "Hell, we in the all, too," meant: we are part of this country too.

### *2.2. Political Efficacy*

"She has an endless faith in people and their power to change their status in life." [261] – **James Forman about Ella Baker.**

Hope is important in action mobilization, since "protest is staged by hopeful, not hopeless people."[262] People have to really believe that their actions in a protest movement can bring about social change, in order for them to start protesting at all. "There is little if any obligation to participate in a hopeless cause," argues professor of Political Science Dennis Chong. This sense of potency is called political efficacy: "the feeling that political actions can have an impact on the political process."[263] Or, in the words of Chong:

> "Members of a group […] are enthusiastic about contributing to collective action or are pressured to do so, only when such collective action has a realistic opportunity to achieve the desired public good. When collective action is widely regarded as futile, or as ineffective symbolic protest at best this [motivation] vanishes."[264]

Scholars Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg agree: "People must perceive the political context as receptive to the claims made by their group."[265] This was very literally expressed in Forman's life

[260] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 108.
[261] Ibid., 215.
[262] Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest*, 211.
[263] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 3.
[264] Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 11.
[265] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 3.

narrative, when he wrote that "[p]eople must be convinced that certain moves will be fruitful."[266] Thus, X, Davis, and Forman attempted to assure the reader that their help was much needed and valuable, by giving examples of previous protest successes, by trying to spark a sense of agency with the reader, and through the shaming of "foolish blacks."

### *2.2.1 Previous Successes as Proof*

Throughout his autobiography, Forman showed his awareness of the value of what he called "proof" of the accomplishments of the movement. "I felt sure in my jail cell in Albany that black people throughout the United States would read and hear about the demonstrations and be deeply affected by this proof that as a people we could come together and forge a unity against our oppressors."[267] He quoted the well-respected activist Frederick Douglass to strengthen his point, which is another good example of the use of "negro heroes" in black writings.[268] Douglass was the obvious name to mention for Forman in his autobiography, since he is the most famous black abolitionist in African-American history and because he understood the importance of motivating his fellow black Americans. In 1845 Douglass mobilized his audience through, among other things, his famous autobiography and he is said to have "made a career of agitating the American conscience."[269]Douglass created consciousness with potential activists, and Forman recognized this: "Frederick Douglass said that no people deserved their rights if they weren't willing to agitate for them. So *we got to make people see that they can fight for their rights."*[270] And making the successes of his movement visible to the public happened to be something Forman was very good at.

Julian Bond dubbed Forman a "master propagandist" in his autobiography, a title that suited him well since Forman was very much aware of when to use which information to motivate his readers.[271] He for instance wrote that he "felt sure […] that black people throughout the United States would read and hear about the demonstrations and be deeply affected by this proof that as a people we could come together and forge a unity against our oppressors."[272] Forman deliberately named several successful events from the Civil Rights Movement to create a positive feeling of progress with the reader. In this way, he constructed the indispensible hopefulness needed for mobilization. "The boycott and Little Rock led me to think that if nonviolent confrontation could *heighten consciousness* and disrupt the society, then this was a method I should investigate […] If

[266] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 104.
[267] Ibid., 255.
[268] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[269] Roy E. Finkenbine, "Frederick Douglass," *American National Biography Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed December 17, 2015, http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-00186.html;
[270] Rogers, "People All over the World Are Supporting You," 109. Emphasis added.
[271] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, xii.
[272] Ibid., 255.

the struggles, the beatings, the jailings would *rile up our people* to action, then they would be worth it."[273]

Here, Forman showed his awareness of how he could use previous victories, such as the Montgomery bus boycott and protests at Little Rock High School for the benefit of mobilization. It was his task with SNCC to find out how he could draw the most attention to such successful protests. Forman even called it "a method" to find out how "the act […] got the widest publicity and had the broadest public appeal."[274] He understood that persevering a certain positive morale caused by successful protests was fundamental for a movement. "The Montgomery bus boycott and now Little Rock impressed me; I had to admire the cultural effects of the boycott in changing the mass psychology of black people, showing them that we could do things as a group."[275] Forman used progressive words such as 'activated,' 'maintaining a moment,' and 'sparked' in his autobiography and speaks of a 'momentum' that could be 'propelled forward:'

> "That same sense of injustice which I as well as others felt as individuals had to be *activated* on a mass scale. We needed a mass movement that would aggressively confront racism if we were ever to shake the lethargy of our people and to *maintain the moment* that had been *sparked* by the Montgomery bus boycott and Little Rock. Having lived in many parts of the US, I knew many brothers and sisters would soon rise up if that *momentum* could be *propelled forward*."[276]

In the same way, Davis gave examples of successful protests. She talked of the power that she and her fellow inmates gained through protesting together. One night, they stood up for a fellow inmate in need of medical care. "We decided that we would refuse to lock in unless she received medical attention immediately. Only after we took this stand did a doctor come to examine her and take her to the hospital."[277] Additionally, Davis wrote that she went into hunger strike to get out of solitary, and her fellow inmates joined her. Again, this strike was successful. "A real togetherness was developing. I was anxious to strengthen this sense of community."[278] One day, Davis and her fellow prisoners began shouting in protest and a guard tried to shut it down. "The more militant we became, the less confident she became, and finally she left the corridor in defeat."[279] These were all examples of fruitful acts of protest. With it, Davis proved

[273] Ibid., 105. Emphasis added.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid., 104. Emphasis added.
[277] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 56.
[278] Ibid., 63.
[279] Ibid., 66.

that protesting worked, even in the radical, suppressive circumstances of jail, when most of one's rights are taken away.

X illustrated successful protest in a similar way. "What Harlem wanted from Malcolm and the Muslims was proof that they were as big and bad as they claimed to be," Peter Louis Goldman says in his biography of Malcolm X.[280] It was an introduction to the story of the 'Muslim brother' Hinton Johnson, who in 1957 was beaten up by the police after an argument with them. What followed was a march against the police, by X and other black Muslims. No violence occurred, but the men and women stared down the police until they offered to take the wounded Johnson to the hospital. It proved Harlem that X and his movement did in fact have power, and he used this event in his autobiography, to convince his readership. "Hundreds of Harlem Negroes had seen, and hundreds of thousands of them had later heard how we had shown that almost anything could be accomplished by black men who would face the white man without fear. All of Harlem had seen how from then on, the police gave Muslims respect."[281]

*Creating confidence*

Together with the writers' claim that many African Americans did not believe they were able to unify, the authors also noticed feelings of resignation that stood in the way of protest. Klandermans and Van Stekelenburg argue that people who are least active "are those who combine political cynicism with the feeling that they are treated fairly."[282] Thus, the autobiographers needed to create a sense of unfair treatment and an urge to change the situation. This is illustrated in an anecdote in the life narrative of Davis. At her elementary school, Davis was told she had to work extra hard to achieve her goals. "It often struck me they were speaking of these obstacles as if they would always be there, part of the natural order of things, rather than the product of a system of racism, which we could eventually overturn."[283] Here, she urged the readers to stand up against suppression.

Furthermore, X shared his incomprehension and frustration with African Americans who were not motivated to protest because they believed they would only get redemption in heaven. "Christianity had made black men fuzzy, nebulous, confused in their thinking. It had taught the black man to think if he had no shoes, and was hungry, 'we gonna get shoes and milk and honey and fish fries in Heaven.'"[284] X wrote that he thought African Americans were very poorly motivated: "I must be honest. Negroes – African Americans – showed no inclination to rush to the United Nations and demand justice for themselves here in America. I really had known in advance

[280] Peter Louis Goldman, *The Death and Life of Malcolm X* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 55.
[281] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 316.
[282] Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, "The Social Psychology of Protest," 3.
[283] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 92.
[284] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 320.

that they wouldn't."[285] Following this idea, Forman and Davis, together with X, attempted to explain to the reader why it was important to try to unite *then*, and why they *were* in fact capable of forming a strong unity.

X expressed his belief that his fellow African Americans could become motivated, that "black nationalist political, economic and social philosophies had the ability to instill within black men the racial dignity, the incentive, and the confidence that the black race needs today to get up off its knees, and to get on its feet, and get rid of its scars, and to take a stand for itself." [286] He for instance focused his attention on the reader who was insecure of his or her capability of achieving change as a result of a lack of resources. "The black man doesn't have the economic strength – and it will take time for him to build it. But right now the American black man has the political strength and power to change his destiny overnight."[287] X illustrated that words were more important than money, creating more potential protesters.

Also, Forman let the reader feel as if everyone and anyone could make a change. He wrote that as a boy, he and his peers could not believe that he was put on the honor roll in high school. "Everyone there knew me as the stud who had a 1934 black Plymouth with red wheels. […] I couldn't have made the honor roll. There must be some mistake."[288] With this example, Forman showed that everyone could be successful. Whether the reader had been dealing drugs on the streets or grew up in a suburb, he had the possibility and the intelligence to change things for the better, and Forman was living proof.

Besides convincing readers they could unite and achieve success, X and Forman also expressed how hard it sometimes felt for them to protest, since there was no 'clear victory' in sight. This is part of a tactic of understanding and motivation. For instance, X expressed his compassion with the uncertainty many people felt when protesting. "Since the Civil war's 'freedom' the black man has gone down so many *fruitless* paths. His leaders, very largely had failed him. The religion of Christianity had failed him. The black man was scarred, he was cautious, he was apprehensive."[289] Both authors acknowledge the challenge of protesting, yet they tell the reader not to give up. Haley quoted X in the epilogue of the book: "I remember his making a great point of how he learned what had been a cardinal awareness of his ever since: '[I]t's the hinge that squeaks that gets the grease.'"[290] X additionally wrote: "[C]hildren have a lesson adults should learn, to not be ashamed of failing, but to get up and try again."[291] In other words, X truly believed and thus communicated to his readership that only those who would stand up and ask for

[285] Ibid., 371.
[286] Ibid., 382.
[287] Ibid., 322.
[288] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 46.
[289] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 372. Emphasis added.
[290] Ibid., 398.
[291] Ibid., 418.

their rights would be rewarded, and those with perseverance eventually prevailed, no matter how difficult the struggle.

Similarly, Forman wrote that he "often wished that our struggle could somehow be less agonized, less emotionally complex for the individual participant, with more promise of clear victory than we have seen after four hundred years of sacrifice and death. But […] I could only feel inspired by that taste of wholeness - and eagerly impatient to work toward achieving it in some form."[292] Here, Forman emphasized the importance of patience and perseverance. He went on with his attempts to convince the reader that they could make a change, as little as it might have looked:

> "The historical process spirals its way upward, with zigzag's, deviations, downwards dips, *but always inclining upward.* It is like the consciousness of a people who are in revolutionary ferment, for no people or group of individuals or a single person is born with an intense commitment to the revolutionary process. They are all activated and pushed by forces of history and by individual actors on the life stage."[293]

Forman told the readers to have trust, that it is all right to sometimes feel demotivated, but then also wrote of the importance of *motivating* these actors again. Later in the book, he used a metaphor. "It was a ripple on the waters of segregation, disturbing and agitating, one of the many ripples, and I was not sure where they would lead, but they were important ripples."[294] He told his reader audience that the uncertainty of where one's actions might lead, should not hold an activist back to try, for all protest, big or small, was of importance in the overall struggle for justice. These examples are all in line with the idea that hope is key in mobilization.

### *2.2.2. Agency*

Hope has much to do with agency, which Smith and Watson describe as "human beings as agents of or actors in their own lives rather than passive subjects of social structures or unconscious transmitters of cultural scripts and models of identity."[295] Only when a person believes he or she can achieve something, he becomes an active subject in social structure. The meaning of the term is also clear in the poem by William Ernest Henley, cited in Forman's life narrative: "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."[296] X, Davis, and Forman felt that rather than

[292] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 75.
[293] Ibid., 215. Emphasis added.
[294] Ibid., 259.
[295] Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2010, 54.
[296] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 54.

passively accept what white society decided for African Americans, they should protest and be active. It was about taking control of their lives, perhaps more so than the outcome.

This feeling of agency was often lacking because African Americans were told to be inhuman, according to film director Ossie Davis, who wrote the epilogue to X's autobiography. "White folks do not need anybody to remind them that they are men. We do!"[297] He quoted X when he wrote to "get up off your knees and fight your own battles. That's the way to win back your self-respect."[298] Ossie Davis wrote that he found it "impossible to remain defensive and apologetic about being a Negro in [X's] presence. He wouldn't let you. And you always left his presence with the sneaky suspicion that maybe, after all, you *were* a man!"[299] Especially in the Black Power movement, men were critically judged on their manhood and potency.[300] As an activist, you had to "man up" to your potential and propagate strength. Ossie Davis wrote that "[X] also knew that every Negro […] who chose […] to swallow his pit and go on smiling, was an Uncle Tom and a traitor, without balls or guts, or any other commonly accepted aspects of manhood!"[301] Staying a passive bystander, meant that you were not a real man.

Demands for humanization and having control and ownership of one's choices are very obviously present in the analyzed life narratives, and they are central to the African-American literary tradition. Slavery had deprived African Americans of their freedom and human rights, and "[n]ineteenth century literature records a continuity of the tradition as its black authors asserted that blacks were human beings entitled to social justices," argues professor of English Mary Alice Vereen.[302] She gives the example of the life narrative of Frederick Douglass. "The idea of black inferiority never enters into the work. Douglass affirms the tradition of human dignity and self respect imbedded in the black race."[303] The autobiographers X, Davis, and Forman attempted to imprint this sense of self-respect in the mind of their readers as well.

Forman introduced his early sense of agency through an anecdote about him going to a Catholic school. "My mother allowed me to go to this school, I think, mainly because I wanted to do it. She usually took the position that my life was mine and I should make my own decisions."[304] And in another anecdote, Forman describes how he, his mother and aunt were refused service at a diner. He afterwards told his mother: "We can't always run, we have to stand up to these situations. We have to force the issue, because if we don't force it now, it will take that much longer."[305] Later on, he used the 'white men's' restroom at the gas station of this diner instead of the one reserved for black men. The attendant got angry, and this worried Forman's

[297] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 464.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid., 465.
[300] Winston Napier, *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 412.
[301] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 465.
[302] Mary Vereen, "Images in the Black Literary Tradition," *ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library*, August 1, 1975, 93, http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations/1368.
[303] Ibid., 42.
[304] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 22.
[305] Ibid., 94.

mother and aunt. Forman told them: "You just can't let people stick you in a hole because they think you're not human. Hell, I'm a man, I can't be accepting –always accepting."[306] Forman here expressed his selfhood and manhood, and urges the reader to do the same by protesting.

Additionally, besides using anecdotes from his youth for the goal of gaining trust from the reader, X wrote childhood stories to share the value of self-respect:

> "I learned early that crying out in protest could accomplish things. […] I would cry out and make a fuss until I got what I wanted. […] I would think to myself that Wilfred [my brother] for being so nice and quiet often stayed hungry. So early in life, I had learned that if you want something, you had better make some noise."[307]

Staying hungry in this example meant not eating anything, but X referred to staying hungry for freedom as well. The reader is pushed to take control of his own life, by speaking up and demanding respect.

Forman also used a story of him fighting back his stepfather. "There was going to be a fight in our house that night if he touched me with a belt or with his hands." His father hit him with his belt en Forman stroke back. "What right does he have to think he can whip me? […] The fight was over. The issue was closed, and not mentioned the next day or the next."[308] Forman here suggests that he has won his father's respect by hitting back; a tactic he thus propagates.

### *2.2.3 Shaming*

The condemning of inaction and staying a "passive subject" is a clear theme in all three autobiographies. As Forman wrote: "Conscious submission to racism seemed to me worse than death. It killed a person's spirit. It took a little from him each time he knew he should not submit- and did."[309] Instead of accepting passive bystanders, the authors tried to enforce on the readers a feeling of obligation to become active and a feeling of shame if they did not.

Davis explained the moment when she decided to become active in protest. She saw children in her pre-school lunch breaks that watched as others ate, for they did not have money to buy lunch. "For a long time, I thought about those who ate and those who watched. Finally I decided to do something about it. […] It seemed to me that if there were hungry children, something was wrong and if I did nothing about it, it would be wrong too."[310] Here, Davis made the reader aware of the fact that it was wrong to stay passive.

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[306] Ibid., 100.
[307] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 8.
[308] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 43–45.
[309] Ibid., 100.
[310] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 88.

Another example is when she wrote of a visit of the Board of Education to her elementary school. When a teacher was called by his first name by one of the members of the board, something blacks experienced more often in formal settings, he replied by telling them his last name, "in case you have forgotten."[311] This teacher was then fired, and Davis wrote that she was "appalled by the silence that reigned among the Black community following this act. It probably stemmed from a collective sense of guilt that his defiance was the exception and not the norm."[312] Davis tried to teach her readers that she believed passiveness was unacceptable in such situations. "Nothing in the world made me angrier than inaction, than silence. The refusal or inability to do something, say something when a thing needed doing or saying, was unbearable. The watchers, the head shakers, the back turners made my skin prickle."[313]

Clearly, no reader wanted to be a watcher, a head shaker or a back turner, and this shaming is in line with the African-American tradition that Turner described, within the theme of the "satirical portrayals of foolish blacks."[314] Slaves used to 'dumb down' as a survival strategy, but this passiveness, although it was then also sometimes considered as agency, was no longer acceptable at this time. Davis illustrated that she practiced what she preached, by sharing a childhood story in which she separated two fighting dogs. "I couldn't stand it any longer; rushed in and tried to pull the dogs apart. It wasn't until after the screaming adults had dragged me away that I thought about the danger. But then it didn't matter; the fight had been stopped."[315] Even though fighting of the dogs was dangerous, doing nothing was deemed worse.

X also used shaming and "the satiric portrayal of foolish blacks" to convince the reader of what *not* to do or who *not* to be. He writes about the town of Lansing, where his father used to preach in church: "I don't know a town with a higher percentage of complacent and misguided so-called 'middle-class' negroes – the typical status-symbol-oriented, integration-seeking type of Negroes."[316] And X continued to shame throughout the book:

> "But it has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren't considered *of* them. Even though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me.* This is the sort of kindly condescension which I try to clarify today, to these integration-hungry Negroes, about their 'liberal' white

[311] Ibid., 94.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[315] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 94.
[316] Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 5.

> friends, these so-called 'good white people'- most of them anyway."[317]

X had no respect at that time for black people who befriended white people and warns the reader that it might look like the white man accepted them as equals, but that they were in fact not considered as such.

Furthermore, X considered his move to Boston to stay with his half-sister Ella as pivotal. "If I hadn't, I'd probably still be a brainwashed black Christian."[318] He continued: "I don't care how nice one is to you; the thing you must always remember is that almost never does he really see you as he sees himself, as he sees his own kind. He may stand with you through thin, but not thick […] as fixed in him as his bone structure is his sometimes subconscious conviction that he's better than anybody black."[319] With this example, X convinces the reader that he should not be content with anything less than equal treatment.

*Conclusion*

In sum, readers of political autobiographies are moved to protest only when they believe in the efficacy of the demonstrations. Autobiographers Malcolm X, James Forman and Angela Davis were aware of this importance of hope over despair for recruiting, and used several traditions from black literature to convince their readers of the strength of an organized, united movement, and of the reader's power to contribute to change.

A strong sense of disbelief among the black community on being able to stick together, an attitude that Forman called "self-destructive," had to be diminished first.[320] For this purpose, personal stories of the autobiographers were used to emphasize the advantages of protesting from within a movement. The readers were made aware of their African heritage and of the responsibilities that come with 'black blood.' Additionally, the authors X, Davis, and Forman used the focus on a shared enemy to create the feeling of shared grievances and unity to inflame the activist in the reader.

For successful protest, a big, organized movement was indispensible. In line with this idea, the exploration of the self versus the community was an important theme in black activist autobiography. The autobiographers let their readers know that with membership to a community comes duty and self-sacrifice. The autobiographers criticize something Forman calls "the messiah complex," with which only one leader of a movement gets most of the responsibility and attention, and thus demotivates the rest of the group members to take responsibility. [321] What is

[317] Ibid., 28.
[318] Ibid., 39–40.
[319] Ibid., 28.
[320] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 85.
[321] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 255.

clear is that the group is more important than the individual. On this ground, the reader is lured to join.

Historical figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Ella Baker were used in the life narratives as "heroic negroes" whom the reader should see as examples in their own activism. It was the reader's responsibility to carry on the struggle, the authors wrote, and they emphasized the hardships their forefathers went through.[322] Additionally, the persuasion technique of the shared enemy was used to make the reader aware of the abnormality of the oppressive situation of blacks. Whilst anger was first directed at "the white man", it was diverted to institutionalized racism. America became the new enemy, and more specifically U.S. institutions such as the jail system, the courthouse and the police. Among others, this made it more plausible for the white man to protest for equal rights. Through an emphasis on the fact that blacks and whites lived under the same constitution yet did not have the same rights, readers were urged to step up to the plate.

In the last part of this chapter, the focus is on how the writers convinced the reader that the movement's goals were realistic, and that the reader was capable of contributing to its success. The autobiographers emphasized the impact that readers could have through examples of previous protest achievements, such as the Montgomery bus boycotts and protests at Little Rock High School. They sparked a feeling of agency and self-respect, and shamed passive blacks who sought integration. By doing so, X, Davis, and Forman took away feelings of hopelessness, despair, and uselessness and called upon the patience and perseverance of their readers.

The autobiographers showed their awareness of, in this case, the value of political efficacy as a persuasive technique, for instance when they spoke of "activating on a mass scale" and "maintaining the moment."[323] Such stories serve as proof of the intentional use of persuasive techniques in political autobiographies. Writers reused personal stories, but also framed public stories, such as the Harlem protest, to their advantage. Overall, instead of the self-destructive, hopeless attitudes the writers met at first, a sense of self-respect and agency was inflamed with the black reader audience. Passiveness was no longer an option.

[322] Turner, "Introductory Remarks about the Black Literary Tradition in the United States of America," 145.
[323] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 104.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, in the late sixties and in the seventies, Black Nationalists Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and James Forman used their autobiographies to recruit new members for, among others, the NOI, SNCC, and the BPP. To achieve this, there is a clear, *intentionally created* pattern of persuasive tactics in their life narratives that is inspired by social movement psychology and the centuries-old black literary tradition.

Fundamental in this literary mobilization is the relationship between political autobiographer and writer. Without this pact, the reader will remain skeptical, which is a deathblow in social movement psychology. Stories of the author's childhood, struggles, development and political life were not written down as mere literature. Instead, these personal histories were framed to create sympathy and respect for the author and a sense of identification with the reader. In this way, the authors aimed to change minds and create awareness among their black and white reader audience.

Through well-known techniques from social movement studies, the writers' patterns of persuasion are explained and labeled. This way, the use of consensus mobilization, action mobilization, and efficacy is uncovered in the texts. Although the authors probably did not think in these specific terms, their awareness of social movement psychology is obvious. For instance, all three writers used stories of successful protests as proof to mobilize their reader, which is in correspondence with the valuable social movement psychology feature of hope.

Additionally, since the main theme in African-American literary tradition is liberation, it is not surprising that the life narratives of X, Davis, and Forman heavily borrowed from its persuasive, sermon-style rhetoric. Throughout their life narratives, traditional stories of for instance African heritage, black heroes and heroic episodes from American history were utilized for the making of new activists. These themes created feelings of belonging, duty, and self-sacrifice with the readers. Other found patterns of persuasion are the justification of the life choices of the writers, shaming the reader for not participating in protest, sparking a sense of agency with the reader, focusing on a shared enemy, and using peritexts. All proved to be indispensible means for X, Davis, and Forman in making the way into their readers' hearts and minds and for the recruiting of new members.

With this sharing of stories, the autobiographer's memory is no longer an academic challenge, since it is of great value to research what is purposely left out, what is framed or forgotten, and what is remembered and how. All of these purposely chosen and accidentally created stories say much about the writers' intentions and the recruiting means of their organization. And the reader was convinced of the author's knowledge by an emphasis on what X, Davis and Forman *did* remember in detail. This way, memory became a tool instead of a problem.

These powerful patterns of persuasion give a glimpse into the ways in which X, Davis, and Forman recruited. It clarifies underlying motivations and agendas of the activists and their

role in the organizations they were part of. Yet, this conclusion is reached by studying a selection of concepts from social movement studies and the black literary tradition. In order to get a more precise and adequate answer as to which other tactics are used in black political autobiographies for recruiting, one must dive further in social movement studies and the black literary tradition and expand the research of its concepts. Furthermore, these persuasive tactics are supported by a rich body of literary examples from the life narratives, yet there are many more personal stories from the authors that can be used as proof.

In the preface of her autobiography, Angela Davis told her readers about the important and practical role of her life narrative. She named it a "political autobiography," and wrote that her book might "serve a very important and practical purpose."[324] This thesis can as well serve as a practical manual, for the historian, on how to read the activist autobiography, and how to use political life narratives in academic work. New life narratives of civil rights activists are still written, and it would be interesting to look into new mobilizing ways in their autobiographies. To research how they "activate on mass scale," "aggressively confront racism," "maintain moment[s] sparked" by successful protest, and help rise up "brothers and sisters" by "propelling forward" a momentum of success.[325]

At this time, when African Americans in the United States are still fighting for justice and equality, it would be of great value to also research this new, powerful wave of autobiographies used as tools in the creation of a bigger movement against racism. The activist autobiography, and more specifically, the tools it holds for mobilization, ought to become more central to historical academic research. Inspired by the words of Angela Davis: "Only if this happens will I consider this project to have been worthwhile."[326]

[324] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, xvi.
[325] Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, 144.
[326] Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, xvi.

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