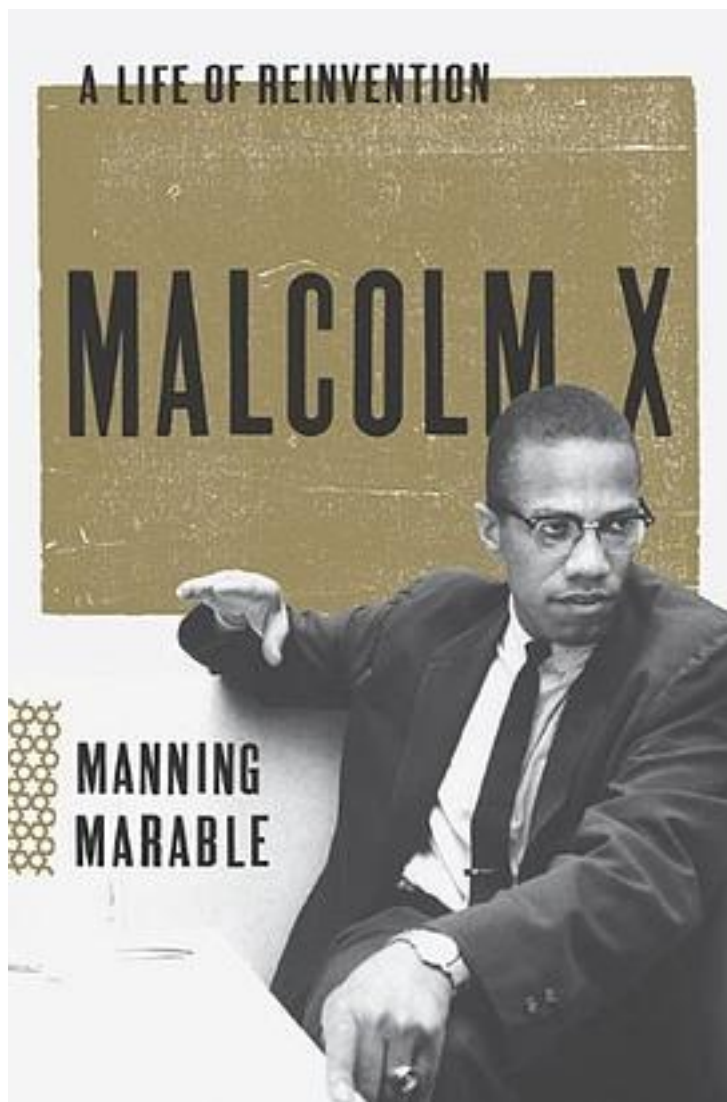# Malcolm X

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著者:Terrill, Robert E.

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Few figures haunt the collective American psyche like Malcolm X. Hoodlum, convict, convert, prophet, nationalist, and martyr, Malcolm's life spans the civil rights era like an index of America's racial anxiety. Dozens of books and hundreds of articles have analyzed his life, his work, and the various ways that his image has been appropriated by American culture. Little has been done, however, to analyze his speeches. This would be a glaring omission in the body of scholarship about almost any public figure, but is especially troubling with regard to Malcolm X. His legacy does not consist of marches preserved on newsreels, legislation passed by Congress, or holidays observed by the state; his legacy consists almost exclusively of his words. Malcolm X, like any orator, did not fashion his discourse in a vacuum but worked within and modified modes fashioned by his predecessors. Malcolm X: Inventing Radical Judgment begins by exploring the interpretive strategies presented in key texts from the history of African American protest, establishing a spectrum against which Malcolm's oratory can be assessed. Then the texts of speeches that Malcolm delivered while he was a minister for the Nation of Islam and of speeches and statements he made after he left the Nation are analyzed to discern the strategies of interpretation and judgment that he enacted and fostered in his audiences. Finally, this radical judgment, presented in and through Malcolm's public discourse, is recontextualized by using three disparate theoretical approaches. The purpose of this triangulation is not to contain the rhetoric of Malcolm X within the limitations of these vocabularies, but rather to show that the changingpotential of Malcolm's rhetoric lies, in part, in its iconoclastic refusal to be constrained by definitive boundaries.

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