

# One Day When I Was Lost

*James Baldwin*

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James Baldwin's screenplay based on Alex Haley's now classic *The Autobiography Of Malcolm X* makes immediate and terrifyingly real the stunning events that gave birth to a forceful, determined man . . . and created the atmosphere of hate that ultimately murdered him. Juxtaposing eloquence and violence, the highest of human ideals with the basest of human violence, this rare screenplay recreates Malcolm X as a symbol for his times . . . and as a flesh and blood black man who feels, loves, hates, and forgives through a life torn by pain, healed by faith, and finally ended by the bullets from a black brother's gun.

## One Day When I Was Lost Details

Date : Published February 1st 1990 by Dell (first published 1972)

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Author : James Baldwin

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## From Reader Review One Day When I Was Lost for online ebook

### Mike says

I enjoy this book for its utility but not much else: this is a breezy walk-through of Malcolm X's life judiciously preened from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, one of the most kickass books I've read. If ever anyone needed a well-paced adrenaline shot to refresh one's self of the legacy Malcolm left, by all means Baldwin's screen adaptation of the masterpiece is a sufficiently deft work. However, it is possible that Baldwin's prudent reverence for Malcolm X has led him into a tightly conservative treatment of the source material, in some ways oftentimes muting his own aesthetic to serve the greater point of Malcolm's life and message. I have no qualms with Baldwin's self-erasure insofar as it still yielded a faithful transfer of material from one medium to another, but I'm so used to Baldwin being able to imbue it with much more. This can in part also be due to being aware of his limitations in a medium unfamiliar to him.

*One Day When I Was Lost* is also probably best read as a companion to a double-threat of Baldwin's other non-fiction: he speaks at length about how challenging the experience of writing the screenplay was in (if I recall correctly) *The Devil Finds Work* and has written beautifully about Malcolm X, often being accused of echoing him in *The Fire Next Time* among other works. I felt I was shadowboxing with the script because I had spent a lot of time trying to summon its context within Baldwin's life and non-fiction. At the same time, I can't quite recommend reading this script "cold," or rather, without already being familiar with Baldwin's superior work.

In some ways my assessment of the book is caught in a bind: I felt very aware of my own attachment to Malcolm X's autobiography and my attachment to Baldwin's gifts as a writer even when writing about this screenplay itself. Yet it eluded me somehow. What arises from the source itself is a competent rendition of the autobiography. Baldwin's choices as a director - his choice to connect flashbacks or liberally use voice-overs - can often lead to some heavy-handed juxtapositions and pat metaphors, but again, this may only appear so on the page but might be effective in translation. (I'm still skeptical.) Baldwin has always had a great ear for dialogue, so there are no surprises there.

*One Day When I Was Lost* reads like a perfectly able work by someone who is perfectly able to do what he can in a medium that is out of his wheelhouse. The self-awareness does come through in his steadfast refusal to omit, or reinvent for expediency's sake. This could be due to his reverence for the subject or the awareness of his unfamiliarity with this craft. Either way, this leads to a conundrum about how well we must regard the subject material before we can assess our tolerance for taking liberties with his life for entertainment value. I like that the screenplay's not meant to entertain necessarily, but it's also no surprise that it wasn't made.

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### Gwen says

I generally don't like reading scripts. At all. If anything I go out of my way not to read them. So I found it surprising just how much I appreciated this book. Baldwin's ability to describe things helped this to read more like prose than a script. At least to me.

I couldn't help thinking about the 1992 *Malcom X* film while I was reading this. This script and that movie clearly share an origin. I like Baldwin's script better than the 92 movie. The script is more poetic, more free flowing and wonderful. The tying of past and present brings everything to life.

I appreciate this script. It hasn't really changed my mind about reading them, but this one I'll read again someday.

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### **R.K. Byers says**

good Baldwin on Malcolm.

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### **H says**

James Baldwin is very precise and delicate in what he does and it's timeless, it's breathtaking. His ethics as a storyteller really stay with me and my respect for the figure can only grow the more I read and learn about his perspective and vision. A great man celebrating the life of another great man, this script is simply the most honest of tribute.

“Malcolm’s voice over :

And if I can die, having brought any light, having helped expose the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America- all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine.

Betty’s voice over :

You are present when you are away.”

It resonates. It’s above any commentary, just so raw, heartbreakingly, respectful, impactful...

I love Spike Lee’s movie and script but I’ll say this, as a Muslim, nothing was dearer to me than the way Baldwin described Malcolm’s hajj.

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### **Billy says**

Interesting screenplay by James Baldwin of Malcolm X. It's been a while since I have seen the Spike Lee Malcolm X movie and I think it'd be cool to see how it compares. Briskly paced, the story contains three large units -- Malcolm growing up, Malcolm in prison and transformation to Muslim, Malcolm's rise in public that led to his assassination.

The images and message pique interest in the topic, but don't delve too deeply into it. I'm left wondering how much is fact and even names are largely anonymous (no last names). I have not read much James Baldwin and perhaps reading his only screenplay is not the greatest means of exposure.

That said, I enjoyed it very much and look forward to reading more of his work and about Malcolm X.

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## **Robert says**

Interesting read for those who're familiar with Baldwin's better known work and would like to get a better feel of his other writings. I read it alongside "The Devil Finds Work" where he discusses in detail working on the script and his reasons for later abandoning the project. Apparently part of the script was used by Spike Lee's in his Autobiography of Malcolm X, but it was decided that Lee's film represented Malcolm in a very different fashion than Baldwin had intended and so Baldwin's name was left out of the credits. For a screenplay that was never made into a movie, it's surprisingly rich and full of imagery, and much longer than the traditional 100-120 page length of most movie scripts.

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## **Evan says**

As a longtime fan of James Baldwin, I've had this book in my sights for a long time but didn't get down to actually read it until a little before now last year.

While I don't remember it really hitting me, I found it to be a great refresher of the life of Malcolm X whose autobiography I read so many years ago as a freshman/sophomore in high school (I think I actually read it for my 10th grade AP US History course with Dr. Paul Dickler, one of my greatest early teachers, over the summer before the start of sophomore year).

I also remember being struck by Baldwin's skill as a writer of scenes and thought it would be a great read for any aspiring playwright/screenwriter.

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## **Sean Estelle says**

This was exactly what I needed - quick, fast read because it's in screenplay format, with all the fire of Baldwin's writing and Malcolm X's life.

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## **Salvatore says**

I should watch Spike Lee's film on Malcolm X. Though here, I thought that Terrence Malick (or someone with his sensibility, since Baldwin's film requests seem to echo Malick's) could direct this, and you might get a decent though sprawling film. It does seem like Baldwin didn't want to cut away any of the source material, which is fascinating nonetheless. Some sturdy dialogues but there's a lot to sift through.

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## **Jonah Smartlett says**

"You are present when you are away." -Betty Shabazz

Baldwin's screenplay- if only it had come to be!

Brief notes- characterization is wonderful and Baldwin's love for Malcolm shines through.

It's impossible to read without imagining the screenplay in comparison to Spike Lee's film. Lee's was great

and Baldwin's reads like an equal- perhaps it's better quality is continually showing what would be the viewer how Malcolm's past relationships- with mother and murdered father, fallen black girlfriend and white lover, loyal Shorty, aging Archie, and so forth- always influenced his own personal movement.

The dialogue is especially powerful during the scenes of Malcolm answering the questions of reporters and the time spent in pilgrimage.

The short version- unique for Baldwin and a great read.

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### **Michael Ward says**

It's a shame this screenplay was not turned into a film. James Baldwin clearly understands cinema and writes for the screen so well. I don't know who was in talks to direct this but it'd definitely have to be a top tier director. These so much going on here that many would lose the groundedness of the scenes

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