Malcolm X

Digital Media in a New Age of Learning and Research

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In spring 2001, the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) launched the Malcolm X Project (MXP) to research, document, and teach Malcolm X's life and historical legacy. The keystone of the project is Manning Marable's research for the definitive scholarly biography of Malcolm X, but from its inception, the MXP has sought to combine traditional academic research with innovative pedagogical approaches. Building on a foundation developed with the construction of the multimedia version of W. E. B. Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* (http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/dubois/), the Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning (CCNMTL) together with IRAAS and the Center for Contemporary Black History (CCBH) have created a Multimedia Study Environment (MSE) version of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (MXMSE). This project serves two purposes: it is a teaching and learning resource for students and instructors of African-American history, and a tool for scholars in the organization, examination, and preservation of primary sources and commentary. This essay focuses primarily on the MXMSE as a pedagogical innovation in its capacity to support both introductory-level students of Malcolm X and more advanced student research at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

As the most popular and accessible primary text on Malcolm X, the *Autobiography* has been both an aid and an impediment to students of Malcolm X. On the one hand, Malcolm X's autobiography represents a personal account of his life story as told to Alex Haley. On the other hand, it fails to reconcile the inconsistencies, errors of fact, and other problems that are inevitably part of any autobiography. The MSE allows users to reexamine the *Autobiography* and construct their own understanding of Malcolm X by juxtaposing the Haley treatment with critical annotations and a digital archive of related multimedia primary source materials. Presentation of these materials through the MSE format serves the MXP's long-term objective of constructing an archive for use as a resource for students and scholars.

Traditionally, scholars have examined and discussed Malcolm X as a political figure

and as a result, much of the existing scholarship has focused exclusively on the political aspect of his life and legacy. What has emerged from this narrow focus is a convincing portrait of the man as a Black nationalist. While we accept that Black nationalism is an important part of Malcolm X's legacy, we believe that the complexity of his life and ideas cannot be fully appreciated by viewing him from this perspective alone. A more robust study of his life reveals Malcolm X not only as a political figure in this tradition, but as a cultural hero, a global citizen, and a religious leader as well.

To represent these many sides of Malcolm X, the MSE provides four "lenses" through which users can examine and reflect on the *Autobiography.* The lenses are Politics (Black Nationalism); Culture (African American Culture and Youth Subcultures); Globalism (the Third World, Socialism, and Pan-Africanism); and Faith (Black Religion, Christianity, and Islam). In order to accommodate the MXMSE conception of "lenses," CCNMTL developed a new version of the Multimedia Template (the MMT is the basic content platform for the MSE) that allows users to switch between lenses, or effectively, critical readings of the text. The conceptualization and technical implementation of this approach highlights how intellectual content can benefit from the purposeful application of digital technology. This newly evolved form of the MSE will be used in a similar manner to animate other texts. Before turning to a more detailed look at the MSE and specifically the MXMSE, a thumbnail sketch of the three-year CCNMTL/IRAAS (CCBH) collaboration follows.

The first year of the MXP featured an ambitious program of instruction and research; the creation of a multimedia archive; the completion of an e-seminar on Malcolm X and the Black cultural imagination, entitled: *Malcolm X: Life After Death* (http://ci.columbia.edu/ci/eseminars/0402_detail.html); and the preparation of two anthologies—political and cultural readers containing secondary and unpublished primary source materials—that are accompanied by a compact disc of music and liner notes pertaining to the life of Malcolm X. During the second year, professional staff and student researchers collaborated on a variety of initiatives to develop content for both the MSE and the two-volume biography of Malcolm X. Four initiatives were given priority: the creation of an MXMSE prototype for demonstration and design research purposes; the collection of oral histories from people who had a significant connection to Malcolm X; the construction of a chronology documenting Malcolm X's life; and the compilation of a comprehensive bibliography of scholarly works pertaining to Malcolm X. The third year of the project focused on producing and launching version 1.0 of MXMSE with all four lenses (Politics, Culture, Globalism, and Faith).

The Pedagogical Roots of the Multimedia Study Environment: Examples of Prior Publications

In the fall Semester of 1998 at Teachers College, Columbia University, I was teaching a course entitled Theories of Communications. One of the most challenging readings was Frederic Jameson's monograph "Postmodernism: the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." The students found it conceptually difficult and written in a challenging style, but they also encountered a text that was riddled with references from every corner of human thought and expression: music (popular, experimental, and classical), films of all kinds, philosophers, psychologists, architectural theory and objects, literature, art, and critical theory. In the interest of allowing students to do an informed reading and interpretation of Jameson's text, we created what would have then been called a hypermedia version of the article. This web-based version was designed to provide students with the information

and examples they needed to follow the article without continually having to research Jameson's references. What emerged from the process was the concept and design of the Multimedia Template and the first Multimedia Study Environment: (http://ccnmtl. columbia.edu/projects/mmt/jameson/). Succinctly, the overarching concept was that of "intellectual and cultural illumination" and the design "hub and spoke architecture." Supportive information was prioritized and made more or less accessible based on the immediacy of the need of the reader, and a system of navigation was designed to allow for multiple points of access and attack. With the completion of the first MSE and its first classroom use, it was evident that more had been accomplished than had been anticipated.

First, from a content perspective: what were going to be simple explanatory annotations became multimedia. We learned from prior classroom experience that having immediately accessible linked text images of Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* and Vincent Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes* allowed the reader to compare them, as does Jameson in his text. This proved to be a significant step in making one of Jameson's key arguments more approachable (see Figure 1): From there we moved quickly to other additions, for example: explaining who John Cage was and what kind of composition he was known for and also including examples of his music; indicating who David Bowie is and what the film, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, was about and including a relevant excerpt. And so it went with similar treatments of an array of artists, thinkers, and others. It soon became evident that students wanted to go past the annotations and selected multimedia content and more deeply engage subjects they encountered. To this end, links to archival websites were added so that, for example, if a students wanted to study Karl Marx, they could go
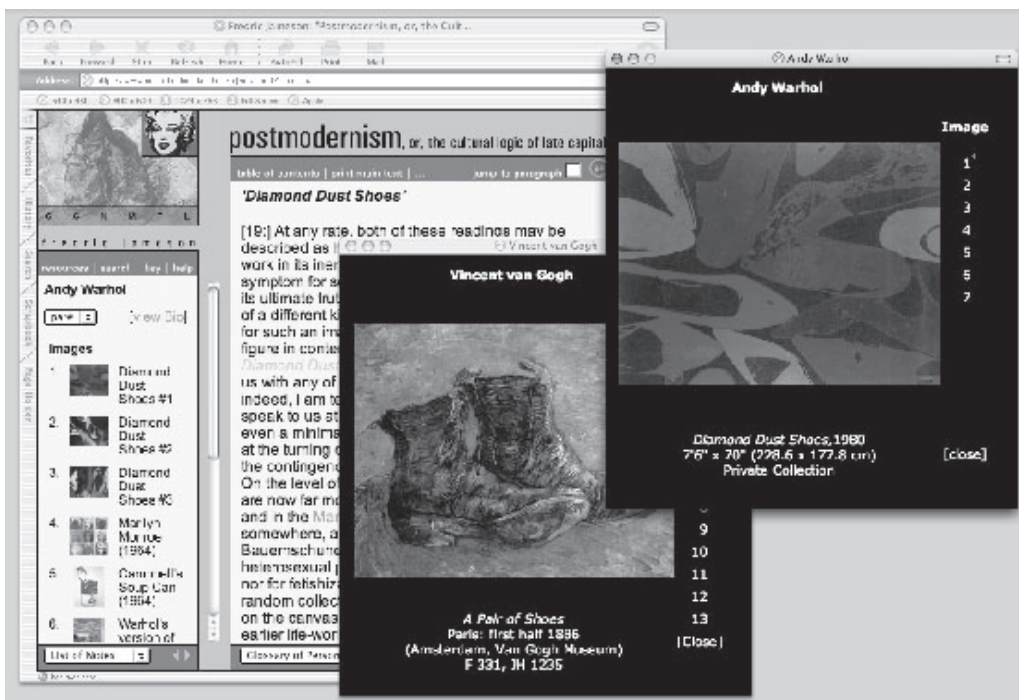

Figure 1. *Sample page of Jameson MSE: A user reading the online version of the Jameson text can immediately access and link to the text images for a gallery of multimedia assets. For instance, Andy Warhol's* Diamond Dust Shoes *and Vincent van Gogh's* Peasant Shoes.

directly from the annotation on Marx to authoritative and comprehensive websites of and on his works. Similarly, certain foundational works such as the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) were added based on the experience of users and their needs (see Figure 2): The knowledge architecture and design of this first MSE focused on mobilizing the complex layers of content in a way that the primary text, the object of study, was kept central. The illuminating and interpretive content was made accessible to varying degrees based on importance (see Figure 3): There are three primary components of the design architecture: main text window; annotation window; and glossaries of terms and persons. First, in the main text window the object of study is stabilized in the center of the screen, while a traditional table of contents allows the direct navigation of the text by paragraph as does the search window on the upper right. Secondly, the immovable annotation window to the left, in addition to providing access to all text annotations and selected visual and audio content (vide: Cage, Van Gogh, and Warhol), also provides an alternative way of navigating the text itself. The reader can toggle from the paragraph indicator in any annotation to all those paragraphs in the main text to which the annotation is linked. Also, the search feature at the top of the annotation box allows for a word search of the text as well as the annotations. Lastly, the keywords at the bottom of the annotation allow for movement within the web of annotations themselves. The third and last component, the glossaries at the bottom of the page of terms and persons, provide direct alphabetical access to all the annotations.
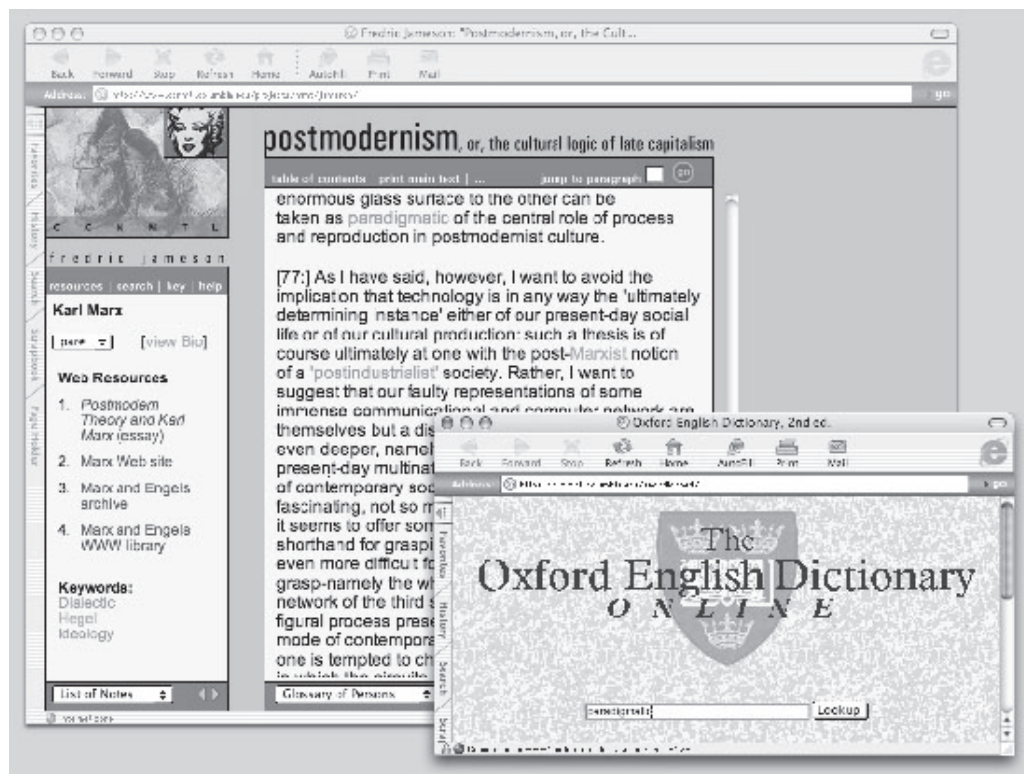

Figure 2. *Sample page of Jameson MSE: Many of the annotations have links to archival websites. For instance, certain foundational works such as the OED were added based on the experience of users and their interpreted needs. The link to the OED would open a new window, as shown here in the image.*
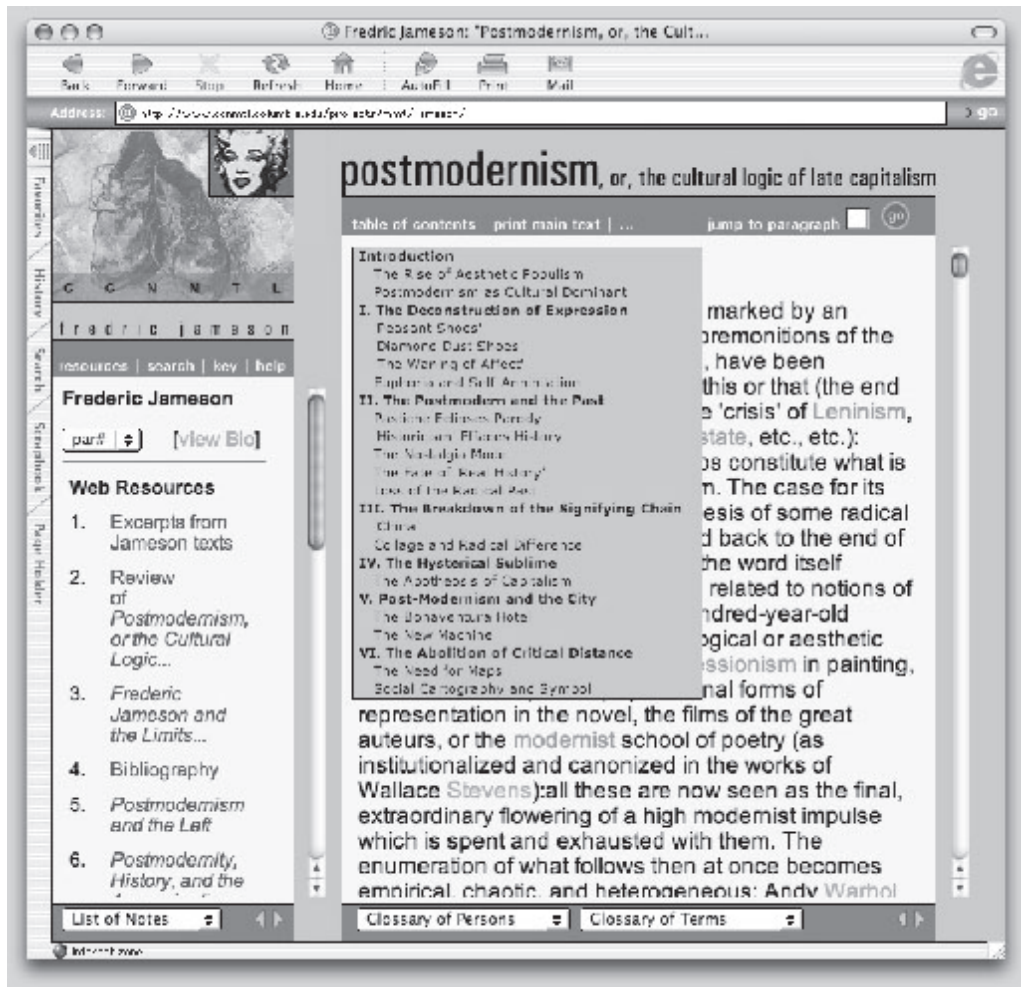
Figure 3. *Sample page of Jameson MSE: Using the table of contents window layered on top of the main text, a user can go to particular section of their choosing.*

Collectively, this architecture is intended to give the reader/researcher maximum flexibility to penetrate the text's referential universe, pursue excursus of study through links to both online library resources and reference works and, at the same time, maintain attention on the primary object of study. The design proceeded out of our observation of students and our resulting awareness of the necessity of maintaining a balance, that is, to control the Web's capacity to distract while taking advantage of its power to bring the world of information to the desktop. This effort to harness the Web's power to support focused study and research remains a priority of MSE design.

After this first project, fifteen other MSEs were constructed which were all antecedent to the development of the MXMSE. No two were the same and they all were important in determining the technologies used in development, the process of development, and the design and knowledge architecture of the MXMSE. In effect, they were all part of the design research for the MXMSE. Their subjects ranged from the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* of the first century B.C. to Shakespeare's Lear to a treatment of Schoenberg's *Pierrot*

Lunaire. Most significant among them as ancestors to the MXMSE, each for a different advance in our understanding, are the following:

1) From Du Bois's ***The Souls of Black Folk*** [SBFMSE] (faculty partner: Prof. Manning Marable http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmthave /dubois/), CCNMTL and IRAAS learned the power of providing scholarly commentary that is focused yet drawn from a range of faculty, each of whom offers a different perspective. This basic principle was deepened and expanded in the MXMSE where the scholars' comments are complemented by a range of testimony from peers and scholars of Malcolm X.

2) From the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** [UDHRMSE] (faculty partner: Peter Danchin, http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/udhr/), CCNMTL began to envision MSEs that would be generally useful to a larger community. The UDHRMSE has had a global outreach and created a community of users that has given it a powerful life outside the university where it supports courses in the area of human rights and international studies. The MXMSE was constructed to become the platform for a diverse and engaged community of scholars, students, and independent researchers crossing boundaries of race, class, and ethnicity.

3) From Rushdie's **Midnight's Children [MCMSE]** (faculty partner: Bruce Ferguson http://www.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/mc/), CCNMTL learned the value of linking to the spine text filmic essays that are effectively small documentaries from specific perspectives on the event of the production of the dramatic version of *Midnight's Children*. In the MXMSE this kernel of an idea is gestated into the presentation of a multiple thematic interpretations of the *Autobiography* and Malcolm's life by Marable.

The Unique Characteristics of the Malcolm X Multimedia Study Environment

The MXMSE is a complex teaching and learning environment that is best experienced by direct engagement. Any effort to describe it in words and illustrations must be undertaken with the clear caveat that its dynamic nature will be best experienced by actual engagement. What follows is an effort to point out certain of the MXMSE's salient content and architectural features, both of which build on and extend the design research CCNMTL has done with prior MSE endeavors, as described above.

Content

The MXMSE has five significant content features. The first, already mentioned, pertains to the capacity to change the scholarly apparatus of annotations as one chooses to view the primary text through one of the four guiding lenses (Politics, Culture, Globalism, and Faith). For example, the annotation for the Civil Rights Movement that appears 14 times in 7 of the 19 chapters of the spine text is actually 4 different annotations. Depending upon which of the four lenses is selected according to the individual's particular line of inquiry, the MXMSE will provide different emphases. One can also shift from one annotation to another within the annotation window (Figure 4). The multimedia archive and references attached to the annotation are common to all four lenses, as are the related terms that allow navigation to other pertinent annotations.

A second distinguishing content feature with important pedagogical and research implications is the depth of the MXMSE primary sources, particularly the assassination case file that represents a compilation of documents and images, many of which were discovered by Marable's research team during the construction of the MXMSE. These
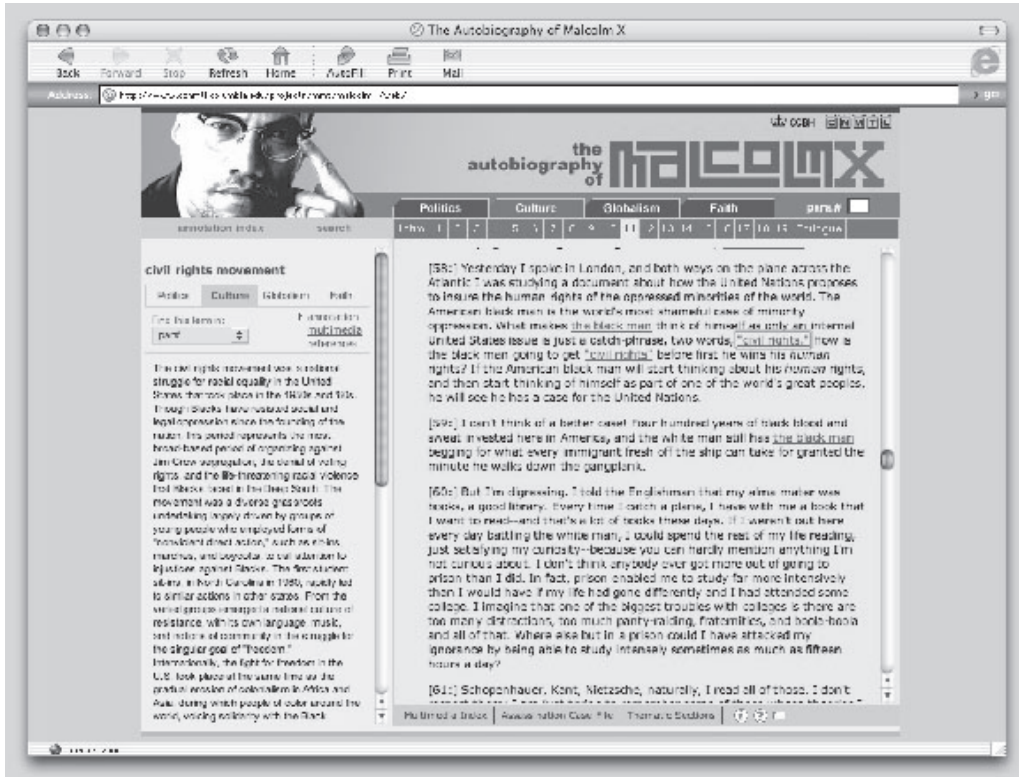
Figure 4. *Sample page of Malcolm X MSE: A user has access to all chapters from the* **Autobiography** *as well as the introduction and epilogue. Chapter 11 is shown in this image. The active annotation is the lens of culture, as indicated by the highlighted "Culture" tab above the text. Clicking on a different lens tab will result in a different annotation on the "civil rights movement."*

include images of the original shotgun shells used in the assassination along with their police tags, the contents of Malcolm X's pockets at the moment he was shot, to the full set of report documents of the New York Police Department, the FBI, and the Manhattan Assistant District Attorney's Office (Figure 5). There are files on the suspects and the collected statements of the witnesses and members of Malcolm X's audience. In some instances, duplicate documents allow the comparison of redacted and unredacted versions. From a pedagogical perspective these data, as distinct from the annotations, allow the researcher to both critique the Haley narrative as well as build their own.

A third significant content feature is the "thematic sections." Building on and extending the theme-oriented filmic treatments of the *Midnight's Children* MSE, the MXMSE includes four Marable presentations of four particular interrogations of the *Autobiography* and its protagonist: "The Assassination of Malcolm X and Its Aftermath"; "Whose Book Is This? The Malcolm/Haley Relationship"; " Malcolm X, Women and Gender"; and "Malcolm X Political Thought and Legacy," From a pedagogical perspective these not only edify but present objects for emulation since most of the content contained in each of the four arguments mobilized by Marable come from the MXMSE (Figure 6).

Fourth, the construction of the MXMSE with its exhaustive research efforts has not only led to the discovery of heretofore unseen documents as mentioned above but also to the creation of original content in the form of interviews of peers and associates of Malcolm
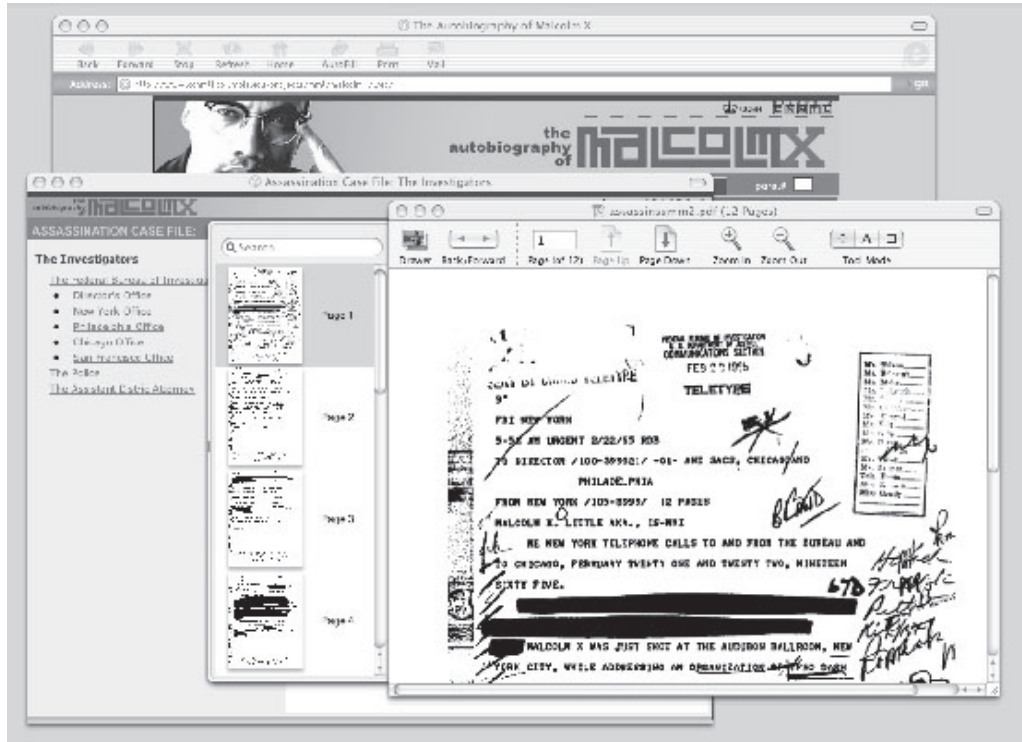
Figure 5. *Sample document from the Malcolm X MSE: Users have access to a number of primary source materials from the life of Malcolm X. Here is an image of an FBI document concerning the investigation of the assassination of Malcolm X.*

X. Significant examples of this includes interviews conducted at Columbia University with individuals such as Dorothy Fardan, the only white member of the Nation of Islam, Max Stanford, Peter Bailey, Amiri Baraka, Ossie Davis, and Abdul Abdur-Raazaq.

Fifth, also supporting the research effort of every annotation, as first conceived in the Jameson MSE, provides direction and resources for further research. Collectively, they represent a concentric band of carefully selected websites and bibliographical citations that surround the core text and its produced content. For instance, if one sought more information on Harlem beyond the produced content of the annotation, one can link to the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture with its vast archives on Harlem.

Design

There are distinct knowledge and design features in the MXMSE that build on certain canonical architectural characteristics of the MSE tradition. First, and foremost, is the effort to optimize access to both the primary and secondary source material that effectively surrounds the spine text. Together these are referred to as the core. One can encounter the same object, whether annotation, interview, image, or mass media, as a link from multiple locations within the MSE. For instance, one can access the annotation on Ossie Davis in Haley's epilogue to the *Autobiography* or in the thematic section linked to Marable's discussion of the funeral in his interpretation of the assassination aftermath, as well as linked to the annotation entitled "Eulogy to Malcolm X." This approach represents a significant advantage of the MXMSE mode of "footnoting" over that of the tradi-
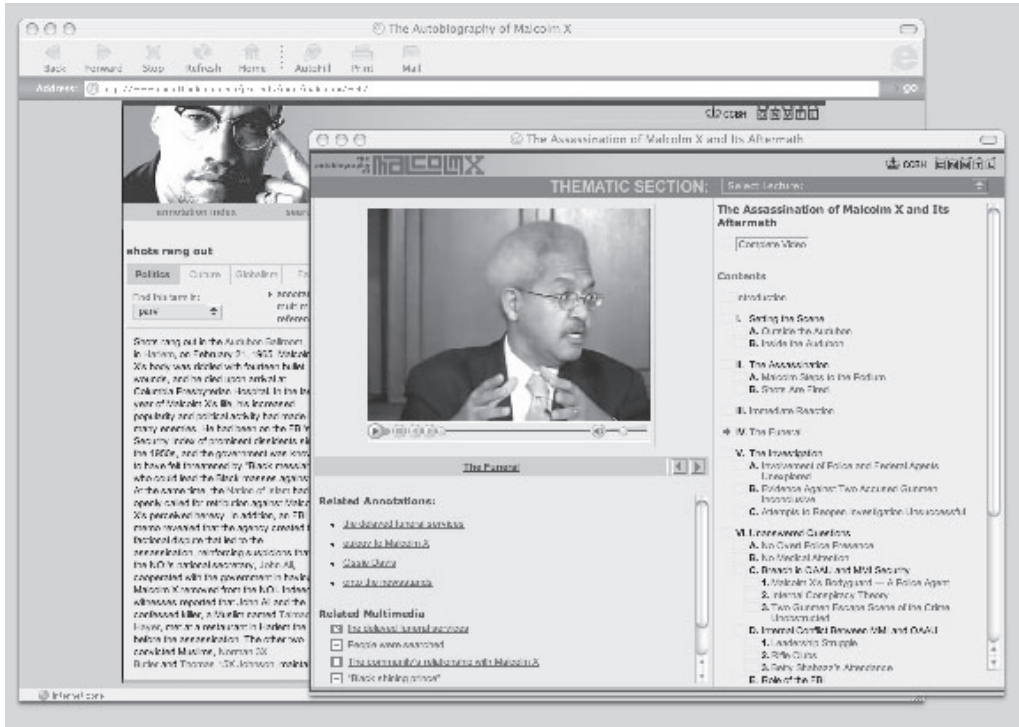
Figure 6. *Thematic section from the Malcolm X MSE: Each video presentation is a 30 minute video of Marable speaking on a particular theme; for instance, Malcolm X's assassination. The videos are accompanied by detailed outlines of each lecture. The outlines serve two purposes: as a navigation tool, they allow each user to immediately view those portions of the videos that are most interesting to him/her; and, as resource menus, they allow the user to view annotations and multimedia assets that pertain to the point currently being addressed in the video.*

tional book in which it seems senseless and repetitive to cite a note verbatim twice. Yet in the immediacy of the reading moment it is preferable to see a note referred to for a second time without searching for it.

A second design feature is that the MSE provides multiple means for navigating and accessing the main text. In addition to the basic search feature accessible in the annotation window that allows one to search by word the main text as well as annotations and references, there are also multiple possibilities for searching the *Autobiography* by paragraph. By using the paragraph search window in the upper right corner of the text window each chapter allows one can jump to a selected paragraph by number. Equally useful is the capacity to navigate the text from the annotation window through the use of the paragraph index that indicates each location to which the annotation is linked. A third unique navigation feature is found in the multimedia index that contains hundreds of audio and video elements, press clippings, documents and images organized in six topical categories: Malcolm X Speaks; Archival Footage; Commentary; Press Clippings; FBI Files; and Image Gallery. Each of these categories has a number of associated fields. For instance, the example in the illustration "Malcolm X Speaks," shows the fields of type, date, location, speech/program, title, and media (Figure 7). One can reorganize the content by giving priority to one of those headings. If one clicks on "date," one can place all the content in chronological order starting with either the earliest or latest.
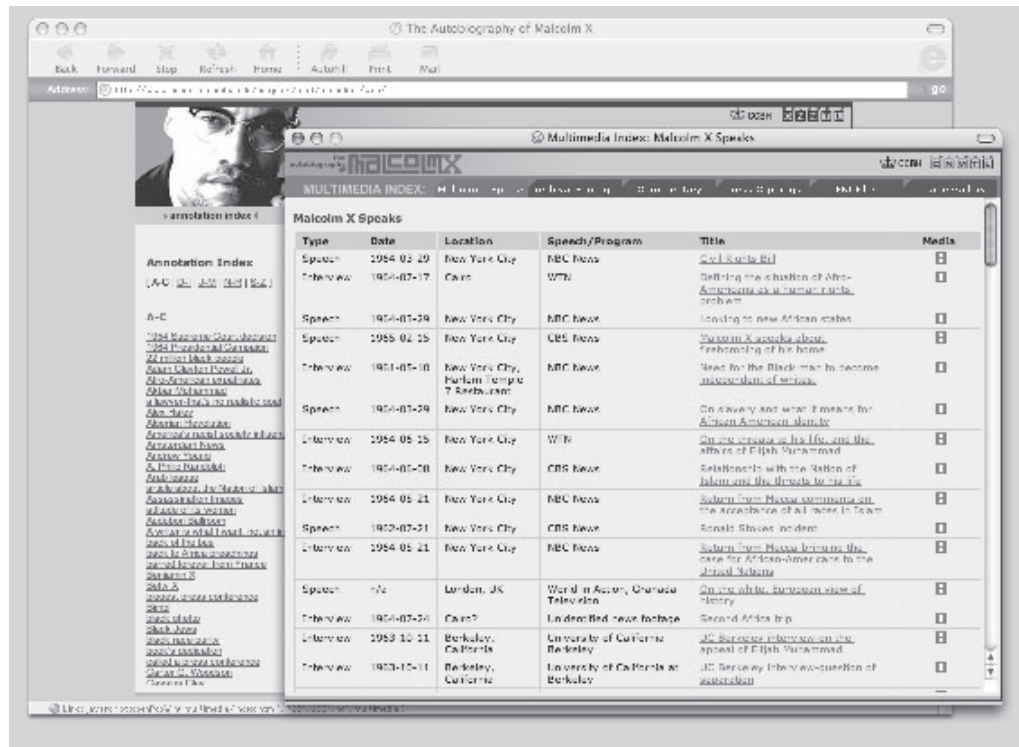
Figure 7. *Multimedia Index from the Malcolm X MSE: Here, we have a listing of the audio and video assets from Malcolm X's interviews and speeches. The information can be sorted in ascending or descending order by type (speech or interview), date, location, the name of the speech or program, title or media (audio or video).*

Digital Divides

In the not too distant past, the expression "digital divide" entered the conversation about technology and education. The argument went that technology, first greeted as a solution to the issue of justice in America's schools, has emerged as new documentation of the pernicious effects of class and race differences in the distribution of resources in education. Despite all the ballyhoo about the "information superhighway" as the new magic bullet, what we have instead of a solution are new terms in which the same struggle for educational justice now takes place. When one understands the digital divide in this larger context, it is possible then without exaggeration and/or hopes of radical transformation to begin to ask the question, how might those who labor in the field of digital media realize some of their potential to contribute to a better and more equitable learning environment? For those who understand these constraints, the MSE, in both design and philosophy, can be said to address serious problems in the way that digital media are finding their way into the poorest of our schools.

Putting aside issues related to the unavailability of the technologies themselves as well as the skilled personnel who understand them, what became evident was that the Web could be a distraction to the students and an enemy of the teacher in environments where the challenge is to inspire interest and teach critical skills built on a foundation of disciplined concentration and reflection. Encouraged by commercialization, students quickly adjusted to the Web as a sport and leisure environment, reflected in the term

that emerged to describe being on the Web as "surfing." Contrary to the highest hopes the most ancient educational axiom, time on task, was violated.

As the MSE has been presented in this essay, it is evident that one of its key guiding principles is to foster attention and to encourage concentration on the chosen subject while providing access to a wealth of resources. One aspiration held for the MXMSE is that the combination of its design along with the power of the *Autobiography* and the life of Malcolm X himself would make the anticipated public version a powerful force to inspire students to study African-American culture and history.

Another digital divide shared by everyone, is that between the student/researcher and the expanded universe of knowledge and information. Digital technologies have resulted in oceans of content. Despite the discussion about search and access, it is evident that this emergent expanding universe grows more alien to us each day. Even those who understand the evolving architecture of the cyber world seek to bridge the gap between the invisible galaxies of information and the actual world of students and scholars pursuing their inquiries. This digital divide represents a unique and exasperating challenge that will take decades to fully understand and address. One response is to focus on the design of tools of engagement that would position the student and scholar less as an observer and more as an excavator and artist with the capacity to seamlessly capture, analyze, organize, and produce knowledge objects of their own. Another is represented by MXMSE, which provides a domicile for individuals with a specific interest, a domicile which is a pathway to a larger universe of emerging knowledge.