

During the summer of 2018, I would commute 90 minutes via public transit from Palo Alto all the way to downtown Oakland for an internship in political strategy. I was a quiet and confused young Black boy, trying to grapple with my own understanding of the world. It was on this commute on two different public transit systems that I sat down to read a book for myself for the first time in years. I ignored the prep I wanted to do for AP English Literature in senior year for one text. Nestled between my water bottle, laptop, and work papers, I brought with me *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

What Malcolm's autobiography reignited in me was a passion for reading that went dormant for years. It goes without saying that American schools treat the act of reading, of rigorous study, as an afterthought. Beyond the lack of choice in class readings, I only grew more alienated from reading when I could not find stories that mirrored my own lived experience as a young Black boy in a world that sought to break my spirit time and time again. It is not simply that I hated my classrooms for not bringing narratives of African peoples into discussions; it felt as though I was actively being asked to suppress any semblance of interrogation about how to stop the oppression of our people everywhere. Malcolm for me changed everything. He reintroduced not only the importance of discipline but of organizing around a struggle greater than any of our own individual accomplishments. In particular, he taught me that study is essential if we are to take the project of building a more just world seriously.

"A Student of Black Study" is the most honest and sincere description I could give of my book collection today. Almost five years after I first started reading Malcolm, the joy and care I have for building my own library have grown significantly. What started simply as me trying to pick up books that I found interesting has now expanded into my thinking about what to read as a scholar in training. In the last half-decade, I have acquired more texts by visiting independent bookstores across the country, used book sales at the public library, or online from reputable vendors that also support radical organizing struggles. I went from stacking books all over my desk to finally getting my own bookcase, along with organizing folders on my computer of dozens of PDFs, all broadly around the theme outlined in the title of my collection.

My collection is motivated by trying to figure out what it means for African-descended people worldwide to seek liberation from exploitative systems and structures that seek to undermine our right to self-determination. I have put together this assortment of texts together because I want to intimately understand what the stakes are to ensure radical futures for Black people are possible. I have texts that discuss the history of African revolutionaries during the 1960s, texts that explore the development of Black nationalism in the US during the 1920s, along with texts that look at the contemporary state of Black Studies as an academic discipline.

The curation of texts largely comes from trying to secure canonical texts in African-centered revolutionary struggles. I began my collection first by picking up books by Walter Rodney,

Frantz Fanon, and others. Since then, I have been attempting to learn about more niche facets of what we could classify as the Black Liberation Movement in the US and abroad. Additionally, I have acquired texts on Black communist organizing in the US south for my thesis research that has taken place over the last two years. Generally, whenever I had a little extra money to spare, the first thing I would do is see what texts I thought I was missing from the library I dreamed of one day having. If I could budget certain amounts for my grant proposals, I would get more books. If I took an extra cover or two working at Harper Café, I would see if I could get a new piece of the collection.

“A Student of Black Study” is also a collection directly developed in response to my political education as an organizer. Whenever my comrades would ask us to put together some resources related to a timely issue, I would use my books as the foundation of where I could begin my inquiries on issues related to anti-imperialism or neocolonialism. I would add new texts to my shelf as we began to focus on new campaigns in the organization, writing press releases on continued interventions in Haiti or on domestic militarization in Atlanta. My studies are not just motivated by my interests academically and out of curiosity, but more importantly, because of my own political commitments as an organizer. My collection has since been able to expand as I have grown politically and begun to develop a more nuanced analysis of the world.

I plan on taking my collection along with me for the rest of my life. My books are some of the most prized possessions I have, more than any technology, furniture, or other items. Hopefully, I will take these books to graduate school and only continue to expand the range of genres and types of writing in the collection. While I do have some Toni Morrison and James Baldwin, I want to expand the amount of fiction I have on my shelf, as well as include more poetry moving forward. My study of the Black Liberation Movement and the radical figures that have motivated my own actions as an organizer should also necessitate delving into other ways writers have chronicled our histories in prose, song, or even through photography.

This may be the first time I am saying this, but I am proud of the collection I have put together over the last five years. I only hope to continue to grow it into a library itself one day, with notes and memories of the times that I have spent with each one of these books. They all tell their own stories, but in many ways, they also simultaneously tell a specific anecdote about my own life. I can only hope I will have the means to continue to bring more books into “A Student of Black Study.”