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Dear Malcolm,

I recently finished reading your book, The Autobiography of Malcom X. Like so many before me, and so many yet to come, this book has had a profound affect on the way I view myself and the world around me. Your story has affirmed my belief in the ability of Americans to rise from humble circumstances and make a difference in the world around them. It has opened my eyes to the wisdom of changing your beliefs when you know you are wrong without sacrificing your principles. Perhaps most important of all the Autobiography of Malcolm X has reminded me that every human being, no matter how seemingly corrupt or lost they may be, has the ability to redeem him or her self for the better.

At the time I completed your book our country had just witnessed a bitterly polarizing election. Like many Americans I had invested my time and energy into this democratic process; and also like some of my fellow citizens I was bitterly disappointed by the results. One of the most disheartening thoughts for me as a stereotypical small-town, middle-class citizen with no wealth or name is that I will be incapable as an adult to have a positive influence on coming elections and events in my country.

Your story radically awakened me to the ability of people of average and even

disadvantaged circumstances to change the world around them. By telling of your own courage coming up as an oppressed and impoverished minority and still going on to overcome your circumstances you have imparted some of that courage you displayed on to myself.

I must admit that I did not finish your book without finding myself sometimes violently disagreeing with you. Despite my respect for your courage and dedication to doing what you saw was right, I often found myself disgusted by your sweeping comments branding all white people as "devils". As the story progressed and you gradually changed your views you did something that left a deep mark on me. When most men would stick by what they said originally, if for no other reason than they were too proud to admit they might have been wrong in the first place, you had the courage to publicly change your positions. The fact that you did so despite having nothing to gain and everything to lose shows that you are truly a man of character. As a somewhat stubborn teenager your own courage in the face of change made me pause more than once to consider how I would have handled the same situation.

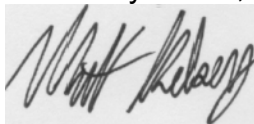
In the end, more than anything else in the book, I was impressed by the way you redeemed yourself from the lowest depths of criminality to the heights of selflessness in the service of your people. Many times do we as a society write off the criminal elements of society as hopeless and

despicable. Until I read [the Autobiography of Malcolm X](#) I had no idea that one of America's greatest leaders was at one time a petty-thief, addicted to drugs and

serving time in prison. Your own story of transformation has opened my eyes to the potential for every human being, even drug-dealers and thieves, to change for the better. Every time I catch myself writing someone off for their poor behavior in the present I will be reminded of your own story. That potential for human redemption in the face of insurmountable odds is what I took to be the most powerful message of your book. While I may have been an average joe, a marginalized member of society, or even a criminal in my past, your message has opened my eyes to the reality that the future is entirely dependent on my present and future choices as an individual. The Autobiography of Malcolm X showed me that the best way to compensate for my past sins was to get off my knees, stop begging for forgiveness, and atone through my own actions both in the present and in the future.

After completing your book Malcolm, I want to thank you for the lessons it taught me. Most importantly I want to thank you for the courage the Autobiography of Malcolm X gave me to go beyond talking about those lessons; courage that allowed me to begin putting those lessons into practice in my everyday life.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Helary", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.