

# Halted Malcolm X auction is latest twist in family saga

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WASHINGTON — Almost lost within the intrigue surrounding the abrupt halt of the sale of Malcolm X artifacts by a national auction-house is the drama surrounding the slain human rights leaders' family and accusations that one of the sisters stole the valuable possessions.

The letter that Joseph Fleming, the lawyer for the Shabazz family, wrote to the Butterfields' auction house asking it to stop the sale this week of the items mentioned the "theft" of the materials. What it didn't mention was that the alleged thief's name was Malikah Brown, one of the youngest of the six daughters of Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz.

Brown, who uses her married name, is one of the twins (Malaak is the other) Shabazz was pregnant with when Malcolm X was assassinated in the Audubon Ballroom in New York City in 1965. Shabazz was in the audience when her husband was slain.

The documents were sold because Brown — who had taken the boxes of letters and documents from Westchester County, N.Y., to Florida — did not pay the fee to the storage house, Public Storage Inc., according to a lawsuit the company filed against Butterfields' in California Superior Court last week. The storage company, which names Brown in the lawsuit, asked the auction house to halt the eBay auction until the court determines whether the sale was legal.

Brown rented a Public Storage locker in Casselberry, Fla., on May 17, 1999, but was warned last August that her items would be sold at public auction if she did not resume payment of the monthly rental fee, according to the complaint. A man identified as James Calhoun bought the materials at Public Storage's sale on Sept. 20, the lawsuit states.

Joseph Fleming, the Shabazz family lawyer, says he is happy the auction was stopped. He is representing several of the Shabazz children, but not Brown. Fleming said the family was unaware that Brown had the items until Butterfields' apprised them of the sale last month. Fleming says neither he nor Malcolm's other daughters know why Brown had taken the materials. "They can't find any rhyme or reason," he said. "The bottom line is that



Malcolm X

File Photo

the property belongs to the family, not to any individual sister."

He believes Brown may have taken them to Florida because she apparently had lived there at one time. Fleming says he doesn't believe the sisters even knew she had a Florida residence. Fleming says he does not know why Brown did not pay the storage fee. He says the Malcolm X papers were in one of two caches she had at the storage unit. He says he doesn't know what was in the other cache.

Attempts to interview members of the Shabazz family were unsuccessful.

Although the sale has been stopped, the incident continues to be a major topic in black America. It is the latest in a series of tragic events and controversies that have followed the family, much of it well documented by film, television and print.

Tragedy has been a part of Malcolm X's family, beginning with the violent killing of his father, a follower of Marcus Gar-

vey, before Malcolm was even a teen-ager. It continued when Malcolm was gunned down Feb. 21, 1965, at the Audubon in front of his pregnant wife, Betty Shabazz, who had brought all four of her daughters with her to hear him speak to followers. Then known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, Malcolm was shot as Shabazz shielded her daughters with her body while bullets tore open her husband's chest.

A. Peter Bailey, a former member of Malcolm's Organization of Afro-American Unity and the editor of Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches, says the personal impact of Malcolm X's assassination on his family cannot be over-emphasized — particularly before child counseling was widely considered necessary after a major trauma.

"You can't tell me that the shooting of your father — that it does not leave a lasting affect on you," he said.

The girls were reared away



KRT PHOTO

Quabilah Shabazz, daughter of Malcolm X, center, is flanked by her mother, the late Betty Shabazz, left, and defense attorney Percy Sutton, right, in 1995 after she was accused of trying to have Louis Farrakhan killed.

from the public spotlight, but have never been able stay out of it.

The eBay incident is the second time Brown has been implicated in wrongdoing. She was fined \$250 in 1995 after reaching a plea bargain in a case involving credit-card forgery. She was charged with spending about \$1,100 in a personal shopping spree using the credit card of a Robert Pace, whom she was assisting while he was on a fellowship in Australia. Brown pleaded no contest to attempted forgery and guilty to giving false information to a police officer.

But the family — and much of Black America — still reels from what happened with Quabilah Shabazz and her son Malcolm.

Five months before Brown was charged with misdemeanors, Quabilah was arrested on more serious charges: She was implicated in a plot to kill Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. The NOI leader has said repeatedly over the past 15 years that he contributed to the atmosphere that led to Malcolm X's assassination, and Betty Shabazz had publicly — and

repeatedly — held Farrakhan responsible.

The charges — that Quabilah had hired her boyfriend to kill Farrakhan to protect her mother, who was speaking out about Farrakhan's role in Malcolm X's assassination — were dropped in May 1995 after she agreed to "accept responsibility" for her actions. Quabilah's defense team maintained that her convicted-felon boyfriend, Michael Fitzpatrick, had attempted to entrap her. Farrakhan publicly denounced authorities with setting Quabilah up in order to divide black America. That act led to a public reconciliation of sorts between Farrakhan and Shabazz at the Apollo Theater in Harlem.

Shabazz cooperated because she was very protective of her children.

She cared for them and Quabilah's son, Malcolm, taking him in because he had run repeatedly away from home and had behavioral problems. His mother, who couldn't provide the stability he needed, had described him as schizophrenic.

Tragedy struck again in 1997. Family members said Malcolm was trying to get in enough trouble so that he'd be returned to his mother. He started a fire in Shabazz's New York apartment. Shabazz, 61, who was home at the time, died days later from severe burns. Malcolm, who was 12 at the time, was sentenced to a Massachusetts juvenile facility for at least 18 months after he pled guilty to the juvenile court equivalent of arson and second-degree manslaughter.

His troubles didn't end there. By the end of 1999, he had escaped three times from a Yonkers, N.Y., group home where he was assigned to live. Malcolm's punishment was another year in detention. Last year, he was still being detained in juvenile detention centers for breaking rules. Two months ago, the 17-year-old and another teen-ager were charged with assaulting and robbing someone at gunpoint in New York.

The New York Daily Challenge reports both teens were

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