



The Audubon Theatre and Ballroom

By Kelvin Turner II

Day 21

March 17, 2023

Scriptures for Mediation

Read Zechariah 13:6

“And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.”

Critical Race Facts!

Another public spectacle lynching took place in 1917 in Memphis, Tennessee, when a mob of twenty-five men seized Eli Persons from a train that was transporting him to stand trial for rape and murder. The mob had announced the lynching time and location in advance, and thousands of people attended, backing up traffic for miles. Food and gum vendors sold their wares to the many spectators as Mr. Persons was doused with gasoline and set on fire. A ten-year old Black child was forced to sit next to the fire and watch him die. When members of the crowd complained that Mr. Persons would die too quickly if burned, the fire was extinguished, and attendees fought over Mr. Person's clothes and remnants of the rope to keep as mementos. Two men cut off his ears for souvenirs, after which the head of Mr. Person's corpse was removed and thrown into a crowd in Memphis's Black commercial district.

Today's Prayer:

Lord, thank you for being a friend that's closer than a brother Help us to always remember that blood – your precious blood – is always thicker than water. In Jesus Name, amen.

The Audubon Theatre and Ballroom was located in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. Originally built in 1912, it has been used as a vaudeville house, movie theater, and meeting place for religious services and political activism. As a staple in the community, it is most known for the events that occurred on February 21, 1965. This was the location of the assassination of Malcolm X.

In 1992 Columbia University and New York City began the process of demolishing the Audubon ballroom to replace it with a medical research facility. This demolition was met with community protest and opposition.

As I reflect on the significance of this building it reminds me of the bible story of rebuilding the walls in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 1:3 it talks about how the walls of Jerusalem had been burned and broken, and the people there were in trouble and disgrace. The walls represented the Strength of God. Similarly, the Audubon Theater and Ballroom represented a time in Black history where our people were strong united and celebrated. It was a time when one of our heroes was killed after risking his life with the hope of better times to come.

Community activist, students, and Malcolm's widow protested the demolition of the building leading to a compromise. Columbia University would build on the northern part of the building. The remaining 2/3rds of the building was preserved and restored to house the interior ballroom, and the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial Education Center.

Brother Malcolm was a civil rights hero with a passion for black empowerment and racial justice, “By any means necessary.” His contributions to the advancement of black people in this nation are indispensable. The legacy of Brother Malcolm and the Audubon Theatre will always be significant to me because exactly 20 years to the day of his assassination, I was born - February 21, 1985. The influence of Malcolm X has instilled in me a personal challenge to always pursue racial justice and to find ways to empower my community and the next generation.

Questions to Ponder

What do you admire most about the life of Malcom X. If you could ask one question of Malcolm X, what would that question be?

