



# The Trouble with Sauling Around: Conversion in Ethnic American Autobiography, 1965-2002

*Madeline Ruth Walker*

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Examining autobiographical texts by Malcolm X (*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*), Oscar Zeta Acosta (*The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *Revolt of the Cockroach People*), Amiri Baraka (*The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*), and Richard Rodriguez (*Hunger for Memory*, *Days of Obligation*, and *Brown*), Walker questions the often rosy views and simplistic binary conceptions of religious conversion. Her reading of these texts takes into account the conflict and serial changes the authors experience in a society that marginalizes them, the manner in which religious conversion offers ethnic Americans “salvation” through cultural assimilation or cultural nationalism, and what conversion, anticonversion, and deconversion narratives tell us about the problematic effects of religion that often go unremarked because of a code of “special respect” and political correctness.

Walker asserts that critics have been too willing to praise religion in America as salutary or beyond the ken of criticism because religious belief is seen as belonging to an untouchable arena of cultural identity. *The Trouble with Sauling Around* goes beyond traditional literary criticism to pay close attention to the social phenomena that underlie religious conversion narratives and considers the potentially negative effects of religious conversion, something that has been likewise neglected by scholars.

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