

THE BALLOT OR THE BULLET

BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND FRIENDS, and I see some enemies.

In fact I think we'd be fooling ourselves if we had an audience this large and didn't realize that there were some enemies present.

This afternoon, we want to talk about *The Ballot or the Bullet*. *The Ballot or the Bullet* explains itself. But before we get into it, since this is the year of the ballot or the bullet, I would like to clarify some things that refer to me, personally, concerning my own personal position. I'm still a Muslim, that is, my religion is still Islam.

My religion is still Islam. I still credit Mr. Muhammad for what I know and what I am. He's the one who opened my eyes. At present I am the minister of the newly founded Muslim Mosque Incorporated, which has its offices in the Theresa Hotel, right in that heart of Harlem—that's the black belt in New York City. And when we realize that Adam Clayton Powell¹ is a Christian minister, he heads the Abyssinian Baptist Church, but at the same time, he's more famous for his political struggling. And Dr. King² is a Christian minister from Atlanta, Georgia—or in Atlanta, Georgia—but he's become more famous for being involved in the Civil Rights struggle. The same as they are Christian ministers, I'm a Muslim minister. And I don't believe in fighting today in any one front, but on all fronts.

In fact I'm a black nationalist freedom fighter.

Islam is my religion, but I believe my religion is my personal business. It governs my personal life and my personal morals. And my religious philosophy is personal between me and the God in whom I believe—just as the religious philosophy of these others is between them and the God in whom they believe. And this is best this way. Were we to come out here discussing religion, we'd have too many differences from the out-start, and we could never get together. So today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic, and social philosophy is black nationalism. As I say, if we bring up religion, we'll have differences, we'll have arguments, we'll never be able to get together. But if we keep our religion at home, keep our religion in the closet, keep our religion between ourselves and our

1. Congressional representative from New York (1945–1970).

2. Martin Luther King, Jr.

God, but when we come out here, we have a fight that is common to all of us against an enemy who is common to all of us.

[The political philosophy of black nationalism only means that the black man should control the politics and the politicians in his own community. The time when white people can come in our community, and get us to vote for them so that they can be our political leaders and tell us what to do and what not to do is long gone. Those days are gone. By the same token, the time when that same white man, knowing that your eyes are too far open, can send another Negro into the community and get you and me to support him, so he can use him to lead us astray, those days are long gone, too.]

The political philosophy of black nationalism only means that if you and I are going to live in a black community—and that's where we're going to live, 'cause soon as you move out of the black community into their community it's mixed for a period of time, but they're gone and you're right there by yourself again.

We must, we must understand the politics of our community. And we must know what politics is supposed to produce. We must know what part politics plays in our lives. And until we become politically mature, we will always be misled, led astray, or deceived, or maneuvered into supporting someone politically who doesn't have the good of our community at heart.

[So the political philosophy of black nationalism only means that we will have to carry on a program, a political program, of re-education, to open our people's eyes, make us become more politically conscious, politically mature.] And then whenever we get ready to cast our ballot, that ballot will be cast for a man of the community who has the good of the community at heart.

[The economic philosophy of black nationalism only means that we should own and operate and control the economy of our community.] You can't open up a black store in a white community; the white man won't even patronize you. And he's not wrong, he's got sense enough to look out for himself. It's you, it's you who don't have sense enough to look out for yourself.

The white man is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community. But you will let anybody come in and control the economy of your community—control the housing, control the education, control the jobs, control the business—under the pretext that you want to integrate. Naw, you're out of your mind.

The economic philosophy of black nationalism only means that

we have to become involved in a program of re-education, to educate our people into the importance of knowing that when you spend your dollar out of the community in which you live, the community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer. The community out of which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer. And because these Negroes who have been misled and misguided are breaking their necks to take their money and spend it with the man, the man is becoming richer and richer and you're becoming poorer and poorer. And then what happens? The community in which you live becomes a slum. It becomes a ghetto. The conditions become run down. And then you have the audacity to complain about poor housing in a run-down community. Why, you run it down yourself, when you take your dollar out.

And you and I are in a double trap because, not only do we lose by taking our money someplace else and spending it, when we try and spend it in *our own* community, we're trapped because we haven't had sense enough to set up stores and control the businesses of our community. The man who's controlling the stores in our community is a man who doesn't look like we do. He's a man who doesn't even live in the community. So you and I, even when we try and spend our money in the block where we live, or the area where we live, we're spending it with a man who when the sun goes down takes that basket full of money in another part of the town.

So we're trapped. Trapped. Double trapped. Triple trapped. Any way we go, we find that we're trapped. And any kind of solution that someone comes up with is just another trap. But the economic philosophy of black nationalism shows our people the importance of setting up these little stores, and developing them and expanding them into larger operations. Woolworth didn't start out big like they are today. They started out with a dime store and expanded and expanded and then expanded until today, they're all over the country and all over the world and they're getting some of everybody's money. Now, this is what you and I— General Motors, the same way, didn't start out like it is. It started out like a little rat-race type operation, and it expanded and it expanded until today it is where it is right now. And you and I have to make a start. And the best place to start is right in the community where we live.

So our people not only have to be re-educated to the importance of supporting black business, but the black man himself has to be made aware of the importance of going into business. And once you and I go into business, we own and operate *at least* the businesses in

our community, what we will be doing is developing a situation wherein we will actually be able to create employment for the people in the community. And once you can create some employment in the community where you live, it will eliminate the necessity of you and me having to act ignorantly and disgracefully, boycotting and picketing some cracker someplace else, trying to beg him for a job.]

Anytime you have to rely upon your enemy for a job, you're in bad shape.

He is your enemy. You wouldn't be in this country if some enemy hadn't kidnapped you and brought you here.

On the other hand, some of you think you came here on the *Mayflower*.

So, as you can see, brothers and sisters, today, this afternoon, it's not our intention to discuss religion. We're going to forget religion. If we bring up religion, we'll be in an argument. And the best way to keep away from arguments and differences, as I said earlier . . . put your religion at home, in the closet. Keep it between you and your God. Because if it hasn't done anything more for you than it has, you need to forget it anyway.

[Whether you are a Christian or a Muslim or a Nationalist, we all have the same problem. They don't hang you because you're a Baptist, they hang you 'cause you're black. They don't attack me because I'm a Muslim, they attack me 'cause I'm black. They attack all of us for the same reason. All of us catch hell from the same enemy. We're all in the same bag. In the same boat. We suffer political oppression. Economic exploitation. And social degradation. All of 'em from the same enemy. The government has failed us. You can't deny that. Anytime you're living in the twentieth century, and you're walking around here singing "We Shall Overcome," the government has failed us.]

This is part of what's wrong with you. You do too much singing.

Today, it's time to stop singing and start swinging.

You can't sing up on freedom. But you can *swing* up on some freedom.

Cassius Clay³ can sing. But singing didn't help him to become the heavyweight champion of the world. *Swinging* helped him become the heavyweight champion of the world.

So this government has failed us. The government itself has failed us. And the white liberals, who have been posing as our friends, have failed us. [And once we see that all these other sources to which we've

3. Prizefighter who, in 1964, took the name Muhammad Ali.

turned have failed, we stop turning to them and turn to ourselves. We need a self-help program. A do-it-yourself philosophy. A do-it-right now philosophy. An it's-already-too-late philosophy. This is what you and I need to get with. And the only way we're going to solve our problem is with a self-help program. Before we can get a self-help program started, we have to have a self-help philosophy. Black nationalism is a self-help philosophy. What's so good about it, you can stay right in the church where you are and still take black nationalism as your philosophy. You can stay in any kind of civic organization that you belong to and still take black nationalism as your philosophy. You can be an atheist and still take black nationalism as your philosophy. This is a philosophy that eliminates the necessity for division and argument. Because if you are black, you should be thinking black. And if you're a black, and you're not thinking black at this late date, why I'm sorry for you.

Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern. And then you go on into some action. As long as you got a sit-down philosophy, you'll have a sit-down thought pattern. And as long as you think that old sit-down thought, you'll be in some kind of sit-down action. They'll have you sitting-in everywhere.

It's not so good to refer to what you're going to do as a sit-in. Then right there it castrates you. Right there it brings you down. What goes with it? Think of the image of someone sitting. An old woman can sit. An old man can sit. A chump can sit. A coward can sit. Anything can sit. For you and I have been *sitting* long enough and it's time today for you and I to be doing some *standing*. And some *fighting* to back that up.

When we look at other parts of this earth in which we live, we find that black, brown, red and yellow people in Africa and Asia are getting their independence. They're not getting it by singing "We Shall Overcome." No, they're getting it through *nationalism*. It is nationalism that brought about the independence of the people in Asia. Every nation in Asia gained its independence through the philosophy of nationalism. Every nation on the African continent that has gotten its independence brought it about through the philosophy of nationalism. And it will take *black* nationalism to bring about the freedom of twenty-two million Afro-Americans here in this country where we have suffered *colonialism* for the past four hundred years.

[America is just as much a colonial power as England ever was] America is just as much a colonial power as France ever was. In fact, America is more so a colonial power than they. Because she's a hypocritical colonial power behind it. What do you call second-class citizenship? Why, that's colonization. Second-class citizenship is nothing but twentieth-century slavery. How are you going to tell me you're a second-class citizen? They don't have second-class citizenship in any other government on this earth. They just have slaves and people who are free. Well, this country is a hypocrite. They try and make you think they set you free by calling you a second-class citizen. Naw, you're nothing but a twentieth-century slave.

Just as it took nationalism to remove colonialism from Asia and Africa, it'll take black nationalism today to remove colonialism from the backs and the minds of twenty-two million Afro-Americans here in this country. Looks like it might be the year of the ballot or the bullet.

Why does it look like it might be the year of the ballot or the bullet? Because Negroes have listened to the trickery and the lies and the false promises of the white man now for too long. And they're fed up. They've become disenchanted. They've become disillusioned. They've become dissatisfied. And all of this has built up frustrations in the black community that makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent. Whenever you got a racial powder keg sitting in your lap, you're in more trouble than if you had an atomic power keg sitting in your lap. When a racial powder keg goes off, it doesn't care who it knocks out the way. Understand this: it's dangerous [Because what can the white man use, now, to fool us? After he put down that march on Washington, and you see all through that now. He tricked you, had you marching down to Washington. Yes, had you marching back and forth between the feet of a dead man named Lincoln and another dead man named George Washington, singing "We Shall Overcome."

He made a chump out of you. He made a fool out of you. He made you think you were going somewhere and you end up going nowhere but between Lincoln and Washington.]

So today our people are disillusioned. They've become disenchanted. They've become dissatisfied. And in their frustrations they want action. You can see this young black man, this new generation, asking for the ballot or the bullet. That old Uncle Tom action is out-

*March on
6:1*

dated. The young generation don't want to hear anything about "The odds are against us." What do we care about odds?

When this country here was first being founded, there were thirteen colonies. The whites were colonized. They were fed up with the taxation without representation. So some of them stood up and said "liberty or death." Well, I went to a white school over here in Maso Michigan. The white man made the mistake of letting me read his history books. He made the mistake of teaching me that Patrick Henry⁴ was a patriot. And George Washington—wasn't nothing non-violent about old Pat. Or George Washington. "Liberty or death" was what brought about the freedom of whites in this country from the English.

They didn't care about the odds. Why, they faced the wrath of the entire British Empire. And in those days, they used to say that the British Empire was so vast and so powerful that the sun would never set on it. This is how big it was. Yet these thirteen little scrawny states, tired of taxation without representation, tired of being exploited and oppressed and degraded, told that big British Empire, "liberty or death." And here you have twenty-two million Afro-American black people today, catching more hell than Patrick Henry ever saw.

And I'm here to tell you, in case you don't know it, that you got a new, you got a new generation of black people in this country who don't care anything whatsoever about odds. They don't want to hear you old Uncle Tom handkerchief-heads talking about the odds. No.

This is a new generation. If they're going to draft these young black men and send them over to Korea or South Vietnam to face eight hundred million Chinese . . . if you're not afraid of those odds, you shouldn't be afraid of these odds.

Why does this loom to be such an explosive *political* year? Because this is the year of politics. This is the year when all of the white politicians are going to come into the Negro community. You've never seen them until election time. You can't find them until election time. They're going to come in with false promises. And as they make these false promises, they're going to feed our frustrations. And this will only serve to make matters worse. I'm no politician. I'm not even a student of politics. I'm not a Republican nor a Democrat, not an American. And got sense enough to know it.

I'm one of the twenty-two million black *victims* of the Demo

4. American Revolutionary leader and orator (1736–1799), famous for his pronouncement "Give me liberty or give me death."

crats. One of the twenty-two million black *victims* of the Republicans. And one of the twenty-two million black *victims* of Americanism.

And when I speak, I don't speak as a Democrat, or a Republican, nor an American. I speak as a *victim* of America's so-called democracy. You and I have never seen democracy; all we've seen is hypocrisy. When we open our eyes today and look around America, we see America not through the eyes of someone who has enjoyed the fruits of Americanism, we see America through the eyes of someone who has been the victim of Americanism. We don't see any American dream. We've experienced only the American nightmare.

We haven't benefited from America's democracy. We've only suffered from America's hypocrisy. And the generation that is coming up now can see it, and are not afraid to say it. If you go to jail, so what? If you're black, you were born in jail. In the North as well as the South. Stop talking about the South. Long as you're south of the Canadian border, you're South. . . .

It'll be the ballot or it'll be the bullet. It'll be liberty or it'll be death. And if you're not ready to pay that price, don't use the word freedom in your vocabulary.

One more thing: I was on the program in Illinois recently with Senator Paul Douglas⁵ the so-called liberal, the so-called Democrat, the so-called white man. At which time he told me that our African brothers were not interested in us in Africa. He says the Africans are not interested in the American Negro. I knew he was lying. But, during the next two or three weeks, it's my intention and plan to make a tour of our African homeland. And I hope that when I come back I'll be able to come back and let you know how our African brothers and sisters feel toward us.

And I know before I go there, that they love us. We're one. We're the same. It's the same man that colonized them all these years that colonized you and me too, all these years. And all we have to do now is wake up and work in unity and harmony and the battle will be over.

I want to thank the Freedom Now Party in the gold; I want to thank Milton and Richard Henry for inviting me here this afternoon, and also the Reverend Cley. And I want them to know that anything that I can ever do at anytime to work with anybody in any kind of program that is sincerely designed to eliminate the political, the eco-

5. U.S. senator from Illinois (1948-1966).

conomic, and the social evils that confront all of our people in Detroit and elsewhere, all you've got to do is give me a telephone call, and I'll be on the next jet right on into the city.

Thank you.
