

The Ballot or the Bullet

by Malcolm X

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Cleveland, Ohio

Symbols:
Ballot = political system
Bullet = civil rebellion

Mr. Moderator, Brother Lomax, brothers and sisters, friends and enemies: I just can't believe everyone in here is a friend, and I don't want to leave anybody out. The question tonight, as I understand it, is "The Negro Revolt, and Where Do We Go From Here?" or "What Next?" In my little humble way of understanding it, it points toward either the ballot or the bullet.

Ethos: establish his credibility letting them know his political

Before we try and explain what is meant by the ballot or the bullet, I would like to clarify something concerning myself. I'm still a Muslim; my religion is still Islam. That's my personal belief. Just as Adam Clayton Powell is a Christian minister who heads the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York, but at the same time takes part in the political struggles to try and bring about rights to the black people in this country; and Dr. Martin Luther King is a Christian minister down in Atlanta, Georgia, who heads another organization fighting for the civil rights of black people in this country; and Reverend G. M. L. Galamison, I guess you've heard of him, is another Christian minister in New York who has been deeply involved in the school boycotts to eliminate segregated education; well, I myself am a minister, not a Christian minister, but a Muslim minister, and I believe in action on all fronts by whatever means necessary.

Ethos: examples of ministers & activists who were howling the struggle

Ethos: 2 roles, just like them that he does well too

Don't let anybody tell you anything about the odds are against you. If they draft you, they send you to Korea and make you face 800 million Chinese. If you can be brave over there, you can be brave right here. These odds aren't as great as those odds. And if you fight here, you will at least know what you're fighting for.

Appeal: making the audience have a connection

I'm not a politician, not even a student of politics; in fact, I'm not a student of much of anything. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican, and I don't even consider myself an American. If you and I were Americans, there'd be no problem. Those Honkies that just got off the boat, they're already Americans; Polacks are already Americans; the Italian refugees are already Americans. Everything that came out of Europe, every blue-eyed thing, is already an American. And as long as you and I have been over here, we aren't Americans yet.

repetition: emphasis

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver - no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.

Antithesis:

The white man is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community. But you will let anyone come in and take control of the economy of your community, control the housing, control the education, control the jobs, control the businesses, under the pre-text that you want to integrate. No, you outta your mind. The political, the economic philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we have to become involved in a program of reeducation 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 which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer. And because these Negroes, who have been misled, 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 rundown community. Why you run it down yourself when you take your dollar out. And you and I are in the double-track, 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 own community. The man who's

Appeal: repetition & emphasis on you not having control & power

asydeton: "The Man"

Antithesis: "The Man" white people

malcolm X holds the black community and black voters responsible

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 to 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.

Logos:
the business practices that hurt the power of the black community

effect of repetition

So we're trapped, trapped, double-trapped, triple-trapped. Anywhere we go we find that we're trapped. And every kind of solution that someone comes up with is just another trap.

When you have - he is your enemy. Let me tell you, you wouldn't be in this country if some enemy hadn't kidnapped you and brought you here.

→ Allusions: African slave trade and original pilgrims

On the other hand, some of you think you came here on the Mayflower. So as you can see brothers and sisters this afternoon, it is 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 a-way 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 them from the same enemy. The government has failed us; you can't deny that. Anytime you live in the twentieth century, 1964, and you walkin' around here singing "We Shall Overcome," the government has failed us. This is part of what's wrong with 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.

Logos:
that's + appeal: teachers to all groups builds sense of community

Allusion: to MLK and non-violence - doesn't think it is effective

Allusion: to sit-ins → nonviolent movement

As long as you gotta 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. That right there 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. Well you and I been sitting long enough, and it's time today for us to start doing some standing, and some fighting to back that up.

Logos: logic of their philosophy

repetition
support: is argument against sit-ins

Knowing the future what is the significance

No, if you never see me another time in your life, if I die in the morning, I'll die saying one thing: the ballot or the bullet, the ballot or the bullet.

How does he feel about the value of protesting?

And this time they're not going like they went last year. They're not going singing "We Shall Overcome." They're not going with white friends. They're not going with placards already painted for them. They're not going with round-trip tickets. They're going with one way tickets. And if they don't want that non-violent army going down there, tell them to bring the filibuster to a halt.

repetition:

obstructive manner in a legislature (Against the C.R. Act - 57 day)

ended Jun 16

The black nationalists aren't going to wait. Lyndon B. Johnson is the head of the Democratic Party. If he's for civil rights, let him go into the Senate next week and declare himself. Let him go in there right now and declare himself. Let him go in there and denounce the Southern branch of his party. Let him go in there right now and take a moral stand - right now, not later. Tell him, don't wait until election time. If he waits too long, brothers and sisters, he will be responsible for letting a condition develop in this country which will create a climate that will bring seeds up out of the ground with vegetation on the end of them looking like something these people never dreamed of. In 1964, it's the ballot or the bullet.

metaphor: growth + change?