

Excerpt: **“The Ballot or the Bullet”**, delivered by Malcolm X, August 12, 1964

And this is best this way. Were we to come out here discussing religion, we'd have too many differences from the outstart and we could never get together. So today, though Islam is my religious philosophy, my political, economic, and social philosophy is Black Nationalism. You and I -- As I say, if we bring up religion we'll have differences; we'll have arguments; and 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 God, but when we come out here, we have a fight that's common to all of us against a [sic] 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 -- The time -- 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.

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 economic philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that we should own and operate and control the economy of our community. You would never found -- you can't open up a black store in a white community. White men won't even patronize you. And he's not wrong. He's got sense enough to look out for himself. You the one who don't have sense enough to look out for yourself...

Whether you are -- 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...

And once we see that all these other sources to which we've 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, a it's-already-too-late philosophy. This is what you and I need to get with, and the only time -- the only way we are 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 is 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. 'Cause if you are black you should be thinking black, and if you are black and you not thinking black at this late date, well I'm sorry for you...

This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death. It's freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody. America today finds herself in a unique situation. Historically, revolutions are bloody. Oh, yes, they are. They haven't never had a blood-less revolution, or a non-violent revolution. That doesn't happen even in Hollywood. You don't have a revolution in which you love your enemy, and you don't have a revolution in which you are begging the system of exploitation to integrate you into it. Revolutions overturn systems. Revolutions destroy systems.

A revolution is bloody, but America is in a unique position. She's the only country in history in a position actually to become involved in a blood-less revolution. The Russian revolution was bloody, Chinese revolution was bloody, French revolution was bloody, Cuban revolution was bloody, and there was nothing more bloody than the American Revolution. But today this country can become involved in a revolution that won't take bloodshed. All she's got to do is give the black man in this country everything that's due him, everything...

So, I say in my conclusion the only way we're going to solve it – we've got to unite in unity and harmony, and black nationalism is the key. How we gonna overcome the tendency to be at each others throats that always exists in our neighborhoods? And the reason this tendency exists, the strategy of the white man has always been divide and conquer. He keeps us divided in order to conquer us. He tells you I'm for separation and you for integration to keep us fighting with each other. No, I'm not for separation and you're not for integration. What you and I are for is freedom. Only you think that integration would get you freedom, I think separation would get me freedom. We both got the same objective, we just got different ways of getting at it.

**Excerpted from "I Have a Dream," a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.
delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.**

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation...

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must ever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force...

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecutions and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends. And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream...