



## Malcolm X: The Ballot or the Bullet

(excerpt) 1964

**racial equality** lighed for

alle racer

**black supremacy** sort

overherredømme

**anti-Semitism** anti-se-

mitisme, afstandtagen til

jøder

**white supremacists** hvide

mennesker der tager af-

stand til andre befolknings-

grupper, i dette tilfælde

sorte

**Malcolm X** (1925-1965): Although he was given the name Malcolm Little by his parents, he took on the name Malcolm X. He wanted the "X" to represent his unknown African name as a symbol of the heritage that had been stolen from him and his slave ancestors. Malcolm X also adopted the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He was a Muslim minister and a human rights activist. He believed in racial equality, black supremacy and anti-Semitism. During his childhood, his father was killed by white supremacists, his mother had a nervous breakdown and was placed in a mental institution, and so the family fell apart.

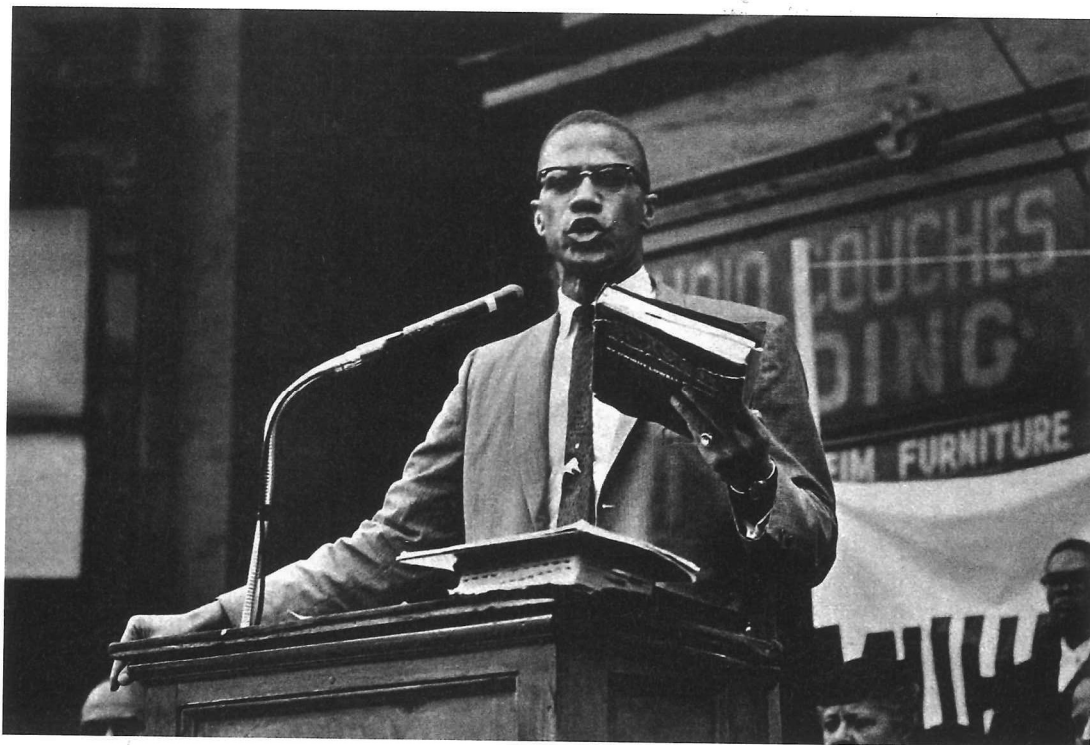
In 1946 Malcolm X was imprisoned for burglary. In prison he became a member of the political group Nation of Islam, which worked for improving conditions for African Americans. Malcolm X favoured violence in the struggle for black equality – and perhaps even supremacy – as he distrusted ideas about racial integration.

Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam stood out from the rest of the civil rights movement by preaching black supremacy and arguing for the complete separation of white and black Americans. However, he changed his opinion over time and developed a more accepting attitude towards the mainstream civil rights movement. He was shot and killed by members of the political group he himself had belonged to, the Nation of Islam, in Harlem, New York in 1965.

### PRE-READING 1

1. In pairs or small groups, look up information about Malcolm X online in order to answer the questions below:
  - A. Did Malcolm X and Martin Luther King know each other?
  - B. Did Malcolm X and Martin Luther King agree on how to fight racial segregation? Why/why not?
  - C. Debate whether it is relevant to compare Malcolm X to Martin Luther King and to discuss their political beliefs.
2. In pairs/groups debate:
  - A. What does the title of the speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" mean? What do you expect the speech to be about?
  - B. Before a presidential election, how can a civil rights activist influence future politics?

Malcolm X gave his speech "The Ballot or the Bullet" on April 3, 1964 in Cory Methodist Church in Ohio. The following is an excerpt from the speech.



Malcolm X giving a speech

**ballot** stemmeseddel  
**community** samfund,  
 befolkningsgruppe  
**jive** tale uforståeligt til en,  
 drive gæk med en  
**crook** skurk  
**letdown** skuffelse  
**trickery** fusk, svindel  
**treachery** forræderi,  
 løftebrud  
**intend** have til hensigt  
**nourish** give næring til  
**dissatisfaction** utilfreds-  
 hed

**Brother Lomax** Louis  
 Lomax (1922-70), en  
 afrikansk-amerikansk jour-  
 nalist blandt tilhørerne

## The Ballot or the Bullet

...

1964 threatens to be the most explosive year America has ever witnessed. The most explosive year. Why? It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises which they don't intend to keep. As they nourish these dissatisfactions, it can only lead to one thing, an explosion; and now we have the type of black man on the scene in America today – I'm sorry, Brother Lomax – who just doesn't intend to turn the other cheek any longer.

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INTRODU  
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legislation lovgivning  
amendment for-  
fatningsændring, tilføjelse  
til forfatningen  
filibuster forsinke vedta-  
gelse af en lov ved at holde  
lange taler  
pass vedtage  
Polack polak  
(nedsættende)  
disguised forklædt  
hypocrisy hykleri  
flag-saluter en person der  
hylder flaget  
flag-waver patriot, en der  
vifter med flaget

...

Well, I am one who doesn't believe in deluding myself. I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner. Sitting at the table doesn't make you a diner, unless  
5 you eat some of what's on that plate. Being here in America doesn't make you an American. Being born here in America doesn't make you an American. Why, if birth made you American, you wouldn't need any legislation; you wouldn't need any amendments to the Constitution; you wouldn't be faced with civil-rights filibustering in Washington,  
10 D.C., right now. They don't have to pass civil-rights legislation to make a Polack an American.

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  
15 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.

...

## INTRODUCTORY WORK

### Politics

1. Why is 1964 going to be "the most explosive year"?
2. What is Malcolm X's view on politicians? Why?
3. What does Malcolm X say about legislation, amendments and the Constitution? Why?

### An American

1. Comment on why Malcolm X feels like a "victim of Americanism".
2. Debate why Malcolm X sees "an American nightmare".

### Intertextuality (see the information box p. 128)

1. On p. 127, ll. 2-4, Malcolm X says: "I'm not going to sit at your table and watch you eat, with nothing on my plate, and call myself a diner." Comment on the possible intertextuality with Langston Hughes' poem "I, Too" (p. 99).
2. On p. 127, ll. 17-18, Malcolm X says: "I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare." Comment on the possible intertextuality with the American dream that Martin Luther King talks about in his "I Have a Dream" speech (p. 120).