

Video: Malcolm X About Race, Crime and Police Brutality: ‘You Can’t be a Negro in America and Not Have a Criminal Record’

By [Malcolm X](#)

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Malcolm X Speech in Los Angeles on May 22, 1962

On April 27th 1962, two LAPD police officers instructed to closely monitor a mosque’s activities (Muslim Temple 27 in Los Angeles) saw Black men taking clothes out of the back of a car outside the mosque. They approached aggressively and soon got violent, and as Malcolm X puts it, “hell broke loose”. The situation ended with seven unarmed Black Muslims shot outside the mosque. Nation of Islam (NOI) member William X Rogers was shot in the back and paralyzed for life. Temple Secretary Ronald X Stokes, 29, was killed. “They’re going to pay for it”, Malcolm X declared, going to Los Angeles to eulogize Stokes at a funeral attended by 2,000 people.

Despite an autopsy that established Stokes was shot at close range and had been stomped, kicked and bludgeoned while dead or dying, an all-White coroner’s jury deliberating the Stokes’ killing, took 23 minutes to conclude it “justifiable homicide.” By contrast, 14 NOI members were indicted for assault in the incident and 11 were found guilty. Elijah Muhammad’s reluctance to aggressively retaliate to Stokes’ death and refusal to work with civil rights organizations, local Black politicians and religious groups, would be the first of a series of events, causing irreparable rifts between The Honorable Malcolm X and the so-called ‘Messenger of Allah’ Elijah Muhammad. And lead to his eventual departure from the Nation of Islam and embrace of traditional, Sunni Islam.

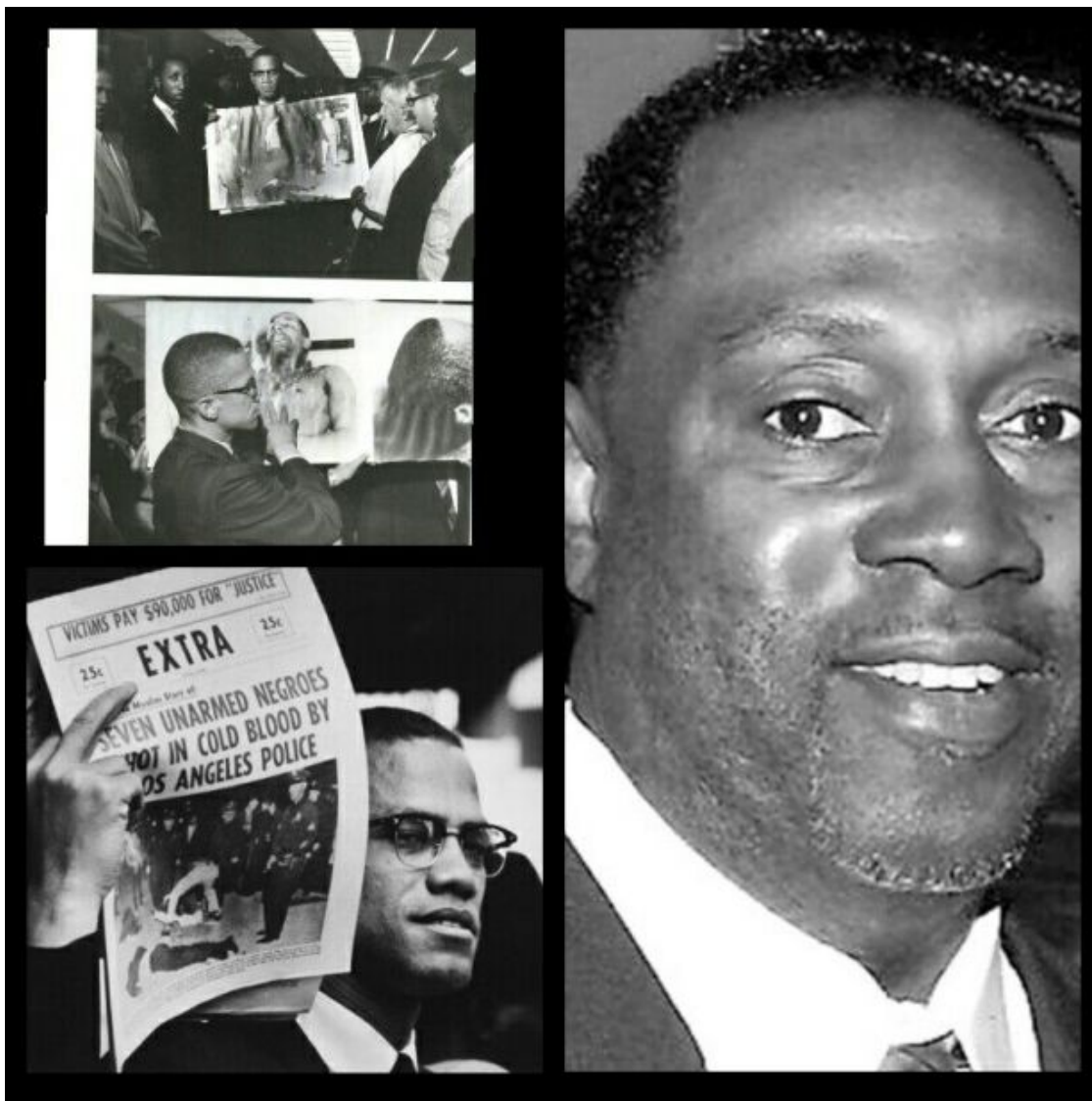
Full transcript below.

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful to whom all praise is due, whom we forever thank for giving us the honorable Elijah Mohammad as our leader, teacher, and guide. And I specifically, ladies and gentleman, and brothers and sisters, open up like that because I am a representative of the honorable Elijah Mohammad. And were it not for him, you and I wouldn’t be here today.

In order for you and me to devise some kind of method or strategy to offset some of the events or the repetition of the events that have taken place here in Los Angeles recently, we have to go to the root. We have to go to the cause. Dealing with the condition itself is not enough. We have to get to the cause of it all. (*crowd concurs*) Or the root of it all. And it is because of our effort toward getting straight to the root that people oft times think we’re dealing in hate.

But first I would like to congratulate and give praise to the Negro, so-called Negro leaders and so-called Negro organizations and, excuse me if I say so-called, it's hard for me to just outright say Negro when I know what that word Negro really means. *(thunderous applause)*

The person whom you have come to know as Ronald Stokes, we know him as Brother Ron – one of the most religious persons to display the highest form of morals of any Black person anywhere on this Earth. And as one of the previous speakers pointed out, who knew him, everyone who knew him had to give him credit for being a good man. A clean man, an intelligent man, and an innocent man when he was murdered.



Stokes

Ronald

The Negro, so-called Negro, organizations and leaders should be given great credit for their failure or refusal to let the White man divide them and use them, one against the other, during this crisis. *(thunderous applause)* As Reverend [Walkard] Wilson pointed out, I think it was eight years ago today that the Supreme Court handed down the desegregation decision. And despite the fact that eight years have gone past, that decision hasn't been implemented yet. *(applause from audience)*

I don't have that much faith. I don't have that much confidence. I don't have that much patience. And I don't have that much ignorance to... *(thunderous applause)* If the Supreme Court, which is the highest lawmaking body in the country, can pass a decision that can't

get even eight percent compliance within eight years, because it's for Black people, then my patience has run out. (*applause*)

When Black people who are being oppressed become impatient, they say that's emotional. (*murmuring*) Please... When Black people who are being deprived of their citizenship... not only of their civil rights, but their human rights, become impatient, become fed up, don't wanna wait any longer, then they say that's emotional. (*laughter and applause*)

The Negro, so-called Negro, leaders and organizations should be praised. They should be congratulated. They should be complimented because out of all of them combined, the White man has not yet found one who will play the role of Uncle Tom. (*thunderous applause*) But yet he has found no Tom, no puppet, no parrot, who is still dumb enough in 1962 to represent the injustices that he is inflicting against our people. (*applause*)

We don't care what your religion is. We don't care what organization you belong to. We don't care how far in school you went or didn't go. We don't care what kind of job you have. We have to give you credit for shocking the White man by not letting him divide you and use you one against the other. (*applause*)

In the past, the greatest weapon the White man has had has been his ability to divide and conquer. As Jackie Robinson pointed out beautifully on the television last night, 4/5 of the world isn't White. Isn't that what Jackie said? (*applause*) And if 4/5 of the world is dark, how is it possible for 1/5 to rule, oppress, exploit, dominate, and brutalize the 4/5 who are in the majority? How did they do it? Divide and conquer.

If I take my hand and slap you, you don't even feel it. It might sting you, because these digits are separated. But all I have to do to put you back in your place is bring those digits together (and punch you). (*applause*) This is what the White man has done to you and me. He has divided us, and used us one against the other. But today, thanks to Allah... You can say thanks to God, or thanks to Jesus, or thanks to Jehovah - whatever you want. (*applause*) But as a follower of the honorable Elijah Muhammad, we have been taught to say thanks to Allah. And that's what Jesus said. Jesus called on Allah. He said, "Allah! Allah! Allah [Inaudible]" I believe what's good for Jesus is good for you. If Allah was good enough for Jesus to call upon, I think He should be good enough for you to call upon. (man: That's right!)

Since the so-called Negro community has shocked the White man by resisting all efforts to divide us, I think that you and I should continue to shock him by singing and working together in unity. Despite religious, political, economic, or educational, or social differences, let us remember that we are not brutalized because we're Baptists. We're not brutalized because we're Methodists. We're not brutalized because we're Muslims. We're not brutalized because we're Catholics. We're brutalized because because we are Black people in America. (*applause*)

Here your mother is being raped, and you're not supposed to be emotional. Your women - please - your woman can't walk the street without some cracker putting his hands on her, and you're not supposed to be emotional! (*applause*) If you say that you're fed up, if you teach the Negro... (*film skips*)

They don't even know their own name (*woman: That's right!*) Why? Because he took took it away from her. Please, please. 20 million Black people don't even know their own language.

Why? Because he took it away from us. 20 million Black people who don't even know the history of their ancestors. Why? Because he took it away from us! And if you try and tell them how thoroughly and completely they've been robbed, he says you're teaching hate. (*applause*) That's something to think about. (*murmuring*)

Today we're coming out of college, you're coming out of the leading universities. You're trying to go in a good direction. But you don't know which direction to go in. And if somebody tries to take you right to the root of your problem they say that that man's a hate teacher. If I ask why should the Senators in Washington... and, then again, if we tell you that Negroes are being hung on the tree, or being shot down illegally, unjustly... and those Negroes should do something to protect themselves, you say you're advocating violence.

The White man is tricking you! He's trapping you. He doesn't call it violence when he lands troops in South Vietnam. (*applause*) Please, please, please! He doesn't call it violence when he lands troops in Berlin. When the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, he didn't say get non-violent. He said, "Praise the Lord, but pass the ammunition." (*applause*) But when someone attacks you, when someone comes at you with a club, when someone comes you with a rope, when someone comes at you with a gun, despite the fact that you've done nothing he tells you, "Suffer peacefully." (*murmuring*) "Pray for those who use you to spite me." "Be long suffering." And how long can you suffer after suffering for 400 years? (*applause*)

So I just wanna play up that little point right there because he said that we play on your emotions. And when you turn on your television tonight, or your radio, or read the newspaper, they're gonna tell you in that paper that I was playing on your emotions. Imagine you, a second class citizen. That's not getting emotional! It's getting intelligent.

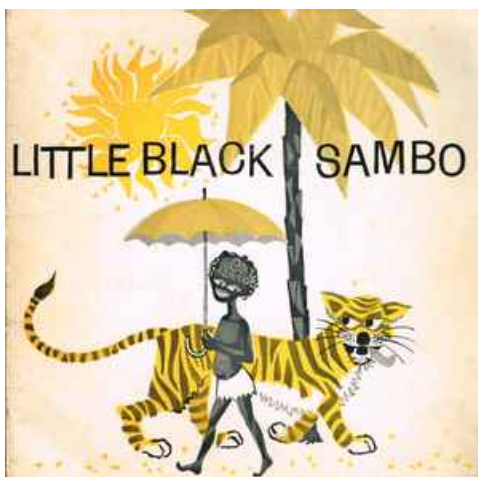
And as far as your mayor is concerned, I see... (I) should say their mayor. A man named Yorty, who has been slandering the Muslims, a professional liar... a professional liar. (*applause*) Who has mastered the art of using half truths. Put in the paper that they break into our religious place of worship and got records that they can use to prove that most of us have criminal records. You can't be a Negro in America and not have a criminal record. (*thunderous applause*) Martin Luther King has been to jail. (*applause*) Please. James Farmer has been to jail. Why, you can't name a Black man in this country who was sick and tired of the hell that he's catching who hasn't been to jail. Charged him with being seditious.

They put Moses in jail! (woman: Yeah!) They put Daniel in jail. (woman: Yeah!) Why, you haven't got a man of God in the Bible that wasn't put to jail when they started speaking up against exploitation and oppression. (*applause*) They charged Jesus with sedition. Didn't they do that? (*crowd concurs*) They said he was against Caesar. They said he was discriminating because he told his disciples, "Go not the way of the gentiles, but rather go to the lost sheep." He discriminated! Don't go near the gentiles, go to the lost sheep. Go to the oppressed. Go the downtrodden. Go to the exploited. Go the people who don't know who they are, who are lost from the knowledge of themselves and who are strangers in a land that is not theirs. Go to those people! Go to the slaves. Go the second class citizens. Go to the ones who are suffering the brunt of Caesar's brutality.

And if Jesus were here in America today, he wouldn't be going to the White man. The White man is the oppressor! He would be going to the oppressed. He would be going to the humble. He would be going to the lowly. He would be going to the rejected and the despised. He would be going to the so-called American Negro. (*applause*)

To have once been a criminal is no disgrace. To remain a criminal is the disgrace. I formally was a criminal. I formally was in prison. I'm not ashamed of that. You never can use that over my head. And he's using the wrong stick! I don't feel that stick. *(laughter and applause)* I went to a prison because I believed in men like Sam Yorty. I went to prison because I trusted men like Sam Yorty. I went to prison following the philosophy of men like Sam Yorty. But since I've been following the honorable Elijah Muhammad, I have been reformed and that's more... Please... That's more than Sam Yorty and Chief Parker and all these other White politicians that have been able to do with the inmates in the prisons of this State. They should give Mr. Muhammad credit. They should give Mr. Muhammad credit for reforming and rehabilitating men whom they have failed to reform and rehabilitate.*(thunderous applause)*

Mayor Yorty went forward to some press report that Mr. Muhammad had once been found guilty of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He failed to explain, purposely, that in 1934, the honorable Elijah Muhammad refused to send his children to White schools in Detroit, Michigan, that were teaching you about Little Black Sambo. That's the minor that he contributed to the delinquency of. You see this vicious, fork-tongue White man has been able to take lies and make you turn against those who want to help you and make others turn against you. This is the contributing to the delinquency of a minor that this mayor, or a man who calls himself mayor, is talking about.



In the same article he said that the Muslims are the same people who rioted in the United Nations. Someone should pull his coat and let him know that at the present moment there's six million dollars worth of suits [inaudible] levelled against two of New York's leading newspapers for making a mistake of charging the Muslims as being involved in those United Nations riots. We were not involved! And if this fork-tongued man who calls himself your mayor had taken the time to find that out, he wouldn't be walking into the trap that he's letting his ignorance lead him into!*(applause)* And if you take the time to read the *Washington Post* that came out the Sunday after that incident took place, the *Washington Post* pointed out on the front page that the Muslims had nothing to do with the UN riots and they quoted, in saying so, the person who was at that time the Commissioner of Police in New York City. See, it's lies that the White man has spread about the Muslims to try and make you afraid of the Muslims, or to try and make you think that the Muslims were a criminal element, an uncouth element in things that you have not liked to be associated with.

Also, they say that... I'm just clearing these things up and then we're going to get into what happened. They also say that the honorable Elijah Muhammad was draft dodger. No, he

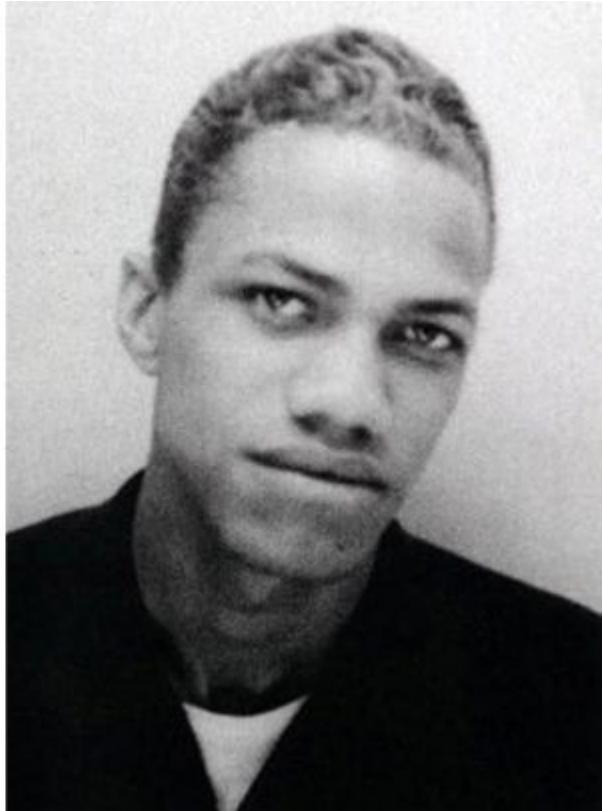
wasn't. He just refused to go to the army because he was a man of peace. He was a minister of a religion of peace. He was teaching peace. So he outright refused to go to the army. That's not draft dodging. That's intelligence. *(cheering)*

Here, before the grand jury, because the coroner's jury is stacked against Negroes. *(cheers and applause)* The Grand Jury is stacked against Negroes. The press, the radio, the television and the newspapers are stacked against Negroes. *(crowd concurs)* But, please, the Los Angeles Police department is stacked against all Negroes, all except those he has appointed to high positions.

The controlled press, the White press inflames the White public against Negroes. The police are able to use it to paint the Negro community as a criminal element. The police are able to use the press to make the White public think that 90%, or 99%, of the Negroes in the Negro community are criminals. And once the White public is convinced that most of the Negro community is a criminal element, then this automatically paves the way for the police to move into the Negro community, exercising Gestapo tactics stopping any Black man who is in this... on the sidewalk, whether he is guilty or whether he is innocent. Whether he is well dressed or whether he is poorly dressed. Whether he is educated or whether he is dumb. Whether he's a Christian or whether he's a Muslim. As long as he is Black and a member of the Negro community, the White public thinks that the White policeman is justified in going in there and trampling on that man's civil rights and on that man's human rights. *(applause)*

Once the police have convinced the White public that the so-called Negro community is a criminal element, they can go in and question, brutalize, murder, unarmed innocent Negroes and the White public is gullible enough to back them up. This makes the Negro community a police state. This makes the Negro neighborhood a police state. It's the most heavily patrolled. It has more police in it than any other neighborhood, yet it has more crime in it than any other neighborhood. How can you have more cops and more crime? *(laughter)* It shows you that the cops must be in cahoots with the criminals. *(laughter, applause)*

(They hate) the texture of the hair that God... Please... That God gave them so much that they put lye on it. *(laughter)* Do you realise... now, you know brother; lye will eat a hole in steel and you know your head is not that hard. *(applause)* Who taught you... Please. Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin to such extent that you bleach to get like the White man? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to? So much so that you don't want to be around each other. You know, before you come asking Mr. Muhammed does he teach hate? You should ask who, yourself, who taught you to hate being what God gave you. *(applause)*



Malcolm X's 'conk' during his delinquent youth, when he was nicknamed 'Detroit Red'. Here is how he tells it in his Autobiography: « How ridiculous I was! Stupid enough to stand there simply lost in admiration of my hair now looking "white," reflected in the mirror in Shorty's room. I vowed that I'd never again be without a conk, and I never was for many years. This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man's hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are "inferior"-and white people "superior"- that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look "pretty" by white standards. »

We teach you to love the hair that God gave you. Here you, way out in the middle of the ocean, can't swim and you worried about someone that's in the bathtub and can't swim. *(laughter and applause)* We don't steal. We don't gamble. We don't lie, and we don't cheat. And that also deprives the government of revenue *(laughter)* because you can't get into a whiskey bottle without getting past the government seal. You can't open a deck of cards without getting past the government seal. Hell, the White man makes the whiskey then puts you in jail for getting drunk. *(cheering)* He sells you the cards and the dice and puts you in jail when he catches you using 'em. So, he's against us because we fix it where he can't catch you anymore. We take the dice outta your hands and the cards out of your hands and the whiskey out of your head.

The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman. And as Muslims, the honorable Elijah Mohammad teaches us to respect our women and to protect our women. And the only time a Muslim really gets real violent is when someone goes to molest his woman. *(man: Right!)* *(applause)* We will kill you for our woman. I'm making it plain. Yes. We will kill you for our woman. *(applause)* We believe that if the White man will do whatever is necessary to see that his woman gets respect and protection then you and I will never be recognised as men until we stand up like men and place the same penalty over the head of anyone who puts his filthy hands in the direction of our women.

(thunderous applause)

We respect them, but we want them to respect us. We think that the law should respect the Negro community. The law should protect the Negro community. The law should approach the Negro community with intelligence if it expects the Negro community to react intelligently. So, the honorable Elijah Mohammed teaches us to always avoid anything that smacks of disrespect for the law. And if the police department tells the truth, they will have to admit that they have never had any, uh, experiences with Muslims that have ever been anything other than honorable unless they themselves come at us in a dishonorable way.

There's no case against the Muslims. It has no case against these brothers whom they shot down. And because it has no case, it's trying to create a case. It's trying to manufacture a case. And therefore they set up a grand jury hearing of the case so that they could hear it behind closed doors, and after hearing what we have to say then they'll... their particular strategy or defense against the actions that they committed on that April the 27th. So, at the advice of our attorneys, we purposefully, the victims, those who have been indicted, or rather those who have been arrested and are out on bond, have purposefully refrained and refused from making any statement whatsoever until after the case appears in court.

And when you hear their story it will be in a public trial. We have already been... had experience with these private hearings behind closed doors. Anything that the White man has to do to the Muslim, he has to do it in the open. He has to do it in public, or he has to put every single one of us behind bars for the rest our our lives. *(applause)*

When Mayor Yorty called for a government investigation of a religious group that have the highest moral standards of any group in the Negro community, Mayor Yorty was giving you an example of what Hitler did in Nazi Germany when he began to go on the rampage. *(applause)*

We feel, we have confidence that the White public and the Black public, if they hear our case, if they hear and have access to the investigation, will never be fooled by this phony set up that's stacked from the top all the way down. And if you doubt it, when you leave home tonight, when you go home tonight, look for the press. I'd like at this time to call forth these brothers who are under, uh, who were arrested. The brothers who were arrested. Come up here behind these chairs, please. *(applause)* They were suspects. *(laughter)* This wouldn't happen in a White neighborhood. White man can walk down the street with packages on his head, packages under his arm and packages anywhere else and won't anybody question his right to carry those packages. But a Negro is suspect because the press makes you suspect. Yes, the White press makes Negroes suspect. *(murmuring) (video skips)*

... all the information you need, Officer. And the Officer made one stay at the rear of the car and the other go to the front of the car, and while he was taking the one to the front of the car, the polite attitude, the humble if, the submissive, intelligent peaceful spirit that he unexpectedly found in this Negro infuriated him. And he began to... He told the brother; 'Put down your hands.' Brother was talking, he's not a criminal. A man has a right on the sidewalk to talk with his hands. 'Put down your hands, don't talk with your hands.' And when the brother continued to gesture with his hands the Officer grabbed his hand, twisted it around, 'round behind his back flung him up against the car and then that's when hell broke loose. That was when hell broke loose. A struggle ensued, shots were fired by the police and by a Negro doorshaker. *(laughter)*

An alarm went out. When the alarm went out, instead of the police going to the place where the incident occurred, the police went one block away to the temple. When they arrived there, they got out of their cars with their guns smokin'. You woulda thought it was Wyatt... What's his name? Wyatt Earp. I'm telling you, they came out of those cars, and we have enough witnesses to hang 'em. With their guns smokin'. Chief Parker knows this, Mayor Yorty knows this and every police official in the city knows that. They didn't fire no warning shots in the air they fired warning shots point blank at innocent, unarmed, defenseless Negroes. As I say, two of the brothers were shot in the back. Another was shot in the shoulder. Another was shot, two of them were shot, excuse the expression, through the penis. (*murmuring*) Another was shot in the hip and the bullet came out the other side. But Arthur here was shot 1/4 of an inch from his heart.

Let me tell you something, and I'll tell you why you say 'we hate White people'. We don't hate anybody. We love our own people so much, they think we hate the ones who are inflicting injustice against them. (*applause*) (*video skips*)

... who has been shot, the bullet having passed a 1/4 of an inch through his heart. I'm not gonna let him talk, which I think you can understand why. You should listen to the conversation of the police officers while it was going on. Two of the brothers who had been shot, who were lying hand in hand, the officer said they were chanting a death chant. You read that. They were saying 'Allahu Akbar'. What does that mean? It means that God is the greatest. It means that God is the greatest. (*applause*)

Understand what the White officer called a death chant was a prayer. They were praying when they were shot down. They were saying Allhu Akbar. And it shook the officer up that they haven't heard Black people talk any kinda talk but what they taught 'em. And two of the brothers who were shot in the back were telling me that as they lay on the sidewalk, they were holding hands. They held hands with each other saying Allahu Akbar. And the blood was seeping out of them where the police bullets had torn into their insides. Still, they said Allahu Akbar and the police came and kicked them in the head. Police kicked them in the head telling them to shut up that noise while they were laying on the sidewalk in front of our temple. Kicked them in the head. Shut up that noise.

And one of them, when he was on his way to the police station in the ambulance, one of the ambulance attendants told the White cop, 'Why don't you kill the nigger?' He said, 'I'll tell them that he tried to get away. Why don't you kill the nigger? While you got a chance. I'll swear that he tried to get away.' If he didn't say this, then I need to be put in jail, and I'll gladly go. (*applause*)

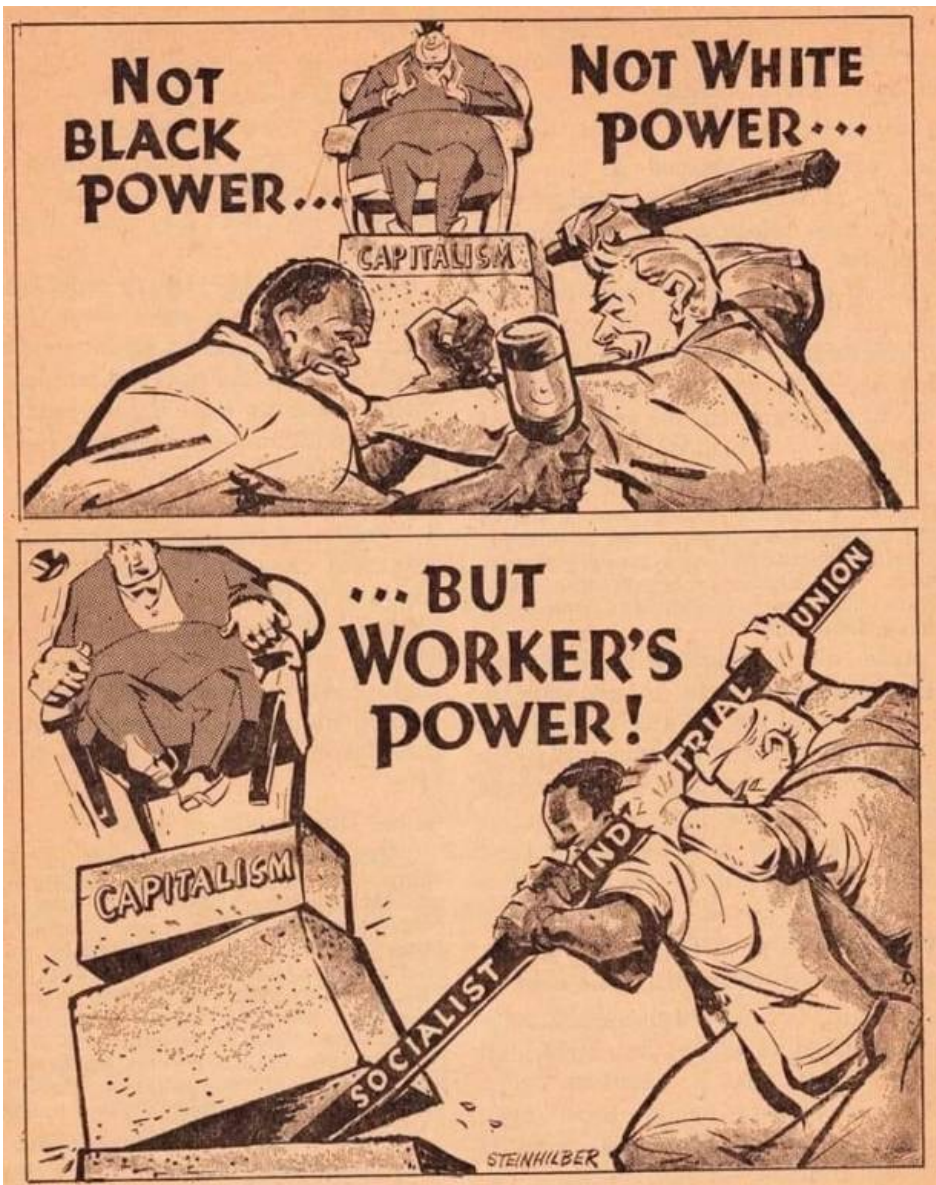
One of them who was being taken to jail in a police car as the ambulance sirens were coming to the place, one of the policeman said to the other: 'What are the ambulances rushing for? Nothing but some niggers.' So, he looked then and saw the Muslim brothers sitting beside him and he shut up. But after he got to the jail, the same officer that said this turned to the brother and said; 'I hope that you didn't get offended by what I said back there under the heat of emotion, because some of my best friends are colored.' (*roaring*) That's what he said. That's his password: 'Some of my best friends are colored.'

And I for one, as a Muslim, believe that the White man is intelligent enough, if he were made to realise how Black people really feel and how fed up we are without that whole compromising sweet talk. Why you're the one that make it hard for yourself. The White man believes you when you go to him with that old sweet talk 'cause you been sweet talkin' him

ever since he brought you here. Stop sweet talking him. Tell him how you feel. Tell him how or what kinda hell you been catching and let him know that if he's not ready to clean his house up, if hes not ready to clean his house up, he shouldn't have a house. It should catch on fire. And burn down. (*applause*)

As Muslims, we identify ourselves with the dark world. So we're not any minority. We're a part of the majority and the White man is the minority. (*applause*) You have to know this to understand us: we don't think any odds are against us. We don't fight a battle like the odds are against us. Why, the whole dark world today is in unity. It's one. If you don't think so, look at the United Nations. When the dark world votes, they vote as one. They gettin' the colonialists out of Africa, and out of Asia. Tellin' them to get out. They don't have any nuclear weapons but they got a solid, united voice and their unity alone is sufficient to drive the oppressor and exploiter of their people out of their own country.

You and I need to learn a lesson from that right there. In the UN, the dark world consists of Buddhist's, Hindu's, Shinto's, Taoist's, Christian's, Muslims, everything. But they're together. They forget their religious and political differences. They think as one. They move as one against a common enemy. And [*the French occupier*]of Algeria, he's going, don't think he's not going, he's going. (*applause*) They're getting him out of Angola, out of Tanganyika, out of Uganda, out of Kenya. He's going from South Africa, too. He hasn't got long to be there. All over this earth, dark people who have been oppressed and exploited by those who are not their own kind, strangers, are coming together to get the oppressor off their back. You and I learn a lesson from that.



We are oppressed. We are exploited. We are downtrodden. We are denied, not only civil rights, but even human rights. So, the only way we're going to get some of this oppression and exploitation away from us, or aside from us is come together against the common enemy. *(applause)* When they sat down at the Bandung conference, everyone there had this in common: a dark skin. Some of those who were sitting there were socialists, some were communists, some were capitalists, some were Christian, some were Buddhist. They were everything! But all of 'em was dark skinned. And they looked at that dark skin and agreed that this is one thing they had in common.

Forget that you're a Methodist, forget that you're a Catholic, forget that you're a Protestant, forget that you're a Muslim. Remember that all of us are Black, and we're catching h... [end of video].

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