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Malcolm X

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Anger and fear are the two most powerful, driving emotions known to humans. In his speeches, Malcolm X, who was known to be more radical than the other lieutenants in their fight for freedom against racism, moved people to act instead of stand by. He was an African American Muslim minister turned civil rights activist in the 1960s. X was once part of the Nation of Islam, but violated their moral code in his campaign against racism. Subsequently, he was assassinated in 1965 by three men believed to be members of the Nation of Islam. In his 1964 speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet," Malcolm X used facts, fear, and anger to effectively persuade his listeners into fighting for the freedom they have never had.

Malcolm X's use of facts surrounding recent events that happened during the civil rights movement made his speech relative to what has been going on throughout it. He asks the rhetorical question, "whose little girls are being murdered." (8) X is referring to the Birmingham church bombing, where four girls were killed in the explosion. The church was a meeting place for civil rights leaders, and this attack was traced back to the Ku Klux Klan. He wanted people to acknowledge the fact that this was not a random attack, it was a hate crime. He also brings up the fact that, "this man [Uncle Sam] has got the nerve to stand up and talk about South Africa, or talk about Nazi Germany, or talk about Deutschland," (8) even though America was having its own war to fight against discrimination. America was willing to solve international affairs regarding prejudice but unwilling to acknowledge its own internal conflict that has spanned across hundreds of years. Bringing facts into a persuasive speech is critical, considering that the

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truth behind what has been going on needs to be seen by the black community, but utilizing their fear is just as important.

Fear is a driving emotion that ignites other emotions, and Malcolm X's utilization of pathos in this way left an impact on his listeners. When he explains how, "we're trapped, trapped, double-trapped, triple-[t]rapped. Anywhere we go we find that we're trapped. And every kind of solution that someone comes up with is just another trap," (2) it is safe to assume that it struck fear in the hearts of his listeners. As humans, purely just another mammal at core, feeling trapped is comparable to suffocating. X included this in his speech to make his listeners panic, hoping to scare them into fighting to be free from the restraints that America's democracy has placed on them. X reiterates, "I say and I say it again: You got a President who's nothing but a Southern segregationist from the state of Texas. They'll lynch you in Texas as quickly as they'll lynch you in Mississippi. Only in Texas they lynch you with a Texas accent; in Mississippi they lynch you with a Mississippi accent." (6) In this quote, he explains to his followers that it does not matter where they are at, people are out to murder them because of the color of their skin. He does this to terrorize his listeners into realizing that a change needs to be made in order to survive. Anger is an emotion that stems from fear and is the emotion that leads people to act on what they believe is right.

The best way to drive people to act on what they are hearing is to make them angry, which is exactly what Malcolm X does in "The Ballot or the Bullet." He asks, "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... They've become dissatisfied, and all of this has built up frustrations in the black community that makes the black

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community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent.” (4) X was trying to ignite a fuse in his listeners, showing them that they need to put their anger to good use by fighting for what they believe in, both in the voting booth and in their everyday lives. He knew that the black community was powerful enough to make a change in America’s democracy. X reiterated this by explaining that, “We don’t see any American dream; we’ve experienced only the American nightmare...And the generation that’s coming up now can see it and are not afraid to say it. If you go to jail, so what...Long as you south of the Canadian border, you’re south.” (5) In this quote, X explains that no matter where his listeners are at in America, they will never be free without change. They will never be able to experience the true American dream without freedom. The anger behind not being able to free in America would enrage his listeners to do whatever is necessary to create a change in this democracy.

Malcolm X utilized anger, fear, and reciting facts to make his speech, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” impactful to his listeners. Inciting anger and fear into his audience would drive them to push for a lasting change in America’s battle against racism. Introducing facts to his listeners made them realize how close to home and relative this issue really was. X taught his listeners to stand up for what they believed in, and his speech was a huge stepping stone in the fight for civil rights.

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