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Karenga and Malcom X’s *The Ballot or The Bullet*

Karenga suggests that there are at least four themes that are evident in African rhetorical practice: 1) “As an expression and constitutive process of community, African rhetoric is first of all a rhetoric of community”; 2) “In the context of historical and current oppression, African rhetoric is also a rhetoric of resistance” in response to enslavement and systematic oppression; 3) it is a “rhetoric of reaffirmation” of dignity, fundamental rights, a meaningful life, the right/possibility to speak the truth; 4) and as rhetoric of possibility “It seeks not only to persuade, but to share, to inform, to question, and to search for and explore possibilities in social and human condition”. These themes are evident in Malcom X’s speech titled *The Ballot or The Bullet*. X discuss the idea of black nationalism and how the African American community has been oppressed by the white people in the United States and calls for unity and cooperation among African Americans despite their personal differences.

Quotes to use:

Karenga:

“a central aspect of the corpus of African American Rhetorical practice is rooted in and reflective of constant resistance” 6

“Africna culture as a rhetoric of communal deliberation, discrouse, and action, directed toward bringing good into the community and world” 6

“It is self-consciously committed to the reaffirmation of the status of the African person and African people as bearers of dignity and divinity, of their right to a free, full, and meaningful life, and of their right and responsibility to speak their own special cultural truth to the world and make their own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history” 6

“It is a rhetoric of possibility. It seeks not simply to persuade, but to share, inform, to question, and to search for and explore possibilities in the social and human condition” 6

Malcom X:

“Mr. Moderator, Reverend Cleage, Brother Lomax, brothers and sisters, and friends and I see some enemies. In fact, I think we’d be fooling ourselves if we had an audience this large and didn’t realize that there were some enemies present” 1

* Community
  + Despite differences of ideology and beliefs he wants to bring people in to support the cause and not alienate them if they do disagree

“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 an enemy who is common to all of us” 1

* Rhetoric of reaffirmation
  + Affirming that African people are entitled to their own beliefs and values/religious identities but despite what they may think they are all unified in this cause

“We all have the same problem. They don’t hang you because you’re a Baptist; they hand 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” 3

* Rhetoric of resistance
  + Uniting African American people and showing them that they are all fighting for the same cause and all want the same thing in the end

“So we’re trapped, trapped, double-trapped, triple-rapped. Anywhere we go we find that we’re trapped” 2

* Community
  + Emphasizing that this is a struggle that all African American people experience and that they are not alone in the struggle

“When we look like – at other parts of this earth upon which we live, we find that black, brown, red, and yellow people in Africa and Asia are getting their independence” 3

* Rhetoric of Possibility
  + If other groups and communities can get their freedom around the globe why would African Americans not be able to? If they work together and stand up for what they believe in freedom will come