

WATTS SPEECH

(The following speech was delivered by Stokely Carmichael in Will Rogers Park on November 26, 1966. The Saturday speech had been preceded by a controversy over the right of the rally's sponsor, the Black Congress, to use the park. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors had voted 5-0 to deny a permit and had passed a resolution, introduced by Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, which charged that the black power movement was "a neo-political program nakedly designed to foment racial hatred, violence and civil disorder." However, Mayor Sam Yorty attacked the denial of the permit, because, he said, the emotions stirred up by action made it "more likely that something could happen than if this action had not been taken." Carmichael spoke without a permit and with no incidents of violence before a crowd of 6,500 persons.)

I hope my friend Hahn is out there so he can see for himself that he can't tell black people who they can listen to.

Hahn and Reagan and their black backers say that wherever I speak there is a riot. What they want is that I not be permitted to speak. We can't win under their rules. If I don't speak, they win. And if we do speak, they and their friends start a riot...

Now the most important thing that black people have to do is to come together, and to be able to do that we must stop being ashamed of being black. This country has made us hate ourselves; this country has made us anti-black...

We have to come to a position where we can love each other and love ourselves, and that's going to be very hard to do. What that means is that we must understand we are black and they are white and that we are not as beautiful as they are with their own criteria. We do not have skinny lips; we do not have straight noses; we do not have stringy hair, therefore, we cannot be as beautiful as they are beautiful...We are black and beautiful...

We got to tell our brothers to stop kinking their hair and watching Tarzan movies, rooting for white men...

Every time black people start to move in any direction, this country puts us on the defensive so we got to apologize to them for even fighting for our liberation. That's a lot of junk. We don't have to apologize; they should have to apologize to us.

Now let me give you an example. About five years ago one of the Negro leaders would get up and say, "We want to integrate, because we want better houses and better jobs." And the white man would say, "You don't want to integrate, you want to marry my daughter." And the Negro leaders say, "Oh no, I don't want to marry your daughter. I just want to be your brother."

Negro leaders, even before they would begin to move, they were apologizing. Now I never get embarrassed when they ask me that question. I tell them: "Your mother, your daughter, your sister is not the queen of the world; she's not the Virgin Mary. She can be made. Let's move on."

Now it's the same thing with black power. Before we ever start to move they say black power means that, this, it means that...Black power means that black people should have the power that white people stole from them. Black people will define black power...

Now there is another reason why they got to stop black power: because it speaks to us... President Johnson could get up there and say "Ma fellow Americans, we shall overcome." And all the Negroes sat back there and say, "Massa Johnson going to take care of us now." But I'll be damned if he'll ever say, "Ma fellow Americans, I want black power." ...

White people know what power is. And we know what it is, because we ain't never had none. And that's why we are where we are, because we're talking about love and morality and nonviolence with people who shoot us like dogs and tell us to be nonviolent at the same time.

And there is another thing you should understand. These Negro leaders who say, "I don't see where looting gets nobody. The majority of Negro Americans are law abiding." And then they get a white man up there to say, "I don't see where looting gets anybody." And all these Negro leaders say, "That's right. Looting don't get you no where."

We ought to talk about looting like it ought to be talked about. There is no white man in this country who can talk to us about looting. The white man looted this country from the red man, and then they turned around and looted us. Looting has made the American empire what it is...

The only power that Negro leaders have is the power to condemn black people. That's the only power they have. The only time you see them is when black people start to move. Then the leaders are there: "We must go slow, we can't loot." You never see them before that. If they are afraid to condemn those white people, they ought to keep their mouths shut when they talk to black people.

Now you've got to understand that because we don't have power in our community is why we are where we are. We cut and shoot each other more than we cut and shoot white people. And inside of our community there are more policemen than there are anything else. Yet they never stop the cutting and shooting that we put on each other on Friday and Saturday nights. But if you take one nappy headed brother with a Molotov cocktail, they bring the whole damn National Guard in. And that is because and only because they care about property more than they care about human beings...

Our people need to practice nonviolence among ourselves, and that's where it starts. Once we're together, ain't nobody going to mess with us. Now all those people running around talking about how the rebellion didn't do no good. The rebellions did one good thing for this country: it let white men know that, if they think they are going to play Nazi, black people are not Jews...

We have to move to a position where we can bring black people together. We are the only people in this country who have to protect ourselves from our protectors. We have to have community alert patrols, not to patrol our neighborhoods but to patrol the policeman.

And the only reason we have to do that is because we are black. The only reason they suppress us is because we are black. Not because we are stupid, lazy, eat watermelon and got good rhythm, but because we are black. And that's what we must begin to understand. We must begin to tell the truth to each other and move from there.

This country tell us that if we work hard, if you sweat, you will succeed. If that were true, black people would own this country, lock, stock, and barrel. Our trouble has been that we care more for this country than we care for ourselves.

And the time has come to begin to think about us. That is what we must do. We have sent our mothers to take care of the Man's babies first, before they take care of ours.

We have sent our fathers off to fight wars to help Polish people fight Hitler and when they get back home, those same Polish fight us in Cicero.

We got to take care of us. The only protection we have is each other. We have to begin to let this country know that if they shoot a black man walking down a Mississippi highway with a Bible in his hand, if they shoot a black man taking his wife to the hospital in South Los Angeles, they aren't dealing with one black man, they're dealing with twenty million black Americans.

Now there is one more thing we must talk about, and that is the war in Vietnam. Some people have been saying, Negro leaders have been saying, "I don't see why they're talking about that war for, we're just concerned about our civil rights."

Well I'll tell you why we got to talk about the Vietnam war. You know that guy McNamara? He's the guy that wears those Ghandi glasses, telling folks to be nonviolent. Well he's a racist. He knows that he is going to be drafting 40% black people to fight that war in Vietnam. What he's doing is called black urban removal. That's why we got to be against that war in Vietnam.

But we got to be against that war for other reasons. This country wants to rule the world. That's all it's ever wanted to do. They're using black people to get Asia so they can rule Asia too. If you are for that war, you're a black mercenary. That's what you are. Anytime a black man goes from this country to another country to fight for something he doesn't have, he's a black mercenary.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, this country says we're fighting that war for love, peace, democracy, equality and justice. And as black people living in this country, knowing what love, peace, democracy, equality and justice are, we ought not to be willing to give it to anybody...

Now the reason I know black power is good is because so many white folks came out against it. Whenever we're talking about black power, we're talking about being able to control the community in which we live. That means being able to control the police force inside of Watts. And it will be responsible to you. Not if you control the police force, you don't have to worry about police brutality, because you just say, "Anybody who wants to work on the police force must live in our community." That would stop police brutality tomorrow.