

James Brown, “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968)

In the summer of 1966, Civil Rights activist James Meredith was shot while on a solitary march from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, in protest of continuing racism in the south. While he was recovering in the hospital, Civil Rights leaders across the country organized and planned to finish Meredith’s march for him. James Brown, who was already a celebrity by that time, initiated the march with a musical performance. While originally known as the “Walk Against Fear,” the event later became known as the first “Black Power” march, as it was the first time the term “Black Power” was invoked in public, by the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader Stokely Carmichael.



Two years later, Brown again became involved in the Civil Rights Movement at a seminal moment. Following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King on April 4th, Brown devoted a tour to reaching out to black communities, promoting a message to “learn, don’t burn,” and use their anger over Dr. King’s murder in productive ways. A few months later, he recorded “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud,” which became a fearless endorsement of Black Pride. “That song cost me a lot of my crossover audience,” Brown recalled later, “I don’t regret recording it though...It was badly needed at the time. It helped Afro-Americans in general, and the dark-skinned man in particular. I’m proud of that.”

Lyric Excerpt

Some people say we got a lot of malice, some say it’s a lotta nerve
 But I say we won’t quit movin’ until we get what we deserve
 We’ve been buked and we’ve been scorned
 We’ve been treated bad, talked about as sure as you’re born
 But just as sure as it take two eyes to make a pair, huh!
 Brother we can’t quit until we get our share

Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud
 Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud
 One more time, say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud, huh!