



**AFRICAN LIBERATION DAY:
HONORING A HISTORY AND CULTURE OF STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

LET US begin by saying, we send greetings of solidarity and increased and continuing struggle to all African people throughout the world African community and to all the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world on this African Liberation Day, May 25, in its 52nd year. Let it be said that this African Liberation Day finds us still standing, steadfast in struggle, still committed to the constant theme, process and practice of the liberation of African people everywhere and in every way as a self-conscious contribution not only to our own freedom and flourishing, but also to that of the world and all in it.

And what is liberation if it is not a revolutionary process and practice that frees the mind and heart, frees the person and people and frees the land whether it is a community, country or continent, that is to say, whether it is African America, Haiti or the whole of Africa? It is a personal and collective thrust upward and onward satisfying human need for human good of every kind, and freeing and transforming the people in the process.

Therefore, blame history and a struggle-tested hardline stance on Us, but we cannot in good faith change the name of African Liberation Day to Africa Day as the African Union decided to do in July 2002. For we cannot deny its original ideals and central aims, rooted in and reflective of our ethical and enduring commitment to liberation. Nor can we be diverted, satisfied or silenced because all 54 African countries now fly their own flags, sing their own national anthems, and send their own representatives to international bodies and forums around the world.

As Frantz Fanon rightly affirmed, our history and culture cannot be celebrated detached from the daily and decisive struggles of our people. Thus, anyone who appreciates African history and culture must struggle to create the free space, the *liberated context and conditions* for this history and culture to unfold in the image and interest of the people, especially the masses, as Malcolm X and Mary McLeod Bethune taught us. Nor can we simply celebrate history or culture stripped of its central focus on liberation as an ongoing cultural, political and economic process and practice that frees the people from domination, deprivation and degradation and opens the way to a new way of being and living in the world.

After all, how do we celebrate Africa, if we do not celebrate African people? And how can we celebrate them, if we do not honor their past, current and continuing struggles and achievements to free themselves from every form of oppression, and every unnecessary limitation on their lives and to build the good world we all want, deserve and struggle for each day? When we said in the Sixties that “Liberation is coming from a Black thing”, it was declared without apology, reservation or self-erasing reasoning and represented a reaffirmation of our *inalienable right* and *inescapable responsibility* of self-determination. It was a defiant declaration of our deep-rooted, wide-reaching and determined struggle to *free ourselves, be ourselves* and *flourish* in solidarity with other oppressed and struggling peoples and open a new history for the world. Following Fanon, it was a commitment to build and do righteous battle to secure human good and the well-being of the world.

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Therefore, we have an African liberation history that is an awesome legacy and that gives us a special identity, purpose and direction as a people. It is a history of *struggle, creativity, and achievement* against all odds, a struggle against the Holocaust of enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, neocolonialism, and the continuing struggles against old and new forms of oppression without and within, on the continent and throughout the world African community.

Some of its signs, symbols and lessons are from Palmares, Brazil; Yanga, Mexico; the Haitian Revolution; Isandlwana, South Africa; Adua, Ethiopia; the liberation struggles on the continent in the 60s and after; and the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. in the 60s and others. And there are also the unmarked, but equally meaningful battles our people have fought and fight daily to hold on to their humanity, break the hold of oppression and create free space for a good life for themselves and a legacy of well-being and flourishing for future generations.

We cannot and must not give up this *history and culture of struggle*, but must know and honor it by increased and relentless struggle and continuous and expansive achievement. This is the meaning of Marcus Garvey's teaching that "history is the landmark by which we are directed into the course of life". Moreover, "the history of a movement, the history of a nation, the history of a race (or people) is the guidepost of that movement's destiny, that nation's destiny, that race (or people's) destiny". And as Malcolm said, "history is a people's memory" and thus a fundamental source of the meaning of our lives and we cannot lose

it without losing an essential part of ourselves and our self-conception as persons and a people.

There is, then, continuing work to do and struggles to wage. *Africa must be free and united*. Its wealth must be harnessed for the good of its people and then in the interest of the world as Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah and other liberation leaders urged. It must focus on the alleviation and end of poverty, famine and food insecurity; and the control of devastating diseases of HIV/AIDS, malaria and others. Africa must end debilitating civil and military conflicts, strengthen democracy, and educate and employ more of its people in work that not only satisfies material needs, but also elevates the mind and spirit and gives each and every African an expansive sense of themselves, solving their own problems and building their own lives and future.

Africa must also see itself, not simply as a continent, but also as a world community in the Garveyian sense of the pan-African project. In this regard, we must, as Africans, continue and increase the struggle wherever we are, in Africa, North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Islands of the Seas. Indeed, we in the U.S. must continue to struggle for liberation, not only to aid and join continental and other diasporan Africans in their liberation struggles, but also to free ourselves. This means freeing ourselves from racial inequalities and disadvantages of wealth, power and status, from police and other forms of systemic violence, from legal limitations on rights and freedom, and from the endless array of post-racial, capitalist, and general Americana Pablum and illusions packaged and peddled as genuine freedom.

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