



**AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AND REAFFIRMATION:
CELEBRATION AND REMEMBRANCE IN SENEGAL**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Our delegation landed in Dakar, Senegal, without illusions about what was still to be done to achieve an African Renaissance, defined by President Abdoulaye Wade, our gracious host, as the rise and renewal of “a continent united by the best of human achievement, cultural excellence, prosperity, security, peace and progress.” However, there was among us a profound and pervasive sense of history and hope, of the unfolding of something promising, and an important contribution to the cooperative pan-African project of a liberated and uplifted Africa. And we knew and talked about how every thing, thought and practice must be measured by how it addresses and answers the needs of African people, their aspirations to be free from domination, deprivation and degradation, and to become self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation.

Joining the Senegalese people and government and many heads of states to celebrate Senegal’s 50th Anniversary of Independence, our delegation included, as reported in the press, “representatives of the NAACP, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, the Constituency for Africa and African American Unity Caucus, Africare and many other organizations.” Also the press reported, “Among prominent African Americans taking part (were) Rev. Jesse Jackson, Benjamin Todd Jealous, Roslyn Brock, Dr. Julius Garvey, Dr. Maulana Karenga, Ambassador Dudley Thompson, Dr. Lonnie Bunch, Mel Foote, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, Randy Weston, AKON, Richard Gant, State Senator Anthony C. Hill, State Senator Rodney Ellis, Constance Newman and Debra Fraser-Howse.” Dr. Molefi Asante was unable to attend because of a prior commitment. But thru his work over the years on pan-African projects and his key role as chair of the U.S. FESMAN Committee directed toward the

African Renaissance, his presence was both felt and missed.

We began with a briefing and self-introduction, reaffirming the necessity of an African Renaissance and our commitment to it. And we talked too among ourselves about the meaning of the spiritual and emotional longing of our ancestors to return home and how we, in this decision to return and help build, become the living embodiment and fulfillment of this ancient longing. Moreover, we paid homage to Dr. Martin L. King whose day of martyrdom falls on the day of Senegal’s Independence, 4 April. And we thought about the link between martyrdom and liberation, about how as we used to say in the 60’s, “freedom ain’t free.”

We had come to celebrate Senegal’s independence, to witness the Unveiling of the African Renaissance Monument and to participate in the pan-African colloquium on the African Renaissance. But Dr. Djibril Diallo, Chair of the U.S. Leadership Committee for the World Festival of Black Arts (FESMAN) 2010 and Senior Advisor to the Executive Director of UNAIDS (the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) knew we needed to make a sacred pilgrimage to the Holocaust Memorial Site at Gorée Island and arranged it. A professional diplomat and avid pan-Africanist, he had taken the initiative in organizing the U.S. delegation with input from a wide range of African American advisors. So, we went to Gorée to pause and pay homage to our ancestors, as a rightful remembrance and raising up in reverent respect of the millions personally and collectively killed in one of the greatest holocausts in human history, i.e., a morally monstrous act of genocide not only against African people, but also a crime against humanity.

Even before we went to Gorée Island, we talked about how the Holocaust of enslave-

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ment was a binding link between us as African peoples, as a parallel and interrelated process with colonialism and imperial domination of Africa. And when we stood in the sacred space of the Holocaust Memorial Site at Gorée, Tiamoyo Karenga and I talked about how the link was even deeper, for it was not simply sharing in parallel and interrelated systems of oppression and exploitation. It was also about the common ground of having come from the same families who shared the same loss and suffering, and also who shared resistance and rising from the coffins of enslavement that could not contain them.

Here it is important to understand the Holocaust of enslavement as a shared history and catastrophic loss. For the enslaved Africans who were captured, kidnapped and killed in numerous ways were not nameless, familyless and communityless people. On the contrary, they were members of African families and communities who were named, known and loved and who were missed and mourned at their physical deaths and the social and cultural deaths they suffered passing thru the many “doors of no return.” And we are their descendents and survivors. Thus, we returned to pay homage to those ancestors whose genocide was justified “in the name of God and progress,” whose savage oppression was considered a “saving grace” and whose brutal exploitation as objects of labor and uses of various kinds was explained as both natural and necessary for “the higher interests of a superior people.”

Finally, our viewing and discussion of the African Renaissance Monument and of the promise, problematics and prospects of an Africa Renaissance brought us full circle back

to reaffirming our commitment to African people. The Renaissance Monument, the tallest and most massive of its kind in the world, is the symbol of Africans moving up and outward from all constraints on human freedom, well-being and flourishing. Indeed, the hub and hinge on which a real African Renaissance will turn or stall is the way the people are respected, participate and benefit.

Thus, African people and a real Renaissance require a unified Africa, a United States of Africa, which can harness and harvest its natural resources; develop its human capacities and provide, promote and protect the well-being and flourishing of the people, peace throughout the land, gender equality, freedom, social justice, human rights, regional integration and cooperation, and cultural reaffirmation and renewal. Moreover, Africa, strengthened in its unity, must insist on and struggle for debt cancellation; reparations; the end of resource and land theft; and the end of global fiscal policies negative to African self-determination, self-reliance and sustainable development.

As Ambassador Dudley Thompson stated, our united aim must be to establish Africa as a global power. This is done not only to defend, enrich and expand the lives of the living, but as Marcus Garvey said, it is also to pay rightful honor to the sacred memory of our ancestors for their struggle, suffering and sacrifice by building “a free and redeemed Africa—a monument for all eternity.” Likewise, Kwame Nkrumah says, it is also to protect and promote human rights, well-being and flourishing everywhere and thus “become one of the greatest forces for good in the world.”

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