



**CRITICAL ISSUES THAT CALL US TO ACTION:  
MEETING THE DEMANDS OF THIS DECISIVE MOMENT**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**A**S WE MOVE AND MAKE OUR WAY through the troubled, treacherous and trap-laden waters of our time, we, as a people, are morally compelled to deal deliberately and decisively with the many critical issues that confront us and call us to action. We speak here of the ethical imperative to continue the struggle, keep the faith and hold the line, honoring and advancing our past and current efforts to expand the realm of freedom, justice and shared good in this country and the world. And to do this, we must act without narrow notions of our interests or concern for funds, favor, fear or false friends who constantly call for concessions and compromise, and at best, can only promise a dignity-denying comfortable place in oppression.

These critical issues to be dealt with include current and enduring issues of: defining and resisting fascism; ICE raids, immigration and Black/Brown relations; reparations, repairing ourselves and an injured and injuring world; war, waste and White supremacy; and ongoing issues of housing, health care, food security, and security of personhood and peoplehood. And although these and many other issues confront us, none is more vital to our physical, psychological and social health than understanding and asserting ourselves as *a central moral and social vanguard*, actively committed to a liberating and transformative struggle to achieve an inclusive African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. This requires that we be constantly attentive to the *moral quality, radical character* and *active commitment* of our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world.

It could be argued that our self-understanding is of little value in solving the problems which confront us. But in reality, self-understanding is key to self-assertion in the

world. Indeed, how we see and understand ourselves determines and often dictates how we assert ourselves in the world. Thus, if we have limited conceptions of ourselves, then we will tend to assert ourselves in limited and self-diminishing ways. And instead of embodying and expressing the opened minded and open-hearted emotions, thought and practice that define us at our best, we will tend toward imitations of our oppressor, those of the narrow and human-negating mind and cold and constricted heart, those who call genocide just war and the slaughter of innocents self-defense. This means emulating our oppressor who cannot and must not be our teacher.

The idea and practice of being a moral and social vanguard both as persons representing a people and the people themselves is deeply rooted in our history and culture from ancient times to now. It is a concept and practice which defines those who go forward first, show and open the way for others, who teach, demonstrate and embody what is good, right and possible in community, society and the world, and who cultivate and assist the people in becoming self-conscious agents of their own lives and liberation. In the sacred text of ancient Egypt, the *Husia*, REDIU Khnum defines himself saying, "I am one who knows himself as a vanguard of the people, a precious staff made by God, dignified, openhanded, noble in appearance, godly to behold, kindhearted, clear thinking, a person of character, loved by the people."

Furthermore, in the sacred text of ancient Yorubaland, the *Odu Ifa*, we are given, as Africans and humans, the shared task of bringing good in the world. The text says, "Let's do things with joy, for surely, humans have been divinely chosen to bring good in

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the world.” Given this divine assignment and the demands and development of our history, we say we have been chosen by heaven and history to bring good in the world. And we say in *Kawaida* teachings, this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life. It is in this spirit of a world-encompassing vocation that Nana Dr. Mary Mcleod Bethune teaches us that “We are custodians and heirs of a great legacy” and “Our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this.”

Likewise, this expansive understanding of ourselves is found in the moral teachings of Nana Dr. Anna Julia Cooper who reaffirms our central and vital role for ourselves and the whole of humanity when she tells us “We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, condition or country.” This posing us as a moral and social vanguard in the world is also reaffirmed by Nana Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who tells our people at the dawn of the civil rights phase of the Black Freedom Movement, let us so struggle “that years from now historians will have to say there lived a great people, a Black people, who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization. This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility.”

In the midst of the liberation struggles of African peoples and other peoples of color, Nana Frantz Fanon urges us to not become “obscene caricatures of Europe” but to think deep and expansively for ourselves and the world, saying, “Let us reconsider the question of humanity. It is a question of . . . starting a new history of humankind. We must work out new concepts and try to set afoot a new man and woman.” And in this period of the righteous rising and resistance of African peoples of the world and other oppressed and

struggling peoples, Nana Haji Malcolm tells and teaches us that we belong to the rising tide of history, that our liberation struggle “is part of the rebellion against the oppression and colonialism which has characterized this era.”

Given the definitional dominance of the dominant society, it is easy to embrace its values of vulgar individualism, hatred for the different and vulnerable and narrow notions of personal and communal self-interests. Some of us thus might feel and argue we have no interest in the emerging and expanding fascism in this country even though we are among its most devastated, different and vulnerable victims. Some might also claim we have no interest in the fascist ICE raids, even though Black people, Afro-Latinos, Haitians, continental Africans, other Caribbean Africans et al, are among those most targeted, abused and abandoned. And some may argue we have no obligation also to resist the genocidal war against the Palestinian people, even though our ethical tradition enjoins us to be sensitive to fellow human suffering and to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among the vulnerable and oppressed, and even though we, ourselves, have suffered the Holocaust of enslavement.

But as Black people, African people, practicing the best of our culture and our moral reasoning, we know we cannot minimize or miniaturize our interests in a just and good society and world. Moreover, oppressed people in this country and around the world borrow from and build on our moral vision and vocabulary, sing our freedom songs and pose our liberation struggle as a model to emulate. Indeed, being engaged in the struggle for the shared goods of freedom, justice and

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other human essentials are not only an ethical imperative, but also an existential one.

**F**OR WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH THE CONTINUING advancement of racism regenerated, increasing aggressive imperial projects and White supremacy in a fascist form. And in this context we remember lessons left us by Nana Paul Robeson who joined in coalition and alliance to fight against the first fascist powers, recognizing early this anti-human system's will to wage total war on the world. And given its existential danger to the

world and to us as different and vulnerable people, as well as others similarly situated, he urged us to recognize that "the battlefield is everywhere; there is no sheltered rear" and to join the resistance. For in reality, there is no safety or sanctuary on the sidelines and no reliable remedy for this virulent and vicious pathology of oppression, except righteous and relentless struggle to overcome and end it and pose and put in place a new paradigm of shared and inclusive good in this country and the world.▲

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