



**DR. KING HOPEFULLY RE-IMAGINING THE AMERICAN DREAM:
HAJI MALCOLM RIGHTFULLY OPPOSING THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 01-15-26, p. C-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

TO MAKE EVEN PARTIAL SENSE OUT of the Orwellian world and Madhatter would-be wonderland minus Alice which Trump and his MAGA Trumpeteers seek to establish and impose, we must, in no way submit to it, sanction it, attempt to explain it away or be dispirited by it, but rather reject and resist it. For it is a fundamental and enduring lesson of history and struggle that evil, injustice and oppression which is not resisted remains repulsively present and in place unless it is uprooted and removed through righteous and relentless struggle. And this moment in history, this context and the conditions which confront us, call for such a dedicated, disciplined and determined struggle.

I speak here of reimagining the so-called American dream, going beyond the self-congratulatory conceptions of American history and daring to imagine and bring into being a new history and hope for ourselves and future generations. Our task, our honored ancestors teach us, is to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice, the silenced and suppressed, the downtrodden and oppressed. And I want to engage texts and teachings from Nana Dr. Martin Luther King and Nana Haji Malcolm X to discuss this, especially Dr. King in this his month of coming into being.

In 1965 in marking the 4th of July, Nana King chose as the focus of his lecture the American dream. And he states that “I choose this subject because America is essentially a dream”. It was then and

remains an unfulfilled dream, an aspiration rather than an actuality, an unfinished project, not a finished product as the current gangsta regime wants us to affirm and accept in spite of the nightmare it was for Native Americans and us at its very founding and the nightmarish conditions being created for the various vulnerable and different groups in our time at home and abroad, citizen and immigrant, young and old.

Nana King describes the dream as he imagines it saying, “It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities, and of all creeds can live together as brothers”. He goes on to say that “The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime words. ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’”.

Identifying another pillar of the American dream from this passage from the Declaration of Independence, he notes that it affirms that “each individual has certain inherent rights that are neither derived from or conferred by the state. They are gifts from the hands of the Almighty God”. Haji Malcolm also speaks of our natural God-given rights and makes a necessary distinction between civil rights granted by a government and human rights that are natural and God-given. And he argues these must be our foundation and focus in our liberation struggle.

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Immediately after praising the dream as an aspiration, King recognizes its unfulfilled character, and says, “But ever since the Founding Fathers of our nation dreamed this dream, America has been something of a schizophrenic personality. On the one hand, we have proudly professed the noble principles of democracy. On the other hand, we have sadly practiced the very antithesis of those principles”. Haji Malcolm, speaking of this split personality of American society, this blatant contradiction between principles proclaimed and practices imposed says that given the oppressive character of society, “Black people . . . are the victims of American democracy”, not its beneficiaries. Moreover, he notes that whereas some still might see “the American system as an American dream”, others are seeing and experiencing it “as an American nightmare” in which we should not place our hopes. Neither King nor Malcolm wants us to lose hope or be dispirited. On the contrary, they both want us to hold US society accountable for its claims, promises and oppressive practices, and they both see holding society accountable through righteous and relentless struggle, reimagining a new society and world, and working and struggling to achieve them.

King goes on to say that there is an urgent need for US society to assess and alter itself. Indeed, “now more than ever before, America is challenged to realize its noble dream”. He links this to a call for a healthy democracy instead of an “anemic democracy”, a democracy which Malcolm calls “disguised hypocrisy”.

Moreover, “the price that the United States must pay for the continued exploitation and oppression of (Black people) and other minority groups is a price of its own destruction”. Here King sees, as Malcolm, the negative forces and practices of America as the central source of its destruction, and he and later Malcolm calls for it to change before it’s too late.

Dr. King tells America that it must change not to counter its enemies or to win allies among the emerging most numerous peoples of color. Oppression, he argued, “must be uprooted from our society because it is morally wrong”; it is in opposition to cherished religious and ethical principles; undermines genuine human relations; “and ends up relegating persons to the status of things”. Thus, “this problem must be solved, not merely because it is diplomatically expedient, but because it is morally compelling”.

Haji Malcolm doubts the moral commitment of the oppressor, and asks us to maintain a healthy suspicion of an oppressor’s motives and claims, arguing the immorality and amorality of the oppressor. He states, “It has never been out of any internal sense of morality or legality or humanism that we were allowed to advance”. Indeed, he tells the oppressor society, “You have been as cold as an icicle whenever it came to the rights of (Black people) in this country”. Thus, he contends, “Tactics based solely on morality can only succeed when you are dealing with people who are moral or a system that is moral. A man or system which oppresses a man because of his color is not

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moral”. Given this, he says, it is our duty to resist and end our own oppression.

LIKewise, KING BELIEVES THAT A new society must be built and achieved in struggle, saying “if the American dream is to be a reality, we must continue to engage in creative protest in order to break down those barriers which make it impossible for us to realize the American dream”. And from the beginning in Montgomery, like Haji Malcolm, Dr. King wants us to see and conduct ourselves as a moral and social vanguard in this country and world. Indeed, Malcolm sees us as part of the rising tide of human history, part of the liberation struggles enveloping the world then. And King tells us “we must begin with a world perspective.

For we will not be able to realize the American dream until we work to realize the world dream, the world dream for peace and brotherhood and goodwill”. And we must not become numb or indifferent to the suffering and oppression of others in the world or doubt our eventual victory over oppression. For as he asserts in one of his classic contentions, “the struggle must go on, knowing that the victory can be won because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”. Finally, he states that “with this faith in the future”, we will be able to end despair, embrace hope and achieve a reconceived shared and inclusive good for ourselves and the world for which we have struggled so hard and long.▲

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