IN REMEMBRANCE AND RIGHTFUL HONOR OF
Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the great freedom fighters of African and human history, we submit again a brief depiction of the powerful and beautiful way she taught us to think, live and struggle to bring good in the world.

In these uncertain and unsettling times of the self-silencing of the lambs, the fearful and fatigued surrender of summer soldiers, and the out-of-control hate-filled howling of ice age winter wolves, lessons and models of struggle and resistance from the sacred narrative of our history are both appropriate and compelling. Certainly, in this month of October, which is the month of her birth, the revered freedom fighter and human rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer, wife and companion in struggle of Perry “Pap” Hamer and daughter of James Lee and Lou Ella Townsend, stands out as an excellent and instructive model for us all. For she challenges us to a constant courageous questioning of things.

Mrs. Hamer begins with constant and courageous questioning of her social situation, the conditions of racial oppression and racism, and the social savagery that this embodied and expressed. She questions America’s self-congratulatory self-depiction as the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” Thus, she says, “Now the question I raise: is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave? Where people are being murdered, lynched, killed, because we want to register to vote?” and again “because we want to live as decent human beings?” She tells us, “I’ve heard several comments from people that was talking about ‘with the people, for the people and by the people’ when they describe this country and its government”. But she asserts, “Being a Black woman from Mississippi I’ve learned that long ago that’s not true; it’s with the handful, for a handful, by a handful. But we going to change that.”

And what shall we say about the claims of bravery in the face of a history of murderous terrorism against the unarmed and defenseless, the demonstrators, marchers, activists—young, middle aged and old; the imprisoned women beaten into bad health and in sexualized ways as she herself was brutalized; children attacked with dogs and high-power fire hoses; shootings, killings, lynchings and burnings of all, in the name and need of something White in its most ghastly and ghoulish forms? Mrs. Hamer also raises question about the sanity and humanity of a country and people who would kill without moral conscience or social constraint innocent Africans for “reasons” of racial hatred and dominance and also kill their own White sons and daughters who denounced this racist barbarism and found common cause with the oppressed African Americans in rejection and resistance.

Based on the level and extent of violence and hatred which infect the American body politic, Mrs. Hamer offered what might seem to be a startling assertion to those nurtured on decades of self-deceptive and self-congratulatory accounts of what America has done for its people and the world without recognition of what it has also done to its people and the world. She states that “America is a sick place and man is on the critical list.” It is, we learn from her lectures, a social, moral and spiritual sickness America suffers, self-generated by a daily diet of lies and illusions about race, class, gender and the world in which we live and die; about our choice to practice peace or drop bombs from drones; and to send soldiers to war and youth to prison or to improve education, feed the hungry, heal the sick, house the homeless, and do justice in and for the world.

She asked then, “How can we in good faith celebrate America’s bicentennial of vaunted progress; how do you think Black people, Indian people and any other oppressed
FOLLOWING OUR FOREMOTHER FANNIE LOU HAMER:
COURAGEOUSLY QUESTIONING AMERICA
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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

folks feel celebrating something...that de-
stroyed over twenty-five million of my peo-
ple...wiped out our heritage and taking our
name” and continues to oppress us in varied
dignity-denying and disabling ways? It is a
mockery of truth and a compounding of tragedy
for us and other oppressed people to over claim
progress for America when still the majority of
our people lack the basic requirements they
need and are denied an equitable share in the
abundance they helped create and deserve.

Like her contemporaries, Dr. Martin
King, Min. Malcolm X and others, she ques-
tioned, criticized and condemned the war in Vi-
etnam, upheld the right of self-determination
for the Vietnamese people and argued that the
urgent need of real peace and real democracy
depended on bringing the soldiers home. And
she said, “When we bring them home, some of
the billions of dollars that’s being spent in Vi-
etnam can go into rural areas like Mississippi”
as well as in the impoverished and needy urban
areas. She called for a multiracial coalition of
millions, not only to end the war, but also build
a new America and a new world. Once we end
the war, she reasoned, “We’ll be able to stand
and fight together for things that are rightfully
deserved, not in Vietnam…but right here in the
United States to make democracy a reality for
all of the people of the world regardless of race
or color”.

Mrs. Hamer was deeply rooted in the
Christian tradition and she demands that Chris-
tians, especially preachers and leaders, live the
best of their faith and see and feel God present
in the divine cause of freedom and justice.
Thus, she says of the socially unconscious and
other-world oriented preachers, “You know,
they like to rear back in the corners and over
the rostrum and say what God has done for Me-
shach, Shadrack and Abednego”. But, she con-
tinues, what they did not know or failed to see
is that “God has done the same thing for Fannie
Lou Hamer, Annelle Ponder and Lawrence
Guyot” and other freedom fighters, who being
thrown in the hell fires and furnaces of a savage
segregation and bestial racism, refused to be
cowered or consumed by raging fire or racist
fiends.

And Mrs. Hamer calls for an open and ac-
tive struggle, not simply money thru the mail or
social network signing and blogging, but also
an active on-the-ground engagement in build-
ing the good society and world we all want and
deserve. Therefore, she makes an important
distinction between being behind freedom
fighters and being with them. She says that in
the midst of the struggle, “I don’t’ want to hear
you say ‘Honey, I’m behind you’. Well, move;
I don’t want you back there. Because you could
be two hundred miles behind. I want you to say
‘I’m with you.’ And we’ll go up this freedom
road together.”

Mrs. Hamer tells us there is so much
injury, injustice, unfreedom and unnec-
essary suffering in this society and an inability
to honestly, earnestly and openly question so-
ciety. But she says, “When you take a close
look at American society, it’s time to question
these things”. Indeed, she says, “There is so
much hypocrisy in society. And if we want a
free society, we have to stop lying”, lying about
who we are as a society and the terrible things
society is doing to vulnerable peoples in this
country and around the world. And then, we
can honestly and audaciously advance together
without the self-deception, illusion and lies,
and self-consciously and relentlessly struggle
to free, renew and remake ourselves, society
and the world. ▲

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