IN THIS ERA OF POLITICAL MADNESS, MEAN-
spiritedness, racial and religious scapegoat-
ing, continued and expanding police vio-
ence, obscene inequities in wealth and power, 
mass incarceration, extensive and needless pov-
erty and proposals for mass deportations, immi-
regation bans, an apartheid wall and national reg-
istries of suspected and stigmatized peoples, there 
is an urgent need for an African American com-
munal voice of moral courage, political reason, 
and expanded righteous and relentless re-
sistance. In a word, there is a pressing need for an 
African American ethical agenda speaking to the 
critical issues of our times.

Indeed, as descendants and memory keep-
ers of the victims, resisters and survivors of the 
Holocaust of enslavement, the racist savagery of 
segregation and continuing systemic violence of 
various kinds, we cannot and must not find our-
selves willfully inattentive, uncaring and inactive 
in such a critical time. Certainly, we have more to 
say and more at stake than is foregrounded in this 
sick and sordid American reality show posed by 
the Republican president and his supporters and 
enablers, and the racial and religious supremacist 
ranting which masquerade as personal or party 
policy and platform. Nor can we remain silent, sit 
on the sidelines or mindlessly accept Democratic 
Party political timidity, pablum and placebos out 
of some misplaced sense of loyalty, given our his-
tory as authors and heirs of the Black Freedom 
Movement of the 60s. For in this righteous strug-
gle, we waged and won battles that not only ben-
efited us, but also expanded the realm of freedom 
and justice for all in this country and offered a 
moral vision and vocabulary engaged and uplifted 
around the world.

Thus, our core vision of a just and good so-
ciety and world must not be dismissed or charac-
terized as a narrow ethnic or racial agenda un-
suited for national and global discourse and prac-
tice. For it is the perception of the Black agenda 
that is narrow, not the agenda itself. Indeed, it is 
the White agenda which, since the founding of the 
country, has been racialized, racist, exclusive and 
oppressive. Our agenda at its best has always 
been inclusive and in resistance to exclusion and oppression.

The African American ethical vision and 
agenda, then, must be reaffirmed, for at its best 
and most expansive, it is a national and world-en-
compassing agenda anchored in the ancient Afri-
can ethical imperative of serudj ta, i.e., healing, 
repairing and remaking the world, making it more 
beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. Its 
modern expression is found in the world-encom-
passing task set for us by Dr. Mary McLeod Be-
thune who taught us that “We must remake the 
world. The task is nothing less than that”.

Moreover, this task and challenge is reaf-
irmed by Dr. Martin Luther King who assures us 
that if we waged a righteous struggle for freedom 
with courage, dignity and love, “when the history 
books are written in future generations, the histo-
rians will have to pause and 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 overwhelming re-
sponsibility”. And this task and challenge finds 
its own reaffirmation again in the philosophy of 
Kawaida in the Sixth Principle of the Nguzo Saba 
The Seven Principles), Kuumba, which calls us 
“to do always as much as we can in the way we 
can in order to leave our community more beau-
tiful and beneficial than we inherited it” and by 
extension, the world.

Our concept of community is a world-en-
compassing one in which we, as African people, 
have expanded circles of obligation. These con-
centric circles of obligation are the African Amer-
ican community, the world African community, 
and fellow human beings and the environment in 
the city, state, country and world in which we 
live, work, build and struggle. The Swahili word 
“walimwengu” rightly defines human beings as 
world beings or beings who belong to and are re-
ponsible for the world - both its human and nat-
ural dimensions. Indeed, Min. Malcolm X taught 
us that “our interests are world-wide, not just lim-
ited to things American” and that we must always
see and place ourselves firmly in the ranks of the international rising tide of resistance, “the global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter”. For we do not live outside the world, but in it. And urgent issues of oppression and occupation, resistance and liberation, security of persons and peoples, peace, food security, the end of human trafficking and enslavement, healthcare, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, reparations, immigration justice, equitable distribution of wealth and resources, and environmental care - are all issues of a local, national and global nature and urgency.

If we are to self-consciously honor the best of our ethical tradition, then, we are obligated to engage in the courageous questioning, moral reflection and audacious action called for in these critical times. Indeed, we are obligated by history and heaven to “bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice”. That is to say: the vulnerable, the poor and disempowered; the ill, aged, infant and disabled; the stranger, refugee and prisoner; the have-nots, the abandoned and the needy; the Indigenous and Native peoples whose lives, labor, lands, water, forests, orchards and other resources are mercilessly plundered by corporations and occupying countries.

And so we are to rise up and stand in active solidarity with all those whose voice, value and visibility have been diminished and denied, and who struggle against all odds to end their oppression and push humanity forward toward a new history and hope for these and future generations, whether here, in Africa, Haiti, Palestine, Yemen, Myanmar among the Rohingya, Native America, Native Australia, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia or anywhere else. This means appreciating and engaging our own history and culture and the ethical vision, values and models of human excellence and achievement in thought and practice they provide us. For no culture is deeper in spiritual grounding, richer in ethical insight or as comprehensively capable of providing us with the foundation and framework for directing and living our lives in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

And we must practice an independent politics, rooted in a profound and primary commitment to people and principles - not to politicians or parties. That is to say: a primary commitment to our people and others and to principles that represent and reflect the best of what it means to be African and human in the world and lead us toward the just and good society and world we all want, deserve and demand, and struggle eagerly and earnestly to achieve.

Finally, we must build and rebuild an overarching Movement that prefigures and makes possible that just and good world. This means building on, intensifying and expanding Black mass education, mobilization, organization and confrontation - demonstrations, rallies, interventions already in motion since Ferguson for racial and social justice. It means praising the audacious and decisive youth initiative in this process, but not diminishing the active contribution, experience and insight of those older. This requires an intergenerational cooperative initiative that builds and consolidates its internal and communal strength and reaches out to create increasingly larger coalitions and alliances. And it means developing a logic, language and practice of struggle that puts forth and expands our ethical vision, reaffirms our highest values, builds on our best practices, and effectively addresses the enduring problems of race, class and gender and all other constraints on human freedom and flourishing and the well-being of the world.

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