



**OBAMA IN BERLIN:  
A WORLD-ENCOMPASSING CONSCIOUSNESS**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

In spite of the early-man emotions and racialized reasoning that undergird continuing White ambivalence towards Barack Obama and that keep John McCain afloat and almost equal in the polls, no one can seriously assert or imagine that there is even a remote resemblance between them in terms of intellectual competence, political progressiveness or a sorely-needed world-encompassing consciousness and practice. Nothing was more symbolic of the latter than Obama in Berlin, Germany speaking to an assembly of 200,000 in lofty and uplifting language of human solidarity, “the burdens of global citizenship” and the need “to build bridges across the globe” and “come together to save this planet”, and McCain going to a German restaurant in Ohio, savoring sausages and calling for cream-puffs-to-go as a imagined and meaningful political counterpoint.

Obama began his speech by introducing himself as “a proud citizen of the United States and a fellow citizen of the world”, the former identification serving as a necessary affirmation to concede a national dimension to his global call. But it was also to avoid any right-wing claims back home that he was unpatriotic, more concerned about the world than Wyoming, and advocating a “godless globalism” at America’s expense although, the right still ranted and raged against him. It was a bold initiative which won for him and this country a measure of renewed respect and hope on an allied continent which nevertheless demonstrates regularly and fervently against the presence and policies of the current U.S. president.

Obama conceded that in Europe, and I would argue in the world at large, “the view that America is part of what has gone wrong in our world is all too common”. But he maintained there are “burdens of global citizenship”

which bind, as well as walls which divide the peoples of the world. And he called for “constant work and sustained sacrifice” to strengthen cooperation and bonding and to tear down walls between allies, the haves and the have-nots, races and ethnic groups, native people and immigrants, and the Abrahamic faiths. Finally, he asked, will we, “extend our hand to the people in the forgotten corners of the world who yearn for lives marked by dignity and opportunity, by security and justice;” the poor, the refugee, the victims of HIV/AIDS, and those who struggle for human and civil rights and for security against genocide, torture, and violations of life and laws. It was a well-delivered and well-received piece, and in a world where honoring Black athletes and entertainers is the standard and staple practice and recognition of excellence in other areas is neither regularly mentioned nor imagined, this expansive self-presentation and presidential-like reception of a Black man who is still only a presidential candidate surely merit marking.

At our 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Kawaida Seminar in Social Theory and Practice, held last week (July 20-26) by the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies in Los Angeles, and which draws professors, students, activists, professionals and lay persons from around the country, we discussed Obama’s international trip and his call for a shared recognition and responsibility of global citizenship. Discussing it within the framework of our overarching theme: “The Moral Ideal of Ancient Africa: A Kawaida Cultural Conception”, we placed both Obama and the best of his message within the moral and social justice tradition of African people. For in spite of Obama’s advisors revising his bio and claiming Kansas as the source of his commitment to social justice, as he first stated, it

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is the Black religious and social justice tradition, the most ancient in the world.

And it is this ancient African ethical and spiritual tradition which informed later nearby traditions and gave humanity some of its most important ethical and spiritual concepts. This is reflected in its five overarching core concepts, i.e., self-conscious respect and responsibility for: the sacred and Transcendent; the dignity and rights of the human person; the well-being and flourishing of family and community; the reciprocal solidarity of humanity and its cooperation for common good; and the integrity and value of the environment as sacred space as expressed in the *Husia*, the sacred text of ancient Egypt. Such a conception requires a world-encompassing consciousness and practice best suggested by the Swahili word for human, *Mlimwengu*, which literally means “inhabitant of the world”, indeed, “inhabitant of the universe”.

We also talked about how Obama did not visit Africa, Latin America or Asia and how this does not reflect badly on him, but is a recognition of the balance of forces in the world, i.e., White wealth, power and dominance and his need to deal with this fact to win office. Therefore, we knew then that his call for tearing down walls would not include all lands; that his commitment to continuing the fight against terrorism would not include all forms; and that most issues would not be broached simply because they were right, but because they resonated well with the addressed audience and left little or no opening for the opposition to pimp and

pander. It is, we concluded, the nature of the political beast we call American politics, often self-deceptively divinized as the best example of democracy in the world.

We cannot ask Obama to commit political suicide by saying what could only alienate his audience and expected voters. But if we want him to be more than a moral mask for the corporations in their quest to conquer and consume the whole world, then we cannot sit in silence ourselves without speaking truth to power and to the people and urging him, ourselves and the peoples of the world to dare conceive and bring into being a whole ‘nother way of doing politics and being human in the world.

In the Maatian ethical tradition of ancient Egypt, we are morally obligated to practice *serudj ta*, i.e., to constantly repair, renew and transform the world making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. It is, then, on us, we who seriously care not simply about the world in the abstract, but about real people, the earth and universe itself and all that exists in it. It is on us, we, *walimwengu*, inhabitants and sons and daughters of the world; we, Native, Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples everywhere; we, Africans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asians and Europeans who must insist on and work and struggle for a new world and way to relate as human beings. And we must do this, as our ancestors teach in the *Odu Ifa*, by understanding and asserting ourselves as *eniyan*, responsibility-bearing humans, chosen to bring good into the world.

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