



## RIGHTFULLY LINKING REPARATIONS AND LIBERATION: RIGHTEOUSLY REPAIRING OURSELVES AND THE WORLD

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

AS A NEW AND EXPANDED ROUND OF reparations discussions and discourse take place in the public square and in the current political campaigns, seeking promised votes and progressive validation, it is vital for us to maintain control of how we define and pursue this world historical project. Indeed, it is important to look back, remember and reflect and not rush forward thinking it's all over but the shouting. For ours is the most ancient of human histories with an endless library of lessons in life, work and struggle. And we know from this history, there is no easy walk or way to the victory in struggle we seek, not only to achieve reparations, but also a liberated life in which reparation is truly realized.

Rightly defined, *the struggle for reparations is a struggle for justice for a people, accountability from the oppressors, and an ethical model for the world of how to treat a grievously injured people.* It is a struggle to repair the gross historical and ongoing damage done to us as African people in the Holocaust of enslavement and in subsequent forms of racist and White supremacist oppression; to rebuild and reinforce our ongoing movement for liberation and ever higher levels of human life; and to create a continuing expanding realm of human freedom, justice and flourishing in the world. And this is to be achieved, not simply by what we are compensated for by our oppressors, but more importantly by what we gain and give of ourselves in and for the struggle itself. It is a struggle based on the psychology of Frantz Fanon and the social ethical teachings of Malcolm X: that we can only heal and repair ourselves in struggle; and that struggle must be not only against the conditions which caused the damage, but also to expand the realm of human freedom, justice and flourishing in the world and initiate a new history of humankind. This process and ethical practice is called *serudj ta* in the ancient Egyptian Maatian tradition and means to heal, repair and transform the world with the understanding that in the process we heal, repair and transform ourselves.

For our struggle for reparations to be more than a quest for back payments rightly owed, then, and for it to be more than a deceptive dependency on the actions of the oppressor, we must understand and approach it, as a people, in its most meaningful and expansive form. That is to say, as a critical site and source of our ongoing struggle to create engaged and empowered communities of African people, just and good societies wherever we are, and a good and sustainable world for our ancestors, ourselves, and the generations which follow.

Regardless of the eventual shape of the evolved discourse and policy on reparations, there are six essential aspects which must be addressed and included in any meaningful and moral approach to reparations. They are public dialog, public admission, public apology, public recognition, compensation, and preventive measures against the recurrence of Holocaust and other similar forms of massive destruction of human life, human culture and human possibility.

First, there must be a *public dialog* in which Europeans (Whites) overcome their acute denial of the nature and extent of injuries inflicted on African people and concede that the most morally appropriate term for this utter destruction of human life, human culture and human possibility is Holocaust. Secondly, there must be *public admission* of Holocaust committed against African people by the state and society. By Holocaust is meant a morally monstrous act of genocide that is not only against the targeted people, but also a crime against humanity. And this is why we call Holocaust in Swahili *Maangamizi*, which means great *intentional* destruction. This moves the issue from one of commerce or trade gone bad with collateral damage to a moral issue of Holocaust.

Thirdly, once there is public discussion and admission of the nature and extent of the injury, then there must be *public apology*. Moreover, the state must offer it on behalf of its White citizens. For the state is the crime partner with business and corporate interests in the initiation, conduct and sustaining of this destructive

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process. It maintained and supported the system of destruction with law, armed forces, ideology and brutal suppression. Thus, it must offer the apology for the Holocaust committed. Fourthly, there must be *public recognition* through institutional establishment, monumental construction and educational instruction through the school and university system and the media directed toward teaching and preserving the memory of the horror, terrorism and awesome meaning of the Holocaust of enslavement, not only for Africans, but also for humanity as a whole.

Fifthly, reparations also requires *compensation* in various forms. Compensation does not automatically mean simply money payments either individually or collectively. Indeed, it is a multidimensional demand and option and may involve not only money, but land, free healthcare, free housing, free education from grade school through college, etc. But whether we choose one or all, we must have a communal discussion of it and then make the choice. Moreover, compensation as an issue is not simply compensation for lost labor, but for the comprehensive injury – the brutal destruction of African lives, African cultures and African possibilities during the Holocaust of enslavement as well as subsequent forms of oppression and their historical and ongoing effects. Finally, reparations requires *preventive measures*, i.e., institutions, processes and practices to preclude the reoccurrence of such massive destruction of human life, human culture and human possibility. This, again, means that we must see and approach the reparations struggle as part and parcel of our overall struggle for freedom, justice, equality and power in and over our destiny and daily lives. In a word, the struggle for liberation.

Our struggle for reparations is and must be, then, an *inclusive project* which seeks to repair the gross and ongoing injury of one of the greatest holocausts in human history, the Holocaust of African enslavement. And this essentially means to produce in the midst of

struggle a process by which we, the injured people, not only self-consciously understand and assert ourselves in ongoing efforts to restore a sense of wholeness, well-being and freedom in our lives, but also rightfully see ourselves as continuing our ancient ancestral struggle of expanding the realm of human freedom and flourishing and bringing good into the world. Thus, reparations as a world-encompassing ethical ideal and practice of repairing, restoring and remaking the world, *serudj ta*, provides us with an expansive concept for understanding and approaching our lives, work and struggle in the world. Indeed, it translates as reparations in a most expansive sense and roots us in a world-encompassing ethical project worthy of our collective vocation as a people.

It also insures and proves that our movement is more than a mobilization for money; that it is not tied to the mistaken idea that concessions from our oppressor will heal and repair us; and that we are all clear about how we define reparations as an ethical principle, pursue it as a personal and social practice and achieve it as a goal of *Maat*, rightness and good in and of the world. And if reparations is to be our collective vocation, we must involve our people on every level, expand our presence in the major institutions of our community and society and dare to impact and shape social discourse and policy.

We can understand ourselves, then, as injured physicians who have the capacity to and must heal and repair ourselves in the process and practice of repairing and remaking the world, transforming it into an ever-expanding realm of freedom, justice and human flourishing. For we are indeed our own liberators. Given this understanding, as we've said so often, in the context of oppression, there is no remedy except resistance, no medical or social strategy that does not privilege and promote struggle, and no future or possibility of flourishing except that forged on the battlefield for a new world and a new history and hope for humankind.

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