



**UPLIFTING, UNDERSTANDING AND HONORING BLACK AUGUST:  
FOREGROUNDING THE PRACTICE AND PROMISE OF RESISTANCE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HE MONTH OF AUGUST IS RIGHTLY commemorated and celebrated as a special time of uplifting, understanding and honoring our history and continuing practice of resistance. In a word, we foreground and focus on the practice and promise of resistance leading to liberation and a shared and inclusive good in the world. We speak here of our righteous and relentless struggle, historically and currently, to be ourselves and free ourselves, to live good and meaningful lives and to build the good world we all deserve and demand on every level of life. Indeed, to talk of resistance is to talk of our self-formation as a people, for we are a people who were formed in struggle, a dual struggle. It was a struggle to build, out of the many African nations and ethnic groups from which we came, a single, self-conscious and self-sustaining people, and the simultaneous struggle to liberate ourselves from the Holocaust of enslavement and continue the struggle to build the basis for the life, work and resistance still ahead of us.

It is in this process and practice of liberation, as Kwaaida reads our history, that we developed a culture of struggle - a culture founded and formed in struggle by a people who understand and embrace struggle as a normal and necessary way of life, as an indispensable way forward and upward, and as a rightfully required way to be ourselves, free ourselves and bring good into the world. This Kwaaida understanding of the centrality of struggle is reaffirmed and reinforced in the teachings of Nana Frederick Douglass who taught us that “The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. . .” Indeed, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress”. And he reminds us that “The struggle may be a moral

one or it may be a physical one, or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will”.

This fundamental teaching is reenforced by the teaching of Nana A. Philip Randolph who speaks to the open-textured and ongoing character of our liberation struggle and our commitment to it. He tells us that “Freedom is never granted; it is won. Justice is never given; it is extracted. Freedom and justice must be struggled for by the oppressed of all lands and races and the struggle must be continuous. For freedom is never a final fact, but a continuing evolving process to higher and higher levels of human, social, economic, political and religious relationships”. Here, the Kwaaida conception of resistance is relevant and reaffirming, for it defines resistance not only as *opposition* to oppression in every area of life, outward and inward, but also as *affirmation* of ourselves and the good, and active *aspiration* for a new world and way of relating and flourishing as human beings in the world.

The concept and practice of celebrating Black August as a month of resistance evolves from captives, political and other prisoners in California prisons, engaging and honoring the lives of struggles of prisoners resisting oppression and demanding prisoners’ rights. Continuing this initiative and critical emphasis, the commemoration and celebration of Black August has expanded to commemoration and celebration of our resistance as a people taking into consideration our positions and concerns as members of the world African community. Thus, focusing on events occurring in the month of August of major historical weight and meaning, we raise them up and reflect on their meaning to us and our righteous and relentless liberation struggle. Within the context

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and understanding of these seminal insights concerning our culture of struggle and our commitment to it, we draw from the library of lessons from our history and uplift and reflect on the practices and promises of resistance, not only during August, but also before and after August. Indeed, we embrace and practice it as an everyday and fundamental feature of our lives.

It is in August 1619 that we arrived in enslavement and resistance in this country, having resisted capture, conquest and colonialism in Africa. We revolted on the ships of enslavement, hit the beach in rebellion and have engaged in resistance, righteous and relentless resistance ever since we arrived. *It is the intergeneration remembrance of this history and reality that reminds us of a freedom lost and to be regained, a justice denied and to be demanded and achieved, and a world bruised and broken to be repaired, renewed and remade in liberated and liberating ways.* It is both a history of our ongoing freedom struggle and our continuous self-formation as a people, a history of our becoming as Haji Malcolm taught, “A nation within a nation”, and also our becoming a central moral and social vanguard in this country and the world.

As pan-Africanists, we understand and assert ourselves as active members of a global African community and also find lessons of life and struggle among all the African peoples of the world. And certainly, the historic Haitian Revolution beginning in August 1791 is a central and singular event and achievement in Haitian, African and human history. How rich, varied and enduring are the lessons offered by an enslaved people for the first and only time in history, freeing themselves, outlawing enslavement, building a republic, aiding other liberation movements, and posing an enduring uplifting

model of liberation struggle for us and other enslaved, oppressed and struggling peoples.

Certainly, the history of our resistance during the Holocaust of enslavement also offers us an abundance of lessons in life and struggle to study, uplift and emulate. Whether we take as texts to read and reflect on the enslaved African revolts led by Nana Gabriel Prosser in August 1800 or by Nana Nat Turner in 1830, and the founding of the Abolitionist Movement in August 1850 and its illustrious members, Nana Harriet Tubman and Nana Frederick Douglass, we speak of freedom fighters daring to resist and rebel against all odds, willing martyrs who offered and sacrificed their lives for our freedom and to expand the realm of freedom in this country and the world for everyone.

We are instructed and uplifted by these freedom rebels’ defiance of death and remember and reflect deeply on this, reflected in one of those in Nana Gabriel’s fighting force who is dismissive of the oppressor’s judicial process, contemptuous of their rank hypocrisy and ready to demonstrate the depth of his commitment to his people’s freedom. Thus, when his captors who ask for a statement from him, he tells them, “I have ventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice to their cause; and I ask that I may be immediately led to execution. I know that you have predetermined to shed my blood. Why then all this mockery of a trial?”

August also raises memories and lessons of the Hon. Marcus Garvey born in August 1887 and the founding of the UNIA in August 1914. Moreover, in the transformative and defining decade of the 1960s, the Watts Revolt sets the city on fire in August 1965, becomes a reference point for other evolving revolts and produces a context for

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the coming into being of numerous organizational, ideological and philosophical initiatives, including the Organization Us, and Kwaaida philosophy out of which I created the Nguzo Saba and Kwanzaa. Finally, as we have noted before, the Ferguson Revolt of August 2014 was the historical spark that ignited a forest fire of resistance around the country and brought the Black Lives Matter Movement to international prominence and increasing promise.

**A**ND SO, WE WELCOME AUGUST AND each month, raising the battle cry, “Everywhere a battleline; every day a call to struggle”, remembering the central instruction of Nana Dr. Mary Mcleod Bethune that “our task is to remake the world; it is nothing less than this”. Embracing this fundamental tenet and teaching, let us all rise each day and declare as we do in the Organization Us since the 1960s, “It’s a good day to struggle”.▲

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