



**BEARING WITNESS TO THE WONDER OF NANA JOANN WATSON:
WAKING UP DETROIT, US AND THE WORLD**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

LET US PAUSE AND BOW OUR HEADS AND raise our hands in rightful remembrance and praise for our beloved sister, freedom fighter, pastor, professor and political leader, reparations advocate and activist, and radio and TV host of Wake Up Detroit, a helper in time of need and “one who comes at the voice of the caller,” the Most Reverend Dr. JoAnn Watson who came into being April 19, 1951, and made transition and ascension on July 10, 2023. We must have unconsciously imagined she would always be with us, loving and uplifting us, serving and sacrificing for our people in the most self-giving way and faithfully fighting the good fight with us against every form of oppression we as a people encounter and refuse to accept. But she has now lain down in peace and risen up in radiance, and everywhere we and all kinds of peoples are missing and mourning her and recounting the good she brought and did in the world.

Surely, we as an organization, Us, and as a people, African, share this great loss with her family, friends and other loved ones. And we say in the tradition of our honored ancestors, may the joy she brought and the good she left last forever. And may all her family, friends and loved ones be blessed with consolation, courage and peace. For surely, she has risen in radiance in the heavens and now sits in the sacred circle of the ancestors, among the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded. Indeed, it is written in the *Sacred Husia* “To do that which is of value is for eternity. A person called forth by her good work does not die, for her name is raised and remembered because of it.”

So, we raise and praise the name and work of Nana Rev. Dr. JoAnn Watson for as

Nana Ossie Davis said of Nana Haji Malcolm, in honoring her, we honor the best in ourselves. Let us in the tradition of our honored ancestors, raise her praise names, her five royal and righteous names as was done in ancient Egypt, Kemet, which speak to the special goodness and greatness she embodied and expressed in her life, work and struggle. For even in her physical absence, she will always be with us if we practice the morality of remembrance and uphold her legacy in the way we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles for good in the world.

Let us remember and praise Nana JoAnn in her name *honored and beloved pastor*; speaker of the sacred and sustaining truth; uncompromisingly Black and unalterably Christian; speaking a liberating truth to the people, and a lacerating truth to power; one who taught the good news that brought joy and hope to the poor and all the people; preaching and proclaiming the coming end of poverty and the promise of freedom for the captive and oppressed; clean water and food security for the needy, and increasing happiness for all the people.

Moreover, let us praise her in her name *Queen Mother*, royal in her righteousness, godly in her goodness, wide-armed in her motherly embrace and care and concern for her people. Honored advisor, skilled counselor, possessor of the healing and helping hand, the loving heart, a masterful mind stayed on the liberation and good life of the people. Queen Mother, royal mother, nurturer, mentor of the next generation of leaders and servants of the people. She said she was mentored by many, a long list of leaders, teachers including Nana Dr. Dorothy Height, Nana Rev. C. T. Vivian, Nana Mother

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Rosa Parks, Nana Dr. Imari Obadele, Nana Rev. Milton Henry, Nana Chokwe Lumumba, Ray "Reparations Ray" Jenkins, Dr. Claud Anderson; and I am honored and humbled to have also been on that list. We returned the praises to her in equal measure as a regular presenter at our Nguzo Saba conferences and a co-combatant in this beautiful and world transformative struggle.

Furthermore, we raise and praise her in her name *womanist warrior*, constant soldier who would not walk away from the battlefield until the struggle is won, and now having made transition, she has left the future of the struggle and our people in our, her survivors', hands. As a woman and womanist warrior, she insisted without compromise or equivocation on the equal and interrelated rights, respect, and indispensable role of women in the life, work and struggles of our people. But she, like our foremothers, Nana Dr. Mary M. Bethune and Nana Ella Baker, also recognized the special disabling and deadly targeting of Black boys and men by the police and society in the context of the oppression of our whole people. And as Nana Ella Baker taught, "We who want freedom cannot rest" until freedom is a shared and living good for all of us. In this spirit, she and her lifelong friend and co-combatant in the liberation struggle, Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, noted pastor of Fellowship Chapel, organized and sent a delegation of 100,000 men to the Million Man March.

We raise and praise Nana JoAnn in her name *good and faithful servant* of her people and her Lord. She loved our people and her Lord and it is through her self-sacrificing service that she demonstrated it daily. She served in various organizations and capacities in the interest of African and human good

and the well-being of the world. She served as senior pastor at Westside Unity Church, executive director of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP, Detroit City Council member and President Pro-Tem, and board member of Detroit Council of Black Elders.

To talk of her life's work for freedom and justice is to pay homage to the work she has done in the city, the country and internationally serving as a delegate on the historical UN World Conference on Racism in South Africa, producing a critical document on our liberation struggle for freedom, justice and reparations. Indeed, she was a tireless teacher, advocate and activist for reparative justice, serving as a liaison and advisor for Detroit Congressman, John Conyers, who crafted the historic HR 40 bill for reparations; board member of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), chair of its Detroit chapter; a commissioner of the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), and a member of the Detroit Reparations Task Force.

Finally, let us raise and praise Nana Rev. Dr. JoAnn Watson in her name *opener of the ways*. A servant leader of the rarest kind, she was an opener of the ways for emerging leaders. Indeed, she opened the way for all of us. She was a model and mirror of how we not only open the way for others, but open the way beyond the narrow mind and constricted heart, beyond the alienation from self and community, and the paralysis of self-pity and the dope of self-doubt. She calls on us even from the hereafter in the manner of her signature radio program saying, "Wake up Detroit, wake up Black people, African people, be yourself and free yourself, your beautiful Black sacred soulful resilient and resourceful

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self; dare to wake up to begin another day of working for an ever expanding shared good in the world.”

IN ONE OF HER LAST INTERVIEWS, SHE WAS asked what is a good lesson from your life to share and she said, we have “to identify (and engage in) acts which help change,” that is to say, bring about a change that expands the realm of freedom and justice in this coun-

try and the world. Remember she said, “we are not just here to take care of ourselves” so we must constantly ask ourselves “what have you done to help somebody today?” And “if I can help somebody along the way, then my living has not been in vain.” Surely, what she has done is forever and she will remain a model and mirror by which we mold and measure our lives. ▲

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