



**HAVOC IN THE HOUSE, DOUGLASS AT THE DOOR:
JULY 4TH, NOVEMBER 5TH AND UNAVOIDABLE STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-04-24, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AS WE MARK THE FOURTH OF JULY AND treat an epidemic of anxiety about the outcome of November 5th, we would be well served by recognizing that annual hard knock and powerful presence at the door of the honored abolitionist, freedom fighter and most insightful activist intellectual, Nana Frederick Douglass. For by every metric of good sense and every measure of a good life, there is havoc in this house called America. It is a very dangerous and self-destructive disorder of rampant conflict, varied oppression, cultivated confusion and emerging fascism, not only detrimental to democracy, but also to any conception, practice and enjoyment of freedom, justice, security of personhood and peoplehood, and other shared social goods for all.

And the problem is not simply the pernicious and prattle and blustering pretensions of Trump or the weak self-presentation of Biden in debate. It is something deeper and systemic, i.e., the loss of even a claimed moral center, let alone a real one, which would, when realized, be free from the racial and religious claims and savage practices of White supremacy, racial capitalism and empire.

Clearly, in spite of the danger and the persistent panic expressed in public and private spaces, America is not going to be saved from itself in its addiction to hypocrisy, Hollywood hype, AI dependence or internet trivia, trash and mutual savaging. It can only save itself by moving beyond the diversionary discussions of problematic candidates to craft an inclusive moral vision and concrete program of doing justice and supporting freedom for all the people. And revisiting Nana Douglass reminds us and teaches us lessons

on these issues from which we will certainly benefit.

In his classic 4th of July speech in 1852, Douglass begins by calling rightful attention to U.S. society's congenital hypocrisy, inconsistencies and the systemic and savage violence and treatment they are imposing on Black people and others. Moreover, he tells them, he could be hypocritical himself and be welcomed of a sort among them by turning a blind eye to injustice and a deaf ear to the truth of the barbaric enslavement of his people while claiming a tenuous status of being "semi-free" among them. But he defiantly refuses.

Thus, he says, "To side with the right, against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! here lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day." And he concludes, he will not forget his people or their severe suffering and brutal oppression. For "To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world."

Indeed, he says, "I will, in the name of humanity, which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery -- the great sin and shame of America!" Of course, enslavement is the ultimate unfreedom, but there are also today, as then, many other forms of unfreedom involving exploitation, domination, deprivation, and degradation,

**HAVOC IN THE HOUSE, DOUGLASS AT THE DOOR:
JULY 4TH, NOVEMBER 5TH AND UNAVOIDABLE STRUGGLE**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-04-24, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

and these too must be resisted, overcome and decisively ended.

Continuing, he tells them, that they are betraying their own best principles, denying others the freedom and justice they, themselves, speak of in self-congratulatory narratives about their forefathers. Indeed, he says, “The cause of liberty may be stabbed by the men who glory in the deeds of your fathers.” And speaking in terms reflective of what is going on in this country today and concerning Israel’s genocidal campaign in Palestine, he states, “It was fashionable, hundreds of years ago, for the children of Jacob to boast, we have “Abraham to our father,” when they had long lost Abraham’s faith and spirit. That people contented themselves under the shadow of Abraham’s great name, while they repudiated the deeds which made his name great. Need I remind you that a similar thing is being done all over this country today?”

Indeed, it is an insistent observation being made by the young people and others struggling on campus, in community and in society against genocide in Palestine and oppression in all forms and every place by the claimants and violators of the best of the Abrahamic tradition. And they are confronting Jew, Gentile and other claimants to the faith, refusing to allow them to commit genocide, injustice and other atrocities in their names or the names of their faiths.

Nana Douglass will not let them or any of us borrow the names and achievements of the worthy models and values of the past and betray them in their names. Therefore, he states “We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time.” So, we point to the past, not claim and betray its great achievements, but

to emulate them in the present even correcting errors and completing the tasks they left unfinished or failed to envision themselves. Thus, we say in Kawaiida philosophy, “this is our duty: to know our past and honor it; to engage the present and improve it; and to imagine a whole new future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways”.

Clearly, Nana Douglass is appalled and morally repelled by the savage hypocrisy of the church, which is a metaphor for all claiming a religion worthy of its name. He expected more from them, as is expected now in reordering the moral priorities and practices of this country and positively influencing others. Thus, he says, criticizing their betrayal of silence and active complicity, “At the very moment that they are thanking God for the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, and for the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, they are utterly silent in respect to a law which robs religion of its chief significance, and makes it utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness.”

Indeed, he condemns such a corrupt community of faith, saying, “A worship that can be conducted by persons who refuse to give shelter to the houseless, to give bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and who enjoin obedience to a law forbidding these acts of mercy, is a curse, not a blessing to mankind.” In truth, it “is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers, and thugs” and “They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny and barbarous cruelty.”

Nana Frederick Douglass gave such attention to the fundamental role of religion, not only because it serves as a source of our earliest and continuing concepts of morality, but also because he recognized that people were misusing it to enslave and oppress and

**HAVOC IN THE HOUSE, DOUGLASS AT THE DOOR:
JULY 4TH, NOVEMBER 5TH AND UNAVOIDABLE STRUGGLE**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-04-24, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

to claim biblical teachings to justify satanic or radically evil practices as now. That is why it was critical for the Black church and temples of original African religions as well as mosques, also of the Abrahamic tradition, to stand in solidarity with Palestine and resist genocide and oppression everywhere.

FOR AMERICA STILL ATTEMPTS TO MAKE the biblical claim of being a city set upon a hill as a beacon of hope and moral guidance for peoples of the world. But Nana Douglass recognized, then as now, that it is a society built on a mountain of mendacity and morally monstrous practices, and an official and unofficial litany of daily lies that seeks to

hide its past, deny its current radically evil racial and social injustice and unfreedom at home and complicity in genocide, unjust war and empire abroad. And he tells us, as we say so often, that in a context of oppression, there is no reliable remedy except righteous and relentless struggle. For he says, in his classic teaching on the ethical imperative and urgency of struggle, “Without struggle there is no progress. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” Thus, let’s continue the struggle, keep the faith and hold the line.▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of *Kwanzaa*; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.