



**AFRICAN LIBERATION DAY:
LIBERATION IS COMING FROM A BLACK THING**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

WHEN WE DEFIANTLY DECLARED ON THE burning battlefields of the Sixties that “liberation is coming from a Black thing”, we meant that it would come from a process and practice that Black people, African peoples, themselves, self-consciously conceived, constructed and carried out. For we knew then as we know now, that there is no sanity, safety or salvation in an undignified and disempowering dependence on others; that we are our own liberators and life savers; and that the hands, hearts and minds that ultimately and authentically liberate us and lift us up must be and are always our own. We also know, as Frantz Fanon taught us, that the process and practice of liberation is not only the collective freeing of our people from oppression, but also the personal effort each person makes to free themselves as part of the collective struggle. In other words, as Fanon states, “an authentic liberation exists only to the precise degree to which each person has irreversibly begun his (her) own liberation” as part and parcel of his and her contribution to the liberation struggle as a whole.

This does not mean we do not need allies in struggle or friends in strategic places. It simply means that no matter how numerous our allies or how steadfast our friends, the first, final and decisive blow to break the back of our oppression must be our own. This is the clear, compelling and overwhelming evidence of history and we do ourselves damage and disservice by denying or ignoring it.

Surely, these are also central lessons of the lives and unrelenting struggles of our ancestors, men and women who laid the foundation and built the framework for the Pan-African project and the vital wall and work of resistance and reconstruction we now uphold and advance inch by inch, day by day and year by year. In the proper understanding and advancement of pan-Africanism, we must see and approach it as a world-encompassing project and practice, dedicated to liberation and a good life for Africans everywhere. For to talk of Africa and Africans is to talk not

only about a continent, but also about a world-community and to reaffirm our need to focus on both in our constant concerns and continuing struggle.

We turn toward Africa, the continent, first in the celebration of African Liberation Day because it is our ancestral home, the ancient and original source of our unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. And this is expressed not only in our kaleidoscope of colors, shapes and sizes and the biological source of humanity itself, but also in our varied and shared orientations in the ways we perceive the sacred, practice worship, make music, do dance, express creativity, perform speech, revere and relate to our ancestors, renew and enrich our culture and walk in the world across the room or down the street in cool, defiant and dignified movement.

This is the essential meaning of Malcolm’s teaching that in the struggle for liberation, we must return to Africa—culturally-spiritually-psychologically—in order to “recapture our heritage and identity”, “bring us closer to our African brothers and sisters”, on the continent and in the diaspora, begin “the journey to our rediscovery of ourselves” and “break the bonds of white supremacy” imposed on our lives and the world.

But the turn toward Africa is and must be a political as well as cultural turn. In other words, turning toward Africa here is a *sankofa* project of reaching back and retrieving the best of our culture—continental and world-community, and as Frantz Fanon states, expressing our commitment to African culture by giving “practical support to the creation of the conditions necessary to the existence of that culture, in other words, to the liberation of the whole continent” and world African community. Thus, the arc of our concern as pan-Africanists includes our people from African America to Haiti and Zimbabwe, from Congo, Nigeria and South Sudan to the Caribbean, Venezuela, Cuba, Burkino Faso and everywhere Africans live, work and struggle for justice and

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peace, security of person and people, food security, clean water, a welcomed future, human flourishing and all the good of life.

Maria Stewart reaffirms our primary identity as “daughters and sons of Africa” in her pan-Africanist calls to us to “awake and arise”, liberate ourselves on every level, and do great things that distinguish us and immortalize our names, as African persons and peoples. She also urges us to do righteous things that sustain us in everyday life and “lay the foundations for generations yet unborn”. Therefore, she tells us to discharge our parental duties well, and raise culturally-grounded children “who thirst for knowledge, whose ambitious mind(s) soar above trifles and long for the time to come when (they) shall redress the wrongs of (their) father(s) (and mothers), and plead the cause of their brothers (and sisters)” and continue and intensify the struggle for African rights and freedom in this country and the world.

Marcus Garvey, one of the founding fathers of Pan-Africanism, also teaches us to be righteous servants for the masses of our people. He calls on us to love and serve our people and realize that “the only aristocracy is that acquired through service and loyalty to the people”. And he teaches us to remember always that “the ends you serve that are selfish will take you no further than yourself, but the ends you serve that are for all, in common, will take you even to eternity”.

Wangari Mathaai, environmentalist, culture-keeper and activist in the interest of our people reminds us that the three major objectives set for us by the first post-colonial African rulers were and remain “to decolonize the entire continent; to promote unity; and to effect economic

and social development”. But she states, echoing Sekou Toure, Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, that “a more difficult agenda will be to decolonize the mind and reclaim the cultural and spiritual heritage of African people” which is necessary to conceive, craft and complete the other three tasks.

Moreover, we find a compelling truth and a corresponding moral obligation of practice in Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah’s pan-Africanist insight that “It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems and that this can only be found in African unity. Divided we are weak, united Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world”. This means we “must break through (the) apathy and fear” that immobilizes so many and “strengthen the people’s faith in themselves and encourage them to take part in the freedom struggle” which is the path, not only to liberation, but also to the good and meaningful life they desire and deserve.

Finally, Mary McLeod Bethune, as Garvey, DuBois, and Nkrumah, reminds us we are a world historical people, heirs and custodians of a great legacy and that as Bethune teaches us, “our task is to remake the world”, and this means practically that we must act now and rebuild our movement in each country and around the world with a sense of awesome urgency. As W.E.B. DuBois, another founding father of pan-Africanism taught us, “Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future year. It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow. Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the playtime”.

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