



ART, STRUGGLE AND AFRICAN RENAISSANCE: FESMAN III

Los Angeles Sentinel, 04-16-09, p. A7

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The theme and constant thrust of African Renaissance, the self-regeneration and victorious rise and reassertion of African people on the stage of human history has been an ongoing quest and project for centuries. Indeed, it rises and runs like a bright red unrelenting line thru the writings and work of Maria Stewart, Martin Delaney, P.K. Isaka Seme, Sylvester Williams, W. E. B. Dubois, Shirley Graham DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Amy Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Nandi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Leopold Senghor and so many others. It is an aspiration and work resistant to desertion, dispirit and defeat, for it is an expression and announcement of a deep-rooted need of a people for dignity and development, for a hope and history shaped in our own image and interests, and for a dignity-affirming and life-enhancing legacy we strive ceaselessly to leave to coming generations.

To speak of an African Renaissance is to pose the necessity and possibility of not only regaining our internal strengths and rebuilding our lives and lands, but also the securing of the peace and prosperity, the democracy, development and just societies that give form, foundation and content to this project. Moreover, as we have maintained since the 60's, such a renaissance requires the recovery and reconstruction of the best of our culture in our indispensable efforts to reconceive and engage our world in ways that bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human.

This means that culture cannot be cut off from the issues and events of today, i.e., the pressing problems that increase need and decreases life chances, and our ongoing liberating efforts to live lives of dignity, decency and meaning. Indeed, this is the understanding that President Maître Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal expresses in his initiative to explore and en-

gage African culture as an instrument of African development. Thus, Pres. Wade has called for and set in motion preparation for the Third World Festival of Black Arts (FESMAN III) to be held in Dakar, Senegal, 2009 December 1-14 with the theme "African Renaissance: Diversity and Unity".

In his address at the special conference to inaugurate the African American FESMAN preparatory committee, Pres. Wade outlined the context which confronts us as African people. It is, he said, "a context of globalization in which economic dependency is likely to increase", disease and poverty persist and the weaknesses of health and education systems continue to pose problems on various levels. But, he continued, "We have to unceasingly explore new ways to face and fight..." these awesome, even overwhelming challenges. And "in that quest for an exit from our crises, it is critical to invest in what we have best to offer: culture". In a word, culture must serve as a "real lever of development", addressing the issues of how to "alleviate Africa's economic dependence and its political marginalization". For Maître Wade, the Festival represents a decisive historical moment, not only for "a display of the excellence and rich creativity of the Black world", but will "also be a field of moral reaffirmation and a mobilization of all forces for the development of Africa".

Thus, he concludes, "I call on all Africans, all the sons and daughters of the Diaspora, all my fellow citizens, all the partners that are ready to walk by our side, all states, all international organizations, foundations, firms, etc., for a shining success for this Festival and for the emergence of a new Africa". Pan-African and international in scope, FESMAN III will include representatives, participants, artists and scholars from over 80 coun-

tries in Africa and the Diaspora, addressing the critical issue and project of African Renaissance.

Last year Pres. Wade appointed Molefi Kete Asante chair of the United States FESMAN Committee (USFESMANCO) which was launched at the UN under the auspices of the President and the authority of the African Union 2009 January 13 with over 600 persons in attendance. The committee was charged with securing U.S. artists and colloquium scholars for FESMAN, selecting, orienting and coordinating the activities of participants, and defining areas of art and intellectual focus for the Festival and its colloquium. Included among its members, along with Molefi Kete Asante, are: John W. Franklin, Ama Mazama, Maulana Karenga, Robert H. Dickerson, Patricia Reid-Merritt, Haki Madhubuti, M. K. Asante, Jr., Tiamoyo Karenga, Randy Weston, Charles Fisher, Susan Goodwin, Rosalyn Howard, Maya Freelon-Asante, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Joyce King, Niyi Coker, Christel Temple, Marta Vega, Troy Allen, Carol D. Lee, and Frederic Bertley.

Professor Asante has been at the center of conversations and numerous projects around the concept of an African Renaissance. Indeed, his development of the concept and theory of Afrocentricity is rooted in his aspiration and intellectual and practical work for an African Renaissance based especially on cultural recovery as the foundation on which we conceive and construct our future. He advocates strongly for cultural centeredness, for he says without this centeredness “we exist in borrowed space”. And it is a space which falsifies our history and fossilizes our thought in

a Eurocentric framework, depriving us of the capacity to conceive and create the new world and our self-determined way of being African and human in the world.

But Asante says, “By regaining our own platforms, standing in our own cultural spaces and believing that our own way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation we need to participate fully in a multicultural society (and world)”. And “without this kind of centeredness, we bring almost nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of Whiteness”.

This is the meaning of Frantz Fanon’s call to start a new history of humankind by drawing from the resources within us. It also means, we must, he tells us, untangle ourselves from the European embrace, “turn over a new leaf, ...work out new concepts and try to set foot a new man (and woman)” in the world. Moreover, as he contends, we must not reduce culture to art, literature, song and dance, nor separate it from the liberation struggle. For culture is the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself and introduces itself to history and humanity. Thus, if we appreciate African culture, we must, Fanon says, “give 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 indeed the whole world African community. Given then, the demands of history and struggle, Fanon concludes, “the new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute”.

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