



**BLACK PEOPLE IN WAR AND STRUGGLE:
THE MIRROR AND MESSAGE OF MALCOLM X**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

SURELY, IN TIMES LIKE THESE OF WAR AND waste, cultivated fear and confusion and wholesale flights to fantasy for meaning and questionable comfort, there is a deep and urgent need for an unadorned, undoctored and action-demanding truth. And our honored teacher and mentor Min. Malcolm X, offers us here both a mirror and message of great and enduring value. Thus, when the ASALH issued its annual Black History Month Theme: “African Americans in Times of War”, I thought immediately of Min. Malcolm. For Malcolm would naturally and necessarily expand the theme so that it involves not only discussions of issues of wars the U.S. waged abroad, but also those it wages at home and our resistance to them.

Having expanded this discussion, he would focus not on how well we served this country, but rather how in spite of our doing so, we still were not given equal rights and equitable benefits and how unjust wars waged against us and others were negative to freedom, justice and security in the world. And he would, of course, stress the need for righteous and relentless struggle to end this state of things. Indeed, Malcolm noted that “We have been America’s most faithful servants during peace time and her bravest soldiers during war time. And still white(s)...have been unable to recognize us and accept us as fellow human beings”, worthy of the same rights they enjoy, equal treatment and equitable access to the goods of society and the world. Thus, he taught early that the war or struggle to be waged was not unjust war against other oppressed and struggling people, but *a righteous and relentless struggle* to radically change this country, to expand the realm of freedom and justice so that we and all people could live good and meaningful lives.

Here, Malcolm makes a distinction between unjust war and righteous struggle. And he condemned America’s and Europe’s wars of imperial and racist conquest. It was Mal-

colm, among all the major leaders of the Black Freedom Movement, who stood up first and condemned the wars against the Vietnamese people. Malcolm saw the wars against the Vietnamese and Congolese peoples and other peoples of color, including us, as a people, as rooted in “racism which involves a war against the dark-skinned people of the world” as well as in economic interests. Thus, he upheld the right of resistance for those who were unjustly attacked, including us as a people and linked these liberation struggles, placing us in the midst of the transformative rising tide of history. Likewise, he exposed the horror, hypocrisy and savagery of White supremacist wars, masquerading as saving the people, defending democracy and bringing peace to the world.

Indeed, Malcolm reminds us that the rulers of this country talk of peace, but they continue to make war everywhere. They claim to love freedom and promote democracy, but they have built and maintain the largest prison system in the world, and have disrupted and overthrown duly-elected governments, and invaded and set up and supported brutal occupations in numerous lands, ruthlessly taking peoples’ lives and resources as a racial and imperial “right”, underwritten and reinforced by technological and military might. And as Frantz Fanon reminded us, they talk so freely and glibly about man, woman and human beings, but everywhere they encounter them, they kill them, violate and do violence to them on every level—psychologically, culturally, socially and physically. In their humanity-denying conceptions of race and religion, they exalt themselves as the chosen, elect, elite and superior ones, and all others are designated as at best less equal and troublesome dependents and at worst unworthy and disposable objects of labor, sex and entertainment of various violative and dehumanizing kinds.

Malcolm speaks, teaches and acts in the tradition of Harriet Tubman and Frederick

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Douglass who taught that struggle on every level and in various ways is indispensable, and clearly, the only dignity-affirming and freedom and justice-achieving way forward for an oppressed people. He does not embrace or tolerate illusions about where we, as a people, are; the oppressive conditions under which we live or the ruthless character and behavior of our oppressor. Thus, Malcolm calls for rightful attentiveness to earnest and ongoing struggle; truth-telling as an ethical and educational necessity; and constant exposure and resistance to the oppressor's hypocritical call for a "law and order" without freedom, justice and equity. Nor will he allow leaders to prematurely call for peace and healing or to declare the end of the struggle before these goals are won.

Indeed, oppressors always call for "law and order" in the face of resistance. But the call is for the oppressed to accept an unjust law and an oppressive order. They mean, as Dr. Martin Luther King taught, an imposed peace without justice and as Min. Malcolm taught, a hypocritical violent peace without freedom or justice. And both of these conditions leave us still oppressed, exploited and degraded without real remedy or redress.

As Malcolm stated, "I'm for peace, but I don't see how any Black people can be at peace before the war is over", before the struggle is won. We cannot be taught to give ourselves or accept from others awards or praised for peace when we have no peace, little justice and less freedom than we deserve and are due. He says, "It is impossible for a general (real leader) to be at peace when his people get no peace", no peace at home, at work, at school, or walking and driving in the streets. Those at the top always seek real peace for themselves, but as Malcolm con-

tends, there should be no peace in this country or on earth until we and all oppressed people are at peace with justice, freedom and an equitable share of the goods of the world.

Thus, Malcolm informs us that given the constant threat to our lives and security, Black people should "realize they're living in a war zone" and that they are "at war with an enemy that is as vicious and criminal and inhuman as any war-making country has ever been". Here, it is important to note that when Malcolm says, we are "at war", he is talking not about *our activity* of engaging the enemy, but rather the *condition of war* the oppressor has imposed on us. Thus, in the 60's, we made the distinction between being "at war" and "in a war", saying to the reluctant potential Black soldier or freedom fighter, "You might not be *at war*, but you are *in a war*". This meant living in a condition of war or as Malcolm said, "living in a war zone", even if we wish we were living in a just and more gentle world.

GIVEN THIS, WE MUST NOT BE DIVERTED from discussing and dealing with this state of things and putting righteous and relentless struggle at the forefront. And we cannot do this by fantasizing about fictional heroes, digitized battles and imaginary worlds, and forgetting the critical issues and demands of daily life and the history we make or miss by what we do and do not do. On the contrary, we must face the facts and tell the truth, no matter how painful, unsettling and challenging it may be. And then we must move resolutely and relentlessly in our work and struggle to radically transform the conditions of our lives, and with other oppressed and struggling peoples and progressives, dare imagine and struggle to initiate a new history and future for humankind.

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