



**PATRICE LUMUMBA ANSWERING THE INVITATION OF HISTORY:
LEADERSHIP FOR LIBERATION AND A MISSION OF MARTYRDOM**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-11-24, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE REAL MEASURE OF A MAN AND WOMAN is not their capacity to accommodate, adjust to evil, injustice and unfreedom, and find a comfortable place in oppression; rather it is to find themselves in the ranks of resistance, regardless of how overwhelming the odds and the balance of forces against them. And Nana Patrice Lumumba, in this his 99th birth year, July 2, 1925, stands firmly and rightly in the ranks of these honored self-giving and self-sacrificing soldiers and servants of our people. Nana Lumumba, Baba wa Taifa (Father of the Nation), founding father of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its first Prime Minister, was a nationalist who worked to build a national unity beyond “tribalism” and factionalism, and narrow notions of class and ethnic interests, becoming a founding member and the leader of the *Mouvement National Congolais*, the Congolese National Movement (MNC), the party of independence.

He stressed that the Congo’s vast wealth belonged to the people and must be regained and used to improve their lives and enhance their future. He was also a dedicated pan-Africanist who constantly consulted Nana Kwame Nkrumah, founding father and President of Ghana, and the paradigmatic pan-Africanist, and argued the indivisibility of African freedom and the indispensability of African unity to harness African human and material resources and direct them toward the liberation, upliftment and development of the people. Also, he stressed the importance of a *sankofa* retrieval of the best of African values to ground the liberation struggle and build a new society worthy of the name African.

Daring to be truly independent, he incurred the hatred of the Belgian colonialists and other imperialists including the US which with Belgium fomented and supported

a coup against him and assassinated him along with two of his ministers, Nana Joseph Okito, VP of the Senate and Nana Maurice Mpolo, Commander of the Army. African Americans, Africans on the continent and around the world, as well as freedom-loving and struggling peoples on every continent, rose up in demonstrations against the brutal act. African Americans demonstrated at the UN outside and inside and interrupted the Security Council meeting February 15, 1961. And African American intellectuals and writers spoke and wrote about the meaning of Nana Lumumba to all African peoples and to African liberation and condemned the US for its CIA participation with Belgians and Congolese betrayers of the liberation struggle. This reversal of independence and the continuing savage suppression, exploitation and oppression of the Congolese people and robbery of their resources under various guises points back here and offers a lesson on the awesome costs of liberation and the self-giving soldiering, sacrifice and service exemplified by Nana Patrice Lumumba in offering his life and death to the people and the liberation struggle.

Thus, when Nana Haji Malcolm condemns the US and Belgium and praises him for his audacious and uncompromising stand, he was expressing ultimate praise and appreciation of Nana Lumumba as both a man and martyr at the time in which the pain of his sacrifice was still present and profoundly felt. He is speaking also of Nana Lumumba as a martyr, who without cowering or compromise, offered his life and death in the liberation struggle of his people. Haji Malcolm’s effusive praise of him speaks to the virtues of critical consciousness, moral, emotional and mental courage, and an active commitment to righteous and relentless struggle. And this is made more evident and important in a context

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in which history offers both an invitation to leadership for liberation and a mission of martyrdom given the balance of forces arrayed against him as a liberation leader and against the independence of his people oppressed and in resistance. Haji Malcolm understood this well for he, himself, offered and accepted this dual invitation of history, giving his life and death to the liberation struggle of his people.

To understand and appreciate the Congolese liberation struggle, the people's choice of their leader in the liberation struggle and his view of them, the past and the future, it would be valuable to revisit his Independence Speech (translations from the French mine) which was for the imperialists further evidence that, as Nana Lumumba told them in his speech, "We, who have suffered in body and heart from colonial oppression, tell you out loud that from now on, all that is finished". He begins addressing both "the men and women of the Congo", including all in the liberation struggle, calling them all "combatants for independence who are today victorious" who "have fought relentlessly" and together to achieve this historical moment and victory. And understanding the importance of memory-keeping, he tells them from the outset that it is a great and sacred achievement in their history that they must remember and "keep unalterably engraved in your hearts", and "teach its significance with pride to your children so that they in turn will relate it to their children and grandchildren the glorious history of our struggle for freedom".

Continuing, Nana Lumumba tells the people of the Congo that although they are to be proud of their achievement and liberation, they must not forget the awesome cost to them and *that their independence was not really granted but won through righteous and*

relentless struggle. He states that in spite of the ceremony for conceding independence on June 30, 1960, "No Congolese worthy of the name can ever forget that it is through struggle that it was won, a daily struggle, a fervent and idealistic struggle, a struggle in which we were not sparing in either our strengths, our deprivations, our suffering or our blood". Moreover, he stated "this struggle which was made of tears, fire and blood, ... was a struggle, noble and just, a struggle indispensable to putting an end to the humiliating enslavement imposed on us by force".

Nana Lumumba, then enumerates some of the forms of brutal injustice, oppression and exploitation imposed on the Congolese people for 80 years that cannot and must not be forgotten. These included forced labor, humiliation and degradation, land seizure, segregation (apartheid) laws and practices, political and religious persecution, mass shootings, tortuous political imprisonment, forced exile, denial of self-governance and freedom, and system-imposed suffering of great and gruesome magnitude. However, Nana Lumumba understands well that even as we remember, know and honor the past, we must engage and improve the present and imagine and dare to forge a whole new future for our people. He, thus, proposed a Congolese path forward that is linked to pan-African initiatives for the liberation and cooperation of the whole of Africa. He defines it as the beginning of "a new struggle, an awe-inspiring struggle that will lead our country to peace, prosperity and greatness".

He calls on the Congolese people to work and struggle together to "establish social justice and ensure that each one receives just remuneration for their work ... to show the world what Black people can do when they work in freedom, ... and to make the Congo a center of radiance for all of

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Africa”. Furthermore, he tells the people that together they can and will ensure that their richness in resources benefit them and their children; that laws will be revised from their racist forms and new laws will be made that “will be just and noble”. In addition, all the freedoms and rights provided for in the Declaration of Human Rights will be enjoyed by the people, discrimination will be suppressed and each person will be given “the rightful place that their human dignity, work and dedication to the country deserves”. And finally, he rejects the colonial peace of injustice, imposition and oppression and states that “we will establish not a peace of guns and bayonets, but a peace of the heart and of good will”.

HE ENDS WITH A CALL TO THE MEN, WOMEN and children of the Congo for unity, cooperation, sacrifice and service to ensure “the success of this great undertaking”, and with a reaffirmation of his commitment to pan-Africanism and an independent and unified Africa. In his last letter to his wife, Nana Pauline Opango Lumumba, Mama wa Taifa (Mother of the Nation), combatant and companion in love and struggle, who was among the first members to join and help build the national liberation movement, he reaffirms his commitment to Congolese and African freedom. And he likewise reaffirms his refusal to bend or break under the cruelties and torture inflicted on him, his “unwavering faith” in his people and his country and in their inevitable liberation, and their boldly writing, along with all other Africans, a new history of Africa and humankind.

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