



**FORGING OUR FUTURE WITH OUR PAST:  
RECLAIMING OUR HISTORY AND HUMANITY IN STRUGGLE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**E**MERGING AND EMERGENT CONVERSATIONS about our future as a people conducted in the community and academy in the midst of ever evolving technology, AI and related ideas, apprehensions and aspirations bring to mind the dual focus on the lessons of our history and the ethical concerns for our humanity. As Nana Haji Malcolm taught, history is a vital resource and indeed an arsenal of knowledge for our struggle from which we can draw to protect and promote our humanity and conceive, fashion and forge a future in the cultural image and human interest of our people. Thus, he says, “Armed with the knowledge of our past, we can with confidence chart a course for our future.” And he stresses the essentiality of cultural grounding in this process saying, “Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle,” and “we must take hold of it and use it to forge the future with the past.”

In a 1976 interview with *Black Books Bulletin* titled “Black People and the Future,” I spoke of critical issues revolving around the approach to an increasing impact of technology on our lives and the special impact it had and continuously has on Black people and other Third World peoples (peoples of color). I emphasize our need to think deeply about how we must engage this new real and constantly changing social reality and how it calls for increased and expanded struggle using our best views, values and practices drawn from our culture, history, and lived and living experience. Below I share some excerpts which reflect enduring concerns of today.

In approaching and dealing with these issues, “The first point we should make about technology is that it, like the reality it helps fashion, is a human construction and the problems and future it poses depend, in the first and final analysis, on human energies and efforts, human thought, will and action. It's important

to say this because we often mystify technology either as a god which will miraculously free us from the problematic of being human and the permanent need and struggle to solve it continuously or as the embodiment of evil, a direct threat to us, the earth and perhaps the universe. But technology, as history shows us, is not divine nor diabolical, but rather an instrument of human design and used for both good and bad. It is thus a historical and social product regardless of its obvious and more recent advances. And to talk of it as if it were *sui generis* or other than earthly, is to deny its historical origin and continuity in development and assign to it awesome and omnipotent attributes which confuse rather than clarify its role in human history.

A central problem with technology is that it's in the wrong hands and thus is used for the wrong purposes, i.e., planned obsolescence production and consumption to waste, the ruthless and armed pursuit of profit, and a more vicious and violent suppression of profound and serious social change. Moreover, we cannot simply tread lightly over the question of the capacity of the human personality and spirit to encounter and absorb positively the drastic alterations of the natural and social world which the owners and controllers of technology have systematically carried out. There are, in fact, real ecological limits to deformed and unplanned growth in the natural, social and human sense. And unless all oppressed and progressive people unite to reverse this rule and ruin, destruction and deformity are ensured.

The effort required to stem this tide is directly related to the need for Black people to build and maintain a profound and permanent sense of community, a kinship in time and space, in views and values, in life-chances and life-activity, and in self-consciousness and self-confirmation. Without this sense of and commitment to community, alienation and anomie

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will certainly undermine our *adaptive vitality* and self-destructive life-styles and patterns of behavior will overcome us. Struggle remains the priority of every agenda, struggle first for internal strength, for change in our collective and personal self, and then struggle in alliance with other oppressed and progressive people to change society.

The future belongs to those who plan and struggle for it, to the masses, not to machines or their manipulators. The role of the Afro-American people in history will be determined by what they do to liberate themselves and thus, this key world country from the twin rule of racism and capitalism, from racist cavemen and corporate destroyers and deformers of our history and humanity. We are a key people in a key country and our liberation will not only free us, but bring the whole of humanity closer to full liberation.

The future will be unique only if we acquire the power and values to shape it in our own image, to reclaim and reconstruct our lives in more human terms. It will not be unique because there are more machines, but because the masses have struggled and succeeded in bringing into being a new society and world, a new woman, man and child, people with new values and vision, living and enjoying a free, fuller and higher level of human life. But the lessons from the past will always be important, for in fact everything including uniqueness is a product of history. And when I speak of history I am speaking not of any abstract process or force but of the march and struggle of humankind to realize and fulfill itself. History is a very human

thing; we bring it into being with our own hands and minds. Thus, we must not mystify it and let it happen behind our backs but must determine its course and content. So, when we study history, we study ourselves, our struggle, contradictions and achievements, and this yields lessons about how we should and should not live our lives.

Moreover, there is in fact never any total rupture with the past, only expansion beyond it. Therefore, the uniqueness of the future will lie not in our destruction or denial of it (the past), but in our diverse, dynamic and decisive ability to transcend it. And transcendence is, above all, absorption and expansion, not denial and destruction. It requires the *values, vision* and *vigor* to extract, and then internalize the best and strongest historical achievements and go beyond them. Continuity and change are basic aspects of the same whole, and nations, civilizations and cultures contain within them the past, present and future, not as separate dichotomous divisions, but as periods and parts of the same historical process.

THESE ARE SUBVERSIVE CONTENT TO OUR history, heroic and instructive images, events and issues that provide valuable alternatives to the established order, that point to possibilities we owe to ourselves to dare. Let us learn our lessons well, then, begin to build a new world as we struggle; face the future boldly and shape it in our own image; reclaim our history and humanity from alien hands and reconstruct our lives in correspondence with the values, visions and strengths we've gained in struggle.▲

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