



**VOTING AND STRUGGLING TO REMAKE AMERICA:  
IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS AND CAPACITIES FOR LIFE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**B**Y ANY SANE AND SERIOUS REASONING, measure and meaning, these are bleak, unBlack, challenging and taxing times for this country and especially for us as a people. America, the beautiful, has revealed its ugly monster side, a defining part of its multiple personalities since its framing and founding. Thus, it is expressed not simply in the pathetic and perverse person and performance of Trump, but also in the deep rooted racism and other pathologies of oppression and anti-human policies and practices he and his enablers, supporters, supplicants, co-signers and crime partners conjure up, adjudicate, legislate and impose. And in such a context, singing and claiming “America the beautiful” is blatantly self-hyping, hypocritical, wholly illusional and grossly immoral. Indeed, the “amber waves of grain” and the harvests of “the fruitful plain” go to the corporate pirates and profiteers and the boastful billionaires, not to the millions of poor, hungry and homeless in every city, town, reservation and unnamed place of deprivation, degradation and suffering.

Likewise, the country has not been “crowned with brotherhood from sea to shining sea”, not to mention blessed with sisterhood from city to city. On the contrary, we are fed and confronted with varied and daily doses of racist, class, sexist and other forms of domination, deprivation and degradation of those different and vulnerable. And we must remember the teachings of Nana Fannie Lou Hamer who asked and urged us to “stop lying about the history of this country” as a beginning step toward righting its wrongs and building a just and good society. Thus, we must reject concealing and suppressing the truth of the horrors of U.S. history with this song and similar self-blinding myths that

the pilgrims “a thoroughfare of freedom beat across the wilderness”.

For the so-called wilderness was the inhabited land and life space of Native Americans and it was the pilgrims and their fellow Europeans that brought the wilderness of unfreedom and oppression, and the wildness of White supremacy and genocide. Moreover, they instituted and imposed a radically evil religious self-righteousness and intolerance that led to the burning at stake of their women as witches and Native Americans as pagans and heathens or any other name to justify illusional claims of racial and religious superiority and the raw reality of genocide. Thus, we must ask in good faith, as we try to sing this song and make such claims and similar ones, how can any God bless evil, injustice and oppression without being complicit in it? And how can the willfully wrong and oppressive ask a just God to “shed his grace on thee”? And how can oppressors and their enablers and collaborators ask in song, prayer or simple conversation that “God mend thine every flaw, Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!”? when they don’t admit their flaws and destructive ways are clearly and wildly out of control, and instead of defending and expanding liberty with law, are using law to constrain, constrict and deny freedom, justice and other shared human goods.

There is then clearly a *major mending* to be done, a *radical rethinking and remaking of America*, not to save its abstract soul, but to save and secure its real people, especially the poor and less powerful, the ill and aged, the different, the devalued and the vulnerable. Moreover, the coming elections are an important part of this overarching struggle. And whether we want them to or not, these

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elections, at this critical time of turmoil and turning, impose on us, as both Black persons and people, a special responsibility and task. For whatever we do or do not do, will have a tremendous impact on the conditions and capacities for life for us and all other oppressed, marginalized and struggling peoples. Indeed, no matter what the media makes of us through racist indictment, distortion and erasure, we remain an indispensable moral and social vanguard in this country and the world. And no matter what racist, social and moral madness is intentionally metastasized into public policy and socially sanctioned practice, we must resolutely resist it, regardless of the calculation and consideration of odds against us.

Let's face it, we really have no real choice in the matter of righteous and relentless struggle left by our honored ancestors as a legacy of an *advanced* but *unfinished* fight that we are called and compelled to continue until victory is achieved. Indeed, as our honored ancestors taught and our philosophy, Kawaida, affirms, we have been chosen by heaven and history to bring, increase and sustain good in the world. It is our divinely granted and natural right, they teach us, to be free, to have and enjoy justice, to be respected in our divinely endowed dignity and sacred humanity and to live good and meaningful lives. And it is our co-relative right and responsibility to rise up in rebellion and resistance against any system that dares to deny, diminish and violate these inalienable rights. In other words, this is our moral duty and historical destiny and we cannot avoid or neglect it without damage to our dignity, harm to our humanity and denial of our right to conditions and capacities for life that are unquestionably due every human being in all our diversities and commonalities.

We have come once again to a critical battle ground called elections and voting, making hard choices at home and in the community, and casting ballots become a fundamental means of struggle. For again, we are at a critical juncture of history in the ongoing struggle to determine the political course, moral character and quality of social life of this society. And as usual, we are destined to play a decisive role as a key moral and social vanguard in struggling and voting for a vision and realization of a remade America, beyond its myths, policies and practices of oppression in its various subtle and savage forms.

And the coming elections, whether we want them or not, impose on us a special responsibility to participate fully in this election cycle and exercise a right and legacy born and reaffirmed through great sacrifice and suffering. This is a real and rightly focused struggle and we must set aside, even cast aside, all illusions about what is to be done and what must be done and right away be about doing it. Indeed, there can be at this critical time no half stepping, holding out for better times, lagging back or tripping and trying to play cool in a hot war zone. Again, from our art of war and struggle texts, Nana Paul Robeson reaches out to us and teaches us to accept and act on the firm and unavoidable fact that "the battlefield is everywhere, there is no sheltered rear".

We all know that the religious and political right are vilely committed to serving up deceptive dishes and bewildering wines wherever they can, restricting freedoms and denying fundamental rights to women, men, children and entities they haven't encountered yet. And we also know that the Democrats are addicted to giving them latitude and to whimpering, whining and failing to face them with the political strength and moral

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positions that we and the majority of Americans have given them. We know that politicians are vulnerable and venal to different degrees and that money in a capitalist and consumerist society is an idol easy to worship and to sell oneself and one's soul for. But where does that leave us with all this knowledge, simply condemning it and refusing to participate or daring to struggle and being committed to win?

Again, we cannot choose not to act and to struggle, for there is no neutrality between oppression and freedom, no way to claim in any moral sense that you can stand on the side and let things happen when you know wrong is being done. The voting, then, is not for a candidate, even if you like them; it must always be for the issues involved and for our own vision and what conditions we see as the most promising conditions to pursue and

realize that vision after the election and beyond.

**W**ITH THIS IN MIND, LET US GO TO VOTE for these additional reasons: to exercise the hard-won right and responsibility to make our own unique contribution to how this society is governed, reconceived and reconstructed; to honor the legacy of our ancestors born of service, sacrifice and righteous and relentless struggle; to engage and participate in critical and contested space for policy and resources; to refuse to let the oppressor rule, plunder and deny our rights without resistance; and to see and engage voting as another battleline and battlefield on which we fight to improve the conditions and capacities for life and open the way to the radical reconception and remaking of America.▲

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