



**COMING INTO COMPTON:
THE CONTINUOUS QUEST FOR QUALITY EDUCATION**
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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The recent petition initiative of a group of parents in the Compton Unified School District to turn McKinley Elementary School into a charter school clearly reflects these parents and other parents' continuous quest for a quality education for their children and in a larger sense, for our children as a whole. For each battle waged with good faith, right focus and fierce determination is a contribution to the overall and inclusive struggle. But it also raises issues of process and promise, of how the struggle is waged, the weapons and strategy used, and the necessity that the strategy and struggle be self-determined, informed and inclusive and that the community speaks and moves as a self-conscious, concerned and unified force. In a word, it cannot be a corporate construction with a community face, but must be the community, itself, defining, defending and developing its own ideas, interests and aspirations.

This particular parent group initiative was pursued within the framework of California's "Race to the Top" education reform legislation passed last year which gave parents the right, curiously called the "parent trigger", to petition to compel change of management and staff at their underperforming school or transform it into a charter school. The main force behind this initiative is Parent Revolution, an educational reform group, closely allied with the Celerity Education Group, the charter corporation the parents – toured, cultivated and counseled by Parent Revolution – chose to take over their school. Concerns and criticism have rightly been raised about inadequacy of information for an informed parental choice; lack of transparency in the

process; just evaluation and treatment of the teachers who, with the exception of one year, have raised the test scores and met state growth targets since 2004; the lack of a public discussion; and the progressive privatization of public space and monies under the guise of quick-fix fantasies. The law and process are billed as an empowerment of parents, but it's simply the legal right to choose a private corporation rather than a public institution. They will not have any direct governing power, nor do they have proof of overall superior performance of charter schools or improvement in oversight or accountability.

However, in matters of life and learning, of daily striving and major struggles of achieving a quality education for our children or of defining, developing and defending our interests as a whole, there is no substitute for an *aware, organized* and *active* community. To be aware is what we called in the 60s "being conscious". To be conscious is, first, to be conscious of ourselves – of our history and culture so there is always clarity rather than confusion about who we really are, and what we have done and must do.

And it is to be conscious of our ever-present strength and our currently existing weaknesses and with due deference to Frederick Douglass, it is to know that the need to struggle is always with us and "without struggle there is no progress" or promise, no future or movement forward worthy of the name, history and culture African.

To be conscious is also, as Marcus Garvey taught, to be aware of our opposition, our enemy and oppressor, or any

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other category of those who block our way forward, who wish, work and make war on us and others to maintain their monopoly on wealth, power, status and knowledge and who talk post-racial fantasies and simple-minded patriotism essentially to divert and disarm and ultimately to defeat us. And it is to be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses also and to know that unless we consider them to be gods, they can be defeated and a new, just and good society and world can be brought into being.

And finally, to be conscious is to be conscious of the context in which we live and struggle to be able to assess and know the issues involved, the balance of forces, the conditions of the times, the presence and possibilities of allies, the trends and tendencies of history and thus, the appropriate weapons and strategy to use in the struggle. It is to be conscious of the possibilities of victory or defeat at any given moment, the most favorable grounds on which to fight and the grounds to be avoided or to enter with extreme caution. And it is to be aware that we must prepare carefully and conscientiously for every battle and as Molefi Asante says, possess a victorious consciousness that refuses to be dispirited or defeated even in the face of the most overwhelming odds.

Secondly, to be organized is to be in ongoing structures that harness our energies and house and advance our interests and aspirations and unite us into an aware and active social force for African and human good in the world. It is to be an active member of a group, building a supporting and sustaining context and structural capacity for collective discussion, planning,

decision-making and decisive action. It is, as Maria Stewart suggested, to stand ever-ready to enter the field of action. For as we said so often in the 60s: in the struggle, our defense depends not on the enemy not coming, but on our being ready to receive him when he does.

Thirdly, to be active is to be constantly mobilized, in motion, in movement and in struggle. It is to understand that episodic engagement, mere monetary contribution, and occasional involvement are not enough, that we must be as we used to say constantly, “on the case for the race” and continuously “in-it-to-win-it” for our people, the world and future generations. It is to understand and embrace Frantz Fanon’s teaching that the opening of a new future and the basis of hope lie in a commitment to action. Indeed, Fanon says that to achieve that opening and “to ensure that hope and to give it form, (one) must take part in action and throw (oneself) body and soul into the national struggle” of one’s people.

Moreover, Fanon says, “you may speak about everything under the sun, but when you decide to speak of that unique thing in (human) life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by bringing light to your own country, and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, then you must collaborate on the physical plane.” That is to say, you must move beyond ideas to action, give of yourself, engage in a persistent practice which proves your commitment and produces the desired result. For as we say in Kawaida: in matters of love, life and struggle, practice proves and makes possible everything.

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