



**IN REMEMBRANCE, CELEBRATION AND PAN-AFRICAN SOLIDARITY:  
MARKING OCTOBER BLACK HISTORY MONTH IN ENGLAND**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**n 1987, TIAMOYO AND I TRAVELED TO London where on October 1<sup>st</sup>, I gave the inaugural lecture at County Hall for the establishment of Black History Month in England. My inaugural lecture and others I gave at the West Indian Center, Haringey; the Hackney Black Peoples Organization; and the London Strategic Policy Unit were published in the book, *Our Story: A Handbook of African History and Contemporary Issues*. Below, I share these edited excerpts from this inaugural lecture in remembrance, celebration and Pan-African solidarity with the African people of England in this their month of celebration of Black History.

I would like to say thanks very much for the opportunity to speak here with you. I'd like to say I'm honored to be in the company of such distinguished persons on the dais. And I'd like to start off by saying thanks especially to Mr. Ansel Wong and Mr. Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, one of the founders of this Black History Month celebration, as well as, the London Strategic Policy Committee, the Association of London Authorities and the Inner London Education Authority for the invitation to come and give the keynote inaugural address for the official establishment of Black History Month in London, England.

Certainly, I'm honored and humbled by the invitation and opportunity to give this address, and I share the honor with the late Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the African American historian and scholar, who initiated the systematic and critical study of Black history and began Black History Month in the United States in the early 1900's. He felt like, of course, we feel, that the study of African history, of Black history, is a contribution not only to Africans' understanding of themselves, but of humanity understanding itself,

and also a contribution to the racial modesty of colonizers of Africa, i.e., European peoples. We are, of course, still fighting that battle, but nevertheless it's good to honor Dr. Woodson because he had such faith in the transformative power of knowledge.

As we celebrate Black or African history this month and this year, it is important to ask what is the meaning and challenge of our history as African people, where is it headed and what should be our self-conscious role in it? For to celebrate African history is above all to grasp its meaning and challenges, its relevance and rootedness in all we do, and to define and answer effectively the challenge and task it poses for us. This is especially important for us as an African people, for it is among African people that human history has its origin and original meaning, and it is among African people that Frantz Fanon, a great theorist of Africa, suggests a new history of humanity must be launched and pursued. Europe, Fanon says, can offer the world no direction here in building a new history of humanity, for when it had the power to inform and unite the world, it decided instead to enslave it, and to develop all kinds of ways to deny, deform and destroy both the history and humanity of Third World peoples, the majority of humankind. Among the chief ways it achieved this is through, of course, capitalism, imperialism and racism.

History is a very human thing. We bring it into being with our own hands and minds, with what we do and do not do. The meaning of history is multidimensional, rich and diverse in its relevance. In fact, there is no understanding of Africans or humanity without history. Min. Malcolm X, one of our major leaders in the liberation struggle, who knew the importance of history said, "of all

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our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research". He knew that history was more than dead dates, more than disasters and coronations and casualties of kings. Malcolm knew that history is above all a struggle and a record, not just a record, for history is a *struggle* and a *record*, a struggle of a people in the process of shaping their world in their own image and interests.

In other words, history is the struggle and record of humans in the process of shaping the world in their own image and interest, i.e., taking nature and making it an ally rather than an enemy and developing self, society and the world in the process. Therefore, African history is the struggle and record of African people, the fathers and mothers of human civilization, in the process of standing up, making a rupture with the animal world, and shaping the world in a more human image and interest. So, when we talk about African history, let us be reminded we're talking about the fathers and mothers of human civilization, and the fathers and mothers of humanity itself.

Now, if history is the struggle and record of a people in the process of shaping the world in its own image and interest, then it surely establishes its significance first by being a contribution to our own self-understanding as African people, that is to say, our identity, in terms of our *origin* and *achievement*, but also identity in terms of our *possibilities* based on that achievement.

We're all African people whether we're in the United States, or in the Caribbean, or in Canada, or whether we're on the Continent. Thus, we form a world African community. And it is important not to reduce Africa to its continental dimension. We must talk of Africa as a world historical project and world community. Africa is both a project that seeks to pose a new paradigm for humanity, and a world community that seeks to step

back on the stage of human history as a free, proud and productive people, and speak our own special truth to the world. To rescue and reconstruct African history, then, is, in fact, to rescue and reconstruct our humanity and human history also. It is to set the record straight and reconcile the truth of Africa with the truth of human history.

But there are problems to overcome because of several things. First of all, there is the problem of historical amnesia caused and cultivated in the Holocaust of enslavement. Second, there is the problem of racism which also contributed to that historical amnesia. And there is the problem of building self-conscious and sustained struggle for liberation which will solve both problems.

When we start off with the question of historical amnesia, we begin first of all, with the enslavement of African peoples, which is one of the greatest holocausts of human history. The enslavement of African people represents a great human loss on three fundamental levels: (1) the loss of human life, (2) the loss of human civilization, of knowledge, skill, memory and achievements of Africa to world history and civilization, and (3) the loss of human possibility in Africa and the Diaspora as a result of the massive human and cultural destruction.

And then, of course, there was and remains the question of racism. A lot of time we don't want to talk about enslavement and racism. We want to forget, to deny, and to escape the penalty demanded and imposed for Blackness in a white dominated world. But, if we forget, we violate historical memory. We dishonor those who fought and died and built for us, those who dared to struggle for liberation and a higher level of human life. Amilcar Cabral was so precise and correct when he argued that one of the greatest disservices the colonialist, the imperialist, the racist, and the capitalist did to us

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was that they interrupted and appropriated our history. For history is a way we know our humanity. And thus, key to our liberation is the return to our history in and through struggle.

The future is ours and the struggle for African and human liberation is our means of making it. But we need historical and cultural anchor. We must, in order to really accomplish our mission, now that we understand the functions of history, do two things: one, develop a new historiography and two, engage in a struggle that makes history possible and conscious.

FRANON SAID WE MUST STRUGGLE TO START a new history, bring the new world into being and a new man and woman to inhabit it. The ancient Egyptians left us a model of struggle in and for history. They said, "Every day is a donation to eternity. And even one hour is a contribution to the future." And they also said, "to do that which is of value is forever. A people called forth by their work do not die, for their name is raised and remembered because of it." May our name as African people be forever raised and remembered because of our work and struggle for our own liberation and the liberation of all humanity.▲

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