



**“KAWAIDA, COOPER, KING, MALCOLM AND AI:
SAFEGUARDING HUMAN DIGNITY, LIFE AND THE WORLD”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IF WE, AS A PEOPLE, TAKE SERIOUSLY our critical and ongoing role as a moral and spiritual vanguard in this country and indeed the world, then we are morally obligated to consider and to speak and contribute to every righteous effort to achieve African and human good and the well-being of the world. Thus, as Kawaida philosophy teaches, we must constantly dialog with our own culture, asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the fundamental issues confronting African peoples and humanity as a whole. And likewise, we are open to dialoguing with the peoples of the world in the ongoing search for common ground and common good.

Indeed, we embrace Nana Anna Julia Cooper’s morally centering declaration that “We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition”. But as we always maintain, we must come to the table of deliberation and decision not naked and in need, but fully clothed in our own culture, able to speak our own special cultural truth and make our own unique contribution to radically reconceiving and reconstructing our shared societies and world.

Clearly at this moment in history, we must come together to reflect on, interpret and address the critical issues, problematic practices and transformative trends and tendencies of our times. And no problem looms larger over the horizon of our

lives and future than that of technology, especially digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) with its rapid advances, its pervasive presence in our lives for good and evil, its privatized character and power, and its inherent threat given its human designers and builders, and their unregulated practices. Indeed, information technology; increased surveillance and suppression; data collection on the wholeness of our lives including our DNA; biotechnology; nuclear power; data centers; and AI used to kill without conscience, make war and commit genocide provide a small group of corporate owners and allied elites with a relatively unchecked power over humanity, the world and its future.

Recently, there were dire warnings of AI’s potential to achieve superintelligence beyond humans and to destroy humanity within a decade. And people and communities around the country are raising questions, demanding action and resisting data centers’ destructive presence. These and other struggles are essential, for as Nana Frederick Douglass taught, “without struggle there is no progress”. It is clearly not enough to see and engage AI as simply a neutral tool like others. Indeed, AI and technology are not simply neutral, for they are stamped with the character of the humans who conceive, design and develop them, own and use them. AI’s recent accessing data systems without permission or programming and its attempts to cover its actions and hide

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its mistakes demonstrate how much it is a product of its makers, molders and owners who willfully monopolize access, benefit, ownership and control.

We can also say it's simply a need for internal and public oversight, but there is the parallel problem of views and values, the progressive thingification of human life and human relations and issues of inequality, injustice and oppression. Thus, the design, production and use of technology and AI must be guided by a clear and compelling ethical code and controlled by a credible system of oversight and governance both nationally and internationally which puts a pause on advanced AI development and a ban on superintelligence. And it must seriously study, develop and implement ways to rightfully and responsibly design, develop, deploy and share public access to AI and other advanced technology in the interest of shared human good and the well-being of the world.

Nana Martin Luther King had warned of the issues of gaps between technological advancement and moral progress and the need for a radical change in the central values that drive American society. He stated that “if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society”. For he said, “When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme material-

ism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered”. Moreover, he said, “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies”, make us question “the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth” and capitalists extracting profits from what is now called the Global South “with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, ‘This is not just’.” And he asserts that “A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war, ‘This way of settling differences is not just’,” especially given its devastating effect on human life and vital resources for life.

Nana Haji Malcolm X also stressed a cultural revolution of values, arguing that “the Western World, filled with evil and wickedness, is groping and stumbling blindly through spiritual darkness toward its inevitable doom”, and that people must think for themselves and choose and practice values that contribute to their liberation and upliftment and to human solidarity. Conscious of the society's cultivated consumerism and vulgar materialism, he states that often “spiritual values are submerged, if not destroyed, by an emphasis on material things” and that what is needed is a balance between grounding in the spiritual and moral and people's pursuit of material progress.

The point he makes here is not against the material advancement and well-being of the people, but against the pursuit of the material at the expense of the spiritual and the moral, and to the detriment of the people, themselves and their

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liberation struggle. Therefore, he concludes, “Truly a paradise could exist wherever material progress and spiritual values could be properly balanced”.

| AS I HAVE WRITTEN IN A PREVIOUS ARTICLE here, “Black People in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Resisting The Progressive Artificiality of Human Life”, our meeting the social and ethical challenges of big tech and artificial intelligence must include our resistance to the progressive artificiality of human life, human learning and human relations. For, artificial intelligence is pre-

ceded and made possible by the progressive artificiality of much of our lives in terms of our relations with each other, with others and with the natural world, reflecting the progressive erosion of quality relations which ground and define our humanity. Thus, at the heart and center of our resistance must be the larger struggle for both a technology and a society rooted in values that at a minimum are dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving, committed to an inclusive, common and compelling good for us, humanity and the world.▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor Emeritus of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org. www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org.