



**KING AND ROBESON AT THE NO KINGS DEMONSTRATIONS:
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY AND THE DIFFERENT AND VULNERABLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

APRIL 4TH IS NANA DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING'S Day of Sacrifice, the day of his assassination and martyrdom. And we stress his awesome sacrifice, his offering his life and death in the struggle for freedom, for this is his gift to us and humanity. April 9th is the birthday, the day of coming into being of Nana Paul Robeson who also gave his life to the struggle for our and human freedom, sacrificing his own freedom, livelihood, well-being and personal security. Nana King and Nana Robeson left us a legacy and lessons that we, in rightfully paying homage to them, should raise up, reflect on and put into practice in the ways we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles. For there is no better way to honor the great and good-doing women and men of our history than to live and advance their legacy as best we can. Certainly, this is the central meaning of the Kawaida teaching that this is our duty: to know our past and honor it; to engage our present and improve it; and to imagine a whole new future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

This month we are in the midst of the murderous madness, devastation and waste of war and a would-be king who is drunk with dreams of unlimited power and war with no cost or blow back and constantly spewing out gansta and gutter talk which he is most comfortable with and most competent in. Trump and his crime partners in and outside the administration have waged a continuous assault

not only on the Constitution and democracy, but also brutal and deadly attacks on citizens, residents and immigrants, especially the different and the vulnerable. And they have not only dared to control the government and politics on every level, but also the economy, the education system and the media and is ruling with fear, force and falsehood reflective of an unannounced but no less real fascism. Also, Trump, having facilitated and funded his manipulating proxy and protégé, Israel's war of genocide and ecocide in Gaza Palestine and its pogroms in West Bank Palestine, is now aiding it in its devastating aggression against Lebanon. And he has joined Israel in world threatening aggression against Iran, intending to repeat in Iran and Lebanon what was inflicted on Palestine, and criminally promising to kill the "whole civilization" of Iran.

Across this country millions have risen up in rallies of resistance to this destructive madness, declaring no kings, no empires, no emperors and no oppression in any form. And we of the African American Cultural Center (Us) joined these millions in building a united front against fascism, empire and the White supremacy that undergirds and informs them. We went defiant and determined, held high our signs, and chanted the demands our signs spoke to and advocated. We called out: "Respect For All, Justice For All, Freedom For All"; "Embrace Cuba, Resist US Thuggery"; "Healthcare Not

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Warfare”; Resist! Resist! Resist!”; “Stop the War on Palestine, Iran and Lebanon”; and always “No Justice, No Peace”. For as Nana Martin Luther King taught “True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice”.

Indeed, since the 1960s, we have maintained that there can never be real peace until there’s justice, and the oppressor has no right to oppress us in comfort and peace or to be secure in their suppression or safe from our resistance. For us, our resistance is not only political in defense of democracy, but it is also self-consciously moral in our steadfast resistance to the violence and suffering imposed by the perverse, predatory and powerful who make relentless war on *the different and vulnerable* at home and abroad. Moreover, our resistance is in affirmation of our shared humanity and human rights, and also in affirmation of our different, unique and equally valid and valuable ways of being human in the world. And our resistance is also in active aspiration for the new world we seek to achieve in the interests of African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it.

We know that our resistance must extend beyond rallies, but we take the stand with Nana Robeson that “The battlefield is everywhere” and with Haji Malcolm that “wherever Black people are is a battleline” and likewise, wherever their interests are. Thus, this whole country, he taught, is a battleground, a place and space for righteous and relentless struggle for a radical reconstruction of society achieving an inclusive and shared good

for everyone. Demonstrations are a beginning, not the end. They are practices of mobilization to energize and educate and to point toward stronger forms of engagement, organization and sustained struggle on every front. They are also means of building solidarities for the larger and longer forms of struggle.

Both Nana Robeson and Nana King were concerned about democracy at home and abroad and against empire and the wars waged for it, even under the guise of freeing the people. As Dr. King stated, “America must begin the struggle for democracy at home. The advocacy of free elections in Europe by American officials is hypocrisy when free elections are not held in great sections of America”. And this applies to similarly and even more brazen and hypocritical posturing in Africa, Asia, Latin America and West Asia (the Middle East). Likewise, both believed that at the heart of the question of democracy was the central issue of an inclusive freedom and justice, a freedom freed from racism and racial injustice. Nana King asserted that the problem of freedom here “is so tenacious because, despite its virtues and attributes, America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially”. Thus, he argues “Justice for Black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions nor from fountains of political oratory nor will a few utopian changes quell all the tempestuous yearnings of millions of disadvantaged Black people”. Indeed, he maintained “White America must recognize that justice for

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Black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society”. And these structural changes will have implications for not only how society treats other vulnerable and different peoples in this country but also around the world.

Nana Robeson, recognizing Black people’s moral and social vanguard role, had argued that the fight for freedom of Black people in this country “represents the decisive front in the struggle for democracy”. Moreover, he argued “democracy cannot survive in a racist America”, for racism in both its subtle and savage forms does not allow for the moral and social quality of relations needed for everyone to participate and benefit equitably in the good and caring society we all want and deserve. Nana Robeson goes on to say that the achievement and practice of democracy in this country is a powerful moral and transformative challenge to it

and us. He said, “we ask for nothing that is not ours by right, and herein lies the great moral power of our demand” and its eventual triumph.

NANA PAUL ROBESON, IN DISCUSSING the young children who dared to desegregate the Little Rock educational system and exercise their right to an equal education argued that they gave “new life” to the American dream and to American democracy. He stated that “these children must ever be cherished for they are not only the hope and promise of my people, with them stand the destiny of democracy in America”. Here he refers not only to the unfinished fight for democracy, but also the unfinished fight for an expanded and inclusive freedom and justice which undergird and determine the moral quality and social value of democracy for us, human life and the well-being of the world. ▲

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