



**LIVING MALCOLM'S LIBERATION ETHICS:  
REMEMBERING, RISING, RAISING AND RESISTING**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 05-18-17, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**N THIS MONTH OF HEIGHTENED HOMAGE and increased attention to the life and legacy of Min. Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, it is important to do so placing rightful and repeated emphasis on his commitment to the liberation of our people and all the downtrodden and oppressed peoples of the world, especially the dark peoples of the world with whom he felt a special kinship of shared humanity and interrelated struggles. Haji Malcolm's liberation project is above all an ethical project in a comprehensive sense of the word *ethical*. It is an awesome disciplined and dedicated striving and struggle called *jihad*, directed toward transforming ourselves, society and ultimately the world. Malcolm is a teacher and soldier from his heart with a deep love for his people and for the righteous and relentless struggle he sees and embraces as the path and practice of their liberation. It is an internal and external struggle in the interest of freedom, justice, equity, security of persons and people, flourishing and other goods in the world.

Indeed, it is a striving for the good in both a spiritual and social sense. Thus, he teaches us not simply to strive to be good, but also to do good; not to simply strive internally and in isolation from the life and struggle of his people, but to strive to be always deep in the midst of the matters and struggles of the masses on this everywhere-present battle line we call America. For he states, "In this country, wherever a Black (person) is there is a battle line. Whether it is in the North, South, East or West, you and I are living in a country that is a battle line for all of us". And it is here that we must consciously and constantly struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. And we must do so without compromise, seeking a comfortable place in oppression or collaborating in our own oppression by accepting the things society peddles and pushes as substitutes for freedom, dignity and truly flourishing.

Thus, Malcolm will not separate his faith from the work he does and the struggle he wages in the existing world. Indeed, he declares that it is through righteous struggle and good deeds that the words in his sacred text, the Quran, are

made "a living reality" in and for the world. Therefore, he wants us to embrace an ethics of struggle—struggle for liberation, a freeing of ourselves and being ourselves without conditions, compromise or conceding to the savage systemic calls for Black self-erasure and deformation. It is, he tells us, a freeing of the mind and body—from both the vices and self-negating inner and outer voices which diminish and destroy our capacity for self-respect and social struggle against the system of oppression that cultivates these vices and implant these voices in us to weaken and divert us in our struggle against it and our oppression.

Clearly, as Malcolm taught, at the heart of his liberation ethics is the call to "wake up, clean up and stand up"—that is to say, to come into critical consciousness, achieve moral grounding and engage in transformative struggle which liberates the minds of the people and the people themselves from the oppressive and constraining conditions of their lives and opens a new horizon of history and human possibilities. And Malcolm teaches us that this waking up, this coming into critical consciousness, this liberation of the mind begins with a serious and sustained remembering. He teaches us that "History is a people's memory and without a memory man is demoted to the level of the lower animals". And this, Malcolm teaches us, was the intent of the oppressor to "strip us of our history, strip us of all cultural knowledge". Indeed, Malcolm taught the oppressor engaged in a massive brainwashing operation to cause historical amnesia in us, to erase our identity and culture. In this way, the oppressor intended to make us derivative beings, who had no inherent relevance of our own, only a relevance derived from our relationship with our oppressor and the dehumanizing and dignity-denying role he assigned us. And this role and relationship were violently and viciously established and maintained with equal violence and viciousness against our bodies, our minds and our memories.

Thus, Malcolm stresses the need for a cultural revolution to retrieve our memories of ourselves, our history and culture. "We must recap-

**LIVING MALCOLM'S LIBERATION ETHICS:  
REMEMBERING, RISING, RAISING AND RESISTING**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 05-18-17, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

ture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of White supremacy”, he tells us. “We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people”. Moreover, he states, “This cultural revolution will be a journey to our rediscovery of ourselves”. And again, he stresses history, the studying and learning of history and embracing and emulating its models of human excellence and achievement as indispensable to this liberating process and practice.

We must, he tells us, remember and learn who we are, where we came from, in what historical narrative we fit and in what culture we can ground ourselves and remake ourselves in our own image and interests. Indeed, our remembering must be a *reflective remembering* in which we think deep about the lessons of our history, embrace its spirit of struggle and possibilities, extract and emulate in models of excellence and achievement and practice a morality of remembrance—“raising and praising the bridges that carried us over”.

In this journey to rediscover ourselves, Malcolm teaches, “We must ‘return’ to Africa philosophically and culturally” regardless of whether we return physically or not. We must draw from the best of our ancestors’ thoughts, practices and teachings, and use them to enrich and ground our lives and direct our lives toward good and expansive ends. And we must continue through our history to include not only the continent of Africa and ancient times, but also the African diaspora and current times—finding appropriate models and meanings in ancient Egypt and Yorubaland as well as in the modern and more current lessons, achievements and struggles of our peoples. In a word, we must include *the whole world African community* in the arc of our engagement and draw from it all

the good it has to offer in living our lives and waging the liberation struggle that will free us and lay the basis for our flourishing and coming into the fullness of ourselves. For in the end, to be ultimately useful, the study of history and all other subjects must serve the ethical ends of our lives and contribute to the advancement and victory of our liberation struggle.

Malcolm teaches us also to rise up and raise up others as we rise. We say as a greeting in Us, “Black man, Black woman or Black people rising” and we answer, “And we are raising as we rise”. It is a lesson from our ancestors, reflected in the Black Women’s Club Movement’s call and challenge to “lift as we climb”. Malcolm, then, is teaching two concepts here: agency and other directedness which is both a personal and collective call and challenge. Agency is the ability and will to act and becomes at one point a moral obligation to act—to act to do and bring some good in the world. And in Malcolm’s teaching, it is a stress on self-raising as a part and practice of self-determination and self-reliance as both a person and a people.

**S**uch rising or self-raising as persons and a people is tied to Malcolm’s concept of resurrection, raising up from the dead level and grave of ignorance and oppression. He teaches that this new knowledge of our people’s dignity, divinity excellence and achievement which he brings is liberating and life-giving. And heard rightly and practiced diligently, it will raise us from a social death designed by our oppressor, put a board in our backs, the fire of freedom in our minds, love of ourselves and our people in our hearts, and the unbreakable will to wage righteous and relentless struggle on every front and field of battle until victory and a new world are won.

---

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, *The Message and Meaning of Kwanzaa: Bringing Good Into the World* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, [ww.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org](http://ww.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org); [ww.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://ww.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).