



**CELEBRATING, SUSTAINING AND ADVANCING INSURGENT AUGUST:
HONORING THE LEGACY BY SELF-CONSCIOUSLY LIVING IT**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

BY EVERY MEASURE AND MEANS OF RATIONAL and relevant consideration, calculation and comprehension, August is a month of major historical markers and milestones for us as African peoples. Indeed, it is an August of revolution, revolt, rebellion, insurrection and resistance of various kinds, and therefore, we call it *Insurgent August*, the August of *rising up in resistance*. The root meaning of the word insurgence is to rise up, and for us it is to rise up with the full meaning of our battle call “Black People Rising”, rising up in resistance against systems, policies and practices negative to human life and the well-being of the world and rising up to imagine, work for, and achieve a shared and inclusive good for us, humanity and the world.

Indeed, it represents for us a call and commitment to continuously rise up in righteous and relentless resistance in *opposition* to evil, injustice and oppression; in *affirmation* of the good and our sacred and soulful selves, and in active *aspiration* to remake the world, as Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune taught, and to forge in the furnace and fires of radically transformative struggle a future worthy of the best of what it means to be African and human in the world.

Insurgent August is a special marking, then, in which we remember and raise up the concentration of struggles, events and people in this month committed to *regaining our freedom* and building a liberated world and way of being human that

is unencumbered and unmarred by any form of oppression and injustice. Indeed, we celebrate this sacred narrative we call Black history remembering our constant and costly struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. For as Nana Harriet taught “freedom is not bought with dust”, but rather regained and achieved in a life and death struggle. And it is this insurgent history of righteous and relentless resistance that concentrates itself in the month of August across time and space in the world and calls us to remember and honor this legacy by self-consciously living and advancing it in the varied ways and spaces required.

This means remembering, reflecting on and taking seriously the reality that ours is a history of liberation struggles, and of a culture founded and formed in these struggles directed towards radical transformation and bringing and ensuring good in the world. These struggles were and remain a liberated and liberating process and practice before, during and after August, every day, year, decade and century. In a word, it was and is a practice of life and living itself. And thus, it is full of enduring lessons of life, love and struggle. It is in this context that we speak of celebrating and honoring the legacy of Insurgent August and the larger liberation struggle and history of which it is a valuable and instructive part.

We mark our arrival in this country in August 1619, in *enslavement and resistance* on ships and boats, beaches, and

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plantations as a beginning focal point. But it is safe to say, we were in resistance every day and month in Africa already, not only against enslavement, but also against colonialism and imperialism, its systemic crime partners. Long before the *Amistad* arrived in Long Island, New York in August 1839, seized by enslaved Africans, there were surely many other mutinies and continuous forms of resistance. Indeed, in August 1729 enslaved Africans rose up in rebellion and freed themselves from the enslavement ship, *Clare Galley*.

Nana Harriet Tubman taught us during the Holocaust of enslavement that we do not escape from our history nor the moral obligation to fight for and win a shared and inclusive freedom for everyone. And Nana Frederick Douglass assured us that struggle is indispensable to progress and freedom. These are lessons and teachings from the *text of living practice* given to us not only by Nana Harriet and Nana Douglass in their high risk liberation activities, but also by enslaved African revolts led by Nanas Gabriel and Nanny Prosser in August 1800 and by Nana Nat Turner in August 1830 and others in and outside of the month of August. We write and speak here in memory and honor of these freedom fighters, these audacious, steel-willed and self-sacrificing insurgents, daring to rebel and resist against all odds, mindful martyrs who offered their lives and deaths in the interest of African and human freedom.

As always, the Haitian revolution which began August 22-23, 1791, was and remains a singular, signature and world transforming achievement in

Haitian, African and human history. It is a model and mirror for us and the world in all that it overcame and achieved, freeing the Haitian people and assisting others in their liberation struggles and contributing a crucial turning point in the international struggles to eventually abolish human trafficking and enslavement and the genocidal savagery and suffering it imposed on us.

Certainly, the Watts Revolt in August 1965, is a fundamental turning point and central reference for the decade of the 1960s, which was defined by hundreds of revolts of varying scale and scope. During this period of uprising and resistance, numerous organizational, ideological and philosophical initiatives were developed, including our organization Us and its *Simba*, (Young Lions) formation. And so was *Kawaida* philosophy out of which I created the *Nguzo Saba* and *Kwanzaa*, a pan-African holiday created as an act of freedom, an instrument of freedom, a celebration of freedom and a practice of freedom, and now celebrated by millions throughout the African global community.

The celebration of Black August which began in August 1979 is also an important part of our special focus on Insurgent August. It is dedicated to remembering and supporting Black prisoners, freeing Black political prisoners, honoring the lives of the struggles of prisoners resisting oppression, and demanding prisoners' rights which has been a continuing struggle since the 1960s. Also, it is out of the Ferguson Revolt of August 2014 against police violence that a forest fire of resistance was ignited around the country which intensified our liberation struggle

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and brought the Black Lives Matter Movement to international prominence at a critical juncture in our history.

OUR COMMITMENT TO RIGHTEOUS AND relentless struggle, then, has a long and honored lineage in this country and the world. And again, the month of August offers us concentrated proof of this practice over centuries of lived experience, both imposed by others and initiated by us in insurgent resistance.

Again, this insurgent resistance has filled the calendar and content of our days, years, decades and centuries. And every act of our righteous and relentless resistance reaffirms Nana Malcolm's teaching that wherever we are is a battle line. Indeed, our response to injustice and oppression is always and everywhere resistance of every kind and audacious resurgence at every level and line of battle.▲

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