



**HAITI AND AFRICA INSIDE US:
THE SACRIFICE, GRANDEUR AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

This month, January 1, marks the 211th anniversary of the Haitian Revolution and offers one of African peoples' most impressive and important legacies to humanity. For Haiti is our shared heritage, a fundamental part of that sacred narrative we know, commemorate and celebrate as African history. As President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti says in his classic work, *In the Parish of the Poor*, we are impoverished and endangered by our failure to see and honor our relatedness and our shared history and heritage. He says, "Only at great peril do we lose sight of our people's historic connections, our shared birthright. If we lose memories, we will be like the elderly ill man who does not recognize his friends and relatives when they visit and who instead, dying, leaves his beautiful inheritance to his enemies."

But the history of Haiti, especially its Revolution and enduring struggle, serves also as a model, mirror and inspiration to all those who love freedom, cherish justice, and are committed to the lived dignity, self-determination and flourishing of persons, peoples and humanity as a whole. At the Sixth World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela, January 26, 2006, President Hugo Chavez declared "We carry Africa inside us. Africa is a part of us; Latin Caribbean America cannot be understood without Africa and the sacrifice of Africa and the grandeur of Africa." Now, President Chavez did not say this simply because he and many other Latinos are Afro-Latinos and share African heritage. He was speaking also of the legacy of Africa's and Haiti's own liberation struggles and sacrifice, Haiti's support of Latin America in its liberation struggle and thus its and Africa's contribution to the advancement of human freedom and flourishing in the world.

To speak of the sacrifice of Africa is to speak of the human casualties and costs of

Africans' struggle for freedom, the lives lost and destroyed, the cultures decimated and diminished, and futures forfeited on the sacrificial altars of the psychological disorder and practical destructiveness of racism, imperialism and White supremacy. And to speak of the grandeur of Africa in this case is not to speak of its classical civilizations of the Nile Valley or in other parts of Africa, but of the model and mirror provided by an enslaved people in their quest and achievement of freedom. Indeed, what is more noble than the unbroken and unbreakable human spirit of a people whose need and demand for freedom cannot be postponed, pawned or denied, who stand up in the coffins prepared for them and then, defeat and dig deserved graves for the genocidal system that oppressed them.

Certainly, Haiti's history is one of pyramid proportion in its singularity, significance and enduring instructiveness: to step forward without allies, adequate arms and supplies or traditional training and defeat five European armies dedicated to destroying them. In the midst of the catechism of impossibilities drummed and drilled into the minds and hearts of the oppressed, Haiti offers us lessons which not only cause us to lift it up as a living tradition of resistance and revolution, but challenges us to raise the Red, Black and Green flag of righteous and relentless struggle also.

The first lesson is always unity as active solidarity. The enslaved Africans met on August 14, 1791 in unity to commit themselves to a life-and-death struggle to open a way to freedom and to remake their world in their own image and interests. They were all there, men and women, all the ethnic groups, representative from all the plantations, each one and all dedicated to freedom in an intense and unbreakable way. Dutty Boukman, Houngon (High Priest), and Cecile Fatiman,

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Mambo (High Priestess), gave spiritual grounding to the historical gathering at Bwa Kayiman (Bois Caiman). They brought visions and called forth blessings of the Creator and of the divine spirit Ezili Danto, symbol of the generative and sustaining power of African motherhood and the divine spirit of Ogun, opener of the way to righteous struggle and eventual victory. It is this spiritually and ethically-grounded solidarity in righteous resistance that President Aristide maintains is an indispensable beacon of the oppressed to light our way in our righteous struggle to bring and share good in the world. He says in his book, "If we hold that torch ahead of us, we will never stray from our path, though our road is long and weary and filled with obstacles: barricades, bullets, ambush, fire and death." And in the end, we will triumph.

A second lesson is one of cultural grounding and self-determination. Boukman in his invocation of the Divine asks the people to reject the racialized and racist religion of the oppressors which they use to commit and justify crimes and turn to "our own God who is good and just" and "wills good works" and to "listen to (the voice of) freedom which speaks in all our hearts". Later, President Aristide would echo this insight and instruction stating, "the way of the Lord is the way of justice and justice blooms on the banks of Deliverance". And deliverance, at its most essential level, is freedom, freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation and freedom to realize ourselves in the fullness of our humanity.

A third lesson of the Haitian Revolution is hard, righteous and relentless struggle until victory. Thus, we must celebrate the Haitian Revolution as both a historical achievement and an unfinished, ongoing, righteous struggle, and we must continue the struggle for Haiti, for ourselves and humanity. For in the final analysis, in the face of oppression there is no hope for humanity and the poor, the plundered and less powerful except on the battlefield and battlefield for a new world.

The U.S., France and Canada have decided to go on punishing Haiti for its historic victory, plundering its resources, exploiting its labor, supporting thugs, blocking aid and ensuring poverty, hunger, ill-health and dependence. Haiti must be free and we must actively embrace its struggle as part of our own. The brutal occupation of Haiti must end and so must the punitive imposition of poverty and hunger on the people; the plunder of Haiti's natural resources; the NGO's and corporate theft of billions in "aid"; and the savage repression of Lavalas and the resistance and thus the denial of the Haitian people's right to self-determination and to a good and expansive future they want, will and deserve. The struggle will be a long and difficult one, but it must be courageously waged and won. As President Aristide says at the end of his book, "When we get to that distant point we will have made a worthy revolution. We will have upset the table of privilege so that we too will be welcome to sit and eat." And then the people will be truly free; the forests will reappear and the waters will run clean and clear again.

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