



**“HONORING THE SACRED NARRATIVE OF OUR HISTORY:
ACHIEVING AN INCLUSIVE GOOD FOR ALL THE WORLD”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS INDEED A FUNDAMENTAL KAWA-IDA understanding and 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. And now, as we close out the celebration of Black History Month, we must ask ourselves how do we best honor this sacred narrative and initiative we know as Black History, especially in these dangerous, difficult and demanding times? How do we think and talk about this, the oldest of human histories and about ourselves, the elders of humanity, the fathers and mothers of humanity and human civilization, the sons and daughters of the Holocaust of enslavement, and the authors and heirs of the re-affirmation of our Africanness and radical liberation tradition of the 1960s? And how do we honor the awesome and enduring legacy left to us and the world in dignity-affirming, life enhancing and world-preserving ways as our honored ancestors instructed and urged us?

These questions can only be engaged and answered, as we have consistently argued, by studying and grasping the essential meaning, message and forward motion of our history in the context of this country and the world, and approaching the celebration of Black history, not simply as an annual commemorative engagement, but rather as an ongoing process of remembering, studying, reflecting and transformative practice in our lives and the world. And through this process

and practice we realize and reaffirm that at the heart of the meaning, message and forward motion of history is the practice and promise of struggle, what Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune calls “our ceaseless striving and struggle” as a people.

First, to honor our sacred history, to bear the burden and glory of our sacred narrative and initiative, we must first know it in rightful, instructive, uplifting and liberating ways. We speak here of our ongoing struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves and to develop, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves as social and natural beings in the world. And we speak here also of our striving to be good relatives among ourselves, with others and the world, to cooperatively create the good world we all want and deserve, and to enjoy the common, shared and inclusive good of the world.

Secondly, to honor our history in the most meaningful ways, we must practice a radical, fierce and fad-resistant self-determination. The Second Principle of the *Nguzo Saba* (Self-Determination) instructs us to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves. Thus, we must not allow others to define the meaning, message or our forward motion toward African and human good and the well-being of the world which we call Black history. They must not change the name of Black History Month to Black Heritage Month or rename and reduce our Black Freedom Struggle to a civil rights struggle which

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redefines the character and larger goal of securing freedom.

Indeed, we must not allow others to redefine and rename Black History Month "Black Heritage Month" for several reasons: Black *History* is the name and focus Nana Dr. Carter G. Woodson gave this marking and celebration and thus it represents an established and cherished tradition; it is a matter of self-determination and self-definition of and by ourselves; and there is a clear difference between history and heritage. History is striving, struggling and movement, and heritage is selection and preservation of things of value from our history. Heritage is a product and preserved part of history, things achieved, left and selected as highly valued. And history is the process and practices, the strivings, struggles and achievements that make heritage possible. Thus, history is an ongoing process and lived and living practice, and it must not be reduced to the memory-dulling official ceremonies with their pretentious prattle and boilerplate proclamations that intentionally or not tend to detach it from the actual and ongoing strivings and struggles of the people and the lessons of life, liberation and achievement drawn from these.

Likewise, we cannot allow others to redefine our history and our struggle and rename the Black Freedom Movement the Civil Rights Movement. For the established order to do this is again an arrogant attempt to appropriate our right to define ourselves and speak for ourselves; to erase our struggle and our essential goal of freedom expressed in our battle cry of "Freedom Now"; and to collapse the civil rights phase and Black power phase of the

Black Freedom Movement into the Civil Rights movement erasing a critical period in Black history. Furthermore, it is to erase Black from our Movement's name and thus, fail to give due recognition to our people and their struggles, sacrifice and achievements. Also, such renaming redefines the focus and narrows the concept of our interests in our historical and current struggle, an unfinished and ongoing one for freedom in its fullest form which requires a radical reconstruction of society in ways a simple civil rights agenda could not provide.

As Nana Haji Malcolm taught, freedom is a human right, a natural, God-given right, not dependent on governments or the imagined good will of oppressors. Moreover, it is through our struggle for freedom that we are part of the rising tide of global liberation struggles, make linkages and alliances, and stand and struggle in solidarity with other oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. Here we are reminded of Nana Dr. Carter G. Woodson's teaching that we as a people, must with new vision and creativity strive "to give humanity something new" and in unity and struggle initiate "a new advance to that larger freedom of (humankind)".

Also, to honor the sacred narrative of our history, we must reaffirm and reinforce our culture as a culture of struggle, a culture founded and formed in struggle by a people who understand and embrace struggle as a normal and necessary way of life and an indispensable way forward and upward. Among its central contentions are: the immorality, injustice and unnaturalness of all constraints on human

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freedom (Nana Anna Julia Cooper); the indispensability of struggle for progress (Nana Frederick Douglass); the need to fight on the road to freedom “every step of the way” (Nana Fannie Lou Hamer); and freedom is always won in struggle, not granted in repentance or reconsideration by oppressors (Nana A. Philip Randolph).

Finally, to honor the sacred narrative and initiative of our history, we must self-consciously intensify and expand our role as a *central moral and social vanguard* in the midst of the liberation struggles of the world. As I have noted before, in this sacred narrative and initiative which we tell, teach and practice as Black history, we speak of and struggle for things that are knowledge-giving, liberating and uplifting, that heal and give hope and that lead to the health, wholeness and shared good of African peoples, humanity and the well-being of the world. And in this process and practice, we honor the sacred ancestral teaching that we are chosen by

both heaven and history to bring, increase and sustain good in the world and that this is the fundamental meaning and mission of human life.

|HERE, THE KAWAIDA CONCEPTION and practice of righteous and relentless resistance is profoundly relevant in our role as a central social and moral vanguard in this country and the world. For it defines resistance not only as *opposition*, but also as *affirmation* and *aspiration*. It is *opposition* to the oppressor and oppression in all its forms, savage and subtle, outward and inward. It is also *affirmation* of the Good, and of ourselves, our sacredness and soulfulness, our resilience and resourcefulness, and our beauty in its many models and manifestations. And it is *aspiration*, an active aspiration expressed in an expansive and liberating vision and struggle for a new world and way forward, a new history and hope for humankind, for the earth and all in it. ▲

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