



**JUSTICE, REAFFIRMATION AND RESISTANCE:  
ADVANCING AN AFRICAN AMERICAN ETHICAL AGENDA**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**N THIS ERA OF POLITICAL MADNESS, MEAN-spiritedness, racial and religious scapegoating, continued and expanding police violence, obscene inequities in wealth and power, mass incarceration, extensive and needless poverty and proposals for mass deportations, immigration bans, an apartheid wall and national registries of suspected and stigmatized peoples, there is an urgent need for an *African American communal voice of moral courage, political reason, and expanded righteous and relentless resistance*. In a word, there is a pressing need for an African American ethical agenda speaking to the critical issues of our times.

Indeed, as descendants and memory keepers of the victims, resisters and survivors of the Holocaust of enslavement, the racist savagery of segregation and continuing systemic violence of various kinds, we cannot and must not find ourselves willfully inattentive, uncaring and inactive in such a critical time. Certainly, we have more to say and more at stake than is foregrounded in this sick and sordid American reality show posed by the Republican president and his supporters and enablers, and the racial and religious supremacist ranting which masquerade as personal or party policy and platform. Nor can we remain silent, sit on the sidelines or mindlessly accept Democratic Party political timidity, pabulum and placebos out of some misplaced sense of loyalty, given our history as authors and heirs of the Black Freedom Movement of the 60s. For in this righteous struggle, we waged and won battles that not only benefitted us, but also expanded the realm of freedom and justice for all in this country and offered a moral vision and vocabulary engaged and uplifted around the world.

Thus, our core vision of a just and good society and world must not be dismissed or characterized as a narrow ethnic or racial agenda unsuited for national and global discourse and practice. For it is the perception of the Black agenda that is narrow, not the agenda itself. Indeed, it is the White agenda which, since the founding of the country, has been racialized, racist, exclusive and

oppressive. Our agenda at its best has always been inclusive and in resistance to exclusion and oppression.

The African American ethical vision and agenda, then, must be reaffirmed, for at its best and most expansive, it is a national and world-encompassing agenda anchored in the ancient African ethical imperative of *serudj ta*, i.e., healing, repairing and remaking the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. Its modern expression is found in the world-encompassing task set for us by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune who taught us that “We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that”.

Moreover, this task and challenge is reaffirmed by Dr. Martin Luther King who assures us that if we waged a righteous struggle for freedom with courage, dignity and love, “when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, ‘there lived a great people - a Black people - who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization’. This is our challenge and overwhelming responsibility”. And this task and challenge finds itself reaffirmed again in the philosophy of Kawaida in the Sixth Principle of the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), *Kuumba*, which calls us “to do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it” and by extension, the world.

Our concept of community is a world-encompassing one in which we, as African people, have expanded circles of obligation. These concentric circles of obligation are the African American community, the world African community, and fellow human beings and the environment in the city, state, country and world in which we live, work, build and struggle. The Swahili word “*walimwengu*” rightly defines human beings as *world beings* or beings who belong to and are responsible for the world - both its human and natural dimensions. Indeed, Min. Malcolm X taught us that “our interests are world-wide, not just limited to things American” and that we must always

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see and place ourselves firmly in the ranks of the international rising tide of resistance, “the global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter”. For we do not live outside the world, but in it. And urgent issues of oppression and occupation, resistance and liberation, security of persons and peoples, peace, food security, the end of human trafficking and enslavement, healthcare, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, reparations, immigration justice, equitable distribution of wealth and resources, and environmental care - are all issues of a local, national and global nature and urgency.

If we are to self-consciously honor the best of our ethical tradition, then, we are obligated to engage in the *courageous questioning*, *moral reflection* and *audacious action* called for in these critical times. Indeed, we are obligated by history and heaven to “bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice”. That is to say: the vulnerable, the poor and disempowered; the ill, aged, infant and disabled; the stranger, refugee and prisoner; the have-nots, the abandoned and the needy; the Indigenous and Native peoples whose lives, labor, lands, water, forests, orchards and other resources are mercilessly plundered by corporations and occupying countries.

And so we are to rise up and stand in active solidarity with all those whose voice, value and visibility have been diminished and denied, and who struggle against all odds to end their oppression and push humanity forward toward a new history and hope for these and future generations, whether here, in Africa, Haiti, Palestine, Yemen, Myanmar among the Rohingya, Native America, Native Australia, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia or anywhere else. This means appreciating and engaging our own history and culture and the ethical vision, values and models of human

excellence and achievement in thought and practice they provide us. For no culture is deeper in spiritual grounding, richer in ethical insight or as comprehensively capable of providing us with the foundation and framework for directing and living our lives in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

And we must practice an independent politics, rooted in a profound and *primary commitment* to people and principles - not to politicians or parties. That is to say: a primary commitment to our people and others and to principles that represent and reflect the best of what it means to be African and human in the world and lead us toward the just and good society and world we all want, deserve and demand, and struggle eagerly and earnestly to achieve.

**F**INALLY, WE MUST BUILD AND REBUILD AN overarching Movement that prefigures and makes possible that just and good world. This means building on, intensifying and expanding Black mass education, mobilization, organization and confrontation - demonstrations, rallies, interventions already in motion since Ferguson for racial and social justice. It means praising the audacious and decisive youth initiative in this process, but not diminishing the active contribution, experience and insight of those older. This requires an intergenerational cooperative initiative that builds and consolidates its internal and communal strength and reaches out to create increasingly larger coalitions and alliances. And it means developing a logic, language and practice of struggle that puts forth and expands our ethical vision, reaffirms our highest values, builds on our best practices, and effectively addresses the enduring problems of race, class and gender and all other constraints on human freedom and flourishing and the well-being of the world.

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