



**NANA MARCUS GARVEY'S CENTERING
LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP:
ACHIEVING THE EXCELLENCE WORTHY OF THE NAME LEADER**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-20-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS IN THE MONTH OF INSURGENT August that Nana Marcus Garvey came into being and started on his historic journey to become the greatly honored pan-African leader whose legacy of lessons we lift up and strive to put in practice. Although he wrote on leadership throughout his voluminous works, I want to focus on an essay he wrote titled "Leadership" in his book *Marcus Garvey Life and Lessons*. Nana Garvey offers many lessons on leadership in this essay, including lessons on appearance, dress, hair, clothing, etc. But I will choose and speak to those lessons that seem more central to the Kawaidea concept of leadership as a moral vocation.

Nana Garvey begins with an early emphasis on excellence as the foundational principle of leadership. This reminds us of the teachings of Seba Ptahhotep who says in the sacred *Husia*, "if you are a leader and command many, strive for excellence in all you do so that no fault will be found in your character". He uses the word "superior" instead of "excellence", but his use of it points toward achieving and sustaining excellence rather than any problematic sense of superiority over and against the people one seeks to lead. He says, "for others to follow you, you must be superior to them in the things that they must follow you for". Explaining this, he states that "you must have superior ability".

We can assume a leader, a person so striving and serving must have numerous

abilities including knowledge and skills in: relating, organizing, planning, problem solving, self-discipline, etc. Nana Garvey, however, focuses on having knowledge, indeed, an excellence in knowledge. For he says, "in particular, you must always be ahead by way of knowledge of all those you lead". This requires, he states, acquiring "the latest and most correct information for which they are searching". Here Nana Garvey reminds us that to serve the masses we must be able to answer the essential and ongoing questions the masses of our people have concern about and raise. And implicit in this is the instruction to the leader to teach and urge the people to search for themselves and how to search and then, to share their findings and knowledge with others including the leader. For the leader, the teacher must always be a student themselves, practicing the cooperative acquisition and sharing of knowledge.

Nana Garvey also speaks of the moral imperative of telling the truth, saying, "never tell lies to those you lead". This is important not only because it is wrong in itself, but also because it undermines trust and faith in the leader, leadership, the cause and the struggle. We are to speak truth to the people without subterfuge, deception and insincerity. Truth telling is always morally necessary, but in a context in society in which lying is a way of life and passed off and peddled as official policy, truth telling is intellectually indispensable and morally unavoidable.

**NANA MARCUS GARVEY'S CENTERING LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP:
ACHIEVING THE EXCELLENCE WORTHY OF THE NAME LEADER**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-20-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Also, Nana Garvey teaches that “a leader under all circumstances must carry himself (herself) with dignity”. The leader “must not be a snob”, he says, “but he (she) must maintain his (her) pride”. Here pride is not the biblical negative pride that goes before the fall or self-destructive arrogance. Rather, it is a positive self-pride which compels a person to maintain their self-respect and their sense of the good and right, and act accordingly. It means developing boundaries and avoiding being “mixed up... with anything that is not dignified or self-respecting”.

In striving for and maintaining the excellence worthy of the name leadership, Nana Garvey also counsels that “leaders must be self-possessed, confident, feeling self-reliant” and “always speak outright from your head and from your heart”. For he adds “if your heart is not in it, it’s a lie. If your head is not in it it’s pure sentiment”. Indeed, he tells us, “your head and heart must work together”. And “when your heart and head is in it, your whole body expresses the truth” and people will recognize and appreciate your sincerity.

Turning to achieving a balanced and disciplined life, Nana Garvey states that “a leader must not be extravagant (or) flashy” and “be serious without being sour”. Moreover, as leaders, he states you should “always think before you act”, and never “write or speak just for hearing yourself”. On the contrary, “speak and write only when you have something to say”. Here again discipline is decisive for leaders striving for excellence in all they do.

Emphasizing building a strong presence and deep-rooted relations in community, Nana Garvey tells us that “a leader should always make an effort to be known in his (her) community” and “must acquaint himself (herself) with everything that is happening”. Indeed, he/she must also know other leaders of various kinds in the city, state and country. Clearly, this initiative is indispensable to both asserting a strong cooperative presence at critical sites of power, policy and planning, and building relations of strength and value to the work the leaders do and the struggle they wage in service to our people.

Nana Garvey also tells us to go to the people to learn them and their lives. “You must seek to know all the people who you want to be in your organization”, he states. “Visit them in their homes, their workplaces and anywhere and always extend to them a glad hand”. This is a reaffirmation of the sacred teachings of our honored ancestors in the *Odu Ifa* which urges us to always “do things with joy”. He ends by saying, “be diplomatic in your approach”, i.e., learning and practicing the best skills associated with the diplomat: showing care and sensitivity to people and their concerns, being skillful in communication and being tactful in dealing with difficult persons and situations.

Nana Garvey also asks leaders to wean those affected away from internal color divisions and confusion, stress the unity of Black people, teach the people Black history, and to appreciate and honor their African selves and their link with the

**NANA MARCUS GARVEY'S CENTERING LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP:
ACHIEVING THE EXCELLENCE WORTHY OF THE NAME LEADER**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-20-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Divine. Also, he asks leaders to teach agency to the people, self-conscious action for the good, for it is in them that “the power to rise” resides. This reaffirms of his classic work and struggle call, “Up you mighty race. You can accomplish what you will”.

RECOGNIZING THE DEEP SPIRITUAL consciousness and commitment African peoples have, Nana Garvey

counsels us not to be overly dependent on God for things we can and must do for ourselves. Again, he emphasizes our agency and ends his essay reaffirming the moral imperative of self-determined human action to create good in the world. Thus, he says to the leaders that we can pray for strength, but “Let the people know that in them and in themselves only is the power to rise.”▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor Emeritus of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org. www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org;