



**RETRIEVING THE SACRED NARRATIVE OF OUR HISTORY:
GLEANINGS FROM A CENTURY OF MEMORIES,
MILESTONES AND MOVEMENTS**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-19-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AT THE VERY HEART OF CENTERING AND honoring the sacred narrative of our history is the process and practice of retrieval, a *sankofa* practice of remembering and reaching back to bring it forward and engage and employ it in fruitful, future-facing and meaningful ways. In this second Carter G. Woodson Centennial Black History Month Lecture on the celebration of Black History Month, I want to focus on retrieving the sacred narrative of our history. And I want to bring within the arc of our focus some interpretive gleanings from a century of studied and analyzed memories, milestones and movements again engaging the teachings of Nana Dr. Carter G. Woodson. We speak here of successfully meeting challenges that have changed our lives as we struggled to be ourselves, free ourselves, produce the written and taught truth of history, and achieve the conditions and capacities to know and live the beautiful, soulful and sacred character of our history unencumbered with oppression in any form.

The retrieval, as this second lecture explains, lies first in valuing our own history, seeing ourselves and it as sacred and central and thus, placing ourselves rightfully at the center of our own history and also at the center of humanity's origins, evolutions and achievements and acting accordingly to this self-knowledge. This means, Dr. Woodson states, that although we center ourselves, we should not give less attention to world history. But in that

narrative we should place African people where they were and are present and as agents of history, also. In a word, he taught, we should know "not only the history of (African) people, but of all peoples". In other words, he wants us to retrieve "Our own particular history" in the context of world history, and "we should not dim one bit the luster of any star in our firmament".

Nana Woodson tells us that "we have a wonderful history behind us" which we must know and share among ourselves and with the world. It is a history of long and uplifting memories, numerous milestones and transformative movements that have brought a great good in the world. It is a deep, wide-reaching, rich and most ancient initiative and narrative within the annals of human history, and we must dig up and extract its truths, discern their meanings, and use them to anchor and advance our lives. He says, "Truth must be dug up from the past and presented" in various ways to "permeate the educational system" and also our lives. And we must know and appreciate the value and weight of this transformative truth which "comes to us from the past . . . like gold washed down from the mountains".

As an educator, he calls on teachers to come forth boldly and teach the truth of this wondrous history. But he knows there are penalties to pay for such outrageous audacity. And he tells us, as if speaking of today, that the system will try

**RETRIEVING THE SACRED NARRATIVE OF OUR HISTORY:
GLEANINGS FROM A CENTURY OF MEMORIES, MILESTONES AND MOVEMENTS**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-19-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

to “keep out school teachers who may be bold enough to teach the truth as it is” and “terrorize” them and others to the extent they will be afraid to speak or teach the truth in class and in public. But then as now, he challenges us all to dare to resist and to teach truth to the people and truth to power regardless. Such challenge speaks clearly and compelling to the anti-Black times in which we live and our ongoing resistance to the hydra-headed attempts to deny, distort and erase Black history and our right of presence at the center of our own history and the history of this country and indeed, the world.

We don’t deny others the right and rightfulness to see themselves and their histories as sacred also. Certainly, we do not and would not deny other peoples of color this self-determination and self-definition, we ourselves claim. Nor do we deny it to Whites as Nana Woodson said, “the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton”. But we rightfully resist their attempts to claim sacredness for themselves only and to deny equal humanity and history to us and others. Indeed, it is racial and religious hatred and hostility and assumptions of single chosenness, special election, racial superiority and such, that have produced the immoral and amoral claims of oppressors, enslavers, colonialists, imperialists and genocidists throughout time and history.

Nana Woodson speaks of and teaches a history that educates, inspires and uplifts and that offers evidence of what we have done and can do again in new and ever expansive ways. It is indispensable to what he calls “a real education (which)

inspires people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it, and make it better”. Likewise, he taught that lynching of the body is not the only form of lynching, there is also the lynching of the mind, especially in the classroom, but also in the media and wherever deformed and death-dealing White supremacist ideas reign and rule. For such mind lynching teaches Blackness as a curse and that “the struggle to change (our) condition is hopeless”. This, he taught, undermines the will, kills aspirations, instills a profound sense of inferiority and teaches Black people to accept their oppression “as final and just”. And such social madness and immoral practices must be righteously and relentlessly resisted.

Dr. Woodson was a consummate scholar and advocated the most rigorous research and scholarship, “to reveal the hidden truths of history”, and to write a “history of the world void of national bias, race, hate and religious prejudice”. But he recognized that even open-minded people harbor biases and are often victims of falsehood and falsifications and that “there are others who know the truth, but prefer falsehood for selfish purposes”, whether on the personal, class, gender, racial, or national level. But he dares to believe that the majority of the peoples of the world “will ultimately heed the teachings of the truth” and be freed from such ignorance, illusions, hatred and hostility. Still, he advised us, in any case, to be prepared, patient and persistent, for people do not easily or quickly change, even

**RETRIEVING THE SACRED NARRATIVE OF OUR HISTORY:
GLEANINGS FROM A CENTURY OF MEMORIES, MILESTONES AND MOVEMENTS**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-19-26, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

when they see the error and evil of their anti-Black and anti-human ways.

Nana Woodson calls, then, for a new history of humankind, as Nana Frantz Fanon, one not exclusive but inclusive; not “propaganda to justify the present, domination of the world by brute force”. What he calls for is a rigorously researched and written history of “the civilization of the world to which all races have made their contributions”. Speaking then as if he were responding to the events and conditions of today, he said this concept of an inclusive history “sounds like heresy today”. Indeed, he says, “a teacher teaching history as it really is, therefore, would not be tolerated two weeks in some of our accredited universities”. For he says again, “what the authorities want is not history, but propaganda and justification of domination and exploitation of the weak by the strong”, the oppressed by the

oppressor. And certainly, whether we talk about the attacks on Black history and lives or the history and lives of other oppressed, marginalized and excluded peoples, this reads like an understanding and analysis which is real, relevant and reflective of the actual state of things today.

OUR TASK, THEN, IS TO LIVE OUR lives, do our work and wage our struggles for a new history of Africans and humankind. And it will be not only a new written, recorded and taught history, but a lived and living history, undergirded, informed and impelled forward by the quest for an inclusive, African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. And at the heart and head of it all will be spaces for us and all humans to be ourselves, flourish in freedom and come into the fullness of ourselves as we each and all determine.▲

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;