



**DEMOCRATIC BLUE AND PEOPLEHOOD BLACK:
NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PARTY**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

T HIS IS A REVISITING OF AN EARLIER ARTICLE that speaks, not so much to history repeating itself, but of different peoples repeating their behavior, and therefore the need for critical change in their behavior in order to create new, just and equitable outcomes for our people and others.

It is said that the defeat of Donald Trump signals that the country is ready for a change, but we have not been given on the nightly news, on social media or by mail, anything that resembles a comprehensive view of what the change might look like. Nor have we heard from the academy, Congress, or the corporate world anything beyond convenient confessions that Black lives do indeed matter. And the question of how that works out in public policy and social practice is still to be determined with no definite or proposed dates in sight. But we know from the ample evidence of history and the lived experience of our daily lives that whatever it means and promises for White folks and others, it will not mean or promise the same for us.

So, as Frantz Fanon urged us, we must think new thoughts, “originate and discover,” and put forth and pursue our own vision of a new society and world. Indeed, as the *Husia* says we must reach deep inside ourselves and “bring forth the truth within us.” And this truth is a constantly unfolding conception of ourselves that seeks ever new, better, and more beautiful and beneficial ways of being and relating as humans in the world. In a word, it speaks to the enduring issues of securing and sustaining concrete conditions for an inclusive and expansive human good and the well-being of the world.

Thus, there is still so much work to be done, so many more struggles to wage and win for us to achieve the concrete and comprehensive benefits which throughout history

we have fought so fiercely and self-sacrificingly to achieve. Yes, we have given the Democratic Party a historic victory over a regime rotten and reeking with racism, sexism, xenophobia of all kinds, wealth worship, perverse pettiness, monumental mendacity and meanness, and a constantly and committed display of depraved disregard for human life and death during this most devastating pandemic. And we are rightly praised for this, but often in problematic and problematizing ways. That is to say, the praise is a problem in how it is interpreted and presented and also problematizing for us in how we, as a result, do and might relate to the party which offers its interpretation of what we did and what it means. Thus, as the rightful recognition of Black people’s, especially Black women’s vital role in the election of President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice-President-Elect Kamala Harris, continues to be noted and discussed, we must take careful note that it does not come without potential costs.

As with all praise, it could become a substitute for a more substantive demonstration of appreciation and reciprocity. For years, the Democratic Party has given us praise and promise but deprived us through actual policy and practice. So, it is advisable for us to receive the praise, but insist on rightful fulfillment of the promises, not of small and individual advancement but those concerned with the well-being and flourishing of our people.

Also, such rightful recognition of Black women, wrongly posed, can be used to divide our people with an unbalanced stress on the rightful value of Black women at the wrongful expense and indictment of Black men. Such is the case of the singling out and selective concern about the small number of Black men who voted for Trump when other men of

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all races, religions and classes voted for Trump in higher numbers. And, of course, it hides and passes over the fact that the overwhelming majority of Black men voted Democratic. Such a practice – intentional or not – is detrimental, not simply to Black men, but also to Black people. For such an interpretation raises the ever-ready red flag of racist indictment and targeting of Black men as worthy of the worst and most fatal treatment.

And especially does it deny the whole truth of our struggle as a people, a whole people, not a people hacked into hostile halves, but a people united in our struggle against White supremacy and racism in its various metastatic mutations. Indeed, we demonstrate an operational unity, a unity in diversity, not a total unity or uniformity, but a working unity in struggle against all kinds of injustice and oppression we undeniably confront in our daily lives in various ways and spaces.

There will be serious cost also if this moment of praise and promise ends in superficial but highly symbolic and visible ways, i.e., individual appointments without collective benefit and yet increases passive and uncritical loyalty to the party. For this would not only signal the lack of need to be concerned about us by the party elite, but also lead us into a mindless Americanism. Indeed, it could easily lead to a pathetically narrow notion of patriotism that prohibits real criticism of the system, and passive acceptance of party policy regardless of the damage it does to us and vulnerable others here and around the world.

Another cost that comes with a possible uncritical party loyalty is the tendency to collapse the interests of the party with the interests of our people. *We are not a party or blue; we are a people and Black.* The party seeks office and power over the country, its wealth, and instruments of control. We seek freedom, justice, equity, and power over our destiny and daily lives. The party is tied to the system

and only wants to reform it; we strive to radically reconceive and reconstruct it in dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways.

As racialized insiders, power holders and principal beneficiaries, the Whites who control the party, regardless of symbolic appointment and appearances of Blacks and other peoples of color, praise and protect the system as “seeking to be more perfect.” But we, the racialized outsiders, disempowered and the least and last of beneficiaries know America is not perfect and is desperately in need of a radical transformation in the interests of African and human good and the well-being of the world. In other words, then, our fundamental commitment must be to our people, not the party and to the ongoing project of creating a country without oppression and with the conditions favorable to and supportive of human freedom and flourishing and as always, the well-being of the world and all in it.

Indeed, the hope and future of our people and the liberating transformation of this country depends definitively on our retaining our active commitment to our self-conception and social and political practice as *a moral and social vanguard*. By this I mean those who are at the forefront in defining the essential moral and social concerns and conversations in this country and in waging righteous and relentless struggle in alliances and coalitions with others so committed in order to determine the country’s political direction in the interest of an inclusive good for all humans and the world. This requires, as always, that we must build and sustain an independent overarching Movement which engages the struggle on numerous battlegrounds. Also, it requires not only winning elections, but also holding politicians accountable; and constructing a vision, program and strategy of struggle before and beyond elections. And thus, in every area of life we must seek racial

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and social justice, and work tirelessly to expand the realm of freedom and flourishing in the face of unfreedom and oppressive constraints.

THE NEED, THEN, IS TO HOLD ON TO OUR spirit of resistance and not let it be co-opted and recast into compromises “across the aisle” that betray the struggle to replace this regime and open society to new possibilities of human good. We must transform campaign structures into organizations

for needed social service and radical social change. Also, we must guard against and resist the backroom, undercover deals with corporations and various elites and continue to educate, mobilize, and organize the people and confront injustice and oppression everywhere. And we must remain committed to the ancient African ethical imperative found in the *Odu Ifa* that enjoins “an eagerness and struggle to bring good in the world and not let any good be lost.”▲

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