



**AFRICAN LIBERATION AND RENAISSANCE:  
BEYOND BORROWED AND DEBILITATING SPACE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

As we gather to celebrate African Liberation Day, let us be ever and intensely mindful that we meet in the midst of an unfinished fight, an ongoing struggle with social and ethical imperatives concerning how we approach our past, engage our present, and imagine and forge our future. Indeed, this is the overarching understanding with which we assert ourselves in the world. For as we say in Kawaida, the sum and essential substance of our duty is: to know our past and honor it, to engage our present and improve it, and to imagine our future and forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

This year's African Liberation Day, called African Day in some places, brings increased conversations and conferences, projects and promises of an African Renaissance. It is a reembrace of an historical call and challenge posed by our ancestors who in the midst of the Holocaust of enslavement, colonialism and oppressions of various imperial kinds dared to dream, work and struggle for freedom. Indeed, they struggled for freedom in its dual form: freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation and freedom to live good, meaningful and expansive lives, and leave a legacy worthy of the ancient, rich and ever-relevant culture and history of the people African.

Thus, in furtherance of their historic struggle and in the urgent interest of our people, African Renaissance must be seen and engaged as a multi-dimensional project rooted in the idea of African excellence. For there is no sense or salvation in a renewal or rebirth into the ordinary, routine, commonplace and continually oppressive. We must bring into being and cause to flower a model of excellence measureable in real and relevant terms and, as we say in Kawaida, rooted in and reflective of an ongoing synthesis of the

best of African thought and practice in constant exchange of the world.

Given this, the concept and construction of an African Renaissance must begin with the understanding of Africa as the fundamental source and resource for its own renewal, its most important ideas and aspirations, its paradigms and undiscovered possibilities. It means using African culture—ancient and modern, continental and diasporan, as the foundation and framework for our self-understanding and self-reassertion in the world.

Here it is important to understand Africa as a world community whose ancestral center and current major focus is the continent. For even though the renaissance of the continent is the major focus in our current conversation, this continental project must, in the Garveyian sense, be related to and inclusive of the Africans in diaspora also. And this cannot simply include what is called the newly arrived diasporan Africans, but rather diasporan Africans as a whole from Haiti to Harlem, New Orleans, South America and everywhere we are outside of Africa.

Also, as Molefi Asante has rightly argued, a true renaissance requires that we abandon the borrowed and debilitating cultural spaces of Europe and center and sustain ourselves in our own culture. This reaffirms Frantz Fanon's advice to reject being an "obscene caricature" and pathetic imitator of Europe and dare think independently, audaciously and with profound commitment to the liberation and good life of our people. Asante rightly calls for a radical reordering of thought, "a transformative turnabout (which) is about taking the globe and turning it over so that we see all the possibilities of a world where Africa . . . is subject not object". Here are intellectual echoes and reinforcement of

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Malcolm's and Kawaiida's call for a new logic and language of liberation.

African renaissance requires real independence of thought and practice, an independence in the political, economic and especially cultural realm. For it is independence that will provide the basis and motivation for the unfolding of our own internal strength, the use of our own resources and riches, and the securing of well-being and flourishing of our people. It is this kind of independence as opposed to the false flag-only independence that requires and reaffirms, as Amilcar Cabral says, "the total sovereignty of our people on the national and international level, for them to construct for themselves in peace and dignity, by the expenditure of their own efforts and sacrifices, marching on their own feet and guided by their own heads, the progress to which they have a right like all the peoples of the world".

Moreover, Min. Malcolm X reminds us that true African Renaissance must engage freedom as a priority, even and especially in the midst of the demands of development. In the past, many African governments had argued that freedom of the people could be sacrificed in the interest of their development, but the record offers no proof of that. On the contrary, domination insures both undevelopment and underdevelopment. Indeed, real and righteous development requires the freedom of the people to contribute to their own liberation and to the improved and expanded lives that liberation and development bring. Thus, Malcolm taught, "freedom is essential to life itself (and) . . . to the development of the human being".

As we have said so many times, there is no hope or possibility for the development of Africa as a continent and world community without the self-conscious and active engagement of its people to harness its resources and to free and develop itself. This requires a project of renaissance that not only is designed for the development and satisfaction of basic human needs, but also builds in as a component part ways and means for the people to transform themselves in the process and become self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation. The people's need for food cannot be weighed against their need for freedom to plan and build their lives in their own image and interests, to assemble and organize, and participate in the decisions that affect their destiny and the daily way they live their lives.

Thus, as ever, we must not let our oppressor be our teacher in building a true African Renaissance, but must reach inside ourselves and bring forth constantly our best and most beautiful. It is in this context that Sekou Toure in his call for full reAfricanization taught that given the experience of oppression, we must free ourselves from the values and views of the oppressor and take upon ourselves, both personally and collectively, "the task of effecting our own complete rehabilitation". This means, he says, "each one must go back to the African cultural and moral sources, recover his own conscience, reconvert himself in his thoughts and his actions to the values, to the conditions and interests of Africa" and its people, on the continent as well as throughout the world African community.

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