



**BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTIONS:  
HONORING OUR HISTORY IN STRUGGLE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

The current presidential campaign and election have become a crucial battleground and critical time of testing for us as a people. It is not that this election will mark an end of history, if President Obama loses, or be a life-altering experience if he wins. In any event, there will still be pressing problems of oppression, evil and injustice in the world, and thus, the urgent and ongoing need to resist, resolve and end them, and to build and sustain a movement for the radical reordering of U.S. society, its priorities and practices, and the exceptionalist, self-deceptive and destructive way it conceives and conducts itself at home and in the world.

Therefore, in assessing the actual things at stake in this election and the critical role we must play in it, we must do several things. First, we must recognize that elections have never been and will never be a cure-all, panacea or path to paradise. They are always, including this one, a means to some larger end. The strength of any election is the effective participation of the people, its calling into action an aware, organized and engaged people in pursuit of power over their destiny and daily lives and in conscious and active concern for the quality and direction of their lives, the promise of their future, and the well-being of the world. Here, it is clear that *full Black* participation is not only key to the outcome of this election and to keeping vital gains we've made during the Obama Administration and in other areas and eras of struggle, but also in regaining our historical initiative and expansive self-conception as a people.

Second, then, to understand the issues involved in a useful way, we must, at one point, separate the meaning of this election,

from the special meaning President Obama has for the overwhelming majority of us. In this heightened sense of meaning, he has become, not simply a President or world-renown politician, but rather the symbol and substance of an awesome achievement that engenders in many a respect bordering on reverence, usually reserved for the divine and that makes our people forget they, themselves, made the miracle they credit him alone with achieving. Thus, he is, in many quarters, given an unwise and self-defeating immunity from criticism, questioning and accountability.

Such an unreflective posture deprives him of the necessary and useful support and push towards the progressive, which he has, himself, conceded he needs and invited. Also, it relieves us of the ancient African ethical responsibility "to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice." And it sets the stage for immobilizing disappointment in loss or failure of the elected persons to act and achieve in ways we had hoped or expected. But rightfully read and engaged, elections are not the beginning or end of our struggle, but one particular and important field in our whole historical struggle for good in the world. Thus, we must know and honor the whole of our history and act accordingly.

The election, then, is not simply about Obama, but about us, about what we stand for and oppose, about our shared vision and aspirations for our people, society and the world. Also, it's about which candidate, in an imperfect world, comes closest to this, even with serious expected and unexpected flaws and failures to perform. And we know

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that for the overwhelming majority of Black people, President Obama is the only candidate running, since Gov. Romney is not even a considered and rejected possibility. But we must also know that, even as before, President Obama cannot and will not win without us, without our working in the campaign and voting for him, for ourselves, and for another way forward than that offered by his and our self-declared enemies and opponents.

Thirdly, we must recognize that in this election, the Right wing and its corporate members, handlers and funders have promised to wreak racial and social havoc on us and the country, if they win, and thus they pose for us an unavoidable challenge. They are determined to make the election a racial referendum on President Obama and by extension our people, launching both uncivil and savage attacks on him and us in coded language or with openly racist ruminations about “putting white back in the White House”. Moreover, they have worked to suppress our vote, to racially indict us; discourage and prevent us from political participation; reverse our hard-won gains, and drive us away from our historical position and self-defining practice as a social and moral vanguard in this country and the world. And they promise continued and expanded corporate welfare, tax avoidance and reduction; determined disregard for social and economic justice, human and civil rights, and social safety nets for the poor and vulnerable, immediate rollback of healthcare and putting in place policies that severely increase racial and social inequality.

To meet this challenge, we must *get up, get out and go vote in full numbers*. And

we must not only resist at the polls, but also expand and continue the struggle after the elections, also in the courts and academies, in workplaces and board rooms, in governmental and corporate spaces, and in the media, and the many other spaces and places of daily life where we encounter evil, injustice and varied forms of oppression.

Finally, we must regain *our historical initiative and self-conception as a people* who understands and asserts themselves as a social and moral vanguard whose *ethical mission and rebuilt Movement* is world-encompassing and ongoing. It is a millennia-old mission which reaches back before the current presidential era, this election and this country and will continue and gain even greater urgency and importance in the difficult and demanding years and struggles to come. It is found in the ancient sacred texts of our ancestors which call on us to seek and speak truth, do and demand justice and constantly repair, renew and reconstruct the world, making it more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

Indeed, it is reaffirmed in more recent times by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune’s reminder that “we must remake the world” and Dr. Anna Julia Cooper’s “stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life and the unnaturalness...” of all forms of favoritism and oppression. And it calls to mind Min. Malcolm X’s teaching that there is no substitute for historical grounding, cultural revolution, a deeply reflective “journey to our rediscovery of ourselves” and a sustained liberating self-practice and social movement that radically transforms us, society and the world.

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