



BEYOND THE BONDAGE OF PLANTATION POLITICS: CRAFTING OUR OWN PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 2. THE INSISTENCE ON CALLING OUR righteous and relentless struggle by its rightful name, The Black Freedom Movement, instead of the Civil Rights Movement, is no minor matter. For it speaks to our commitment to freedom itself and reflects in a real way how we understand ourselves and our initiative and history in the world. Indeed, it reveals our resistance to plantation politics that sought and seeks to determine every aspect of our lives, deny our dignity and rights and undermine our agency as subjects of our own history, liberators of our own selves and builders of our own future. And it speaks to the right, responsibility and need for us, as a people, to define ourselves, to interpret our own history and the ideas and actions, events and agents of which it is made, and by which it is given meaning and motion. And we long ago decided that the essential concept, overarching goal and indispensable practice of our Movement and our people was and remains that of freedom.

Thus, we self-consciously called our Movement, the *Black Freedom Movement* and demanded “*Freedom Now*,” not civil rights now. We composed and sang *freedom* songs, not civil rights songs. And we built *freedom* schools, not civil rights schools, and we risked our lives on *freedom* rides, not civil rights rides. You can always say there was indeed a fight for civil rights. But although civil rights were an important concern of the Black Freedom Movement, the Black Freedom struggle was committed to freedom as a more expansive concept, practice and goal. In a word, it was concerned about freedom from oppression and freedom to grow, develop and come into the fullness of ourselves.

And of course, as Malcolm taught, at the heart of the Black Freedom struggle are not simply civil rights, but rather human rights. Also, as he says, “As a collective mass of Black people we have been deprived, not only of civil rights, but even our human rights, the right to human dignity, the right to be human” and live a dignity-affirming, good and meaningful life and thus, the human rights nature of our freedom struggle. I

make these extensive prefatory remarks as background considerations when we talk about moving beyond the borders and bondage of the plantation and plantation politics. For the key to breaking the bonds of the plantation and the seduction and servitude of plantation politics is our concept of and commitment to the demanding practice and uplifting promise of freedom.

Surely, we know how these presidential election processes go and how they have worked in the past, even with heavy Black participation and a Black presidential candidate and president, and thus, we cannot claim lack of prior knowledge. Nor can we ask our people to wait and see, give “them” a chance or to sacrifice our interests in the “greater” interests of defeating Trump. For Trump must not only be defeated by voting for another candidate; he must be also defeated by our and others’ embracing the larger struggle to radically reimagine and transform this country into a real site of freedom, justice, equality and power for us and all peoples.

And we cannot allow people to talk us out of our central, historical and ongoing role as a moral and social vanguard in this country and the world. Nor should anyone be able to convince us that our agenda, the Black agenda, is a limited agenda and we need instead an agenda for the whole country. We’ve seen the hypocrisy in telling us this, while conceding to other racial, religious, ethnic, sexuality and labor groups, etc., without telling them likewise. In fact, it is the Black agenda which has been the most *inclusive* agenda—it is the White agenda that has been the *exclusive* agenda. Indeed, it is our struggle against the racialized and racist agenda of Whites that has been at the heart of our Black Freedom Struggle.

And again, where the White agenda, by various names like Democratic, Republican, Tea Party, etc., was, in reality, a blueprint for continued unfreedom, injustice, inequality and disempowerment for others and the opposite for Whites, the Black agenda of freedom, justice, equality and power for all was and is inclusive

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and open to a continuing expansion and further inclusion of the excluded and marginalized. Moreover, it is the struggle around these issues on the Black agenda that expanded the realm of freedom in this country and inspired and informed the struggles of other marginalized, excluded, and oppressed peoples in this country and the world. Indeed, our emphasis on freedom, justice, equality and power of the masses in all areas reflects both the inclusiveness of our agenda and its urgency and need as an essential human initiative. As Anna Julia Cooper states, “The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or sect, a party or a class – it is the cause of humankind, the very birth right of humanity.”

Given this understanding, then, it is important to note that even with the assembly of the largest field of presidential candidates in modern history, it is not about them, as much as it is about the issues, what they intend to do with and for our community, this country and the world. We will want to know what they intend to do about the death-dealing racial disparities in Black and White wealth and income, power and status. Moreover, we must insist on full employment, equal pay for women and men, raising the minimum wage to at least \$15 per hour, support of unionization, and the protection of social security.

Additionally, we must insist on adequate and affordable housing, the end of homelessness and a halt to unrestrained gentrification which leads to the destruction of our communities; and certainly, health care, Medicare for all. We must also insist on addressing the issues of reparations; food security; immigration inclusive of Haitians and Continental and Caribbean Africans; and police violence and mass incarceration. We must insist too on a quality education for our children, a culturally relevant, culturally responsive and adequately funded and supported education, and

likewise a tuition-free, debt-cancelled higher education that is also a relevant education, i.e., meaningful to the student, useful to the community, and reflective of the realities and needs of the world. Further, we must also insist on a sane international policy with justice for Africa and Africans everywhere; a policy against war and for peace with justice and development initiatives without destructive capitalist and imperial demands, invasions and occupations. And we must be rightfully attentive to the environment and thus to the well-being of the world. For only in such a context of genuine and active concern can humans flourish and continue to exist.

WE WHO ARE SERIOUS MUST DARE TO break the chains of oppression rather than hug them and we must dare reject and leave every plantation situation we encounter. And we must not get weary and walk away from the battlefield until the war is won. It is Ella Baker who reminded us, “We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes,” until it is won – and even then, we must remain vigilant to maintain it. As we said in the Sixties, “freedom ain’t free,” “every good-bye ain’t gone,” and there are many more rivers and battlefields to cross and plantations to leave behind before we can seriously say and sing the words of our sacred song with Dr. King, “Free at last. Thank God Almighty free at last.” So, we are to remember that each period of history has its own particular version of the plantation, the context and terrain of our oppression. And we must each moment in history and every day in life refuse to live on it, refuse to be enslaved or imprisoned in it and choose to be free in heart, mind, spirit and active commitment to the demanding practice and uplifting promise of liberation and the new world this righteous and relentless struggle will bring into being.▲

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