



**HAITI AND THE UNFINAL FACT OF FREEDOM:
ITS ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND LIBERATION**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 1. IN CELEBRATING THIS THE 221ST anniversary of the world transformative liberation struggle and Revolution of the Haitian People, we understandably and unavoidably focus on and think about Haiti's ongoing struggle, not only for liberation, but also their continuing efforts for life itself in the midst of the radical imperialist evil imposed on it for daring to puncture the racist and irrational claim of White supremacy in all its original and metastasized versions. Indeed, the Haitian Revolution stands as a monument to African and human freedom, to the awesome cost and casualties it required and the exemplary willingness of the Haitian people to give all requested and required to achieve, in the Malcolmian sense, "freedom by any means necessary". As I have noted, *it was a decisive victory over evil, unfreedom and injustice that freedom-loving people of the world would never forget and old and new oppressors would never forgive.*

It is a sacred narrative rightly repeatedly told and held high, for no people ever before and none after had achieved such a victory. For Haiti's historic revolution and liberation struggle was a decisive and transformative blow for us and victory for African and human freedom in the world. And likewise, the eventual victory of the Haitian people against occupation and oppression will be a shared victory, a shared gain and good for Haiti, Africa, us and Africans everywhere and for humanity as a whole.

Given such an historic achievement, we are ever asking how Haiti could come to the consuming crisis it now faces. But, at the outset, it is important to note that no one can seriously deny the deep, widespread and undeserved suffering brutally imposed on and

resiliently endured by the Haitian people. And even though internal factors contribute to this state of things, it is the external forces of oppression who have for centuries created and sustained the conditions and capacities of these negative forces, the elites, gangs and other predators, as well as the puppets and parasites. And those external forces are none other than the U.S., France, Canada and other members of that racist, capitalist and callous cabal called the Core Group. And it is they who must be forced to leave Haiti and return to rule the ruins of their own societies, no longer able to sustain themselves through imperialist ravage and robbery of others. But there is also the reality, as the legendary labor leader, Nana A. Philip Randolph taught that, "freedom is never a final fact, but a continuing evolving process". For it is shaped by the demands of continuous development, and also in this case, by oppressors' refusal to accept an inclusive freedom for everyone as an inviolable human right, and thus, the need to defy and defeat them.

Therefore, even as we recount and discuss the instructive and inspiring lessons of the Haitian Revolution and liberation struggle, it is important to engage these lessons to continue and expand their liberation struggle and our own and improve the lives of our peoples everywhere, and eventually and certainly overcome and end the oppression of African people everywhere. And if we follow Haiti's model, we will also aid and ally with others in the struggle to free humanity as a whole, daring to expand the realm of freedom, justice and inclusive good in the world. Indeed, it is an essential motivating and guiding commitment in our liberation struggles as

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African peoples to struggle for African and human good and the well-being of the world.

The first lesson from then and for now is the indispensable need of *cultural grounding*. The Haitian people and all those who sustain themselves in struggle and eventually achieve victory were/are clearly grounded in their own culture. It is Nana Amilcar Cabral that taught that “The greater the differences between the culture of the dominated people and the culture of their oppressor, the more possible a victory becomes”. And likewise the greater the similarity of cultures, the easier it is for the oppressor to dominate and defeat the oppressed. Here cultural grounding is clearly emphasized in the meeting in Bois Caiman which grounded and initiated the Haitian Revolution.

As I have written, “at the center of the sacred narrative of the Haitian Revolution and liberation struggle is the decisive meeting at Bwa Kayiman (Bois Caiman) presided over by the Houngan (High Priest of Vodoun) Dutty Boukman and the Mambo (High Priestess of Vodoun) Cécile Fatiman. On August 14, 1791, they called the people together at this historic site to conduct a sacred ceremony to free the people’s minds; strengthen their will to struggle for freedom; reaffirm their rightful belief in a Beneficent God of liberation who would guide and assist them; and to commit all to wage the struggle for liberation until it was won, regardless of cost, casualties and the sacrifices required. They took an oath to live free or die, *viv lib o mouri!*”

Certainly, a defining moment in the meeting was the offering of a prayer by Hougan Boukman which had at least three distinctive aspects and emphases: *spiritual grounding, ethical distinction; and cultural and political commitment*. And it is these

emphases that offer us a framework for waging righteous and relentless struggle ourselves in our time. It is important to note here that Boukman uses a prayer and religious and ethical discourse to call the people to arms and struggle rather than simply political discourse. This is done, not simply because he is a priest, but also because he recognizes and respects the anchoring and uplifting power of religion, rightly conceived and practiced in the lives and struggle of the people, as Nanas Min. Malcolm, Rev. King and Dr. Bethune would also later teach us.

In his prayer, Hougan Boukman first pays homage to God as the Creator and as controller of sea and storm, calling him *Bon Die*, Beneficent God, who gives us light to see and has the power to control and change the world. And he uses sun, sea and storm as signs and metaphors for this awesome Divine presence and power. Moreover, he speaks of a liberating God who sees the suffering of the oppressed and will “guide and assist” them in their liberation struggle. Here he, Mambo Fatiman and the hundreds gathered, embrace a liberating God, who enjoins them to wage a liberating struggle to restrain and subdue their oppressor and end his oppression of them. They, thus, contribute to an emerging liberation theology in the midst of the Holocaust of enslavement which inspires and resembles other similar theologies among African Americans in the U.S. and other parts of the Americas.

Hougan Boukman also draws a clear line of ethical distinction between the God of the oppressed Haitians and the god of the oppressor Whites. He states that “the god of the white oppressors commands crime, but our God enjoins us to do good works”. Those crimes, which the oppressor says his god allows, blesses and urges are imperialism,

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colonialism and the Holocaust of enslavement. And the good works, the Haitian people are called to do, are not only living righteous lives, but also waging a righteous and relentless struggle for freedom in Haiti and the world. Therefore, he reaffirms the ethical character of the liberation struggle, not only against oppression, but to achieve and enjoy a lived and practiced freedom.

FINALLY, BOUKMAN CLEARLY CALLS FOR a cultural and political revolution, a radical and reordering change of the hearts and minds and social situation of the people. He realizes that Whites came not only with

claims of racial superiority, but also religious superiority with an imagined mandate to rule and ruin the lives of the people in the name of their god. He, thus, calls on the people to “throw away the symbol of the god of the white oppressor and listen to the voice of freedom which is in the hearts of us all”. It is this voice of freedom that remains loud, clear and compelling in the hearts of the Haitian people, sustains them and lets us, the world and the oppressor know that the Haitian people still offer in righteous and relentless struggle the radical refusal to be defeated, regardless.▲

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