



**TALK FREEDOM TO THE PEOPLE:  
FRAMING OUR FUTURE IN STRUGGLE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-26-19, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**N THE FIERCE AND INHUMAN FACE OF oppression and unfreedom that we confronted in the Sixties, we stood up and declared and demanded of ourselves and others that we *talk freedom to the people*. And over five decades later, we have not abandoned, diluted or deviated from this indispensable ethical imperative and practice. For conditions of oppression and unfreedom remain even today and thus the fight remains unfinished and the struggle must continue, deepen and intensify. So, let us continue to talk freedom to the people. Tell them liberating and liberated things, things that free their hearts and minds, cause their spirits to soar and cultivate in them an active and passionate commitment to pursue and practice freedom from all forms oppression. Talk freedom to the people. Free them from constraining external pressures and internal urges to doubt themselves, deny themselves, condemn themselves and mutilate themselves.

Tell them that to free themselves, they must be themselves, that degrading adjustment is not justice, and that the happy hour of liqueurs, liquors and laughs after work or dinner don't solve problems or really ease oppression. Talk freedom to the people, free them of the illusions manufactured as a matter of course in a land where lying is a way of life for the self-appointed saviors and wealth worshiping wardens of an imprisoning society. I speak here of a society not satisfied with denying and limiting liberties and rights, but also needing to narrow the mind in its thinking, constrict the heart in its caring, and make the people accept this as normal, even necessary.

Speak freedom to the people, cause them to see what Min. Malcolm told and taught us that there is no substitute for freedom, that "freedom is essential to life." Moreover, it is part of what it means to be human and indispensable to living a good and meaningful life and coming into the fullness of ourselves. Tell them it is their right and responsibility to be free, free from domination, deprivation and degradation. Free from the domination of others regardless of

race, class, sex, religion, sexuality, ability, age or any other excuse and concocted way to oppress.

Tell them too they have the right and responsibility to be free from the deprivations of poverty and powerlessness; hunger and food insecurity; lack of access to clean water, air and sanitation; homelessness and lack of adequate and affordable housing and healthcare; inferior and oppressive education; joblessness; official and unofficial violence; and alienation from people as fellow human beings. And tell them, they have a right to be respected, regardless of differences and diversity, and a similar responsibility not to disrespect ourselves by letting the oppressor be our teacher. That is to say, imitating him in ways that flatter him and flatten and falsify our conception of ourselves as "Black-ish," "mixed-ish," and slavish to fashionable, funded and favored terms and ways of the dominant society.

Speak freedom to the people. Tell them free themselves from self-denying, self-damaging and self-condemning ways. Encourage them to think freely and focus firmly on their enduring beauty, creativity, adaptive vitality and durability, their resilience and resourcefulness and their unsurpassed history of striving, struggle and resistance. Help develop in them, as Molefi Asante tells us, the will and way to cultivate a victorious consciousness which resists and rejects any feelings of despair or fears of defeat.

Talk freedom to the people. Speak a liberating truth to the people. As Mari Evans, poet of deep vision and struggle said, "Speak truth to the people . . . Free the mind of the people." Indeed, "Free them with honesty. Free the people with Love and Courage of their Being." And then, they will be ready to unite, build and struggle. "Talk sense to the people," she told us. There is no need for lies, illusions, half-truths and mind-dulling mystification.

We must speak the truth of oppression and the human suffering it causes and sustains,

**TALK FREEDOM TO THE PEOPLE:  
FRAMING OUR FUTURE IN STRUGGLE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-26-19, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

speaking of our own and yet linking it to and finding common cause with other peoples. For it is a central and enduring ethical teaching of our honored ancestors that we are to “bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice,” the vulnerable and devalued, the poor, the less powerful and the oppressed.

Talk freedom to the people, then, speak to them about Haiti, the hidden and hushed subject; about Palestine, the prohibited subject; and about the Rohingya of Burma, the Uighurs of China and the Yemeni, a subject deemed irrelevant by the daily and nightly news. Talk of the savage and inhumane occupations of the people’s land and lives, the totalitarian violence on every level including against children, ethnic cleansing campaigns and the refusal of the right to return, the imprisonment of millions and deculturization concentration camps, and the criminal indiscriminate genocidal bombing against the peoples.

Talk freedom to the people. Tell them, where there is oppression, there is resistance, and thus these peoples and all the oppressed of the world are in various forms of resistance and struggles for freedom. Convince them that the oppressor can never have the same moral status of the oppressed in any moral system, no matter who the oppressor is and that neither race, religion or ruling fantasies about being elect and elite, superior, chosen or champions for their grossly flawed notions of civilization can override the human rights of persons and peoples to be free, to practice self-determination and pursue their own notion of the good.

Talk freedom to the people. Tell them that the denial of climate change is not a life-preserving option. For the forests are on fire more often with greater intensity; the glaciers

are melting; the seas are rising, erasing coastlines and sinking islands; droughts and flooding happen simultaneously; extreme weather is occurring everywhere and the seasons seem less distinct. Tell them to resist talk that people will adjust or are adjusting. For they are not adjusting, but coping. To talk of adjustment in the face of such devastation and decline is to minimize the severity of the problem, the suffering of the people, the urgency of the situation and the requirements necessary to correct it.

Speak freedom to the people. Remind them of the words of wisdom and righteous struggle of Harriet Tubman on the life and death struggle that must be waged for freedom when it is denied or threatened with loss or unjust limitations. She tells and teaches us, “we must go free or die, and freedom is not bought with dust.” That is to say, it cannot be bought with little cost and no casualties. And, of course, it will not come from the self-corrected conscience or change of heart of the oppressors and the unrepentant and rapacious rulers and ruiners of human lives. It will only come from the righteous and relentless struggle of the people, themselves.

**|M**ALCOLM SAID IT; WE HEARD IT AND dared to live it. He said that “wherever Black people are is a battleline.” And we turned this teaching into a battle cry and commitment to struggle, saying “Everywhere a battleline, every day a call to struggle.” So, here we are still in righteous and relentless struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves, to make our way in the world as African persons and people, and with others similarly committed, to break the back of all forms of oppression, hidden, disguised or arrogantly open. In this way, we dare to frame and forge our future in struggle and in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.▲

---

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).