



**MEANINGS, MAPPING AND MAKING HISTORY:
THE SIGNIFICANCE AND CENTRALITY OF STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS HAJI MALCOLM, MAULANA (MASTER Teacher) and constant soldier, who taught not only the centrality and indispensability of knowing history, but also the urgent imperative to map out its meaning and course and make it consciously and conscientiously. Indeed, he said, “we must recapture our heritage (history) and our identity if we are to ever liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy.” We need, he asserts, a cultural revolution to recapture an expansive historically grounded and future facing conception of ourselves and our duty. Thus, he taught that “Armed with the knowledge of our past, we can with confidence charter a course for our future. Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle.” Here he puts history at the center of culture, that self-making and self-affirming process and practice of every people and reaffirms our need to learn it, make it and appreciate it in memory, thought and practice.

Now the understanding and appreciation of Black history begins with the definition of history itself and then uses that definition to define Black history and its relevance. In Kawaida, history is defined as “*the struggle and record of humans in the process of humanizing the world, i.e., shaping it in their own image and interests.*” To shape the world in a human image is to add to it a human form and character, and to shape it in human interests is to make it serve humans in positive ways rather than threaten, deform or destroy them. African or Black history, then, is the struggle and record of Africans in the process of Africanizing the world, i.e., shaping their world in their own image and interests. As a particular people, Africans shape the world in a particular way. This adds to the richness and beauty of human diversity and contributes to

the overall effort of humans to transform the world in ways that improve the human condition and enhance the human future. Thus, as Africans developed agriculture, medicine, science, etc. to defend and develop themselves, they built societies and civilizations which contributed to the overall humanization of the world and to the forward flow of human history.

Humans do not always make history as they would like, but only through self-conscious intervention in the social and historical process can history be engaged and self-consciously made. And the most effective means of intervention is struggle in various forms. In fact, the motive force and fundamental shaper of history is struggle, righteous and relentless striving and struggle to bring and sustain good in the world. Thus to make history, humans must struggle with four major challenges: (1) nature; (2) society; (3) other humans; and (4) their immediate selves.

Even a cursory review of African history shows Africans in the process of meeting these fundamental challenges. The very struggle to be human, to separate oneself from the animal kingdom is a struggle with nature as is the struggle to make nature an ally rather than an enemy. As the first humans, Africans began to humanize the world by harnessing various forces and materials of nature and using them to improve their lives. Thus, they discover fire, make tools, clothes, shelter, and devise ways to increase food. They collect seeds, learn the seasons, engage in cultivation, harness the Nile and use it for irrigation and thus develop agriculture. They study disease and find cures and develop medicine; they dig in the earth and discover and extract its resources and develop mining; they move beyond basic

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structures and build large temples and pyramids and develop architecture; and they observe the stars, discover patterns and movements, name them and develop astronomy.

The second major challenge humans face and must overcome continuously in making history is society or more precisely the limitations society imposes at various historical periods on conditions and capacities for the survival, development and flourishing of human life. It is a fundamental paradox that society which is designed and built as a context for human freedom, defense and development often becomes a context for suppression, exploitation and oppression. In the long march toward human freedom, i.e., the absence of restraint and the capacity for rational self-determination, society has both impeded and aided progress toward this goal. In the constant struggle to shape society in a more human, i.e., freer and more positive image, humans have, throughout history, struggled to break the elites' monopoly on knowledge and make it available to the masses; to defend against dictatorship and to establish and maintain democracy; and to create conditions for a shared and inclusive human good and the well-being of the world.

In African American history, the struggle against society, or more precisely against society in its various oppressive forms of enslavement, segregation, racism and capitalism, has clearly been its motive force. In fact, the periodization of Black history reveals focal points of liberation struggle against various forms of domination, deprivation and degradation. The Holocaust of Enslavement, the reversal of Reconstruction and the rise of the savagery of segregation; lynchings and racism in education, employment and other areas of social life; disempowerment and

police brutality are all categories not only of exploitative and oppressive social relations but also focal points of liberative struggle against them. But society is only context. Other humans are actors who impose, exploit and oppress in that context. Thus, history involves the struggle against others who threaten human life, freedom and development. Enslavement is imposed by the enslaver, racism by the racist, capitalism and colonialism by the capitalist and colonizer.

Indeed, the ruling ideas and dominant relations in any given society at any historical period are the ideas and imposed relations of those who rule. This social grouping may be a ruling class or a ruling race or as in the USA and pre-independence South Africa, *a ruling race/class*, i.e., a ruling class made up of and exclusive to the ruling race in a society. Moreover, "others" could be other smaller social units like other nations, ethnic groups, political parties or interest groups, who seek to injure, disadvantage, exploit and oppress.

The final major challenge in history is the struggle of humans with themselves, against deficient conceptions of themselves and their conditions and the possibilities they see or fail to see in them. Indeed, there is a constant struggle against that which seems permanent and overwhelming, and the tendency to submit to or accept the immediate. But history is made when humans collectively and personally break beyond the current restrictive and restraining concept of self and the possible, and distinguish between *actuality*, that which is; *potentiality*, that which can be; and *reality*, that which ought to be and becomes when persons, peoples, societies or things realize themselves, i.e., fulfill their inherent potential and ultimately come into the fullness of themselves. Fundamental to understanding this conception, then, is to

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see reality not as being, but as *becoming* and to see struggle as the motive force of both becoming and history. For human essence is human possibility and history is the process through which that possibility is expressed and realized.

THE TASK HERE, AS OUR HONORED ANCESTORS have taught, is to understand and assert ourselves in radically transformative and expansive ways. This is ex-

pressed in Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune’s teaching that “we are custodians and heirs of a great legacy” and “our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this.” And it is reflected and reaffirmed in Nana Frantz Fanon’s struggle call for us to reject imitation of our oppressors and reimagine and “reconsider the question of humanity” and dare to open an expansive horizon for the emergence of a new history of humankind.▲

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