



MODELING AND MIRRORING NANA FANNIE LOU HAMER: QUESTIONING AMERICA, WALKING OFF THE PLANTATION

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS NANA FANNIE LOU HAMER WHO reaffirmed the sacred teachings of our other honored ancestors' emphasis on the moral obligation to remember when she taught that "there are two things we all should care about; never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over". So, on this 106th anniversary of her coming into being, we are morally compelled to practice the morality of remembrance, raising and praising her name and work and reaffirming that we honor her most by trying to live the awesome legacy she left us in enduring love and constant struggle.

So, let us praise her then in the *izibongo*, praise naming and singing, tradition of our honored ancestors. Let us honor her in her royally righteous names as: an immensely beautiful, blessed and loving soul, a model and mirror for us all; a formidable and fearless freedom fighter, as the *Sacred Odu Ifa* teaches, "a constant soldier never unready not even once"; an outrageously audacious speaker of the plain, mind-opening, life-enhancing and uplifting truth; a resilient, unbuckling and unbreakable bridge, faithfully carrying us over treacherous and tragedy-laden waters; and a courageous and uncompromising questioner of America in its shallow and shameless claims about being a land of the free, home of the brave, a perfect union, and a righteous city on a hill and such.

We praise her too as an uplifted light shining ever bright, showing the way through the fog of fakery, the forest of lies and the murky and murderous waters of savage oppression. And we also praise her in her other royal and righteous names, prophet and midwife of the new world coming, who turned her prayers into liberating practice, her faith into the transformative wonder of work, and her and her people's longing for freedom into a lifelong struggle for an inclusive and shared good in this country and the world.

Nana Fannie Lou Hamer continuously calls on us to question America and to walk off whatever physical, psychological, relational or structural plantation we find ourselves on and

dare freedom. We are to question especially the false claims it makes about freedom, justice, equity and inclusion and its founding myths of "the land of the free and the home of the brave" and the almost pathological compulsion to erase and revise its real history, ours and others which reveal the truth of America's past. She would want us to critique, condemn and resist its developed mania of burning and banning books and flooding the media with falsified versions of real life, past and present, and suffering and sustained oppression in many forms in this country and around the world.

She describes America as a sick society and she suggests that it is the will to lie as a way of life, and to persistently indulge in self-deception and the unbridled attempt to deceive the world that helps define a corrupt, oppressive and decadent society that sets the stage for its own undoing. And as Kawaida teaches, a society that cannot concede its problems, cannot solve its problems, and a society that cannot solve its problems cannot survive its problems. She tells us we are obligated by history and heaven to free ourselves and this country from the anti-human, grotesque grasp of racism, capitalism and other forms of oppression.

We cannot live good and meaningful lives if we tie our lives to lies, if we actually live those lies and impose them on others as a way of life. In a lecture in Harlem, December 20, 1964, she shared the stage with an equally committed and courageous freedom fighter and teacher of the way of freedom, Nana Haji Malcolm, who was a severe critic of America and its self-proclaimed democracy, calling it nothing but "disguised hypocrisy". Haji Malcolm defined her as "one of this country's foremost freedom fighters" and the respect was mutual. She said to us that night and elsewhere, "What I am trying to point out now is when you take a very close look at this American society, it's time to question these things". That is to say, the claims, the structures and the practices that actually define and drive America, especially its addiction to and continued disguising, denying

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and justifying inequality and inequities; celebrating wealth in the midst of poverty, sickness and suffering; violating human rights; and waging wars all over the world which destroy countless lives, pillage lands, and waste resources desperately needed for human good and the well-being of the world.

Indeed, she asks us not to imitate our oppressors by indulging in self-deception about our actual state of unfreedom and oppression. She tells her sisters and brothers listening that the government and White people know what they are doing against us. And she relates how when she went to West Africa, which was a beautiful informative and uplifting experience for her, government agents and operatives followed and questioned her. Confronting them, she tells us she told them, "If we had been treated as human beings in America, you wouldn't be trailing us now to find out what we are trying to do over here". What Nana Hamer realized early and wanted us to know and to resist is that the ruling race/class of America wants us to embrace the founding and ever-growing field of myths about freedom, justice, equality, opportunity for all, and learn to accept or at least tolerate our oppression and simply seek a comfortable place in oppression. And it monitors and surveils us and our loyalty to the myths, both at home and abroad, seeking compliance and concessions in the name of a mindless and immoral patriotism, reduced to praise without criticism, and to defense, service and support without reciprocity in kind and quality.

So, Nana Fannie Lou Hamer tells America, Harlem and us as a whole, if we are ever to be free we must radically confront America and the country must stop lying, lying about what it has done and is doing to us, others and the world. And

we must dare to walk off the plantation and struggle to achieve the freedom we deserve and have been so long denied. But to walk off the plantation, we must question America in thought and practice. Again, she tells us "this is something we going to have to learn to do and quit saying that we are free in America when (you and) I know we are not free". Indeed, she says, "you are not free in Harlem, Chicago or Philadelphia". And when you look in clear-sighted ways, "some of the places are a Mississippi in disguise". And we must struggle with all we are and can become to change this state of things. Again, this requires walking off the plantation, freeing ourselves from the sentiments, thoughts, practices of oppression and as Nana Frantz Fanon states, engaging irreversibly in the interrelated liberation struggle to free ourselves and our people and start a new history of humankind.

MRS. HAMER, NANA FANNIE LOU HAMER, had an abiding faith and hope in the power and promise of our people, and in a struggled for and eventually achieved freedom, justice and shared good for everyone, indeed all the peoples of the world. Thus, she urges us to continue the struggle, keep the faith and hold the line saying, "One day I know the struggle will (bring) change" and it will "be change not only in Mississippi (and) for the people of the U.S., but (also for) people all-over the world". This has been the center of our faith, hope and struggle as African people, Black people, since we arrived here. And on this sacred ground of faith, hope and struggle, let us continue and intensify the struggle, keep the faith, hold the line, living and advancing the legacy she left us with such uplifting love and liberating practice.▲

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