



**RESISTING THE MADNESS ENGULFING AMERICA:  
DEFYING THE OUTLAWING OF LEARNING AND BEING BLACK**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HERE IS AN EMOTIONAL, MENTAL AND moral sickness eating at the insides of American society and crushing and killing its most vulnerable victims with various forms of systemic violence whether physical, psychological, social or educational. This societal sickness is rooted in and reflective of the ways the ruling race/class feels and thinks about itself and others different and vulnerable and in the palpable and practiced hatred and hostility directed against them.

The recent retrogressive efforts to reestablish Eurocentric narrow notions of education in Florida and elsewhere and which especially focuses on degrading African American Studies and denying its rigor and relevance, represents a resurgent race-based madness engulfing America which we must defiantly and radically resist. For it is not only against Black Studies, but also against Black people, part of a larger insane and savage attempt to outlaw not only our and others learning about people and things Black but also to outlaw being Black, itself. The persistent and destructive pattern and practice of police violence against Black men, as well as Black women and children, under the color and camouflage of law, is a more graphic and gruesome expression of this, but the system maims, kills and destroys in a multiplicity of sick, sinister and sustained ways in virtually every area of social life.

Thus, there is violence not only against the body, but also against the heart, mind and spirit, especially in the media and in educational institutions, beginning in kindergarten and public and private schools and culminating in the colleges and universities. And it is based in the sick and savage desire of oppressors for domination, deprivation and degra-

ation of the different and vulnerable. In such a context, key to all oppression is the oppressor's capacity to define reality and make the oppressed accept it, even when it's to their disadvantage. Controlling the information and education process, then, is vital to the practices of waging ongoing war against the oppressed, force-feeding them the oppressor's fantasies and falsifications of history and reality, and teaching them to accept their lot of oppression and that resistance is irrational, futile and self-destructive.

Therefore, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' shameless and medieval public performance of dancing around the heretic burning stake and dousing the inflammatory retrogressive proposals and piles of banned books and suppressed subjects is not simply reflective of a personal disorder, but rather is symptomatic of a larger societal disorder, i.e., the pathology of systemic racism, which is institutional and social, collective and personal. It is a sickness, indeed a madness, which thrives on hatred, hostility and violence against those different and vulnerable, even though those targeted and victimized have done nothing to the predators and victimizers. It is this irrational and unprovoked racist hatred, hostility and violence that led Nana Rev. C.T. Vivian in the 1960's to ask the thuggish southern sheriff and the howling and hovering mad mob who viciously assaulted him and other Black people for simply trying to register to vote: "what kind of people are you all?"

Like his predecessor and former high priest of low life, former president Donald Trump, DeSantis seeks to rise to power and pride of White place by stoking, provoking and pandering to manufactured, manipulated and irrational racist fears and fantasies of Whiteness. He attempts to arrogate to himself

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the role of educational overseer without credentials, competence or credibility. Like the White oppressors in his history that he wants us to exonerate and forgive and forget the radical evil they imposed on us, he appears on stage as our White and not so bright would-be savior. He arrogantly and irrationally claims he is saving us from ourselves, from learning and thinking critically about the truth of our history and the history of America with the horror and Holocaust of enslavement, the barbarism of lynching, the savagery of segregation, and the current hydra-headed forms of gross and gratuitous violence and oppression imposed on us.

Clearly, it is difficult for a society to criticize itself and almost impossible for it to condemn itself. And it is common knowledge that the insane often thinks that everyone is insane and a threat except them. But it's a problem that must be confronted and solved. Decades earlier we talked a lot about the sane and insane society. It was during the 1960's when virtually everything was brought up and out from society's secret, sordid and self-serving places and put on the table of disclosure for dissection and discussion. It is in this context that Nana Fannie Lou Hamer, combatting and calling out the pathology of racist oppression, offered the lived and living experience diagnosis that "America is a sick place and man is on the critical list". And again, the signature symptoms and substance of this sickness of racism is violence of various kinds and in varied venues.

Also, in 1969, the Black Psychiatrists Caucus in the American Psychiatric Association interrupted the trustees' breakfast meeting to demand among other things that "extreme bigotry", extreme racism, be added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. As distinguished

Harvard psychiatrist, Alvin Poussaint who led this effort reported, they refused to do so, "arguing that because so many Americans are racist, even extreme racism in this country is normative - a cultural problem rather than an indication of psychopathology." This posture recalls renowned clinical psychologist Na'im Akbar's concept of "democratic sanity", which I read as a delusional position in this country which holds that what the majority determines is sane is sane, even if they themselves are insane or grossly and grievously mad.

As Poussaint argues, "(t)o continue perceiving extreme racism as normative and not pathologic is to lend it legitimacy" and that "(t)his leads psychiatrists to think that it cannot and should not be treated in their patients". However, "Clearly, anyone who scapegoats a whole group of people and seeks to eliminate them to resolve his or her internal conflicts meets criteria for a delusional disorder, a major psychiatric illness".

Thus, if we are to understand and rightfully and successfully resist these latest retrogressive and racist efforts to outlaw our learning and being Black, then we must place them in the context of the historical and continuing pathology of oppression in this country and our righteous and relentless resistance to it. Indeed, it is at the origin of the country that preventive and punitive measures are put in place to disrupt and destroy our capacities for our learning ourselves and being ourselves as African persons and a people. Not satisfied with controlling the body of the oppressed, the oppressor seeks also to control their mind, heart and spirit. As Nana Frantz Fanon, internationally recognized social and clinical psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist, points out concerning colonialism or any other system of oppression, it "is not satisfied with merely

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holding a people in its grip and emptying the indigenous person's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it".

Here the oppressor sought and seeks to empty our minds of memory and knowledge, especially the memory of freedom and the expansive knowledge of our humanity and our rightful place in the world. Thus, they outlawed our learning and life of freedom and they cultivated historical amnesia in our minds and self-hatred in our hearts for our African selves, lifting us out of our own history and making us a negligible footnote in their own. The aim was to turn us into objects of labor, sex and entertainment and create and sustain our social death and dehumanization.

But we rightfully, rigorously and relentlessly resisted. And we must continue to do so now. For these people want a Black history, a Black Studies and a Black people silent about racist oppression and our rightful resistant to it and subservient to the Eurocentric self-congratulatory narrative posing as a curriculum and passing as quality education. Addicted to the opioids of racial fantasies, historical falsification, and willful forgetfulness, they peddle and promote a cheap and corrupt conception of human life and social

good. And the liberational character of Black Studies' pedagogy and social practice are vital to ending this dignity-denying and life-diminishing conception of education and life, and to imagining and achieving an inclusive and expansive African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it.

**T**HUS, OUR TASK IS FRAMED AND reaffirmed in our National Council for Black Studies Statement of resistance to this madness. It says "Together, we can work to ensure that Black/Africana Studies continues to reaffirm and expand its vanguard role in generating vital and valuable knowledge, and cultivating expansive capacities in our students for critical thinking, love of learning, mutual respect and empathetic concern for others and an active commitment to social and human good and the sustained well-being of the world. And we know from historical and current experience and study that to achieve the quality education and just and good society we want and deserve, there must be struggle, constant and consistent struggle. For as our honored ancestor, Nana Frederick Douglass affirmed "if there is no struggle, there is no progress", and thus, no possibility or promise of the quality education and just and good world we all want and deserve.▲

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