



BEYOND THE BONDAGE OF PLANTATION POLITICS: CRAFTING OUR OWN PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM

Los Angeles Sentinel, 05-02-19, p. A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 1. DURING BOTH THE HOLOCAUST OF enslavement and the era of segregation, *leaving the plantation* was a metaphor, mental process and actual practice of freedom. It was a freeing oneself mentally and physically, thinking freedom and then acting in ways that led to its achievement as did Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Fannie Lou Hamer, Messenger Muhammad and countless others in their rejection of and resistance to enslavement and segregation. Clearly, it is rumored and reported in various official and unofficial send-outs and circles that we have all left the plantation and are all free. But today, regardless of official edited and embellished reports; images of mixed couples and company in TV commercials and movies; and our wishing and wanting to believe we are beyond its borders and bondage, the plantation and its politics remains with us. As Malcolm taught, “what (we) experience in this country is one huge plantation system,” and the only difference is that it has become more modern in its structure and functioning.

Indeed, the plantation has changed its form but not its essential oppressive content. And too many of our people and even more of our leaders too often appear to have their minds and movements rooted in the memory and modern practice of plantation life and politics. When I speak of the plantation - I speak of conditions of oppression and the mindset that accompanies it - resignation to White domination, acceptance of and deference of their right to rule and lead and belief that we *literally* cannot live, think or act well without them involved in some essential way. In a word, it is an unhealthy dependence rather than relations of mutual respect and an interdependence of persons and peoples with each bringing something important to chosen relationships and selected shared projects.

The plantation, then, is the conditions, context and terrain of our oppression - which is structural, practical and ideological. That is to say, it is the system itself, the mentality and practices it produces and the justifications it develops to

excuse, disguise and perpetuate its oppression. And there can be no real and rightful practice of freedom or achievement of justice without leaving it behind in mind, practice and transformative struggle. Thus, doing politics in America, for us, must mean in thought and practice, leaving the plantation and practicing a self-determination worthy of our history and culture and respectful and representative of our people and their interests.

We said it in the Sixties and I don't mind repeating it, the first and most fundamental battle we must fight is the battle to win the hearts and minds of our people, and if we lose that battle, we cannot hope to win the political one. For every struggle, revolutionary or reformist, requires a philosophy of struggle that reaffirms who we are, and affirms what we stand and fight for in terms of principles, issues, needs and aspirations. And thus, it draws a clear line between us and the established plantation order. We cannot in good faith or within any real concept of self-respect, allow others to give us their platform as if it were our own, and not bother to even ask us what we see as important, essential and indispensable. But again, we have to acknowledge that there are people among us who are still on the plantation in their minds, still committed to the plantation politics of this country and to the liberals and conservatives and other whites who continue to control it while often denying that they do so. As Malcolm taught, this is hypocrisy disguised as democracy, still carrying its Greek heritage of *herrenvolk* democracy - democracy for the ruling race/class and domination, deprivation and degradation for others.

Of course, it's not like it once was, but racism, White supremacy and oppressions of various other kinds, still exist and seriously limit and often take the lives of way too many of us and other similarly situated and oppressed peoples. So, we owe it to ourselves and to our ancestors who opened the way to freedom for us, to push on with great and continuous striving and struggle and not betray their trust or dishonor the legacy

**BEYOND THE BONDAGE OF PLANTATION POLITICS:
CRAFTING OUR OWN PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 05-02-19, p. A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

they left us. And this means in this context the coming presidential race, having a clear concept of what are our interests and crafting a Black agenda that must be considered and included in the common ground platform of any presidential candidate that wants and merits our support.

Moreover, it is a fundamental understanding of a successful and meaningful struggle that our people must know what we and they stand for, what issues are critical, essential, urgent and non-negotiable. They need to know, as Frantz Fanon taught, that the victory or losses in the struggle depend on them and it is they who determine how they sustain loss, absorb setbacks and go on to celebrate and enjoy victory. Indeed, they must see themselves at the center of their own struggles. And this means initiating and sustaining a wide-ranging conversation with our people, based on a Black agenda, a political platform on which we as a people stand and on which we base our support for any candidate that comes calling as well as ongoing goals we pursue in the process and practice of our larger unfinished struggle for liberation.

This is why political education is so essential and indispensable, why it precedes and makes possible the deep and effective engagement of a people in every serious concept of self-determination, democracy and substantive freedom and justice. Back in our most defiant and transformative history, we shared a collective vocation in our struggles. We called this the Black Freedom Movement – and within this larger movement were the Civil Rights Movement or phase and the Black Power Movement or phase. And the overarching goals of this collective vocation was freedom, justice and equality, later augmented by the demand and goal of power for our people. That is to say, Black peoples' power over the space they occupied, over their communities, and over their destiny and daily lives in concrete, real and meaningful ways.

It was the redefinition by others of this inclusive Black Freedom Movement as exclusively the Civil Rights Movement that changed the basic focus and fundamental goals of the Black Freedom Movement. Thus, freedom, justice, equality and power were reduced to the narrow quest for civil rights. And the Black Freedom Movement was no longer defined as specifically Black or for freedom, justice, equality and power as we defined it. Instead, it was defined simply as a civil rights movement, a system-declared American project of self-correction, the system working to be better or achieve “a more perfect union” without having ever been perfect or truly free, just and equal for all, leaving aside the question of the grossly unequal distribution and possession of power.

BUT TO REDEFINE A BLACK FREEDOM Movement as a Civil Rights Movement, not only denies and dismisses its Black Power Movement phase, but also erases and reduces the severity of our suffering in the savage oppression of segregation and unfreedom, injustice, inequality and disempowerment at virtually every level of life. Moreover, it also denies our *identity* and *agency* as a people, a Black people, and focuses more on our White allies and our “relations of dependence” on them rather than the initiative we took, the awesome sacrifices we made in our struggle and the victories we won because we stood up first and waged the life-and-death self-determined struggle that freedom demands. And we knew when we assumed responsibility for our own struggle that in the final analysis, a people is and must be its own liberator, no matter how sincere or numerous our allies or associates are. It is important to note that we knew then, in the midst of the fire and furnace of the struggle, the essential and expansive meaning of freedom – not only freedom from oppression, but also freedom to live good, dignity-affirming and self-determined lives, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves.

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; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.