



**“CALLING THE QUESTION ON KAMALA’S IDENTITY:
COMMUNAL AND MORAL MEANINGS OF BEING BLACK”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

WE ARE AT A CRITICAL HISTORICAL moment of the amassing, movement and meeting of progressive forces in this country to protect the people from Trumpian fantasies and promises of fascism, save and make real democracy, regain and defend freedoms, and lay the basis for achieving a future of inclusive engagement and shared good for all. And at these meetings we must now call the question, stop debating issues already decided, and vote, not on Kamala’s ethnic Blackness, but rather vote for vital issues, issues essential to our freedoms, our future and our effectively moving forward. This red herring issue of VP and presidential candidate Kamala Harris’ ethnic identity has already been engaged, discussed and definitively established by the evidence of her genetic heritage, her communal embeddedness and embrace, and her own self-definition. And we must not let ourselves or our allies be diverted or divided by the latest attempts of the Mad Hatter of MAGA land, suffering from his own identity issues of being White or orange and from racial and religious delusions of being the chosen one and the ultimate fixer of every problem except himself.

It is a fundamental and firmly held principle in Kawaida that our oppressor cannot be our teacher, especially in matters of critical importance. Indeed, there are some things we should and must never allow our oppressor, enemy, or opponent to question or define for us. Among these are: our humanity; our particular unique and equally valid and valuable African way of being human in the world; our equal and inalienable human rights; and our self-defined identity as a person and a people. These essential questions and answers of who we are as Africans and human beings, our

human rights and responsibilities, and the fundamental mission and meaning of our lives are ours and we must be rightfully and rigorously attentive to them in every way relevant and required.

Indeed, self-definition is a form of self-determination, an essential practice of freedom. The second principle of the *Nguzo Saba* is *Kujichagulia*, self-determination, and it is a moral imperative “to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves”. Again, then, we must not let our oppressor or others define us or find ourselves discussing what they said rather than reaffirming who we are by the defining qualities of our sensibilities, thought and practice which reflect the best of our interrelated ethnic, cultural and moral identity. For as we have consistently taught, one of the greatest and most pernicious powers of an oppressor is the ability to define reality and make others accept it, even when it’s to their disadvantage and contributes to their own oppression. And in any struggle, this points towards and often ensures psychological, cultural and political defeat.

The critical thing in all of this, then, is not Kamala’s racial or ethnic identity which has already been evidentially, personally and communally confirmed. The essential issue is her agenda, national and international agenda, and how it reflects the best of what it means to be Black, American and human in the fullest meaning and potential of these interrelated identities. What she must be rightfully and regularly attentive to is the constant striving to lead the country to a larger and more moral concept of itself and to policies and practices which reflect this new self-understanding. And if she is true to the ancient and ongoing ethical tradition of Black

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people, she realizes that Black is not only an ethnic or racial identity, but that it also carries with it a moral identity and duty, which calls for a leader to strive constantly to guide rightly and to create conditions and capacities for a meaningful participation and shared good for all.

In the Sixties, during the Black Power Movement phase of the Black Freedom Movement, we asserted that the defining features of Blackness were color, culture and consciousness. To speak of color is to speak of phenotype with multiple variations on a theme and of genotype, a genetic heritage reflecting membership in a historically evolved cultural community called African or Black. For us, culture meant and means a system of views, values and practices which are the basis of our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world. And among these defining views and values are profound respect for and commitment to: (1) the Transcendent in spiritual and ethical terms; (2) the rights and dignity of the human person in all their diversity; (3) the well-being and flourishing of family and community; (4) the integrity and value of the earth; and (5) the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for common good of humanity as a whole.

To speak of consciousness in that time of turbulence and testing in the midst of the Black Freedom Struggle, both its Civil Rights period and its Black Power period, has lessons for us today. It was to speak of consciousness not only as awareness of the world. It also carried the meaning of awareness of self in both historical and cultural ways so that we could honor the consistent servants and all-seasons soldiers in our freedom struggle who came before us by continuing their legacy, building on it and expanding it. Consciousness also meant for us active

self-knowledge, a coming-into-consciousness as a people rooted in a history and culture of struggle for good in the world and deriving a sense of identity, purpose and direction from it.

This understanding is framed by Nana Dr. Martin Luther King in his first speech in Montgomery on the eve of his rising to national and international leadership. He tells us that we as a people must struggle in such a way that people and “historians will have to say there lived a great people, a Black people, who through their struggle injected a new meaning and morality in the veins of civilization. This is our challenge and overwhelming responsibility”. And it is in the teachings of Nana Fannie Lou Hamer who reinforced the morality of remembrance in her teachings, telling us we must “never forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over”. And we can only honor, praise and remember them rightly by embracing the dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving views, values and practices that have grounded and guided us for centuries and made us one of the most respected moral and social vanguards in this country and the world.

Key here is for Kamala as candidate and president to come to the table constantly concerned with the promise and task of expanding the realm of freedom, justice, equity, peace and other shared goods in this country and the world and for us and all her supporters to hold her to her promises, and encourage her to listen to young people, activists and others who have energized her campaign and not pick a vice-president that hinders and harms her awesome motion forward.

And it also, means helping her to move beyond the policies of elites and empire, of racial and religious favoritism, the dignity-

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denying deference to wealth and warmongering, the unquestioning and immoral support of the undeniable evil of allies, and the radically evil acceptance of the domination, deprivation, degradation and destruction of peoples different and vulnerable in this country and around the world. Thus, candidate Kamala must prefigure in her campaign the kind of governance and society she will work to build in unity and struggle with all the peo-

ple: Native Americans, African Americans, Latina/o Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, European Americans and other diverse Americans. Only then can the freedom, justice and future proposed and promised become a lived reality and shared good. For as our honored ancestors taught, “If you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you”.▲

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