



**FOR CHOKWE, OURSELVES AND HISTORY:
CREATING FREE AND SPECIAL SPACES**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

A great and honored lion has lain down and a Horus falcon, royal in his righteousness, has risen in radiance in the heavens and now sits in the sacred circle of the ancestors among the doers of good, the righteous and the rightfully rewarded. And we are painfully aware he cannot be replaced or turned to again in his former physical form. But we have his spirit, his lessons of life, work and struggle, and the great good he has left us—and we have each other and the work he left for us to continue together for our people and the world.

It is the timeless teaching of our ancestors, found in the sacred texts of the *Husia* that tells us “to do that which is of value is forever; a man called forth by his work does not die, for his name is raised and remembered because of it”. And so it is with our brother warrior, this fearless witness and tireless worker for the people, Chokwe Lumumba. Here and forever, we pour libation and raise and praise his free and noble name, Chokwe Lumumba: Gifted Hunter, who, like we say of his mentor and awesome model, Malcolm, “Great Hunter who hunted the forests of evil, injustice and oppression until the beasts begged for relief”. And let us raise and remember his other five righteous names in practice of the morality of remembrance as taught by the ancestors: all-seasons soldier and servant of the people; permanent attorney for the defense; uncompromising advocate of the poor, oppressed and unpowerful, the vulnerable and devalued; one who, in the words of the *Husia*, untiringly dared “to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice”.

His was a life well-lived, fulfilled and expressed in a struggle waged audaciously to the end, and an unbreakable nationalist and pan-Africanist commitment, rooted in a

profound and unfailing faith in and love for his people. Indeed, the hub and hinge on which his life, struggle and faith turned was his love for the people. Thus, all the lessons we can learn from his life rise from and relate to his deep-rooted, enduring and revolutionary love for the people. And it is the reciprocal love of the people for him that joins us together now in this mourning of his passing and our rejoicing in having known and worked with him in this too brief time of fundamental turning and moving forward in Mississippi, this country and the world.

Chokwe said he wanted “to build a just and thriving city” with and for the people, one he could set forth as a model of achievement, possibility and promise for his people, the country and the world. As our people say in their own righteous and religious way, it was to be “a good and righteous city set upon a hill that could not be hid”. The movement to achieve this must and did, he said, start with the people, with the battle cry “the people must decide”. So “educate, motivate and organize” the people; form people’s assemblies where the people can speak, dialog, learn, plan together, get involved and become confident and self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation.

And Chokwe knew and told us many times, like Amilcar Cabral, people are fighting not just for ideas in our and their heads, but also to change the material conditions of their lives and to push their lives forward. Change comes, Chokwe said, not from revolutionary thought alone, but also and especially because we “change the material conditions of the people and get people to assist in the change, (and) be the mainstay in the change in their conditions”. It means, he said, moving them beyond the life and death struggle for simple survival and existence so that they can experience well-being, wholeness and

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eventually flourish. So he encouraged, in his talks and interviews, the people to embrace the *Kawaida* (and *Kwanzaa*) principles of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility) and *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics) in the cooperative creation of “a common culture where economy is something to be shared by all people together” which he called “a solidarity economy”.

He asked us to learn lessons, as he had, from our own history and culture of struggle, “a powerful movement, perhaps one of the most powerful movements the world has ever known and it’s still going on”. He raises Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King, Queen Mother Moore, Imari Obadele, Kwame Ture and others as models and mirrors to us all, in matters of dedication, discipline, sacrifice and love for the people. “The question becomes”, he said, “How do we keep the liberation movement going”? And here he stresses the need to link past, present and future involving all ages, especially the youth, teaching them who they are and what they must fight for. He tells us, “That’s the training of the future”.

Finally, he, like Mary McLeod Bethune, leaves us the legacies of faith and hope. In one of his many interviews after the election as Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, he spoke with audacious hope and faith in the people. He had said of Mississippi, the place he had chosen to work and called Kush, an ancient land of African excellence and achievement, “This is the place and this is a special place. I think some of the most significant things happen in

history when you get the right people in the right place at the right time, and I think that’s what we are”. That is to say, we are the right people in the right place and the right time. No need, he said, to argue about what plantation we’re on and which is the worst. For as Malcolm taught us, Mississippi is America and vice versa.

So we all have our Mississippi and must, as Marcus Garvey instructed us, dare to struggle wherever we are so we can each day on our own battlefield ask “who am I here?” in this place and time. And thus we can recognize ourselves as the all-season soldiers and servants of the people we need to be, and as a self-conscious part of the world-encompassing project Frantz Fanon urges of creating a new history of humankind. In this regard, Chokwe tells us, “We are not foolish enough to think that it is a mission that can probably be accomplished here in the absence of fundamental movement in the (larger) world, but we think we can start the movement and help carry it forward and help advance it in a really powerful way”.

Chokwe then has passed on to us his invitation to history which he accepted in the name of African people—on the Continent and the Diaspora—with strength, dignity and determination. And in honor of our ancestors, for the sake of our people and in the interest of our future and the world, we can do no less than accept it and dare contribute to achieving the good, just and sustainable society and world we all want and deserve to live in, in our own time and place. Hotep. Ase. Heri.

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