



**GARVEY'S WHIRLWIND; WATTS' AND FERGUSON'S FIRE:  
SIGNS AND OBLIGATIONS OF OUR TIMES**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART 2. NOW, IT IS MIN. MALCOLM WHO said, "There are signs for those who would see," those who look for signs of the times to understand where we are in history and "where we fit in the scheme of things" in the time in which we live, work and struggle. And if we read the signs rightly, every sign is an indication of obligation to understand and act in definitive ways. Thus, we cannot see and hear the whirlwind and not know the obligation Marcus Garvey left us as a legacy to free Africa and Africans everywhere. Nor can we see the transformative fires of today's struggle or remember those of the past and not realize their significance as signs and obligations of fierce, righteous and relentless resistance.

Reading the signs of the times is as old as our ancestors who stood up first and asked what is the message and meaning of this and that here on earth and in the heavens? Thus, if we read the signs of our time, we see a pandemic out of control, a sick society not only medically, but also morally and psychologically. We see self-inflicted wounds by a society that chose a radically evil and embarrassingly and woefully ignorant mimic of a man to rule and ruin it. We see a segment of a population that refused to recognize their vulnerability to the virus and their obligations not to infect, harm and kill others and who are busy creating conditions of sickness, suffering and death. They have met an enemy they cannot kill with their drones, smart bombs and other high-tech war machines. And they are frustrated and clamoring to be let out, to go to beaches, bars and stadiums and let the games begin. And we must resist this madness at every level.

Garvey taught us that we must have power to defend ourselves, develop ourselves and come into the fullness of ourselves. He said, "A race without power and authority is a race without respect." Indeed, he stated, "point to me a weak nation and I will show you a people oppressed, abused and taken advantage of by others. But show me a well-organized nation and I will show you a people and nation respected by the world."

It is this understanding that informed our concept of Black Power and led to our organization Us and other Black Power organizations holding three Black Power Conferences in 1966, 1967 and the last in August 1968. Also, it is within this context of Garvey's stress on the importance of power to defend against oppression and abuse and to demand respect and develop our own potential, that I offered this definition of Black Power. I defined Black Power as the "means to obtain three things: self-determination, self-respect and self-defense."

Self-determination meant then and means now, the right and responsibility to be free and control our own lives. Self-respect meant then and means now, the right and responsibility to be ourselves, to engage in culturally grounded practices and to honor in the most expansive ways the beautiful Blackness of ourselves. And self-defense meant then and means now our right and responsibility to defend ourselves against systemic and social violence and oppression *by any means society compels us to take and by all the efforts and any sacrifices required of us.*

And Garvey stresses the positive use of our power. He declares "our power will never be to oppress the human race, but we shall use our strength, physically and morally, intellectually and otherwise to preserve humanity" and build a new world. "We will teach (all) the way to life and peace, not by ignoring the rights of our brother (and sister) but by giving everyone (their) due." Indeed, the hand of justice, freedom and liberty shall be extended to all. Thus, power is a moral necessity of defense and development not a means to dominate others.

The principle and practice of self-determination is central and indispensable to Garvey's teachings and practice. He tells us that if we are to survive, develop and flourish, "...it must be done through our own efforts through our own energy." He speaks of agency, i.e., the choice and will to act when he says we must be "up and doing." This is reminiscent of the teaching of Min. Malcolm, a serious student and

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follower of Garvey, who taught we must wake-up, clean-up and stand-up. It is again an emphasis on agency. For in the final analysis, "We must realize that upon ourselves depend our destiny, our future and we must carve out that destiny, that future."

Garvey calls on us to deepen our love for our people and each other. He tells us that "The time has come for those of us who have the vision of the future to inspire our people to a closer kinship, to a closer love of self, because it is through this appreciation of self that we will be able to rise to that higher life" and unite "into one mighty bond so that we can successfully pilot our way through the avenues of opposition and the oceans of difficulties that seem to confront us."

The Hon. Marcus Garvey charges us to discover and understand ourselves; to raise and answer three questions: who am I; who am I here and what is expected of me? This is about seeing and being ourselves as an African people in oppression and resistance with a moral and meaningful message and model for the world. And it is about doing our duty well in the context of the time and place in which we live.

This applies, not only to our ongoing struggle against the pathology of oppression in general, but also what we are doing here and now in the context of the pandemic of COVID 19 and the struggles being waged against police violence and systemic racism. If we take Min. Malcolm's teaching seriously that "Wherever Black people are is a battleline," then, we know, as we say in Kawaida, "everywhere battleline; everyday a call to struggle." This means an obligation especially, not only to resist racism in society, but also to resist the residence and residue of racism in our hearts and minds, our homes, churches, mosques

and temples, our schools, college universities, our work sites, and the governmental bodies and authorities that impose this poison, pollution and oppression on us.

Thus, Garvey tells us that as self-respecting and self-determining Africans and human beings, we must "remould (ourselves), remake ourselves mentally and spiritually and place responsibility in (our) own two hands." For in the final analysis, regardless of our oppression and all the damage it does to us, we must heal ourselves, raise ourselves, and renew our lives in and for ourselves and our community. And this, so we can think freely, reconceive and reconstruct a new society and world and struggle audaciously and victoriously to bring them into being. As Garvey said sharing his vision: "I saw before me, then, as I do now, a new world of Black people, a nation of sturdy people, making their imprint on civilization and causing a new light to dawn on the human race."

**F**INALLY, HE CHALLENGES US SAYING, "LET US not try to be the best or worst of others, but let us make the effort to be the best of ourselves." And let us rise in unity and righteous and relentless struggle to form that whirlwind and storm that embodies and ensures Garvey's promise to return. We speak here of becoming and being that Garvey whirlwind, that Watts and Ferguson fire of our liberation movement that clear the way forward for reconceiving and reconstructing a liberated life, one lived without domination, deprivation and degradation and which offers the conditions and capacity to be ourselves, develop ourselves, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves.▲

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