



HOLDING GROUND AND MOVING FORWARD: IN RIGHTEOUS AND RELENTLESS STRUGGLE

Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-26-18, p.A-6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 1. THE AWESOME OVERARCHING TASK before us as a people, as an African people, remains one of righteous and relentless striving and struggle to be ourselves, free ourselves and build the good world we all want and deserve and leave a worthy legacy for those who come afterwards. In the words of our honored ancestors, it is about repairing, renewing and remaking ourselves and the world in liberating and liberated ways. And this overarching task has always had three interrelated and mutually influencing aspects and obligations. That is to say, a deep, demanding and unbudging active commitment to our past, pre-sent and future which is expressed and fulfilled in the context of our lives in our community, society and the world. This is the meaning of the Kawaida affirmation which says: this is our duty, to know our past and honor it; to engage our present and improve it; and to imagine a whole new future and to forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

This brings us to the ongoing and urgent need to hold our ground, constantly move courageously forward and forge our future in righteous and relentless struggle. To hold ground is to hold on to the rich, ancient and living legacy left us, the good we've done to advance it, and the spirit of the righteous and relentless love, work and struggle that produced and sustains it. In a word, the *Odu Ifa*, the sacred text of our honored ancestors, says it is to struggle eagerly and earnestly to increase good in the world and not let any good be lost. For we are divinely chosen to bring, increase and sustain good in the world and not let any good be lost. To move courageously forward is to strive mightily to bring new good in the world, to bear witness to truth, and set the scales of justice in their proper place among the voiceless, vulnerable and devalued. And it means contributing meaningfully to efforts and struggle to ease and end suffering, to practice and increase active caring, and to do good and justice for ourselves, others and the world.

And to imagine a whole new future and to forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways speaks to our need to constantly be concerned about those who come after us, about the world itself after we, as our honored ancestors say, have risen in radiance in the heavens and sit in the sacred circle of the ancestors. It's about wanting, working and struggling for the constant advancement of good in the world and imagining and forging a future worthy of the name and history, African.

We take up this topic in the midst of social madness, meanness and mayhem, and increased forms of domination, deprivation and degradation in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, age and any other differences the haters and hostiles find unacceptable in their narrow, noxious and nether-world minds. We live in an era of racial and religious scapegoating, kidnapping and separate-ing of children from their parents at the border and in our community under the camouflage and color of law. It's a time of continued and expanded police violence and mass incarceration, immigration bans, and gentrification and the destruction of Black communities as centers of life and culture, with monied White people walking and pampering their dogs and demanding police protection from the Black people they displace and replace.

And there is continuing lack of food security, clean water, available and affordable housing and health care, and gross and immoral inequities of wealth and power in this so-called democracy, which Min. Malcolm constantly called "disguised hypocrisy" and a nightmare of violence for the vulnerable and victimized. Thus, there is a great and ever-growing need for our people to remember and resume on a larger scale our role as a key moral and social vanguard in this country. And we must take up this challenge, not only because the times require it, but also because our history and culture demand it. For if we are to honor our past, improve our present and forge a new future, we cannot avoid it.

To say we must hold our ground is to raise two interrelated and unavoidable questions. First,

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what is the ground we must hold, and second, how do we hold it? The ground I speak of is *the source of ourselves* as African people, our views, values and practices that anchor us, uplift us and urge us to continue on the upward paths of our culture. I speak here of *the foundation and framework for what we do and why we do it*. I speak also of the gains we've achieved and the good we have brought to this society and world. And, of course, when we talk of how to hold our ground and move courageously and effectively forward, we know it all must be done in love, work and struggle in righteous, rigorous and relentless ways.

In the overarching concept of holding ground, there are four vital areas or kinds of ground we must hold: cultural ground; moral ground; relational ground; and political ground. Cultural ground is the first and all-encompassing ground, for it is the totality of thought by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. It is the ground on which we stand and go forward and it is the first and fundamental ground we must hold. Indeed, our moral, relational and political ground are rooted in our culture and we derive our identity, purpose and direction from it.

Our culture teaches us what is good and beautiful, right and just, and their opposites; how to relate rightfully and rewardingly, and the criteria for envisioning and building a good world. It teaches us that Blackness, Africanness, at its best is cultural consciousness and practice that is dignity-affirming, life-preserving, life-enhancing, and world-encompassing and concerned. And our culture teaches us that we are American by habit

and African by choice and we must self-consciously choose to be African every day and in all things good and beautiful.

Moreover, our culture teaches us that our oppressor cannot be our teacher regardless, that our allies cannot be our tutor no matter how well meaning, and that we must constantly dialog with African culture, asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the fundamental issues and problems facing Africans and humankind. And our culture teaches us, the quality of our lives and the success of our liberation struggle depends upon us waging cultural revolution within and political revolution without, resulting in a radical reconstruction of self, society and ultimately the world.

THE MORAL GROUND ON WHICH WE MUST stand and hold speaks to our holding to the best of our views, values and practices, and using them to ground ourselves, rightfully orient ourselves, and direct our lives toward good and expansive ends. It means we hold on in thought, emotion, speech and conduct to the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles): *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity) and *Imani* (Faith); and to the Seven Cardinal Virtues of *Maat*: truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and righteous order. And the essential starting point for embracing, standing on and holding this moral ground is the fundamental principle that Africa (its people and its culture) is a moral and spiritual ideal; that there is no people more sacred, chosen or elect, no history more holy and worthy of being taught or told, and no culture more ancient, rich and relevant to us than our own.

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