



**“KAMALA, PALESTINE AND NANA FANNIE LOU HAMER:  
QUESTIONING, CONFRONTING AND ACHIEVING THIS COUNTRY”**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-05-24, p. C-1*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**R**IGHTEOUSLY REFUSING TO BE SILENCED and defiantly demanding a seat at the table, Nana Fannie Lou Hamer speaking and lobbying for justice at the Democratic National Convention in 1964, reaffirmed that to achieve a just and good society, we must “question America”, confront its contradictions and radically change and achieve this country in the interest of freedom, justice and equality and other shared goods for the peoples of this country and ultimately the world. She knew and taught, as our ancient and ongoing ethical tradition teaches, that freedom is indivisible, that democracy of the few and favored is a contradiction in terms and a deceptive, dishonest and impossible practice, and that justice cannot be or mean “just us”, the so-called right race, religion, class, gender, etc. Here it is important that we not use Nana Hamer and our other honored ancestors as a convenient reference, but rather as a constant resource, as a model to emulate and a mirror by which we rightly and regularly measure ourselves.

Mrs. Hamer, fearless freedom fighter and co-founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), had come to the Democratic National Convention in 1964 to demand that the MFDP’s delegates who accompanied her be seated in the convention, rather than the all-White Mississippi Democratic Party delegates who were pillars and protectors of segregation, an American apartheid. Refusing the compromise which kept the segregationists in power, she and her delegation walked away from the charade of pomp and puffery, this democracy of rank hypocrisy and racist exclusion. But she gave testimony that was broadcast on national television and it is here that she raised the issues of questioning, confronting and changing America in the interest of a shared good for

all. Exposing the continuing context of daily savage racist violence, exclusion and oppression, she asked “is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave where . . . our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings?”

The DNC of 2024, by every measure of media manipulation and management, looked like a site of unquestionable unity, pervasive joy and radical inclusivity. But there can be no joy without justice and no unity without inclusiveness. Indeed, even with all the apparent unity, joy and inclusiveness, there were some people, voices and issues not there, not engaged, crudely rejected as unsuitable and unworthy of presence or place at the site of celebration and self-presentation of the chosen presidential and vice presidential candidates. We speak here especially about the Palestinians and the genocide being committed by Israel against them, but also of the poor and less powerful, the new Jim/Jane Crow, militarism, empire, and unfreedom and injustice on many levels to be confronted and corrected.

Here we must question this concept of a new America promised and projected. How do we claim unity, joy and inclusiveness by suppressing on the floor and refusing to provide space for the presence and self-representation of the Palestinian people on stage? With Nana Fannie Lou Hamer we ask is this the new America where one of the most important and urgent issues of our time and for the world: the ending of the Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian presence, voice and cause of freedom are prohibited and refused their rightful place at the DNC? Yes, the name Palestine was mentioned, the gruesome suffering of the people and support for a ceasefire and the right of Palestinians to statehood, security

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and self-determination. But like the segregation of Nana Hamer and the MFDP delegation, there was no place for the Palestinians on stage at the center of the claims of an inclusive America so that they and their representatives could speak the truth of their own narrative, one which clearly is as worthy of being told as any other, and certainly more worthy than the lies of commission, omission and message manipulation so freely offered by others.

Another point Nana Fannie Lou Hamer made that is highly relevant here is that we must not only question, confront and radically change America, but we must stop lying about things. This includes lying about what America has done and is doing to us, others and the world. For example, calling Israel's savagery and genocide “self-defense”. We, of course, can tell how vapid, vacuous and invalid the claim is by the lack of any definition or delineation offered of what in this mass killing qualifies as self-defense. Surely, we cannot claim the killing of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and wounding 100,000 plus, seventy-percent of whom are children and women, as self-defense. Nor can one claim self-defense in the destruction of churches, mosques, schools, universities, hospitals, heritage sites, water and food systems, humanitarian aid supplies and aid workers, doctors and health workers, journalists, writers and poets, babies in incubators and patients in bed, in a word, making everyone and everything a target in a frenzy of terroristic destruction and vengeful and racist bloodlust.

Also, Biden and company pretend they are for a ceasefire, working day and night and yet are still sending billions in weapons and other war materials and support to Israel to continue its mass killing and expand its killing fields in Palestine. This is the height of

Orwellian doublespeak and unspeakable dishonesty. Likewise, for Netanyahu and his rightwing government, there is, as Israelis daily declare, no real desire to secure the return of the Israeli hostages and no talk about or even consideration of the Palestinian hostages, cruelly culled from the whole of Palestine in practices reminiscent of the science fiction Wraiths, tortured, beaten, hung up with chains and sexually assaulted - children, women and men. Clearly, if they wanted the Israeli hostages, they would have retrieved them by now like they did with the first hostages, by negotiation, 105 released in a prisoner exchange and four released by Hamas unilaterally.

Finally, we are told it's all about winning, defeating Donald Trump. But there must be questions about what winning is, and winning for what and by whom and how to achieve a shared victory. Yes, it is clear that our people and progressives in this country want Kamala to win over Trump. But will she open a new path of freedom, justice, equality and radical inclusivity for everyone? And will it be a victory for Palestine and us and the vulnerable of this country and the world? Or will it be as before, with only a change in faces while policies stay in place? For it's not just about winning, but how we win and what we win.

Indeed, as our fathers and mothers taught us, “What would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” That is to say, lose one's ethical essence, one's defining essence as an African and human being? Here the *Odu Ifa* teaches us to consider our honor, our dignity in every struggle we wage. It says, “May the struggle we wage always add to our honor”, i.e., to our honor-enriching, dignity-affirming sense of ourselves.

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**A**ND THIS TOO, NANA FANNIE LOU HAMER teaches us, we must not narrow our notion of freedom, neither in terms of who is included nor what is included nor confuse it with seeking a comfortable place in oppression. Freedom to her and us as a people has always been to struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves, to be ourselves without punishment, penalty, prohibition, exclusion or oppression. And it is to free ourselves from all forms of domination, deprivation and degradation, and to free ourselves to live, love, learn, relate rightly, to

develop, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves. Nana Hamer’s faith was in an inclusive freedom born of righteous and relentless struggle. Thus, she tells us in her firmness of faith, “One day I know the struggle will (bring) change and it will be change not only for the people of the US (all the people) but (also for) people all over the world”. This is the new and promising path and possibility we want, and work and struggle so hard to achieve in these difficult, demanding, deceptive and dangerous times.▲

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