



**THE CONFEDERATE MIND OF AMERICA:  
DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND DOUBLE-DEALING**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

With all due respect to the eminence and awesome insightfulness of W.E.B. DuBois, it is not only de-centered and dislocated Blacks who suffer a “double-consciousness,” but also self-centered and supremacy-committed Whites, who constantly claim a common humanity but have racialized the world, and who advocate democracy but are unmistakably dedicated to racial domination at home and abroad. In his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois discussed what he defined as a *double-consciousness* among Blacks, troubled and traumatized by the Holocaust of enslavement and subsequent racist oppression. He defined this state of things as a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world. . .” Moreover, he further defines it as a feeling of “two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.” It is a struggle to be both African and American without diminishing and denying the relevance and reality of both.

But White America’s problem is not that it sees itself from others’ eyes, which would be a contribution to a corrective for its self-centered illusions of its superiority and righteousness. The problem is that its double-consciousness is rooted in a self-delusion which feeds on itself, seeing no need for dialog and deference to others. Indeed, such people have enclosed themselves in a cocoon of self-congratulatory conceptions of themselves.

From its inception, America, that is the U.S., exhibited a double-consciousness, a split personality we used to call schizophrenia. The Whites came to America, they said, to pursue religious freedom, but they refused to respect Native American religious beliefs, summing them up as savage, pagan and in need of coercive conversion to Christianity and White

“civilization.” Even among themselves, they were hostile to religious questioning and dissent and curiously and cruelly committed to burning their women as witches and thanking their God for bloody triumphs over the Native Peoples who had saved their lives and shared food and knowledge with them.

During the Holocaust of enslavement, the barbarous behavior toward Africans knew no limits, except what Whites wanted to impose on themselves. But still both South and North saw themselves as practitioners of a freedom, justice and equality of a most irrational and racialized kind. This is why Frederick Douglass, called upon to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, defiantly told this double-consciousness and double-dealing crowd, “Your celebration is a sham; your boast of liberty, an unholy alliance; your national greatness, swelling vanity . . . your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence . . . (and) your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery.”

Between 1861-1865, the U.S. fought against its Confederate mind and itself, waging a civil war against a system that no longer served its purpose. But the country’s war against itself during the Civil War, did not resolve its doubles-consciousness dilemma. It only contributed to self-soothing illusions of saving us from the South, its savage alter ego. Also, the country did not provide us with promised support to build our lives, and abandoned all pretensions of protection with the Hayes-Tilden Compromise which allowed the South to resubjugate us in various brutal ways.

Confederate America was clearly committed to racial domination, i.e., White supremacy on every level of life. In matters of wealth, power and status, there was no confusion or conflictual conversation about who was in charge and divinely chosen to

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rule, plunder and play God on earth. And they were ready to make war, lay waste to the land and destroy a country to defend and perpetuate this unworthy way of life. Meanwhile, the North, losing no sleep over its abandonment of Africans to their former enslavers, went about their own business, institutionalizing racism.

The Confederate mind privileges a racialized religion, a mock Christianity that equates White and Christianity and sees Whiteness rather than righteousness as the defining feature of their religious belief. Indeed, as Malcolm X says, these advocates of a racialized religion have so identified Whiteness and Christianity, "when you hear the white man bragging, 'I'm a Christian,' he's bragging about being a white man." For they interpret their role in religion and the world as "chosen people," the "elect," who use God to underwrite their racial illusions and oppression. It's this religion that Douglass condemned as "the religion of oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers and thugs."

The Confederate mind of America is likewise a racist mind whether raw or veiled. Racism here is not racial prejudice, i.e., hatred and hostility toward groups and persons for various irrational reasons. Rather it is the practice of turning that hatred and hostility into public policy. For example: enslavement laws; the Indian Removal Act and other anti-Native American policies; the Chinese Exclusion Act; the dispossession acts and laws against Mexicans of the Southwest; the Dred Scott Decision; Plessy v. Ferguson; segregation laws; Japanese Internment; unequal penalties and sentencing; the recent Arizona anti-immigration law and countless other examples of racism as imposition, ideology and institutional arrangement.

White liberals and leftists of various sorts would like to pass-off the Confederate-minded haters, howlers and madhatters as aberrations within a sane and praiseworthy mainstream. But like its Tea Party embodiment, the Confederate mind of America is part and parcel of the American mind as a whole, with even a little local color in the mixture. True, they are composed of religious and secular racists, militia men and women, birthers and Birchers, xenophobes, Zionists and evangelicals. But they also are middle class, educated and angry for unrevealed reasons, have nice houses and hopes in the suburbs, go to church, buy stocks, attend opera and offer other indications of commitment to White high culture. Thus, they are what many would call "normal Americans." And it is these, as the Tea Party members demonstrate, who also possess and display the Confederate mind of America.

In his 4<sup>th</sup> of July speech, Douglass made an earnest call for concerted struggle to strip away America's veil of self-deception and hypocrisy, end oppression and bring into being a society, not marked and marred by double-consciousness and double-dealing, but defined by a unity of thought, spirit and practice dedicated to the freedom and flourishing of all. And to do this, Douglass asked us to move beyond simple clarifying conversations on race to struggle to end racism itself. In the struggle, he tells us, "It is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake" of a united people and movement that dare to bring into being a new history and new horizon of hope for humankind.

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