



**AFRICAN LIBERATION DAY:
HARRIET TUBMAN AT THE CROSSROADS, MENELIK AT ADUA**
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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

This African Liberation Day, we are, as ever, at a critical time of turning and testing and we are again standing at the crossroads of history with Harriet Tubman, confronted as always with the question of choosing individual escape or the freedom of our people as a whole, of attempting to find comfortable places in oppression for ourselves and our families or committing and recommitting ourselves to clear free space and create the conditions and capacity for freedom, well-being, development and human flourishing for all. And we are likewise ever at Adua with Menelik II determined to do battle, to be victorious, to remain free, and to make and keep Ethiopia as a center, sanctuary and symbol of resistance and promise for Africans in oppression and in struggle on the continent and everywhere.

It is important for us to be conscious of the fact and quick to concede that we remain in the midst of struggle for the liberation of Africa and African people everywhere. And even though the heads of state of Africa agreed to change the name of African Liberation Day to Africa Day, in no way can we let the renaming of the day strip it of its history and meaning of struggle. For in spite of the changes of countries' names and the visible exit of the European rulers on the continent and in the Caribbean, the corporate, political and military hand of White supremacy still manipulates, causes confusion, wages secret and open wars, and controls the wealth of the richest continent in the world. And it still oppresses in all parts of the world African community, increasing pain, persistent poverty and destruction; ensuring suffering, death and

devastation in Haiti; bombing and resource-robbing in Libya; trying to erase the memory and meaning of the tragedy and the obligation to rebuild New Orleans; and using the face and front of an African American president as a moral mask to continue corporate plunder and imperial domination and war in the world.

In the face of this continuing oppression and plunder, we cannot in good conscience remain silent or inactive or find ourselves collaborating in our own or others' oppression. When the Italian imperialists tried to impose a protectorate on Ethiopia, Empress Taytu declared on behalf of the Ethiopian people and indeed Africa as a whole, "We are not the people to accept this. This will never be." And the Ethiopian people went to Adua to join in the victorious struggle against the invaders. We too then must say to our oppressor and ourselves repeatedly, "we are not the people to accept this." For as Queen Mother Moore taught us, "Those who seek temporary security rather than basic liberty deserve neither." Indeed, there is no security without justice and no justice without freedom.

However, if we are not the people to accept our oppression and enslavement, then we must wage a rigorous and relentless struggle. As Harriet Tubman reminded us, we must be ready to make the supreme sacrifice; "We must go free or die and freedom is not bought with dust." In a word, the struggle for liberation is not cheap or without challenge, and there is no easy walk or way to freedom, but the struggle must and will be waged.

Let us also commit and recommit ourselves to struggle, then, and to core

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principles and practices that keep us on the upward paths of our ancestors. And key among these core principles must be the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, which have been embraced throughout the world African community and serve as a path to liberation and a living practice of good in and for the world. They are *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith).

It is no accident that the first principle is *Umoja*, unity. It is the hub and hinge on which all the other principles and accompanying practice depend. For without unity there is no possibility of the struggle, work, service and institution-building required for freeing, repairing and rebuilding ourselves and the world. The principle of *Umoja* (unity) calls for a deep and enduring sense of kinship with African people everywhere, for us to build relationships of solidarity and struggle, and of cooperative work, investment, mutual support and varied forms of exchange. In a word, it is to create and recreate the spirit and space for the practice of pan-Africanism as a lived and life-enhancing experience.

Malcolm asks us, “Can you imagine what can happen, what would certainly happen if all of these African-heritage people ever realize their blood bonds, if they ever realize a common goal, if they ever unite?” But to what end do we seek and strive for unity? Clearly, it must be in the interest of our people on the continent and in the world African community as a whole. As Mwalimu Julius Nyerere said, “all the

reasons for African unity can be summed up in one phrase—the welfare of the people of Africa. Their greater freedom is the objective: that is the freedom from outside oppression, from poverty and from the possibility of inter-African wars.” Surely, when we look at past and current wars in Africa, especially in Congo, and the devastating toll they take on the people, we see the wisdom in his words and the urgency of the project and practice of unity. Moreover, as Kwame Nkrumah taught, not only could a unified Africa serve the interest of African people, but also “a unified Africa would become one of the greatest forces for the good of the world (and) another bulwark for world peace.”

Surely, it is through unity and the work and struggle that grows out of it and our commitment to the liberation and uplift of our people on the continent and in the diaspora that we can achieve for our people the necessities of life, security of person and peace, human rights, sexual equality, sustainable development, reparations, social justice and environmental care. In a word, we can, as Patrice Lumumba urged us, secure our people’s “right to an honorable life, a dignity without stain, and an independence without restriction.” This clearly requires that we have *Imani* (faith), profound faith in our people, in their capacity to liberate and uplift themselves, and in the reality of their role as injured physicians who have the knowledge, skill and will to heal, repair and transform themselves and their lives in the process of healing, repairing and transforming the world and opening a new horizon of human history.

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