

# SANKOFA SANKORÉ

*A Ritual Acknowledgement Ceremony and Statement of Atonement for the Stolen Legacy, Labor, and Lives of Enslaved Africans in the Americas and their Descendants throughout the Pan-African Diaspora.*

By

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Sunday, May 9, 2021



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“We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered... A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” April 1967

“There is no doubt that, at this time in history. Western civilization is suffering from a great sickness of the soul. The West's progressive turning away from functioning spiritual values; its total disregard for the environment and the protection of natural resources; the violence of inner cities with their problems of poverty, drugs, and crime; spiraling unemployment and economic disarray; and growing intolerance toward people of color and the values of other cultures—all of these trends, if unchecked, will eventually bring about a terrible self-destruction. In the face of all this global chaos, the only possible hope is self-transformation. Unless we as individuals find new ways of understanding between people, ways that can touch and transform the heart and soul deeply, both indigenous cultures and those in the West will continue to fade away, dismayed that all the wonders of technology, all the many philosophical ‘isms,’ and all the planning of the global corporations will be helpless to reverse this trend.”

— Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 1994

~ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE ELDERS ~

“If some people forget their past as a way to survive,  
other people remember it for the same reason.”

– Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 1994

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Namaskar (*The God in me recognizes the God in you*). In the spirit of our ancestors, beloved community, mutual respect, and the African tradition of honoring our elders, I, \_\_\_\_\_, ask permission from the eldest person in the presence of my voice to speak and, therein, commence this ritual acknowledgement of the stolen legacy, labor, and lives of enslaved Africans in the Americas and their descendants throughout the Pan-African Diaspora, upon which the wealth of western cultures was established through centuries of colonial exploitation, exclusion, and the dehumanizing construction of a racial caste hierarchy.

[Proceed once permission is granted from the eldest person present.]

Today, we pause to acknowledge the stolen legacy, labor, and lives of enslaved Africans in the Americas who, despite the commission of these intergenerational crimes against their humanity, survived the trauma of their enslavement through resistance and resilience.

Today, we recognize the cumulative impact and historical trauma of racialized violence, oppression, and state-sanctioned terrorism on our collective humanity.

Today, we advance the journey of atonement by honoring the strength, wisdom, power, and spirit of our ancestors...

~ INVOCATION OF THE ANCESTORS ~

“Some people are your relatives but others are your ancestors,  
and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors.  
You create yourself out of those values.”

– Ralph Ellison (1914 – 1994)

~

“We have to call the names of the ancestors, of the people that have brought us to this point. We came in as enslaved Africans, distributed throughout the world. The fact that we exist is a miracle. It’s a miracle because we have decided intentionally, to recreate our lives, recreate family... It’s our responsibility to make sure that our people are not invisible, that our people are seen as agents of change because we built this country. We built it! Any monument that you see, we built, right? So how do you not call our people’s names?”

– Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, *In Our Mothers’ Gardens*, 2021

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In this moment, we invoke the sacred and empowered names of our ancestors:

[Invite people to speak the names of African Americans they choose]

In the spirit of these often unsung, but also unforgotten names and their legacies, their exploited labor, and their resilient lives, we honor them by remembering our past, recognizing our present, and realizing our potential. Today and every day, we take responsibility for the destiny of this nation, and we do so in full awareness of the fact that our country and our culture is the inheritance of those who were denied and disinherited from the wealth of their hands and the nation they built; disenfranchised from the self-determination of their economic aspirations, civil and political rights; and dehumanized through systems of racial discrimination.

From Black August and Black History Month to Juneteenth and “What to the Enslaved is the Fourth of July?” – our legacy, labor, and lives have and always will matter because we are the eternal reflection of the infinite divine, the self-knowing mind that defies space and time, the I/eye of universal consciousness manifesting in the specificity of our radiant skins – the *I Am A Man* and *Ain’t I A Woman* affirmations of our being within the humanity of our doing what we continuously do: resist cultures of dehumanization engendered by the post-slavery logic of a nation birthed in our blood and built on our backs.

By continually reimagining and rewriting the meaning of freedom, justice, history, prosperity, and sovereignty, beyond the parameters of racial capitalism, we reclaim our ancestors' legacy, labor, and lives. We drum, dance, decolonize, and dismantle racial caste systems of social control maintained by the false politics of fear, the fraudulent economics of debt and scarcity, and the fallacious ideology of anti-Black structural racism in all its evolving forms and by all its destructive means, names, and machinations (white supremacy, manifest destiny, Jim Crow, the war on drugs, separate but equal, "voter fraud," and the criminal justice system).

- ◆ We resist the avarice and wanton cupidity of consumerism and racism;
- ◆ We refuse the dehumanization of mass incarceration and the state-sanctioned violence of racist domestic terrorism;
- ◆ We reject the temptation to be satisfied with survival, or delimit our dreams and our discourse through complacency or complicit assimilation or silent acquiescence to the hegemonic, normative, imposition of a status quo existence relegated to the margins of so-called minority politics;
- ◆ We are the "creatively maladjusted," melanin majority—the mothers and fathers of humanity—and we stand in the space our ancestors forged from this earth with the indomitable spirit of those who thrive and rise despite the tides of oppression beating against the shores of our bodies, our minds, our unconquerable souls.
- ◆ We reclaim and reconstruct our names and our nation with awareness and by Constitutional amendment or revolution; not by domestic terrorism and coup d'état (Jan. 6, 2021).
- ◆ And we commit these acts of courage and defiance and resistance with joy and love and creativity because Black Legacy Matters, Black Labor Matters, and Black Lives Matter.

In the spirit of our ancestors, ashe, amen, inshallah.

~ A STATEMENT OF ATONEMENT ~

“We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future... [But] America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.”

– Frederick Douglass (1817 ~ 1895), “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (1852)

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“For the horrors of the American Negro’s life,” wrote James Baldwin (1924 ~ 1987), “there has been almost no language.” Baldwin argued that the “unspeakable crimes” against our humanity have produced “unnameable objects” —objects that seem to accumulate with each passing generation, overwhelming the U.S. social landscape like grotesque scenes from an installation by artist Kara Walker. The American pastime of lynching; the “necropolitics” of sentencing disparities and the lifetime incarceration of our children; the social policing and criminalization of Black bodies; the banal spectacle of police murder and the insouciance it produces with respect to the value of Black lives — all such horrors defy comprehension except for when viewed through the lens, and within the logic of “white supremacy,” or what author Michelle Alexander describes as the “system of racialized social control” that reproduces a racial undercaste in America.

Inarguably, healing the deep psychological, physical, social, and emotional wounds inflicted by the trauma of racism—including colorism, implicit bias, and microaggressions—requires more than truth-telling, acknowledgment, and reconciliatory gestures. Atonement and holistic healing, in fact, requires what Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) called “the annihilation of caste,” and the simultaneous advancement of racial equity, justice, and reparations. “The Negro was granted freedom from physical slavery,” wrote Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) in 1967, “But he was not given land to make that freedom meaningful.” Recognizing the inherent hypocrisy of a brokered freedom *sans* the material resources and political rights to realize and protect it, King ultimately concluded: “It is a miracle that the Negro has survived.”

In order to overcome the near aphasia resulting from racial terrorism and trauma that Baldwin describes, we must reckon with the fact that America is highly indebted to Black America; and reparations is the structural adjustment program we, the native sons and daughters of enslaved Africans in the U.S., require in order to reconcile the debt. The gravity of this moral, social, economic, and political imperative has been rendered even more conspicuous in light of the disparate racial impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the white supremacist terrorism incited by former President Trump and enabled by members of law enforcement, which led to the attempted terrorist insurrection at the U.S. Capital on January 6th, 2021.

Just months prior to his assassination in 1968, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. succinctly articulated the case for reparations. After enumerating the myriad ways in which the U.S. government has redistributed our nation's wealth to white Americans, Dr. King famously concluding his remarks to an audience of poor, civil-rights supporters in rural Mississippi during the campaign to organize a Poor People's March on Washington, D.C., with the following words: "Now, when we come to Washington in this campaign, we're coming to get our check." Put differently, As James Baldwin commented in one of the last interviews he gave before dying in 1987, "The human fact is this: that one cannot escape anything one has done. One has got to pay for it. You either pay for it willingly or pay for it unwillingly."



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