



**INTERPRETING OUR RIGHTEOUS OUTRAGE:  
RETAINING ITS SPIRIT AND SPECIALNESS**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 04-19-07, p. A-7

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

If we are not careful and rightfully attentive to the interpretation and preservation of our own history, we could miss or minimize the magnitude and larger meaning of our successful struggle to remove the powerful and protected icon of racist rantin, Don Imus, from two major networks within a week. It should be a time now to review how it was done, call for retention of the righteous outrage against all forms of oppression and carry this passion and commitment into the unfinished fight for racial and social justice in the media and larger society.

But the media has already begun to reshape the discourse from criticism and condemnation of racism, Imus, itself, and the larger society to gangsta rap and us. Our desire as a people to be fair, even to our oppressor, and the media and academic manipulation of our minds, sometimes cause us to co-sign the pathological presentation of our community by the dominant society, to feel responsible for our own oppression, and to confess to high crimes and misdemeanors we didn't commit, and to things in the media and the middle of America we have no control over. But we must resist this.

First, let us recognize it was by any standard, a quick and decisive victory. The media moguls had hoped to put Imus on ice for a couple of weeks of public relations rehab and repentance and then return him contrite and triumphant. But the masses would accept no compromise and the National Association of Black Journalists, the internet activists, Black media employees and executives, Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, the African American Leadership Family, the National Congress of Black Women, and other national and local activist groups, involved

Native American, Latino, Asian and White allies and mobilized millions to send e-mails, make calls, march, picket, demonstrate, and demand the end of Imus and the way the media treats us as persons and a people.

Although these racist things had happened before, this time it was different; and like with Sis. Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Black community in 1955, it was the spark that set a whole forest on fire. It was the target, the text, the venue and the time that were the sources of the righteous outrage and organized resistance. At the heart of it all was a defense of our daughters, a standing up for the dignity and sake of our younger sisters, refusing to let them be an easy and undefended target of White racism and *racist sexism*. It was the racial viciousness of the text of the attack, an unprovoked and racist verbal savaging of the young and innocent at play without warning or warrant.

It was also the venue, in public and plain sight for the world to see and hear in horror and deep disgust, a public pillorying of children even, denying them a chance to understand and assert themselves in dignity-affirming ways and to enjoy this wonderful period of their lives. And it was the time, a coming to a point after years of hearing and watching the white-sheet antics, verbal cross-burning, linguistic lynching, and the arrogant assaults on our dignity, when finally the retaining walls weakened and the flood waters of righteous outrage broke through. It was a struggle well-waged and a victory well-won. And it is important to pursue it within a larger arc of concern about the enduring problem of racism in the media and society as a whole.

But unable to admit racism beyond the forced concession of Imus, the media turned

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

to cultivation of a context in which their social indictment of us and our indictment of ourselves would overlap and coincide. It began with appeals to forgive and forget, to demonstrate mercy and moral humbleness toward Imus, the iceman, whose addiction to “acceptable racism” and mean-spiritedness reaches back to the reign of Reagan and his dismissive impatience with the poor and vulnerable.

The media moved quickly to make Imus’ attack more a case of sexism than racism; to divide the community into realms of male and female recriminations about rap and their relationships. They also convinced some it was the money rather than the movement that compelled their concession. And they suggested we resolve the problem of rap before we charge them with racism and racist sexism, and that they and Imus had forced us into a discussion we had long since begun and to which they themselves would not give space. Indeed, their corporations produce, promote, protect and profit from the music and madness they pretend to find offensive. Moreover, their children buy four out of every five rap CD’s sold and they have yet to have discussions which indict themselves, their children, parents and community as a whole.

Perhaps, we are at a Rosa Parks-Martin King moment in which we can rebuild our movement and move this country further along the road to radical reconstruction and human flourishing. If so, it is good to remember King’s closing words at the first

mass meeting of the historical Montgomery bus boycott and a new phase in the Movement. He said, “as we prepare ourselves for what lies ahead, let us go out with the grim and bold determination that we are going to stick together; we are going to work together.” So that “when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, ‘there lived a race of people, a Black people, *fleecy locks and Black complexion*, a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. And thereby they injected a new meaning in the veins of history and of civilization’.”

Our task is to intensify our struggle, internally and externally, to create the good community and just society we deserve. For we realize it’s not just the songs but the system we must challenge and change and transform ourselves in the process. Indeed, the system is responsible for our oppression, but we are responsible for our liberation on every level.

This means not letting our oppressor be our teacher, set our agenda or escape culpability by blaming us, and hiding his hand, not just in the rise and retention of gangsta rap, but also in the social and racial domination and degradation our people struggle against daily. And it means strengthening and rebuilding our male/female relations and families on the basis of mutual respect, equality, reciprocity and shared responsibility in love, life and the struggle to end the evil and injustice that systemically surrounds and oppresses us.