



**CAMPAIGNING WITH DR. MCKENNA:
FORGING A FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-19-14, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Part 2. In addition to the people's rejection of an imposition and their reaffirmation of self-determination; the excellence of Dr. George McKenna as a candidate; and the dedication, determination and skill of Team McKenna; a fourth factor that contributed to the McKenna and community victory was the opposing candidate, Atty. Alex Johnson. Atty. Johnson was not a strong candidate and was perceived essentially on the ballot as a surrogate and "supportee" of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas. He suffered what could be ordinarily called a disqualifying credentials deficiency, offering inadequate evidence of any real, serious or sustained experience or knowledge in education or educational administration.

Moreover, he could not shake the shadow he shared with Mr. Ridley-Thomas and could not escape the identity of a dependent proxy rather than an independent and competent candidate. Also, a third problem was his lackluster performance and repeated absences at community candidate forums which yielded him no gains and only added to his image as an unqualified proxy, offering none of the "new ideas" some argued a younger person would bring. On the other hand, the forums reminded many and revealed to others the excellent credentials of Dr. McKenna who drew from a wealth of knowledge and experience, having served as a teacher, principal, superintendent and educational consultant for many years.

Finally, the victory was also, in a significant measure, a reflection of the community's conscious resistance to Supervisor Ridley-Thomas' politics in this matter. For in spite of the urgency of an appointment for the seat vacated by the passing of Dr. Marguerite LaMotte, and thus the vital need of immediate representation, as the majority of the community had argued, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas

had opposed it and supported an election. This ensured the lack of community representation on the board in a time of urgent decision-making on critical issues. And the board, for its own racial, racialized and even racist reasons, supported this position and instead offered the community a symbolic presence with a no-voting power and no participation in areas considered crucial to effective and rightful district representation. This appeared to many as not only a gross mistake in judgment by the supervisor, but also a dismissal of legitimate and pressing community concerns.

Furthermore, it was strongly felt that he favored an election rather than the appointment process to allow more time to shore up his candidate which on professional grounds could not compare or compete with the community's choice for appointment. It seemed to be assumed that the election would provide the opportunity to use money and media to obscure and even "erase" this inadequacy. After all, the corporate conception and barber-shop belief was/is that with money, media and manipulation of information and image, you can make almost anyone into almost anything. So if, as history has shown, you can turn a "B" actor into a president and a body builder into a governor, you can also turn a lawyer into a qualified educational representative, although he clearly has inadequate experience in education or educational administration.

As we move into the run-off, there are lessons in all of this for the supervisor, the community's candidate and the community itself. Certainly, Supervisor Ridley-Thomas should not take the defeat of his candidate personally. For this could make him less responsive to reason and less receptive to reassessment of his plans and practices. After all, he and Dr. McKenna are friends and he has many supporters in the community. Also, he should realize and accept the fact that his candidate

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was not the best or better choice; that his opposition to the urgent and immediate representation of District 1 was not a good move; and that it suggested an unacceptable self-serving at the expense of the children and in disregard of community concerns and support for immediate representation, as the results of the first round of voting reveal.

One of the greatest challenges Supervisor Ridley-Thomas will have in the coming run-off is to not let Atty. Johnson's campaign stoop to mudslinging in desperation, which is a hallmark of American politics, especially when a candidate's credentials are inadequate or unsellable. Clearly, here we all must be reminded that our oppressor cannot be our teacher and that, as Malcolm taught us, the logic of the oppressed cannot be the logic of the oppressor, if they seek liberation and higher levels of human life. And as we say in Kawaia philosophy, although we are so often American by habit, we must continuously be African by choice, constantly bringing forth our best ideas, values and practices. Therefore, what would bring praise to Supervisor Ridley-Thomas and his candidate, Atty. Johnson, and honor and relief to the community is if Atty. Johnson would bow out in the interests of our children and community, conceding, even if not publically stating it, that Dr. McKenna is the better and best candidate. But again, we live and struggle in America and such things are not often done.

The lessons for Dr. McKenna and the community, then, is to "keep hope alive" about others, but also maintain our own fer-

vor, faith and will to struggle. Further-more, we must keep in mind that this first victory came from a spoken and unspoken covenant between the community and candidate, a covenant of mutual respect, mutual benefit, accountability and cooperation for common good, and this covenant must not be broken, weakened, dismissed or played down. For in a larger sense, the campaign is not only about this election (as important as it is), but also about a new kind of politics beyond trading favors, repaying funding, isolated and indentured leadership endorsements, and candidates picked and presented for unquestioned acceptance without adequate engagement with the community for which they presume and pretend to speak. Indeed, it is about a new covenantal politics which opens up a new way to relate to each other, respect and count on each other, and be responsive and responsible to each other.

Let us dare to struggle and dare to win again, then. But, as we celebrate and contemplate our initial victory, let us remember this lesson of Amilcar Cabral: that in our righteous and demanding struggle, we must "mask no difficulties, tell no lies and claim no easy victories". Thus, as we hope for the best, let's prepare for all that may come and intensify the struggle. For the stakes are too high to go to the battlefield unconscious of history, unprepared for the present and simply hope for a future we ourselves don't forge in the fire and furnace of our own, work, sacrifice and struggle.

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