



**FOR TRAYVON AND OUR PEOPLE:
RADICAL RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The savage and senseless murder of Trayvon Martin drives another nail in the coffin of “post-racial” confusion and double-talk about the devastating racial and racist reality of life and lived experience in U.S. society. So, we pause and pay homage to Trayvon’s shortened youthful life, to mourn his unnatural and undeserved death and to share as best we can the immeasurable loss and incalculable grief continually suffered by his mother, Sybrina Fulton, and his father, Tracy Martin, as well as other family members and friends. And we also commit ourselves to stand and act in solidarity with them to bring Trayvon’s killer to justice, hold the police accountable for coddling and covering up for the killer, and to put an overdue end to the racist practices that have led to targeting, assaulting, arresting, false convictions, wrongful imprisonment and killing of so many other Black boys and men in Sanford, Florida and throughout the country.

Indeed, the local and national African American community have rightfully risen up in revolt against the brutal injustice, vulgar irrationality and violently racist character of it all. And they, thru struggle, have raised up a hidden horror of racial injustice, forced the resignation of the police chief and state attorney general, prompted federal and state intervention and called into action people of good will around the world. Thus, others in this country and around the world who also truly value children, cherish life and love justice have joined in this critical and compelling struggle to demand justice for Trayvon and to raise the larger issue of justice for all who have suffered and are continually threatened by similar racist targeting, brutal and degrading treatment, and deadly violence from both vigilantes and police.

The racist targeting and savage taking of

Trayvon’s life evolves as he, a 17-year old Black youth, is walking back to the residence his father and he are visiting, having gone to the store for a bag of candy and a can of tea. He is seen and targeted by George Zimmerman, a White Hispanic, a self-appointed overseer of an imaginary White plantation, self-medicated and drunk on racial myths and pathetic dreams of undeserved relevance, and a trigger-happy guardian of racialized space.

Zimmerman calls 911 to share his racist slurs and illusions, describing Trayvon as “suspicious”, “walking and looking around”, “up to no good”, and “on drugs or something”, etc. He is explicitly told not to follow Trayvon, but high on racial hatred, he continues to pursue him. Thus, we hear in horror how Trayvon is hunted down as prey, how he tries to elude this prehistoric hunter of boys and men, and how he is intercepted and killed in cold blood as he cried for help.

It is said that Florida’s “Stand Your Ground and Shoot First” Law contributed to this vicious killing of Trayvon. Certainly, it gives some support and sanctuary to Zimmerman and kind, but it is only part of the social picture. The larger source of support and sanctuary for this *callous* and *cave* behavior is society itself, and the deep-rooted remains of racist thought and practice. And it is this racism that provides the ready-made and repeatedly used store of racial stereotypes and irrationalities which are already part of the racist counter discourse to demonize and indict Trayvon, the child, and the unarmed and pursued victim and to defend and exonerate Zimmerman, the adult and armed and out-of-control aggressor.

The killing of Trayvon, then, is not an isolated incident in either number, kind or location, but a pervasive and persistent

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problem in the country, rooted in racism and the centuries old practice of *racializing crime and criminalizing a particular “race” or people*. To racialize crime is to consider it a racial characteristic, instead of a social reality and as a racial problem of a particular people rather than a social problem of society as a whole. This leads to criminalization of a “race”, especially, peoples of color, tagging and targeting them as a menace to society.

In such a racialized and ultimately racist context, Black boys and men are seen as especially dangerous, always under suspicion and as a result, are routinely denied *the right of presence, security of person, equal protection under the law and ultimately the right to life*. Thus, Black boys and men are constantly apprehensive about being out of racial and social bounds, trapped behind enemy lines, and classified as “enemy combatants”, long before Bush coined the term to deny POWs legal and human rights. And their parents and other loved ones share this persistent apprehension, for they know that no matter how much survival instruction and advice they give them about racially appropriate speech, behavior, dress and attitude, the racist character of society still leaves them vulnerable and potential victims. President Obama indirectly reaffirmed this shared Black male vulnerability in his customarily cautious and indirect way, saying “If I had a son, he would look like Trayvon.”

It is said in some quarters that it’s not an issue of Black and White, but one of justice; however, the victim is Black and the justice is

for him, his family and his people. If a Jew was targeted as a Jew and sought justice, we would not say, it’s not about Jew and anti-Jew, it’s just about justice. *Thus, if racial injustice is imposed on us, recognition of it and racial justice are required to remove it*. Are we to outlaw racism discourse because it makes our oppressors and the peace-without-justice crowd uncomfortable? Or are we to follow the ancient African moral mandate “to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place among those who have no voice”, i.e., the vulnerable, violated and murdered?

It is a righteous, good and historic struggle we wage here, not only for justice for Trayvon and family, but for all the others who have suffered and continue to suffer in this social context of racism, racial vulnerability and systemic violence—structural and personal. This and other particular struggles must be linked to our larger struggle for *radical racial and social justice* around issues of wealth, power and status. And we must remain steadfast and not be diverted or dispirited by inevitable calls for calm, healing, reconciliation, official hearings, deference to formal processes, and *a passive peace without justice*. Our struggle has always been against oppression and exploitation in various forms and this continues to require the relentless, rightful and radical transformation of society, marking out the fields and laying the foundation for maximum human freedom, justice and flourishing and the Maatian well-being of the world.

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