



**THE MURDER AND MARTYRDOM OF GEORGE FLOYD:
THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF HIS SACRED SACRIFICE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-05-25, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE MURDER AND MARTYRDOM OF NANA GEORGE FLOYD on May 25, 2020, and our 5th anniversary commemorations to mark the taking and legacy of his life do not end the day they happened, but rather remain with us. Indeed, they have an awesome and enduring afterlife of remembrance, sustained trauma, grieving, reflection and ongoing struggle. Moreover, these momentous tragedies and traumas in our lives are also lived and living experiences and initiatives that reflect ongoing realities of oppression and resistance on every level.

It is only right, then, that when we remember the murder and martyrdom of Nana George Floyd, we reflect on and respond rightly to the multiple meanings of his sacred sacrifice. We speak here of the unintentional and undeserved loss of his life in an undeclared war against our people with all its lethal and destructive consequences. However, regularly and routinely, these multiple meanings are subsumed and hidden under one tired and tedious question put to us to frame, focus and limit our engagement with these meanings. And that question is: whether any progress has been made since his murder and martyrdom? This reduces the conversation and concerns to one question with basically three most often given answers: yes, no, or some, but still a long way to go.

This focus has several conceptual and conversational flaws. First, it fails to focus on the fact that whatever progress or gains made are because of the struggle of the people, not out of the kindness, consideration or awakened moral conscience of the oppressors. Also, such a conversation tends to confuse and conflate what we have done and

achieved in struggle with what the oppressive system has failed to do right and its ongoing retrograde resistance to progress. And this can lead too often to turning to criticism of us as persons and a people in some self-condemning, self-injuring way, leaving the question of the injustice, even savagery, of the system inadequately engaged, explored and exposed. But, if we resist and reject the system's framing the issue and its striving to maintain definitional dominance, then the multiple meanings of the murder and martyrdom of Nana George Floyd will clearly unfold and expand our concerns, considerations and conversations.

The first of the multiple meanings of his sacred sacrifice is *the shared loss, trauma, grief, post-traumatic stress and heightened sense of anxiety and vulnerability* this engendered for his family, friends, his community and for us as a people. For his needless and savagely inflicted murder was a shared loss we all felt and continue to feel deeply as a people in oppression and resistance. Indeed, it was the sheer and prolonged savagery of his murder that compelled the focus, revulsion and resistance in this country and around the world. It was a rabidly racist savagery seared in our minds and it reaffirmed the pervasive pattern and practice of police violence and the depraved disregard for Black lives and Black people.

Also, this public lynching rightly provoked *our increased and expanded resistance with a global reach*, not only to police violence, but also to the anti-Black racism that expresses itself as public policy and socially sanctioned practice. We saw, see and posed police violence as a fundamental feature of our oppression, as a concentrated physical,

**THE MURDER AND MARTYRDOM OF GEORGE FLOYD:
THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF HIS SACRED SACRIFICE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-05-25, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

legalized, visible and daily-present expression of general systemic violence which takes various other forms in social life, i.e., political, psychic, economic, educational, etc. Here violence is defined as unjust and intentionally injurious and lethal force, and though it may be legal and imposed under the camouflage and color of law, it is always immoral, and thus we are morally obligated to resist it.

Given that violence is a fundamental feature of this system of oppression and police violence is central to it, the murder and martyrdom of Nana George Floyd and our increased and intense struggle for justice for him and others, *reaffirmed that the struggle against police violence is part and parcel of our overall struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves*. Indeed, against anti-Black racism, we dare to create conditions to be ourselves without penalty, punishment or oppression. And we struggle to free ourselves not only from the violence of authorized agents of the system, but also from the pervasive violence of the system itself with its various forms of domination, deprivation and degradation of those different and vulnerable.

In the midst of the civil rights phase of the Black Freedom Movement wracked by bombing, brutal beatings, physical and legal lynchings, Haji Malcolm declared the whole country a “war zone”. And he maintained that we were/are struggling against “an enemy that is as vicious and criminal and inhumane as any war-making country has ever been.” Moreover, he stated “In this country, wherever a Black (person) is, there is a battleline.” And we are “living in a country that is a battleline for all of us.” And it is within this understanding that we often said during the Black Power phase of the Black Freedom Movement to reluctant participants that “you

might not be at war, but you are in a war” and are obligated to defend yourself and free yourself.

Another meaning of the murder and martyrdom of Nana George Floyd is how *it invites and urges us to consider the reality and role of martyrdom in our lives and liberation struggle*. Martyrdom is usually relegated to the realm of religion, and a martyr is defined as a person who is killed or sacrifices their life for their faith. But a martyr can also be defined as one who is killed or sacrifices their life for a cause or righteous struggle. Our grounding and guiding cause and righteous struggle is for the dignity and rights of African people and every human being, their rights to life, freedom, justice, equal treatment, and the conditions and capacities to live a good and meaningful life, develop, flourish and come into the fullness of themselves.

In the long, casualty-laden history of our righteous and relentless struggle, we have millions of martyrs, who lost or sacrificed their lives in the interest, advancement and victory of our sacred cause and struggle. Indeed, there are two kinds of martyrs, two kinds of persons whose lives become a sacred sacrifice in the interest of African and human good and the well-being of the world and all in it: the *intentional* and *unintentional*. The intentional martyrs are those like Haji Min. Malcolm X and Rev. Dr. Martin L. King who in the face of threatened and almost certain death, refused to back down, turn back or walk away from the battlefield until the struggle was won. Indeed, they self-consciously offered their life and death to this sacred struggle for an inclusive and shared good in the world. The second type of martyrs are the unintentional ones, those who do not and did not intend to be martyrs but are victims of a

**THE MURDER AND MARTYRDOM OF GEORGE FLOYD:
THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF HIS SACRED SACRIFICE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-05-25, p. B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

vicious multifront war against their people and the oppression of their people. These include Nana George Floyd, Nana Breonna Taylor, Nana Tamir Rice, Nana India Kager, Nana Amadou Diallo, Nana Elijah McClain and oh so many others. It is the sacred teachings of our honored ancestors that all lives are sacred, and thus whether they are offered or taken in the context and waging of our liberation struggle we are obligated to uplift and honor their sacred sacrifice.

AND FINALLY ONE OF THE MULTIPLE meanings of the murder and martyrdom of Nana George Floyd is that *we uplift*

and honor his sacred sacrifice and those of all other martyrs as well as all others who offered their lives in various ways to the sacred cause. And we do this by making an active commitment to continue the struggle, keep the faith and hold the line until victory is achieved and everyone shapes and shares the inclusive and ongoing good for the world we as a people have suffered, sacrificed and struggled so long, hard and courageously for. ▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of *Kwanzaa*; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*; *The Message and Meaning of Kwanzaa: Bringing Good Into the World* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.