



**HONORING TRAYVON, SAVING OUR SONS:
RECOMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

So, there we were once again at this painfully uncomfortable, but familiar place, waiting and wondering, waiting for simple justice in the case of the killing of Trayvon Martin, hoping for the best and fearing the worst, and wondering whether a jury of women and mothers would make a difference or if the deep-rooted racialized pattern of dispensing justice would persist and prevail. In a word, we were wondering whether maternal and gender moral sensibilities would trump race and history, and these five White women and one person of color (?) would do that which was just, ethically sound and humanly sensitive.

We wondered too how this racial and racist killing could happen in this so-called illusionary post racial society, during this era and administration of a Black president and after all the self-congratulatory societal narratives and speeches about America's having turned a racial corner and put its more savage racist practices behind it. And we wondered in what kind of country and system of justice could a lawyer feel comfortable claiming that the sidewalk was a weapon for an unarmed Black child, shot to death, struggling in defense against a man who stalked him, left his truck and confronted and killed him? We wondered too how we and our people would respond to a verdict which again vindicated the killer and validated the vigilante practice of stalking, confronting and killing Black boys and young Black men because of their presence in "unapproved places", their wearing "questionable" clothes, and a racialized criminalizing feeling that just their presence is proof of ill intentions and worthiness of suppression and death?

Even before the verdict, the post-trauma pacifiers had assembled and were prepared to call for calm, and to caution against displays of righteous anger, if the verdict exonerated the killer and excused the killing. And so, they call on us to do nothing that would be considered "irresponsible" in the jaundiced and unjust eyes of our oppressor. Also, waiting in the wings to

be called for faithful service were the system supporters who trust in the system, ask us to be patient, stop the demands and demonstrations for justice, and let the process work itself out. Their concept of justice is procedural, not substantive, satisfied by simply going through the process, not by the ethically just and rightful results required. They too talk of acting responsibly and of due respect for the rules of an unjust system.

Here, they have confused and collapsed two conflicting concepts of responsibility, the responsibility we owe to our people and ourselves and that which the dominant society defines and demands to preserve itself and the dominance of the ruling race-class. Malcolm X notes how the system calls righteous anger "emotionalism" and resistance, "irresponsibility". He says "you're supposed to have the rope around your neck and holler politely. You're supposed to watch your diction, not shout or wake other people up. You're supposed to be *respectable* and *responsible* when you holler against what they are doing to you". But he concludes, "You'll always be a slave as long as you're trying to be responsible and respectable in the eyesight of your master".

Indeed, to be responsible to the oppressor and respectable toward the structures of our oppression is clearly to be irresponsible and disrespectful to ourselves and our people. Our responsibility, the *Husia* says is to "bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice", the oppressed and vulnerable.

There are several things necessary to wage the long, difficult and righteous struggle ahead of us. And it begins with our self-conscious re-introducing our *identity* and *interests* as Black people, African Americans. For if we cannot say our name and we deny we exist, we have no claims. And if we have no claims or rights, how can we say they targeted us and deprived us of our rights, even the right to life? How indeed do we save our sons, reaffirm our daughters, and build and strengthen the families and

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communities critical to all things good if we deny our distinct identity and interests?

We are a Black community, an African people and there is no dignity in denying our identity or value in playing down our particular interests. For without a distinction of identity and interests, we cannot form necessary coalitions and common ground solidarities with others who are clearly committed to their own identities and interests. Indeed, we can only become satellites and supporters of others.

We must also reaffirm that the issue is above all an ethical issue, the killing of an innocent, the killing of a child by an adult who stalked, confronted and murdered him, and its relationship to the pernicious pattern of police and vigilante killing of Black men, especially the young. So much of the media and other kinds of discourse is about law detached from the tragic and cruel taking of a human life. There is also too much hypocritical and rationalizing talk about the “demands of law” and “reasonable doubt”, as if both “reason” and “doubt” are not routinely racialized in the service of Whiteness and in the denial of the equal dignity and value of Black life.

Thus, it is us who must, in all things, put forth and stand our ground on the ethical. Indeed, declarations that we are a “nation of laws”, “the jury has spoken” and we must “accept the verdict” appear as both grievously unconcerned about the ethical, and grossly unaware of our people’s continuing struggles to challenge and change laws and verdicts on the ethical grounds that they were/are wrong, injurious, anti-human, hypocritical and racist.

Also, we must reintroduce a national dialog on race and racism as a system that rules and ruins our life in the most persistent and pervasive ways. Moreover, this dialog on racism must not confuse it with racial prejudice, i.e., attitudes of hatred and hostility which anyone can have. On the contrary, racism must be defined and approached as a systemic capacity to turn hatred and hostility into public policy and socially sanctioned practice. And it expresses itself as violent imposition, ideological justification and institutional arrangement to promote and perpetuate both the imposition and ideology.

In addition, we must build a national initiative with local and national structures, to save our sons, and build and strengthen the families and communities they need to grow, live and flourish in. For we all know, there is no dignity in denial of our identity; no safety in servile silence or the suburbs; no guarantee of acceptance and security in gated communities; and no way, even with money, to make ourselves immune from a pervasive and persistent racism, except by struggling against it and eradicating it root and branch. Thus, let us put aside all illusions and continue and intensify the struggle.

Finally, this means rebuilding our liberation movement involving five fundamental initiatives of: education, mobilization, organization, confrontation and transformation. And it means harnessing this current righteous anger against injustice, moving beyond periodic anger and episodic engagement, and involving our sons, families and people deeply in ongoing struggle to build the good community, society and world we all want and deserve to live in.

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