



**REVISITING THE RADICAL EVIL RACISM:
CARTOONS, COWARDS AND NATIONAL COMPLICITY**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-26-09, p. A7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

If we want to critically understand American or any society, we cannot simply accept or mindlessly mouth its self-congratulatory narratives—neither those masquerading as curriculums in colleges and universities nor the daily media dose of patriotic stimulants and sound bite sedatives that produce alternating states of fear and aggressiveness towards “others” and uncritical acceptance and support for the established order. Nor can we gain a useful insight by simply reading and repeating as sacred text the high principles and hopeful promise found in its most cherished documents. Indeed, as our experience in this country has proved, it’s a good thing they’re on paper, since it has been difficult to find them anywhere else, especially in the daily and demanding life we live. For even after 390 years—so many of us still struggle to move not only from the recurrent American racist nightmare to the promised American dream, but also to a secure and sustainable life of dignity and decency worthy of the name human.

So, it is not from society’s sanitized and officially sanctioned portrait of itself that we understand it in a critical and non-complicit way, but especially by studying the life and treatment of its most vulnerable persons and populations. And although the contrary is discussed quietly in some quarters and argued openly in others, there is no identity in this country more indicative of the level, extent and various forms of oppression than race. Moreover, given the racial hierarchy in which Black and White are polar opposites and all others fall somewhere in between, there is no one conceived of and constantly discussed and dealt with in more pathological, oppressive and degrading ways than Africans, Black people. And this

racist web of evil is woven so tightly, not even a Black presidential candidate or sitting president can escape it.

Thus, the *New York Post* cartoon of two White cops shooting a chimp and saying “They’ll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill” crudely reminds us that in a racialized and racist society, no one of the devalued and degraded race is exempt—not the President in this one, nor the billionaires caricatured in corporate conversations or comedic and cartoonist portrayals camouflaged as fun and free speech. This cartoon and similar caricatures of Black people and other people of color are not isolated acts or events, but are taken from a master-race template created with the emergence of the racist mind and ever-ready for repeated use.

The cartoon, placed in such a context, sent several messages, each with its own sinister signification. First, it is a reflection of the reach of racism in every aspect of American life whether in cartoons, comedy shows, courtrooms or commentaries on the president and congress. Secondly, it is a reflection of the American addiction to the official and unofficial use of violence to solve problems, extract confessions and compliance, and act out hatred and hostility toward rejected ideas, policies and people. Third, it is also a reflection and reminder of the role police play in the suppression of peoples considered problematic. And it is an especially poignant image given the recent and recurring police killings of Blacks and the depraved disregard for Black life that prompts and promotes this.

Finally, it is a recurrent reprint from the mental and cultural template of the White supremacist mind which has long viciously associated apes and other animals

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2

with Blacks and gods, angels, saints and other ascendant beings with Whites. It was and remains part of the process of dehumanization in order to call for, facilitate and justify dominance, suppression and terrorist violence against the dominated. And this violence is especially directed against those who step out front and dare to defy and reject the established order's understanding and arrangement of things.

Although our man in Washington has tried so hard to put race behind him or at least to the side, those committed to White privilege, power and superior-people status will not let him. Moreover, it is not just a question of moving beyond racialized and racist attitudes as imagined, but of eradicating racism itself. Bad attitudes require therapy, but the radical evil of racism requires radical change in the structure of society that alters the way wealth, power and status are distributed and shared. And it is here where Attorney General Eric Holder's call for moral courage rather than cowardice is most relevant and required.

To define racism as a radical evil is to indicate its morally monstrous history which ranges from domination to decimation, from daily injustice to genocide, and from systemic exclusion to the Holocaust of enslavement. Also, it is to stress racism's deep-rootedness in the conception and history of America. Indeed, it was grotesquely present at the very founding of the country, received consideration in its Constitution, and found life in its laws, comfort in its courts, chosen people status in its churches, and pseudo-intellectual support from its learned men and universities.

The problematic of racism has proved resistant to eradication due to several inter-related and interlocking realities. Among the most difficult to deal with and most resistant to reason and socio-ethical consideration is first: the self-medicating national myths about the flawless founding of the country; a manifest destiny to conquer, convert or crush; and existing equal access to freedom, justice and opportunity regardless of racial, class and gender obstacles. Secondly, there is the accompanying addiction to acute denial of the raw realities of oppression, the daily pain and depth of suffering it imposes on persons and peoples, and the normalcy in the minds of so many Whites of White dominance, privilege and centrality and the marginal, minimized and less than meaningful position of others. And then there is the dominant group's lack of will and internal motivation to change, to seriously engage new ways for humans to relate without the unnatural need to oppress, exploit, dominate, deprive and degrade.

At this point, we unavoidably find ourselves in a decisive struggle at Adua with Menelik; vowing commitment at the crossroads of freedom and enslavement with Harriet Tubman, and wrestling with ourselves and our oppressor on the ground of battle with Frederick Douglass. And at each juncture, the lessons are ever and always the same: we are our own liberators; real freedom is always forged in struggle; and there is no alternative to our own initiative; no substitute for our own sacrifice; and no wonders without hard work and the masses self-consciously committed and in radical and resilient motion toward a new opening on the horizon of history.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kawaida and Questions of Life and Struggle: African American, Pan-African and Global Issues*, [www.MaulanaKarenga.org; www.Us-Organization.org and www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org].