



**NO SANCTUARY IN THE CITY:
RESISTING REPRESSION IN WARZONE AMERICA**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-06-17, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 2. THERE IS NOTHING MORE DEFINITIVE of the destructive approach to us as a people than *state-imposed* and *state-sanctioned* violence. In other words, not only does *the state*, i.e., federal, state and local governments and their agents and institutions, commit violence against us, they also accept and approve it as normal and necessary. For they have redefined us in racist ways from who we are to who they want and will us to be: dangerously and dislikeably different, deserving domination, deprivation and degradation. And this, they argue and act out, holds true whether we are young or old, children, women or men and whether of sound mind and body or mentally and physically disabled.

We might wish to be beyond concerns and conversations about racism, but it will not willingly leave us alone nor be wished or good-willed away. For racism is not just attitudes of fear, hostility and hatred; it's a system of violent imposition, justifying and degrading ideology, and oppressive institutional arrangements and practices. Thus, these attitudes of fear, hatred and hostility rise out of society and are legalized and turned into public policy and socially sanctioned practice. Given this, the police as representatives of the state, act not as irregular rogues, but as regular and real representatives of the state and society who feel they have not only the right, but also the responsibility to repress and suppress this so-called Black menace to White society. And it is racism's savage practice of perpetual violence against the disfavored races, with Blacks at the top of the list and the bottom of society, that forces many into escapist fantasies.

As Malcolm taught, in such a criminally racist society, some of us begin to believe we are imprisoned by our own skin, locked up and locked down in a brutal and confining space for life, penalized not for what we've done, but for who we are, Black, different and vulnerable in a White dominated country. And this is why our liberation struggle is a righteous and relentless struggle, both to free ourselves and be ourselves without racist penalty, prejudice or oppression.

But as Malcolm also taught, on one level for us America, itself, is a prison and the president serves as the warden. The police are obviously the guards, but in times of revolt, the National Guard and army are brought in to quell resistance, reassert dominance and reaffirm to the community in Borg-like fashion, "You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile". And to be assimilated is to be *mentally stripped* of our memory and history; to be *culturally stripped* of our defining views and values; to be *economically stripped* of our capacity to provide for ourselves and our families and live lives of dignity and decency; and to be *politically stripped* of the power to determine our destiny and daily lives.

It is important to point out here that we are not confronted in our daily lives by police violence alone, but also by various other kinds of violence imposed and sanctioned by the state and society. In addition, there is legislative, institutional and psychological violence that limit our lives and life chances and our capacity to live and flourish in dignity-affirming ways. Thus, Malcolm also tells us we are on the battleline everywhere. And this is, of course, a reaffirmation of Paul Robeson's reminder to all in this war zone and indeed the war zones of the world. For Robeson says, "The battlefield is everywhere there is no sheltered rear". That is to say, there is no sanctuary, no safe place from the wounding and killing and constant attempts to break our will and resolve to resist.

But although there is no sanctuary in the city or country for us, we must, can and will find it within our community, a community in righteous and relentless struggle to free ourselves, be ourselves and build the aware, united, organized, engaged and caring community. We are, then, sanctuary for ourselves with due respect and concern for others of similar situations and needs and always for the well-being of the world. The principle and practice of sanctuary reaches deep in our history, the oldest of human history. In the classical African civilization of ancient Egypt, temples were sanctuaries for the persecuted and pursued. Indeed, those given

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sanctuary were not to be touched, taxed or taken away by force. As Seba Pahebhor in the *Husia* says, “One who finds sanctuary is not to be taken away by force”.

But there was also the parallel moral imperative to make our very selves sanctuaries, especially for the vulnerable and needy. For in a real and expansive sense, the Kemeti words *ibu* and *nekhet* for sanctuary, include in their range of meanings—sites and sources of shelter, aid, protection, comfort, safety and security. Therefore, in the *Husia* Harwa says, “I was a refuge and sanctuary (*ibu*) for the poor, a raft for the drowning, a ladder for those trapped in the pit of despair, one who speaks on behalf of the lowly, who assists the unfortunate and who aids the oppressed, one who is steadfast until the end of life”. And Intef says in his role as builder of community and provider of sanctuary: “I was a servant of the needy, a father of the poor, a mother of the timid, a protective shelter (*ibu*) for the battered, caretaker of the ill, advocate of the deprived, a refuge (*nekhet*) for the orphan, and a place of peace for those who needed comfort”.

It is only through building a caring, committed and engaged community in and through struggle and waging righteous and relentless resistance will we achieve the consideration we deserve and the social conditions and capacity to lives of dignity, freedom, justice and flourishing. Indeed, we must not be afraid to fight and do battle on every front and in every way necessary and needed, and truly fight to the finish. Here we take the struggle oath of our foremother Harriet Tubman who challenged us to “go free or die” and to remember the heavy price to be paid, for “freedom is not bought with dust”.

It is no easy task to begin in earnest a serious struggle for the needed radical social change in this country and it is even more difficult to sustain it. We of Us speak here from the experience and study of over a half century of uninterrupted righteous and relentless struggle, even in the midst of captivity, exile and underground life, and obstacles and oppositions of all kinds.

And we know from experience and study that there is always the brightly burning fires of righteous anger at the beginning that give us the mind and heart to challenge the system and its representatives in the streets, corporate boardrooms, public chambers, religious and educational institutions and on other fronts. But eventually the cameras and lights leave, the crowds and fires dwindle and disappear, and there is only the most dedicated and determined who remain.

Therefore, we who are left must redouble our efforts, strengthen our organizations, build alliances and rebuild the over-arching Movement that prefigures and makes possible the good world we all want and deserve and our history and ethical tradition point to and demand. Our foremother Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune advises us that “If we have the courage and tenacity of our forebearers, who stood firmly like a rock against the lash of slavery, we shall find a way to do for our day what they did for theirs”. And what is this *awesome doing*, except rising up in righteous and relentless resistance; building community, consciousness and commitment; daring to imagine a whole new world and giving our lives to achieve and build it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways our ancestors left as insightful lessons and an enduring legacy.

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.