



**THE WAR ON US AND DRUGS:
NECESSARY RESISTANCE OR RUIN**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

There is a vicious war going on against us under the guise of another name and like all wars, it is a matter of life and death and depending on the seriousness and success of our resistance, it can lead to survival and strengthening or ravage and ruin. It is called the “war on drugs”, but the major targets and victims of its violence by law, policies and police practice, as well as, of its long-term and life-diminishing outcomes and costs are clearly us. Indeed, only the evil and dishonest and perhaps the woefully and willfully uninformed can deny that this so-called “war on drugs” is not against products, but against persons and people; not against manufacturers, but against families and not against sellers and corrupt cops, but against vulnerable communities. And those targeted, terrorized and traumatized families, communities and people are us, Black people, and also other people of color. But I want to focus here on us, who are by all statistics most targeted, pursued, prosecuted, sentenced, incarcerated and victimized by the life-long mark of indictment and oppression and the direct and collateral or consequential damage that accompany all this.

Although Nixon is noted for declaring the “war on drugs” and Reagan for reinforcing and expanding its deadly reach and ruinous effects, every president, including this one, has added to its expanding arsenal of attack through policy, racialized social preachment of suppression and punishment, and conscience-less cooperation with the corporate intention to imprison for profit at every turn and possible time. And this racialized “war on drugs” has lead to the diversion of unlimited funds, a trillion dollars plus at 70 billion per year, better used to treat drug use as an issue of public health and social justice rather than one of crime and criminal justice and to repair

the torn and unraveling social fabric and safety net and the deteriorating infrastructure.

The policies and approach are rooted in racism, as well as vulnerabilities of class, i.e., a system of imposition, ideology and institutional arrangements, which targets, disadvantages and destroys Black people in varied cold and structured ways. Here, it is again important in noting the racial aspect of this particular problem that it applies also with variations to other people of color, especially Latinos and Native Americans. But it is also important that we define our particular problem, develop our own specific strategy for engagement of the issue and then link our initiative in common struggle with others who are similarly situated, interested and willing.

The war on us under the guise of a war on drugs is like a bomb dropped in the midst of a population; its damage and devastation reaches far beyond the initial point of impact. And thus, the first concern in this war is the awesome cost and casualties in human lives, health and well-being—the wounded, disabled, destroyed and threatened. There are the death blows and injuries delivered almost daily by a militarized police and other armed and predatory participants in the war on us—the dealers, the drive-by shooters, the warring factions, and the aggressive addicts trying to feed their habit. And there is also the ravaging and razing of the community often defined by war zone scenes of devastation, ruin and rot—vacant lots, dilapidated houses and buildings, piles of garbage and trash, the missing trees and the tragic parade of the wounded and wandering in alleys, down streets and in unkempt parks. And more and more there are too many missing men, mostly womenfolk and pre-incarcerated boys and girls in various conditions of health, happiness and hope for the future.

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Also, the war on us, disguised as a war on drugs, has disrupted and devastated the economy and economic well-being of the community, fostering generation after generation of unemployed and unemployable persons, mostly males, who having been caught up in the criminalization system, most often for simple possession and receiving a record, cannot get jobs, receive public assistance, obtain or live in public housing, or receive student loans and are left in the streets to fend for themselves. Thus, checking the notorious “box” on applications to indicate a record is like signing a “slow death” warrant.

And this too is a defining and destructive feature of the war on us disguised as a war on drugs—the increased militarization of the police and its visible role as an occupying army, defending not us, but the interests of the dominant society, protecting property and ruling race personnel; cultivating a fifth column of informers and indebted thugs; taking cuts of cash and products when corrupt; and terrorizing the community with military-type raids, targeting, rousting and increased arrests. Earlier, they hid and denied their military mentality and practices; now they openly display their military clothes, equipment and armament; conceive and carry out their strategies and tactics in military terms; and talk publicly of the community as a war-zone, demonizing the residents so that they can act with impunity in reckless and often depraved indifference for Black life and rights.

The Institute of the Black World 21st Century (www.ibw21.org) and the Black Community, Clergy and Labor Alliance

(BCCLA) recently held a forum on this issue as part of a national campaign IBW has initiated to resist and end this politically motivated, racially biased and socially unjust policy. The Institute’s “10 Point Action Agenda to Create Just and Human Alternatives” is a call to end: the disparity in sentencing; mandatory minimum sentencing; legislation proliferating prison slave labor pools; the criminalization of drug abuse; racial profiling; and mass incarceration.

And it calls for support for: “the promotion of evidence-based approaches to address drug policy, including treatment instead of incarceration, harm reduction and decriminalization models; changes in laws and policies to allow people with felony convictions and criminal records who have served their time to be gainfully employed, adequately housed, successfully reintegrated into society and have their voting rights restored; a dialogue on the pros and cons of the regulation of drugs to decrease crime, violence and fratricide in Black communities; and a holistic ‘Domestic Marshall Plan’ type of social, economic and jobs initiative to create wholesome urban inner-city communities”.

The need, then, is for a radical rethinking and reframing of current dominant conversations and policies around these and related issues and engaging in a serious and sustained struggle for social and racial justice which ends the war, builds the peace, repairs and empowers the people, secures and rebuilds our communities, and caringly tends to the well-being and wholeness of ourselves and the world.

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