



**BLOODLUST, CELEBRATION AND BIN LADEN:  
AN UNSEEMLY SENSE OF JUSTICE**  
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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

Maybe this should be raised after September 11, or if now, discussed in church, mosque, synagogue and temple, those places set aside for conversations about the moral and meaningful, not in the public square where and while this country is in the midst of joyously celebrating the killing of Osama bin Laden, America's most wanted for almost ten years and the major symbol and focus offered for waging this multi-front war without end called the "war on terrorism." Indeed, it goes against the patriotic grain and current public will to stand up and question the triumphant celebration of killing such a hated and media-hammered enemy, demonized by some as similar to Hitler. It is said, even by some religious leaders, that the people should be able to rejoice in deserved relief and due retribution. Echoing the Obama administration, they say "Justice has been done" and people are rejoicing for this "justice done," not for the killing itself, although it is the killing that is called and conceived as "justice."

But still, the bloodlust and the blood ritual of killing, taking possession of the body, raising the voice in a primal scream of triumph over the enemy and dancing deliriously, in gloating satisfaction and celebration is to the classical African ethical tradition, *an unseemly sense of justice*. It raises images of early man killing his victim, howling victory, seizing possession of the body and its parts as a trophy, and dancing and drinking thru the night in triumph. And, if we have not lost our own particular historical memory as a people and accepted the "more perfect union" version of U.S. history void of racial oppression, we can recall the blood rituals of lynching and savage celebra-

tion which were once a regular feature and constant fear in our lives.

Even in a just war of self-defense against attack or the most severe and exacting oppression, we must struggle in ways that do not violate norms of dignity and decency demanded by our ethical tradition. Indeed, the *Odu Ifa* says, "May the battles we wage always add to our honor," i.e., win respect of others for the righteous way we conduct ourselves even in the most taxing and terrible times. And the *Husia* teaches that we must be ever mindful of the sacredness of human life, and thus be reluctant soldiers, even in righteous struggles and never be worshippers of war.

Surely, there is so much unknown about the causes and conditions that led to the summary execution of Bin Laden, who was unarmed. And "they" have, from the beginning, offered a web of lies so intricately woven it would make a spider's head spin. But there are several things we do know. First, we know that it is immoral and illegal to summarily execute or kill an unarmed person and deny him/her due process, a central tenet of justice. We also know it is morally wrong, gross and grotesque to gloat over murder and killings of any kind, even in self-defense. To make it less culpable and repulsive, religious leaders from various faiths call it a "death" and say it's wrong to rejoice over death, but that hides the act of killing and leaves the conscience less burdened or bothered.

We know too that this killing does not solve anything and will no doubt, increase the urge for retaliation from the other side. Nor can the U.S. console itself and comfort Muslims by saying they bu-

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ried the body in an Islamic fashion. For in regular moral reasoning, the killer of a person lacks the moral status or moral authority to bury the victim. Also, we know with relative certainty that the Republicans and media have given President Obama only a temporary reprieve, not a new status in the way they relate to him. He has, in their militaristic minds, proved his metal and manhood thru this "prized kill," but already they are trying to transfer credit to Bush, the CIA, the Navy Seals and anyone else involved.

We know too that regardless of how many people are killed, captured and imprisoned by the U.S., neither the problem of terrorism nor the larger problem of justice and peace in the world are solved by this, and that even as low-tech group terrorism kills, so does high-tech state terrorism kill in greater numbers. And only a selective and self-centered morality would deny the equal dignity and human worth of other innocents killed.

Thus, there is an urgent need to re-think and rebuild U.S. international policy based on a genuine respect for the peoples of the world and their right to control their own destiny and daily lives, own and use their own resources, and live lives of dignity, well-being and flourishing. We know too, as Native Americans have rightly pointed out, it was grossly wrong and insensitive to give Bin Laden, the terrorist, the code name Geronimo, the Apache freedom fighter and leader, and a legend in his own time.

Finally, we know that we are challenged, as a people, by our history and social justice tradition to maintain a critical distance between ourselves and the

established order, regardless of who is president, and to reject unreflective patriotism rooted in the racial and religious fears, loathing and limited worldview of the dominant race/class. For such passive Americanization could cause us to find ourselves in the historically ironic and morally repulsive position of joining lynch mobs rather than resisting, dissuading and dispersing them, and supporting discourse and policies that eventually are used against us.

Fannie Lou Hamer urged us to *question America*, its self-concept, claims and practice and Martin Luther King called on us and all progressive people to at least *compel the country to live up to its highest values*. Moreover, Malcolm X and his descendents of the Sixties, among whom we are counted, urged us *to transform America beyond its highest White conceptions of itself and create a real democracy without victims at home or abroad*. And Mary McLeod Bethune taught us even earlier of the world-encompassing task our history and expansive sense of humanity impose on us, i.e., *to remake the world in the interests of humanity as a whole*.

In a word, this means moving beyond self-congratulatory, "perfect union" and exceptionalist conceptions of U.S. society, and daring to conceive and craft on common ground with others another way of being and relating as humans in the world. It will, of necessity, be a way that is multicultural, democratic, rooted in freedom, justice and mutual respect, and consciously concerned with the well-being and flourishing of the world.