



**THE DECADE OF DISENCHANTMENT:
THE LOSS OF CHERISHED ILLUSIONS**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 01-07-10, p. A7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

If there is one major lesson from this decade, it is that America must free itself from its most cherished illusions and begin to rethink and renegotiate its place and role in the world, as well as, reconceive and reconstruct itself in ways that recognize it is not a White finished product, but an ongoing unfinished multicultural project. In their age of Enlightenment, Europeans and their American descendants embraced notions of their superiority, linking race and religion, establishing “master” narratives of a chosen and elect people, and making the arrogant assumption of racial title to the world. It was seen as their manifest and ordained destiny, a divinely ordered assignment to subdue the world and all in it, in spite of their disavowal of myth and generally assumed freedom from madness.

Thus, the Europeans had come to the U.S. full of such illusions about themselves and an equal amount of ignorance about the Native Americans—and they wreaked havoc, horror, dispossession, devastation and Holocaust against the other peoples in this land. Moreover, once established, America exalted itself even above its parent peoples of Europe. It was the mythic city on the hill, the sanctuary for the persecuted and pursued, the promised land for a divinely chosen, elect and blessed people, oppressing and enslaving others without any sense of contradiction or contrition.

America maintained this conception of itself rooted in racial, religious and political myths thru numerous periods of history. Even the rise of communism and later anti-colonial struggles did not send it signs it wanted or was able to read. It imagined itself invincible and invulnerable. But this decade produced an increasing questioning and disenchantment with this conception of itself, increased disillusionment and rising cynicism.

It is the reign of Bush that began the decade of disenchantment, i.e., the progressive

loss of cherished illusions America has created for itself, illusions of racial, religious and moral superiority; holders of rights to overthrow governments at will and invade other countries for self-serving reasons and a model democracy for the world. In fact, the decade began in the year 2000 with a stolen election, fraud, voter suppression, and the political intervention of the Supreme Court on the side of the Republicans, divesting us of any illusions of an orderly political process, separation of powers, an independent judiciary, and democracy rooted in people power.

Secondly, still reeling from the rude awakening of election theft, on September 11, 2001, three planes launched strategic attacks on the country’s financial center, the Twin Towers; its military center, the Pentagon; and a fourth plane was interrupted and downed ostensibly on its way to the White House, America’s political center. Here the conceptions of invulnerability and invincibility are challenged; our security is compromised; and our technology seems to have been used against us. We search for simple answers, but they do not come.

But we could begin by denouncing the killing of innocents everywhere, whether by vicious intention in New York, criminal neglect in New Orleans, indiscriminate destruction or “collateral damage” in Iraq and Afghanistan, or continuous violent occupation and savage suppression in Haiti and Palestine. For we cannot in good faith practice a selective morality. With 9/11, Bush and Cheney see an opportunity to extend their commitment to war as the fundamental way to assert the country’s power and interests in the world. They launch war on a group, Al Qaeda; invade Afghanistan; declare an endless “war on terrorism”; and begin a propaganda program to win support and suppress opposition. They cultivate a politics of fear, hate and addiction to force as a

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preferred and indispensable policy, and the media accommodate. In 2003, Bush goes to war again claiming a non-existent threat to our security from Iraq and hiding interest in seizing the Iraqi people's oil and water and removing Iraq as an ally of occupied Palestine.

These wars brought images and evidence of torture of prisoners, with racist, anti-religious and sexualized dimensions at Abu Ghraib, Bagram and Guantanamo. They also revealed continuing practices of rendition, rendering the American claim of moral superiority hypocritical and shamelessly false. Moreover, our vital rights are suspended and denied in the interest of national security under the curious name of the USA Patriot Act.

And then came Katrina, August 29, 2005, a hurricane of both history and nature, i.e., embodying historical oppression and natural devastation. New Orleans and Katrina conjure up nightmares of images and memories of broken levies and broken, disrupted and destroyed lives; of children, women and men abandoned in killing waters and unsafe places by local, state and federal authorities without food, water, medicine or any other rightfully expected assistance. It speaks to the savage nature of racism in spite of illusions of a post-racial society, and leaves little room for illusions about differential treatment of racially devalued and favored folk in the mythic city on its imaginary hill.

The economic meltdown and impending collapse also aided in challenging America's illusion about its economic soundness and unchallenged dominance it once had. China, once a metaphor for hunger, is America's ma-

ior creditor, loans it money and reduces U.S. criticism of its human rights record and position on greenhouse gas emissions. And the U.S. corporations, peddling patriotism and war to the public, choose greed and gross spending of government welfare bail-out money on lunches, bonuses, etc., regardless of their effect on the economy.

And then, there is our embattled President Barack Hussein Obama, who came into being and into office bearing the hope and aspirations of his people, all progressives and much of the world. This was not his decade; he came into a crisis Bush made, and in the midst of a mad assemblage of racist haters and howlers resentful and rejective of his Presidency. And he seems unable to free his administration from the Bush era, i.e., the continuing unjust and unwinnable wars and waste of lives and resources, the negative attitudes toward Haiti, Palestine, Cuba and Latin America as a whole, the inadequate attention to Africa and African Americans, and catering to corporations and congressional opposition.

Indeed, any assessment of last year must concede that there was both great joy and hope as well as disappointment as things settled in, returned to the rule of big business as usual, and people realized that symbolism is not substance and that there is no substitute for self-conscious, committed and continuous struggle. However, it is thru struggle, continuous and uncompromising struggle that the need for illusions disappear and the good lives we want, need and deserve begin to take form and flourish in front of us.

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