



**DEFENDING MARLENE PINNOCK AND OURSELVES:
ISSUES OF JUSTICE, AGENDA AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

WE ARE AGAIN deeply involved in an ongoing and urgent conversation and struggle around one of the most critical and enduring issues facing us as a people—*police violence*. For whatever old names or new formulations used to introduce, justify or explain it away—reasonable force; perceived possession of weapons; within policy shooting; justifiable homicide; actions to protect the police and public or save the victims from themselves—it is still police violence. And it is made more difficult to deal with, reduce and eradicate, because it is *systemically based* and *socially sanctioned* as a legitimate, legal and necessary way to deal with Black people, other people of color, the poor, the mentally disabled and any others who are vulnerable, stereotyped, stigmatized and posed as a real or potential threat and deemed unworthy of due respect.

One of the latest demonstrations of this is the unjust and unjustifiable brutal beating of Mrs. Marlene Pinnock, a Black woman, homeless, unarmed, apparently mentally disoriented, and obviously in need of caring assistance, not a cold-blooded attack. This increasing police violence which extends nationwide offers evidence that the attacking officer is not a rogue cop or an “officer gone wild”, but a representative of a definite system, a protector of the established order with its race and class determined rights, privileges and preferred people.

Thus, the first thing we notice about the CHP officer’s brutal beating of Mrs. Pinnock is the *normalized savagery* of it, as the official silence and standard “wait-and-see” reservations reveal. It is a reaffirmation of society’s racist classification of her as racially and socially unworthy. Thus, she is tackled, pinned down, straddled, punched and pummeled in the head and face repeatedly and mercilessly. It is a violence rooted not only in

general racist ideology, but also in racialized police perceptions of and approaches to the Black community as an occupied and hostile territory. It is also reinforced by the increasing militarization of police departments in training and weaponry and by the increased hiring of ex-soldiers from recent wars with little or no rules and restraints on things done to the “enemy”.

Secondly, there was a racist arrogance and confidence displayed by the CHP officer’s brutalizing of Mrs. Pinnock. Like the officers who beat Rodney King and others similarly, there was an assumption that he has not only the right, but also the responsibility to do this under the color, cover and camouflage of law. Thus, he does not hide it in the night, but savages Mrs. Pinnock in broad daylight, on a busy freeway, and in an age of video cameras, you-tube and social media that can and does expose his and his confederates’ unedited racialized police practice.

Thirdly, this vicious attack demonstrates also the continuing racist tendency to dehumanize and de-womanize the Black woman and to objectify Black people as a whole—women, men and children. Clearly, Mrs. Pinnock was denied the special deference owed to women as women when approached by men, officially and unofficially, in terms of how they are talked to, touched, searched and arrested. Instead, she was dehumanized, de-womanized and treated as an objectified Black man, not as a woman and human being. Thus, she was tackled, pinned down on her back, and straddled with all its implications, and then repeatedly pounded into submission. It is the same objectification and similar police violence often applied to our children, especially the Black man child.

Fourthly, it is important to note that the attitude and actions of police officers are also shaped by the racist ideology of the

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racialization of crime and the criminalization of the race. In other words, crime is defined as a racial characteristic of Black people and thus, the whole people—men, women and children—are indicted and treated as a race of real and potential criminals. Therefore, the police aggressively and eagerly move to suppress them through wrongful targeting (profiling) stops, searches, humiliations, home invasions, arrests, beatings, shootings, and other forms of psychic, verbal and physical abuse and violence. A culture of violence and the vicious racial hatred and hostility in which it feeds, breeds and lives becomes then the order and reality of the day.

Finally, this brutal and savage beating of Mrs. Marlene Pinnock is a clear and compelling challenge to us to intensify the ongoing struggle to end this unjust and unjustifiable police violence, oppressive treatment and often depraved disregard for the lives and rights of Black people and other vulnerable persons and peoples. Clearly, the beginning step is to unify around the struggle for justice, not only for Mrs. Pinnock, but also for all those other past and current victims, and to reduce the number of future ones among whom we could easily count. Indeed, it's important to remember and reaffirm that the struggle to defend our sister Marlene is also a struggle to defend ourselves and achieve the justice and security we deserve as persons and a people.

Moreover, in the face of oppression in any form, there is no real remedy except righteous and relentless resistance and no strategy worthy of its name that does not

include and foreground ongoing and unyielding struggle. Also, our collective agenda must include as a minimum of demands: (1) dismissal and indictment of the perpetrating officer; (2) no indictment of the victim, Mrs. Marlene Pinnock; (3) release of Mrs. Pinnock from the police hospital hold; (4) Justice Department exploration of civil rights violations and the need for federal oversight; (5) a civilian review board with subpoena and discipline power, in spite of the police bill of rights; and (6) a serious review and reforming of hiring, training and discipline practice in the face of increasing militarization of the police and continuing racist practices.

Linked to this must be a call for our political representatives to stand up like Rep. Maxine Waters and Rep. Karen Bass and demand and pursue policies that achieve justice, security and dignity-respecting treatment for Mrs. Pinnock and us in this and other critical issues. But also, we know that the demand for justice and security from police violence and dignity-respecting treatment is at the same time a call to ourselves to commit ourselves to the struggle to achieve these social and human goods. It is a covenant with ourselves, our ancestors and future generations, not to be brittle or break, not to sell-out or surrender, not to be dispirited or deterred, but to wage this and our larger struggle with strength, dignity, determination and victorious consciousness, knowing that the righteous requirements of heaven and history demand that we dare not do otherwise.

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