



**EXCISING AMERICA'S CANCER OF RACISM:
TURNING LEFT FROM THE FAR RIGHT LANE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-07-19, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IT IS ALL THERE, THE BEGINNING OF another myth-making drama of an America honestly engaged in coming to terms with its racist past and present, openly discussing the grievous hurt and harm White racism causes to its victims, and making a united front and consensus call for the resignation of a governor caught with his White Klan cape up and his blackface guard down in a pre-selfie photo for his med school yearbook. Clearly, it must be an important issue, for it is on all the media: corporate, social and otherwise. And if it drags out long enough, it could inspire the making of a movie or at least lead to other goodwill tours inside the alternating racist and reformist mind of America.

And at the center of all this White soul searching drama is the fallen-from-grace governor of Virginia, Ralph Northam, the repentant sinner, asking for an opportunity to earn forgiveness for his racist transgression, and the Democrats and others all crying "no." And we don't really know if this widely advertised outrage is out of real moral concern or rank political calculation. But given the history of these selective episodic engagements with personal expressions of racism, it's safe to suspect and assume that moral concern is not the first order of the day.

Indeed, regardless of what we say about and see in this incident and the man who sparked it, it is the structure and functioning of America we are really discussing and the governor is only a mime and metaphor for a larger, more injurious and lethal systemic problem. He did not create the blackface caricature from the lime pit in the White racist recesses of his mind. Nor did he design the clown and dunce cap costume of the Klan. Both are American historical traditions, born of a larger bloody and savage tradition of degradation and death-dealing terrorism against Black people. And it should be noted that these photos and the decision to immortalize them in a med school yearbook were taken in 1984 not 1884 or even 1915 when a movie acted as midwife for the notion and "birth of a nation" of

Klansmen, saving America from its reconstructionist memories and mistakes about the humanity, equality and human rights of Black people.

We are talking about a history of violence and oppression and its continued unfolding, a deeply rooted White supremacist approach to Black people and the world that cannot be seriously altered or ended even with ten thousand resignations and repentances on a personal level. For racism is not simply an attitude of hostility and hatred of different persons and peoples, but the turning of that hatred and hostility into public policy and socially sanctioned practice. That is turning this attitude into law and systemic policy and practice. Indeed, what difference does it make whether the suit is white or blue, if its wearers have a depraved racist disregard for our lives and rights as persons and a people? And in the final analysis, what consolation or real contribution to social change is it to have the system fake our equality in TV ads, pretending interracial mingling and sex is some sort of index of progress?

Indeed, interracial sex has been engaged in since the Holocaust of enslavement, but it was vicious rape of women, men and children and did not change relations of wealth, power and status and neither do symbolic placements of Blacks in ads and roles on TV or in the movies. Afterall, it is not a question of who's in the bedroom, but who's in the boardroom; who rules and defines reality and who controls the racist structure of wealth, power and status which, of course, is monopolized by Whites? And unless we discuss and move to change such relations of crushing and criminal inequity and injustice, calling for one or numerous resignations, taking people to lunch or bed, and joking about Trump and his open and silent supporters and confederates-in-arms on late night shows, will not change our condition or that of others who are oppressed by this system.

Certainly, it's important that every instance of racism, especially in public space, be

EXCISING AMERICA'S CANCER OF RACISM:
TURNING LEFT FROM THE FAR RIGHT LANE

Los Angeles Sentinel, 02-07-19, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

exposed, criticized and condemned. But let's be clear - the expressions of racism we are discussing now are about personal transgressions, not various forms of systemic racist treatment and their effects on us and other peoples of color. This kind of focus on personal transgressions works well for the system, for it comes with little cost to it. In fact, the system is strengthened by the myth that it corrects itself, outs its rogue members, and removes them while the system itself that produced, sanctions and supports them, until they are caught, keeps rolling on and over the oppressed.

Moreover, America loves to force and hear confessions and is almost pathologically committed to purges in their personal and cinematic forms. However, again, the ruling class never sacrifices the system itself, but periodically finds itself needing to make an example of the embarrassingly problematic characters it has produced. Such is the case of the wayward Virginia governor who has been declared a racist rogue and is being urged to resign, thus saving the racist system itself from serious and sustained scrutiny.

So, the Governor, dressed in racist rag, becomes the talk of the town and nation. But police violence, mass incarceration and disabling disparities in health, housing, employment and education which deal with systemic issues rather than personal disorders and evil acts are not engaged in a depthful and sustained manner. But this is the crux of the matter, the hub and hinge on which it all turns - the racist oppressive structure and daily functioning of the system. And failing to address this ensures an endless repetition of racist words spoken and acts committed by persons that have their roots in a racist system, unengaged and unaltered.

In the final analysis, we are confronting and discussing a serious pathology in America called racism, a systemic disorder. Indeed, Min. Malcolm states that racism is "plaguing America

like an incurable cancer," and that he had dedicated his life to bringing light and teaching "meaningful truth that will help to destroy (this) racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America." Given the nature of the disease, its history and its pervasive and persistent presence, it will not be easy to excise and eradicate. But we can be sure that tea and sympathy, confessions and personal repentance, resignations and more ad man images of interracial exchange as evidence of progress and change will not solve the problem. Only a radical reconstruction of society and of wealth, power and status relations offer any serious promise and possibilities of real and substantive change.

AMERICA SEES ITSELF ON GOOD DAYS AS A liberal society and truly believes its founding myth of being a light of democratic hope and capitalist heaven among nations. But in reality, in race relations, it is driving in the far right lane on the highway of history holding fast to White power, privilege and illusions of superiority, while promising and pretending it's going left toward a truly just and inclusive society. Among the Democrats, there is talk of a rising left initiative among them, but they seem apprehensive of its presence and promise. And the Republicans are fear mongering about the spread of socialism here and in Venezuela and the suppression of democracy, as if they have not already enabled and presided gleefully over this suppression. And yet a new overarching movement to the left and of an inclusive left of peoples and groups *united in struggle*, is possible. But it cannot minimize the centrality of race and racism, pretend all differences are equally disadvantaging or ask Black people to erase themselves and accept funding, favor, accolades for controlled anger, and a comfortable place in oppression as a substitute for *a real and irreversible freedom*.

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.