



**FERGUSON: HOLDING GROUND, EXPANDING GAINS,
PUSHING OUR LIVES AND BATTLELINES FORWARD**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-04-14, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

SURELY, it is a heavy, hard-gained and well-learned lesson of history, that regardless of major or minor gains or setbacks along the way, the struggle must and will continue until the ultimate victory of our people is won. So regardless of the grand jury's unjust verdict in Ferguson, the struggle must and will continue, intensify, expand and ultimately triumph. But we must, at all times, be aware of the reality we face, the difficulties involved, the work to be done, the sacrifices to be made, and the struggle to be waged. And we must do this without unrealistic optimism, paralyzing pessimism or a faith lacking the hard work that gives our struggle its foundation and forward thrust.

As Amilcar Cabral taught us, "we must always face the future with optimism, but without losing sight of realities, and particularly of the special difficulties of our struggle". And the central reality here is the savage, sustained and pervasive nature of our oppression and the need for our struggle to be deep-rooted, radical, relentless and all-encompassing. As Cabral tells us, "our struggle must be waged on all levels of the life of our people". Now, if we are to wage struggle on all levels of the life of our people, then we must never over-focus on one issue or fail to continuously link every issue to our larger struggle: to free ourselves and be ourselves; to live a good and meaningful life in dignity, peace and security; to experience our lives moving forward; and to ensure a safe, secure and flourishing future for our children.

There is an expanding sense that we stand at a critical juncture in our history and that there is a rising tide of resistance that can lead to a fundamental time of turning we have not seen since the 1960s. But if we are

to harness this hurricane of righteous rage and resistance of our people and help it mold itself into a disciplined and sustained movement for liberation, certain obligations are in order. At a minimum, these are to hold our ground, build on and expand our gains, and constantly push our battlelines and the lives of our people forward.

To hold our ground is to hold the original and rightful positions we took at the beginning of the struggle and not surrender them or set them aside for "reasons" and excuses unworthy of us as persons and a people. Clearly, at the core of our concerns and at the heart of our commitment to wage struggle is the liberation of our people, to free them from domination, deprivation and degradation, and the systemic violence involved in these various forms of oppression.

At a minimum this involved: securing justice for Michael Brown—and by extension others similarly killed; restraining and ending police violence under the color and camouflage of law in Ferguson and the U.S. as a whole; holding police accountable in various ways; and always linking our local struggles to the larger struggle for racial and social justice and liberation in this country and the world. Also, to hold our ground is to stand tall and immovable on the common ground of our Blackness, our Africanness, our shared identity, shared interests and shared struggle as a Black people, African people. This means refusing to be divided by age or generation, sex or sexuality, ability or disability. Surely, we must recognize and respect differences and distinctions and embrace them as varied and valuable ways of understanding and asserting ourselves as persons and a people.

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And we must not be diverted by the media, its minions or its mimics; by conversations and claims that turn our talk and attention to dominant society ploys to escape responsibility for its racist thought, sentiments and practices; and its attempts to equate and confuse thug killing in the community with legally allowed and socially sanctioned police killing of Black men, women and children, in a word, equate crimes by criminals in the community with police crimes against Black people, legalized and sanctioned by society.

To build on and expand our gains means building and expanding on lessons learned, experience acquired, achievements made and victories won currently and in the past. In our assessment, we must neither overstate our problems and weaknesses nor underestimate our achievements and strengths. Surely, Fannie Lou Hamer's teaching here about our obligation "never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over" is instructive. Not to forget where we came from is not only to remember to pay rightful homage to our origins, but also to appreciate the long and terribly taxing journey we've made in our struggle against a most savage and sustained oppression.

Likewise, praising the bridges that carried us over means practicing a morality of remembrance and respect for those forerunners who paved the way and offered lessons and models of human excellence and achievement. Let us leave behind the unworthy and ahistorical pretension that what we're doing is totally new without precedent, that our current marches, demon-

strations, civil disobedience, disruptions and other forms of confrontational resistance are products of a self-generating generation or single group, rather than a continuation of a long and ongoing legacy of righteous and relentless struggle of our people as a whole.

And finally, let us end as we began, reaffirming our commitment to our people, our commitment to service, sacrifice, work, building and struggle for their liberation and the good, secure and flourishing lives they long for and deserve. Thus, we must *constantly push our battlelines and the lives of our people forward*. This means, as Cabral tells us, struggling on every level of the lives of our people. It means remembering Paul Robeson's teaching that "the battle front is everywhere; there is no sheltered rear". It means that we cannot be spring and summer soldiers, but soldiers for all seasons, wagers of relentless and righteous struggle who will not walk away from the battlefield until the struggle is won.

It means also we cannot be dispirited by setbacks, losses, defections, betrayals and battles that seem to never end. Thus, even severely injured and exhausted, we must still, with unbroken commitment and courage, clean, bandage and bind our wounds, pull ourselves up off the ground and throw ourselves back into the fury and fire of battle. For in a larger sense, given the global reach and plunder of our oppressor, the moral and social vanguard role we have played and play, and the world-encompassing character of our liberation project, as Mary McLeod Bethune taught us, "We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that".

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