



**HOLDING AMERICA AND OBAMA ACCOUNTABLE:
CRAFTING A PROTOCOL AND PRACTICE—PART II**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The urgent need to develop a well-conceived and conscientiously practiced protocol of exchange concerning how we discuss and approach President Obama emerges from the ethical imperative to bear witness to truth without trashing each other or trading in falsehood; to do justice while we seek it, beginning with ourselves; and to struggle in ways that strengthen and enrich our relationships rather than leave them in ruins. And as ever, we are to remain firmly focused on our core and continuing concerns for the well-being and flourishing of our people, the quality of life in this country, and the health and wholeness of the world.

For again, regardless of the conversations around Obama and the coming elections that will inevitably evolve, the central and compelling conversations and questions are not simply about Obama, but essentially about the state and future of our people, the country and the world. And it is about raising up and reaffirming in thought, conversation and practice our ancient and ongoing *social justice tradition* which is rooted in active defense of the dignity and rights of persons and peoples, privileges the poor, vulnerable and less powerful, and is uncompromisingly committed to the protracted struggle to secure and sustain freedom, justice, and good in and for the world.

But no matter how we pose and pursue these issues, it is clear that the need for a protocol of this kind and at this particular junction of history is reflective of a response to the special challenges or problematic that President Obama poses for us as a people. By problematic is meant here, not a problem in the negative sense as someone delinquent or difficult to deal with, i.e., a person or re-

lationship gone woefully wrong. Rather, it is to suggest, as in the Swahili word *tatizo*, an issue that is complicated, intricately structured and requiring deep and careful consideration for resolution. And the problematic is not simply Obama as a person or even as a president, but him as a key factor in an intricate process of a people coming to terms with the demands of its history and highest values at a critical juncture in this time and place.

This problematic is clearly complex and includes a number of interrelated factors. Among these are first, the way the established order uses Obama and his presidency to further their own agenda. Also, there is the way he has, in too many cases, accommodated and emulated them, rendering less visible and perhaps, less laudable in balance the good he has done. And a third factor is the overwhelming majority of our people's profound commitment to him as a/the symbol, substitute and even essential substance of a larger legacy, project and promise we are morally obligated to preserve and pass on.

As I have pointed out in prior writings, whatever role our people want Obama to play and regardless of the role he himself wishes to play, the established order has its own agenda for him and this poses a major aspect of the problematic. It seeks first to use him as a *moral mask* to conceal, condone and continue corporate looting and leeching at home and military-backed plunder and pillage abroad, using a face and figure from a people known world-wide as a moral and social vanguard and whose historic freedom struggle serves as a model and monument for the world.

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Secondly, the established order uses Obama and his election as a *shield against rightful social justice claims*, arguing an America miraculously redeemed, free from the brutal reality of racial dominance and debilitating racial differences in wealth, power and status and thus, in life conditions and life-chances. Thus, rightful social justice claims and those honest and audacious enough to make them are dismissed and devalued as bitter, angry and nursing grievances and advancing aspirations from another time and generation.

Thirdly, the established order uses Obama's presidency as a *counterweight to valid and needed criticism of the system itself*. For Obama is now the leader, chief advocate and protector of U.S. state interests and there is a widespread feeling among African Americans that to criticize the system is to criticize Obama and give aid and ammunition to his racist opponents and enemies. Thus, the tendency is to remain silent in the face of systemic evil and injustice and international plunder and predation and to defend Obama's and U.S. wrongful policies thru denials and willful self-blinding.

Finally, the established order uses Obama and his presidency to *facilitate an uncritical and even mindless Americanization* without the self-questioning discourse and dialog any real democracy and free society demands and requires. *No, we are not there yet*. And talk of creating "a more perfect union" presupposes a perfection not yet achieved and encourages illusions of social accomplishments rather than the work and struggle necessary to achieve them.

Obama clearly means so much to us because he is one of us by his own self-

definition and ours, and because we, more than any other constituency, literally brought him into being as president and promise. Moreover, our commitment to him is shaped also by the historic nature of the victory and its meaning to us and U.S. society; his representation of a historic hope fulfilled for so many of us; his referential value for us and our children against racist ravings; our deeply felt need to defend him against racists, rightists and ruination critics; our sense of shared destiny in his success or failure; and shared illusions (by some) of his representing a post-racial moment and future for U.S. society.

We are, each and all of us, always standing at the crossroads of history with our foremother Harriet Tubman, embodying the hopes, aspirations, prayers and promise of our people. And like her, we must not run away seeking security and satisfaction in illusions and individual escape. Instead, we must realize with her that freedom, dignity, self-determination and all the great goods of life are shared goods and we must achieve, secure and enjoy them together. Also, we must recognize that no matter how far we personally have come, until all our people are free from domination, deprivation and degradation, we cannot rest or claim victory. And thus, like our foremother, this noble ancestor, witness and warrior, we must in our flight toward personal freedom, turn back around toward our people to join them in the liberating thrust upward; turn around and defiantly face the enemy and oppressor pursuing us, dare victorious struggle, and dare build the good world we all want, deserve and must save and secure for our ancestors, ourselves and future generations.

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* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, www.MaulanaKarenga.org.