



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

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

In the precise measure that a people perceives themselves as their own liberator and realizes that no leader or ally is a substitute for their own work and struggle to lift themselves up and advance forward, that people begins to open a critical path in history to a new, upward and uplifting way of living and being human in the world. Likewise, in the precise measure that a people advances and practices without exception or excuse the principle that no leader, person, people or society is exempt from rightful criticism and accountability, that people rejects an immoral silence in the face of evil, and demonstrates the praiseworthy capacity for self- and social criticism, indispensable and morally compelling for correction of errors, evils and flaws humans are known for.

We are at a particularly critical juncture in our history as a people and in the history of this country, a juncture at which the policies and functioning of this society are palpably and patently harmful to its people and itself, as well as to the world. And yet, we are told and made to feel we cannot criticize it without being condemned ourselves, considered unpatriotic and disloyal, and as offering aid and ammunition to a long list of real and imagined enemies and thus a potential, if not real, “person of interest” by the police and intelligence agencies of the country.

And for us, as a people, it gets even deeper and more complex and problematic. For we are also given similar restrictions concerning criticism of the country’s leader, President Obama, from within the African American community. Clearly, we cannot blame U.S. history on Obama or be unmindful of his efforts to “promote the

general welfare.” Certainly, he inherited chaos, corruption, wars, waste, the progressive erosion of civil and human rights, shameless deference to the rich and disdain for the poor, and a host of other problems too numerous to name. Indeed, Obama campaigned and came to power condemning and calling into question all these ills. Now that he is at the head and helm of the country, he must also accept a just measure of responsibility for the way the country is moving since he has been president, regardless of obstacles and opposition.

Surely, we recognize that the Republicans, Tea Partiers and other rightists have dedicated their political lives to ensuring Obama’s failure and humiliation for both *racial* and *political* “reasons.” And thus, they share no small measure of responsibility for the crisis in this country, as well as the Democrats, liberals, and leftists, who offered Obama little public aid or advice to check or challenge these “wild west” and “savage south” opponents. Likewise, those of us, progressive intellectuals, activists and concerned citizens alike, who conveniently or unconsciously confused Obama the man for the Movement, itself, and refused to build a Movement and hold him accountable and aid him in keeping the campaign promises as he, himself, had asked, clearly share responsibility for many of those things which have gone grossly wrong and are in dire need of being set right.

And, of course, we as an African people bear a special share of the responsibility for not seriously holding the country, Congress, and the President accountable as is our tradition, and for not

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rebuilding our Movement to ensure and increase our capacity to do this and truly transform society. Surely, it is our special and unique responsibility as a people, who have since our arrival in this country served as a moral and social vanguard, to uphold in thought, speech and practice our ancient and ongoing social justice tradition. Politicians, administrations, governments and even allies come and go, but our moral obligation rooted in and expressed through our social justice tradition and the righteous struggle we wage to honor it, keep it alive and advance forward in the interest of our people, this country and the world are indispensable and enduring.

President Barack Obama called on us and all Americans to join him in winning leadership of this country and we, as a people gave him over 95% of our support and approval. He is now the country's leader and thus, neither he nor we can rightfully claim he is not responsible for at least *some* of what the American government is doing here in this country and around the world. Indeed, to claim he is not responsible is to claim he is not the leader, only a pathetic puppet, a role which he and all his advocates will vociferously deny and denounce.

Likewise, to claim to be its leader and to have no responsibility for the course of this country at home and abroad is to deny his role as a moral agent, a human being capable of distinguishing right and wrong and acting accordingly. For regardless of his ability or inability to pass bills, overcome right-wing opposition and control his party or raise them from their supine position of

silent and submissive reception of rightist aggressive assertions, he still has the moral responsibility to, at least, speak out against injustice, oppression and exploitation, war, waste and other wrongs and *not* practice these himself. And he also has the moral responsibility to do what he can through the authority and power of his office in the resistance to evil and wrong in the world and in advancing good. Moreover, he cannot adopt the policies, practices and personnel of the right and then ask for special exemption or brotherly and sisterly understanding, because of their relentless savage and racist attacks on him.

The coming election will no doubt compel us to discuss President Obama in ways and to an extent we have not done before, especially what he really means to us as a people, and our increasingly diverging views on what he has done or has not done for us, the country and the world. But we must be careful to do this without *imploding from within* or *being exploited from without*. Thus, there is an urgent need to craft a *protocol of exchange* among ourselves that offers a framework in which we can conduct our conversations in the most meaningful, measured and fruitful way.

This means always being mindful of the fact that in a larger sense, this needed conversation is not simply about Obama or the election, but *about us*, about how we see and assert ourselves as a people, if we are to honor our history, improve the current conditions of our lives and forge a future reflective of the highest African and human ideals and aspirations.

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