



**IN THIS SEASON OF CELEBRATION:  
A FOREST FIRE OF STRUGGLE**  
*Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-10-15, p. A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**T IS AN IRONY AND TRAGEDY OF HISTORY that as we come into this season of celebration of Christmas and Kwanzaa and of calling for peace and security and bringing and sharing good in the world, unfortunately, we still lack the justice necessary for peace and sadly, good and security are regularly sacrificed on the altar of systemic violence against the vulnerable and oppressed of the world. It is a season for calling for good will and increased kindness and caring, and yet we are unwillingly caught in a context that replaces hope for harmony with hostility and needed security with a heightened sense of vulnerability and apprehension for us as Black persons and a Black people. Certainly, as African Americans, we share with others concern about the ongoing mass killings in the country, but we remain concerned also about the continuing police killing and violence of various other kinds against our people.

Thus, we find ourselves seeking security on another level and demanding and looking for ways of protection against the so-called and self-defined “protectors”, otherwise known as the police. And we know in our heart of hearts that there will be no relief without resistance, no change without audacious challenge, and no promising future except that fashioned and forged in righteous and relentless struggle.

Yes, in this season which brings calls for peace on earth, war ravages the world, not only in faraway countries against vulnerable peoples, but also here at home, not just in random or planned mass killings, but also in our targeted and oppressed communities, vulnerable to racist vigilante violence, and treated as zones of occupation by militarized occupation forces known otherwise as police. And we are forced to face the hard and illusion-resistant fact that, as we said in the 60’s, we might not, ourselves, be *at war*, but we are clearly *in a war*, a war against us as a people and especially against

Black men. It is what is called a “low-intensity” war and dishonestly justified by a racialized and racist reasoning which racializes crime and then criminalizes a whole race, an entire people. Having criminalized the race, they can be killed under the color and camouflage of law which is reinforced by pervasive social sanction.

And this, of course, as Malcolm taught, turns the victims into criminals and the criminals into victims, the dead into demons and the killers into demon slayers, pretending to be frightened and forced to defend themselves. Even in earlier times, we as a people had hoped for and expected more from America, and in a time which now seems so long ago, most of us saw a new opening and opportunity in the campaign and election of President Barack Obama. But we soon were relieved of our most outrageous illusions about racial justice, social change, shared power and the possibility of a new America simply through elections.

For his rightwing enemies fell on all four in their attempts to discredit, block and defeat him. His party and progressive allies lent only the silence of lambs and the self-camouflage of chameleons. And Obama, himself, “went patriot”, praised his problematic and self-congratulatory country, courted his enemies, and implemented many of their policies and had the “audacity” to attempt to lecture his most faithful supporters. But Anna Julia Cooper had told us we can never imagine that the elevation of one man counts or substitutes for the elevation of a people, and that the whole people, women and men, as well as children, must benefit from any claim to progress or an upward and forward social thrust.

There are faint hints President Obama has, in part, at least now, seen a light cast across the horizons of history by the fires of struggle in Ferguson that have spread all over

**IN THIS SEASON OF CELEBRATION:**

**A FOREST FIRE OF STRUGGLE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12-10-15, p. A6

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

the country. But we all know again that without a Movement to make demands, educate, mobilize and organize the masses of our people and others, and sustain the struggle, all concessions by the established order are tactical, all promises ephemeral, and all gains subject to reduction and reversal at the opportune time. It is a fundamental Kawaida teaching that one spark in the right season and under the right conditions can set a whole forest on fire. The struggle in Ferguson is that spark in a season of rightful anger after a long history of police and general systemic violence and oppression. But the conditions for this spark to become that forest fire of radical, even revolutionary, change that Malcolm prophesied and promised can only come from a self-conscious and sustained Movement rooted in righteous and relentless struggle.

And so here we are again, at still another critical juncture in the history of our people and this country, struggling to secure the most basic of human rights for Black men and boys and Black people as a whole: the right to life, to security of person and the right of presence. Here it is important to understand that the right to life and all these other related rights are rights of actual persons and a people. If Black life and lives are to matter, to have meaning and value, then this meme and principle must take concrete form in the respect, protection, well-being, fulfillment and flourishing of the people themselves, Black people. Moreover, it is important to reaffirm the dignity and rights of Black people, the sacredness of their lives, and the rightfulness of their need to have the capacity and conditions to live free, secure,

good and flourishing lives without constant threats and practices of varied forms of violence by the police and the larger system.

To build a Movement and set a forest fire of radical and revolutionary change, we must, as I've said elsewhere, begin by holding our ground, building and expanding our gains and pushing the battle lines and lives of our people constantly forward. And pushing our battle lines forward means expanding our concerns and struggle for Black people themselves, so that our *arc of engagement* includes not only resistance to police violence, but also involves struggle against systemic violence as a whole and struggle for the creation of the capacity and conditions to free ourselves, be ourselves, and build with others the just, good and sustainable society and world we all want and deserve to live in.

This also means, above all, staying united and in motion and practicing self-determination in all that is planned and pursued. Indeed, as we've said before, there is no substitute for an aware, organized and engaged people, constantly involved in a multiplicity of actions to define, defend and promote their interests with rightful attention to the interest of others and the world. A historic spark has set a city named Ferguson on fire and the question is: will a Movement emerge to become the forest fire that Malcolm counselled could and would engulf and righteously transform the country as well as ourselves? And as Malcolm reminds us in his deference to history and commitment to struggle, surely—"Time will tell".

---

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 *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, [www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org); [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).