



**KINDS AND COLORS OF LOSS AND GRIEF:  
PROBLEMS OF UNITY WITHOUT JUSTICE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-21-16, p.6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART 1: AS THE COUNTRY PASSES thru this period of dangerous and difficult times and of declared shared loss and shared grief, it is important that we not find ourselves joining conversations and embracing policies that diminish or dismiss our own loss and grief, indict us as a people and divert us from our righteous and relentless struggle. For the struggle is about justice for us on the most fundamental level, i.e., for the inalienable right to life, to be present at home, in the park, at school, at work, in the car, at the store, in the streets or anywhere without fear for our lives as persons, families and a people at the hands of officers of the state. And it is part and parcel of the historic unfinished struggle of our ancestors to expand the realm of freedom, justice and equity and reconstruct society at its roots in the interests of all people, not of one privileged race or powerful, ruling and voracious class.

Certainly, we stand firmly in defense of human life as sacred and worthy of the highest respect and are against the killing of innocents. This is an ethical imperative advanced by our ancestors at the dawn of human moral consciousness, defining humans in our sacred texts as possessors of dignity and divinity, and we will not violate this vital principle and commitment. Indeed, this is the moral ground on which we stand in defense of our own lives and we do not deny the same moral consideration to others. But often some of us lose consciousness of our own equal value and equal rights when we are urged to stop referring to ourselves in the interest of national and local unity, to set aside our rights and our just demand of equal rights and equal treatment without having secured either. And we begin to reconsider, recant and retreat as the media and established order shift the conversation away from our original legitimate concerns about our lives and security, to the lives and

security of the police and praise of the system itself.

Some fail to see we can regret the loss of life without surrendering our criticism and resistance to the injustice and inequality of the system. And certainly, we can resist letting the media and established order recruit us to defend and praise a system that suppresses us and convinces us to essentially argue they can kill us until the killers in our community stop killing us. This is not only immoral in any sense, but also irrational and a dangerously self-devaluing and self-indicting form of collaboration in one's own oppression.

In the midst of media and political mystification and manipulation, the problem posed is not "the rule of law" or "the need for law". We all know the function and value of law for societies. But here people are collapsing "the law" as a principle and framework with the police, and the way they conduct themselves, i.e., law enforcement. So again, it is not the issue of the need for law. It is how the law is applied unequally, how some representatives of the law use it to abuse and kill us, and how the law is then used to defend them, justify their actions and render them innocent almost all the time.

Nor are Black people out to target and kill the police; on the contrary, we are struggling against the police's targeting and killing us. And Black people know all police are not bad or biased, brutal and out of control; for many are our family members, friends and neighbors. But we must and do wonder why the reported "99% good police" don't stand up, speak out and act against the sick and savage ones, as they ask us to speak out against those who do them harm. And we are also concerned that they do not co-sign, in silence or active fraternal cooperation, abusive and fatal acts and the cover up that follows.

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If we are to get thru these times of anxiety, uncertainty and unsettling acts and events, then we must be clear minded; open to listening, and be mutually respectful and reciprocal in all things, and explicitly committed to actions to achieve justice and equity for all. It is the wisdom of the ancestors that “if you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you.” And if, in this moment of crisis, we are to extract and learn the lessons from it, regardless how painful, then we must engage the history that brought us here. And as Seba Malcolm X taught us, “Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research.”

As I’ve said before, nothing comes into being by itself; everything is a result and reflection of that which came before in real and meaningful ways. It is easy to call Micah Johnson and Gavin Long demonizing names and more difficult to ask and engage the answers to critical questions about them without believing that to do so would be to search for justification. But what would drive these two African American ex-military, army and marine veterans to engage in these universally condemned and desperate acts? How did they move from serving the country to questioning it, being enraged by police violence and seeking to address it by engaging in such killing on U.S. soil?

Clearly, we must talk about police patterns of practice in a system that cannot be wished away or declared ended by self-deceptive phrases like “post racial.” And that system is racism, “live and psychologically sick” and still dangerous in America. Some call it the elephant in the room we must certainly discuss. But racism is not the elephant in the room; it’s the room itself, the system

and context in which we think, feel and act; it is pervasive, pernicious and poisonous and it deforms, disables and kills in countless ways. And regardless of how big and inclusive a house America claims to be, whenever we meet with White folks in that room and context, it colors, conditions and constrains our conversation and exchange. For we meet in a context of unequal power, wealth and status. In a word, White is dominant and we resist domination; and domination and resistance determine the course and content of our lives and deaths in America.

**I**T IS BECAUSE of race and racism that we are more often targeted, stopped, harassed, searched, arrested, receive the longest sentences, get the death penalty, and are killed in the context of the repressive criminal justice system. And it’s because of race and racism, we are given instructions at an early age on how to survive encounters with those sworn “to protect and serve,” even though courteousness and compliance are no guarantee of survival. And it is why at “gatherings of unity” we can only “honor the memory and mourn the loss” of police and their families, mention sometimes the grief of our families, but not call the names of the victims of police violence. Nor can we grieve openly and vocally for them or mention the centuries of our suffering from official and unofficial violence in this country. That would be called divisive and unhelpful, for in a racist context, only the racially approved victims can be remembered and mourned. And this reveals how problematic calls for unity and peace are without justice, equality and equity that make them real, relevant and righteous for all concerned.

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