



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

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART 2: WE, AS A PEOPLE KNOW from the hard lessons of life and history that no matter what we hope or have as an ultimate goal in race relations, common ground cannot be built on episodic outreach by the dominant society simply for its advantage and without effectively addressing serious concerns and requirements of justice for us. In these times of national crisis, political campaigns or holiday celebrations of a imagined country united, we are told that we are all Americans now and must work together for the good of this ideal and unfinished project we call America. But afterwards, we go back to being considered deficiently different, gravely in need of being saved from ourselves, worthy of only symbolic presence on the edges of centers of power granted begrudgingly to a few “honorary exceptions” among the sports, entertainment and sometimes, academic elite.

And of course, there is a price to pay for this symbolic presence, i.e., divesting ourselves of that which is particular to us as a people, compromising principles to accommodate or curry favor and being simply a darker version of our illusionary superiors. There is no way forward worthy of the name and no common ground without *mutual respect, justice* and *accountability* and the hard choices and concrete steps that must be taken and constantly monitored to achieve these ends. The hub and hinge on which the whole of human life turns is relations. And quality relations in every area of life must be our foundation and framework in any shared proposal, project and practice. At the heart of quality relations is the principle and practice of *mutual respect*. Each person and people must be equally respected as a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. And they must be treated as possessors of dignity—an inherent worthiness, the sacred texts teach us, that is transcendent

of all social and biological attributes, equal in all, and inalienable.

The police and public call for Black people to *trust* them and talk about us gaining their trust. But trust is not the central problem, it is their need *to respect us as equal human beings worthy of equal respect and therefore equal treatment*. And we need to be able to respect them as professionals, who respect us, do their sworn job of protecting and serving and will not kill us and our children for the flimsiest of racialized excuses. Moreover, the police department and system and society must respect us equally and that cannot be realized in grand calls of “can’t we all get along” after some of them die or they have just killed one or more of us and the White public becomes alarmed, unsettled and insecure about real and anticipated consequences. And then they ask us to reassure them that we will engage in routine rituals of “healing,” i.e., forgetting and forgiving without *the prerequisite of respect, the relief of justice and the rightful expectation of accountability*.

Indeed, mutual respect is, above all, a principled practice that ultimately is reflected in the way people are conceived, engaged, treated and rightly given their due, i.e., justice. Justice is giving persons and peoples what is due to them, being fair and impartial, using authority and power to uphold what is right and good for the people, and holding those accountable that violate the principles and practice of justice. In our ancient sacred text, the *Husia*, justice is defined as life-giving. It says, “Doing justice is breath to the nose.” It also speaks to unsettling tension, disruption and unbalance that come in the world when justice is not done. It says “the true-balancing of the world, lies in doing justice.” So “Speak, do justice” and restore balance in the land, i.e., engage in rightful and righteous struggle to restore justice to its place.

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Thus, there is the ancient African ethical imperative that we are too stand up in the midst of silence and even against overwhelming odds to “bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among those who have no voice”, the poor and disempowered, the violated and invisible, the vulnerable and devalued, and those killed and sacrificed on the altars of injustice and oppression of every kind.

Moreover, if there is to be common ground, there must be *strict police accountability*. They must be held accountable, i.e., responsible for their acts and disciplined accordingly when they violate the rights and lives of the people and their oath to protect and serve. If the police commission doesn’t work, it must be, as it is, confronted, as well as the politicians who appoint and protect them from accountability also. The police bill of rights have to be exposed and altered so that justice can be done and accountability can be practiced. And again a civilian review board must be fought for and achieved. For the police alone will not and cannot rightfully police themselves or break thru the culture of racialized violence they have developed for centuries when left to themselves.

Also, if the police are to be respected as police who protect and serve, they cannot continue to militarize, dressing as soldiers with battlefield technology, weapons, equipment and vehicles. For they then clearly look like and will act like they are protecting and serving themselves and everyone else except the victims of their violence. They can’t strap down and suit up like a combat soldier and then ask people to trust them, let alone respect them as who they, their ads and ad men say they are.

The use of the bomb in Dallas and its general approval has set the police on its still deeper path toward militarization, introducing battlefield technology and weapons into a civilian zone and raising ethical issues about the use of such level of force in a populated area which could injure others and cause loss of life and destruction beyond the intended target. And there is also the ethical concern about sliding down the slippery slope from using this bombing technology as the last resort to using it as a first or regular choice. Police C-4 bombing against Black people has a sordid history of use first in Philadelphia, 1985, against the organization MOVE. There the police killed 11 persons, 6 adults and 5 children, and destroyed 65 homes. It was widely condemned for obvious reasons by a broad section of people, but of great concern is that the Dallas bombing was widely supported by the police and public.

But ours is a history of a Holocaust of enslavement, brutal and savage segregation, and exploitation and oppression of all kinds and yet we have not simply survived, but also prevailed. And we’ve done this knowing that in the face of oppression, there’s no remedy but resistance, no relief except justice, and no alternative to due respect and accountability from those armed and in power and their active and passive supporters. Indeed, ours is a righteous and relentless struggle whose battlefronts and battle lines are everywhere. For we, with Paul Robeson, Harriet Tubman and all our ancestors, know “there is no sheltered rear” and no divisible freedom or respect or justice worthy of its name for just some or a few of us.

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