



**THE MEANING AND MEASURE OF MANDELA:
AN AFROCENTRIC ASSESSMENT**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-12-13, pp. 6-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

To accurately and usefully grasp the measure and meaning of Rolihlahla Dalibhunga Mandela or any person of greatness, we must move beyond deserved but detached declarations of admiration; interesting but insufficient in themselves, anecdotes of personal encounter; and certainly beyond the extensive but self-serving and manipulative coverage by the established order media. In a word, we must put Mandela or any person and all our praise and claims for them in context and view them, not detached from their people and history, but rather in the midst of lives born and lived in community, struggle waged with and for the people, and a victory cut and carved out of the hard rock of a daily reality of sacrifice, suffering, martyrdom, resiliency and refusal to be dispirited or defeated.

The media mythology seeks to reduce the liberation movement to a man and then redefine him in ways that instruct us and other oppressed and struggling people how to win their freedom and White favor. The stress is on accommodation to Whites, called variously racial reconciliation, forgiveness, compromise, and “transcending racial passions”. But may God and good sense save us from such seduction by our oppressor and illusions about their embrace of us. For in their unsolicited “approval”, there is the unspoken reality that they only praise us for doing what is in their interest, even if it means injury to ourselves and the world. This media mythology, which also seeks to make Mandela into a servant of White interests rather than a servant of his people as he defined himself, must be resisted and rejected at every level. They are redefining him so that he stands alone and outside the very people that brought him into being, supported him as he struggled and was taken captive, sustained the movement, demanded his freedom and enabled him to

negotiate from a position of power rooted in the people.

Moreover, this means we must praise others along with Mandela, those who also struggled and were brutalized, tortured, imprisoned, banished, murdered and martyred in the interest and advancement of the struggle. For Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko, Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sizulu, Walter Sizulu, David Sibeko, Elizabeth Sibeko, Chris Hani, Albert Luthuli, Vuyisile Mini and many others are being left out of or erased from the very history they helped make and embody. But we can give Mandela and ANC credit without dismissing or diminishing Robert Sobukwe and the Pan-Africanist Congress, Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement, the Azania People’s Organization, the labor unions, the people and youthful soldiers of Soweto and numerous other groups and formations, as well as ordinary people who suffered everyday humiliation, harassment, hanging, judicial persecution, constant torture, poisoning, letter bombs and merciless pummeling, and many other forms of murder and mayhem.

And let us remember, raise up and show proper respect for the central and sustaining work and struggle of Winnie Nomzamo Madikizela-Mandela. For it is she who, as Madiba’s wife and fellow freedom fighter, served as a vital link between him and the liberation movement throughout the 27 years of his captivity. And let us note with added admiration that she did this in the midst of raising their children, eking out a living and resisting the hounding, hassling, arrests, banishment and imprisonment inflicted on her by the racist regime which has been officially absolved in the interest of so-called of racial reconciliation. But clearly no man, group or government can officially and rightfully absolve a victimizer; only victims, themselves, can do this.

THE MEANING AND MEASURE OF MANDELA:

AN AFROCENTRIC ASSESSMENT

Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-12-13, pp. 6-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Clearly, we cannot let the corporate hypocrites and global highwaymen, who holler hurrah for Mandela now but demonized him as a terrorist earlier, define his measure or meaning for us. They praise him for “reasons” of their own, not for our reasons. They praise him to appropriate his image and memory; to redefine his life and legacy and hold him up in his redefined and limited legacy and role of racial reconciliation, congenial compromises, unangry and unembittered elder statesmen made wiser by this imprisonment, underserved suffering and “rightful” respect for White power and perspective.

But if the oppressor nations are so impressed with their definition of Mandela’s legacy, they should follow his example in some meaningful way. Perhaps, they could demonstrate commitment to his ideas by: ending the occupation of other people’s countries; releasing all political prisoners; stop invading countries and plundering other people’s wealth; returning the people’s wealth; tearing down the apartheid walls on the borders and in conquered and colonized lands; ceasing the torturing of prisoners; and stopping the plundering, polluting and depleting of the earth.

It is more than interesting and vulgarly hypocritical to urge Africans and other people of color to love their oppressor, forgive the savagery of their suppression, and to embrace the victimizers as fellow human beings even when they have done their brutal best to dehumanize us. But we all know there are no similar lessons for the oppressor of loving his enemy, forgiving his brutalizer or enslaver, or even offenders of White racial interests and sentiments. Thus, shocked at our relentless resistance and struggle for liberation, they

indict it as racial hatred, bitterness and a desire for vengeance or retribution.

When we praise Madiba, then, let’s praise him for our own reasons—for his sacrifice for the liberation struggle and his dedication to it; his willingness to lay down his life in armed and any form of struggle necessary; his refusal to disown allies who assisted the South African liberation struggle, neither the leaders nor the people of Cuba, Palestine and Libya; his peace-making and condemnation of oppression and war-mongering; and his serving as a symbol and inspiration to all freedom-loving, peace-seeking, oppressed and struggling people. And again, let us do this without denying the sacrifice, suffering and relentless struggle of the South African people. Indeed, let us praise them, as we praise Madiba, and recommit ourselves to continuous support for their unfinished struggle to lift themselves out of poverty and misery and end the continuing White monopoly of wealth and its associated power.

But no matter what praise oppressors have for concession and compromise, and no matter what condemnation they have for resistance, we must continue the struggle. For we know righteous anger against oppression is not hatred; uncompromising commitment to justice is not vengeance; and wanting the people to regain their land and freedom is not seeking retribution. And so the struggle continues and in the distance, we hear and join the liberation song of the martyr, Vuyisile Mini, who on the way to the gallows called on fellow prisoners and the Movement to continue the struggle, defiantly chanting: “Watch out (oppressor), Black people are coming”. And so, we still are.

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.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.