



**NOTES FROM THE BATTLEFIELD:
TRAYVON, STRATEGY AND STRUGGLE**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 04-12-12, p.A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

In thinking deep and determined about the strategy and struggle for justice for Trayvon Martin and all the other Black boys and men, and persons and peoples of color similarly targeted, abused, maimed and murdered, we are compelled to recall the essential teachings of Amilcar Cabral about the long, toll-taking and relentless struggle we must wage, not only for victory, but also to sustain ourselves in the process. Cabral tells us that to wage serious, sustained and victorious struggle, we must “mask no difficulties, tell no lies, and claim no easy victories”. Indeed, on the way to liberation, the streets are strewn with casualties; the roads are full of ruts, detours and deceptive signs; and the way forward often blocked and always lined with minstrels and merchants of fantasies and false hopes of every diversionary, divisive and disabling kind.

Moreover, we cannot wage real, righteous and sustained struggle and not expect and prepare for constant counterattacks that, as with Trayvon, portray the victim as violent, menacing and unworthy in a thousand ways. And these counterattacks will not only be frontal assaults from the oppressor or adversary by any other name, but also from the dignity-deprived minions, hirelings and hand maidens quickly assembled and eager to give paid-for or freely submissive service. Thus, as we said so often in the Sixties, paraphrasing Sun Tzu, master military strategist, our defense depends not on the enemy not coming, but on our being ready to receive him when he does, i.e., to defeat his attempts to defeat us.

For we understood then as now, we cannot and need not defeat the oppressor in one or a series of major conventional battles, but must wage a guerilla struggle of relentless attrition on every level. Indeed, as Paul

Robeson reminds us, “the battlefield is everywhere; there’s no sheltered rear”, neither for us nor for them. Thus, always outnumbered and out-armed, we must devise ways not only to avoid defeat by the oppressor, but also ways of avoiding defeating ourselves. For as long as a people united and in struggle refuses to surrender in their hearts and minds, even if they are forced to say it with their mouths or write it on paper, they are not defeated and will continue to resist in every way possible.

As the struggle for justice for Trayvon and our people stretches out over time, several developments are possible which can contribute to the defeat of ourselves. These include problems which affect all struggles and movements—division, diversion, doubt, and despair. The first and central challenge is always sustaining unity, *Umoja*, and avoiding division and divisiveness. Here the Kawaiida concept of operational unity is key, that is to say, unity in diversity, unity without uniformity. It is a unity of mutual respect of difference, allowing various voices to frame the strategy, engaging in full, frank and free discussion, but moving as one against the established order to achieve a shared goal. This is especially difficult when differences arise about tactics and strategy for going forward and how to achieve, in concrete and practical terms, the general and shared goal of justice.

This leads to another problem of self-limitation, the tendency to be satisfied by small gains or a resolution of one case, rather than continuing the struggle on many fronts to deal with others similarly situated, vulnerable and in dire need of support and justice. There are many Trayvon’s and we must ask ourselves how do we transfer our fervor and commitment to the larger struggle for radical

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racial and social justice in this country and ultimately in the world? Here, the issue of doubt rises, so often cultivated by the dominant society about the justness and rightness of our cause, and our ability to wage and win a major and lasting victory. These conversations are part of every movement and must be anticipated, engaged and put aside.

There is also the problem of self-indicting diversions such as asking in the midst of our struggle for justice for Trayvon, why we don't show similar concern and mobilization against the killing of Blacks by Blacks? We do, and to deny and dismiss this is to discredit all the work Black people are doing to fight against gang and other violence and the corrupt police and other officials who are complicit in it. It is also showing a racialized conception of crime as a racial defect rather than a socially rooted reality requiring similar societal intervention as unnamed "White" crime.

Moreover, everyone knows gang and personal violence is wrong and it is not sanctioned or supported by law or society. But police violence and the violence of vigilantes against peoples of color are sanctioned by law and supported by racist ideas and practices of the established order as the Trayvon Martin killing demonstrates. Why shouldn't people be *even more concerned* about the racial and racist targeting and killing of a people which is sanctioned by law and supported by society?

A central challenge to sustaining a movement is maintaining its first fire and fervor. As time passes, setbacks, delays and defections ensue and the initial fire and fervor

cool to apprehensive questioning and concerns among the weekend warriors and summer soldiers, despair can and does often set in. It is, as perhaps Jena demonstrated, difficult to move from mobilization in anger and disgust at injustice to organization in determination to "bring right and justice where there is wrong and injustice" as Fannie Lou Hamer taught and urged us. It takes a certain kind of consciousness and commitment to move from social network soldiering to the streets, neighborhoods and other terrains where life and struggles are lived, lost and also made worthy and won with great and continuous effort.

There is closely related this problem of despair, the tendency to become jaded, fatigued and cynical, disabled by a self-generated sense of *déjà vu* – been there, seen this, done that, etc. It represents a real or imagined battlefield fatigue reflected in declarations on radio and in community meetings that "I am tired of all these rallies, meetings, marches, strikes, demonstrations, strategy sessions and such". But social action is as essential to struggle as breath is to life, flour is to bread and trees to a forest. If either is absent, the other cannot and does not exist. Thus, no real struggle, revolutionary, radical or progressive, can be a mere episodic or seasonal engagement with the issue or devoid of continuous social action of various kinds. Indeed, struggle is a long, relentless, difficult and self-sacrificing striving to open the way to a new world, remolding and making ourselves worthy in the transformative process and practice to achieve it.

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