



**OBAMA'S AND TRUMP'S TRANSFER OF POWER:
LEWIS AND OUR ENDURING LEGACY OF STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

WHATEVER LEGACY WE EVENTUALLY DECIDE President Barack Hussein Obama has left for us, the country and the world, it must be discussed in the context of the larger legacy of Black people who brought him into being and shielded him from the arctic wolves and winter winds that howled hatred and hostility throughout his tenure. This ancient and enduring legacy of struggle, of resisting evil and injustice, and pursuing the good is the criteria by which we must judge him and ourselves. It's not the simplistic question of are you, personally or even you and your family, better off materially, but what also was done to advance the cause of freedom, justice, the good of humanity and the well-being of the world?

We cannot reduce everything to money, jobs and material things, even though they are vital to a life of dignity and decency, but also must think and feel beyond ourselves, even the country, and embrace a real responsibility toward creating, increasing and sustaining good in the world. And in this period of transition, it is good for us to pause, measure ourselves in the mirror of the best of our history and culture and ask where do we as a people stand? In this way we can map out and mark off the way forward on the upward paths of this legacy and our lives.

To talk of legacy is not simply to speak of and determine what Obama has done, but also to ask ourselves what have we ourselves achieved and how is it related or unrelated to what Obama did or did not do? In a word, how did we collaborate, cooperate or fail to act to insure a legacy worthy of the name and history African? Did we think an election of the man meant an end to struggle, a redefinition and rendering irrelevant the reality of race and racism?

Did we seek in Obama a savior and find ourselves actually saving him from the haters and howlers who sought to block his every

move and force his failure? For we knew, it was never just against him the person, but also against us the people. And in our attempt to save just him, did we forget ourselves, lose our moral voices, conflate him with the system and fail to give him and the system needed criticism and creative challenge? And in doing this, did we not break with centuries of a tradition of speaking truth to power and to the people, of holding everybody, including our beloved leaders and ourselves accountable and on point and of waging righteous and relentless struggle against a system that still oppresses us in various disguised and clearly visible ways?

Regardless of the love, hate or indifference directed towards them, presidents come and go, but our people's legacy and life of struggle to expand the realm of freedom and justice and increase and sustain good in the world of necessity endures. For the *Husia* says, we are "given that which endures in the midst of that which is overthrown." And that which endures in the midst of that which is overthrown and passes away is our moral and spiritual principles, and we cannot deny or fail to uphold them without deforming, disabling and deadly damage to ourselves and the legacy we leave for those who come after us.

Thus, as others talk of "peaceful" transitions and transfers of presidential power as the mark of democracy, it is up to us, as our foremother Fannie Lou Hamer taught us, to raise uncomfortable and essential questions about the praise songs leaders, governments and societies sing about themselves. Indeed, she suggested that in the midst of the constant killing of Black people for racial and racist "reasons," the lines of the praise song "land of the free and home of the brave" might ring truer, if they were instead "the land of the tree and home of the grave," i.e., the lynching tree and the grave of the innocent Black victims of of-

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ficial and vigilante violence in the fields, forests, streets and roads of southern and northern America.

And so now we are asked and even urged to accept elected evil, pray for its success in office, attend its official ritual of recognition called inauguration and give it a chance to prove itself. For, it is argued, it represents the “peaceful transfer of power” which is essential to democracy. But we must not collaborate in our own oppression nor fail to see that the transfer of power is among the elites; and power to the people is yet to be achieved.

Therefore, it is good and within our moral and struggle tradition for Rep. John Lewis to stand up and speak truth to power in the midst of silence, muted voices and constant calls for compromise and collaboration in the interest of an agenda we have not defined and don't share. Lewis dared to declare to this country and the world that Donald Trump is “not a legitimate president” and “You can't feel at home with what is wrong, not right,” if you have any sense of the moral.

There are three basic ways to understand illegitimate, i.e., as illegal, unreasonable and immoral. Lewis points to the legal issue in that Trump's election was a tainted process, involving intervention by the Russians and the FBI in favor of Trump, and if democracy is about the rule of the majority, Trump lost by 3 million votes. And it is an unreasonable assumption that a person who is willfully and arrogantly uninformed, professionally unprepared, pathologically self-focused and embarrassingly temperamental can be president, if president is to mean anything more than just being in the position and having a title.

But even if legally and reasonably he passed the criteria established, the most defini-

tive disqualifying criteria are the moral problems he poses for the vulnerable, the country and the world. These moral issues expressed by Trump, himself, include his commitment to reestablish state sanctioned torture; killing of whole families to get at suspected or designated “terrorists;” mockery of the disabled; contempt for the poor; racist indictments of peoples of color; hostility toward Muslims as personal attitude and public policy; degrading conceptions and treatment of women; exploitative practices toward workers; warmongering threats and promises; and encouraging the worst in those prepped, prepared and prone to hate, howl and harm the vulnerable, different and disadvantaged.

The move to include us in a ritual of recognition and acceptance begins with asking us to accept Trump's election as a legitimization of the wrong and evil he promises and represents. That's why Lewis' reminds us that we should not “feel at home” with things that are wrong and not right, regardless of who's proposing, pushing or peddling them.

Then, some tell us we should or they will pray for Trump's success because his success means the success for the country. But Trump's concept of success will not be success for the country, but for himself, his associates and his class. Thus, if we pray for success it should be success for the people, and if he acts in the righteous interests of the people, the people and the country will be successful and he will be also. But if he doesn't, he should and will fail by any moral measure of success and justice. Clearly, then, we have no alternative but to set aside illusions, keep the faith, honor the legacy and continue this beautiful, righteous and relentless struggle that is our honored legacy and self-defining way of life.

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