



**SUSTAINING FERGUSON AND MOVING FORWARD:
THE ANATOMY AND OBLIGATION OF RESISTANCE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART I. The critical and demanding juncture of history at which we stand is unavoidably marked and made meaningful by our ongoing struggle for racial and social justice. Indeed, it is our ongoing and unfinished struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves, as an African people, self-consciously committed to the ancestral ethical imperative to bear witness to truth and set the scales of justice in their proper place, especially among the *voiceless, vulnerable and devalued*. And it is also marked and made meaningful to us in these troubled and trying times because of the increasing threat to our lives and security by persistent police violence, and the repeated refusal of those in power to either prosecute or promise relief. On the contrary, they attempt to justify and actually collaborate in this official violence, conceived and carried out under the cover and camouflage of racialized law. But this critical and demanding juncture of history at which we stand is also marked and made especially meaningful to us because of the high and strong tide of Black resistance that rose in response, demonstrating Black people's resolute refusal to accept this unjust and unjustifiable state of things.

And here we must pay rightful homage to the Black people of Ferguson who first stood up, resisted and called on others to come and join them in this vital struggle. Surely, when a real and rightful history of Black resistance in this country is written, the struggle of the Black people of Ferguson for justice and against police violence will stand as a bright light in this noble and honored tradition. It will be rightly remembered as that special spark that set an emerging movement on fire and ignited a necessary, serious and sobering conversation about the ongoing racist and oppressive structure and functioning of this country and our need to continue and

intensify our struggle against it. Ferguson, thus, becomes a model and motivation for our continuously moving forward in the struggle.

This increasing police violence against the Black community, especially against young Black men and boys, has created an expanded sense of insecurity and righteous anger and outrage at the cold and callous disregard for the life and rights of Black people as demonstrated by the continued police killings. Indeed, this urgent concern crosses class, generational, gender and sexual lines and expresses itself in an active solidarity of righteous resistance. And it is this unity in struggle of a diversity of Black persons and groups that greatly contributes to the wide-ranging, long-running and intensely felt character of this resistance.

But now we are at a decisive point where we must ask ourselves, as Dr. King advised us, "where do we go from here?" And joined to that question is and must be the question of "how do we sustain the struggle, rebuild the movement and win victory for our people?" Clearly, it is important to take into account the fact that we ask these questions in the context of the established order's ancient and ongoing strategy of delayed action, drawing out the process of procedural justice, hoping the people will tire of the struggle, lose hope and interest, and turn their attention to other less demanding things. And these vital questions are also posed in the context of the established order's massive propaganda and public relations campaign to demonize the victims, make victims of the killers, link the unlinkable and compel former severe critics to tone down and "balance" their criticism, praise the police and proclaim that "police lives matter too".

Finally, these questions of the direction and sustainment of the struggle is raised in the context of the recent decision of the U.S. not to pursue prosecution of the police killer of

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Michael Brown on violation of civil rights charges. And like former times of setbacks and failures of the system to give our people even simple justice, there arises in some quarters a sense of despair and the nagging feeling that perhaps the Borg overlords of the land are correct in their constant contention that “resistance is futile” and we will all ultimately be assimilated. Thus, it is said, we should forgo and forget resistance and more wisely seek instead a comfortable, cushioned and well-paying position in oppression.

However, we, who have any serious knowledge of this sacred narrative known as our history, know also we can never be comfortable in oppression. Indeed, we defiantly declare it is good to rebel against evil and injustice, to refuse to let the oppressor rest, to disrupt his daily routine, to make him uncomfortable, uncertain and unable to do this dirt and evil in the daylight or the dark without radical resistance, incessant interruption and relentless exposure. The *Husia*, a sacred text of our ancestors says, resistance to evil and injustice is an ethical obligation, stating that “You are commanded to struggle against those that act against you”, who act against Maat, against truth, justice and good in the world. Likewise, it says, we are obligated to constantly seek and speak truth, do and demand justice and defend and do what is good.

Thus, we stand in righteous resistance at the crossroads of freedom and enslavement with our foremother Harriet Tubman, rejecting the narrow notion of freedom as individual escape and imagined “moving up”. Instead, we define freedom as a shared good, as the collective practice of self-determination in and for community. And we stand in solidarity with our forefather Frederick Douglass, who having determined he would not be brutalized

again, resisted and restrained the hand of the overseer, freed himself and then gave his life to building a movement to free our people, end their enslavement and build with them a new life and way forward.

So, we already know that regardless of the particular actions we decide to engage in to *advance* and *sustain* our Movement, righteous and relentless resistance lies at the heart and soul of all of them. As we’ve said so many times—in the face of all forms of oppression, there is no remedy more effective than resistance; no strategy worthy of its name that does not foreground and require struggle, and no real way forward except across the sacrifice-demanding battlefields directed toward liberation and ever higher levels of human life.

Therefore, as our forefather Henry Highland Garnett taught us, we must “let our motto be resistance, resistance, resistance”. By resistance we mean *standing firm against* the established order and *actively opposing* it in various ways. This means rejecting its influence and control; denying it support and cooperation; disrupting its daily and normal functioning; and compelling it to change in progressive, radical and revolutionary ways. History shows that our tradition of righteous resistance is deep rooted, continuous and committed to expanding the realm and possibilities of freedom and flourishing in this country and the world. Indeed, it has become a model and inspiration for oppressed and struggling people in throughout the world. And we can never yield this ground gained, nor seriously question the rightness and relevance of our struggle in creating new *capacities, conditions* and *possibilities* of African and human freedom and flourishing and shared good in the world.

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