



**ENGAGING GARVEY, KATRINA, FERGUSON AND WATTS:  
EMBODYING THE WHIRLWIND, FLOOD AND FIRE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HIS MONTH of August, full of commemorations, comes always with special meaning, for it is a central source and reference point for our history of righteous resistance as a people. It is the month of the 128<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the towering pan-Africanist, resistance leader and movement builder, the Hon. Marcus Garvey, who promised to return in the whirlwind to aid us again in winning our ongoing struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves. It is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that pivotal uprising and fiery turning point of the liberation movement we call the Watts Revolt. It is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Devastation associated with the Hurricane and Floods of Katrina and our people's heroic demonstration of resilience and resourcefulness in the face of savage abandonment and abuse by the local, state and federal governments. And it is the first anniversary of the Ferguson Revolt, that bright and still burning spark that ignited across the country a new forest fire of righteous rage and resistance against police violence and the systemic violence of which it is a central and fundamental part.

This month represents not only our righteous anger and resistance, it also, of necessity, calls to mind these continuing injustices and unfreedoms and the unfinished struggle which needs to be continued and intensified to end them. It calls on us to be, become and embody the whirlwind, flood and fire of righteous struggle to clear a way forward for a liberated life, lived without oppression, exploitation and degradation, and opened up to expansive ways, as Garvey taught, to come into the fullness of ourselves.

Let us imagine for a moment, that when the Hon. Marcus Garvey said to us regarding the need for continued struggle, "Look for me in the whirlwind or the storm", he was talking about us embodying and being the whirlwind and storm in which he would return in awesome and overwhelming resistance. And let's imagine for another moment that when Freder-

ick Douglass said to us and the world, "It is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake", he too was referring to us and our responsibility to be that fire, thunder, storm, whirlwind and earthquake for the achievement of freedom and justice. And let us imagine once again that when our ancestors sang the spiritual and freedom song, "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water the fire next time", they also were talking to us about what we must become and be: the fire of righteous rage and resistance against unfreedom and injustice of every kind.

Therefore, our people of Ferguson need to be praised, supported, strengthened and sustained, and this is especially true for those whom Garvey called the "true warriors for freedom", those still on the battlefield for justice and good, and freedom from police violence and the general violence of a self-deluding racist city and society which can neither rightly or usefully criticize nor condemn itself. To continue to support and sustain Ferguson is to support and sustain our efforts to rebuild our Movement for racial and social justice. It is to recognize, respect and reinforce every progressive act against oppression and injustice, every righteous effort of our people to free themselves and be themselves without oppression, persecution or penalty. It means also the name, needs and original aims of Ferguson must not be marginalized, minimized or pushed to the side because the media declares there is a new movement they feel more at ease with, for one organization is not a movement.

Likewise, we must remember, praise, support and sustain our people of New Orleans who without adequate or any serious support from government agencies, fought their way thru unimaginable amounts of death, disease, deprivation and destruction, holding on to life and hope in the most bleak and unBlack of times. And let us remember and duplicate the quick and massive response of the Black

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community, not always reported or remembered but nevertheless present and powerful for a host of reasons. Still the people struggle to return and reclaim their own, and to block, slow down and stop the continuing Europeanization and de-Africanization of the historic and current character of the city and we must support them.

And there is also our people's continuing struggle in Watts that must be praised, supported, strengthened and sustained. Here Watts refers not only to the geography, but also the Black community as a whole, as it did during the Revolt. Moreover, as during the Revolt, it refers to a needed and necessary consciousness and commitment to struggle. It was the fire of fires that represented and helped initiate a turning point of the Movement.

Finally, in the midst of our ongoing struggle, there is currently an international initiative directed toward securing for the Hon. Marcus Garvey a posthumous exoneration that clears his name; affirms his innocence of the crime for which he was unjustly charged, tried and convicted; concedes the wrongfulness of the charge, trial and conviction; and begins the process of repairing this wrong and injury done not only to Garvey himself and his descendants, but also to the global African community. And we in the spirit of our struggle for justice in this country and the world must support, strengthen and sustain this struggle. There are, of course, legal grounds for the exoneration: (1) Garvey's innocence; (2) the lack of evidence against him; (3) the denial of a fair trial; and (4) the fact that he was targeted by the FBI and thus the charges, prosecution and conviction were politically motivated.

Historically, the American state has used its power to suppress and silence voices of liberation thru political trials and political im-

prisonment, but like Garvey, we must refuse to be frightened, dispirited or defeated. And like Garvey, we must declare "Service to my (people) is an undying passion with me. So, the greater the persecution, the greater my determination to serve". Indeed, he said, "I have sworn by you and my God to serve to the end of time, the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds".

Clearly, the times in which we live do not allow us the luxury of episodic engagement, detached observance or deference to others concerning issues vital to our lives, and essential to our moral and historical self-understanding and self-assertion in the world. It is a simple and sobering fact: *the oppressor does not rest in his oppression, and we cannot rest in our resistance*. Nor can we imagine things will eventually work themselves out, that the "arc of the universe will bend towards justice" by itself, or that a real and radically transformative movement can be made by any means other than the people, themselves, deeply involved in self-conscious and sustained work and struggle. Indeed, it is worth remembering and repeating regularly that there is no substitute for an aware, organized and engaged people constantly involved in a multiplicity of actions to define, defend and advance their interests with rightful attention to the interests of others and the well-being of the world.

Let us go forward, then, confident in the righteousness and victory of our struggle. Let us embrace Garvey's whirlwind and become it, relight and be the fire of our liberation movement and become and embody the Haitian call to unified struggle, saying "*yon sèl nou fèb; ansanm nou fò; ansanm, ansanm nou lavalas*. Alone we are weak. Together we are strong. Together, together we are the flood".