



**GUARDING THE GATES OF CHANGE:  
KEEPING FAITH, CONTINUING FORWARD**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

Regardless of any disillusionment or doubt about President Obama's record or rate of reform and change, we cannot, with any rightful or righteous justification, give up even an inch of ground gained in our ongoing struggle for a just and good society. Thus, the profound and pervasive sense of hope and history we shared in 2008 as a people and a country must not be shattered or compromised by the unchallenged resurgence and return of the right-wing and Republicans to dominance thru our amnesia concerning their record or our apathy and inactivity which will insure their victory in the coming midterm elections.

On a deep ethical and ebonically expressed level, then, "it ain' eb'n 'bout" liking or not liking Obama, but about the critical issues facing us, about not giving up gained ground without a fight; about whether we sit on the sidelines mourning about what might have been or stand up and continue struggling to remake this country not just thru elections, but thru the practice and process of ongoing struggle on every level and in every area. For to paraphrase Paul Robeson, the battlefield and "battlefront is everywhere; there is no sheltered rear." And elections are one of those areas of struggle. Thus, there is a need to engage this election as a critical one. For it's about and part of the unfinished struggle for social justice and a liberated life which our ancestors have left as a living legacy we must embrace, nurture and carry forward. And it's about our heart, will and commitment to carry it thru and hand it to the next generation to expand and extend it even further.

And this historical moment and the challenge it poses for us is also about how

we see ourselves. Mary McLeod Bethune has taught us that in spite of the night of the Holocaust of enslavement and the subsequent horror and eviscerating violence of segregation, we must endure and "discover the dawn and share it with our children and the masses who need it most." And Martin Luther King counseled us at the first meeting in Montgomery in the apartheid winter of 1955 saying, that we should struggle in such a way that "when the history books are written in future generations, the historians will have to pause and say, 'There lived a great people—a *Black* people who injected a new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.' This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility."

Again, then, it's not just or even principally about President Obama as a person, about disappointments, identified flaws and failures to follow thru on campaign promises made or loss of faith in a hoped-for savior. Obama never said he was such, only that he was just a man, sorely in need of a movement to support his progressive policies, check and challenge him, protect his flanks and push him forward, helping to bring into being the just and good society we all want and work for.

Let's face it too; many of us became fans and faith-driven followers of Obama, imagining the man to be not only the symbol of the movement, but also its substance. And so we built fan clubs who adored and guarded his image at the expense of his and our interests. We refused to listen to or tolerate any criticizing or questioning of him, a process vital to any serious, moral, meaningful or democratic process. Nor did we build the independent movement he called for and

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we needed and knew was necessary long before he was born, became a candidate or a socially-conscious person.

And we should remember also the real gains in healthcare, education tax credits, credit card reform, state stimulus money, etc., that President Obama achieved in spite of Republicans, and that every time he said, “yes we can,” they said “no you won’t.” Remember too how high-ranking Republicans declare with diabolical glee personal animosity and resistance to him and publicly commit themselves to working, not for the good of the country, but to block, harass and make him fail. And think too about those he mistakenly placed around him who have not advised him well, are hangovers from another time and tense, and have not done well announcing his achievements, resisting the racist attacks on him or speaking to the American people about his worthy efforts to repair the two-term damage of Bush and company.

If you want the return and rule of those who have pimped and pandered the crises of the country, who blocked President Obama on the public option on health care, middle class tax cuts, help for small business, stay home, don’t vote, and continue to complain. If you want the return and rule of the chaos-makers, hawking and hustling the same agenda of further enriching the rich, increasing impoverishment of the poor, repealing health care and leaving the working class unemployed and uninsured, then forget it, and “fake it off like it don’t mean nothin’ nohow.” And if you want the return and rule

of those who pander and peddle fear, hatred and hostility of different others, and who in their customary war-mongering way will expand the two wars they left for Obama and keep us on infantile color codes of alert and anxiety, then write-off this moment as unimportant, unworthy of the attention given even to the latest fad or football game.

Actually, these people and their tea-party clones and clobbies are counting on African Americans not voting, not engaging the issues, not thinking deeply or carefully about what’s at stake. They know how critical the Black vote is in at least eleven states and they are already telling us we’ve lost faith or will not vote if Obama is not running, reinforcing fan politics rather than recognizing a politics of issues, interests and struggle.

Again, our struggle is beyond Obama, although it clearly includes him. For the attacks on President Obama are at their deepest and most definitive level race-driven, not just against a person, but also against a people and their defiant refusal to accept the role racists would assign them. The venerable and veteran civil rights leader, Rev. Joseph Lowery, has said, “In 2008 we changed the guard, and now we must guard the change.” He is clearly right. However, our struggle includes but is beyond this election. And it requires not only that we guard the gates of change, but also keep the faith, continue forward, and knock down all doors that block the way and divert our work toward a new history and hope for humankind.

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