



## HISTORY AND THE LESSONS OF LONG BEACH: LEADERSHIP, PRINCIPLES AND STRUGGLE

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As we say so often in *Kawaida*, history is a very human thing. We bring it into being by what we do and do not do, by the awesome and outstanding thought and action we call greatness; by the alarming and disruptive things we call failure, defeat and destruction, and by our weaving and weathering the major and minor triumphs and tragedies we call daily life. But as Africans, whatever we experience or encounter in the world, we must always dare to take the initiative and to carve out of the hard, implacable and plea-resistant rock called reality, a place of good and worthy gain in the world.

In the Sixties, the works of the pan-African revolutionary Frantz Fanon were seen and embraced as sacred texts. They were food for thought, and insight and inspiration for action. Especially important was his classic work, *Wretched of the Earth*. And so this week as Black History Month I (General Focus) in February begins and leads into Black History Month II (Women Focus) in March, I picked up a paperback edition I had given as a present and promise to Tiamoyo, my House, wife, friend and companion in all things good and beautiful. For I needed intellectual nourishment and I longed to recover the insight and recapture the spirit of the Sixties when we, Africans, and the world were in revolutionary motion, daring to move mountains, imagining and seeking to bring into being, as Fanon says, a new man, woman and world, and a new history of humankind. For now, I am confronted with the horror and hard lessons of Long Beach, another face of history.

Last week a White judge tried nine African American children charged with a hate crime assault. He handcuffed them to chairs

in court during their trial, held them in custody for 87 days, dismissed devalued exculpatory evidence, and convicted all but the 11 year-old turned 12 on the day of decision. Moreover, he ruled that 8 of the 9 were guilty of a “hate crime” which aggravates the “crime” and calls for a more severe sentence. Surely, there is something radically wrong, even sick and sinister, about a society, which, not satisfied with how its racist justice has damaged generations of adults, pushes ahead relentless to make monsters out of our children, criminalize and cut short their future and make them the poster children of hate crimes.

It is an obscene irony of history that the people against whom society has so savagely taught and practiced racial hatred should be tried by its racial representatives and presented as the model of racial hatred and crime in the U.S. Surely, Malcolm reminded us, White people should speak about hate and hate crimes with some racial modesty, given the Holocausts they committed against Native Americans and Africans and their historical and continuing racist violence in general against us and other peoples of color. Moreover, an oppressor has no moral authority or right to indict or try the oppressed. It is only by the force of law undergirded by gun, gas, electric chair and economic chokehold that he rules in court and society and compels compliance. Indeed, let us never fail to see the violent nature of White domination whether imposed by those with modified choir robes or other uniforms of various colors and kinds. And let us not mystify the law which, in an unjust and racist society, is little more than the racial and class interests of the rulers raised to

the level of sacred observance thru the power of the gun.

But there are lessons to learn here in our ongoing struggle for freedom and justice in this society and the world. First, we must realize that in a racist society, there is no neutral side or exempt position, even for children. And either we choose justice for the people or injustice by the oppressor. As Paul Robeson said, "the battlefield is everywhere; there's no sheltered rear." It is in the courts that confine and kill us under the camouflage of law, in the religions that relegate us to cursed or unchosen status, and in the society that sends us to die in distant lands, fighting vainly for our oppressor's contrived right to rule and rob the vulnerable peoples of the world.

Secondly, we must practice self-determination as a compelling moral principle necessary to be full human beings and men and women in the world. Not only must we not allow our oppressor to be our teacher, but also we must not let White liberals, leftists, conservatives, racists, gays or straights of any stripe to lead us. On the contrary, we must reflect and act on the deep ethical, intellectual and experiential knowledge we have developed in the cradle and crucible of history and struggle from its earliest origins to its most current and continuous unfolding.

Especially must we rebuild the Movement and strengthen the concept, principle and practice of leadership. One can only be saddened by some of the community's reaction to the children's arrest, indictment and

conviction. This included accepting the racist criminalization of the children, assuming they were guilty by association, if not by action. One father said, he did not know what happened, but believed his child should still apologize, apparently to appease the oppressor and seek mercy instead of struggle for justice. And there were some leaders, who instead of mobilizing the masses for struggle in defense of our children called on them to passively wait, pray and prepare for the worst.

Indeed, so much of today's leadership has been reduced to PR and pacification of the masses, becoming mediators and managers of the people for the established order. Thus, in times of crisis, they immediately preach a peace without justice; a healing without restraining the upraised racist hand; and a servile surrender without even the pretense of justice. In such a context, how do we force the established order to recognize and consider the cost and consequences of their dominance for us and them? Surely, they must know there's a price to pay for oppression, that there will be no peace without justice, no security for *any* without freedom for *all*, and no pretension of togetherness until there's a true and equitable sharing of wealth and power in this land and the world. And this will come not from a passive collaboration in our own victimization, but thru courageous and relentless resistance to societal and communal violence and the suppression of injustice, crime, criminality and gangs in high and low places.