



**IN REMEMBRANCE AND RECOMMITMENT:
INVOKING KING, CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 04-09-09, p. A7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

April 4th marks the martyrdom and assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and thus a time of paying homage to him and his ultimate sacrifice as a martyr, and of actively reaffirming that his legacy will be honored and endure, and that his undeserved death will not be in vain or undervalued and can never be counted even as an imagined triumph for his assassins and the system that spawned them. Thus, the mass march and rally in Los Angeles on April 4, was not only in rightful remembrance and respect for him and his awesome sacrifice, but also an active recommitment to continue the transformative work and struggle that were the root and reason of both his sacrifice and assassination.

Called by SCLC, under the leadership of its President and CEO, Rev. Eric Lee, this commemorative mass action was joined by community partners SEIU/SOULA, AFL-CIO, UTLA, Fix Expo Campaign, Say Yes to Children, LAANE, Brotherhood Crusade and Mothers in Action, as well as other community organizations, including Community Coalition in Los Angeles, NAACP, our organization Us and others. Embracing the theme “Remembering King, Realizing the Dream”, we marched and rallied to emphasize the urgent need for quality jobs, quality education and safer neighborhoods which are essential elements in a life of dignity and decency.

Grounded in the spiritual and ethical culture of a people who are committed to faith and hope as pillars of life, Dr. King defiantly declares, as a counterpoint to the pessimism, cynicism and materialism that characterize so much of society, “I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits”. Here, Dr. King advances an audacious faith in the rightness

and realizability of economic security, an expansive education and essential cultural grounding, and a context of freedom in which dignity and equality are assured, the human person flourishes and the human spirit soars. It is an audacious faith, not yet realized, but realizable, a goal to be reached at the end of a still unfinished fight.

In an article which appeared in print after his martyrdom, he explained his turn toward greater emphasis on economic security saying, “We call our demonstration a campaign for jobs and income because we feel that the economic question is the most crucial that Black people and poor people generally are confronting”. It is important to note, however, that this turn is not away from racial justice, but an added focus to better achieve it. Speaking as if he were witnessing today’s conditions, he stated “there is a literal depression in the (Black) community”.

To deal with the Black and overall the economic crisis, Dr. King argued for “an economic bill of rights” which “would guarantee a job to all people who want to work and are able to work (and) an income for all who are not able to work”. As President Obama would later promise, King proposed massive government investment in “creating certain public-service jobs”, “new forms of work that enhance the social good...” and attending to interrelated issues of housing, health care and education.

Dr. King also supported unions while at the same time criticizing them and challenging them to be more responsive to Black interests, and urging Black people to “strive for enhanced representation (leadership) and influence in the labor movement”. He repeatedly asserted that Black people “who are almost wholly a working people cannot be casual toward the union movement”. Defining as “a

**IN REMEMBRANCE AND RECOMMITMENT:
INVOKING KING, CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 04-10-09, p. A7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

2

basic right—the freedom of labor to be organized and be represented,” he, thus supported workers’ right to choose freely their relationship with unions as envisioned by the current proposed federal “Employee Free Choice Act”, of vital importance to workers’ rights, wages and benefits and rebuilding the labor movement.

As noted above, Dr. King links “economic insecurity and insufficiency” to other issues of deprivation and disadvantage. He states that “economic insecurity strangles the physical and cultural growth of its victims. Not only are millions deprived of formal education and proper health facilities, but also our most fundamental social unit—the family—is tortured, corrupted and weakened by economic insufficiency”. Moreover, Dr. King defines inadequate education based on racial segregation and discrimination as “a crippling evil”, which disables the mind and has a tremendous negative impact, not only on the child, but also on the family and community as a whole and by extension even society.

The third issue of safer neighborhoods is often seen as a reduction of internal violence, but there is also systemic violence against the oppressed, as King noted. And it is not only police brutality, but also an inferior education which disables, an unemployment and poverty that degrade and a political vulnerability that invites exploitation. Thus, the march and rally focused on resistance to another immediate danger, imposition and unequal treatment—the decision of the MTA to put a train-line at street-level down Exposition Blvd. in Black

and Brown communities while using overpasses in Culver City and an underpass at Figueroa by USC.

This decision by MTA to run the train line thru South (Central) L.A. at street level poses unacceptable and unnecessary risks and dangers to our children and the residents of our communities as it runs close to our schools and parks without overpasses or underpasses at most intersections, thus increasing the threats of death and injury. This raises issues of race and class disregard and disadvantage, the privileging of some and the preying upon others and valuing the lives and safety of one group and devaluing the lives and safety of others. It follows a nauseating familiar and unjust pattern rumored to have recently been overcome thru an election, but which can only be checked and changed thru dedicated, disciplined, deep-rooted and long-distance struggle.

In his last speech after reviewing the state of the movement and the forward march of history, Dr. King asked “Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history?” And his answer remains relevant and equally compelling today. He said: “it means we’ve got to stay together and maintain unity ...keep (our) issues where they are (out front)...give ourselves to this struggle until the end...strengthen (Black) institutions...develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness...rise up with a greater readiness...stand with a greater determination...and move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be”.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kawaida and Questions of Life and Struggle: African American, Pan-African and Global Issues*, [www.MaulanaKarenga.org; www.Us-Organization.org and www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org].