



**NOT JUST IN JENA:
RESURGENT RACISM EVERYWHERE**
Los Angeles Sentinel, 10-18-07, p. A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

It is a shocking surprise to some, a painful revisiting of a racial nightmare to others, and still to others the sudden horror of a racist Halloween show turned real; one for which they have neither the stomach to witness nor the stamina to resist and repel. This recent bout of resurgent racism should surprise no one, for racism is an opportunistic social virus that often lies below-the-surface, deceptively dormant, waiting for the weakening of the will, strength and struggle of its chosen victims, peoples of color. And it only retreats under a therapeutic regimen of steadfast resistance, but still returns repeatedly at every opportunity. For it is rooted in a deeper problem of White supremacy, its father, which made it a fundamental principle and practice.

Although we have the knowledge to end it in its most virulent forms, it seems society, even at its most liberal self-understanding, does not have the will to do so. Thus, the struggle must continue not just in Jena, but throughout the whole country. For whatever the U.S. imagines itself to be in its best moments—a democracy, a color-blind guardian and guarantor of equality, equal opportunity and justice under the law; it is not. Indeed, whenever it pretends to be color-blind, it is always to the disadvantage of the people of color.

The need for confrontation and continued struggle is evident whether we talk about injustice in Jena, police violence as a daily practice, massive imprisonment of our people, brutality and death in boot camps, the denial of a decent life and even the right of presence or the sadistic use of a noose to remind a people of the history and horror it represents. Indeed, a noose and Nazi swastika flaunted in the face of victims and their descendants who suffered and were sacri-

ficed on the altar of unspeakable oppression, destruction and crimes against humanity cannot be dismissed or excused away as a childish prank.

For a noose is a symbol of savage lynching, suppressive segregation, brutal exploitation and barbaric degradation. It is the brutish, wanton and racist killing of human beings: beating the person into a pulp; dragging the body behind a car for hours; calling a gathering of the settlement or town around a tree; hanging the person alive or dead; setting the body on fire, with women, children and men shrieking and howling hate and eating popcorn and things; cutting off testicles as trophies of triumph; placing them in jars on the counter of the general store and deluding themselves into believing they have done a good White and Christian deed. A single page of Molefi Asante's book, *Erasing Racism*, reveals in graphic detail the barbaric nature of these racist rituals of death-dealing, hate and horror. Thus, the system which produced its history and its current deformed and pathetic peddlers must be challenged and changed.

It is important to remember, then, it is not just about injustice and violence in Jena or the South, but about the structure and functioning of a racist/class society which demands and defends domination in various forms. And regardless of the numerous names offered to conceal its savagery, soften its image or to cultivate collaboration and cooperation from its very victims, domination is always a violent phenomenon. It can be the aggressive violence of the military, police or private security guards about the brutal business of corrective discipline, savage suppression, destructive constraint and intentional and so-called "collateral" killing under the color and camouflage of law.

**NOT JUST IN JENA:
RESURGENT RACISM EVERYWHERE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 10-18-07, p. A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

2

Or it can be the “peaceful violence” of legislatures and courts which narrow, block and erase paths to the future for peoples of color thru the racist construction, interpretation and application of law, criminalizing a whole people, mercilessly locking up or shooting down their youth and depriving them of productive and promising lives. Likewise, it can be the “peaceful” psychological violence of the educational system and media that presents dignity-denying, false and deformed versions of a people’s history and humanity, and its culture, its unique and equally valuable way of being human in the world. It is this kind of physical and psychic violence, Fanon says, that produces in the vulnerable and oppressed tendencies toward “self-doubt, self-denial, self-condemnation and self-mutilation”.

So Jena is a symbol of injustice in the South and North, a sign and symptom of a deep and enduring problem in every corner of the country: the persistent presence and preference of White supremacy. It is the racist assumption and violent assertion of the contrived “right” and responsibility of Whites to rule and reign supreme and to be the paradigm for all things good, the model for all things meaningful, and the guardian of a “civilization” built on the savaging of those different and unable to defend themselves. And so, we cannot call a holiday, go on vacation or pretend a victory over oppression we have not yet achieved.

We can only call oppression into question, and eventually end it thru long, hard, heroic and relentless struggle. As Fanon

says, the end of our oppression “cannot come as a result of magical practices, or of natural shock or of a friendly understanding.” It must be won in the clash and clamor, the disquieting dangers and demand of battle on every front and every level. For as Robeson reminds us, “there is no sheltered rear” and thus no “panic room” except for the rich, and no sanctuary or safe place except in the space we free, found and fortify in struggle.

If we are defined by our deeds, and if we understand ourselves by how we assert ourselves in and for the world, there is nothing more important than that we continue the struggle to expand the realm of freedom in society and the world. We must resist and beat back those efforts and ideas of the dominant society that seek to suppress, seduce or divert us and to return us to that restrictive past and plight out of which we have already emerged.

We must not waiver or walk away from the battlefields we’ve marked off in the fight for freedom, justice and human flourishing. For the war is not won with a single battle, march, strike or demonstration. And victory will not be handed to us by the simple evolution or unfolding of history. It will come from the steadfast struggle of the masses of people, appropriately aware and organized, resilient and resistant to battle fatigue, fear, and false consciousness, and in self-conscious motion towards the new world they have imagined and dare to bring into being.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Black Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, [www.US-Organization.org and www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org].