



**RAISING UP AND REMEMBERING BIKO:
RESISTING THE BLEACHING OF HIS BLACKNESS**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-13-07, p. A-7

Dr. Maulana Karenga

This month marks the martyrdom of Steve Bantu Biko who stands among the pillars of the world African Liberation Movement as a tall tree among the towering trees at the top of a mountain. Therefore, before the established order has bleached out his Blackness, reinterpreted the radical meaning of his message of Black consciousness and commitment to liberation and reduced his narrative to another story and symbol to sell rather than a way of life to live, let's speak of his special message and meaning to Africans and the world.

This, then, is a homage to *umfowethu* (our brother) Biko. It is to be said on the day of his birth (December 18) and the day of his martyrdom (September 12), during the days of Black History Month and days of Kwanzaa when we remember, reflect and recommit ourselves to the Good done and still to do in the world, and on any and all days, when we see the sun or hear the wind or drink water and dream of the new world he and all our ancestors gave their life for.

Let us say his *izibongo*, praise poems, for his enduring contribution to an awesome chapter in this sacred history we name and know as African. And let us do it in the ancient ancestral words and ways as done for kings, queens, and men and women of great weight and worth in the world. Let us start as they did in the tradition of the royal ones. For in *Kawaida*, we say that the real basis of royalty is righteousness. This is the meaning of the teachings of our ancestor, the Hon. Marcus Garvey that Africa's aristocracy is composed of those who love and are loyal to our people and express it in sustained and self-sacrificing service.

And so we say to you, *mfowethu* Biko, in the words of the ancestors in their opening praises: *Bayede, Nkosi*, Hail, Royal

One; *Bayede! Wena Omnyama*, Hail you Black One; *Wena waPhakathi*, You of the inner circle (at the center of the people); *Wena woHlanga* You of the original stem and stock; *uBantu kaMazingaye Biko na kaDuna Biko*, Bantu son of Mazingaye and Duna Biko; your name means the people and is given as a sign of your mission, the meaning of your work and purpose of your struggle—to serve and uplift the people and offer your life for their liberation; • *Umfelukholo wenhlalo engapheliyo*, ever-living martyr, you who even lying down still stands up among those who continue the struggle. They call you the praise name of your ancestor, *uMafavuke njege dabane*—He who died and rose again like the dabane plant that withers, recovers and comes to life again.

They asked who are you. We said they know you by the awesome ever-burning light you have left in the sky: • *Ilanga eliphumayo njalonjalo*, you ever rising sun, who lifted the mist from the minds of the people so that the morning of freedom could emerge, who cleared away the fog of confusion about Blackness so that the fight for our freedom would be waged in a dignity-affirming and self-determined way. • *Umfundisi wodumo wendlela ensha ukuhamba emhlabeni*, honored teacher of a new way to walk as Africans and humans in the world. In the midst of battle, you stopped to remind us “we have set out on a quest for true humanity and somewhere on the constant horizon we can see the glittery prize. Let us march forth with courage and determination, drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood (and sisterhood)” in life and struggle.

• *Umlilo ohangazayo*, ferocious fire, forcing its way thru the tall grass in which

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the apartheid predators hid, clearing the land so that the people might live and walk in the world without fear for themselves or future generations and so that seeds for a new society and world could be sown, cultivated and flourish. You reminded us we must enter the struggle without fear or illusion and with an unbreakable will and determination to win. “Our preparedness to take upon ourselves the cudgels of struggle will see us through,” you said. “We must remove from our vocabulary completely the concept of fear. Truth must triumph over evil. In a true bid for freedom we have to take off our coats, be prepared to lose our comfort and security, our jobs and positions of prestige and our families. For just as it is true that leadership and security are basically incompatible, a struggle without casualties is no struggle. We must realize the prophetic cry of Black students: ‘Black man (and woman) you are on your own’.”

• *Isikwishikwishi*, whirlwind of history and hard struggle, son of Garvey the Great, who said he would send you and millions more of us. He said we should look for him in the whirlwind. Then we heard the roar of a rising and whirling wind and looked up and saw you coming and knew the oppressor who sowed the seeds of oppression would reap the whirlwind of relentless resistance and certain defeat. • *Umlinzi wamasiko nemendlo yethu*, keeper of our culture who taught we must recover and reconstruct our

own culture, “rewrite our history and produce in it heroes that form the core of our resistance to the White invaders,” cling to essential features of our culture which reaffirm and respect humanity, “restore the great importance we used to give human relations,” people and life and avoid the worship of technology and material things.

Umfowethu Molefi Asante has returned home to the sacred land to bring a message of honor, solidarity and continuing struggle from us, your brothers and sisters, Africans in the Diaspora. It is a message from your own mind and ours, one we have always shared: It is that we honor you, mfowethu Biko, and all our ancestors by continuing the work and struggle for good in the world, reaffirming the dignity and awesome responsibility of being African in the world, respecting the sacred narrative we call African history, holding high the values of our culture and daring to create and pose a new way for humans to relate and live in the world.

Let us close in the way and words of the ancestors confident in victory in the continuing struggle. They said as we say to you, *Bayede, nkosi. Inkosi kayiqedwa*. Hail Royal One, Bring them all. For a righteous royal one is never overcome. *Bayede, impela ubuhlula ngowethu*. Bring them all. Surely, victory is ours.

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].