



**REFRAMING CONVERSATIONS ON CHARLESTON:  
AN ETHICS OF RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND RESISTANCE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 06-24-15, p.A6*

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**E**ven though we, as a people, are painfully and persistently aware of the dangerous, disabling, and death-dealing conditions under which we live, we never get used to the savage, cold-blooded and no-quarter killing with which we are constantly confronted. Whether it is in our homes, at the park, in the streets, at school or university, at work or in our sacred places of worship, faith and fellowship, the official and unofficial violence of a racialized and racist society continuously stalks us, targets us, attacks us and kills us.

Now, it has happened once again, a racist massacre and no-quarter killing of our people, Black people, Africans, African Americans. This time, it was in the sanctuary of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., a sacred historical site of righteous resistance of our people, the spiritual home and social activist center of Denmark Vesey and other liberation leaders who preached freedom, prophesied deliverance, and planned and did the work and waged the struggle to bring it into being. And we are again unwilling witnesses, deeply wounded and devastated by this sadistic carnage in a sacred place, even though we have seen and experienced it for centuries.

We painfully count their numbers and repeatedly speak their names in honor: nine martyrs, six women and three men—Mrs. Susie Jackson (87), the eldest; Rev. Daniel Simmons (74); Mrs. Ethel Lance (70); Mrs. Myra Thompson (59); Mrs. Cynthia Hurd (54); Rev. Depayne Middleton-Doctor (49); Mrs. Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45); Rev. Clementa Pinckney (41); and Mr. Tywanza Sanders (26), the youngest, an audacious Black man who took the first bullet, giving his life to shield his great aunt, Mrs. Susie Jackson. The evil is so enormous and the loss is so large, but we are a resilient and resistant people. So, we strengthen ourselves to bury

our dead, treat and bandage our wounds, deal with our grief, and dare imagine a way out of this valley of death, evil and oppression which surrounds us.

But before the blood has dried and the grieving has gone through its first stage, they ask us to put the city, state and country at ease. We, the victims and the terrorized are asked to declare our love and forgiveness, even before the victimizer asks, and to lose ourselves in the process they prepare each time to paste over our pain, repress our memory and suppress our righteous anger at the racist terrorism and evil of it all. The religious and political leaders stress the need for immediate undefined “healing” which in practice translates as putting White society at ease, even though it is we who have been battered, brutalized and killed. The media, mayors, governors and higher officials of the country join our religious and political leaders in praising our calm and compliance, our refusal to be rightfully angry and our willingness to join in symbolic and soothing acts of city unity and racial reconciliation without any consideration of relations of wealth, power and status.

We are given space in the media and public square to unnecessarily declare freedom from hatred, our ever-readiness to forgive and forget the injuries to us and embrace our abusers and murderers, even before they are caught, booked and tried, and even before they ask. We are not allowed to offer a moral process for the offender to deserve or at least receive forgiveness, i.e., recognition of the wrong; remorse for committing it; committing to restraint from future acts; request for forgiveness; and restitution in some meaningful way. Sometimes, we even deprive the dead of agency and the right to self-representation by attempting to forgive their killers for them. And perhaps, we have not noticed, but Whites in no religious tradition ever line up to declare

**REFRAMING CONVERSATIONS ON CHARLESTON:  
AN ETHICS OF RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND RESISTANCE**

*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 06-24-15, p.A6

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

their love for any of us or anyone anywhere who offends, injures or kills them or offer forgiveness from their dead.

Clearly, our oppressor cannot be our teacher nor can our White liberal and progressive friends be our undercover advisors who ask and demand of us what they don't do themselves or ask and demand of their offending and oppressive fellow Whites. We are morally obligated to question and reject such "selective morality". And if it is such a morally sound and "high ground" practice, they should, themselves, practice it toward their enemies, attackers and killers. But we know they won't, for it is a disabling and disarming "morality" the oppressor and ruling race/class teach the oppressed. They do not practice it or preach it to themselves.

Indeed, this massacre in the sanctuary again reminds us of the horrific history of the ongoing, undeserved and unjustifiable violence against us—from the Holocaust of enslavement through the bloody terror and lynching of Jim Crow to this fantasized and self-deceptively named period called "post-racial" in which police, vigilante and systemic violence against Black people continue to wreak havoc on our lives and future. It also reminds us that in the midst of racist oppression and without our relentless resistance, there will be no haven or hiding place, no sanctuary or safe zone for Black people whether they are children or adults, women or men, young or elderly, dark or light.

Moreover, it reminds us how deeply embedded and tightly woven racism and White supremacy are in the founding, functioning and very fabric of U.S. society; how it infects, cultivates and compels, and creates a depraved disregard for Black and human life. This is why some who gathered in grief and are conscious of the demands of the unfinished fight

before us declared upon the arrest of the killer, that *the killer is now caught but the co-defendant and crime partner is still at large*. And that crime partner and co-defendant is none other than the racist system itself, the system of American White supremacy.

Also, it reminds us again of the fantasy-resistant reality that in the midst of oppression there is no remedy except righteous and relentless resistance, no strategy worthy of its name that does not privilege and promote struggle, and no real way forward except across the casualty-covered battlefield for freedom, justice and a new way of living and relating as humans in the world. And as we go forward, we must reject attempts to make righteous anger at evil, injustice and oppression immoral. In virtually all our sacred texts, righteous anger at evil of varied kinds is not only a Divine attribute and a characteristic of the prophets and moral teachers throughout the world, but also an important aid in honoring the ethical imperative to not only find evil, injustice and oppression morally reprehensible, but also to rightfully and relentlessly resist them.

**H**ow can we not be angry at the daily violence of racism and White supremacy; mass murder; sex-trafficking; oppression and deprivation of the vulnerable; the human and material destruction and waste of war, invasions and occupations; the needless suffering in the world; imposed poverty; the criminalization of whole peoples; and the degradation of peoples and the earth? Righteous anger is justified anger which pushes us past indifference, apathy, insensitivity to others and excuses for inaction. It is restrained, controlled and focused, never vengeful or self-serving. And it is redemptive, liberating, uplifting and always directed toward bringing, increasing and sustaining good in the world.

---

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).