



**BALTIMORE IS STILL BURNING:  
AND LET'S NOT FORGET FERGUSON**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**M**ANY Black people appreciate Baltimore's State Attorney Marilyn Mosby's handing down an indictment of the six police officers involved in the callous and cold-blooded killing of Freddie Grey. But they are understandably only partially relieved and clearly restrained in their rejoicing. For they know that even though the fires no longer light up the night skies, Baltimore is still burning. And they cannot and will not forget that Ferguson remains a defining site and undeniable sign of our unfinished fight for racial justice and against systemic oppression and police violence. Also they know that the issue is not solved by a single or several indictments or the simple elections and presence of Blacks in low and high places.

Moreover, placing things in context and seeing their interrelatedness, we realize that the hinge and hub upon which all things turn is righteous and relentless struggle. Indeed, it is not the seemingly "kind" or "conciliatory" gestures of the system or its strategic and tactical moves to pacify, divert and delay, and confuse and fatigue the people that deserve praise. It is always the people who deserve praise, our people, who for centuries have given their lives and all they had to advance Black and human freedom, justice, equity and ultimate flourishing. So whatever gains we achieve, whatever gestures or moves made in concession or calculation by the system and its representatives, it is the people in struggle that deserve the credit and who forced the Aryan hand, even though hidden, to respond.

Here we stand on the battleground of centuries of struggle with our forefather, Frederick Douglass, who reminds us that "without struggle there is no progress". For "power concedes nothing without demand; it never did and it never will". And we stand too at the crossroads and on the battlefield with our foremother, Harriet Tubman, who taught

us that freedom is vital to life and a costly practice and pursuit and that those who want to achieve freedom must be ready to give all. Indeed, she said about its value and cost: "we must go free or die. And freedom is not bought with dust". Thus, we should not condemn those who confront the system in various ways and compel the system's representatives to concede they hear our battle cry "no justice; no peace" and can no longer do its business of oppression in smug satisfaction and suppressive "peace".

The indictment of Black and White officers serves the interests of the system. It gives some a way to claim the system is working, and to advise us to wait for justice and refocus our attention to waiting for a decision as in Ferguson, if we are not careful. Also, the indictment of the Black officers gives others a chance to claim it's not a racial thing; it is a police, class or "human" thing. But it is racial, whatever else is added to it, and class and police culture certainly can and should be added to the discussion. But it is Black people—regardless of class, education, etc., that are being repeatedly and ruthlessly killed, and the major sites of these killings are in our occupied communities, admittedly defined also by concentrated poverty and disempowerment.

That Blacks are assumed to be in power in Baltimore or Washington does not automatically mean improved conditions for Black people. Here we must make a distinction between "Blacks in power" and "Blacks in place". Clearly, Blacks are in high places now, but it does not necessarily translate as power and certainly not power for Black people. Whites remain in power regardless of the faces of color that appear in place. The first Black Mayor of Gary, Indiana, the Hon. Richard Hatcher, spoke truthfully when he declared it was U.S. Steel that controlled

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Gary, not him. He had come to test what could be done in spite of that and to change that with the people's help and struggle.

Still people in place or in "assumed power" are moral agents and must be held accountable, even if they are being blocked by the most rabid of racists, right-wingers and corporate plunderers. They must do what they can and ask their people to stand with them in these efforts in reciprocal support and righteous struggle. Even Black and other police officers coerced by a culture of violence and depraved disregard for the lives and rights of Blacks and other people of color must resist being enveloped in such evil. In the 60s, some "sat by the door", exposed the evil, passed on information, intervened where possible, and resigned, joined the Movement and became real protectors and servants of the people rather than predators and protectors of White power and privilege and the oppressive system constructed to maintain them.

In no case can we let the dominant society divert us from struggle by redefining struggle as violence, resistance as futile, and demonstrations as useless and doing more harm than good. Min. Malcolm has taught us how the system, especially through its media, can turn victims into criminals and criminals into victims. And already the propaganda war has begun. There is the continuous racializing of crime (i.e., Black, but not White) and the criminalization of the race. In such a system, we are not only the "usual suspects", but also the "necessary suspects", for the racialization of crime demands it. Thus, police are given

the right and responsibility to suppress and kill us under the camouflage and color of law.

We are as ever at the crucial juncture in this historical and ongoing struggle, which Dr. King called this "bitter and beautiful struggle" and we must reach within ourselves for enduring strength and will, and continue, intensify and expand the struggle. And we must not discourage our young people from struggle and certainly not assault them in struggle and drag them through the streets to a demeaning and discouraging place outside the struggle. If we fear for them in one place at the battlefield, we should urge them to move to another site on the battlefield or battlefield, but not destroy their will to resist and struggle for a new world.

**O**ur foremother, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, in her Ninth Legacy leaves us an important responsibility to our youth. It is to remember that "Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world...must never be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness (and) never forget...the masses of our people" and their conditions of oppression. On the contrary, we must realize "we have a powerful potential in our youth, (and) we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends". Clearly, killing the spirit of resistance is not good, benefits only our oppressor and leaves a tragically empty space on the battlefield for a good world founded in justice, secure in peace and flourishing in freedom.

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