



HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM: AMERICA, SPACETRIPPING WITH TRUMP

Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-01-19, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THIS IS NOT A DRILL. “HOUSTON, WE have a problem,” or more historically and currently correct, “Houston, we’ve had a problem, here.” It’s not a problem of a ship in space, but rather the ship of state, setting aside its *best-documents claims* and making a hard right turn towards its *worst-practices*. And both the captain and crew are unrepentantly and defiantly doing and saying immoral, mad, mean-spirited and small-minded things.

It is a persistent, pernicious and particularly American problem. For it takes place in plain sight in America, in a land that bills and boasts itself as the land of freedom, justice and equality for all in an exceptional and almost worshipful way. Indeed, it is seen by many as something close to unforgiveable sin to criticize it. It is a problem of the imbalance and inequity of wealth, power and status, based on race, class, gender, religion and a host of other socio-biological attributes. Indeed, these socio-biological attributes are used to assign human worth, social status and opportunity for a life of dignity, decency and flourishing in the cities and rural areas and even at the border.

So, let’s stop pretending it’s only about Trump. For it is a condition larger than him; larger than the limited and distorted dimensions of his mind and his self-identifying and identifiable supporters and enablers. It is the American system, itself, that produces Trump and reflects its monster side. For Trump is an anomaly only in a personal sense. In a larger social sense, there’ve been others like him, the racists, White supremacists, the oppressors of the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable different.

It sounds nice to say “we” and America are not like this for the nightly news, but how do we claim this when “the we” are the ones doing it, supporting it or half-heartedly resisting it. And what about those who also caution and counsel the victims, survivors

and resisters of these various forms of oppression to go slow, don’t be angry at injustice, and practice healing and reconciliation with oppressors as the highest ethical act and goal.

Clearly, Trump has a special demon brew of venom, invective and viciousness toward peoples of color, not just against Reps. Elijah Cummings, Ayanna Pressley, Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, and Rev. Al Sharpton. His supporters, enablers and even would-be neutral analysts say his attacks are not racial or racist, but directed toward all who attack him. That, of course, is a desperate use of a see-through cloth to cover a naked flasher who himself says he delights in what he does, especially to those of color who dare criticize him.

This is one of the most used claims in varied attempts to lessen the intentional injury and evil of Trump’s racist attacks on Black and Brown persons, peoples, neighborhoods and countries. But this isn’t so and it’s not just the attack; it’s also the language used, the “go back,” “get back,” “stay back,” and “be grateful” language and suppression designed especially for peoples of color over the centuries of White American domination, deprivation and degradation of them. He is regularly and rightfully criticized by Rep. Charles Schumer and Rep. Jerry Nadler who continuously advocate for his impeachment, but he does not tell them to go back to Israel, and it’s not because they are citizens. We all are. Nor does he tell Speaker Nancy Pelosi to go back to Italy. Like all bullies, he picks vulnerable targets, those who because of race and religion are least likely to be defended vigorously in concrete political ways.

Also, it is dishonest or at least self-deceiving to pretend that Trump is saying and doing such evil things simply because he’s playing to his base. This is not tenable for at least three reasons. And even if it were, it’s

**HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM:
AMERICA, SPACETRIPPING WITH TRUMP**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 08-01-19, p.A6

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

still wrong. First, he has declared and they themselves have proved, he can't do anything to lose them or make them less subservient to him. From the beginning, he confidently said, "I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose any voters."

Moreover, if he needed to do anything for them, he has certainly satisfied at least those that looked for judicial and political dominance, and extreme financial enrichment. However, some are satisfied with the official sanction to hate and holler at rallies of White supremacy reinforcement. And, of course, his madman antics are not any thought-out strategy, but rather are acts of one who is a violator, small-minded, a hater, insecure and at least slightly unhinged as some psychiatrists have suggested.

Even though he pimps and panders patriotism, conveniently declares an undemonstrated love for his country and shows no respect for its people, especially his base, he dares to demand others show respect for America he doesn't have and has not shown. During his campaign, he was constantly hedging and moaning about how low America had fallen from grace and greatness, how it was ravaged by crime and greed, left to rust and rot by corrupt leaders, and how it had become the laughing stock of the whole White world.

This chaos and its porous borders, he claims, allow the entrance of Black and Brown undesirables and have insured "The American dream is dead." He repeated these regular claims at his inaugural performance, feigning concern about "rusted-out factories, scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our country." And he ended by calling it all "American carnage." So, no there is no love here for America, only its condemnation unless it reflects what he does, which is

always exaggerated and unerringly false in some real and relevant way.

But if there is no end to the unhinged and hate filled racist rants and rage of the pretending and pretentious president Trump, there is also no limit to the moral and verbal contortions Republicans will perform in order to excuse, avoid addressing and explain away his ignorance, incompetence and daily dispensed evil. Sen. Mitch McConnell wouldn't even defend his immigrant Chinese wife against the Trump go-back-to-your-country attack. Instead, he changed the subject and stared in space as if he had lost himself on the sacrificial altar of Trumpian support.

The lack of moral consideration, let alone moral courage, is grossly absent here. Their considerations are said to be "political," as if there is a clear and compelling need to divorce morality from politics, and by implication, ethics from the way we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggle depending upon the situation.

AS I HAVE NOTED ELSEWHERE, "A society that cannot concede its problems cannot solve its problems. And a society that cannot solve its problems cannot survive its problems." Certainly, we cannot deny America, U.S. society, has a series of interrelated self-destroying problems. And these basic problems cannot be summed up as Trump, although he represents them in one of their most raw, racist and unadorned forms. The struggle over what kind of America we will have is still being fought on the ground in every place and instance of oppression. Paul Robeson is right, "The battlefield is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear." And the task, Fannie Lou Hamer tells us, is to constantly question America, and set aside all illusions of a "perfect union," of freedom unfought for and of justice not gained and sustained in righteous and relentless struggle.

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; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.