



**“IN RECONCILIATION AND REPAIR:
OBAMA, WRIGHT AND THE REST OF US”**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

We are again as always standing with our foremother, Harriet Tubman, at a cross-road and critical juncture of history and heavy responsibility: ominous howling and barking in the background; the hounds and hunters in hot pursuit, snarling and sniffing the air and ground, searching for any sign of weakness, wounds and wrong turns they can exploit; and she and us determined not to go back or be taken, yet deciding to stop and think carefully about the meaning and measure of real freedom and the right, worthy and effective way forward.

These are lessons worthy of remembrance as we stand at this critical juncture of African and U.S. history at which an African American man is on the threshold of holding the highest office in the land, and various forces are assembled to block, defeat or remake him in their own image and interest. We are, thus, rightly concerned that no one or no thing interrupts or diverts his motion forward and denies him and us a victory rightfully deserved. So with the eruption of the engineered controversy around Rev. Jeremiah Wright, too many of us, anxious and unthinking, let the media and its manipulators be our teachers, accepted their interpretation of Rev. Wright and Sen. Barack Obama and made them *the problem* rather than the established order itself. Indeed, there was this strong negative position-taking against Rev. Wright for “bad timing and divisive talk” and against Obama for “caving in to the established order” and distancing himself from his mentor and former minister.

And with these rigid and counterproductive positions came a reduced discussion about how the system, itself, from the beginning, problematized both Rev. Wright

and Sen. Obama in racial and religious terms and diverted discussion from critical issues confronting this country and the world. Moreover, many missed how this demonization and discrediting of Rev. Wright, forced Obama and Rev. Wright into uncomfortable postures to defend their church, relations and religion, postures McCain and Clinton as Whites don’t have to assume and how this could only lead to the painful break we witnessed last week in sadness and apprehension of what it would eventually mean.

Clearly, we cannot justly condemn and cut off from community and communication either Rev. Wright or Sen. Obama. As Malcolm taught, “the logic of the oppressed cannot be the logic of the oppressor if they seek liberation”. Our task, then, is to rethink and reframe the issue and realize and rightly argue that the problem is not Rev. Wright or Sen. Obama, but the system, itself, and the racist way it relates to, restricts and constrains us and other peoples of color.

It is the established order that focuses and feeds on division and disinformation, victim blaming and bloodletting, racial codes and character assassination as political discourse. Indeed, there are two simultaneous processes and interest groups at work here—one is to undermine and defeat Obama, the other is to recast Obama in the image and interest of the dominant group. One makes Rev. Wright an issue and uses snippets from his sermons not only to indict him and Obama for his relationship with him, but also to raise the issue of the appropriateness of a Black church, a Black liberation theology and the electability of a Black candidate.

The second group requires of Obama at least four things for their racial comfort level: self-concealment of his Blackness,

distancing from his primary community; denunciation of designated undesirables; and deference to them for direction. Thus, after Obama had denounced his mentor, his reception by the media improved and even some of the commentaries and editorials argued it was time to get beyond the media-mauling of Rev. Wright.

Also, we must see these painful exchanges as part of a necessary struggle for the best way forward and a constant call for reconciliation, recommitment and repair of ourselves and the world. Here we have two persons with valuable projects, struggling to hold on to and promote their values and vision of the good, the right and the possible. Obama is running for the office of president of all the people. But given the current balance of forces in this country, Obama will spend a lot of time courting and comforting various kinds of Whites, because he and others argue he needs Whites to win. But he needs Blacks as much to win, if not more, given the ambivalent embrace Whites have extended him. Furthermore, he needs us to help him maintain his original vision and expand it in the interest of freedom, justice, peace and other shared goods in the world.

Rev. Wright is above all a prophetic preacher and teacher, whose vision, of necessity, extends beyond both the office of president and the election process to win it. Yes, most of us preferred his impressive interview on Bill Moyers' Journal to his question and answer period at the National Press Club. And though we might see it as a tactical mistake, it was by no means a "mortal sin". Moreover, we cannot deny that Rev.

Wright has the right and responsibility to speak truth and insist on justice as he determines and to defend his personal reputation, social and religious reasoning, and his record of decades of service to his community against the deformed and disinformation media portrait of him and his church.

Moreover, hidden with the faked and uninformed horror of the manufactured image of Rev. Wright is the subliminal priming and preparation of Black people to blame Rev. Wright and themselves for either the theft of Obama's deserved nomination or his defeat by McCain for lack of White Democratic support. And if we have already accepted their racialized reasoning which makes us self-condemning, it will seem right and worthy of repetition as a given, if not, gospel truth.

Our task, then is to understand our historic role as a people as a moral and social vanguard in this country and the world, and not simply cherish Obama, but also challenge him and constantly remind him of his own words that "this is a time when we can't just settle for business as usual, that we've got to have a different kind of politics", a politics of inclusion, respect for the interest of all and commitment to cooperative projects and products of common good. This also means that we must not exaggerate the meaning of this election, but always act consciously and audaciously to honor the liberational demands and direction of our history, the ethical imperatives of our culture and the world-encompassing and life-enhancing values and vision of our struggle.