



## MONUMENTALIZING KING, KILLING QADDAFI: AMERICA'S PERNICIOUS PARADOX

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

Since its inception, America, i.e., U.S. society, has been plagued by a pernicious paradox in the way it sees and asserts itself in the world. That is to say, it is afflicted, blighted and bedeviled by a combination of interrelated contradictions and inconsistencies in its claims and practice that are certainly self-deceptive, ultimately self-destructive and clearly unjust and injurious to the world. It began as a country with claims of freedom for Whites and the savage practice of enslavement for Blacks; claims of the sacredness of property and life for Whites and the brutal practice of dispossession and genocide against the Native American; and claims of democracy and political life for White males of a certain status and a degrading disenfranchisement and social death for those of the wrong race, gender and status.

Recently, this pernicious paradox expressed itself in the hypocritical monumentalizing of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the savage killing of Col. Muammar Qaddafi. The paradox is in honoring King, a man of peace and non-violence, on one hand and waging a criminal war of indiscriminate destruction against the people of Libya on the other. It is expressed in honoring an advocate of the poor, vulnerable and "least among us" and then, mercilessly preying on a vulnerable country with no means to protect itself or defend its right to its resources. And it is expressed in the hype and hypocrisy of pretending to save the people while seizing their country and wealth, fomenting and allowing racist lynching and mass killings, and enriching the corporate vultures who will rob in still another way under the camouflage of reconstruction. For it was never really about Qaddafi, but about control of Libya, claiming it and its riches and resources for the White West with compliant Libyan elites in tow.

King had seen these contradictions and inconsistencies in America's claims and

practice and had literally given his life to insure, he said, that American "democracy (is) transformed from thin paper to thick action" and "to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of racial justice" which, of necessity, includes social and economic justice.

When I heard that the US/NATO forces had killed the Libyan leader, I returned to King's works to reread his classic anti-war speech at Riverside Church. And I refused to watch Col. Qaddafi's lynching, called for and facilitated by the U.S. government who engaged in a caveman claiming competition with France over whose bomb, drone and plane it was that destroyed Qaddafi's convoy, which was breaking siege, and left him wounded and defenseless. Indeed, I would not become a participant-observer in this parade of assassinated, tortured, bloodied and bleeding victims offered as victor and spectator entertainment, masquerading as nightly news.

In his anti-war speech, King challenges U.S. society to reflect seriously on the harm the triple and interlocking evils of *racism*, *materialism* and *militarism* are doing to it and the world. King calls for a world-enveloping sense of justice and the end of injustice, especially against the vulnerable peoples of the world. He lists as major points of injustice: "the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth;" capitalists who "take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries;" U.S. alliance with the powerful against the poor; "the (White) Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them" and using war as a "way of settling differences."

He concludes that "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." And in

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the midst of this steady move toward spiritual death, it leaves ravaged, ruined and destroyed lives and lands and provokes righteous anger and resentment in the injured and an understandable urgent will to respond and resist.

Indeed, only a morally immature and self-deceiving people could believe that they can kill the leaders and peoples of the world with impunity, that the ashes and bombs of destruction they throw in the winds of the world won't blow back on them and that a blow struck won't be returned in kind as the ancestors taught. King had observed concerning the country's ability to concede its wrongness and injury to the world that we might not be up to it. He says, "the world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to achieve." For "it demands that we admit we have been wrong." Moreover, if we are to achieve and exhibit moral maturity, then, also "we must be ready to turn sharply from our present ways."

The U.S. government has called for and facilitated the killing of yet another head of state from another race and religion, trying to convince the world, and itself, with bombs, drones and arms of every kind that the White West is still superior in weaponry and might, even if not in the moral wisdom that would inform them that such savage imposition on others will eventually return to haunt and harass them.

But we are not able and do not want to imagine American leaders running for their lives from invaders, hiding in air-conditioned caves and bunkers like Bush during the 9/11 crisis. Quickly forgetful, we imagine if they come, it will be from Mars and the movies, not from places on earth where millions have

been attacked, killed, occupied, lost loved ones and are systematically robbed of resources and the future those resources could have made flourish. Thus, the U.S. government and its allies continue to demonstrate they have the capacity to kill without conscience or any constraints, except those they deem pragmatically necessary and PR appropriate. And it is in this context that King regretfully called the U.S. government "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."

That there is a Black man "at the helm" in the White House has nothing to do with the racist and imperialist history and current realities in which the presidency and country are founded and function. For the country is rooted in a system of White power and privilege, racial and religious illusions of superiority and the assumed right of Whites to conquer and kill persons and peoples with impunity, especially if they have the audacity to object and earnestly engage in struggles to defend and free themselves. And since its inception, this system has demanded compliance of presidents and peoples, imposed its own constraints and concedes only to movements that dare to challenge, check and change it thru difficult, sustained and demanding struggle.

Let us hope then, with King, that "a new spirit is rising among us" and that we will move beyond a low-standard, mindless and paralyzing patriotism "to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history," and struggle earnestly to truly transform this country and the world.

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