



**ON DEATH ROW WITH TROY DAVIS:
SEEKING HIS LIFE AND LIBERATION**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Say what you want or will, there is something ethically savage and socially unseemly about engaging in official killing as an object lesson, preventive measure or pretension of doing it in the name of God and social good or in the interest of justice, just reward or coming to closure by satisfying the bloodthirsty call and hunger for vengeance. And if we add to this early-man sense of “justice” the morally monstrous practice of killing the innocent, because they are vulnerable and convenient victims, it takes even a more cavish, cruel and callous turn.

Such is the case and precarious position of Mr. Troy A. Davis, a vulnerable and convenient victim of the Georgia and U.S. systems of justice with their race and class biases and their addiction to dealing death as an official and honored practice. Mr. Davis, an African American, sits now on death row in Georgia, waiting again to learn whether he will live or die, be exonerated and let free or be killed as a result of an unjust and wrongful conviction for a murder of a White police officer, which the evidence argues he did not commit. Indeed, there was no DNA evidence or murder weapon produced or presented by the prosecution and seven of the nine witnesses have since recanted. Some have cited police coercion as the source of their false testimonies; and others have said another man has admitted to the killing for which Mr. Davis was charged. One of the two hold-out witnesses said he only saw the shooter’s clothes and that he was left-handed, although Troy is right-handed and the other hold-out is a suspect himself.

Mr. Davis’ case has wound its way thru at least 29 judges in seven kinds of reviews

since his wrongful conviction in 1991, taking its heavy toll on him and his family, especially the *three times* he has been brought to the brink of being executed and the execution was stayed almost literally at the last moment, coming one time within 90 minutes of his being killed. His case, from the beginning, was clearly problematic and pock-marked with flaws and prejudicial profiling and prosecution. As much as we might want, work and even pray for a post-racial society and a president to prove it, it is the long history of racism and its daily, disabling, and deadly practice that undermine our illusions and force us to face its pervasive presence and persistence.

As Rep. John Lewis, honored veteran of the Civil Rights Movement and a supporter of the efforts to exonerate and free Troy, stated in a recent interview, “In spite of all the progress we’ve made as a nation and a people, we still have so far to go”. For “the scars and stains of racism are still deeply embedded in every corner, in every aspect of American society”. And nowhere is this more evident and indicting than in the disproportionate number of African Americans on death row which according to a NAACP Legal Defense Fund report is over 41%, three times their number in society.

It cannot be easy to live daily as a dead man walking, to have said good-bye to family, friends and supporters three times and to have waited to be walked to the chamber of horrors called the execution room and there have your life taken even though you are innocent and be unable to do anything about it. And so one can only admire the internal strength of Troy Davis, what he calls his “never ending faith”. In a letter to his sup-

porters, he talks of that foundational faith that sustains and uplifts him and makes him tell us, "I am in a place where execution can only destroy your physical form, but because of my faith in God, my family and all of you (supporters) I have been spiritually free for sometimes and no matter what happens in the days (and) weeks to come, this Movement to end the death penalty, to seek true justice, to expose a system that fails to protect the innocent must be accelerated".

For he says, "There are so many Troy Davis' ". And "this fight to end the death penalty is not won or lost through me, but through our strength to move forward and save every innocent person in captivity around the globe". Prepared for the worst, he nevertheless hopes for the best declaring at the end of his letter, "I can't wait to stand with you no matter if that is in physical or spiritual form. I will one day be announcing 'I AM TROY DAVIS, and I AM FREE. Never Stop Fighting for Justice and We Will Win."

His life and letter are a model and mirror of the unbreakable human spirit, of a victorious consciousness, and the refusal to be less than the ancestors' definition of us in the fullness of our humanity as bearers of dignity and divinity, worthy of the highest respect. And it also reminds us of the sacred teachings of the *Odu Ifa* (43:1) that says "even if we are going to die, we must wage

a life-and-death struggle". For thru struggle we strengthen ourselves and open the way to victory, justice and the good we all desire and deserve.

Bro. Troy also rightly pays homage to his sister, Martina Correia, saying he marvels at her love for him, worries about her health and knows "she will not back down from this fight to save my life and prove to the world that I am innocent of this terrible crime". Reminding us of the internal strength and struggle of Fannie Lou Hamer and our heroic foremothers, Sis. Martina refuses to tire, talk defeat or be dispirited. A cancer survivor who, she notes, feels the "effects of 7 ½ years of constant chemotherapy", she says in a letter to supporters, she remains steadfast and still "prayerful and hopeful", determined and working daily to exonerate her brother and bring him home.

Introducing herself in the letter to her supporters she says, "My name is Martina Correia and I'm on death row because that is where my brother lives". Indeed, we are all on death row with Troy Davis, struggling and strengthening him and each other, resolutely seeking to secure his life and liberation. And we do this so that justice can be done, the death penalty can be defeated and the sacredness of life can have presence and power beyond our sacred books and the various circles that read and recite them and then act otherwise.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kawaida and Questions of Life and Struggle: African American, Pan-African and Global Issues*.

www.MaulanaKarenga.org

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