



**WAITING FOR WORDS OF JUSTICE:
A RIGHTFUL AND DANGEROUS EXPECTATION**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

We are all waiting for words of justice, as I write this piece, waiting for simple justice, the rightful expectation that a documented killing-without-cause will not be explained away and that the undeserved death of Oscar Grant and the brutal and self-condemning disregard for his life by the transit policeman, Johannes Mehserle, will not go unpunished or be passed off as just another “tragic accident.” After all, we reason, Oscar Grant was lying face down with his hands cuffed behind his back and was making no wrong moves when Mehserle shot him in the back point blank and without warning.

But although justice is a requirement of life and a rightful expectation for everyone, we, as a people, know this expectation is a fragile and dangerous one, depending on how we engage it. It is dangerous because it is *a hope with a bad history* which so often ends in disillusion, disgust and sometimes desperation. And it is dangerous because if they win and we’re not prepared to continue the struggle *regardless* and on a larger level, it might not only discourage us, but also embolden them in their self-assigned role as an occupying army with the artificial right to profile, hound, abuse and subdue us, insuring a persistent repetition of this deadly pattern. It is also dangerous because it’s dependent on hopeful assumptions about a system of race and class domination that imposes on us and other peoples of color *a restricted right to life and only a privilege of presence*, even in our own homes.

Indeed, the intentional kicked-in-door, wrongly ransacked house and roughed-up, arrested and sometimes killed occupants have become too often a terrorizing calling

card of the local police. For we are under regular suspicion in all places. And in spite of post-racial peddlers and would-be prophets of “the new world come,” we still live in a society which has made a fetish out of race and a faith and loyal followership out of White racial dominance.

It is a society that uses race to assign human worth and social status; provide, restrict or deny access and opportunities; determine wages; mete out justice and win over juries. And it can win them over because they have racialized crime and criminalized “races” of color, especially Blacks and young Black males. We wait for rightfully expected justice, but the police in Oakland and Los Angeles are preparing for our anticipated revolt against an unjust verdict. In one sense, they are simply preparing for any eventuality, but it may also mean they have read the historical record and expect their colleague to win and us to be outraged and revolt against this injustice. Surely, they must notice the process seems so setup, so rightfully arranged. There was the delayed departmental investigation; the Simi-Valley shift to a Whiter venue; the dismissal of all Blacks from the jury pool; and a judge with a reputation and record of police-friendly findings, ruling favorably for the accused.

Moreover, in a context of racialized and criminalizing interpretations of Black behavior, the tendency is to accept the police accounts of their conduct and their claims to be simply protecting themselves and society against constant threats from the Outer Limits. And when their acts seem too savage, even to supporters, the police need only transform themselves into untrained mem-

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bers of F-Troop, making unintended tragic mistakes or into sympathetic wimps, whining about perceived and contrived threats.

Here a danger appears in the midst of what Frantz Fanon calls the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity. The strength is that the people refused to accept injustice and immediately resisted it at every level, risking their lives and livelihoods as our people have done before, demanding the accused be brought to trial. However, the danger lies not only in the risk to life and well-being, which the people consciously or unconsciously accept every time they confront the established order. It lies also in the danger, Fanon says, of exhausting ourselves in the battle-at-hand and not being organized or motivated to move continuously forward to engage the larger struggle for justice.

This battle fatigue for the few and loss of spirit for the many and the turning to other things at hand until the next time is what we must guard against. Even if we win this battle, we should still have hope and rightful expectation of a larger justice and continue the struggle. We know the pattern now: police killing; calling for calm; revolt anyhow; investigation which most often exonerates and seldom indicts; trial in a favorable venue; acquittal; revolt in outrage; call for federal review; another investigation and just maybe, a federal trial for violation of civil rights; and after everything cools down, an out-of-court settlement with the city; and then a repetition of it all.

If this dangerous and deadly cycle is to be broken, it must be destroyed in struggle, righteous and relentless struggle, not only to change the way police act, but also the behavior of the people for whom they are the

guardians at the gates of racial and class dominance. The struggle remains for: independent oversight, serious and consistent monitoring; psych checks and removals; and swift and certain punishment for abuse; a civilian review board with budget, staff and investigative and subpoena powers; a special prosecutor for police brutality cases; federal intervention and funding linked to police respect for civil and human rights, and an effective system of civilian reporting and timely administrative response. There is no substitute for short-term and long-term struggle; for case by case and ongoing overall struggle simultaneously.

As always, we must rebuild our Movement. And it is on each and all of us to bring the Movement back to life by our own actions, personally and collectively. We must realize the struggle is where we are, in real life and real time, where we work, play, pray; stand, study, think good and move relentlessly toward it. We must carry the struggle inside us or it's not real, carry it in our hearts and minds, in the way we live, relate to each other, teach our children, mentor our youth, honor our elders and ancestors, care for the vulnerable, maintain a rightful relationship with the environment, and support liberation and justice everywhere.

This is the societal and world-encompassing nature and aim of our struggle. Let us, then, in our struggle, always have the spiritual courage to hope, the moral consciousness to care and the personal and collective confidence to dare and achieve a decisive victory for shared good in the world.

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