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**Won't Reform: Memorial Day is Everyday
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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Solentiname
was like a paradise
but in Nicaragua
paradise is not yet possible.
I have given no thought
to the reconstruction of our little community
of Solentiname.
I think of the far more important task,
the task for us all:
the reconstruction of the whole country.

Ernesto Cardenal, "The Meaning of Solentiname"

Sojourner Truth, it was said, was "unruly and excessive." She was not material to be reformed! "Unruly and excessive," radical, unpredictable, an abundance of uncompromising strength and spirit, Truth was a threat to the status quo, capable of transforming an oppressive state. The more "refined" Frederick Douglass declared her "a genuine specimen of the uncultured negro." Truth, however, stayed on course: free my people! In her time, she was a non-conformist rather than a socialite of the elite Black community. Her activism sought the concrete liberation of Black people from enslavement. "'Well, 'manicipation came; we all know; can't stop to go throo de hull. I go fur adgitatin'... I believe dere is works belong wid adgitatin'" (*Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*).

Ida B. Wells, following the footsteps of Harriet Tubman, didn't hesitate to display her rifle in defense of herself and her family, often threatened by white mobs who opposed her fight against the lynching and Black men and women. At her first public speaking engagement, she recalled standing before an audience. "As I described the cause of the trouble at home and my mind went back to the scenes of the struggle to the thought of the friends who were scattered throughout the country, a feeling of loneliness and homesickness for the days and the friends that were gone came over me and I felt the tears coming...but I kept on reading the story which they had come to hear" (*Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*). Paradise was not yet possible for Black citizens in the South or North! Wells kept on and stayed on course.

For Black people, traditional non-conformists and agitators, keeping on hasn't become easy since the days of slavery and Reconstruction. *They came in my yard, said Baby Suggs*, and then the Black folks embraced them!

Shirley Chisholm, the first woman to place her name in the nomination for president at the Democratic National Convention, the first Black to be on the ballot as a candidate for president, had the audacity to believe she could remain a person conscious of her cultural and historical heritage while fighting on behalf of the forgotten humanity.

But amidst the activity of the invaders and the embracers stood Shirley Chisholm where there was "little place in the political scheme of things for an independent, creative personality, for a fighter" (*African American.com*). "Anyone who takes that role must pay a price." And was betrayal by one's own people the price to pay for remaining a non-conformist and an agitator?

Chisholm ran for the people, but the people, well, they began running too. It was a massive run on someone's course, with someone else's goal, and, thus, a run at full speed, backward. And years later, these runners are still speeding, backward, downhill, but so many that they can't see beyond themselves, beyond the flashing images, signifying an enormous illusion of movement. The runners can't remember Chisholm; they can't remember the heritage of non-conformity or agitation. They can't remember the defiance and fight of our revolutionaries because "the first thing the enemy tries to do is isolate revolutionaries from the masses of the people, making us horrible and hideous monsters so that our people will hate us," wrote Assata Shakur.

But, she, Shakur, with that marathon of Black folks running backward at full speed, with the FBI and local police conducting shooting sprees in the Black communities, even with the bullets lodged in her body and lay chained to a hospital bed, Shakur could remember to listen for *the* voice that had power beyond the doctors and police officials surrounding her.

“Who’s better than you?”

“Nobody.”

“Who?”

“Nobody”

“Get that head up” (*Assata: An Autobiography*).

In defiance of bullet wounds and physical imprisonment, Shakur raised her head!

The path to freedom, as Shakur discovered, is knowing that “the almighty dollar is king; those who have the most money control the country and, through campaign contributions, buy and sell presidents, congressmen, and judges, the ones who pass the laws and enforce the laws that benefit their benefactors.” As a result, we are all in jail wherever we go, a fellow inmate remains Shakur.

Hasn’t it been the occupation of Amerikkka to invest the backward running mob with the power to suppress these voices of opposition (here and abroad), to trample on the memory of their deeds, to stamp upon those of us who won’t reform because we know the militarism and corporatization of U.S. government can’t be reformed? It’s the only power they are allowed—only this power to destroy! In the globalization of destruction and death, our role as agitators, fighters, and non-conformist extends beyond reconstructing our “little” communities. As agitators, fighters, non-conformist, we can envision *freedom* from destruction for people of color, globally. But we are far from that goal.

Although many of our people are tripping over themselves to run at the bidding of their Master in that insidious downhill marathon, we must remember that those who wish to remain Negroes, enslaved to their Masters in a new forms of enslavement, represent our casualties of war: the living dead. We, the last standing, must go on. As surviving members of the Black Left, we must hear the voice and raise our heads beyond those feet that would annihilate us if we fail to remember who we are. We have a worthy and a formidable tradition behind us, and, though few now, we must pick up the torch and carry it forward. “Important tasks” have begun with just a handful of people. We have an important task too, and we are fortunate to have someone standing in the tradition of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Shirley Chisholm, and Assata Shakur. We have our Cynthia McKinney.


It’s imperative that we recognize that this historical moment could very well be our last. Left to the forces of an imperialist regime, it could be! If you haven’t read, please do read Larry Pinkney’s “Cynthia McKinney: That Audacious Black Woman Standing for the People” in the *Black Commentator*, [May 22, 2008](#). I will add this—our loyalty is to the struggle and to stand with those leaders like McKinney who


honors the right to fight for human rights above the right of corporations to drain humanity of life. For McKinney and us, our loyalty is to *the* Movement and not an election campaign by and for the "Joshua generation" against the so-called "Wright generation," so-called because it's corporate media's image depicting paradise in white mainstream but "militancy" in dark corners. We are the opposition against militarism and corporatization, standing theoretically beside McKinney. Let's make it a real! When you stand up, you will do so with the understanding that our war heroes never die for us as long as we are imbued with their spirit of resistance.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.

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