



Watching *Fruitvale Station* With Bob Avakian

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For those who don't know, *Fruitvale Station* is a very powerful, moving, and excruciating film that depicts the last day in the life of Oscar Grant. Oscar was a 22-year-old, unarmed Black man murdered by Bay Area Rapid Transit police on New Year's Day, 2009. He was returning home from celebrating on New Year's Eve, when police stopped Oscar and the friends he was with, harassed and brutalized them, straddled Oscar as he lay face down on a subway platform, and fatally shot him in the back.

Not too long ago, I watched *Fruitvale Station* with Bob Avakian (BA), chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party. Towards the very end of the film, agonizing, heartbreaking and infuriating scenes are shown: The cop shooting Oscar in the back; Oscar's girlfriend frantically rushing to the scene, trying to find out what happened; Oscar's loved ones gathering together and waiting desperately to find out if he would make it, only to find out he was gone forever.

As these scenes unfolded, I looked over at BA. **He was sobbing.** Not just misty-eyed. Sobbing. And he continued to cry tears of heartbreak and rage for several minutes, as the closing credits rolled.

This made a very big impression on me. BA did not know Oscar Grant personally. But he felt the sting of his murder in an extremely raw and visceral way. And I think his reaction speaks volumes about who Bob Avakian is, what he represents, and what he is all about.

BA has literally been fighting against this system for *50 years*. He has been a revolutionary communist for about 45 years. He has been shouldering the responsibility of leading the Revolutionary Communist Party for almost 40 years. And over the course of the last several decades, he has forged the theory and deepened the science for the revolution humanity needs to get free, while also providing practical leadership to the party and movement working for that revolution. And all of this has involved not only tremendous work, but also tremendous risk and sacrifice on BA's part as anyone with a sense of U.S. history, and/or BA's personal history—specifically, what this reveals about the way the U.S. government viciously goes after revolutionary leaders—should well understand. And over all these decades, and through everything described above, BA has never lost an ounce of his love and feeling for the masses of people, his sense of outrage and hatred for all the ways in which the masses suffer needlessly, and his fire for revolution to emancipate the masses all over the world. *Not one bone in his body has become numb.*

There is a great deal more that could be said about the experience of watching *Fruitvale Station* with BA. But I want to highlight two points.

First, I think that in BA's reaction to this movie, there is a lot for revolutionary communists, and anyone with concern for humanity and hatred for oppression and injustice, to reflect on and learn from. Even with all the work BA has done and continues to do in the realm of theory, in order to forge a deeper understanding of why police murders like the execution of Oscar Grant and countless other outrages keep happening, the larger picture they are connected to, and how these outrages can be ended through revolution; even though BA has been at this for decades; and even with all of the horrors that pile up every single second that this system remains in place, there is absolutely **no** sense on BA's part of world-weary detachment or defeatism when something like the murder of Oscar Grant goes down. His reaction is decidedly not: "Oh, well of course, this happens all the time, what do you expect?" Rather, he cries tears of rage and anguish, both because he feels acutely the pain of Oscar's life being stolen **and** because he knows that outrages like this are completely unnecessary and that humanity does not have to live this way.

This brings me to the second point I want to make here—and it is one I want to give even greater emphasis to, even while the first point above is very important and very related. The point I want to close this letter with is: **We had better fully recognize and appreciate what we have in BA, and act accordingly.**

I'll say it again: **We had better fully recognize and appreciate what we have in BA, and act accordingly.**

And when I say "we had better," that "we" is addressed to many different people and audiences. Yes, I am most definitely speaking to revolutionaries and communists and to all those who are already deeply familiar

with and supportive of BA. **But in saying “we,” I am also speaking to those who are just now—or just recently—learning about and getting introduced to this revolutionary leader**—including, to quote BA, “Those this system has cast off, those it has treated as less than human” who “can be the backbone and driving force of a fight not only to end their own oppression, but to finally end **all** oppression, and emancipate all of humanity.”

To all the masses of people, here and around the world, who suffer brutal oppression minute after minute, day after day... and to all those who may not directly suffer this oppression but ache for a world where this oppression is no more, I want to say this: If you do not know about Bob Avakian, or just recently learned about him, that is not your fault. But you, and millions of other people, need to understand how incredibly rare and precious it is for the people of the planet that we have this revolutionary leader and act in accordance with that reality.

BA is not only the leader of the revolution, he is also a best friend to the masses of people. He is a leader who has done decades of work in the realm of theory to bring forward the scientific method, strategy and vision needed to make revolution and bring into being a radically new world where all the horrors that humanity suffers unnecessarily would be no more. He is continuing to develop the advanced scientific method that he has forged, and apply that method to all of the big questions and obstacles confronting the revolution. He is able to break down all of this down for people, **without** even slightly watering it down, in a way that everyone can understand, take up, and be inspired by. He has taken on the daily responsibility of leading a party and a movement to make revolution right here in the most powerful imperialist country in the world. He has dedicated his life to the emancipation of humanity. And, through all of this, he maintains a deep, visceral connection to and feeling for the masses of people who most desperately need this revolution.

A leader like this comes along very, very rarely. And when this does happen, the absolute worst thing we could do is fail to recognize this, fail to act in accordance with this, fail to take this seriously, or take this for granted. Instead, all of us—whether we have known about BA for decades, are just learning about him and what he represents, or anywhere in between, and whether you agree with BA about everything or not—must fully recognize and embrace what BA means for the people of the world. We must study, and learn all we can from his incredible body of work on the biggest questions of revolution and human emancipation, as well as the lessons of who he is and what he stands for as a revolutionary leader. We must realize that it is not just us who need to know about BA, his work and vision, and the leadership he is providing to this party and movement for revolution: **millions of people must know about all of this, and this must impact all of society.**

Furthermore, and very crucially, we must fully confront the reality of what it would mean for the people of the world to lose this leader, and take extremely seriously that there are people and forces—those officially part of the powers-that-be, as well as those willing to do the work of the powers-that-be—who hate what BA represents and would like nothing more than to tear him down, silence him, and take him from the masses of people. ***And we must be absolutely determined not to let that happen.***

This means taking very seriously the need to do everything we can to protect and defend BA. This means denouncing and ***not giving a millimeter of space*** to those who slander and personally attack BA, because these attacks and slanders are part of creating the poisonous atmosphere and conditions that would make it easier for the powers-that-be, or those doing their bidding, to take BA from the people of the world. Protecting and defending BA, and building a wall around him, also means boldly and sharply challenging those who may *not* be part of the camp of the enemy, but who are wallowing in, or at least being influenced by, arrogance, cynicism and snark, and who seek to dismiss without seriously engaging what BA has brought forward; this arrogance, snark, cynicism, and dismissal, regardless of the intent of those who fall into it, stands in the way of BA and all that he has brought forward having the reach and societal influence that this urgently needs to have. And this, too, creates easier conditions for those who would try to silence and isolate BA and take him from the masses.

Few things in life are more tragic than a critical lesson learned too late. And it would truly be a tragedy if BA were taken from the people, and then people said: “Wow, I wish I had realized sooner what we had here.”

But the good news is: It is **not** too late. We, and the masses of the planet, have BA **right now**. We had better realize, and let everyone know, what that means.