



**FULFILLING OUR MISSION:
LEAVING A LEGACY OF STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

T HIS IS AGAIN A SANKOFA REVISITING AND reviewing of the constant and consistent work we've done and the righteous and relentless struggle we've waged over half a century as an organization so that we, as a people, could truly be ourselves and free ourselves and honor the awesome legacy and obligation we inherited from our revered ancestors. What we have endured and overcome has been a test and template for all time revealing the metal out of which we were made and the strength we developed and deepened in the heat of struggle. This is not said in any boastful way, but rather to honor those who sacrificed so much to bring us to this point which so many other organizations larger, better financed and more favored were not able to reach.

We came into being as the organization Us in the wake and heavy weight of the martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X and in a wave of resistance that culminates in the Watts Revolt, in the year 1965, self-consciously assuming varied and inter-related roles as *Saidi*, self-affirming lords of our own lives and audacious agents of our own liberation as persons and a people; *Muminina*, faithful defenders of the people and conscientious keepers of the tradition; and *Simba Wachanga*, Young Lions, soldiers and servants of our people. It is a noteworthy narrative, not yet truthfully or fully told; one of struggle, sacrifice, service, work, and institution-building.

We stood up and stepped forward September 7, 1965, and have not stopped or sat down since, in spite of suppression, setbacks and the continued and calculated falsification of our history and current work. It was a life vocation we chose, a dangerous and difficult struggle to uplift and liberate our people. Imbued with the spirit and special disregard for danger and difficulty for which youth are known, we talked and acted as if victory was not only certain but also imminent. But in our most thoughtful moments, especially as government forces began their varied programs to discredit, disrupt, detain, destroy and otherwise neutralize Us and the Black Movement as a whole, we knew it would be a long as well as

dangerous and difficult struggle. And we realized the awesome and exacting truth of Amilcar Cabral's classic teaching concerning the liberation struggle, i.e., that we should "mask no difficulties, tell no lies and claim no easy victories."

We called ourselves Us to affirm and remind ourselves constantly that our work and struggle and our very lives are first and foremost for us, our people, Black people, African people, for their uplift and liberation. The name Us was chosen too to draw a clear and uncompromising line between Us and them, between our people and our oppressor in our vision, values and practice in our struggles and strivings upward. And Us also was selected to stress our commitment to a communitarian way of life, i.e., community focused and collective-oriented feelings, thought and practice in the way we relate, remember, reason, accept responsibility, work, struggle and understand and assert ourselves in the world.

It was a time of great turning and testing, revolt and revolution, of liberation struggles almost everywhere. And we accepted Min. Malcolm's teaching that we were "living in an era of revolution and the revolt of the (African American) is part of the rebellion against oppression and colonialism which has characterized this era." Moreover, Malcolm stressed the role of young people in the liberation struggles, the Simba, our namesake, in the Congo and youth in other parts of Africa, and in Asia and Latin America. And he challenged us to think for ourselves and to choose to act in the interest of our people and the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world.

Frantz Fanon taught us that "each generation must discover its mission and either fulfill or betray it." But even before reading Fanon, our fathers and mothers had taught us in words similar to the *Odu Ifa* which says, "when it becomes your turn to take responsibility for the world, you should do good for the world." And, of course, this should start with our people, or the race, as they called themselves then, without deference to deconstructionist definitions or post-racial "reasoning."

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It was clear to all that our people were oppressed, and restricted and restrained in life-conditions and life-chances and that we had not only the unalienable right, but also the unavoidable responsibility to struggle to end our oppression. And so, standing up we dared to declare both our organizational and generational mission: *to leave a legacy of revolution*. Indeed, we declared, "We are the last revolutionaries in America. If we fail to leave a legacy of revolution for our children, we have failed our mission and should be dismissed as unimportant."

Thus, following the teaching of our philosophy, *Kawaida*, we committed ourselves to the cultural revolution within and the political revolution without. The first is to radically transform ourselves; the second is to radically transform society. Such a dual and radical transformation, we argued, requires cultivating, reinforcing and sustaining a *culture of struggle* so that revolution and liberation are acts of culture, i.e., processes and practices which are called into being and even compelled by the nature, needs and self-understanding of the culture.

To leave a legacy of revolution, we reasoned, is, above all, to leave a legacy of radical and relentless struggle. For revolution rightly read is a not a single event of storming the gates, rallies in the public square and forcing a dictator to step down. Nor is it a matter of simply changing presidents, parliaments and flags or even simply seizing power from one group by another. Rather, it's radical self- and social transformation, an overturning of ourselves as well as society, uprooting and rebuilding in more humanly expansive and historically promising ways.

Clearly, the country and world have changed dramatically since we stood up in the 60's and liberation struggles pervaded and

engulfed the world. It is surely a different time when CIA-sponsored "revolts" are accepted as "revolutions;" occupiers and oppressors are given immunity from criticism and accountability for their acts; freedom fighters are routinely called terrorists; and oppressors are accorded moral status equal and superior to the oppressed. There is also the decline and crisis of the Left, the nationalist, socialist and Marxist Left, and the aggressive rise of the Right, riding roughshod over the poor and vulnerable at home and globalizing White supremacy and bloody and bold-faced banditry abroad.

Certainly, it is sad to say and sadder to see that very few radical or self-defined revolutionary organizations are left from the Sixties. Almost all have folded tent and taken up talking like reformed and redeemed religionists eager to denounce their former wicked ways, which were learned and lived in the "sinful Sixties." *Others have found new faiths and make only episodic public appearances to rant and rave against former rivals and to leave lists of whom to hate.*

BUT REGARDLESS OF HOW THINGS HAVE changed since we began, enduring human problems and the need to struggle to solve them remain. For still the oppressed want freedom; the wronged and injured want justice; the people want power over their destiny and daily lives; and the world wants peace. So, for Us, the struggle continues in various forms and fields of battle, directed toward carving out of the hard rock of reality a new history of African people and humankind, free of oppression and full of human flourishing and of social miracles made by the masses, themselves, in their awesome thrust upward and onward in the world. ▲

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