



**KAWAIDA, REAFFIRMATION AND RESISTANCE:  
CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF STRUGGLE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

This 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Seminar in Social Theory and Practice to be held July 24-30, 2011 at the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies (Us) here in Los Angeles, like all our cultural and political education projects, are based on the early overarching and anchoring proposition that “Our first and fundamental aspiration is to create and consolidate a body of people capable of and committed to internal and external transformation,” a people, as Fanon says, who “deciding to be and embody history thru action” dares to liberate themselves and contribute with other struggling peoples of the world to a new history of humankind.

Indeed, we said in our early writings, “We want a body of committed people, men, women and children, capable not only of physical courage, but (also) of mental and moral expansiveness, a revolutionary solidarity capable of confronting and dealing successfully with problems on various levels in the struggle; a nation, conscious of and committed to its role and responsibility in terms of human history, actively and emotionally associated with the continuous evolution of (human)kind.” And at the heart of this process of transformation was knowledge acquisition and its application in personal, collective and social practice.

That is why Kawaida declared in the 60’s “Nationalism demands study. Show me a true nationalist and I’ll show you someone who studies.” By nationalism here is meant national awareness and self-conscious and committed practice to liberate, build, develop and expand community. No other radical or revolutionary organization in the 60’s stressed knowledge acquisition and application more than the organization Us. Thus, in this seminar and other educational thrusts, we hold firmly to the ancient African ethical proposition that knowledge is never simply knowledge for

knowledge sake, but knowledge for human sake in all its complex and compelling meanings. Therefore, we link theory and practice, thought and action, and knowledge with the obligation to act in the interest of our people and with rightful consideration of the interest of humanity as a whole.

For we recognized that progressive or radical social change, indeed “revolution begins in the minds and hearts of men, women and children who want it, study and plan it, then carry it to its conclusion.” Moreover, we’ve argued from the outset that “progress in thought remains the basis of progress in struggle” and without a body of critical and coherent thought as theory, ideology or philosophy, there is no real or radical social change or revolution, only thoughtless action, easily accessible illusion, false hopes and tragic failure.

So the thrust has been, since 1965, even before the summer seminar, to cultivate a radical and revolutionary consciousness, provide a philosophy which offers a moral, meaningful and useful interpretation of ourselves, society and the world and which cultivates allegiance and a corresponding practice. It is also to teach the methods by which such a critical grasp is achieved and then direct participants and the people toward thought and practice that is both liberated and liberating. Here we talk in the tradition of Malcolm X in his teaching that we need a logic of liberation. And this logic, which contains within it a language of liberation will inspire, inform and undergird reaffirmation and resistance, reaffirming the dignity, rights, power and possibilities of the people and resisting the cultural, economic and political dominance and deceptive acceptance and other overtures of the oppressor. This, in turn, lays the philosophical grounds for cultivating a culture of struggle.

For Us and many others that liberated and liberating thought is Kawaida which we

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define as an *ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world*. Kawaida, a philosophy of culture and social change, is the foundation and framework for the conception and conduct of the seminar. African-centered, Kawaida emphasizes our need to constantly dialog with African culture, asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the fundamental issues and concerns of human life, especially in the seven basic areas of culture: history, religion (spirituality and ethics), social organization, economic organization, political organization, creative production, and ethos. Thus, we say, we base everything on tradition and reason, the best of our culture, the authority of our own experience and understanding, which is informed by a moral reasoning and sensitivity that measures well with the highest values, thought and practice of humankind.

Therefore, the ideas, insights and exchanges that emerge and drive the seminar are above all rooted in decades of dialog within Us and in discussions with others about African people and the world, drawing on the critical and continuous work, service, struggle and institutional building we have engaged in since the 60's on behalf of our people. The constant themes which undergird the conversations, concepts and understanding of the seminar are the broad and overarching goals of our organization Us: *cultural revolution, radical social change, and bringing good in the world*. Within this framework a series of complex and interrelated issues and struggles emerge which are world-encompassing and range from the local and national to the international.

These ethical and social issues evoke and include conversations, reflection, programmatic explorations and struggles this year around: leadership as a moral vocation; the meaning and measure of Malcolm X; Fannie Lou Hamer and the concept and practice of walking off the plantation; the critical struggles in Africa and Haiti and the world; the HIV/AIDS struggle and the need for a covenant with ourselves to choose life; police and prison justice issues; an ethics and agenda of education; the ethics and work of peace and resistance to war; labor struggles; environmental ethics of greening and growing in urban areas; rebuilding the Movement, and building and strengthening alliances in an age of President Obama.

Finally, we stress always that every principle and pronouncement must become a practice, if it is to be real and relevant to how we actually live our lives, relate to each other and others, do our work and wage our struggle in the interest of ourselves and the world. And inherent in every lesson taught, every concept and conversation shared is this fundamental effort to create, strengthen and sustain a culture of righteous and relentless struggle. Thus, as we have said, To know is to acquire the responsibility to act; to act to bring, sustain and increase good in the world. Moreover, we say, if we don't practice, preaching and teaching is of little use. Indeed, we say "Ten thousands theories cannot save us, if we, ourselves, don't dare to struggle, to go against the tide and do as Amilcar Cabral urged, 'act audaciously (and) with great initiative'."

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