



**US, CULTURE AND STRUGGLE:
ULTIMATELY ENGAGED ON THE GROUND**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The founding and developmental unfolding of our organization Us, September 7, 1965, was in a fateful and furious year, a time and context of decisive turning. It was the year of the assassination and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, master teacher, continuous student, and constant soldier who would not blink, step back, waiver or walk away from the struggle even in the fierce face of certain death. It was the year of the righteous rage and resistance of the Watts Revolt, a fiery sign and symbol of similar things to come throughout the country. And it was the year of the definitive decline of the Civil Rights phase of the Black Freedom Movement and the defiant rise of its period of Black Power with its stress on self-determination, self-respect and self-defense, and Blackness as a moral, social and aesthetic ideal to which our organization, Us, and philosophy, Kawaida, contributed in both essential and expansive ways.

And all over the world in Africa, Asia, Latin America, there was talk and movements informed by the moral and political imperative of the independence of countries, the liberation of nations and revolution for the masses who would imagine and bring into being a new history, promise and prospect for humankind. So it is in this exciting and uplifting context that I called and chaired our founding meeting at my apartment, in Los Angeles at the end of the summer of '65. And we, men and women of varied interests and ideas, sat down in the circle of shared social activist concerns, and diligently searched for ways we could develop and bring a distinct, useful and meaningful message and initiative to the Movement.

To raise up and continue the legacy of Malcolm was a central and priority shared concern. And so we wove within the fabric of Kawaida philosophy itself pivotal concepts in

his social and ethical thought. These included his teachings of radical self- and social transformation thru the liberation struggle; the centrality of culture and cultural revolution in the liberational process; the need to return to the source, Africa, culturally, psychologically and spiritually to reaffirm our identity and dignity and extract paradigms of human excellence and possibility; the right and responsibility of resistance to injustice and oppression, and of self-defense, armed and otherwise; Black united fronts; a God in our own image and interests and committed to justice and liberation; global pan-Africanism; and Third World solidarity.

Working within our emerging philosophy of Kawaida, we took seriously Sekou Toure's call for "full reAfricanization"; and his concepts of the indivisibility of African freedom; resistance and liberation as acts of culture; and liberation as freeing of the mind and life, as well as the land. And from Frantz Fanon, we took the challenge to discover our generational mission and fulfill it in the struggle to start a new history of humankind and set afoot a new man and woman in the world. And this too we learned as a vital lesson from Fanon, that we must practice a deep-rooted self-determination, reach inside ourselves, think new thoughts and struggle to produce new ways of understanding and asserting ourselves in the world.

We defined ourselves as revolutionaries, those dedicated to radical, deep-rooted and far-reaching social change, indeed, the end of White supremacy and the creation of free space to imagine and bring into being new ways of being African and human in the world. But we did not seek to import our revolution and the strategies to wage the liberation struggle. On the contrary, we believed, then, as we do now, that we must create out of the

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rich, resilient and resourceful depths of our own culture ways and means not only to imagine liberation, but also ways to achieve it in sound and sustainable ways.

We also defined ourselves as cultural nationalists without surrendering our identity as revolutionaries. For as I argued in the *Quotable Karenga*, “culture is the basis of all ideas, images and actions; to move is to move culturally, i.e., by a set of values given to you by your culture”. Thus, as Toure, Fanon and Amilcar Cabral have argued, revolution, liberation and resistance are all acts of culture, conceived, made and carried out by a people whose culture demands it, legitimizes and sustains it. Here culture is conceived in the most expansive sense as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. And we as a people are a cultural community, a cultural nation striving and struggling to come into being as a self-conscious and capable political power.

Kawaida cultural nationalism in its liberational and revolutionary thrust is based on three interrelated and interlocking propositions. First, the defining feature of a people is its culture. Second, for a people to be itself and free itself, it must be self-conscious, self-determining and rooted in its own culture. And third, the quality of life of a people and the success of its liberation struggle depends upon its waging cultural revolution within, and political revolution without, resulting in the radical transformation of self, society and ultimately the world. Whatever else may be said about cultural nationalism and its revolution-

ary and liberational character, conduct, history and future, these are its fundamental propositions and those by which we of Us understand and assert ourselves in the pursuit of our work and struggle.

There is to our organization both a core set of values that represent our anchor and the source of our unbudging Blackness. We call these the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles): *Umoja* (Unity); *Kujichagulia* (Self-Determination); *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility); *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith). We see these as values central to our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world as African people, ways of righteously and rightfully grounding and orienting ourselves in the lives we live, the work we do, and the struggles we wage in the world.

In our 48 years of work, struggle, service and institution-building, we have seen organizations come and go; some streaking across the sky like a comet with a great ball of light and then disappearing in the darkness below the horizon. But we are blessed to have been internally strong enough to weather the storms and the artificial hurricanes of history created by our oppressor and to see fundamental aspects of our work flourish in our lifetime. Yet we know the struggle is far from over, and there are so many social network soldiers waging good-weather war in cyberspace, and too few all seasons soldiers actually and ultimately engaged on the ground. And so even after 48 years of struggle, we remind ourselves and urge our people to set aside any and all illusions and intensify and expand the struggle.

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