



**"KAWAIDA AND THE CURRENT CRISIS:  
A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, LOVE AND STRUGGLE"**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART II. To say that Kawaida is a philosophy of life, love and struggle is not to suggest that love and struggle are the only areas of life with which Kawaida concerns itself. As a philosophy of life in its comprehensive sense, Kawaida concerns itself with every area and aspect of life, especially questions of life in the seven fundamental areas of culture: history, religion (spirituality and ethics); social organization; political organization; economic organization; creative production; and ethos (the collective self-consciousness developed as a people as a result of thought and practice in the other areas of culture). But in times of crisis like these, it is useful to focus on foundational principles and practices which anchor and inform all others.

Clearly, the foundational and overarching concern and commitment of Kawaida is life—human and other life and all that is related to the respect, preservation, protection, development and flourishing of it. And likewise, it is concerned with and opposed to all that would threaten, diminish, abuse or destroy life. But to talk of human life and make it real is to talk of actual people. For history and current reality have shown that an oppressor can claim respect for life as a universal abstract, but hate, enslave, dispossess, terrorize and murder, singularly and in mass, actual living humans of various kinds and cultures.

What I want to do here is to try to weave an interrelated and seamless conception of life, love and struggle as they relate to us as African people in the context of oppression and resistance in this critical moment in our history. For Kawaida understands life as a sacred good, grounded and made most meaningful in relationships. It sees love as the most anchoring, strengthening and enriching character of relationships. And it sees struggle to bring, increase and sustain good in our lives, loves and the world as a defining feature of

our becoming and being human in the most dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways.

In a philosophy of life, there are always key concepts, principles and practices, views and values and, of necessity, corresponding practices to make the views and values a living reality and part of a vital and viable tradition. As we say in Kawaida, in the final analysis, practice proves and makes possible everything. Given not only the centrality and sacredness of life and the current and ongoing threat to Black lives and Black people in virtually every existing social space, the focus on life and respect of it in the most comprehensive way becomes essential, indispensable and compelling.

Certainly, the oppressor has chosen the way of death for us and the world in the system of oppression and exploitation that he has imposed. But as we have said so many times, the oppressor cannot and must not be our teacher. Indeed, all our sacred texts teach us we must choose life, not death, and that this means accepting the serious responsibility of living life well and constantly striving and struggling to create conditions in our community, society and the world in which we and others can live, love and create freely.

As a communitarian philosophy, Kawaida understands life as a relational reality, especially in the context of family and community, but also the world. We come into being in relationship and responsibility, and we establish and develop our identity, meaning and measure in this context. It is as community, as a people, that we receive as a cultural legacy our identity, purpose and direction. In a word, we are who we are and who we become or ought to become in relation with others, especially in our circles of significant others. This is the meaning of John Mbiti's often-quoted positing of the African concept of human existence and essence, "I

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am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am". And it's found also in the Zulu concept of *Ubuntu* or what it means to be human—*ngingumuntu ngabantu*—I am a human being through other human beings, a person through other people. Our duty, then, is to build, strengthen and constantly expand those relations on every level in principled, purposeful and caring ways, in a word, in the ethical, effective and expansive ways required of us as African people.

At the core of Kawaida's philosophy of life, love and struggle are the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles), a Black value system that we understand as the moral minimum set of values Black people need in order to rescue and reconstruct our history and humanity and shape them in our own image and interests, in a word, to free ourselves and be ourselves in ever flourishing ways. These principles are *Umoja* (Unity), *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination), *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics), *Nia* (Purpose), *Kuumba* (Creativity), and *Imani* (Faith).

In conscientious and righteous practice of these principles, we, of necessity, begin with the pursuit and practice of *Umoja*, unity, a principled and purposeful togetherness in life, love and struggle in our families and local and national communities, as well as the world African community. This principle urges us also to build and strengthen quality male/female relations; intergenerational unity, engagement, and transfers of knowledge, experience and relational networks; to form and reinforce alliances and coalitions of common ground, respect, reciprocity and mutual benefit; and to courageously stand in active solidarity with the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world.

Also, we must practice self-determination, *Kujichagulia*, with the understanding that we are our own liberators, lifters-up of our own light, coming to the table and battlefield, not culturally naked and in need, but fully clothed in the ancient and ongoing richness and resourcefulness of our own culture. And we must live, love and struggle with the certain knowledge that there is no people more sacred than our own, no history more worthy of being taught or told, and no culture a more valid or valuable way of being human in the world. Moreover, in the spirit of *Ujima*, we must work together tirelessly to build the good world and forge the good future we want and deserve. And let us hold fast to the principle of *Ujamaa* that we must share work and wealth and ensure all have a life of dignity and decency and an equitable share of the goods of the world without undermining its well-being.

Our overarching purpose, *Nia*, the *Odu Ifa* tells us, is to constantly bring good in the world and not let any good be lost—no good be lost in our families and friendships, and our relationships of all kinds; and no good be lost that would threaten or undermine the well-being of the world and all in it. And let us, in the spirit and practice of creativity, *Kuumba*, do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community and by extension, the world, more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it. Finally, let us dare to practice *Imani*, the faith of our ancestors, a steadfast faith in the good that compels us to constantly pursue it; and an unflinching faith in our people, Black people, African people. And let this faith express itself as love of them in real, radical and revolutionary ways, ways that translate as ongoing striving and struggling with them to create the life conditions for and the reality of their happiness, well-being, constant development and flourishing in the world.

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