



REVOLT, RESISTANCE AND BLACK POWER: LESSONS FROM 50 YEARS OF RIGHTEOUS STRUGGLE

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PART 2. IN DEFINING BLACK POWER as an ongoing revolt, my intention was to pose and help shape it as a process and practice of *righteous and relentless struggle*, a sustained righteous resistance against White racism, cultural imperialism, domination, deprivation and degradation imposed on us and the world in all its violent and vicious forms. It was to suggest Black Power as a constant rising up in righteous resistance to all the ways the oppressor seeks to constrain, suppress and destroy us. In other words, it was meant to suggest that the Black Power revolt was a radical insertion into history against the established order in the interests of liberation and the acquisition of power to control our destiny and daily lives and forge a future worthy of the best of who we are. In addition, to conceive of Black Power as a *righteous revolt* was to reaffirm our right to rebel, to resist, and to stress its moral grounding and its morally compelling nature in the rightful pursuit of freedom, justice, equal treatment.

The principles of self-determination, self-respect and self-defense, essential to the Black Power revolt and resistance Movement, spoke to both our central goals and the practice we had to engage in to realize those goals. For in the final analysis, as Kawaïda teaches, practice proves and makes possible everything. *Self-determination* requires the practice of controlling the space we occupy, control of our community in this country and the world African community, and thus our destiny and daily lives. *Self-respect* means engaging in practices that are culturally grounded and which affirm and honor our identity and dignity as African persons and people and legitimize the life we live, the work we do and the struggle we wage. And *self-defense* means affirming in practice our right and responsibility to defend ourselves against systemic and social violence and oppression by any means society compels us to take and by any sacrifices required of us.

It was in the summer of 1966 in the Summit of Black Power in D.C. and in the summer of '67 at the Black Power Conference in Newark, that Us, its leader, its philosophy, *Kawaïda*,

and its fundamental principles, the *Nguzo Saba*, emerge to play a continuing major role in Black political and intellectual culture. Indeed, they have played a key role in every major Black Movement since the 60s: the movements of Black Power; Black Arts; Black Studies; Black student union; Black youth; Black Power conference; Black liberation theology; reparations; rites of passage; independent Black schools; Afrocentricity; Million Man March/Millions More, ancient Egyptian Maatian studies; and Ifa ethical studies.

The Black Power period of the Black Liberation Movement, which began in 1965 and lasted to approximately 1975, was clearly defined by an increase in openly Black-centered local, national and international initiatives. The Watts Revolt of 1965 marked in fire and struggle the beginning of a new era and from that time with the founding of Us and the ideological and practical struggle that raged across the country and world, lessons of revolt and revolution were learned, practiced and shared. The year 1967 was defined by its revolts in Newark and Detroit; the first Black Power Conference; the founding of the Simba Wachanga of Us, The Young Lions, armed, trained, disciplined and engaged; and in the formation of numerous other groups which announced and explored differing and similar options of struggle. It thus represented the flowering of various schools of thought and ways to pursue resistance and achieve liberation. And again, all these initiatives constituted the Black Liberation Movement and offered lessons for Us and all those involved and observant.

For the organization Us, the lessons of 50 years of struggle begin with the Kawaïda lesson and teaching that in the context of oppression, there is no remedy or effective response except resistance, no real or relevant strategy without the centrality of struggle. and no dignity-affirming and promising way forward except on the battlefield to be ourselves and free ourselves and build the good world and future we all want and deserve. Struggle, we teach in Kawaïda, is a defining feature of what it means to be human,

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to be alive and to assert oneself in free, righteous and rewarding ways. And the struggle for liberation and to expand the realm of freedom is part of our being human, being ourselves as Africans and engaging and transforming the world in life-enhancing and dignity-affirming ways.

Secondly, one of the most important lessons from our struggles is the centrality of the identity, idea and practice of *Blackness*, i.e., our Africanness, in its most expansive meaning. That is to say, Blackness is not simply color, but more definitively culture and consciousness that leads to liberated and liberating practices directed toward our flourishing, human good and the well-being of the world. Therefore, we called for “Back to Black” and asserted that the first step forward is a step backward to ourselves. We understood then as now that in order to free ourselves we must be ourselves and we cannot be ourselves, let alone come into the fullness of ourselves, if we doubt, deny, condemn and mutilate our Blackness. Indeed, this becomes a classic case of collaborating in our own oppression and allowing our oppressor to be our teacher.

Surely, if we *deny* our existence as Black persons and a Black people, there is no injury of oppression and thus no need to struggle to end it. If we *doubt* our own identity, dignity and rights, then we give our oppressor an evil opening to deny our humanity and human rights and violate both. If we *condemn* ourselves as Black people, we borrow and build on the language and illogic of our oppressor to indict ourselves and render ourselves the pathological threats he uses to oppress and kill us as a matter of public policy and socially-sanctioned practice. And if we *mutilate* ourselves in a vain attempt to look, sound and think like our oppressor and gain his approval,

we exhibit willfully self-destructive practices and fail to reaffirm, recover and raise up our own paradigms of human excellence and achievement. And thus, we will contribute to one of the greatest human problems of our times, the progressive Europeanization of human culture and human consciousness.

Thirdly, we learned from Min. Malcolm that “Wherever Black people are there is a battleline” and we must wage righteous and relentless struggle everywhere—internally and externally. It is also the teachings of the *Odu Ifa* that the battle can be lost at home before we reach the battlefield outside, if we don’t strengthen ourselves for struggle. This strengthening must begin with our family and community, but it can only be truly tested and tempered in confrontation with the oppressor in the test of wills, hearts, minds and practical struggles.

Still Amilcar Cabral is right, we must constantly strive to “turn our weaknesses into strengths”, for, he said, that too is struggle. For each person carries within himself or herself a vital part and possibility to strengthen or hinder the liberation struggle and therefore each and all must take it upon themselves to be themselves and free themselves and make their contribution to the liberation struggle, a liberated life and liberating ways of asserting themselves in the world. This is the meaning of Frantz Fanon’s statement that “an authentic national liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his (or her) own liberation”. And as Harriet Tubman taught us, this liberation and the struggle to achieve it must be for and through community.

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