



**THE NGUZO SABA, US AND KAWAIDA:  
GROUNDING AND CENTERING OURSELVES**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**T**HIS YEAR marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Organization *Us* and the introduction of the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles, and *Kawaida* philosophy in which they are both grounded and grew. And this too is the year for holding the *Nguzo Saba Conference 2015*, a major conversation held every five years to celebrate these achievements and to provide space for Africans in the U.S. and throughout the global African community to come together and discuss the value and uses of these principles and *Kawaida* philosophy in their and our people's work, struggle and daily lives.

Moreover, this year finds us, as a people and *Us* as an organization, now as always, still on the battlefield in a life-protecting and liberating struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves and build, with others so committed and inclined, to the truly good society and world we all want and deserve to live and flourish in and leave as a legacy for future generations. Thus, it is important for us to look back and reflect on the context in which we came into being as an organization called *Us*; the continuing relevance and current application of our thought and practice forged in the furnace of hard work and fierce struggle for 50 years; and our contribution to imagining and achieving a good future and way forward for us and all. For indeed, this is ever our duty and self-conscious commitment as found in the sacred teachings of our ancestors: to know our past and honor it, to engage the present and improve it and to imagine a whole new future and to forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

The year 1965 was clearly a critical juncture in the history of the life and struggle of our people with clear transformative impact and implications for this country and of no small significance to events and processes unfolding around the world. 1965 was not only

the founding year of *Us* and the introduction of the *Nguzo Saba* and *Kawaida* philosophy, but was also the year of the assassination and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, and the great loss and challenging legacy attached to this; the Selma March and the winning of the Voting Rights Act; the Watts Revolt, a fire sign and signature of forms of resistance to come; the historical exhaustion of the Civil Rights phase of the Black Freedom Movement; and the emergence of the Black Power phase of that Movement. And all over the world the people were in righteous resistance to imperialism, colonialism, racism and White supremacy in its many forms.

Malcolm had prophesized and offered his life in the struggle for the end of White supremacy in its various national and international forms and the bringing into being through righteous and relentless struggle a reign of freedom and justice in the world. And he taught, we must be ready to sacrifice and give whatever the struggle for freedom requires and demands of us. In a word, we must pursue and achieve "freedom by any means necessary". And this also means having and maintaining the fierce determination and continuing courage of all kinds not to fear or be seduced by the oppressor and not to walk away from the battlefield until the liberation struggle and good world are actually won.

Our conception of ourselves, of our thought and the character and direction of our practice were all shaped in the multidimensional interrelated process of the liberation struggle. It involved constant reading, study and reflection; on-the-ground struggle, organizing, mobilizing, serving and engaging our people in varied ways; teaching and learning from our people; and reflecting on the lessons of other liberation struggles in the world without forgetting we must conceive, build and wage our own. And we also formed our self-

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conception and philosophy of life and struggle in ideological struggle with our contemporaries and fellow Movement activists around issues of revolution and the indispensable role of culture; the centrality of Africa for cultural grounding; the art and seriousness of war; guerrilla war vs. “Custer stands”; self-determination and relations with White activists; pan-Africanism; Third World alliances; class and race; and the relationship and correct way of handling conflict and contradictions between organizations and our people, among other things.

We were living and struggling in what was called “the belly of the beast”, the citadel and imperial center of White supremacy in the world, the USA, world capitalism’s and racism’s security homeland and homeland security. And we understood ourselves and our people in the Malcolmian sense, as part of the rising tide of Third World resistance then engulfing the globe. That is to say, liberation struggles that would redraw the map of human history, redistribute wealth and power, and alter forever the minds and lives of billions. We were sure these world-changing struggles would lead to victory, although we were partially aware of how durable and deeply entrenched systems of oppression are—not only in structure and practices, but also in the hearts and minds of the oppressed.

This is why from the beginning, following Malcolm, Sekou Toure, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral, we called for a cultural revolution that would undergird, aid and sustain the political revolution. We stood with Malcolm in his contention that “culture is an in-

dispensable weapon in the freedom struggle. (And) We must take hold of it and forge the future with the past”. Also, we embraced his affirmation that “We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are to liberate ourselves from the bonds of White supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to un-brainwash an entire people”. Here Malcolm’s thinking on the essential requirement for a successful revolution intersects with that of Fanon who contends that the cultural revolution is necessary to insure that during and after the struggle “there is not only the disappearance of colonialism, but also the disappearance of the colonized person”. Thus, he states, “an authentic liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his/her own liberation”.

**I**t is from this understanding that I maintained that the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis which at the same time is an urgent and unavoidable challenge. And this is to break the monopoly the established order has on so many of our minds, to return to ourselves as African people rooted in the best values and practices of our own culture, and to imagine and bring into being thru righteous and relentless struggle a new world and way forward. And it is within this understanding about the indispensability of cultural grounding to offer framework and foundation for the inclusive liberation struggle of our people that Kawaida philosophy was developed, the Nguzo Saba conceived and the Organization Us was constructed and took its vanguard place in the Black Liberation Movement.

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Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of Kwanzaa; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, [www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org); [www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org).