



**US IN THE INTEREST OF OUR PEOPLE:
CENTERING THE MANY SEASONS OF OUR STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AS WE OF US CLOSE OUT THE MONTH OF our reflective commemoration and significant celebration of 58 years and 232 seasons of our culturally grounded and love-driven struggle together with and for our people, it is useful to discuss some of our key concepts and central motivations. Clearly, the name, concept and practice of being Us is central to how we understand and assert ourselves in the world. In the Sixties, we emphasized the concept of Us as opposed to them, Us the people and the organization in resistance to the oppressor. But it is important here to offer a more expansive understanding of our identity, purpose and direction – involving not only the oppositional, but also the affirmative and value-driven way we engage the world.

Us, first and foremost, signifies our priority commitment to our people, Black people, African people, everywhere and all the time. It affirms our profound and irreversible commitment to actively putting their interests, our shared collective interests, at the center of how we conceive and conduct our lives, our work and our struggles. It speaks to our enduring understanding that our freedom and future as a people are indivisible, that there is no justice worthy of its name that is not inclusive of all and that there is no honor, dignity or moral justification in seeking a comfortable place in oppression at the expense of others oppressed and excluded.

Us, also, signifies us in opposition to them, our oppressor, both as an organization and a people. It is an active commitment to righteous and relentless resistance to oppression in its various savage, subtle and seductive forms. And it is an unrelenting and rightful struggle, not only for freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation in oppression, but also for freedom to choose

and act, to grow, develop, create, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves. In addition, Us in its oppositional significance and practice speaks to our drawing a clear distinction, indeed a cultural distinction, between us and them, the oppressor, in the way we understand ourselves, assert ourselves and engage the world and all in it, i.e., other humans and other animate and inanimate beings. Here our sense of the unity of being with its environmental concerns and commitment and the struggle against systems of oppression which degrade and destroy us, the earth and all in it, on it and above it, comes into focus as a vital site of righteous and relentless resistance. Such struggle is also in affirmation of our status and obligations not only as human beings (*watu*) but also as world beings (*walimwengu*), assigned by history and heaven to bring and sustain good in the world, as our sacred texts teach us.

Finally, the name Us signifies our commitment to communitarian African values, values that teach, stress and strengthen the principles and practice of sharing the good of the world and the good in the world. The sharing of the good of the world speaks especially to sharing relations of good among ourselves and others and rightful relations with the environment or the natural world. It reflects again our sense of the unity of being and as Nana Dr. Anna Julia Cooper taught, “the oneness of life and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritism” and forms of oppression. And the shared goods in the world refer to the shared natural and social resources which are the common good of all. This, of course, is the communitarian principle of the inclusive sharing of good within our local, national and world community of African peoples. But it, of necessity, extends to all the people

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of the world. For the world belongs not to the colonizers, corporations and the empire-imposing countries that brutally appropriate the lives, labor, land and resources of different and vulnerable peoples, but to the peoples themselves all over the world wherever and whenever they are as the sacred *Husia* and our best moral reasoning teach and remind us.

So, we began and continue our struggles in the interest of the people. To be truly and irreversibly in the interest of our people is first to be constantly in consideration of the people. That is to say, to make them a central and continuing focus of our reasoning and deliberation about what is to be done. It is to always ask how it benefits or harms them, how they participate in meaningful ways so that they are truly transformed by the process, becoming self-conscious agents of their own lives and liberation. And as always now, we must consider how does it help us and them to relate rightfully to the environment, cleanup, care for and protect their living space and link this work and struggle to the larger struggle to protect and sustain the earth and all in it.

Also, to be in the interest of our people is to serve them and do what benefits them, not only to satisfy their immediate needs, but also to aid them in creating conditions and capacities to realize their expansive aspirations and achieve their rightful interests in concrete and continuing ways. Moreover, it is to imagine and forge with them a whole new future in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways worthy of them and of the name, history and highest hopes of African peoples and humankind. And again, it must include not only consideration and concern for African and human good, but

also the sustained wellbeing of the world and all in it.

To center the work, service, institution building and struggle of our organization Us and its advocates and members for these 58 years and 232 seasons means correcting and rightfully filling out the historical record. This will also include rightful engagement with Us, Kawaida formations and the Kawaida Movement and their vanguard and significant roles in the cultural, political and intellectual history of Black people since the 60s. Clearly, they have been denied this deserved place by a host of conscripted and unscripted “guardians of the gate” for the established order’s self-serving and acceptable versions of history. But this denial is also motivated by a miasmatic mixture of poor scholarship, bad faith, faulty research and reasoning, and an ideological animus immune and oblivious to the facts of history and the minimum rules for writing and relating it. It is clearly an irony of history that those who loudly denounce DeSantis for trying to erase Black history and ideologically editing the American narrative to his limited racist liking find themselves practicing their own form of selective erasure and ideological editing of Black Movement history.

Centering the achievements, messages and meaning of Us, Kawaida formations and the Kawaida Movement would not only correct the historical record, but also rightfully enrich and expand it in the interest of real knowledge and in the interests of our people who need to know the whole of our history in all its diversity. Us’ intellectual and practical work, its philosophy, Kawaida, its programmatic influence on the Black Power Movement and its pan-African reach have not been written about with any accuracy, integrity or fullness. Nor has the history of

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Kawaida formations and Kawaida programmatically influenced organizations and projects such as The East, Ahidiana, the Institute of Positive Education, the Committee for a United Newark, the Congress of African Peoples, the Council of Independent Black Institutions, the Black Power Conferences, the Gary Convention, the *Million Man March Mission Statement*, and other initiatives and achievements.

THIS LEAVES AN AWESOME AND UNJUSTIFIABLE gap in initiatives claiming a full and factual history of our people in struggle

and calls for a real and inclusive history which Nana Haji Malcolm X defines as an indispensable and most rewarding study in life and struggle. Indeed, centering this varied, valuable and continuing tradition of life, work and struggle of Us' members offers us a unique and valuable site for the critical study, understanding and engaging the sustaining sacred narrative we know, live and push forward as Black history, a history of humanity's most ancient people and a vital social and moral vanguard of our times.▲

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; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.