



**HAJI MALCOLM, LIBERATION AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION:
TOWARDS RADICAL RUPTURE WITH CAPTURED CONSCIOUSNESS**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IN THIS MONTH OF A SPECIAL AND PROLONGED remembering and reflecting on Haji Malcolm and his message and meaning to us and the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world, I want to share a topic covered in my coming major work on his liberation ethics. At the heart of Haji Malcolm's teaching, work and struggle is the focus on the agency of the oppressed, their capacity to free themselves, be themselves and together build a new world and future for themselves and future generations. And a beginning focus for the liberation struggle is in the hearts and minds of the people, their coming into consciousness in and through the liberation struggle they wage to be themselves and free themselves and live good and meaningful liberated lives.

The key concept and practice here is cultural revolution, which is also a central element of my philosophy, *Kawaida*, borrowed from and built on from not only Haji Malcolm's teachings, but also from Nana Frantz Fanon, Haji Sekou Toure, Nana Amilcar Cabral and other liberation leaders of African peoples and the world. Indeed, from the inception of our organization Us' joining the Black Freedom Movement, we maintained that that the key crisis and challenge in Black life is the cultural crisis, and that until we break the monopoly the oppressor has on so many of our minds, liberation is not only impossible it is also unthinkable. And we concluded "culture is the basis for recovery and revolution", freeing our minds in the midst of transformative struggle, creating a radical rupture with the captured and colonized consciousness, Nanas Malcolm, Toure, Fanon and Cabral urged us to confront and radically remove. Thus, we aimed to achieve both a *liberated* and *liberating* conscious-

ness, one that was not only free itself, but also committed to the freeing of others, indeed the whole people.

Haji Malcolm taught that at the heart of our struggle was the need for a cultural revolution that had several functions: unbrainwashing the people; recapturing their heritage and identity; rediscovering and returning to ourselves; strengthening the unity of African peoples; and aiding the larger struggle for liberation. In calling for a cultural revolution, he states that "We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people." This brain-washing is the emptying of the mind of its self-defining capacity, knowledge and memory and replacing them with a captured consciousness, which is servile, self-hating and self-injuring.

Haji Malcolm's call for a coming into cultural consciousness through launching a *cultural revolution*, then, is a call for a radical rupture with the ruling ideology, views and values of the dominant society; a self-conscious recovery of the best of African views and values and practices; and using them in the service of our people and waging of the liberation struggle. Like other revolutionaries of the period in which he lived and worked, Haji Malcolm reasons that liberation requires first a rejection of the views and values of the dominant society and then a retrieval of those which valorize and validate the people and advance the liberation struggle.

Here, Malcolm posits a second essential element of the cultural revolution, arguing that we must not only unbrainwash our minds and reject the views and values of the dominant society or the oppressor, but also reappropriate and put into practice the liberating, life-enhancing and self-restoring views and values of our own culture. Thus, he states

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that “We must recapture our heritage and our identity, if we are to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy.” Again, Haji Malcolm links history and culture in the category of heritage here and affirms its liberational role in breaking the bonds and back of White supremacy and providing the people ground on which to anchor and advance their lives and wage and win their liberation struggle.

At the heart of the cultural revolution, then, is not only a firm and steadfast rejection of the life-negating and dignity-denying views, values and practices of the dominant society, but also a self-conscious reappropriation and reaffirming of the life-positive and dignity-affirming views, values and practices of our own culture. And this he states, requires a self-conscious effort “to migrate back to Africa culturally,” also a “psychological and philosophical return to Africa.” This is a need to engage in a *sankofa* retrieval to recover, recapture and use our culture to ground, affirm and liberate ourselves and live lives worthy of our history and highest cultural values.

In discussing the need for a cultural, psychological and philosophical return to Africa, Haji Malcolm addresses a third essential element in his conception of cultural revolution: the pan-Africanist initiative of unity and struggle. It is a Garveyite goal and aspiration which Haji Malcolm raises up and reaffirms. “Our cultural revolution must be the means of bringing us closer to our African *brothers and sisters*,” he states (emphasis added). He makes this same point in the OAAU Program which he was to present on February 21, 1965, the day of his martyrdom, saying with the establishment of the OAAU, “We Afro-American people will launch a cultural revolution which will provide a means for restoring our identity that we might rejoin our brothers and sisters on the African conti-

ment, culturally, psychologically, economically and share with them the sweet fruits of freedom from oppression and independence of racist governments.” Elsewhere, he also argues a global pan-Africanism that includes also all our brothers and sisters around the world, “all persons of African origin to come together and dedicate their ideas and skills and lives to free our people from oppression.”

Haji Malcolm points to the interrelated nature of the struggles for liberation of African peoples and expands the arc of inclusion to argue the interrelated and supportive nature of the liberation struggle, not only of African peoples, but all oppressed and struggling peoples. Thus, he says in agreement with Nana Cabral that “What we do here in regaining our self-respect, our manhood (and womanhood), our dignity and freedom helps all people everywhere who are also fighting against oppression.”

A fourth essential element and goal of the cultural revolution Haji Malcolm envisions and advocates is the rediscovery of ourselves as an African people. Thus, he states that “This cultural revolution will be the journey to our rediscovery of ourselves.” It will be an overall cultural journey, rooted in the liberational project of regaining and renewing our historical memory, learning lessons of our history, extracting its models of African and human excellence, using these as mirrors and models for continued excellence and achievement, and for advancing the liberation struggle. Repeatedly, Malcolm stresses the need to regain, rethink and reconceive our conception of ourselves. Haji Malcolm wants us to rediscover our original reconstructed and expansive ways of being ourselves as persons and a people.

Finally, in his concept of cultural revolution, Haji Malcolm, as noted above, is of necessity and consistently interested in the liberational aspects of culture, i.e., how it aids

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in informing, undergirding and sustaining the liberation struggle. Therefore, throughout the different aspects of the cultural revolution, there is an explicit or implicit call for striving and struggle, righteous and relentless struggle to overcome the cultural and political effects of White supremacist and racist oppression and to free ourselves, remake our lives, and come into the fullness of ourselves.

HAJI MALCOLM'S ASSERTION THAT "WE must recapture our heritage and identity" read in the context of revolutionary

thought, explicitly carries the language of struggle. Indeed, to "recapture" our cultural legacy and dignity-affirming sense of self, suggests and requires our struggling to recover what was taken, captured from us, in and through oppression. For to recapture our heritage and identity is part and parcel of the recapturing, taking back, and recovering our freedom. And both of these, Haji Malcolm teaches, must be ultimately and effectively gained in the righteous and relentless liberation struggle of our people.▲

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