



US AT 44:

REMEMBRANCE, REFLECTIONS AND REAFFIRMATION

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The year 1965 was for Us, even before our founding, a momentous year defined both by ultimate sacrifice and intensified struggle—the assassination and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, the prophesized fire-next-time of the Watts Revolt, and the profoundly transformative liberation struggles in Africa and thruout the Third World. These signal events and processes seared into our consciousness in vivid and powerful ways, vital and enduring lessons in life and struggle. The first was the value and vulnerability of radical and righteous leadership, and the high-level dedication, discipline and sacrifice it required. Moreover, Malcolm's teachings on self-determination, self-defense, cultural grounding, and Third World alliance clearly found their way in our discourse, discussions and daily lives.

Secondly, we were offered parallel lessons on the awesome power and potential of the masses, the strengths and weaknesses of spontaneous revolt, and the never-ending need to organize to move the masses from episodic righteous rage and resistance to becoming a continuing self-conscious force for radical social change. Thirdly, we saw in the African and other Third World struggles the historical opportunity for linkage with our own, and envisioned with Frantz Fanon the possibility and promise, thru solidarity and struggle, of a new history of freedom and flourishing for humankind.

The last half of the Sixties ushered in a new phase of the Black Freedom Movement, moving from the Civil Rights phase to one of Black Power and Us was in the vanguard of this thrust, being founded—1965 September 7. Us and other Black Power organizations defined ourselves as true and ready-to-be-tried revolutionaries, and allies in arms with the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. And we studied revolution around the world,

trained for guerilla and political struggle, disciplined ourselves for reversals and resurgence, and imagined and dedicated ourselves to a new world and way of life.

Us understood and approached its role as an instrument of revolutionary struggle, a vanguard organization, whose mission and meaning revolved around several fundamental propositions from which we have not and will not move. And on this, our 44th anniversary of work, service, struggle and institutional-building, it is important to reaffirm and reflect on these. We began with the fundamental propositions that the total liberation of our people on every level is our ultimate and unchanging goal; and that real liberation begins and continues as a cultural struggle which precedes and makes possible all other struggles. Secondly, this is a struggle to craft and effectively establish and sustain a new vision and value system rooted in the reality of our own lives and history and which produces a liberational practice which not only satisfies our social and human needs, but transforms us in the process, freeing us, as Marcus Garvey taught, and enabling us to come into the fullness of ourselves as Africans and human beings.

Thus, Kawaida's emphasis on recovering the best of our views, values and practices as a people and using them in the interest of liberation, is reflective of Malcolm's stress on cultural revolution, Sekou Toure's emphasis on full-re-Africanization and later Molefi Asante's insistence on Afrocentricity, all of which requires us to be the self-conscious and culturally-grounded subjects of our own life and history. With Toure and Amilcar Cabral we define the liberation struggle as an act of culture itself, that is to say, a practice of freedom rooted in the demands, values and vocation of our culture for us to be free and flourish as human beings.

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This means freedom from domination and dislocation, psychologically and socially, breaking from the vulgar views and values of the dominant society and posing and pursuing a new way of being African and human in the world. These negative values, rejected from the beginning are: racism, capitalism, materialism, religious and cultural chauvinism, war-mongering and acceptance of White supremacy as normal, normative and almost natural. And later, as an indispensable example of our ongoing commitment to self-criticism and self-correction, sexism was added to this outlaw list.

These too are fundamental propositions: we are our own liberators and a people that cannot save itself is lost forever. And this holds true in spite of the acknowledged need and value of allies. Also, African freedom and dignity are indivisible, and wealth and comfortable circumstances in oppression for some is no substitute for the liberation and upliftment of us all. As I've said earlier and elsewhere, "revolution is rank and unreal, if it is not a collective effort and experience, and if it does not reach and raise to a higher level each and all of us".

Finally, we embraced Paul Robeson's assertion that "the battle front is everywhere" and thus as our motto of the 60's says, "anywhere we are Us is". To do battle and build everywhere, as the historical record reveals, has been at the heart and center of our efforts. Our vanguard role in the major movements of our times, our long-term institution-building, and our consistent intellectual and political work in and for the world African community

speak to this. Likewise, our recovery, reconstruction and teaching worldwide the sacred texts and wisdom of ancient Africa, the *Husia* and *Odu Ifa: The Ethical Teachings*, and the vision, values and practices of Kawaida, Kwanzaa and the Nguzo Saba, and thus, creating new discourses and directions for life and struggle also reflect the range, reach and commitment of our work. And our current and continuing work in the areas of education, political issues and labor reaffirm this also.

And so in the midst of such remembrance and the reflection it generates and requires, we are compelled to ask ourselves what is still to be done now after 44 years? First, as Fannie Lou Hamer taught us, we must pause and pay homage to our unbroken bridges, to those Simba soldiers who would not bow, buck or break; who weathered the many and various assaults on us and the organization by the established order and its allies; and who have given so much, those who have passed and those still standing, working to widen the path to liberation.

And then, let us, in the Us and Simba tradition, reaffirm our determination to hold fast to these fundamental commitments: to continue the unfinished struggle; to be self-conscious servants of the people; to always speak truth to the masses; to join them in their daily efforts to live good and meaningful lives; to be humble in our assessment of ourselves and hard-line in defense of the people; and unrelenting and resilient in our striving and struggles to create an enduring good in and for the world.

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