



**US, KAWAIDA AND CONTINUING STRUGGLE:
IN REMEMBRANCE AND REAFFIRMATION**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The recent celebration of the 45th anniversary of the founding of our organization Us unavoidably raises questions about the light and heavy lessons of our history and the self-understanding and social practice which evolve from this. From the first day and hour of our emergence on September 7, 1965, in the tumultuous wake of the Watts Revolt and in vivid remembrance of the message and martyrdom of Malcolm we committed ourselves to be a vanguard and rearguard in the liberation struggle of our people and set for ourselves three overarching aims: cultural revolution, radical social change, and bringing good in the world. Though of more recent coinage, the latter phrasing was already contained in our philosophy, *Kawaida*, expressed succinctly in the Sixth Principle of the *Nguzo Saba*, *Kuumba* (Creativity), which requires us “to do always as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.” And as both Africans and humans, the world is also our community.

Self-conscious keepers and carriers of the legacy of Malcolm, we took seriously his teachings that “We must recapture our heritage and our identity, if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of White supremacy”; that “We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people”; that “this cultural revolution will be a journey to our rediscovery of ourselves”; and that “Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle, (and) we must take hold of it and forge the future with the past.” Thus, we have, from the beginning, argued that cultural revolution is indispensable to the overall liberation struggle, that it precedes and makes liberation possible, and that it requires a radical rejection of the mindset and conditions

of oppression and the self-conscious return to our own culture, recovering and using its best values and practices to reconstruct and free ourselves and forge a future worthy of the name African. This process Sekou Toure calls “reAfricanization”; Amilcar Cabral calls “return to the upward paths of (our) culture”; and we called “back to Black” in the most productive and promising ways.

Here we embrace ancient Africa as a moral and spiritual ideal, the site and source of some of humanity’s highest ideals and our most sacred values and views of life, living, and flourishing in the world. Coming into consciousness, we rejected any religion that assigned us to a secondary, subordinate or “unchosen” status as persons or a people. We declared our dignity and divinity, reaffirmed the sacredness in ourselves, the holiness of our history, the presence of prophets, saints and sacred teachers among us, and our obligation to walk righteously in the world as taught in the *Husia* of ancient Egypt. And we uplift the unique ethical teaching of the *Odu Ifa* of ancient Yorubaland that all “humans are divinely chosen,” and that they are chosen not over and against anyone, but chosen with everyone to do one main thing: to bring good in the world.

Studying Malcolm, Toure, Fanon and Cabral taught us that to free ourselves socially, we must wage a cultural revolution that both prepares our people for struggle and sustains them in the process. With Toure and Cabral, we conceived of resistance and revolution as an act of culture itself. This means that a liberation struggle is the will and work of a people whose culture demands it. For it is an expression of how a people culturally understands and asserts themselves, how they culturally conceive what it means to be human and African—Haitian, Palestinian or African

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American, i.e., free and self-determining or enslaved, occupied and passively accepting of their oppression. In this process of cultural revolution and social struggle, the people are transformed into self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation. For as Fanon asserts, “an authentic national liberation exists only in the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly began his (her) own liberation.” This is the meaning of our assertion in the *Quotable Karenga* that “culture is the basis for *revolution and recovery*”.

Here the question of radical social change emerges. For as Fanon argued, both the culture and the people require struggle to achieve conditions necessary to their existence and development, i.e., conditions of freedom from domination, deprivation and degradation and freedom to imagine and open up new horizons of human history. Thus, Fanon says plainly without subterfuge or face-saving gestures for the timid, “You may speak about everything under the sun; but when you decide to speak that unique thing in man’s life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by bringing light to your own country, and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, you must collaborate on the physical plane.”

Read into this what you want, but it reminds us that joined to all our political education, mobilization and organization must be a plan and point of confrontation. It may be strikes, rallies, marches, demonstrations, disruptions, etc. But there must be confrontation over the critical issues of our

time: freedom, justice, power of the masses, human rights, reparations, rebuilding New Orleans, work and wage issues, health care, just immigration policies, war and peace, environmental care and justice, police violence, the death penalty, egalitarian distribution of wealth, self-determination for all peoples, and the end of White supremacy in this country and the world.

Many fear that to talk of radical social change in the U.S. today seems too utopian, that to work for it seems hopeless, and that to actually struggle for it will run a real risk of rendition at Guantanamo. And yet there is an urgent need to continue the struggle even though confrontation and the level of commitment and courage it requires have clearly lost their currency in many, if not most, quarters. Indeed, a successful press conference appears as the major mission of some leaders and groups; social justice takes a backseat to Sunday messages of personal prosperity; and people praise posting notes on the internet as a substitute for on-the-ground work and struggle, and for mixing and remaking the world with the masses.

But some of us remember the teachings of Frederick Douglass about no progress without struggle, the life-lessons of sacrifice and self-liberation of a people by Harriet Tubman, and the martyrs’ witness of Malcolm and Martin whose ultimate meaning and messages can only be revealed and made real in the midst of the continuing struggle for the new world they gave their lives for and we owe to ourselves and our descendents.

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