



**BOWING IN OBEISANCE TO BALOZI:
IN RIGHTFUL RECOGNITION AND INSTRUCTION**
Los Angeles Times, 12-20-07, p. A-7

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

The sacred teachings of the *Husia* tell us that “Better than riches and royal linen is to do good for those who recognize and respect it.” It is a teaching on paying rightful hommage and due honor not only to those who have passed, but also to those who are still living and walking in dignity and with deserved deference among us. It reminds us that we are to raise up the good always and everywhere, and to encourage good by calling rightful attention to it and honoring it among us. And it is to instruct by example of what we are and should be as persons and a people as distinct from the deformed and pathological portraits painted, peddled and made available in almost every venue.

And so as the year comes to an end and the edges of the year meet and call for remembrance, reflection and recommitment, especially on the last day of Kwanzaa, The Day of Meditation, I keep my commitment to myself and the tradition of raising up the good, by not letting the year pass without paying rightful and righteous hommage to a friend and fellow-soldier, a worthy victor and veteran of our struggle, a builder, elder brother and believer in the Good, Balozi Zayd Muhammad. Balozi Zayd Muhammad is a strong pillar within the pan-Africanist and diplomatic community. His name *Balozi* which means ambassador and statesman in Swahili, is both a definition of his work and a definitive statement of his worth in the world. It is in this defining name, Balozi, that he has done so much of his work and built a lasting legacy in a life well-lived.

Thus, at his “Legacy/Retirement” Dinner, September 13, 2007, ordinary people, activists, leaders, politicians, business persons, educators, professionals and members of the diplomatic community from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Islands

gathered to pay hommage to Balozi. Balozi had gone home to Africa in 1964 as a personal guest of Africa’s exemplary statesman, President Julius K. “Mwalimu” Nyerere of Tanzania. Afterwards, he recruited African American professionals and technicians for work building ties with Tanzania and Africa in general. Later, he would act as a special mayoral aide of protocol and international relations, mayoral liaison to the U.N. diplomatic community, mayoral representative to the New Export Task Force, and President of the Newark U.N. Association as well as hold other posts.

We had met briefly in 1967 when he, as he reminds me, came to L.A. to celebrate Kwanzaa with Us. He would thereafter become one of Kwanzaa’s major advocates on both a national and international level. But it was in the summer of ’68 that we received an opportunity for extended exchange and working together to build a base of Black political power in Newark. The Black Power Conference of 1967 had given me the charge to “convene a national constitutional convention for a national Black party.” However, Us decided to delay calling the national convention and to first test the possibility of political power in a critical city. Thus, we went to Newark to help organize the campaign. I had proposed the theme of the campaign “Peace and Power”, using the symbol of an ancient Egyptian ankh imposed on the Black Power first. This was to suggest in the aftermath of the Newark revolt that peace can only come thru shared power and if Black people didn’t share power, there could be no peace in the city.

This campaign eventually led to the election of Ken Gibson, the first Black mayor of Newark and strong Black representation on the City Council. Balozi had

DR. MAULANA KARENKA

been one of the triumvirate of leaders of this campaign whom I worked with and trained in political organizing, self-presentation and Kawaida philosophy. The other two were Amiri Baraka, whom I appointed Imam (priest-teacher), and Mfundishi Maasi (security expert and co-chair with Balozi of the Black Community Development [and Defense] Organization). Many of the activists and politicians from this campaign were at Balozi's Legacy/Retirement to honor him, reminisce and renew ties, including former Mayor Gibson. But a member missing who had been so active and receptive to my leadership and philosophy was Councilman Donald Tucker who passed recently. He had, along with other Black members of the Newark City Council, called me back to Newark in 1994 to present me with an award for helping to build Black political power in Newark. And he was surely missed and remembered on this night.

In my brief presentation to introduce Balozi, I noted how his work reflected his commitment to and practice of the Seven Principles which he has taught and practiced so long. Indeed, his life and work first of all is a reflection of and commitment to *Umoja* (Unity), expressed not only the pan-African reach and relevance of his work, but also in his loving and life-enhancing relationship with his wife and friend, Karimu F. Hill-Harvey, Judge of the Municipal Court of East Orange. Balozi's life and work reflect *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination) in studying and grounding himself in Kawaida and

African culture, teaching Afrocentric views and values to African youth and others, traveling regularly to Africa and upholding and demonstrating the richness and responsibility of being African in the world. Balozi's practice of *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility), as a Muslim, caused him to take seriously the Quran's and Min. Malcolm's teaching that being a Muslim is not simply a matter of turning east or west, but of keeping the faith, being righteous in relationships and doing good works with and for others in the world.

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) commits Balozi to the African principle of shared work and shared wealth and he has built local, national and international relationships and structures to facilitate this process and practice. Likewise, Balozi is surely one who is committed to *Nia* (Purpose) and works to return African people to their traditional greatness, to strengthen both persons and peoples, and aid in a developmental process that truly involves and uplifts the people. Likewise, in practice of *Kuumba* (Creativity), he, as the text says, dares to do all he can in the way he can in order to leave our community and the world more beautiful and beneficial than he and we inherited it. And all his work is rooted in *Imani* (Faith), a faith that turns belief into good works, profession of religion into righteous acts and prayers into a practice that honors the Divine, liberates the people, and opens the path to a good life in this world and the next.

Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Black Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*, [www.UsOrganization.org and www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org].