



THE RADICAL EMERGENCE OF KAWAIDA PHILOSOPHY: A CRITICAL TIME OF TURNING

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A GAIN, IN OUR CONTINUING CELEBRATION and assessment of our 56 years and 224 seasons of work, service, struggle and institution-building as the organization Us, we are ultimately and unavoidably led to *Kawaida* philosophy. For indeed, it is *Kawaida* philosophy that is not only the central source from which I created the *Nguzo Saba* (1965) and *Kwanzaa* (1966), but also it is the indispensable foundation and framework on and within which we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles for African and human good and the well-being of the world. What follows below is again an excerpt from my book, *Kawaida: A Communitarian African Philosophy*, with additional commentary.

Kawaida philosophy evolved in the 1960s, forged in the crucible of the struggle for freedom. It, of necessity, bears the tone and texture of an organization, Us, and a movement, the Black Liberation Movement, both engaged in intense ideological and practical struggle to change society and the way we think about it and thus, the way we think about ourselves in it. The Sixties was a time of critical social struggles and sustained ideological discourse about the good and just society, the role of culture, the meaning of Black, the relevance of Africa, and the road to revolution or radical and progressive societal change. And the organization Us, the organizational context for the development of *Kawaida*, played a significant role in these ideological and social struggles *in this critical time of turning*. In spite of reductive translations by a host of interpreters of various political and academic orientations, the Sixties marks one of the most definitive decades, perhaps the most definitive decade in African American history. In fact, as a result of its achievements and often exaggerated "failures," it has become an unavoidable historical referent for understanding our immediate past and making critical assumptions about the future.

Its weight as a critical period in African American history is established by several factors. First, it was a time in which African Americans through sustained and costly struggle expanded the realm of freedom in the U.S. in a most definitive way. In other words, they, along with their allies, liberalized the established order, breaking through

racist barriers, opening up closed doors of opportunity, raising critical questions about the unequal distribution of wealth and power, and pointing the way toward a free, equal and just society. Thus, Africans launched, fought and won struggles which not only benefitted them, but also expanded the realm of human freedom, improved the quality of life, and inspired struggles of other oppressed and politically marginalized peoples and social groups, i.e., other peoples of color, women, seniors, the disabled and others.

Secondly, the 60s marked a period of massive organization, mobilization and political education of Black people. Among the most prominent organizations were: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Nation of Islam (NOI); Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); The Organization Us; Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); Black Panther Party (BPP); Urban League (UL); and the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) reached their height in the 60s and have not duplicated such strengths since. Thirdly, it is in the context of this flowering of organizations that a second flowering took place, i.e., the flowering of ideological discourse and struggles. In fact, the processes of organization, mobilization and political education all involved ideological discourse, discussion of issues from differing vantage points and worldviews, reflecting a heightened interest of African Americans in social issues, reinforcing political involvement in both community discourse and action, and providing a context necessary for the raising and engaging of issues.

Fourthly, the 60s also was a time of armed struggle through revolts in hundreds of cities as essentially an act of self-defense as argued by Robert Williams, Haji Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon. The Movement was not yet aware of Ida B. Wells' argument for self-defense which preceded Williams', Malcolm's and Fanon's. Fifthly, it is during the 60s that African Americans challenged the structure and functioning of academia, redefined "relevant education," established Black Studies as a necessary and legitimate discipline, and mobilized and organized Black Students into politically conscious student

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unions. Moreover, the 60s marked a heightened internationalization of the African American struggle with men and women like Haji Malcolm X, Martin L. King, Robert Williams, Fannie Lou Hamer and members of SNCC travelling around the world, speaking our special truth as a people and winning for us moral and political allies we did not formerly have. In addition, the 60s was a time of alternative institution-building with many rooted in the *Nguzo Saba* and Kawaida philosophy, i.e., independent schools, co-ops, businesses, cultural centers, theaters, art galleries, alternative churches, Black caucuses within integrated institutions, alternative media, political parties and as mentioned above, Black Studies programs, departments and research centers. The thrust for structural self-determination was clearly seen as indispensable to the actual control and direction of one's destiny and daily life.

Finally, the 60s was, especially in its latter half, the Black Power period, defined by its thrust to "return to the source," to go "back to Black." It stressed the rescue and reconstruction of African history and culture, redefinition of ourselves and our culture, and a restructuring of the goals and purpose of our struggle for liberation and a higher level of human life. Moreover, there was stress on returning to the Continent of Africa permanently or temporarily, physically and/or spiritually and philosophically for cultural revitalization, to reestablish links and build mutually beneficial relationships as Haji Malcolm X taught. Likewise, there was a stress on living and practicing African culture as an indispensable part of the liberation struggle and process. The call was for a break with all things European and oppressive and to reassert Africanness, Blackness in its awesomeness and beauty, in its reaffirmed history and humanity.

In all these ideological and political struggles, Us played a pivotal role on the local and national

level, especially through numerous organizations building their work, value systems and projects of struggle and institution-building around the *Nguzo Saba*, *Kwanzaa* and other aspects of Kawaida philosophy. Definitive of these organizations are: Uhuru Sasa Independent School and the East in New York; Ahidiana Independent School in New Orleans; Institute of Positive Education in Chicago; the Committee for a United Newark; Ujamaa Shule in Washington, D.C.; and the national Council of Independent Black Institutions.

Kawaida also had and continues to have an international impact through both the *Nguzo Saba* and *Kwanzaa*, as well as other dimensions of the philosophy selected for application and study by those who embrace it as a result of Us' pan-Africanist teaching and practice. This intellectual, ideological and programmatic impact of Us does not include its direct work as an organization in these cities as well as in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Akron and Dayton Ohio, building united fronts and self-defense formations modelled on the Simba Wachanga (The Young Lions of Us).

IN SPITE OF REDUCTIVE TRANSLATIONS ABOUT our work and struggle, we have always maintained a focus on the revolutionary character of culture, seeing culture as the fundamental grounds for the practice of liberation as a wholistic project, i.e., on every level of life. Indeed, we agreed with Haji Sekou Toure, Amilcar Cabral and Haji Malcolm X that the liberation struggle, itself, is an expression of culture and we accepted the revolutionary obligation to wage a relentless cultural revolution within and a political revolution without, resulting in a radical transformation in self, society and ultimately the world. And we have not ceased since!▲

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