



**TOMMY JACQUETTE-HALIFU:
WARRIOR WHO RODE THE WIND**
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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

He was a warrior who rode the changing winds of life and struggle and remained intact, a son of the Sixties who moved into another century without surrendering his most cherished values, one of those rare soldiers who refused to walk away from the battlefield until the struggle was won. Tommy Jacquette-Halifu born 1943 December 13, passed in peace and rose up in radiance 2009 November 16, having brought an enduring good in the world. He has left a worthy legacy of committed social activism, institution-building, consistent service to our people and constant struggle for social justice and good in the world. And we can best honor him by continuing the work and struggle to which he gave his life. Thus, in the tradition of the ancestors, we raise his five royal and righteous names and extract from them models and messages of excellence and achievement.

We know him first by the name he chose as a self-conscious son of the 60's, *Halifu*, which in Swahili means rebellious, resistant, oppositional and defiant. Choosing his name in a time of revolt and massive resistance, he wanted to announce his self-conscious commitment to the liberation struggle of our people and to signal his opposition to the established order and all forms of oppression.

It is in his commitment to clearing space for free discussion and pursuit of the interests of the people that Halifu would often prove problematic in meetings for those with a predetermined script. For often at the many meetings he attended, he didn't recognize "Robert" or his rules. His concern was not with following rigid procedure, but with creating a process that honored the interests

of the community and produced positive and promising results. He talked loud when he was angry or at ease, depending on the mood or the message to be sent. He was impatient with bureaucracy and its rules and representatives and always insisted on respect for the needs and rights of the masses.

The second name Halifu chose for himself is *Mfikiri*, one who thinks deep, ponders, meditates; one who constantly reflects on life, searching for meaning and ways forward. Halifu chose this name both as a sign of how he saw himself and wished to be. Thus, he sought grounding in Kawai-da philosophy, embracing its stress on values, cultural grounding, the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles) and liberating struggle. In the early aftermath of the Watts Revolt, Halifu, Karl Hekima, Ken Msemaji, I and others came together to found the organization Us, organize and intensify work in the community; and we used to imagine and discuss at length a new world in which our people and we would come into our own, a new world without racism, racists, oppression and injustice and in which people were free and flourishing. And throughout his life, Halifu never gave up hope or ceased to work for this vision, this urgent aspiration still to be achieved.

We know Halifu also as *Kujichagulia*, an active embodiment of self-determination which means to choose for self in both the person and people sense. In the 60's, Halifu had to choose between living a wasteful and unworthy lumpen life in the streets or leaving the streets, stretching his mind and imagination, and turning his attention to more important and elevating things. The sacred text, *Odu Ifa*, teaches that all humans are divinely chosen to bring good in the world

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and that this is the fundamental mission and meaning of human life. But it also teaches that even as we are chosen, we must also choose. Thus, Heaven and history had chosen Halifu to do good things for his people and he had to choose to accept and be worthy of this awesome assignment. And so, he chose his community over its streets, manhood over immaturity, struggling and fighting for his people over destructive aggression in defense of an earlier and smaller conception of himself.

Halifu must also be honored in his name *Thabiti*, which means firm, resolute, brave, constant and steadfast. Halifu was steadfast in his commitments in friendship, building and struggle. Indeed, Hekima, who was best friends with Halifu, states that it is this steadfastness, trustworthiness and loyalty in friendship and struggle that formed the foundation of their friendship and brotherhood in struggle. And anyone who knows Halifu, knows how tenacious and unbudging he was in the pursuit of his work, especially in the preservation and promotion of the Watts Summer Festival as its executive director for over 40 years. Indeed, he fought fiercely to preserve the integrity of the Festival and its fundamental meaning and message of cultural grounding, commemoration, social struggle and celebration of the lives and creativity of the people.

Finally, let us in our rightful homage to Mr. Tommy Jacquette-Halifu, recognize and remember him in his royal and righteous name, *Mtumishi*, servant of the people. A student of Malcolm X also, he believed in and loved the masses, and found ultimate

meaning in their lives and struggles and in serving them. In one of his last interviews at the Festival which was conducted by Jordan Jitahidi, Halifu places the people at the heart and center of the understanding of his mission, his motivation and hope for the future. He cites as sources of his inner strength: Kawaida philosophy which gave him “the strength and tools needed to keep going... (and) courage to continue the struggle”; an African spiritual consciousness and a knowledge of the history of the world-contribution and struggle of his people that makes his difficulties seem “like a grain of sand for me in terms of the struggle”.

Halifu identifies the people’s support as the indispensable measure and meaning of his work and the Festival itself. He says, “Without the people’s support, without the people’s participation, all would be for naught. And this is my other source of strength and encouragement that the people do come out and do support the Festival”. And he consistently believed their support is rooted in and rises out of their shared memory of struggle and commitment to good in and for the community.

He concludes saying, “I’m . . . fortunate to have experienced and to have been a part of (this) and I have a moral obligation to continue (the) struggle and continue to do whatever I can in the little way I can to keep good things and positive things happening in the community”. He carried the heaviness of this historical obligation to the end of his life and we who gather to honor him can and should do no less. Hotep. Ase. Heri.

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