



## US' 55 YEARS OF UNBUDGING BLACKNESS:

### AFRICA AS OUR MORAL IDEAL

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART 2. NOW THE INTERRELATED MORAL imperative to be ourselves and to free ourselves is intimately related to our commitment as advocates of Us to the principle and practice of unbudging Blackness and the deep-rooted and irreversible embrace of Africa as our moral ideal. To talk of our Blackness, again, is to talk not simply of our color, i.e., our appearance and genetic makeup, but also and most defining in distinctiveness, our culture and our self-conscious practice of it. In a word, Blackness at its core is about culture and consciousness and commitment to constantly maintain, cultivate and expand both without dismissing or diminishing respect for our color in its various shades as identifying attributes.

To speak of an unbudging Blackness we mean not making the slightest move away from the core and cornerstone of who we are as a people. In other words, it means not changing from the dignity-affirming, life-preserving and life-enhancing views, values and practices that define us as an African people, a Black people. For these define us, ground us, orient us and guide us in directing our lives toward good and expansive ends. They are ancient and modern, continental and global and reflect the best of what it means to be African and human in the world.

In sum, they are our culture, the foundation and framework for our thought, sensitivities, and practice. We define culture in this inclusive sense as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself and introduces itself to history and humanity. Indeed, for Us all we think, feel, say, do or dare is rooted in our concept of and commitment to African culture in its most inclusive sense. And this includes, not only lessons of life and struggle from the great among us, but also from everyday people whose wisdom and righteous ways are learned and treasured.

As we say in our *tambiko*, our pouring libation for them, even though they do not appear in the history books, or wear African clothes, or

remember and speak African languages, they still taught the beset of what it means to be African and human. For they taught us African values, values that enjoin us to seek and speak truth; to do and demand justice; to be kind and not do evil; to honor our ancestors, elders and parents; to cherish and challenge our children; to care for the poor and vulnerable among us; to have a rightful relationship with the environment; to resist evil, oppression and injustice; and to always raise up, praise and pursue the Good. And these values, views and practice are taught not only by those who made transition, but also by those living who love, lead and mentor us and encourage us to bring forth the beautiful potential and promise within each and all of us.

It is our philosophy, *Kawaida*, that brings these and other core values, views, and practice into a coherent system. Indeed, it defines itself as an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world. It is a *synthesis* in that it is a critical selective joining of ideas and practices into a system that provides a moral, material, and meaningful interpretation of life and obligates us to engage in a corresponding practice. It is *ongoing* in that it is open-textured, never a final and finished fact, but rather a constantly and critically rethought and renewed understanding of self, society and the world. And it is self-conscious in *exchange* with the world, from an African-centered vantage point, coming to the table, not naked and in need, but fully clothed in the rich variedness of our own culture, entering every room, dialog and discourse as an equal.

When we talk of Africa as our moral ideal, we mean by *moral ideal*, a composite of the highest values, the most insightful and expansive views, and the most principled and productive practices of African peoples. These include concepts of the "Transcendent or the Divine, of right and wrong, of good and evil, and our relational obligations to the Divine, nature and humans, i.e., ourselves and each other and others. And the

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moral ideal of Africa also includes our concepts of a good society and a good world which we are to pursue and use in our initiatives to radically reconceive and reconstruct society and the world.

From the beginning, we urged a constant dialog with Africa, asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the fundamental questions of African and human life. And this is not usually done, for others most often ask other cultures for these answers, unaware of and unconcerned about what Africa has to say about life at every level. But for Us, African as a world community is the central and indispensable source for us. Drawing from and studying both ancient and modern discussion, we extract and measure each view, value and practice according to our best moral reasoning. This we call basing all we choose and do on two main sources: tradition and reason, always engaging our tradition and shaping and reshaping it according to our best moral sensitivities and moral reasoning.

We understood this posing and pursuing Africa as a moral ideal was/is radical and indeed revolutionary, defiantly going against the grain and grasp of dominant ways or engaging the world. For it was self-affirming, self-authorizing and self-sacralizing without seeking consent, counsel or confirmation from Europe or European keepers of White culture and the realm of mythical Whiteness. We, from the beginning, rejected White racist and wrong-headed conceptions of us, others and the world in every realm of life. We dismissed as racist self-delusion their claims of being chosen, elect and sent to civilize us through their savagery and to lead us into their blinding and bleaching White light and life.

Instead, we affirmed the sacredness of our Black selves in the way we lived our lives, did our work and waged righteous and relentless struggle. Indeed, we knew that no God of ours would send the embodiment of evil to teach us good. We also knew that no God of Africa would send a moral and social savage to civilize and save us when we were already deeply civilized and had no moral, social, real or rational need to be saved by a continent of racists, colonizers, imperialists and

enslavers. And clearly, we knew then as now that it is we, not them, who stood up first and taught the first human truth, who taught first the dignity and divine image and endowment of human beings, the sacredness of life, and the goodness of togetherness in mutual respect and reciprocal solidarity in the shared pursuit of human good and the well-being of the world.

**O**VER THESE 55-YEARS OF WORK AND struggle, we have explained the meaning of our organizational name, Us, in three basic ways which are three fundamental commitments. The name Us is first reflective of our commitment to the priority of our people, Us Black people and thus our love of our people. Secondly, Us is an affirmation of our commitment to oppose and resist “them”, our oppressor and oppression. And thirdly, it reflects and reaffirms our commitment to a communitarian African way of life, the collective and cooperative practice of creating and sharing good in the world. Thus, the name, philosophy and practice of Us is a code, call and commitment to rebel against the givenness of the established order, to engage in system-changing work and struggle that is radical, reflective and relentless, and committed to expansive good in the world.▲

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