



**THE SEVEN-FOLD PATH OF BLACKNESS:
COLOR, CULTURE AND SELF-CONSCIOUS PRACTICE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

SINCE THE SIXTIES, WE OF US HAVE understood, engaged and embraced Blackness as a very serious and sacred way of *being* and *becoming* in the world, an African way, a unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human with all its rich and varied possibilities and worthy of the highest respect. Indeed, we maintain that as Africans, as human beings and possessors of dignity and divinity, as our ancient sacred texts teach us, there is no people more chosen, elect, appointed or otherwise specially designated than we are. This means there are no lives more sacred than our own, no historical narrative more holy or worthy of being taught or told than our own, and no culture richer in lessons of life, excellence and struggle for us than our own.

Unlike our oppressor, we saw no need or reason to ruthlessly seek dominance or irrationally and immorally claim superiority over others. On the contrary, our centuries of sustained righteous and relentless struggle has been to reclaim an identity and culture brutally distorted and degraded, to regain a freedom savagely subverted and suppressed, and to return to and resume a history interrupted and hijacked for the oppressor's radically evil purposes and practices.

To speak righteously and usefully of Blackness as a serious and sacred way of being and becoming in the world is to rightfully define it. We said in the Sixties that the defining features of Blackness in the context and concerns of our times as a people in oppression and resistance were: *color, culture and consciousness*. By color is meant the embodied existence of a people of color, beautifully Black in all its variations and meanings; culture is the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself,

celebrates, sustains and develops itself and introduces itself to history and humanity; and consciousness is the self-conscious ways we act and struggle to create the conditions for the people to be themselves, free themselves and live good and meaningful lives. This is clearly a call for rightful and useful paths to pursue, ground our lives, achieve our goals and come into the fullness of ourselves.

Thus, when we defiantly declared in the Sixties "Liberation is coming from a Black thing," it was a declaration that we were and are our own liberators, and that the path we pursue will come from our own hearts, minds and making. Clearly at the heart of our striving and struggle and the foundational and overarching set of principles and practices that undergird, inform and inspire all we do are the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles: *Umoja* (Unity); *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination); *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility); *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith).

But as a reinforcing reminder of the centrality of Blackness as a self-conscious practice, as an active self-knowledge, the Seven-Fold Path of Blackness still holds a special meaning and source of motivation for the way we live our lives, do our work and wage our struggles to rightfully remake ourselves and radically transform the context and conditions of our lives. These seven commitments and practices are to: Think Black, Talk Black, Act Black, Create Black, Buy Black, Vote Black and Live Black.

To think Black is to first think culturally, think within the context and consciousness of our own culture, drawing from it the best of our sensitivities, views, values and practices, using them to pursue the best of

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what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense of the words. Moreover, it is to think ethically, to think the good, to be concerned, as our honored ancestors taught about bringing, increasing and sustaining good in the world and engaging the critical issues of our time with the best of our moral sensitivities and moral reasoning. Thus, thinking Black also means and requires thinking relationally, seeing ourselves always in relationship with reciprocal responsibilities to our people, each other, others and indeed the world. And it also means thinking deep, critically and creatively and caringly about life and bringing and doing good in the world.

To talk Black is to speak truth, speak in gentle and caring ways, avoid lies and language that hurts and harms, and always speak the good. Moreover, to speak Black is to speak truth to the people and to power; to speak a liberated and liberating truth to our people and a defiant, critical, condemning and demanding truth to oppressive power. It is to talk freedom to the people, telling them things that free their hearts and minds and encourages excellence, and righteous and relentless resistance to all forms and features of oppression. And it is to talk an uplifting reaffirming truth to our people, reminding them of their beauty, creativity, sacredness and soulfulness, and their capacity to wage and win their liberation struggle.

To act Black is to practice and pursue good in the world. It is to be conscious, caring and rightfully motivated and informed in all we do. It is to be self-consciously and actively committed to achieving and sustaining African and human good and the well-being of the world. Acting, showing agency or practice permeates and makes possible following the other paths. For in the final analysis, we say practice proves and makes possi-

ble everything. Thinking, talking, creating, buying, voting and living are all practices requiring agency, the capacity, choice and will to act. And we are to act in ways that embody and express the good we seek to achieve and share in the world.

To create Black is to create good in the world, and as always, the principle and practice of *Kuumba* teaches us, to always do all we can in the way we can to leave our community better and more beautiful than we inherited it. It is to create spaces and possibilities for beauty, meaning and love and reciprocal caring and concern in our local and national communities and in the global African community. Indeed, to create Black is to be our soulful selves, to imagine beauty and bring it into being, to strive for excellence in all we do and achieve it, and make artful – skilled, creative and engaging – the way we live our lives, do our work and even in the way we wage our struggles for good in our lives, the lives of our loved ones and in the world.

To buy Black is to support community economic institutions, projects, efforts and interests. It is to self-consciously be attentive to how economic practices and systems in and outside the community help or harm us, provides space for us to work, have incomes, make decisions and live lives of dignity and decency. And to buy Black is also to be conscious of how our income and monies are spent and used by businesses to preserve and protect the environment or contribute to its progressive degradation. In a word, it is to be conscientious consumers rather than mindless ones collaborating in our own and the world's devastation. Indeed, we must be more than buyers or consumers and dare to be constantly concerned with the world, its

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well-being and our own. For they are inseparably linked.

To vote Black is to vote in the rightful interests of our people, the world and all in it. For we must always be concerned, not with ourselves in isolation, but as a people in and of the world in both the social and natural sense. Also, we must remember that in spite of the established order's attempt to hide and deny it, we are a key moral and social vanguard in this country, with an expansive agency of inclusive good, waging struggles and winning victories with our allies that have not only expanded the realm of freedom and justice in this country, but serves as a world-encompassing model of the struggle for human rights and liberation to emulate. Furthermore, to vote Black is to accept and practice the responsibility to vote for several interrelated reasons: it is a hard-won gain and legacy; a central site for participating in

policy making; another field of resistance in a country whose entire land is a battleground for each and all of us; and it is way of clearing the ground, not so much for a special candidate, but to create the best conditions for our continued struggle after the election.

FINALLY, TO LIVE BLACK IS TO LIVE IN dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways. It is to wage and win the struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves, flourish and come into the fullness of ourselves. It is experiencing a sense of wholeness, genuineness and joy in our lives, profoundly satisfied with the unique and equally valid and valuable African way of our being human in the world. It is to live rightfully, respectfully and in reciprocal relations with others in freedom, security of person, peace with justice, material security, health and wholeness, and always rightly concerned with the well-being of the world.▲

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