



**KAWAIDA, US AND BLACK LIBERATION:
AN ENDURING RADICAL INITIATIVE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

No one with even a minimum of historical awareness can avoid noticing that most of the organizations that once loudly claimed privileged space and special voice in the Black Liberation Movement have disappeared, disassembled, “made peace,” “moved on” or discovered “wisdom” in walking away, “insight” in accommodation and evidence of “maturity” in shelving the radical and shoving Black to the side. Indeed, these demobilized and reformed “soldiers” and their concurring companions in various generations repeatedly offer unfounded assumptions about the supposed obsolescence of Blackness and the unrealistic character of continuing calls for battle on every front and in every form.

Thus, struggle is stripped of its radical meaning and its stress on the indispensability of *education, mobilization, organization, confrontation and radical transformation* of self, society and the world. And instead, it is too often reduced to seeking funds and favor as its core concern; legislative lobbying for others masked as common interest actions, and formalized negotiations for policy reconsideration and reform from positions of disadvantage without adequate rootedness in the people. Indeed, many seem to have forgotten or set aside the basic principle that there is no substitute for the presence and power of an *aware, organized and engaged people, constantly in motion in a multiplicity of actions to define, defend and promote their interests*.

Moreover, instead of holding firm to the fundamental understanding that we are our own liberators, many among us overstress building alliances, as if it is a substitute for building consciousness, capacity and commitment among our own people and thus, being able to wage struggle and enter into alliance from a position of power rather than

one of obvious or disguised disadvantage and dependence. Likewise, too many among us find themselves supporting others’ agendas, not always in our interests, and denying the radical relevance and centrality of our own agenda, believing that advancing and advocating Black interests is a limitation and liability.

Thus, they confuse the Black agenda, which has always been *emancipatory* and *inclusive* of all, with the White agenda, which from the founding of the country to current forms of racism and White supremacy, has been *genocidal, oppressive* and *exclusive*. Also, there is among too many of us, evidence of *advanced historical amnesia*, a wanton and widespread forgetfulness concerning our status as a moral and social vanguard in this country and our radically transformative role in expanding the realm of rights, justice, and freedom in this country and serving as a continuing model, reference and resource for the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world.

It is in this context and among those still actively committed to Black liberation, that the organization Us occupies a unique position based on its unwavering commitment to our people and our struggle, and the enduring radical, even revolutionary, initiative it launched and has sustained for 47 years, in spite of the various obstacles and hazards of history and struggle it has encountered and overcome. And, of necessity, the question arises, during this month of celebration, commemoration, reflection and recommitment, of how is this possible? In other words, what is the philosophical, organizational and community-support basis of the organization Us’ capacity to endure, develop and maintain its *radical and unbudgingly Black* position in spite of government suppression, political

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imprisonment, forced exile and being driven underground, and the vicious and continuing character assassination, misrepresentation and opposition from forces from the right, left and center?

Our 47-year journey began as an urgent and earnest effort to rediscover our African selves as Malcolm taught, to live African lives in a culturally grounded, radical and revolutionary way, and to self-consciously do this as an indispensable element in the struggle for liberation. It was, as Sekou Toure called it, a determined move “toward full re-Africanization” or as Amilcar Cabral termed it, “a return to our history” and culture in radical and upward thrusting ways and always in the interests of our people and the forward flow of human history. When I called the small group of men and women together at my apartment in Los Angeles, to found Us, September 7, 1965, I had already laid out the essential elements of my philosophy, Kawaida, including the *Nguzo Saba*, Africa as a moral and spiritual ideal, and the commitment to cultural revolution and radical social change. And I invited these young men and women to become a part of the disciplined, conscious, capable, committed vanguard that would emerge in history and struggle as the organization Us.

We had no one from the larger society to shelter us, or show us the way away from ourselves, advertise us, make movies for and of us, or to provide lawyers and funds for us. We bore the brunt of government suppression, character assassination and relentless opposition from forces from all quarters, but we would not break, bow and become converts to our own erasure and planned obsolescence. Fiercely self-determining, we dared to believe

in our people and ourselves, and the work and struggle for the good world we all want and deserve.

Thus, all we’ve done and do is rooted in and reflective of our philosophy of *Kawaida*, a philosophy of life and struggle. Indeed, we said of Kawaida in the 60s, it is “a shield to protect you, a weapon to strike with and a pillow of peace on which to lay your head.” Today, we define it as an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world. And again, our work, service, struggle and institution-building, from the Black Power, Black Arts and Black Studies Movements thru the Million Man March/Day of Absence, Reparations, and our initiatives around issues of HIV/AIDS, pan-Africanism, unionization and union leadership, quality education, greening, Third World and progressive alliance and struggle, etc., all are rooted in Kawaida philosophy.

Therefore, Kawaida defines our distinctiveness, determines the way we understand, value and approach ourselves, our culture and our people, constantly dialog with African culture and see Africa in its best thought and practice as a moral and spiritual ideal. Kawaida teaches us to self-consciously practice our culture in our daily lives, embracing and using it to answer simple and complex questions, extract models, and engage and resolve issues in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways. Moreover, it makes us know and assert with courage and confidence that there is no culture richer or more ancient than our own, no history more sacred, no people more divinely chosen or worthy of respect or possessing greater rights to the shared good and goods of the world than we, African people.

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