



## REAFFIRMING OUR AFRICANNESS AND RADICAL TRADITION, 1960s: LIBERATION COMING FROM A BLACK THING

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART I. THE REAFFIRMATION OF THE 1960s stands, after the Classical Period of Kemet-ic civilization and the Holocaust of Enslavement, as a third modal or decisive and defining period in our history. This period of our most ancient and ongoing history was a reaffirmation of our commitment to our Africaness and our radical tradition, that is to say, our liberation tradition. It was a self-conscious struggle to be ourselves and to free ourselves. We strove and struggled to be our beautiful Black selves without doubt and degradation, without restriction, constraint, penalty or oppression. And we struggled to free ourselves internally and externally from White racist oppression.

The Nation of Islam and its leader, the Hon. Elijah Muhammad, challenged us to see and say Black with reverence and rightful respect, and to value this unique way we have emerged and asserted ourselves in the world. He called on us to rise from the grave of oppression and achieve our divinely determined destiny of freedom, justice and equality among the nations of the world. And his most capable representative, Min. Malcolm X, carried forth this message and augmented it with his own understanding of us, our struggle and our relationships with each other and other oppressed and struggling peoples of the world in righteous and revolutionary ways.

It was a time of calls and strivings to get “Back to Black,” to the beautifulness of who we were and are without needing to doubt ourselves, deny ourselves, condemn ourselves and mutilate ourselves, psychologically and physically. We said it and we meant it, “Black is Beautiful” and we declared that as sure as sunrise and day dawning, “Liberation is coming from a Black thing.” We knew too that we could not free ourselves if we did not be ourselves, i.e., claim ourselves and live our lives without disguise and self-degrading practices. We also knew we could not fully be ourselves unless we fully freed ourselves. And so, we took up the struggle and drew heavily on the best of our past

history and current knowledge and practice to reaffirm our liberation tradition in thought, speech and practices.

The reaffirmation of our Africaness and liberation tradition takes place in the midst of several defining realities that help shape the content, character and course of our struggle. We built not only on the best of our own history and culture, but also learned the lessons of struggle taught by other liberation struggles in the world. But again, we begin, continue and sustain our rootedness in our own ancient and ongoing history and culture of radical and revolutionary resistance. And in rightful commemoration of the mission and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, February 21, 1965, I begin with his lessons of life, love of his people and self-sacrificing struggle.

After the NOI, clearly a defining feature of the Reaffirmation of the 1960s is the mission and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X, El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. Min. Malcolm’s self-defining and sacred mission was to urge and enable African people to “wake up, clean up and stand up.” He taught us to appreciate the essential beauty and ultimate sacredness of Black lives and Black people and the moral imperative to free ourselves from unconsciousness, behaviors unworthy of us, and all kinds and concoctions of oppression, internally and externally. Thus, he taught, organized and modelled a process and practice directed toward a *critical consciousness, moral grounding and transformative struggle* that strengthened our capacity to develop our potential as persons and a people and build a self-conscious, self-determining and liberated community.

Moreover, Seba Malcolm, master teacher, taught us to pursue “freedom by any means necessary,” that is to say, first by any means the oppressor compels us to use in self-defense and in rightful pursuit of our liberation from oppression. And second, it is to say by whatever service and sacrifice necessary to advance our liberation. It is here that Hajji Malik models not

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only how we are to live for the struggle, but also how we must be ready to offer the supreme sacrifice for the struggle, i.e., our very lives. This means becoming a willing sacrifice for the liberation of our people, if it becomes necessary. This is the meaning of his martyrdom, then, a willing giving of his life so that we could live freer, fuller and more meaningful ones.

Indeed, this is why we stress his martyrdom more than his assassination. For his assassination is what his and our enemies and the enemies of human freedom did to deprive us and our struggle of him. And we must righteously condemn and continue to resist them. But his martyrdom, his self-sacrifice, is what he did, giving us the awesome gift of his very life for our liberation. Thus, we of Us call the day of commemoration of his martyrdom, *Siku ya Dhabihu*, The Day of Sacrifice. And in the midst of all the fear and anxiety brought about by his assassination, we stood up, February 21, 1966, a year after his martyrdom, to honor him for the magnitude and meaning of his life and death for us and his revolutionary role as Noble Witness (*shahid*) for us, his people, and his faith Islam, and the world.

Another defining reality in the shaping of the Reaffirmation of the 1960s was the Watts Revolt, a decisive turning point in our history and liberation struggle. Although our oppressor tries to discredit the revolt by calling it a riot, we immediately distinguish our revolt against oppression from riots, mob rampaging and violence without overarching political aims. On the contrary, *a revolt is a collective act of resistance to the established order motivated by political aims and ideas to end oppression*. The Watts Revolt was an act of resistance against police violence, merchant exploitation and ongoing systemic racist oppression.

Furthermore, the Watts Revolt and all the other revolts which followed it were a fundamental and defining practice of Black Power.

Indeed, it marked a line of historical transition from the Civil Rights phase of the Black Freedom Movement to the Black Power phase. And it was part and parcel of a long and continuous history of Black revolts and resistance from the Holocaust of enslavement and colonialism to Ferguson, Baltimore and beyond.

Also, an additional defining factor in shaping the Reaffirmation of the 1960s was the continental liberation movements. Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, founding president of independent Ghana, spoke of seeking the political kingdom, political power, with a patient and persistent educating and organizing and learning from the masses of our people. And he taught pan-Africanism and African rising as a decisive power for good in the world. Sekou Toure, founding president of independent Guinea, urged full-reAfricanization as both a cultural and political practice. He stressed the essentiality of a cultural revolution that laid the basis for the political liberation struggle. Indeed, he defined national liberation as a cultural act itself, an act rooted in and required by a culture of resistance as Kawaida teaches.

AND THERE WAS FRANTZ FANON, PSYCHIATRIST, revolutionary, representative and soldier of Algerian independence, whose master work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, became essential and unavoidable reading. He taught us that each person bears the liberation struggle within themselves and that real liberation means not only the defeat of the colonial system, but also the disappearance of the colonized person. Thus, he stressed we must leave Europe where they are always talking about abstract man, and yet always colonizing, killing and enslaving real men, women and children. And we must, ourselves, rethink the questions of Africa and humanity and strive to initiate a new history of humankind and bring into being a new man and woman.▲

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