



**CONSIDERING KAWAIDA, THE NGUZO SABA AND US:
ENDURING MEANING, PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT
AND GLOBAL REACH**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

AS I HAVE WRITTEN, SUGGESTED AND SAID previously and often, surely, there is something to be said about and to be learned from the Organization Us which has: a) waged struggle on various fronts, endured and developed for 60 years, 240 seasons; b) overcome government suppression and disinformation; c) prevailed over political opposition seeking to undermine and sideline it; d) surmounted continued character assassination, and other obstacles, and yet; e) has not been defeated or dispirited or diverted from its original commitment to Black liberation, cultural revolution, constant struggle, and an active and ongoing ancestral-taught commitment to bringing good in the world. And we thank our honored ancestors and elders, Saidi and Malaika, Simba and Matamba, supporters and our people everywhere for advising and aiding us on this awesome journey and beautiful and transformative struggle.

At such a point of serious consideration, it is important to realize that what we have here is not simply a history of surviving, but rather one of prevailing in spite of the odds and assortment of adversaries and their hirelings and handmaidens arrayed against us. It is a history of resistance, resilience and resourcefulness for 60 years, 240 seasons, dedicated to service, work, struggle and institution-building in the interest of the life and liberation of our people everywhere, and ultimately for inclusive human good and the well-being of the world and all in it. It is the history of a Black liberation organization's radical refusal to be defeated, be dispirited or be diverted when so many others have faddishly changed course, found unseemly and dignity-denying ways to confess the wrongness and so-called wicked ways of Black resistance and to try to justify walking away

from the battlefield before the struggle is won.

By any honest and accurate account, Us has had a far-reaching and substantive effect on Black intellectual and political culture since the 1960s. Through its leadership, its intellectual and organizational work, and its philosophy, *Kawaida*, it has played a vanguard role in helping to shape the major movements and organizational initiatives of the Sixties and beyond. These movements and initiatives include virtually every national African-centered movement: Black Power; Black Arts; Black Studies; Black student unions; pan-African solidarity; independent schools; rites of passage; Black liberation theology; Afrocentricity; ancient Egyptian Ma'atian studies; Ifa ethical studies; Black united fronts; the Million Man and Million Woman Marches; and reparations.

In the midst of the political and ideological struggles of the Sixties, I developed *Kawaida* philosophy, out of which I conceptualized and created *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba*, two central cultural pillars which reaffirm us in our Africanness and bind us together as African peoples in the millions throughout the world African community in ways like no other institution or celebration. Also, Us' commitment to service and institution building included its co-founding the Brotherhood Crusade, the Black Congress, and Mafundi Institute which we named, and serving on committees to advocate and offer ideas for Kedren Community Health Center, the Watts Health Foundation, and Ujima Village which we also named and which became a model for the housing initiative *Kawaida Towers* in Newark.

Still on the fields of battle and building, Us continues to maintain several ongoing programs and institutions: the African Amer-

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ican Cultural Center; the Limbiko Tembo School of African American Culture; rites of passage programs; the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies; the Mateka (Captive) support program; the Senu Brotherhood and Senut Sisterhood Societies; Timbuktu Book Circle; and initiatives of solidarity with Haiti, continental African institutions and organizations, Palestine, and immigration support and resistance groups. In addition, ever committed to building Black united fronts, Us is a founding member and the coordinating organization of the National Association of Kawaida Organizations (NAKO), and of the Black Community, Clergy and Labor Alliance (BCCLA), serving as its co-chair. This continues a tradition of co-building Black United fronts in the 1960s and after including: the Black Congress; the Community Alert Patrol; the Operational Unity Committee; the Temporary Alliance of Local Organizations (TALO); the Black Agenda; the National Black United Front; The National African American Leadership Family; and the National Million Man March/Day of Absence Organizing Committee.

What we have tried to do before and try to do now is to emulate our ancestors in their excellence, to praise them through consistent practice of the dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving cultural values they taught us, and to rightfully honor them by living their legacy in the most honest, liberating and uplifting ways. Indeed, we strive to build and uplift as we fight, creating free space wherever possible in the coercive and crushing confines of oppression, and through it all, to remain irreversibly committed to the principle and practice of unbudgingly Blackness. Here we developed at the beginning and over six decades a culturally grounded adaptive vitality our people are known for, rising ever ready to meet and master the occasion and challenge posed, being what the sacred teachings of our ancestors in the *Odu Ifa* define as

a “constant soldier”. And they say, “A constant soldier is never unready, not even once”. Also, they taught us to emulate fire, for “wherever fire emerges, it will make a way for itself . . . Its head will clear a way for it”. Thus, like fire we struggle to clear a way forward and upward for our people and ourselves, using our head and heart, our best reasoning and sensitivities, sensing that as the sacred *Husia* teaches us, “Every day is a donation to eternity and even one hour is a contribution to the future”.

To talk of unbudging Blackness as both a principle and practice is to speak of being culturally grounded and having a steadfast active commitment to people and things Black, that is to say African, our unique and equally valid and valuable way of being human in the world. It is to take the self-respecting, resolute and irreversible position that there is no people more chosen, no lives more sacred, and no human dignity and rights more worthy of respect than our own. It means an adaptive vitality of being able to absorb without being absorbed, learning from the world, but not losing ourselves in it, and always offering the world lessons and models of excellence from the ancient and ever current richness and variedness of our own culture. And it is to come to every table of talk and action, not naked and in need, but fully clothed in our own culture, ever ready and able to speak our own special cultural truth and make our own unique cultural contribution to how this country and world can be reconceived and reconstructed in the interest of an inclusive and shared human good and the well-being of the world and all in it.

As we regularly reaffirm, this means taking seriously our obligation to know our past and honor it, to engage our present and improve it, and to imagine a whole new future and to forge it in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways. Here we see Haji Malcolm’s teachings on history and

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memory as central. For he tells us history is an indispensable knowledge, that our people's history is their memory and that we must preserve our memory, for it is both evidence and incentive for being who we are, knowing what potential and possibility are rooted in us, and how we can resist and overcome any oppression and erasure our oppressors attempt.

THUS, THIS SACRED NARRATIVE WE KNOW as Black history tells and teaches us that even if we are captured, enslaved and oppressed, if we hold on to our memory of

freedom and the good, we will never accept our oppression. Likewise, even if they burn and ban our books, if we hold on to the memory of lessons learned, our love of learning, and our life experiences that are uplifting and liberating, we will defiantly and resolutely resist, regardless. And we will reimagine and rewrite not only our books, but also a new history of Africans and humankind, remembering and honoring the teachings of Nana Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune that "Our task is to remake the world. It is nothing less than this".▲

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