



**KAWAIDA, CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND STRUGGLE:
SETTING THE REVOLUTIONARY RECORD STRAIGHT**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

PART II. Clearly, Us saw and defined itself as a revolutionary vanguard organization and second to none in its ideology, intention and practice directed toward radical transformation of self, society and ultimately the world in the interest of African and human liberation and flourishing. Culture was its area of focus and emphasis, an inclusive emphasis as distinct from a singular area emphasis of those who were political, religious and economic nationalists. For to be a *cultural* nationalist is to deal with every area of a people's life, not just one, and to seek to lay a philosophical foundation and inspire a given practice of liberation for each.

Us was also early defined as a radical and revolutionary organization by the U.S. government and its police and "intelligence" forces and put on every surveillance and suppression list that any other group so considered was placed. We were also victims of the Cointelpro, as was the NOI, RNA, SCLC and others, not simply one group. And we suffered police suppression, political imprisonment and were forced underground and into exile also. The record is there; the historians have read it; they simply refuse to report it for various intellectually dishonest and ideologically motivated reasons.

Moreover, to set the revolutionary record straight, it is also important to note that the category "revolutionary" was claimed by all groups, including Us, who were engaged in serious and sustained resistance to the established order during the liberation struggle of the Sixties. Indeed, as Malcolm taught, and Us maintained, our very condition of oppression and the character of the times called us into struggle and demanded a revolutionary response. That is to say, a response that was the radical rejection of and resistance to White supremacy in all its oppressive forms, i.e., racist, capitalist, imperialist, colonialist, etc.

Thus, no one group can truthfully claim exclusive ownership of the term or the times and pretend only they merit recognition and respect for radical thought and practice.

In addition, no one thinking critically can seriously believe that any one Black group by itself was a threat to the internal security of the U.S., let alone "the greatest threat". Here we must make a distinction between Hoover's manipulative propaganda to heighten public fear and racist loathing and to suppress *our whole Movement*, using its most media visible group, and his real fear which was of *our unity and coordinated struggle as a self-conscious, revolutionary and transformative social force*. Also, we, like the African and other Third world revolutionaries of the time, i.e., Malcolm X, Fanon, Cabral, Robert and Mabel Williams, et al, affirmed the right and responsibility of a people to struggle for "freedom by any means necessary" including armed defense and resistance to systemic and vigilante violence. And no one can seriously deny the quality of our struggle commitment, training and discipline.

We were anti-capitalist, advocating African socialism, defined in great part by Mwalimu Nyerere's concept of *Ujamaa*. We taught and practiced draft resistance, cooperatively organized and held anti-war rallies and teach-ins against imperialist wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and supported the right of self-determination for all peoples. We advocated reparations and prisoners' rights, trained Kasisi (chaplains) to counsel and advise prisoners and provided literature and lawyers where possible. We supported African liberation movements and pan-Africanist projects and built alliances with various Third World organizations engaging in the struggles that gave rise to and defined the times.

Realizing with other liberation movements that we have to build and sustain the

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people as we fight, we committed ourselves to work, service, struggle and institution-building. Thus, we established numerous organizing initiatives and worked in cooperative projects to build institutions to provide affordable housing, accessible health care and quality education; end police abuse, establish economic cooperatives; increase political participation and expand space for cultural grounding, creativity and performances.

Regardless of the misrepresentation of Kawaida cultural nationalism, it is thought and practice rooted in three fundamental propositions directed toward cultural and political transformation. First, the defining feature of any people or nation is its culture. Secondly, for a people to be itself and free itself, it must be self-conscious, self-determining and rooted in its own culture. And thirdly, the quality of life of a people and the success of its liberation struggle depend upon its waging cultural revolution within and political revolution without, resulting in the radical transformation of self, society and ultimately the world.

Now the essential aim here is to build the cultural basis to initiate, wage and sustain the liberation struggle which aims, as Fanon reminds us, not only to free the land, but also the people inhabiting it; not only the country, but our consciousness. As he said, "After the struggle there is not only the disappearance of colonialism, but also the disappearance of the colonized person". The patient and persistent cultural and political education of the masses, before and in the midst of struggle, "brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men and women and with it, a new language and a new humanity".

Thus, we joined Malcolm in calling for and waging a cultural revolution, still in process, not only as Malcolm said to "unbrainwash an entire people", but equally important to facilitate our people's self-conscious return to their own history and to the upward paths of the best of our culture in order to wage the ongoing liberation struggle to free ourselves and be ourselves in the most dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-respecting ways. Thus, we define cultural revolution as the ideological and practical struggle to retrieve and reconstruct our culture, extract from it and create ideas, institutions and practices which break the cultural hegemony of the oppressor and transforms the people, engaging them in the liberation struggle, and enabling them to become self-conscious agents of their own lives and liberation.

It is this understanding and engagement with our people and the liberation struggle that has enabled us to continue struggling these 49 years, even after the Movement, and when so many others have surrendered or turned around and been reduced to bitter and faulty memories, disfiguring grudges, petty recriminations and pathetic character assassination. Indeed, it is our continuing commitment to our people and Kawaida philosophy and to its grounding principles and mandatory liberational practice that has sustained us and reaffirms our reasoned faith in the righteousness and eventual victory of our struggle. Indeed, we refuse to be defeated, dispirited or diverted from our original commitment to Black liberation, cultural revolution, radical social change, and the ancient African ethical imperative to constantly struggle to bring and sustain good in the world.

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