



**KAWAIDA PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE:  
QUESTIONS OF LIFE AND STRUGGLE**

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If we are to adequately answer the questions constantly put to us by the heavy hand of history and our oppression, then we must have an institutionalized context for ongoing collective conversations about how we understand, live, work and move in the world. And these exchanges must, of necessity, lead to enhanced mutual enlightenment and enrichment of our hearts and minds and speak unashamedly and unsparingly to the spirit, discipline and demands of struggle. This is a central promise and essential aim of the Kawaida Institute of Pan-African Studies (KIPAS) which held its 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar in Social Theory and Practice last week at the African American Cultural Center (Us). Each year KIPAS brings together activist-intellectuals, current and future leaders, organizers, students, teachers and others in various fields from around the country who share a profound concern for African people and the world and an active commitment to progressive social change. Moreover, they share a deep interest in *Kawaida* as a philosophy of cultural grounding and social change and are interested in constantly achieving a greater grasp of its role in African American intellectual and political history and its usefulness as a foundation and framework for addressing fundamental moral and social issues.

The theme of this year's seminar was taken from the title of this author's new book *Kawaida: Questions of Life and Struggle: African American, Pan-African and Global Issues* ([www.sankorepress.com](http://www.sankorepress.com)). Within this overarching theme, several subjects and issues were discussed. The first was the structure, methodology and essential aim of Kawaida philosophy. Conceived and crafted in the midst of the liberation struggle of the 60's, Kawaida evolves as an

emancipatory philosophy dedicated to *cultural revolution, radical social change, and bringing good in the world*. It was shaped by its focus on culture and community as the basis and building blocks for any real movement for liberation. This means that culture is conceived as the crucible in which the liberation struggle takes form and the context in which it ultimately succeeds. Indeed, as Amilcar Cabral has argued, the first resistance in any people's liberation struggle is cultural resistance and the struggle for liberation is itself an act of culture. That is why we said and say the battle we wage now and continuously is for the hearts and minds of our people and if we lose this battle, we can't hope to win any other. This means breaking the hold the oppressor has on so many of our minds, reaching within our own history and culture, bringing forth our best ideas and practices, and struggling to create free space for this and other good to take root and flourish in the world.

Our culture provides a necessary moral dimension to our struggle, providing life-enhancing views and values that inform and undergird our practice and teach us the good and rightful way to walk, work and struggle in the world. It is at this point that the ideal of Africa as a spiritual and ethical ideal inserts itself in our consciousness and compels us to see our culture, people, and history in the context of the sacred and within the dimensions of the Divine. Indeed, the *Husia* teaches that we are bearers of divinity and dignity, and the *Odu Ifa* teaches that we as humans are divinely chosen to bring good into the world. It is within this context that Kawaida asserts that there is no people more divinely chosen than our own, no history more sacred or significant and no culture richer or more resourceful in

providing us with the foundation and framework for this fundamental mission and meaning of human life, i.e., bringing good into the world.

We talked too about agency and about being the *injured physicians who must heal themselves and an oppressed people who must surely liberate themselves*. And this process of repair and liberation requires that we repair and transform ourselves in the process of repairing and transforming the world, making it an ever-expanding realm of human freedom and flourishing. Such a self-understanding not only moves away from a discourse of pathology and hopeless victimization, but it also reaffirms our self-conscious capacity for and commitment to repair and transformation as a dual and indivisible project. This also expands the concept of reparations which has in some quarters been reduced to what we should be given rather than what we will do and gain from the struggle we wage for justice and good in the world. This expanded concept fits well within the Maatian or ancient Egyptian concept of *serudj ta*, the moral obligation to repair the world and transform it in the interest of truth, justice, good and beauty.

Another focus for discussion was Kawaida's emphasis on a new language and logic in the Malcolmian sense. It is a fundamental teaching of Kawaida that our lives and struggle require a language and logic that is *liberated and liberating*. For our language and logic to be liberated means they are freed from the enslaving concepts, ideas and terms rooted in the race, class and

sexual systems of oppression which define and dominate this society. And for them to be liberating is to be so crafted, chosen and conveyed that they aid in freeing us from conceptual imprisonment and in generating concepts and ideas that not only render ineffective the catechism of impossibilities taught by the dominant society, but also opens doors to deeper understanding of self, society and the world and the possibilities inherent in each. Kawaida sees itself as not only providing new liberated and liberating concepts and ideas of life and struggle, but also creating new discourses around recovered ways of being, thinking, and asserting ourselves as Africans in the world. These concepts appear not only in Kawaida philosophy itself, but in its most widely known developments—the vision, values and practice of *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba*, as well as ethical discourses rooted in the translation and commentaries on the *Husia* and *Odu Ifa*.

The Institute, of necessity, engaged major issues of our time—Katrina, Darfur, Haiti, male/female relations, immigration, war and peace, leadership, Black power and politics, and rebuilding the movement from a Kawaida perspective. This means from a standpoint that is rooted in African tradition, reaffirmed by moral reasoning and tested and tempered in the process and practice of unrelenting struggle. Indeed, every conversation on every single subject and major theme carried within it our consciousness of and commitment to the ongoing struggles for freedom, justice and good in the world.