



**MALCOLM AND KAWAIDA ON CULTURE:
RECOVERY, REVOLUTION AND RESISTANCE**

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The current conversations surrounding the rightful and wrongful reading of the life and legacy of Malcolm X and the 46th anniversary this month (September 7, 1965) of the organization Us, provide us with an excellent opportunity to critically discuss one of the most important and yet routinely avoided and denied concepts in Malcolm's liberational philosophy. This is his concept of cultural revolution and the central role culture plays in Malcolm's nationalism which is both *cultural* and *revolutionary* nationalism. Indeed, Malcolm provides Kawaida philosophy, which is cultural nationalism in its paradigmatic form, some of its central tenets.

Since the 60s, Us has seen itself as heirs and custodians of Malcolm's legacy, not only as other Black Power advocates who likewise lay rightful claim to it, but also in the special way Us has embraced and applied his key contentions in Kawaida thought and practice. These include: radical self- and social transformation; self-defense, resistance and struggle for "freedom by any means necessary," armed or otherwise; return to the African source; Black united front efforts; pan-Africanism; Third World solidarity; and cultural revolution as indicated in the early Kawaida writings quoted below.

As distinct from the conceptual clumsiness of some and the self-congratulatory rhetoric of others which confuse and collapse *areas of social emphasis* with *qualities of social thought and practice*, Malcolm makes no distinction between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism, even as he makes no distinction between religious, economic and political nationalism and revolutionary nationalism. For culture, religion, economics and politics are areas of social emphasis in nationalism; and revolutionary, radical, reformist, conservative and reactionary are names we assign to indicate qualities of social thought and social practice, based most often on our

ideological orientations. In fact, Malcolm assumes a revolutionary character for his nationalism and thus, links nationalism and revolution in an inseparable way saying "a revolutionary is a nationalist. He wants a nation" and arguing that "if you hate nationalism, you hate revolution, and if you love nationalism, you love revolution."

In a word, Black nationalism which has as its central aim liberating Black people from oppression and opening ways for them to be free, develop and flourish as a people is by definition revolutionary. Therefore, Malcolm says "all thinking people today who have been oppressed are revolutionary." In a word, the nature of Black oppression and the demands of the liberation struggle to end it enjoin and justify such a revolutionary conclusion and commitment.

Likewise, Kawaida, which is the guiding philosophy of the organization Us, makes no such distinction between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism and sees itself as both cultural nationalist and revolutionary nationalist. Indeed, it argues with Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral that resistance, revolution or liberation is, of necessity, "an act of culture," an expression of a people whose culture calls and compels them to engage in revolutionary liberational practice. Therefore, Kawaida teaches "culture is the basis of all ideas, images and action. To move is to move culturally, i.e., by a set of views and values given to you by your culture." Indeed, Kawaida states firmly, "you can't have a revolution without culture because culture is the value system that will teach Blacks an appreciation for revolution." Thus, we define *culture* in an inclusive way as *the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself and introduces itself to history and humanity*.

Malcolm also argues that "culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom strug-

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gle” and therefore, we must recover it and the rightful and self-respecting identity which is rooted in it. Thus, he says, “we must recapture our heritage and identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves and break the bonds of White supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people.” Here, Malcolm stresses the need to break the cultural chains as a requirement for breaking the political chains of White oppression. As Kawaida contends, “We must free ourselves culturally before we succeed politically.” Kawaida reaffirms Malcolm’s call to break these cultural chains and Toure’s and Fanon’s call for the “decolonization of the person” by arguing that “the revolution being fought now is a revolution to win the hearts and minds of our people and if we fail to win this we cannot wage the political one.” What is sought here in Malcolm’s philosophy and Kawaida is the building of a culture of struggle which grounds, sustains, and carries the struggle to its successful conclusion. Kawaida, following Malcolm here, argued that the key crisis in Black life is the cultural crisis, a crisis in views and values which impedes and makes impossible revolutionary or liberational thought and practice. Thus, there is the need for a cultural revolution to resolve this crisis and open the way to the struggle for liberation.

Moreover, Malcolm calls for a cultural revolution that builds on our best ideas and practices, reaching back to Africa, returning to the source or “re-Africanization” as Toure says. This return is to gain accurate and effective knowledge of our historical identity and achievement, to heal the traumatized and disoriented psyche, and to serve as “a means of bringing us closer to our (continental) African brothers and sisters” and of revealing and releasing a capacity for creativity and liberation,

which historical and current conditions of oppression tend to hide, hinder and discourage.

Thus, Malcolm stresses the real return does not mean physical return, but “return culturally, psychologically and spiritually,” recovering views and values that aid in the revolutionary struggle and the recovery of ourselves. The “cultural revolution will be a journey to our recovery of ourselves,” he says. Kawaida reaffirms this, stating that in the liberation struggle, “culture provides the bases for revolution and recovery.” And for Us, this means the recovery of the best of what it means to be African and human, and using it to uplift and liberate ourselves and expand the realm of human freedom and flourishing in the world.

A rightful reading, then, of both Malcolm and Kawaida reaffirms the indispensability of culture as a weapon and way of liberational struggle and cultural revolution as a process and practice which precedes, aids and sustains the larger liberation struggle. And such a rightful reading will also understand that cultural nationalism, as expressed in Kawaida philosophy and practice, is inherent in any real and revolutionary nationalism. Indeed, for Kawaida, which evolved and was forged in the furnace of struggle, cultural nationalism is thought and practice organized around the fundamental understanding that the defining feature of a nation or people is its culture; that for a people to be itself and free itself, it must be self-conscious, self-determining, and rooted in its own culture; and that the quality of its life and the success of its liberation depend on its waging cultural revolution within and political revolution without, producing a radical transformation of both self and society.

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