



**MALCOLM X AND THE MORALITY OF SACRIFICE:  
REMEMBRANCE AND REAFFIRMATION**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

We had dared to stand up in the midst and face of the fear, silence and uncertainty which followed in the wake of the assassination and martyrdom of Min. Malcolm X. It was only one year after, February 21, 1966, and the word was to wait for a more favorable time. But we were already becoming *Simba Wachanga*, young lions, soldiers for all seasons; lions in summer, spring, winter and fall, in emulation of the *Simba*, the young lions who fought so bravely to achieve and defend the liberation of the Congolese people and who Malcolm cited for praise numerous times and urged us to emulate in our freedom and liberation struggle. We had met and talked with him beginning in 1961 and had chosen him after his martyrdom as master teacher and mentor of the Black Liberation Movement. And thus, we defiantly decided we would hold this memorial “irregardless”. (Ebonics for emphasis)

We had decided to call this day *Siku ya Dhabihu* or (*Dhabihu*) which means the Day of Sacrifice, in honor and memory of this noble warrior and eternal witness for our people and good in the world. We would call this sacred day, a day of sacrifice because, as we reasoned, assassination is what the assassins did, but sacrifice is what Malcolm made, indeed the supreme sacrifice of offering his life and death for us and human good. And thus, to simply say he was assassinated hides too much of the whole history of his life, a life of learning, courage, commitment, work and struggle, and refusal to bow or back down before the murderous monsters that marked for death him and his fellow freedom fighters around the world. To say Malcolm sacrificed his life for us is to speak, then, not only of the day of his

actual assassination and transition to eternal life. Rather, it is also to speak of his sacrifice, *Dhabihu*, his offering of his heart and mind, time, effort, material possessions and the whole of himself in the cause of Black and human liberation from the first day he decided and dedicated his life and death to the cause and struggle.

Without money or means after separating from the NOI, he worried toward the end about providing for and ensuring the future of his family. And yet, he pushed on with renewed dedication, discipline and sacrifice, never knowing when the assassins would raise their hatred-dazed and deformed heads. Nor would he accept the head-of-state treatment and invitation to stay and live large in Africa or the Middle East. He felt compelled to return to the battlefield at home to almost certain death. And given such a rich and complex narrative, we cannot reduce his sacrifice to the day of his death, but must see at the center of his life, a self-conscious and committed practice of the morality of sacrifice.

And so we of the organization Us dared to defiantly call the community together to pay rightful homage to this *mujahid*, this steadfast wager of righteous and relentless struggle; this *shahid*, this fearless witness for his faith, Islam, and his people, us; this noble son of Africa who lifted up the light that lasts as a sign and support of all the oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. We were only an emerging organization then, and had not yet carved out the national space in the Black Liberation Movement we would eventually occupy. But even though young and not yet battle-tested, we felt compelled to stand up.

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On that Day of Sacrifice, 49 years ago, we added to the memorial service for Malcolm homage to one of Malcolm's most admired freedom fighters and liberation leaders, Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister of Congo, who was also martyred in 1961. It would be a pattern that prefigured Malcolm's own assassination and martyrdom—mad hatters and puppets pulling triggers and Aryan handlers and manipulators giving the message and means and telling the collaborating minstrels and Muppets the time and tunes they would dance to—predecessors to scenes still being played out today.

This year we were honored to have join us in a full-house commemoration of Malcolm's martyrdom, his and Dr. Betty Shabazz's daughter, Ms. Ilyasah Shabazz at our annual commemoration at the African American Cultural Center (Us). She had come to share with us this historic moment and memorial thru conversation about her legendary and beloved father and mother, using her latest book, *Malcolm Little: The Boy Who Grew Up to Become Malcolm X*, as a central reference and resource. She wrote this engaging children's book, she told us. to explain how a little boy came to be Malcolm X through the love, education and nurturing of his mother and father, and how they instilled in him enduring values—values of the love of learning, respect for others, care for fellow human beings, and insects and plants, and social service and activism.

Malcolm, the soldier and servant of the people. told us in his last days that “any moment of any day or any night could bring

me death”, but “to speculate about dying doesn't disturb me as it might some people”. But he had hoped that his fierce and historic journey and life's work if “read objectively might prove to be a testimony of some social value” and indeed it is of great and enduring value. Teaching us in his *Autobiography* how to live and die, he says, he has cherished his role as a teacher and speaker of truth that unsettles and unseats oppressors and the evil ones of the world, and “I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America—then all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes are mine”.

In opening up the commemoration, I poured libation for Malcolm and other ancestors and I read from an *Izibongo* (Praise Poem), I had written for Malcolm earlier. It was offered as a model of Malcolm, and as a mirror and mission of striving and struggling for us. Some lines say: “Malcolm, the ever oncoming storm, fierce as fire, brilliant as lightning, loud as thunder, demanding respect even from the most powerful enemy. . . He who when he laid down was the length of rivers and when he stood up was the height and strength of mountains. Great hunter who hunted the forests of evil and oppression until the beasts begged for relief”. And we asked ourselves how many of us left and present can be such a warrior, witness and midwife of a new history for the world Malcolm lived and died for?

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