



**MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE SUMMIT:  
TRANSMITTING AND MODELING LEADERSHIP**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

Speaking on the need and nature of education, W.E.B. DuBois reminded us that real and relevant education means sharing knowledge not only about how to make a living, but also how to make a life, i.e., providing vision and values necessary for creating a life worth living. I thought about this point and related ones as I remembered and considered the meaning of our successful African American Knowledge Transfer Summit, 15-17 November and the role of leadership training, not only in transmitting skills of how to lead, but also views and values which direct our leadership and lives towards good and expansive ends. For the success of the Summit was not just in the numbers, although the attendance was five times what we had originally wanted to begin with and build on. Nor was it only the enthusiastic acceptance of the invitation to participate which prompted our having to cut off registration. And it certainly was not because we had a long list of the familiarly famous, although we had persons of national and international reputation among us. No, it was something more essential that drew the people to the advertised event on Friday and kept them there interested and interactive all morning thru lunch to late in the afternoon.

We had opened with a VIP reception on Thursday night with a dynamic and insightful speaker and followed with another engaging keynote speaker for lunch the next day, both who spoke to our central focus on leadership as a moral vocation grounded in the highest of vision, values and service. And we closed Saturday morning with a session on political leadership which provided an invaluable reminder that political leaders, like all other leaders, require an aware, active and united people in order to truly know, represent and serve the interests of the masses and maintain the integrity, cur-

rency and competence we ask and demand of them.

But it was Friday's all-day plenary sessions (Leadership Lessons; Critical Issues; The Activist Tradition; Constructing A Covenant) that were the heart and soul of the Summit. And I would argue that what made this exchange historic and worthy of discussion and duplication was the way it was crafted, presented and conducted by our leadership steering committee and the kind of relationships and cooperative work and responsibility (*Ujima*) it represented. It was, as DuBois suggested, an educational process and practice where the transmission of knowledge carried with it a companion practice of modeling the values and vision we sought to put forth as fundamental to our health, well-being and wholeness as a people. And the people seeing and sensing this quality of exchange, which was devoid of the negative and non-sensical, rightfully attentive to problems, and consciously calling forth the power and potential within our people to confront and solve them, embraced this positive approach and rewarded us with their continued presence, participatory witness-bearing, applause, questioning and wide-ranging conversations before and after each session.

It was the way we worked and related together within the framework of an unannounced and unfinished covenant we forged with each other meeting by meeting. It began with commitment to general principles of unity such as self-determination, service, social justice, cooperation and continuing struggle. And it took form and developed around principles of cooperation which included mutual respect, equal status and worth around the table, regardless of age, gender, occupation, organizational affiliation, size and budget or other secondary

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identities; dialog without animosity or personal attacks; difference and diversity without divisiveness; principled in-house resolution of conflict and continued cooperation in spite of ongoing unresolved issues. Our priorities were our people and the project before us and thus, issues rising out of our working together were treated as secondary and eventually solvable in the course of our ongoing cooperation in the interest of common good.

What the people witnessed, then, was a model of leadership, not simply concerned about the knowledge of leaders, but also about building a united front, committed to its role in representing the interests of our people, reordering the priorities of this country and addressing the pressing issues of the world. What they also consciously or unconsciously wanted to see was how each leader embodied and modeled in their interactions with fellow leaders and the people the values and vision they say they hold. And for them and us, this model offered a beginning basis for a renewed hope and promise of a new level of united front leadership and struggle.

Our idea was to begin with ourselves and ask could we craft a model of leadership and leadership succession that not only served the interests of our people in the L.A. area, but also as a model which could be embraced and duplicated by other leaders on a national level? Also, we asked ourselves could we create a Black United Front of leadership to achieve this practice and produce this model in the interest of our people as a whole? These two interrelated sets of ideas evolved simultaneously in different conversation circles around the city.

The initiative on building a united front was put forth by Rev. Eric Lee, (Southern

Christian Leadership Conference) and the initiative on leadership knowledge transfer was put forth by Blair Taylor, (Urban League). The two initiatives were joined to form one project, the African American Knowledge Transfer Summit and a joint steering committee evolved from this merger. Additional active Steering Committee members included: Charisse Bremond-Weaver (Brotherhood Crusade), Ron Hasson (NAACP, Hollywood), Dr. Maulana Karenga (African American Cultural Center), Dr. Anthony Asadullah Samad (Urban Issues Forum), Valerie Lynne Shaw (Commissioner, LABPW), L.C. "Chris" Strudwick-Turner (Urban League), Brenda Sutton-Wills (Staff Attorney, CTA), Renita Tyson (UNCF), and Jimmy O. Valentine (Counsel, SEIU-ULTCWU).

In spite of our initial success, we are humble enough and sufficiently aware of the highs and lows of history to know this is only a beginning, a framework and still-evolving foundation for the definitely difficult days, sacrifice-demanding months and struggle-filled years ahead of us. But we have stood up together in good faith, stepped forth in the tradition and honor of our ancestors, and we are obligated to continue. And this will require at a minimum: a culturally and ethically grounded vision; a democratic and durable structure; a program which addresses the needs and elevates the aspirations of our people and involves them at every level; a technologically-current and continuously human-focused communications system, and an effective harnessing and developing of our human and material resources for common and continuing good in our lives and an ongoing and expansive good in the world.