



**RELATIONSHIPS AND RESISTANCE:
DEEP THINKING ABOUT LIFE AND STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Each summer since 1977, the Kwaaida Institute of Pan-African Studies (Us) has held a Seminar in Social Theory and Practice bringing together activist-intellectuals, educators, lay people, professionals and students from local, state and national venues to explore critical questions from a Kwaaida perspective. It has over the years produced a unique environment, experience and exchange; a special space for cooperative deep thinking about life and struggle, and a Kwaaida understanding and approach to critical issues confronting African people and the world. And in the process, there is always the reaffirmation and building of mutually beneficial relations, the uplifting enjoyment of intellectual and social exchange and a reinvigorating reinforcement in our shared work and struggle for a good world.

As usual, we set the foundation and framework for our discussions by posing and dialoging about Africa as a moral and spiritual ideal and thus, a source of valuable paradigms and possibilities, models of human excellence and achievement by which we can understand and assert ourselves in the world in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways. We talked too of cultivating leadership as a moral vocation in the tradition of our ancient and modern ancestors. It is defined in Kwaaida by five fundamental commitments: to be a good person in the world; to be a consistent servant of the people; to be a constant soldier in the struggle; to be a continuous student of the teachings; and to be a tireless teacher of the good, the right and the possible.

We stressed also the indispensability of deep thinking, critical below-the-surface

thinking, represented by the ancient Egyptian word *djaer* which has its origin in medical practice and the probing and incisive search and critical interest in *discovery, diagnosis, prognosis* and *prescription*. This indispensable mode of engaging issues and subjects was then joined in discussion by the parallel and interrelated concept and practice of *courageous questioning*, a concept and practice found first in the Book of Rekhmira of ancient Egypt. It is by tradition a rightful and righteous calling into question; seeking answers and offering a severe criticism of the evil, the wrong and the unjust. It is speaking needed truth no matter how unpleasant or unwanted and in spite of calls for a quiet that corrupts, a peace that denies justice and a loyalty of support and silence that violates our most precious values and does great harm to us and the world.

Here we talked of Cornel West and Tavis Smiley and all of us' right and responsibility to speak truth to the people and to power, to demand justice, especially for the poor, and to call into question the self-silencing of a people who have always known themselves and been known by the world as a moral and social vanguard, whose liberation struggle has been a model and inspiration to other oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. And we took note that members of the Black middle and upper classes are beginning to question and challenge the President to stop seeking alliances and acceptance he will never have, praise and credit he will never receive and simply speak truth, do justice and be comfortable being Black and still the President of all America.

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We talked too of the U.S.' immoral and merciless use of drones, its destructive role in Africa, the liberation struggles in Egypt, Haiti, and Palestine; HIV/AIDS and community health, environmental ethics, and where we go from here in the long unfinished struggle to radically change this country. For Us' forums are never about ideas alone or ideas abstracted from the lives we and our people live, but are rather about how we develop and apply ideas to live better lives, do our work, conduct and win our struggle and build a good, just and sustainable world.

Here we always ask ourselves how can we strengthen and expand our ongoing efforts to give increasing space, support and challenge to our young people. Indeed, how do we prepare succeeding generations to discover their particular mission and embrace and advance the shared and awesome legacy left to us and them by our ancestors? And how do we give them the cultural and ethical grounding and direction which constitute an indispensable part of what it means to be a parent, elder, a mentor or even elder brother or sister?

Surely, we must, ourselves, aid them in developing a meaningful life of the mind, an ethically grounded and caring sensitivity of the heart and soaring aspirations of the spirit to bring good in the world. This requires also that in all we do, African means excellence and we always live and struggle for the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest sense. And for all of us, it means, as discussed in our seminar, that the hub and hinge on which everything turns is the quality of our relationships, that the right or wrong of an act, thought or

emotion depends on the kind of relationship it creates and that every rightful relationship carries with it a reciprocal responsibility of respect and returned good.

By all accounts, this 37th annual seminar brought with it a special spirit which built on the strengths and good of those before it. And we took note of the context in which we were meeting, i.e., a context of moral outrage, righteous anger and widespread resistance of our people all over the country. It was, we reasoned, a special spirit of unity honed and heightened in the midst of struggle, a sense of shared will and work for racial and social justice, especially around the current and continuing cause of Trayvon Martin.

We discussed also several requirements for moving forward in the most effective and sustained way: clarity of vision; strength of structures; sustainability of programs; quality of communications; and the independence and adequacy of resources, i.e., money, materials, skilled personnel and the people. In all of this, there is the need to focus and stay on point concerning the original issue—the legally allowed and socially sanctioned killing of Trayvon which is clearly linked to the overall practice of police and vigilante violence against Black boys and men throughout the country. Also, important is the need to avoid bouts of periodic anger and episodic engagement with the struggle for racial and social justice and to remain constantly involved, and ever ready to act, declaring and engaging each day as *a good day to struggle*. Indeed, as the *Odu Ifa*, a sacred text of ancient Africa, says, “A constant soldier (for the good) is never unready—not even once.”

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