



**FOR LOVE AND STRUGGLE:
BEYOND THE CRASH, HUSTLE AND FLOSS**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE WIDE SWEEP OF HISTORY ultimately finds its foundation in the lives of the people who make it. At the heart of the history we make are men and women working in partnership to pursue, do and bring forth good in the world. And there is no greater good than the love and life they share and bring into being in the midst of the many and varied things they do with and for each other and the world. Thus, as we celebrate this second month of Black History with its focus on Black women, we unavoidably turn to their relationships with Black men. For as our sacred texts and ancestors tell us, the world will only be good and in right order if our relationships are righteous, reciprocal and mutually-respectful. Indeed, our culture teaches us that the hub and hinge on which the whole of human life turns are quality relationships. And male/female relations are at the heart and center of critical, decisive and indispensable relations in the world.

Certainly, the dominant society has not given and cannot give us any guidelines or good models we can work with. After all, a society that asserts that “a dog is man’s best friend” and that “a diamond is a girl’s best friend” can’t offer useful information on how we as men and women can and must relate. Moreover, neither can we be informed by a society whose movies and other media regularly mutilate and misrepresent our image as men and women, posing us as deformed and humiliated men and molested and stereotypical women waiting for the molester and oppressor to return and recognizing us with an Oscar or paid performance for surrendering, singing and dancing to our own degradation. Indeed, it’s hard to be a real Black man and woman in a corporate-pimping and plundering society, which worships wealth and power, masters and sells social and self-illusion and hides from itself the war and waste it imposes

on the world. But, in spite of it all, we must be men among men and women among women in the world.

Our task, then, is to engage this historical moment from our own cultural vantage point, to identify truthfully and straight forwardly problems as well as strengths and possibilities and begin to imagine and build the relationships and world we want and deserve to live in. In a word, we must build and maintain rock-strong, profound and fulfilling male/female relationships in a context not conducive to them. Put another way, the challenge is to love freely in an unfree context, to be gentle and caring in a harsh and uncaring world, to practice equality in a sexist society, and to give meaningfully of oneself in a context of possessive and vulgar individualism which fosters selfishness and exploitation of others for one’s own benefit. And in spite of the difficulties, real and imagined which we face in achieving this, there is no real, sane or ultimately satisfying alternative to our loving fully and freely and together building and sustaining the good and meaningful relationships we want and deserve.

It is a common contention that the smallest example of the strength and health of the nation or people is the family. And at the heart of the family and the ground of its health and strength are quality male/female relations. It is important to realize, then, that there is no isolated solution to the problems and challenges we face. Whatever solutions we evolve must be seen and approached in the context of an interrelated web of relationships in family, community and society. For the problems of male/female relations are tied to the problems of the community and the problems of the community are tied to the problems of and with society, i.e., its racism, classism, sexism, etc. Nevertheless, there is no better place to start in our struggle to build family and community and

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to free ourselves as a people than to start with assessing and altering for the best our relations between male and female, man and woman.

To achieve this goal, we must first prepare ourselves by cultivating attitudes and approaches which are dignity-affirming, life-enhancing, and love-sustaining and move away from those which encourage the negative and negate the positive. This means, above all, that we base ourselves in and build on the best of our own cultural concepts and practices; that we develop the capacity for self-criticism, criticism and self-correction; that we avoid recrimination, be oh so sensitive to each other's needs and rush to repair any and all injuries immediately. And finally, this means we must recognize and respect the rightful attentiveness and care and the long and sometimes difficult struggle it takes to build solid foundations and flourishing relationships.

Although we can define love in various ways, I want to define it here as *ultimate attentiveness and appreciation that expresses itself in mutual investment in each other's happiness, well-being and development*. The stress here is on mutuality, equality, shared respect, shared concern for each other, a shared commitment to each other that is deep and enduring and every day and hour alert and active for the good. And this commitment must include assuming together shared responsibility in building the good relations and world we want and deserve to live in, a world of love, material and spiritual well-being, peace with justice, freedom with a capacity for flourishing, and ever-renewed and beautiful

ways of relating in and with the world. It is within this framework that we establish several guidelines for achieving and sustaining the shared good of love and life.

At a minimum we need: shared dignity-affirming and life-enhancing views and values, especially the *Nguzo Saba*, the Seven Principles (*Umoja*—Unity, *Kujichagulia*—Self-Determination, *Ujima*—Collective Work and Responsibility, *Ujamaa*—Cooperative Economics, *Nia*—Purpose, *Kuumba*—Creativity, and *Imani*—Faith); shared aspirations and interests that lead to complementary partnership in all things good and beautiful; clear terms to establish, maintain and develop the relationship; and a profound friendship in which we think good of each other, want and work for the good of each other, share good and do good for and with each other in endless ways.

Moreover, we must build and sustain support structures which strengthen us in the positive and guide us from the negative; shared activities that reinforce the bonds between us; means of continuous renewal and reinforcement; and personal and collective struggle to bring good into the relationship and the world. For the call to love freely is at the same time a call to create the context in which we can do this. Thus, we must struggle against the negative in us and in society. And we must dare imagine and struggle with others to build and sustain the good relationships and world we want and deserve, a world of ever-increasing human freedom and flourishing. Indeed, as we in Us say, "If not this then what, and if we don't do it, who will?"

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