



**THE LANGUAGE AND LOGIC OF KAWAIDA:
AFRICAN WAYS OF ENGAGING THE WORLD**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

Kawaida philosophy was forged in the fire and water of the ideological and practical struggles waged in the Sixties and thus, it became a philosophy born of struggle, kneaded and nurtured in deep reflection and tested and tempered in the practice of liberation as both a psychological and political project. It began with a search for a new language and logic that would undergird and inform ways of being African in the world, what Sekou Toure called the movement *toward full reaffricanization*, and we called step “Back to Black” in our forward movement toward liberation.

Kawaida defined itself as *an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world*. It called for cultural revolution as Malcolm, Toure, Fanon and Cabral taught, arguing that the key crisis and challenge in Black life is the cultural crisis and challenge, and that until we break the monopoly that the oppressor has on so many of the people’s minds, liberation is not only impossible, it is also unconceivable. We are now, as then, grappling with critical issues confronting us and daring to retrieve and reconstruct the best of what it means to be African in the world and use it to think and act in liberated and liberating ways.

Kawaida philosophy forms the foundation and framework for how we of the organization Us understand and assert ourselves in the world. And we use it to address critical issues of our time in this year’s 34th Annual Seminar in Kawaida Social Theory and Practice, 2012 July 23-29. We do this aware of the unique and enduring value and meaning of Kawaida as an African way of viewing and engaging the world. Indeed, out of all the social change philosophies and forms of thought that emerged from the Sixties, Kawaida stands as a unique

contribution, not only in term of its cultural tenets, but also in its extensive reach and enduring impact.

This speaks also to the role and work in the Black Liberation Movement in the 60s and now of the organization Us, in which Kawaida was conceived, created and first embraced and practiced. The uniqueness of Kawaida’s past, present and continuing contribution is evident, first, in the enduring embrace and practice of *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles) in various forms and formations throughout the world African community. For it is out of Kawaida philosophy that *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba* were conceived and thru which they are continually renewed, enriched and expanded.

Clearly, not only do millions of people throughout the world African community celebrate *Kwanzaa* each year, but also the *Nguzo Saba* serve as philosophical grounding, value-orientation and a culturally-grounded guide for daily life for also millions of people. They also serve a similar grounding and guiding function for thousands of organizations and institutions, representing a wide-range of educational, political, religious, economic, social and professional formations.

Added evidence of this is in the impact Kawaida had on informing and shaping thought and practice in major movements in Black intellectual and political culture of our time. This includes its role in and contribution to the movements of: Black Power, Black art, Black Studies, Black students, Black conventions (Gary, CAP, Black Assembly, etc.), Black theology, ancient Egyptian studies, Maatian ethics, Ifa ethics, Black United Fronts, Afrocentricity, reparations, and the Million Man March/Day of Absence.

In addition to the wide-ranging and enduring impact on Black intellectual and political culture, the uniqueness of Kawaida is

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rooted also in the self-conscious culturally-grounded content and quality of its message. Thus, the first thing that makes Kawaida unique and distinct from all other philosophies and forms of thought is its embrace of *Africa as a moral, spiritual and intellectual ideal*, in a word, as its *cultural ideal*. This is to say, Kawaida engages and embraces African culture as the paradigmatic and indispensable source of models, meanings and ways of being moral, spiritual, intellectual and social, in a word, of being human in the world. Thus, at every time and turn, on every critical question about life and living, we ask, what does Africa have to say about this? Others might seek answers to such critical questions from other later ancient lands: Israel, Arabia, China, India, Greece, Rome, etc., but we ask Africa.

And we do not ask haphazardly or inconsistently, but with clear and sustained focus and commitment to constantly search for and bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest and most expansive sense of the words and practice. Indeed, for us, there is no narrative more central or sacred than our own history; no nation more divine, chosen or elect than our own people; and no culture more ancient, rich and revealing than the resourceful and enduring legacy left by our ancestors and our ongoing, equally valuable and valid African ways of being human in the world

This cultural ideal of Africa is recovered and reconstructed from the best of our tradition and moral reasoning. And it is important to note that this cultural centering

and the cultural core of what it means to African and human in the fullest sense have both continental and diasporan, historical and current sources and dimensions. For our culture is not a fossilized or mummified product, but a living process and project that produces ever new and renewed meanings, products and ways of being African in the world. Thus, through Kawaida, we have created new discourses, developed new concepts and provided new ancient and modern ethical texts from *Maat* and *Ifa*, to ground and inform a *liberated* and *liberating* language and logic, break thru the conceptual imprisonment and catechism of impossibilities imposed and taught by the dominant society and pose new life-enhancing ways of being African and human in the world.

Thus, one of the most important ethical and social obligations for us as African people, Kawaida teaches, is for us to constantly dialog with African culture, asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the current and enduring critical issues of our time. And we always bear in mind the essential African ethical teachings on: the oneness of being; the sacredness of life; respect for the transcendent; the dignity and rights of the human person; the well-being and flourishing of family and community; the integrity and inherent value of the environment; and the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for common good of humanity. And in all of this, as the *Odu Ifa* teaches, we must eagerly “struggle to increase good in the world and not let any good be lost.”

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