



**HONORING US' 236 SEASONS OF STRUGGLE:
NOTES ON REVOLUTION FROM A 1960S LECTURE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

F*FIFTY-NINE YEARS AND 236 SEASONS AGO, we met together to build an organization, actualize an idea and pursue a revolutionary initiative we named the Organization Us. Born in the tense aftermath of the assassination and martyrdom of Haji Malcolm X and in the fluid wake of the Watts Revolt of August 1965, we of Us dared to offer our life and death in the liberation struggle of our people and to dedicate ourselves to service, sacrifice, work, institution-building and righteous and relentless struggle to achieve this goal. Below are notes on revolution and liberation from an unpublished 1960s lecture of mine. It speaks to the continuingly relevant questions we sought to address concerning key cultural and political requirements on the liberating road to revolution.*

In the midst of a system of oppression that would deny us recognition, rights and respect, we stand up to recognize and praise ourselves and declare our right to self-determination, self-respect and self-defense in pursuit of Black Power over our destiny and daily lives. And we dare to practice each of these in revolutionary defiance of our oppressor and our oppression. Today, we want to talk about revolution and we want to talk about revolution in terms of cultural revolution. But since we see everything we do, think and feel as expressions of culture, it involves a discussion of politics, economics, art, liberation and all else. However, our main focus will be on building revolutionary consciousness in the midst of discussing and waging the liberation struggle. As we say in Kawaida, until we win the battle for the minds of our people, waging armed struggle or getting out in the streets with guns won't work at all. For you can give a Negro, an unconscious Black,

a gun, but if he's not conscious, he might end up shooting you or himself and run out of bullets before he encounters the real enemy, our oppressor.

Unconscious, they mimic the mentality and actions of our oppressor. As Malcolm taught us, they are sick when the oppressor is; they defend him with their lives; and they are emotionally in bondage to him in clearly psychologically unhealthy ways. Our task, then, is to reshape the Negro mind and make it a Black one. This is based on the fundamental assumption that in every Negro, there is a Black man or woman struggling to come into being. It is within this understanding that we put such emphasis on cultural and political education, on cultivating a nationalist and revolutionary consciousness.

We say that coming into consciousness is first of all accepting that we are Black and acting on that reality in liberating ways. Also, as we continuously say, the fact that we are Black is our ultimate reality. But Blackness is not simply a color, it is three things: color, culture and consciousness. Color is phenotype, physical appearance, which reflects historical origin within our people, Africans. Culture is our system of views and values that shape the way we understand ourselves and the world and the practice that proceeds from that. And consciousness is an active awareness of ourselves and the world that commits us to the practice of nation building, national liberation and revolution. Among these three key aspects of Blackness, we stress culture. For culture gives us identity, purpose and direction. It tells us who we are, what we must do and how we can do it. And consciousness must be grounded in and informed by our culture or it is not in our interest.

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We are an oppressed people in the midst of a liberation struggle, a revolutionary struggle, a righteous struggle. As we say in the Seventh principle of the *Nguzo Saba*, we must “believe in our people and in the righteousness and victory of our struggle”. Therefore, our culture is and must be the basis of our revolution and recovery. But we can’t make revolution in the abstract. That is to say, we can’t jump up and try to make revolution out of random thoughts and practice. We must study other revolutions, as Malcolm taught us, and learn their lessons without trying to import things wholesale from another culture or country. You cannot have a revolution without direction, but that direction can only come from an ideology developed out of and for your own situation and culture. Not understanding this, a lot of brothers play revolution rather than practice it. They read a little Frantz Fanon or Sekou Toure, a little Mao or Marx and believe that this makes them ready for the revolution. But although this information is necessary it is not sufficient, for we must develop a new plan of revolution for Black people here in America. At one point, as much as we admire other revolutionaries, in order to become real revolutionaries ourselves, we must believe in our own cause and be willing to die for it. And we must stop reading other peoples literature and write our own, and stop pretending revolution and make it.

As Malcolm taught, this is the era of revolt and revolution. All over the world, oppressed peoples of the Third World are rebelling and making revolutions. For Us, this era and process started in 1965 in what we call the Year of Revolt. Since the August Revolt in 1965, Black people have risen up in a new form of resistance, moving forward at a fast and defiant pace, actually setting cities on fire

and confronting our oppressor on many levels and in many ways. People are beginning to change now, to acquire a new consciousness and to look at themselves and the world in new and necessary ways. And the questions we are faced with now is how shall we move forward in the most productive and effective ways, and how can we make a revolution like the world has never seen, but recognizes and respects it when they do see it?

Surely, we in Us say “We have not simply come to be taught by the world but also to teach the world”. That is to say, we must strive to achieve and offer a model for struggle and liberation recognized and respected by the world. Fanon has taught us that we must offer more than “an obscene caricature of Europe”, that we must think new thoughts and engage in new practices that produce a new man, a new people and a new history. Moreover, until we produce and offer some lessons and models of excellence in life and struggle, the world will not recognize and respect us for who we really are. We can run around repeatedly quoting Lenin about smashing the state, but without a disciplined guerilla army and the people organized into a self-conscious revolutionary social force, you will only get smashed yourself. What Lenin did in Russia is not a plan for us here in America. And even Mao’s model cannot be applied without serious adjustment and modification. That is why to those holding up the *Red Book* as a model that we can mechanically apply, we say “the *Red Book* is better read”.

SO WHAT WE’VE GOT TO DO IS BUILD A revolutionary movement in our own image and interests, one that speaks to us, one that raises the consciousness of our people and unites them into a self-conscious

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social force for liberation. And we say that we have to mobilize, organize and nationalize our people to achieve this in any real and successful way. This requires at every stage a deep thorough-going educational process and practice directed toward liberation. To mobilize our people is to call them into action around their own interests, to make them aware of these interests, and to put before them issues they care about, confront and successfully resolve. To organize our people

is to bind them together with culturally grounded principles in liberating work and struggle. And to nationalize our people is to build with them a self-conscious revolutionary culture and community that sees itself, as Malcolm taught, as a “nation within a nation”, a people rooted in its own culture, and about the serious business of freeing itself, radically changing this country, and participating in the global rebellion against oppression in the world.▲

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