



**KAWAIDA, CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND STRUGGLE:  
SETTING THE REVOLUTIONARY RECORD STRAIGHT**

*Los Angeles Sentinel*, 10-02-14, p.A6

**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**art I. As September, the month of celebrating Us' 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary draws to an end and there is much talk about developing a national strategy of struggle, it is of no small importance to address and expose one of the most pervasive and pernicious myths to emerge from the Black Power Movement of the 1960's. And this is the artificial, uninformed and divisive distinction routinely made between revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism. Like the old myths of the flatness of the earth and the witchery of women, this mythic distinction depends more on a disabling unawareness and general acquiescence and agreement than on evidence and analysis of any serious and supportable kind. It is simply something one repeats without sensing the need to explain the distinction or explore the reasons and origin of its contrived construction.

Moreover, those who claim to be revolutionary nationalists as distinct from and opposed to cultural nationalists never define the terms or talk seriously about revolution, nationalism or culture. Indeed, even the self-named and reciprocally-referenced Black Power scholars offer nothing but constantly retreated and condemnatory catch phrases about cultural nationalism, without the slightest intellectual effort to explore the rich and varied complexity of the term and especially, how it expresses itself in Kawaida philosophy and practice. Even a book that pretends to be a major study of Us and me in its title is little more than a longer form of the clichéd conceptions and character assassination found in smaller spaces. Only Molefi Asante's book, *Maulana Karenga: An Intellectual Portrait*, lays a foundation and framework for an accurate, honest, open-textured depiction of and discourse on me, my intellectual and practical work and that of our organization Us. The rest reflect an ideological preference for a selected

group, a poverty of theory and vision, and shameless catering to publication preferences of members of the dominant society who are used to determining who shall be the Black group to be preferred, praised and promoted or indicted, condemned and omitted.

Here below are some essential ideas and information to set the revolutionary record straight about Us, its commitment to revolution and cultural nationalism without separating the two or sacrificing one for the other intellectually or in struggle. We understood revolution as a process and practice of struggle for radical transformation of ourselves, society and the world, altering relations of power, wealth and cultural dominance, expanding the realm of freedom and following Malcolm and Fanon, joining other oppressed and struggling people in the world-encompassing task of opening the horizon for a new history of humankind. And we understood nationalism as thought and practice rooted in the conception that we are a distinct historical and cultural personality, and that we have the right and responsibility to exist and to define, defend and promote our political, economic and cultural interests as a people, to free ourselves and be ourselves, and to make our own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history. And we saw and see this as a process and practice of liberation.

From its inception, we of Us saw ourselves as revolutionary *and* cultural nationalists, in a word, as *revolutionary cultural nationalists*. In our earliest public presentations and publications, we understood ourselves and our generation as revolutionaries, dedicated to the far-reaching, deep and radical transformation of ourselves, society, and the world only revolution could achieve. It was our response to the revolutionary challenge of the age to our generation posed by a world-wide revolutionary rising in which Malcolm rightly

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situated our liberation struggle. Our position and practice also evolved out of Fanon's call for us to determine our generational mission and then "fulfill it or betray it". And the mission could only be a revolutionary one, given the transformative reality of revolution engulfing the world.

Thus, in the *The Quotable Karenga*, our earliest formal publication, we dared to declare with the shared boundless energy and utopian vision and sense of revolutionary mission of youth in struggle all over the world, "We are the last revolutionaries in America. If we fail to leave a legacy of revolution for our children, we have failed our mission and should be dismissed as unimportant". This legacy, of course, is one of righteous, relentless and radical struggle, and this call and commitment remains one of our central motivations for continuing the struggle, not, like so many others, reconsidering or resigning, not taking a back seat or even worst, sitting on the sidelines blaming everyone but themselves for losing faith, turning faddish, flipping over and walking away from the battlefield before the struggle is won.

Like Malcolm, we saw and see revolution and culture as interrelated and interdependent, and thus, we made and make no artificial distinction between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism. Rather, we saw culture and cultural revolution as part and parcel of the liberation struggle. As Malcolm said, "Culture is an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle". Moreover, Malcolm taught that "We must recapture our heritage and our identity, if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrain-

wash an entire population". And we took this seriously.

Also, following Malcolm, we linked the love of nationalism with the love of revolution and argued his position that "if you love revolution, you love Black nationalism". Thus, by definition, "A revolutionary is a Black nationalist" and real Black nationalists are those who love and struggle to liberate their nation, i.e., their people, are a revolutionaries. Thus, as revolutionaries and cultural nationalists responding to the demands of history and the liberation struggle, we said in the Sixties, "Nationalism today by its very nature has to be revolutionary, if it is for liberation".

Moreover, we of Us maintained that cultural grounding and cultural revolution are indispensable for "Culture provides the bases for revolution and recovery". Here we define culture in its most inclusive sense, i.e., as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. Given this, we advanced the proposition that "culture is the basis for all ideas, images and action, (and thus) to move is to move culturally, i.e., by a set of values given to you by your culture". And therefore, we agreed with Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral who contended that "the national liberation struggle is an expression and 'act of culture' ". For the process and practice of revolution or liberation presupposes and requires a *culture of struggle* which demands it, prepares, aids and sustains it, and brings it to successful conclusion.

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