



**"KAWAIDA AND THE CURRENT CRISIS:  
A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, LOVE AND STRUGGLE"**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**P**ART 1. CLEARLY, WE, AS A PEOPLE, ARE IN the midst of a deep social crisis, one not only in terms of the conditions of our community, but also in the context of this country. Indeed, at the heart of our crisis is the crisis in America marked by: its steady degeneration into conditions of sustained and self-justifying violence against the vulnerable, at home and around the world; its immoral and radically evil monopoly by a racial and class elite of wealth and power; its attempt to privatize and extract profit from every inch of public, personal and natural space; and its willingness to kill, torture, overturn countries and destroy the environment and world to do so. Also, there are the dominant society's psychological insecurities and issues about everything from its safety to its sexuality; and from its heightened hostility to humans to its increased and openly declared love for its dogs. And there is also the issue of delayed and impending economic collapse, propped up and papered over with new names for depression and system failure, and unannounced loans on state and federal levels from people and countries it once conquered, colonized and caricatured.

Finally, there is society's turn to more elaborate diversions in life and media and thru Hollywood-hype to create for itself a sense of superiority, comfort, and invincibility thru force of arms and technology, and shared self-congratulatory illusions of greatness and exceptionalism. And these illusions of greatness and exceptionalism grow more grotesque in the face of the massive and sustained violence against the vulnerable worldwide; devastating resource robbery around the world; ruthless and continuous assaults against the earth and environment; pervasive and pernicious disparities and disadvantages of life, opportunity, access, and always inequalities and inequities of wealth, power and status.

It is in this larger context of the crisis of American society in which the crisis of the Black community is located and from which it must be liberated. By crisis I mean conditions of both danger and possibility, of the *vulnerability to oppression* and *an incentive for resistance*. It is a critical moment, a decisive turning point at which things could go either up or down, continue forward toward liberation or collapse into internal division and weakening, terrorized silence and a feverish and undignified seeking to maintain or acquire comfortable positions in oppression.

Certainly, society and its race and class rulers have contributed definitively to the basic sources of any crisis we face. They have racialized crime and criminalized our whole people and are involved in a deadly campaign of massive incarceration and wanton killing of them in jails, prisons, streets, homes, playgrounds, schools and even churches. They have declared *in practice* their depraved disregard for the lives and rights of Black people, regardless of their sanctimonious and self-intoxicating illusions peddled about being "a shining city on the hill" and a haven for "the huddled masses" and those escaping from dictatorships they themselves set up and support.

However, it is the savage and sustained police violence that has made us feel so vulnerable and so at risk. The list of the murdered and martyred is long and continues to be extended. It includes men, women, children, unarmed people, innocent people, all vulnerable victims of a racist and racialized police and systemic violence that demonstrates a savage disregard for Black lives and Black rights. Each day and week there are so many others still to be counted, mourned and given places of concern and caring in our minds and memories.

But if we face it, there was always consciousness of the savagery of the system on varied levels: its violence and injustice directed against our lives, our learning, our health and

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material well-being and our sense of security, and confidence in ourselves and our future. This place we called in grade school “the land of the free and the home of the brave” is not exactly as we were told. It was not so at its founding and it is not now, even though we had so much hope for it after each of the milestones in our and its history in which we felt we had made progress and set it on the road to radical reconstruction and redemption. So, as Fannie Lou Hamer taught us, we must constantly question America—its lies, false claims and its self-deluding myths about freedom and justice for all, etc.

For each advance produced a backdraft, a pushback and a move back. Sometimes, it was openly and pervasively violent as during the Black Freedom Movement and the massive racist counter resistance from the dominant society. Now, it remains pervasive, but is conducted under the camouflage and color of law—not just police violence, but other systemic and socially sanctioned violence of varied and vicious kinds which undermines our capacity to live lives of dignity, decency and security as Black people and human beings.

Furthermore, the crisis happens in and is shaped by a context in which many of the veterans of the struggle are being lost thru natural aging and transition and thru unbelievable transformation which places them outside of the struggle or out of touch with the needs and aspirations of our people or even in conflict with their interests. Sometimes we cannot face the transitions or believe the transformations, i.e., that those who gave so much to the struggle have now abandoned it or turned down a road leading everywhere else except to the radical restructuring of society we’ve struggled and worked so hard for. But the unguided hand of history is not always helpful. Nor is the course of history determined by our oppressor. Here

we remember Marcus Garvey’s teaching that “History is too important to leave in alien hands.” Thus, we must not only write our own history, but also read it and dare to self-consciously make it in the image and interest of African and human freedom and flourishing. But to make this liberational history, we need a collective vision and a collective vocation of life, love and struggle, a way forward that reaffirms our identity, crafts our purpose and provides us direction.

As *living Black* in America becomes more dangerous and difficult and such a collective vision and vocation becomes even more imperative, it is good to have a philosophical foundation on which to ground ourselves, a philosophy by which we can understand and assert ourselves in the world, live our lives, bring into being and nurture our loves, and wage the righteous struggle to end this crisis and our oppression and build the good world we all want and deserve. And Kawaida is such a philosophy of life, love and struggle. Indeed, it is an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world. Thus, it is an important contribution to shaping our shared vision and vocation.

**|** G ROUNDED AND FORGED IN THE IDEOLOGICAL and practical struggles of the 60’s, Kawaida has consistently argued that for our or any people to be itself and free itself, it must be self-conscious, self-determined and rooted in its own culture. Kawaida continues to maintain that the struggle we must wage is a dual one of cultural revolution within and political revolution without, resulting in the radical transformation of ourselves, society and ultimately the world. For as Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune taught, “We must remake the world. The task is nothing less than that.”▲

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