



**MAINTAINING MALCOLM'S LEGACY:  
PRACTICING THE MORALITY OF REMEMBRANCE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**C**learly, Min. Malcolm X was/is a giant in a generation of great leaders, a moral teacher that lifted up the light that lasts, and a leader who like the top of the mountain is unconsciously there, but mighty and enduring in its awesome majesty and meaning. His life and death, for Us, as an organization, was the noble witness he had hoped they would be. And we made a solemn commitment to study, teach, practice and expand that legacy and transmit it as a *tradition of struggle* for future generations.

Since the Sixties, when we met Malcolm, we of the organization Us have seen ourselves as heirs and custodians of his legacy, not only in the general way that all Black Power advocates lay rightful claim to his legacy, but also in a more comprehensive, depthful and sustained way thru the study, teaching and application of his most central ideas, embracing them as an expansive Black cultural nationalism that is revolutionary because of its commitment to radical self- and social transformation, the overturning of self and society, and because it was what Malcolm rightly called a rational and compelling response to our oppression and the demands of liberation.

Indeed, we took seriously in both principle and practice, Malcolm's teachings on self-transformation in and for the liberation struggle, i.e.. "wake up, clean up and stand up;" the indispensability of culture and cultural revolution as a weapon and emancipatory process to prepare, aid and sustain the liberation struggle; the return to the source, Africa, culturally, psychologically and spiritually; the right and responsibility of self-defense, resistance and the struggle for "freedom by any means necessary", armed and otherwise; pan-Africanism; a religion with a God in our own image and interests and

which is committed to justice, liberation and the liberation struggle; Black united front strategies; Third World solidarity; communitarian and democratic African socialism; and anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism.

It is from this standpoint that we of Us engage in righteous remembrance of Malcolm; and try as best as we can to live his legacy, to offer a rightful reading of this legacy, and to challenge those interpretations that miss the mark, falsify, trivialize or in any other way tend to reinvent and render less meaningful this awesome legacy and shared African heritage. And thus, it is within this framework of history and practice that a critique is imperative of Manning Marable's new book on Malcolm or any other text that takes a similar misguided, mistaken or misinformed approach, even if originally well-meaning. And in our newly released book, *By Any Means Necessary: Malcolm X, Real Not Reinvented*, my co-editors Herb Boyd, Ron Daniels, Haki Madhubuti and I, Maulana Karenga, as well as numerous contributors have offered corrective and alternative insights. Indeed, this article contains excerpts from my article in the book.

Also, we of Us understood Malcolm's assassination as martyrdom, a courageous sacrifice of self for the life and liberation of our people. For he could have withdrawn, retired or gone to Africa to stay and work. But he returned to resume his work in spite of the real, numerous and consistent threats to his life. It was for me and my colleagues a model and message of struggle and sacrifice that was central to his legacy, and thus, in founding our organization Us in the wake of his martyrdom and the Watts Revolt, September 7, 1965, we dedicated ourselves to lifting up, teaching and continuing his legacy as a living practice. In fact, one writer from the *New York Times*

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noting this, wrote that "Mr. Karenga often refers to the (teachings) of the late Black nationalist Malcolm X, in much the same way Malcolm X had quoted the Black Muslim leader (Messenger) Elijah Muhammad".

Indeed, we of Us were among the first to boldly stand up and bear witness to Malcolm's legacy in the midst of the silence and fear engendered by internal and external forces that surrounded his assassination and martyrdom. Our first major public event was a memorial service for Malcolm in February 1966 at which we declared the day of his martyrdom a holiday called *Dhabihu* (Day of Sacrifice) in homage to his service and sacrifice for our people and the struggle for liberation. Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist in its thrust in reaffirmation of Malcolm's and our own political practice and teachings, our commemoration also paid homage to the martyred Congolese Premier Patrice Lumumba, denounced the Vietnam War as racist, immoral and illegal, and called for resistance to the war and the draft.

Us also celebrated Malcolm's birthday and established another holiday in his honor called *Kuzaliwa* (The Day of Birth) the same year in May, bringing his widow and co-worker, Betty Shabazz to Los Angeles to give the inaugural lecture, her first public address since Malcolm's martyrdom. The following year we called for students not to attend schools on Kuzaliwa and to come to celebrate Malcolm's birth and life at Us' headquarters and they responded in great numbers.

We especially embraced Malcolm's and other African revolutionary leaders' insistence on cultural revolution that gives us the vision, values, will and way to wage the liberation

struggle. And again, for us, as both Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral contend, "the national liberation struggle is an expression and 'act of culture'." Given this, Kawaida contends, a critical and rightful reading of Malcolm, as well as Toure and Cabral, leads us to conclude that the cultural revolution to free the mind and create a *culture of struggle* which grounds and supports overall liberation is imperative. Indeed, "without a cultural revolution, there can be no real liberation of the people. But without the struggle for total liberation, a dynamic, self-affirming, self-developing past-and-future-facing culture cannot be created".

Malcolm, by his own self-definition, was "a Black nationalist freedom fighter." And his nationalism, Kawaida teaches, is defined by three major principles and practices which we used to define Black Power: self-determination, self-respect and self-defense. This means control of our space, destiny and daily life in this country and the world African community; cultural grounding which affirms our identity and dignity as persons and a people; and the right and responsibility to defend ourselves against systemic and social violence and oppression thru increased and continuing liberation struggle and relentless resistance to open and hidden constraints on African and human freedom. And it is in this way that we practice the morality of remembrance, rightfully reading and reaffirming Malcolm's legacy and self-consciously conceive and aid in construction of a new way to a good society and just world, and a new way of being human and relating rightfully in the world.

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