



**REMEMBERING AND REFLECTING ON KWAME TURE:  
PAN-AFRICANISM, REVOLUTION AND CULTURAL GROUNDING**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

**I**T IS OUR MORAL OBLIGATION, OUR FOREMOTHER, MRS. FANNIE LOU HAMER, tells us, "never to forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over". And such a sturdy and unbreakable bridge was/is Kwame Ture. So, in the month of June we pay special homage to Kwame Ture (June 29, 1941—November 15, 1998), tall and unwavering tree in the revered forest of Pan-Africanist freedom fighters; tireless unifying organizer of our people in their righteous pursuit of liberation, justice and power over their destiny and daily lives; and honored and all-seasons revolutionary whose permanent posture and signature saying was always "ready for the revolution."

We know him especially as the audacious leader and ever-engaged organizer who raised the battle cry of "Black Power" and was central to making it an internationally recognized and respected liberation initiative within the overarching and ongoing Black Freedom Movement. But we also know him as an exemplary pan-Africanist who spent decades until his death working for the unity, common struggle and liberation of the continent of Africa and the world African community.

Kwame and I met in the fall of 1966, in Watts, where I lived and worked and which had become a fundamental point of reference and pilgrimage for the northern thrust of the Black Liberation Movement as a result of the August Revolt of '65. A coalition of groups, including our organization Us, had invited Kwame to speak and Us had provided security for him.

We met many times afterward as brothers-in-struggle and spoke together in the community and on campus at Black Power gatherings and conferences, including at UC Berkeley in '66; at Howard University in '68; several times at the African American Cultural Center (Us), Los Angeles; and finally, at a San Diego Million Man March/Day of Absence Local Organizing Committee Reunion, August 1997. It was the last time we saw each other, although we talked on the phone and exchanged messages, and Us raised

money for his medical fund as he fought with his characteristic courage a cancer which eventually took his life.

Our personal and organizational respect for him was based on all the valuable work he did in the Black Liberation Movement on a world scale, and because we found common ground on many points of philosophy and struggle. It was also because of the mutually respectful and principled position he took toward us, recognizing the importance of our contribution and role in the Black Liberation Movement and rejecting the character assassination against us from within the Movement which had come from some of the same sources which had directed similar character assassination against him. He had rightfully warned that they were "dividing Black revolutionaries and causing divisions within the Black community which can only benefit our enemy."

Kwame Ture's life and work was defined and driven first and foremost by his profound commitment to a world-encompassing pan-Africanism grounded in several fundamental beliefs and principles. The first principle is unity—unity of the Continent, of the Diaspora and between the Continent and Diaspora. "Pan-Africanism is grounded in the belief that Africa is one," he stated, and "that all African peoples wherever we may be are one, and as Dr. Nkrumah says, 'belong to the same nation'."

He argued the necessity for Africa to reject capitalism as a way forward, and as his namesakes, Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure taught, draw from the rich resources of our own culture and build a modern economic system decidedly in the service of the masses of our people. Making such a system a defining feature and requirement of pan-Africanism, he asserted that "Pan-Africanism is grounded in socialism which has its roots in communalism," a system of shared work and wealth deeply embedded in African history and culture. Indeed, it was his contention that only a free and united socialist Africa can protect its people and resources from imperialist exploitation, provide for the needs and well-being of our

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people, promote democracy, and offer the basis for a mutually-beneficial relationship between Africans on the Continent and in the Diaspora.

Central also to Kwame's pan-Africanism was a deep and enduring commitment to African people themselves, a revolutionary love of the people expressed in concrete ways of work and struggle for and with them. He called for us to have "an undying love for our people" and thus for ourselves and each other as a part of what it means to be African, human and ultimately revolutionary. His call for this revolutionary love was at the same time a call to struggle to clear free space and empower ourselves to do so. Therefore, he says, "The society we seek to build among Black people, then, is not a capitalist one, but a society in which the spirit of community and humanistic love prevail." But he cautions, "We can build a community of love only where we have the ability and power to do so among Blacks."

In our love of the people, Kwame maintained, we are compelled to be revolutionary and struggle for total liberation on every level. And this can only be done by organizing them around their own emancipatory interests. Thus, he says, "the job of the revolutionary is, of course, to overthrow unjust systems and replace them with just systems (and) a revolutionary understands this can only be done by the masses of the people. So, the task of the revolutionary is to organize the masses of the people." For through this process of organization and struggle, they become self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation, recognizing themselves and their role in African and human history.

As a Pan-Africanist, Kwame was a fierce advocate for self-determination of Africa and Af-

rican people and argued for a revolutionary struggle rooted in our own culture and values, for "culture represents the values for which one fights." Even in his days as the most prominent Black Power leader, he defined Black Power in terms of community, culture and self-determination. He said, "It's a call for Black people to unite, to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for Black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations." He noted that "a lot of people have fought against their oppressors yet maintained the culture of the oppressor" and thus simply changed personnel. Therefore, he said, we must remember "if one is fighting for a revolution, one is talking about more than just changing governments and power and that is changing the value system."

**F**inally, Kwame Ture saw and organized his pan-African initiative through the All-African People's Revolutionary Party as a world-encompassing project that put Africans first, but found common ground with other Third World peoples and other progressive, oppressed and struggling peoples of the world. Like the great African leaders before him, he saw us in world-encompassing and world historical ways, posing our task, as Mary McLeod Bethune and Malcolm X, as a struggle not only to free ourselves, but also help remake the world in radical people-serving ways. And he always kept our interests at the heart and center of such a project. Thus, he said, "Our fight today is a fight for humanity. It is not just a fight to change systems; it is a fight for our very humanity, our freedom to live, to have the type of culture and language we desire, and to live and function and enjoy the wealth of the earth" along with other peoples of the world.

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