



**US, STEADFAST IN THE STORMS OF HISTORY:
56 YEARS AND 224 SEASONS OF STRUGGLE**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

WE OF THE ORGANIZATION US HAVE stayed standing and steadfast, weathered all kinds of storms and wrought various varieties of good for fifty-six years and 224 seasons, striving and struggling mightily to honor the African moral imperative and social mission to bring and sustain good in the world. I use the word “wrought” to indicate a kind of practice of excellence, a working and shaping of varieties of good as a conscious art and craft, a carefully considered focus and skillful effort.

For there had and has to be a substantial amount of thoughtfulness, imagination and skill, i.e., artistry and effort to survive and overcome the vicious suppression and machinations of the enemy oppressor through all forms of harassments, raids, imprisoning us on trumped up charges, driving us underground and in exile, provoking struggles with other groups, and waging an unrelenting campaign of character assassination against us in every venue possible. But it has also taken skill, courage and effort to keep the faith, hold the line and continue the struggle, regardless of changing seasons and circumstances, and to do this with a disciplined and dedicated mind, a joyful and loving heart, irreversibly committed to liberation of our people and good in the world.

Also, I use “wrought” to call to mind its origins in the process and practice of forging, hammering metals into shape with its associated realities of fire, furnace and constant testing. For Us is an organization founded and forged, grounded and shaped, tested and found firm and durable in the fires and furnace of the Black Freedom Movement, particularly its Black Power phase. Indeed, we came into existence as direct intellectual and political descendants of Haji Min. Malcolm X. It is Haji Malcolm, the Fire Prophet, who prophesied the coming setting of the cities on fire all over America that began with the Watts Revolt, August 1965, and represented the initial transformative fire and furnace of a new era and generation of struggle.

Indeed, many people emerged from the fires, furnace and ashes of the Watts Revolt transformed, no longer unconscious Negroes, but conscious Africans, no longer compromised Coloreds, but defiantly and beautifully Black. We named ourselves Us, which reaffirmed our commitment to our people first; our radical opposition to them, our oppressor; and our dedication to an African communitarian way of life. Within this arc of understanding, we fought against views and values that were vulgarly individualistic and stressed togetherness in principle and practice at every level and in every area of life. At the heart of this kind of thinking and practice was the Kawaida African concept of *shared good*. We argued then and contend now that the greatest good is shared good, that life itself is a shared good, that the earth is a shared good, and that so is love and sisterhood, brotherhood, friendship, marriage, parenthood, and all the other essential goods of life and living.

And of course, so is freedom a shared good, and justice, equality, equity, and knowledge and learning and health and housing. Likewise, so is righteous and relentless struggle to achieve and secure these other goods, not only for ourselves, but also for others, indeed for all the peoples of the world. We said then and reaffirm now that every discovery and declaration of a need and every recognition of a right is at the same time a call for commitment to achieve and secure these goods. And history and study have proved righteous and relentless struggle is indispensable in this practice and process.

Like many other groups, no longer here, we saw ourselves and the historical moment and the Black Liberation Movement as revolutionary, committed to the radical reconstruction of self, society and the world. It was one of our favorite chants during Simba sessions or Mwalimu classes, or our Soul Sessions. We declared with equal measures of defiance, dedication and daring that “We are the last revolutionaries in America. And if we fail to leave a legacy of revolution for our

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children, we have failed our mission and should be dismissed as unimportant.” And 56 years and 224 seasons later, we continue to honor that legacy in the way we live our lives, do our work, and wage our struggles for good and radical change in the world. Indeed, we said, “Revolution to us is the creation of an alternative,” a radical alternative to the established order of things on every level. Especially in the seven fundamental areas of culture: religion; history; social organization; economic organization; political organization; creative production, i.e., art, music, literature, etc.; and ethos.

Central to this creation of a radical alternative to the established order is what Haji Malcolm and we called a *cultural revolution*. It is a revolution that precedes and makes possible the political revolution and sustains it. It means, Haji Malcolm said, recapturing our history and culture or as Nana Amilcar Cabral said, returning to our own history and to the upward paths of our culture. This in turn for us means breaking the monopoly the oppressor has on so many of our people’s minds and eliminating the Eurocentric Viking voices in our heads. Now, our concept of culture and revolution is a far cry and totally different process and practice that is available in the small minds and bitter mouths of our opponents, or the propaganda of academic, media and internet sources of our oppressors and their agents, hirelings and handmaidens. We saw and see culture in more depthful and comprehensive ways. For Us, culture is the totality of thought, values and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself, and introduces itself to history and humanity. For us, everything is culture: our spirituality and ethics; our history as narrative and practice; our social, economic and political organization; our art, literature, music, dance; and our ethos, our collective

self-understanding achieved through our self-assertion in the other six areas and in the world.

Thus, we agreed with Haji Sekou Toure that revolution is a cultural act and with Nana Amilcar Cabral, following Haji Sekou, that the national liberation struggle is an expression of culture. Indeed, as we have written and said, “culture is the basis for revolution and recovery.” And recovery speaks to our need to recover ourselves from the ravages of oppression which sought to strip us of our culture, our dignity and very humanity. This is why we focused on culture as foundation and framework, why I developed the *Nguzo Saba* and *Kwanzaa* as an act of freedom, an instrument of freedom, and a celebration of freedom. It was both an enactment and an aspiration focusing on the dual aims of our struggle to be ourselves and free ourselves. The *Nguzo Saba*, then, were offered and engaged as practices central to a critical way forward to liberation. These essential ethical values and principles of life and living are: *Umoja* (Unity); *Kujichagulia* (Self-determination); *Ujima* (Collective Work and Responsibility); *Ujamaa* (Cooperative Economics); *Nia* (Purpose); *Kuumba* (Creativity); and *Imani* (Faith).

AS WE CELEBRATE *KUANZISHA* (*SIKU ya Kuanzisha*, The Day of Founding), the anniversary of 56 years and 224 seasons of work, service, struggle and institutional building, we as usual pay homage to our ancestors, advocates and all who made Us and this moment and milestone possible. And as we remember our youthful commitment to leave a legacy of radical transformative struggle, we realize the legacy we will eventually leave is not ours alone, but is part and parcel of the awesome legacy left by those before us, a legacy which we felt a profound obligation to grasp, safeguard and advance in our own unique and irreversible way. ▲

DR. MAULANA KARENGA, Professor and Chair of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach; Executive Director, African American Cultural Center (Us); Creator of *Kwanzaa*; and author of *Kwanzaa: A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture* and *Essays on Struggle: Position and Analysis*, www.AfricanAmericanCulturalCenter-LA.org; www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.