



**US, THE MOVEMENT AND MEMORY:
IN THE WINDS AND SCALES OF HISTORY**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THIS IS A SANKOFA REMEMBRANCE, AS PART of the month-long celebration of the founding of our organization *Us* which has played a major role in Black intellectual, cultural and political history since the 1960s. Min. Malcolm X taught that “history is a people’s memory” and we must keep our memories, if we are to avoid forgetting who we are, and losing touch with the sacred narrative of our coming into being, developing and becoming who we are and must be, as an African and sacred people.

It is, indeed, no easy thing or feather-light thought to raise up one day and dare enter, stand firm and hold fast in the harsh and heavy winds of history that rise and whirl around and within our long and difficult struggles for liberation here and everywhere in the world. And yet in the 60’s we of *Us* dared to do this. We believed with the men and women of liberation movements around the world that we could make a decisive difference, that a small, conscious, dedicated and disciplined group could help light a revolutionary spark that could set a whole forest on fire and clear the land for the sowing and cultivating of seeds of self-consciousness and struggle. It would be a self-conscious struggle of the masses that would soon flower, bear fruit, bring freedom and lay the basis for a new history of our people and humankind. Obviously, we did not achieve all we hoped and struggled for, but we did what we could with what we had. *And we continue struggling.* Moreover, although we as a people did indeed wage a struggle for liberation that expanded the realm of freedom and serves as a model of instruction and inspiration around the world, there is still so much undone and yet to do.

And so, during this, the 53rd anniversary of our organization, *Us*, as we review the records and remembrances of our weathering the winds and being weighed in the scales of history by friend and foe, allies and enemies, and by us, ourselves, I think of these things and others. I think first of the evening of September 7, 1965

when I called a group of men and women together at our house to found *Us* and discussed with them the historical juncture at which we stood and the obligation we owed our ancestors to continue their struggle and called for a *commitment to righteous and relentless struggle and unbudging Blackness.* And I think of those who have remained steadfast and those we lost along the way, and I, we, pay homage to them all for even the smallest effort to fulfill the sacred and ancestral assignment to bring good in the world.

We had met in the wake of the Watts Revolt and the martyrdom of Minister Malcolm X; so there was no need to explain the necessity and urgency of struggle. It was as clear as a cloudless sky and as unquestionable as the right to life and the need to love. It was a heady and uplifting time and imagining we could do almost anything, we defiantly called for revolution and declared “*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 is one of the main reasons we refuse to walk away from the battlefield until the war is won, refuse to declare prematurely the death and disappearance of racism, and to pretend a racial reconciliation that leaves White people still with a gruesome monopoly of wealth and power and people of color with essentially uncertain influence, treasuries of hope, and tragedies of history.

We committed ourselves to *cultural revolution, radical social change* and a *legacy of expansive good in the world* and established a four-part process of education, mobilization, organization and confrontation in order to bring about the radical transformation we imagined necessary and struggled for in ourselves, society and the world. We began with cultural and political education, for we reasoned that the battle we must wage first is the battle to win the hearts and minds of our people, and if we lose that battle, we can’t hope to win any other. But this position in no way diminished our concrete struggles in the midst of the masses including: vanguard

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roles in the Black Power, Black Studies, Black Student and Black Arts Movements; cooperative institutional building for affordable housing and health care; Black united fronts; cultural centers; independent schools and alternative community funding; and other advocacy and action in anti-Vietnam War initiatives, including draft resistance; prisoner support; voter registration; political organizing, training Black and Brown organizers, and building pan-African and Third World alliances.

And then came the crisis in 1969, with the fatal confrontations with the Black Panther Party and increased government and police suppression of our organization. Indeed, the two were linked, for it is mainly the government thru its Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that provoked and sustained the internecine struggle between us, even accounting for our regular organizational rivalry and disagreement over several issues including: our comparative vanguard status, the return and role of Whites in the Movement, the value of Black studies, the role of culture in the struggle and its relationship to armed struggle, "Custer stands" vs. guerilla war, the importance of Africa and pan-Africanism, African socialism vs. Marxism, and which road to revolution, etc.

COINTELPRO was designed to "disrupt, discredit, destroy and otherwise neutralize" all Black leadership and thru this the Movement. Our organization, Us, was on every FBI list the Panthers and other groups were on, and we were designated as armed, dangerous and revolutionary. And a fierce official and unofficial campaign of suppression was waged against Us thru armed attacks on our houses and headquarters; drive-by shootings; trumped-up charges against me and others and our political imprisonment; the driving of Us advocates in exile and underground; the intense and vicious character assassination which still continues. We still experi-

ence the distorted accounts of our history as persons and an organization that continue today in intellectually incompetent and ideologically driven books and articles, "wild west" websites and respectable sounding info sites pretending to be "free," but at our and others' expense, organizing and digitizing lies in a new and continuing intellectual and political war. But we refuse to be dispirited, diverted or defeated. For we are not summer recruits, but we are battle-tested and all-seasons soldiers, *Simba*, all-weather lions.

So, the war goes on and the central battle remains, as we said in the Sixties, the battle for the hearts and minds of our people. And the established order is waging war against persons, ideas, institutions, historical memory, and ultimately against Black people and Black self-determination. Thus, it's not just about dictating and determining what intellectual or leader we listen to or follow, but also about requirements to deny, denounce and distance oneself from Blackness; and reinterpret and play down the struggle-and-freedom-focused, justice-centered, and emancipatory thrust of our history.

[B]UT IF THERE IS ANY LEGACY OR UPLIFTING lessons left by the 60's, it is that we must resist these new forms of unfreedom and falsification of history and continue to wage struggles of liberation on every level of life. For these struggles are clearly the indispensable way we understand, free and fulfill ourselves and the aspirations of our ancestors. Indeed, these are struggles demanded by our inherent right to freedom, our natural need for justice and our irrepressible longing for a liberated life. And it is a struggle for and longed for life that yields ordinary and special spaces in which the human spirit is nurtured and constantly renewed, and we and other human beings know ourselves as sacred and at the center and subject of every day and hour of history we make.

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