



WOMEN, HOLDING UP HALF OF HEAVEN: SUSTAINING THE MOVEMENT AND THE WORLD

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AS WE CLOSE OUT THE MONTH OF MARCH, Black History Month II: Women Focus, I am drawn to two ancient teachings concerning the sacred and social significance of women in the world. And I want to use them as foundation and framework for paying homage to African women of the world, of the Movement and especially the women of Us. The first is found in the iconic art of ancient Nubia in which the royal couple, Queen Amanitore and King Natakamani, are depicted as holding up half of heaven. Divine beings hold up the other half. For with our ancestors, the Divine is always present, assisting humans in doing good in the world.

So, in reality, women and men hold up the half of heaven for which humans are responsible. In Kawaida, holding up heaven is not only keeping the world functioning, but also holding up our highest values so that the world can function in the most dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving ways. And it is in this sense of humans' awesome work that women share an equal role and responsibility. For it is in partnership as women and men that we hold up heaven, sustain the world, and give life and length to our liberation Movement.

A second ancient teaching I want to use to frame this homage to Black women is the sacred teaching of the *Odu Ifa* concerning the indispensable roles and responsibilities of women which were divinely assigned at the dawn of creation. It is written that the Creator chose all humans to bring good in the world and it is for this divine assignment that humans are called to be respected as *eniyán*, chosen ones, those chosen to bring good in the world. But Olodumare, the Creator, *Odu Ifa* teaches, also gave women the roles of being co-creators of the world, mothers of the world and sustainers of the world. They and men were sent into the world to make it good. And it teaches us that to accomplish this good world, we need wisdom, moral and practical wisdom, sacrifice, character, the love of doing good, especially for the vulnerable, and the *eagerness* and *struggle* to

increase good in the world and not let any good be lost.

In the midst of the rising tide of Black women leadership in the Movement against systemic racism and state sanctioned and vigilante violence, I pay special homage to Black women as a whole in their awesome striving, struggles, victories, and achievements. And I do this, not in any way to deny, diminish or dismiss the equally important role of Black men. For this would not only be wrong and unnecessary, but also it would clearly mimic and metastasize the cancerous conceptions of our oppressor. For us Black people, Africans at our best, we cannot embrace zero-sum conceptions of life. It is together as women and men that we hold up heaven and sustain the Movement and the world.

Again, in this important month of remembrance, celebration and honoring of women, I pay a special rightful and repeated homage to the women of our organization Us and all its formations, from its beginning days in the 1960s to its celebration of its 55th anniversary of work, service, struggle and institution-building, and unbudging Blackness. I pay homage to those who first answered my call to build a new vanguard organization which would serve seven overarching functions. It was designed and developed to be: a *house* of houses (a family of families), a *community* of values, a *revolutionary school*, a *Hekalu* (temple and sacred space), a *congregation* (a spiritual and ethical community), a *revolutionary party* and a core of a *nation-becoming*. And I pay rightful and repeated homage to the women of Us who continue to hold up half of heaven and sustain our organization, the Movement, and the world in various and critical ways.

From the beginning, we decided and declared we would be first and foremost a *House* of houses, a family of families, for we used house and family interchangeably. And the women of Us were at the center of this family building giving it concrete existence, literally bringing life into the organization, the community and the world in various ways, and nurturing and building

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our future in the intellectual and moral formation of our children and also helping to shape Kawaida into the radically transformative thought and practice it is.

We pay homage to the women of Us for co-building the *community* of values Us strove and strives still to be, based on and developed through the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles) representing the best of African thought and practice. Moreover, we pay rightful and repeated homage to the women of Us who were at the center of our efforts to build and be a *revolutionary school*, culturally grounded, politically conscious and morally committed to teach revolution through thought, speech and action.

Us also defined itself as a *hekalu* (temple) and *kutaniko* (congregation). We said our houses and Hekalu were sacred places where we teach and practice our highest ethical and spiritual values, values that protect, preserve and promote human life and the well-being of the world, and women were/are guardians, collaborators and guides in this thought and practice. We said our congregation was a community of faith, work, service and struggle committed to revolution, national liberation, and nation building.

To carry out these tasks, Us conceived and constructed itself as a *revolutionary party*, an organization dedicated to learning, teaching and practicing revolution. And the women of Us were at the heart and center of Us' education, mobilization, organization and confrontation in the interest of radical transformation of ourselves and society. And finally, Us saw and defined itself as a "*nation becoming*, the core and consciousness of a national community struggling to reconstruct itself in its own terms, image and interests." We, as women and men, understood and asserted ourselves as a vanguard organization in the process and practice of "laying an essentially cultural and institutional framework and foundation for an

emerging self-conscious nation of people, committed to the dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving views, values and practices of our ancestors.

Finally, we pay rightful homage the women of Us who literally saved the organization from the destruction the state had planned for us. When the FBI with its Cointelpro and the local police came to capture and kill us, the women of Us assumed the role of leadership to preserve the organization and the work they and the men of Us had done to build and sustain the organization and the Movement. When the state increased its suppressive strategies and practices, putting Us, the men, in captivity on trumped-up charges, driving us underground and forcing us into exile to escape capture, imprisonment and deadly raids, the women of Us emerged as visible leaders, expanding their administrative, security and public roles. And as Matamba (women warriors), they trained in the martial arts and weaponry in commitment to the practice of self-defense taught by Queen Nzingha Mbande and Min. Malcolm X. And they did this, as they self-consciously declared to, "carry on the revolutionary struggle in the absence of the men" and also when they returned. In a word, they said, it was a commitment to practice *Ujima*, collective work and responsibility to continue the liberation struggle til victory was won.

THEY HAD EARLIER BEGUN TO CHALLENGE and expand the concept and practice of their roles assigned in the early days of the organization. Now during the crisis, they insisted on the revolutionary practice of *Ujima*, raising the level of thought and practice to make revolution, national liberation and nation building a living reality, inclusive in its practice and promise, and truly prefiguring the good world we, together in love and struggle, dared to imagine and achieve.▲

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