



**RADICALLY BEING OURSELVES AND FREEING OURSELVES:
A KAWAIDA CONCEPTION OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-14-23. p. C-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

IN THIS MONTH OF OUR FOUNDING 58 YEARS or 232 seasons ago, it is important to reaffirm that our organization, Us, from its inception, has understood itself as a revolutionary organization, more specifically a revolutionary cultural nationalist organization. This means we are irreversibly committed to grounding ourselves in our own culture as foundation and framework for how we understand and assert ourselves in the world; building and sustaining community; radically reordering oppressive relations of life and power; and striving mightily to bring, sustain and increase an inclusive good in and for the world. In other words, we are unalterably committed in sensibilities, thought and practice to *cultural revolution within* and *political revolution without*, directed toward a radical transformation of self, society and the world. It is this rightful attentiveness to cultural revolution, freeing the hearts and minds of the people, as well as freeing their bodies and equalizing relations of power that forms one of the critical distinctions between Us and other self-defined revolutionary groups which have historically argued culture is not a proper focus, only power.

Indeed, we have argued since the Sixties that the first and continuous struggle we wage is the cultural struggle to win the hearts and minds of our people, Black people, African people and that if we lose this critical struggle, we can't hope to win the political struggle. For as we have continuously taught, "Culture provides the basis for revolution and recovery". Here we stress that the struggles to recover our history, our culture, our freedom and ultimately ourselves are interrelated and inseparable. Thus, again, we insist on a

dual struggle: the struggle to be ourselves and to be free ourselves, and culture is the anchor and "an indispensable weapon in the freedom struggle", as Haji Malcolm taught, and it is for Us, the foundation and framework for all we do.

Our task then, as we conceived it, was two-fold: to wage simultaneously the cultural and political struggle, both the cultural revolution and the political revolution. Now the question of cultural revolution as the natural and greatly needed interrelated part of the overall liberation struggle calls for sources and sites for radical internal and external self-transformation and social transformation. To create this context, we defined and developed our organization in fundamental ways which speak to our essential intellectual and practical interests and initiatives, building a multi-dimensional structure which has seven main institutional forms and functions. And in joining Us in the 60's, we took an oath, the *kiapo*, which committed us to this expansive conception of our organization saying, "For me Us shall be house and community, revolutionary school, *hekalu* and congregation, a revolutionary party and a nation becoming, all in one".

We defined ourselves, first as a *House*, a family, indeed the House of Houses. Us as House stresses both relationships and structure and in the African sense of the word is a network of relationships, tradition and lineage, in a word, an extended family or again, a "family of families". For us, the family is a fundamental unit not only of life, but also an equally indispensable unit of reciprocal caring, cultural transmission and resistance, and thus of relationship building and views, val-

**RADICALLY BEING OURSELVES AND FREEING OURSELVES:
A KAWAIDA CONCEPTION OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-14-23. p. C-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

ues and practices in struggle that prefigure and make possible the new persons and people, society and world we want and struggle for.

Secondly, Us is conceived as a *community*, a larger realm of reciprocity of giving and receiving, a place where we share common views and values based on and developed through the *Nguzo Saba*. A community is defined here as a relational concept and context in which people self-consciously share a common vision and common views and values, and practices rooted in and rising out of those shared views and values, as distinct from a neighborhood which is a geographical concept not necessarily associated with similar issues. The central source of this commonality of vision and values are for Us the *Nguzo Saba* (The Seven Principles) and Kawaïda philosophy in which they are rooted.

Us also conceived itself as a *revolutionary school*, a context where advocates learn, teach and develop theory and practice based on tradition and reason, learning from the major revolutionary struggles and literature in the African and larger world. Also, we have developed a new liberated and liberating language and logic, a body of teachers and students dedicated to ongoing rigorous research, study and use of ancient African and modern African paradigms of human excellence and human achievement, and grounded in the art and ethics of revolutionary struggle in the interest of African and human good and the well-being of the world.

In addition, Us defined itself as a *Hekalu* (temple) and a *congregation*, sacred gathering together. As a *Hekalu*, Us carries

within its collective presence and in the places it occupies, sacred space where advocates develop and practice the higher spiritual and ethical values which promote and preserve human life and development and the well-being of the world, especially those found in our sacred texts, the *Husia* and *Odu Ifa*. And because Us is a socially conscious congregation and sacred community, it is also committed to two fundamental political projects: revolution and nation building. Thus, it defined itself in the 60s as a congregation “committed to revolution and to building and development of a nation”.

To carry out the twin tasks of revolution and nation building, Us also conceived and constructed itself as a *revolutionary party*, an organization dedicated to learning, teaching, practicing and participating in revolution, i.e., deep and thorough-going change in achieving the liberation of our people culturally and politically. The tasks posed and accepted for the revolutionary party were “the struggle to: (a) transfer power; b) transfer beliefs; and c) transfer technology to its people”, working with the people so that they sense, believe deeply in and become profoundly committed to their own capacity and responsibility for their own liberation. As we said and say, “We are revolutionists. We believe in change. We believe in being realistic, but as for reality, we have come to change it”.

Finally, Us defined itself as a *nation becoming*, the core and consciousness of a national community struggling to be itself and free itself. We define the nation-becoming as “a group of people who become a community of communities, . . . the chief context to which we owe our existence, our most meaningful reference for identity, pur-

**RADICALLY BEING OURSELVES AND FREEING OURSELVES:
A KAWAIDA CONCEPTION OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 09-14-23. p. C-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

pose and direction”. Us understands itself as a vanguard organization in this process laying an essentially cultural and institutional framework and foundation for an emerging self-conscious nation of people.

US’ CONCEPTION OF NATION AND NATION-building, is expressed in this statement written during the Black Power phase of the Black Freedom Movement: “We want a body of committed people, men,

women and children, capable not only of physical courage, but of mental and moral expansiveness, a revolutionary solidarity, capable of confronting and dealing successfully with problems on various levels in the struggle, a nation, conscious of and committed to its role and responsibility in terms of human history, actively and emotionally associated with the continuous evolution of (hu)mankind”.▲

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 *Introduction to Black Studies*, 4th Edition, www.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org; www.MaulanaKarenga.org.