



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

The Black Scholar Vol. 4 No. 2

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OVERTURNING OURSELVES: FROM MYSTIFICATION TO MEANINGFUL STRUGGLE

READ INTO REVOLUTION what you will, it is essentially a question of enduring and expanding, of transforming discontent into organized and effective action, defying and defeating the enemy and building alternative solidarities that assure the defense of our interests and the development of our potential. And regardless of what was thought or hoped, prayed for or promised, revolution and liberation will not be handed to us by history; nor can it be sloganized, talked or televised into existence. Neither can we, disoriented by frustration or imagined defeat allow ourselves the luxury and lethargy of withdrawal. Our commitment must be continuous; our moral fiber and internal strength great enough to sustain us in our struggle to turn sound and fury into substance and fulfillment. This is an age of quick transition and profound transformation, a time like no other in terms of the depth and dimension of peoples aspirations and demands. It is a time of turmoil, tumult and overturning.

"Countries want independence, nations want liberation, and the people want revolution." But it is not enough to want these things, one must will them and work to make them into a reality.

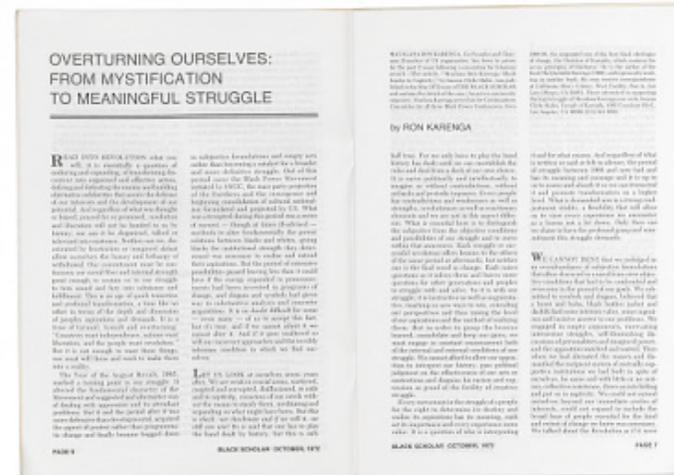
The Year of the August Revolt, 1965, marked a turning point in our struggle. It altered the fundamental character of the Movement and suggested an alternative way of dealing with oppression and its attendant problems. But it and the period after it was more defensive than developmental, acquired the aspect of protest rather than programmatic change and finally became bogged down in subjective formulations and empty acts rather than becoming a catalyst for a broader and more definitive struggle. Out of this period came the Black Power Movement initiated by SNCC, the mass party projection of the Panthers and the resurgence and beginning consolidation of cultural nationalism formulated and projected by US. What was attempted during this period was a series of earnest - though at times ill-advised - methods to alter fundamentally the power relations between blacks and whites, giving blacks the institutional strength they determined was necessary to realize and extend their aspirations. But the period of extensive possibilities passed leaving less than it could have if the energy expended in pronouncements had been invested in programs of change, and slogans and symbols had given way to substantive analysis and concrete acquisitions. It is no doubt difficult for some - even many - of us to accept this fact, but it's true, and if we cannot admit it we cannot alter it. And if it goes unaltered so will our incorrect approaches and the terribly inhuman condition in which we find ourselves.

LET US LOOK at ourselves seven years after. We are weak in crucial areas, scattered, coopted and corrupted, disillusioned, in exile and in captivity, conscious of our needs without the means to satisfy them, meditating and expanding on what might have been. But this is check, not checkmate and if we will it, we can still win! Its is [It is] said that one has to play the hand dealt by history, but this is only

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MAULANA RON KARENGA, Co-Founder and Chairman Emeritus of US organization, has been in prison for the past 2 years following a conviction for felonious assault. (The article, "Maulana Ron Karenga: Black Leader in Captivity," by Imamu Clyde Halisi, was published in the May 1972 issue of THE BLACK SCHOLAR and contains the details of



the case.) An active community organizer, Maulana Karenga served on the Continuations Committee for all three Black Power Conferences, from 1966-1968. He originated one of the first black ideologies of change, the Doctrine of Kawaida, which contains the seven principles of blackness. He is the author of the book *The Quotable Karenga* (1966), and is presently working on another book. He may receive correspondence at California Men's Colony, West Facility, Box A, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Those interested in supporting the legal struggle of Maulana Karenga may write Imam Clyde Halisi, Temple of Kawaida, 4302 Crenshaw Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90008 (213)681-8088.

by RON KARENGA

half true. For we only have to play the hand history has dealt until we can reestablish the rules and deal from a deck of our own choice. It is naive politically and intellectually to imagine us without contradictions, without setbacks and periodic impasses. Every people has contradictions and weaknesses as well as strengths, revolutionary as well as reactionary elements and we are not in this aspect different. What is essential here is to distinguish the subjective from the objective conditions and possibilities of our struggle and to move within that awareness. Each struggle or successful revolution offers lessons to the others of the same period or afterwards, but neither one is the final word in change. Each raises questions as it solves them and leaves more questions for other generations and peoples to struggle with and solve. So it is with our struggle; it is instructive as well as augmentative, teaching us new ways to win, extending our perspectives and thus raising the level of our aspirations and the method of realizing them. But in order to grasp the lessons learned, consolidate and keep our gains, we must engage in constant reassessment both of the internal and external conditions of our struggle. We cannot afford to allow our opposition to interpret our history, pass political judgment on the effectiveness of our acts or contentions and disguise his racism and repression as proof of the futility of creative struggle. Every movement in the struggle of a people from the right to determine its destiny and realize its aspirations has its meaning, each act its importance and every experience some value. It is a question of who is interpreting it and for what reason. And regardless of what is written or said or felt in silence, the period of struggle between 1965 and now had and has its meaning and message and it is up to us to assess and absorb it so we can transcend it and promote transformation on a higher level. What is demanded now is a stronger readjustment vitality, a flexibility that will allow us to view every experience we encounter as a lesson not a let down. Only then can we claim to have the profound grasp and commitment this struggle demands.

WE CANNOT DENY that we indulged in an overabundance of subjective formulations that often obscured or erased from view objective conditions that had to be confronted and overcome in the pursuit of our goals. We submitted to symbols and slogans, believed that a beret and buba, black leather jacket and dashiki had some intrinsic value, some ingenious and incisive answer to our problems. We engaged in empty arguments, enervating internecine struggles, self-diminishing discussions of personalities and imagined power, and the opposition watched and waited. Then when we had alienated the masses and dismantled the incipient system of mutually supportive institutions we had built in spite of ourselves, he came and with little or no serious, collective resistance, drove us into hiding and put us in captivity. We could not extend ourselves beyond our immediate circles of interests, could not expand to include the broad base of people

essential for the kind and extent of change we knew was necessary. We talked about the Revolution as if it were

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