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# PAN-AFRICAN CULTURAL MOVEMENTS: FROM BARAKA TO KARENGA

By  
Nagueyalti Warren\*

Pan-Africanism as a cultural and intellectual movement for African-American liberation has a long history. Frequently thought of as a 20th century movement conceived and developed by Africans living outside Africa, Pan-Africanism was, in fact, frequently expressed in Africa where it materialized as armed resistance to slavery and colonialism. W.E.B. Du Bois, often credited as being the father of Pan-Africanism, defined it as the intellectual understanding and cooperation among all groups of African descent in order to bring about the emancipation of black peoples. The first Pan-African Congress was not the idea of Du Bois, however. A West Indian lawyer, H. Sylvester Williams, who practiced in England and associated with Africans and African-Americans there, called a distinguished group of blacks from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean to meet in Europe in 1900 to discuss the problems of colonialism and racial discrimination. While the idea of Pan-Africanism was the brainchild of Williams, he died in 1911, and it was Du Bois who introduced the word "Pan-Africanism" into currency, promoted the concept and nurtured it to maturity.<sup>1</sup>

This brand of Pan-Africanism was intellectual and political, but unlike the Garvey Movement, sought no expatriation of blacks to Africa. While reviewing the roots of Du Bois's intellectual Pan-Africanism, this study demonstrates how the intellectual movement becomes the cultural and literary movements and focuses finally on Imamu Baraka's Black Arts Movement and Maulana Karenga's Kwanzaa, as Pan-African expressions of the continuing quest for African-American liberation.

The cultural, literary, and philosophical aspects of Pan-Africanism are greatly influenced by the political milieu that often precedes and sometimes enshrouds the cultural movements. When one mentions Pan-Africanism, one often thinks only of its political dimensions. Pan-Africanism in African-American letters is not frequently focused upon. However, literary vestiges of Pan-Africanism in America can be traced back to 1859 when Martin R. Delaney published *Blake, or the Huts of America*. The political issues at the time were the abolition of slavery and the emigration of black people to Africa. In his novel, Delaney deals with the black experience from an African perspective. He treats the American experience tangentially viewing African-Americans as Africans torn from their homeland suffering on alien soil.

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It appears that Delaney is, at least in the literary tradition, the first to promote the concept of Pan-Africanism in African-American letters. Delaney's position is both cultural and political, and like Garvey's it seeks emigration for blacks. He embraces a kind of literal Pan-Africanism. However, Delaney and the cultural movement he represents are almost swallowed up in the literary history produced by the majority of African-American writers influenced and dominated by the tradition begun with the publication of William Wells Brown's *Clotel: Or the President's Daughter* (1853). *Clotel*, Addison Gayle observes, "could have been written by any number of the Plantation School of writers."<sup>2</sup> Following in this tradition were J. McHenry Jones, *Hearts of Gold* (1898), Pauline Hopkins *Contending Forces* (1900), and Paul Laurence Dunbar *The Uncalled* (1901); all embraced the idea of assimilation and some argued the only difference between black and white Americans was the accident of color;<sup>3</sup> an argument which can be traced back to the poetry of Jupiter Hammon (1760) and Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784). Delaney's separatism, therefore, stands in stark opposition to the integrationist tradition in African-American literature.

Delaney, like the most effective Pan-Africanist leaders to succeed him, combined art with politics and produced both fact and fiction. In the 1852 publication, *The Condition, Education, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered*, Delaney seeks the redemption of Africans and Africa.<sup>4</sup> Delaney states a radical Pan-Africanist position when he writes:

No people . . . can ever attain to greatness who lose their identity. We shall ever cherish our identity of origin and race, as preferable in our estimation, to any other people.<sup>5</sup>

The next surge of Pan-Africanist ideology is surrounded by the horrors of Reconstruction and post Reconstruction in America. W.E.B. Du Bois, while not urging the expatriation of black people to Africa, embraced and propagated a spiritual and intellectual Pan-Africanist position; a position quite radical at the turn of the century when he declared the problem of the 20th century to be the problem of the color line. Du Bois articulates the uniqueness of his position in the following statement:

Among Negroes of my generation there was little inherited knowledge about Africa. . . but much distaste.<sup>6</sup>

It is little wonder there was much distaste. Africans were portrayed as savage, grotesque, subhuman creatures incapable of language, art or culture. Characteristic "scholarship" regarding Africa is Hegel's introduction to *Philosophy of History*. He wrote:

Africa proper, as far as history goes back, has remained for all purposes of connection with the rest of the world, shut up. It is the gold land compressed within itself, the land of childhood which lying beyond the days of self-conscious history is undeveloped in the dark mantel of night. The Negro. . . exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality, all that we call feeling, if we would comprehend him. We leave Africa never to mention it again for it has no historical part of the world. It has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it, that is in its Northern part, belongs to the Asiatic or European world. This history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning.<sup>7</sup>

Africans in the diaspora, as well as those in Africa, cringed under the anathema heaped upon them and sought Pan-Africanism as a corrective.

Du Bois, among the 35 African-Americans who attended the first Pan-African Congress in 1900, was elected vice-president of the newly formed organization.<sup>8</sup> He succeeded in organizing a series of five congresses. His position on Pan-Africanism is clearly articulated in the following statement:

Let us realize that we are Americans, that we were brought here with the earliest settlers, and that the very sort of civilization from which we came made the complete adoption of western modes and customs imperative if we were to survive. There is nothing so indigenous, so completely 'made in America' as we. It is absurd to talk of a return to Africa, merely because that was our home 300 years ago, as it would be to expect the members of the Caucasian race to return to the fastness of the Caucasus Mountains from which, it is reputed, they sprang.<sup>9</sup>

Here Du Bois deviates from Delaney and gives birth to what most contemporary cultural and literary movements favor—an intellectual Pan-Africanism.

Marcus Mosia Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the African Communities League, and the newspaper *Negro World* advocated the return of black people to their African homeland. Garvey challenged Du Bois's leadership and laughed at his theoretical concept of Pan-Africanism. Garvey has often been described as possessing the best attributes of both Booker Washington and Du Bois. He had Du Bois's radical spirit and Washington's rapport with the common person. Consequently, he was extraordinarily popular.

The movements and currents which follow the torrent of emotional appeal caused by Garvey's movement have somewhat paradoxically supported Du Bois's position but have been lacking in mass appeal. Garvey's plan appealed to the masses because it addressed their concrete needs, offering a way out of poverty and showing them how to leave the land of racism, violence and deceit. Despite Du Bois's radicalism, he represented the intellectual elite, the talented tenth if you will, and even his extremely self-sacrificing work with the NAACP and *The Crisis* did not seem especially relevant to the black masses. Their needs were material and victories in the high courts were too far removed for most to recognize their value or any practical benefits.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Garvey and his followers branded the NAACP an elite group of middle class blacks supported by liberal Northern whites. Interestingly, Du Bois agreed with Garvey's major aims. But he thought and said that Garvey was an idealist with an unworkable pipe dream. Du Bois also said Garvey's plan was "bombastic, wasteful, illogical and ineffective and almost illegal."<sup>11</sup> He criticized Garvey on the issue of social equality saying Garvey had no right to willingly accept the position that the United States belonged to white people. Du Bois urged African-Americans to fight for equality in American society. The debate between Garvey and Du Bois ended when Garvey was suddenly deported from the United States for mail fraud. Many Garveites blamed Du Bois and the NAACP for the deportation.

The literary surge of the 1920s was profoundly influenced by the work of Du Bois and the effects of the Garvey movement.

Du Bois and Garvey were essentially political men, however great their interest in the arts, with similar aims but different approaches. Du Bois's aesthetic was essentially elitist, or at least perceived to be. Garvey's was grassroots.

Du Bois's own literary efforts made plain his commitment to art as a weapon. Both of his novels, *The Quest for a Silver Fleece* (1911) and *Dark Princess* 1928, articulated the problems of racism and imperialism. Yet the novel itself is, and was particularly so when he used it, a genre not aimed toward the masses. Nevertheless, the central point here is that for Du Bois, unlike others who viewed themselves essentially as artists, there was no contradiction between art and politics. In fact, he declared: "All art is propaganda. . . . I do not care a damn, for any art that is not used for propaganda."<sup>12</sup> This idea becomes a crucial element in contemporary Pan-African cultural movements.

For Garvey, art also had to serve a political function. Garvey articulated a philosophy that became known as the Black Aesthetic during the 1960s. In "African Fundamentalism," Garvey wrote: "We must inspire a literature and promulgate a doctrine of our own, without any apologies to the powers that be. The right is ours and God's. Let contrary sentiment and cross opinions go to the winds."<sup>13</sup> Certainly, Langston Hughes must have, in some way, been influenced by Garvey when he made his own declaration in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" of the artist's independence from shame and fear of the white audience.

Essentially, both Garvey and Du Bois were precursors for the Pan-African cultural movement of the latter decades. *The Crisis* and *Negro World* illustrate the diversity between the two leaders. *The Crisis* tended to promote a "best foot forward" approach to literature and culture while the *Negro World* tended toward a "tell-it-like-it-is" stance. The nuances between Du Bois and Garvey are finely drawn. Tony Martin cogently argues, "it was one thing to write about ordinary folk, but quite another to hold their foibles up to ridicule in the name of realism."<sup>14</sup> Garvey and Du Bois were in complete agreement when Garvey objected to the bringing out and the showing up of the worst traits of black people.

The Harlem Renaissance, in spite of its elite posturing and its white patrons, and because of the influences of Du Bois and Garvey, revived the spirit of Delaney while it sought a spiritual and cultural identity with Africa. The Renaissance sought to make art the catalyst for change. Thus, the Harlem Renaissance fostered a consciousness and artistic purpose which flourished internationally, culminating in the Negritude Movement and influencing contemporary Black Arts and cultural movements.

While the Renaissance was needed to improve the image of black people for black people themselves, critics were quick to claim that if black literary movements were to achieve significance they must move beyond the infantile stage, that of conferring virtue on black people simply because whites had abused them. Frantz Fanon's comments on this point are *mots juste*, pointing out that "those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested."<sup>15</sup> To claim an historical past and affirm a national culture is important to the psycho-affective equilibrium of a people.

Following the flourishing of Black Consciousness and racial pride of the Renaissance, a similar Pan-African literary movement appeared in France. Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas, and Aime Césaire comprise the triumvirate of the Negritude Movement. Césaire coined the term in his poem *Return to my Native Land* (1939).

Leon Damas was the first to publish poetry demonstrating Negritude. He published in *Esprit* as early as 1934. In 1937 his collection of poetry, *Pigments*, championed the theory. *Pigments* was banned by the French government who feared an uprising in the colonies. His poem *S.O.S.*, precursor to Baraka's poem of the same title, reveals his political consciousness. In another poem, "Sell Out" dedicated to Aimé Césaire, Damas reveals his cultural consciousness saying:

I feel ridiculous  
in their shoes  
their dinner jackets  
their starched shirts  
and detachable collars. . .

The poem goes on to decry the cultural displacement of the transplanted African saying, "I feel ridiculous among them/ like an accomplice/ like a pimp/ like a murderer among them/ my hands hideously red/ with the blood of their/ ci-vi-li-zation."<sup>16</sup> The philosophy of his poetry is lucid. The irony of Negritude and other Pan-Africanist cultural movements is this: the lacunae between theory and practice. Scrutiny of the rhetoric and the practice reveals the root of the problem. At its core, the issue is one of double consciousness and the crisis of the "Negro intellectualism."

Senghor defined Negritude as the essence of black culture. He stated: In order to establish an effective revolution, our revolution, we first had to divest ourselves of our borrowed attire—that of assimilation—assert our being, that is to say our negritude."<sup>17</sup> But while Negritude extols the virtue of black culture, it exhibits a curious love-hate relationship with white culture. Exposure to Western culture produces glaring inconsistencies between rhetoric and reality.

The period of the 1960s introduced a plethora of terms, i.e., cultural nationalism, Black Arts Movement, Black Aesthetic, which necessitate definition. S. E. Anderson claims that revolutionary black nationalism is Pan-Africanism. Ron Karenga asks which road, nationalism, Pan-Africanism, or socialism? During the turbulent sixties, the concept of Pan-Africanism was broadly defined. For the purpose of this essay, Pan-Africanism is any ideology that recognizes the brotherhood and sisterhood of black people in Africa and the diaspora. Pan-Africanism is internationalist, socialist and anti-imperialist. Pan-Africanism embraces the common cultural heritage of black people. The movements of the sixties and onward, for the most part, do not embrace expatriation. However, there have been contemporary Back-to-Africa movements.<sup>18</sup>

The Black Arts Movement articulated by Amiri Baraka was born during the political upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements spawned a cultural and literary movement without precedent. This movement, unlike the Harlem Renaissance, drew support from the masses. Huge numbers of people attended poetry readings, came to street theaters and attended

art workshops. According to Tony Martin, poetry albums during this period rivalled soul music, appearing on the best seller's lists.<sup>19</sup> Black publishing houses appeared in Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and white publishers rushed to publish almost anything that was black. During this period the heroes of the past were rediscovered and demands for Black Studies Programs were met on college and university campuses nation wide. On the West coast the Black Panthers and the US organization were radical groups armed to give birth to revolution. On the East coast Malcolm X's cry, "By any means necessary," unleashed the pent-up frustration of the masses on the street. There were summers of inner-city riots. There were surging numbers of people who joined the Nation of Islam and others who developed the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church establishing branches in Atlanta, Detroit, and as far west as Texas.

Beginning in 1956 the world watched Africa throw off the shackles of imperialism and colonialism. Sudan won independence in 1956, followed by Ghana in 1957, Nigeria and the Congo in 1960, Sierra Leone in 1961, Algeria, 1962; Kenya, 1963; Zambia, 1964; Gambia, 1965; and on into the 1970s liberation movements continued to emerge victorious. Africa suddenly became for millions of African-Americans a source of pride, emerging from the shroud of myth, folklore and stigma described by Du Bois earlier in the century. It is within this context that Baraka and Karenga emerge as leaders of Pan-African cultural movements.

Imamu Baraka is, above all else, an artist— a prolific playwright and poet. His position on African-American liberation has varied and the contradictions have been many. Perhaps the Pan-African phase that produced the Black Arts Movement is his most consistent.

Art as expressed in the Black Arts Movement is part and parcel of the revolution. Art, therefore, is not for art's sake; it is political, polemic, and didactic. Accordingly, Baraka uses black art to dramatize positive values. Having pushed beyond his own days of bohemianism, Baraka declares that "the submersion into white would be coalitions, [is] actually the reconstitution of Black neo-bohemianism. . .".<sup>20</sup>

Baraka's assessment of black literature points out the slavish imitation and empty rhetoric of too many black writers and artists. He suggests that the black literati attend political education classes or be dismissed from the struggle as enemy sympathizers.<sup>21</sup> The Black Arts Movement, as Baraka conceived it, included the cultural principles articulated by Ron Karenga. Baraka acknowledges his debt to Karenga. He, however, adds an artistic element that Karenga cannot supply.

Africa is used in Baraka's theory of Black Art to demonstrate how revolutionary African governments like Tanzania's and Guinea's utilize the arts to support the revolutionary message. Recognizing the fundamental differences between the African and the African-American experiences, Baraka says the major struggle in the United States is to establish an identity separate from white Americans. Unlike Negritude and the Harlem Renaissance movements, Black Art focuses on the present situation and upon those values that are necessary in order to consolidate a revolutionary identity and consciousness. Africa is used as a point of reference for understanding present day problems. Baraka notes that "even in Africa where Africans have even more reason to possess the separate identity as a group with completely different values from their colonizers, the job of actually separating the

minds and spirits of many of the Africans from the colonizers has been, and remains, a formidable one."<sup>22</sup> The African-American situation, he concludes, is even more difficult.

Like his progenitors, eclectic in his approach, Baraka involves himself in many segments of the movement, founding the Black Community Development and Defense Organization (BCD), working with the Congress of Afrikan Peoples, as well as propagating Karenga's Kawaidea doctrine. Baraka was also instrumental in founding the Pan-African Party which was conceived as a world African party. The Party's purpose was to provide African people, wherever they were, with identity, purpose, and direction. The theoretical basis of the party reveals Baraka's position regarding Pan-Africanism. He uses nationalism and Pan-Africanism interchangeably; yet in summarizing the ideology it is clear that he is referring to Pan-Africanism: Regarding Back to Africa or repatriation, Baraka exclaims that people need to "understand that Black people, circa 1970, ain't going anywhere."<sup>23</sup> Baraka speaks of separating the mind and concludes that "Back to Africa" is the realization that we are an African people. His analysis is neither new or revolutionary but carries on the intellectual tradition of Du Bois.

Even though the rhetoric of the movement stated there is no revolution without the people, like the literary and intellectual movements of the past, the movement fails to embrace the black mass. Baraka is, after all, a college educated intellectual, turned bohemian, turned black cultural nationalist, turned Marxist. True, he writes to the people and perhaps for the people, yet, he is not one of the people, and the people recognize his alienation. Too often following his didactic approach to telling black people what blackness is, he demonstrates his lack of connectedness with the people by continually asking: "Can you understand?" Lloyd Brown recognizes this tendency and concludes that Baraka's writing on Black Art suffers from "intellectual anemia."<sup>24</sup>

The problem with Baraka, and other artist/intellectuals like him, is they are caught still in the ironies and paradoxes of the diaspora which causes a rupture within black indigenous history and way of life. The fact that the African writer is known abroad, unknown in the village, the West Indian writer, known in Europe and unknown in the islands, and the African-American writer known in intellectual circles and unknown in the ghetto, continues to produce a dichotomy. In America, particularly during the Black Arts Movement, the schism is between the urban black experience and the rural. Neither Baraka nor Karenga pay any attention to the black rural experience. Baraka offers, as Brown points out, Newark, New Jersey, which he calls "New Ark", as a model for a new black nation.<sup>25</sup>

Fanon's schema is most helpful in explaining the alienation of the artist from the people. According to Fanon, there are three phases in the development of the artist:

1. the period of unqualified assimilation including the adoption of the language, forms, subject matter of Europeans; the artists become surrealists, symbolists, modernists, and are obviously alienated from the people.
2. the period of awakening (Baraka's Pan-Africanist phase); here the artist decides to remember who she or he is. But she or he is an intellectual and is therefore not part of the people. Thus the writer grasps for bygone days of childhood, or uses old legends and reinterprets them in light of a borrowed aesthetic and *Weltanschauung* discovered under foreign skies.



This movement toward the past is away from actual events. Much of the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement writing suffers from these escapist characteristics.

3. In the fighting phase, the artist, after trying to get lost in the people, will shake the people, becoming the awakener, the harbinger of revolution.

Either way the writer is out of step with the audience by being behind it or ahead of it. The cultural movements of the 1960s tended to be ahead of the mass audience calling for revolution. When violence erupted in Newark, Baraka, thinking the revolution had begun, rejoiced. Black men on the street were moved to action as a result of his consciousness raising and politicizing through his black art. To a small degree this is not untrue. The rhetoric of the artist, Malcolm X, and the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement and African liberation movements all contributed to the revolutionary spirit of the 1960s.

The artist was ahead of the people regarding revolution and urging them to rise to action, but the people's action failed to produce revolution. Ironically, Baraka's call to "rise, create, destroy," ended only in a rise. Following the rebellions, Baraka felt that the failure of the Black Arts Movement was based on Pan-Africanist idealism. Rather than follow this idealism to its dead end, Baraka opted to change philosophies. His failure to articulate clearly the contradictions and reversals in his intellectual development left him open to charges of political opportunism. Rarely an original thinker, Baraka is better known for popularizing the ideas of others, whether it be Malcolm X or Ron Karenga. During the 1960s this was known as consciousness-raising. But dogmatically spouting the concepts of Malcolm, Karenga, or N-khrumah was quite different from trying to popularize the ideas of Mao Tse Tung. Many of Baraka's followers felt betrayed and ceased to listen to him.

Baraka reasoned that the revolution failed because it was not conceived in scientific terms. Writing in 1977, ten years after the Newark uprising, he said, "In the 1960s, rebellion did not become revolution because there was no genuine communist party. . . ." <sup>26</sup> But these are not the "sacred words" promised in his Black Art phase when he wrote:

we labor/to make our getaway, into  
The ancient image, into a new  
correspondence with ourselves  
and our black family. We need magic  
and we need the spells, to raise up  
return, destroy, and create. What will be  
the sacred words?<sup>27</sup>

Baraka's followers were led to believe that the sacred words would be black not Chinese.

African-American liberation movements were expressed in this nation's ghettos in the form of riots. For the black middle class and veteran civil rights workers, riots were the undoing of years of hard work. Many feared white backlash. Whereas Baraka's movement dominated the East coast, Maulana (master teacher) Ron Karenga, founder of the US organization, was very powerful in Los Angeles. Unlike Baraka, Karenga is not an artist but a highly sophisticated political theorist. At the time of the 1965 Watts riots, Karenga began what appeared to be a black liberation

organization known as US. The members of the US Organization were street-wise youth, many of whom were delinquents. According to one historian, Karenga had trained criminals and black activists to gain entrance into the community and radical circles to carry out a policy of counter-insurgency in the name of cultural nationalism. "Karenga was not only the chief street agent of the government, but he was the chief agent of the Black middle-class whose interest had been damaged by the riot and the emergence of Black revolutionaries."<sup>28</sup>

Instead of freedom by any means necessary, Karenga introduced a construct of Pan-African values articulated in his doctrine of Kawaïda, a system to promote self-awareness and build political consciousness through adherence to a black value system. There are seven fundamental principles of the system which are contained in the *Nguzo Saba*. The principles which must be memorized are stated in Kiswahili, chosen by Karenga because of its non-tribal nature, although he disregards its connections with Arab slavery. These principles are: Umoja (unity); Kujichagulia (self-determination); Ujima (collective work and responsibility); Ujamaa (cooperative economics); Nia (purpose); Kuumba (creativity); Imani (faith). Ironically, the principles promote non-violence and turn the focus from radical activity in the United States, particularly in Watts, to the exploration of an African past, the adoption of African hairstyles and traditional dress, and other interests that Baraka comes to identify as idealistic. Exploring cultural roots replaced the emphasis on the current politics of poverty and racism in the nation's ghettos. The paradoxes intensify when it becomes apparent that the notions popularized by Baraka, the writer, contrast sharply with the behavior of Karenga, the so-called activist. However, it is not until 1974 that Baraka declared one cannot be revolutionary "merely by dressing in African clothes and speaking Swahili and cultivating a superior diet."<sup>29</sup>

The 6th Pan-African Congress became the forum for an ideological showdown between the Pan-African cultural nationalist and the newly emerging Marxist. The Congress convened in Dar es Salaam, June 19-27, 1974. Addressing the Congress, Baraka charged that:

the pseudo-powerful American Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie could, objectively, be the new agents of yet another scramble for Afrika. By saying Black is beautiful or we are an Afrikan people, yet representing the values and designs of U.S. imperialism.<sup>30</sup>

This allegation struck the heart of Karenga's movement. Placing himself as a buffer between the black bourgeois and the angry blacks wanting to destroy their system of oppression, Karenga's double coded language is never more dubious than when he substitutes the real land base that Malcolm referred to with his own metaphorical concept of nation, to mean culture. Apparently his best disciple could not immediately decode the rhetoric. While Baraka was patterning his BCD (Black Community Defense and Development) organization on the model he saw in US, Karenga was using US to undermine the very community Baraka thought they were defending. In light of Bruce Tyler's findings, Karenga's statements on Black Art, and especially concerning the revolution, call into question his personal integrity. Karenga claimed the role of black art/culture was to "expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution,"<sup>31</sup> a revolution he worked to ensure would never arrive. On the one hand, Karenga praises the poetry of Baraka which tells black

people "you can't steal nothing from the white man. He's already stole it, he owes you anything you want, even his life. Black People take the shit you want, take their lives if need, but get what you want, what you need. Dance up and down the street, turn all the music up[.]"<sup>32</sup> and on the other hand, when the music was "turned up" in the form of riots and looting, Karenga and the Commission on Human Relations (CHR) worked assiduously to "turn outer directed impulses inward into a benign Black cultural nationalism," in effect to "turn Blacks away from threats to invade white communities."<sup>33</sup>

The African-American community in Los Angeles, especially the middle class members of the community, supported the CHR program to pacify the genuine militants by adopting a program of "tactical Black Nationalism." Ron Karenga, Tommy Jacquette, Billy J. Tidwell (The Sons of Watts) and Ralph Reese were employed by the CHR to act as "street agents" to control the black radicals.<sup>34</sup> Bruce Tyler (himself a member of the Afro-American Association in Los Angeles) reported that the CHR used Karenga to intimidate the African-American community as a whole and all of its various factions, and social classes.<sup>35</sup> Part of defusing the militant dance-in-the-street-violence in Watts was achieved by providing a cultural outlet. The result was the Watts Summer Festival. Karenga was a major organizer of the festival.

To practice a conservative brand of practical politics as Karenga and his group did is not condemnable, highly respected groups, the NAACP, SCLC, and others do precisely this. What is, perhaps, unconscionable is the effort of US to maintain a veneer of radicalism through deceptive rhetoric. Ironically, many of Karenga's maxims proved true in unexpected ways. There was immediate rejection of the Watts Summer Festival by many members of the community. The festival, referred to as "Darkey Carnival" was criticized harshly by the Black Panthers. By 1970, there was an all-out cry for support for the festival. One newspaper editorial pleaded, "Watts Festival Deserves Support."<sup>36</sup> Thus, Karenga's insistence that culture must emanate from the people and not be forced upon them is entirely appropriate. But, perhaps what is most intriguing is the degree to which cultural activities can be manipulated to manage conflict.

The Pan-African and most popular aspect of Karenga's philosophy is the annual celebration of Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa is adopted and adapted from traditional African harvest festivals. The word itself translates from the Kiswahili as "first fruits." Kwanzaa is a celebration of blackness, a time set aside (December 26-January 1) to review and commit to memory the principles of the Nguzo Saba. It offers a Pan-African, non-materialistic holiday or holy days. It is spiritual, celebrating as it does aspects of African cultural values and giving attention to the ancestors, yet it is non-religious. Its acceptability to the masses of black people in the United States owes mostly to its flexibility. The people can adapt it to their life styles. Many people choose Kwanzaa as an alternative to Christmas while others elect to celebrate both. Another reason for the popularity and spread of Kwanzaa is deeply rooted in the black folk experience and love for holidays and celebrations. Any movement that ignores the rhythms of the people, regardless of how counter-revolutionary those rhythms appear to be, is doomed to isolation and failure.

While Kwanzaa caught on, the fact that it was invented as a diversionary tactic cannot be ignored. Kwanzaa might liberate the mind, but it does little to eliminate economic and political oppression. The US Organization failed to become a far reaching mass movement, but certainly was successful in turning "Black gangsters, criminals, and cutthroats against the radicals,"<sup>37</sup> namely the Black Panthers. The violence between the Panthers and the US Organization became notorious.

Karenga, an intellectual, with a Ph.D. degree, specializing in African Studies, is also affected by the alienation of the artist/scholar, as was Du Bois and many others. In looking back, one certainly cannot dismiss the impact of the Black Arts and cultural nationalist Pan-African movements. Culture is crucial to revolution, but it is not revolution.

By 1974, writing from a prison cell at the California Men's Colony in San Luis Obispo, Karenga also embraced a socialist rhetoric. His stance, like Baraka's, further alienated him from the people. In fact, his scientific socialism, which is now being referred to as revolutionary Pan-Africanism, affronted African-American and African spirituality, an abiding aspect of black culture. Influenced by the writings of Mao, and separated from any real understanding of the black church experience, Karenga states:

A correct and serious grasp of reality clearly shows that mythology, spookism and metaphysics come from our failure to understand and master nature and society. We need gods because we feel alone and alienated and powerless before the artificial majesty of capitalist might.<sup>38</sup>

His analysis fails to understand the African concept of God in all things, the African wisdom to coexist with rather than "master" nature. It fails too in its grasp of the messianic community that informs the African and African-American church experience which are essentially communal experiences.

Discarding God for scientific realism destroys the very spirit, rhythm, and charismatic soul of our people. On June 20, 1971 Karenga was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison for the torture of two African-American women. In an article published in *The Black Scholar*, Clyde Halisi, Chairman of the Temple of Kawaida (US) published an article, actually an editorial, as it offers no documentation, about the arrest and trial, which after having sufficiently praised Maulana Karenga, closed by remarking: "Not one rally was held, not one bail fund created, not one objection made,"<sup>39</sup> in support of Karenga. Halisi assumed, as did many of the so-called revolutionaries, that the people had been duped by the white press. He apparently underestimated the African-American community's ability to think and judge for itself.

Referring to the past two decades and liberation movements among African-Americans, John Henrik Clarke states that "in the United States and in Africa, the Caribbean Islands and in other parts of the world where people of African descent are numerous, the 1960s was a period when we discarded one set of illusion and took on another."<sup>40</sup> Black power was an illusion, and Umoja, the first principle of the Kawaida, was an illusion, as there certainly was no unity between the Panthers and the US Organization.

Other problems with the movement involved the homomania, male chauvinism, ego mania, the styling and profiling of too many "brothers", the "prone" position of

too many "sisters", the alienation of too many ordinary people due to blacker than thou attitudes, and too many contradictions between theory and practice.

The solution to African-American liberation, Baraka says, is revolution. He continues "we thought that then, but we didn't understand what it meant, really. . . . But we made the same errors Fanon and Cabral laid out, if we had but read them, understood them."<sup>41</sup> Pan-Africanist cultural movements have suffered from and still are hampered by sexism and fanaticism of many kinds. Underlying these problems and petty differences of culturalists is the more fundamental problem of their failure to merge with political and economic programs in order to create an holistic approach to the liberation of black people.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Lacy, *Cheer the Lonesome Traveler* (New York, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Addison Gayle, "Cultural Nationalism and the Black Novelist in America," *Black Books Bulletin* 1 (Fall 1971) pp 4-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution* (Atlanta, 1980) p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: International, 1958) p. 343.

<sup>7</sup> Okechukwu Mezu, *The Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (New York: Fairleigh Dickerson UP, 1973) p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Elliot Rudwick, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Propagandist of Negro Protest* (New York, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Du Bois, *Autobiography*, p. 343.

<sup>10</sup> Lacey, *Cheer the Lonesome Traveler*, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Du Bois, "Marcus Garvey," *The Crisis* (December 2, 1920) pp. 58-60.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976) p. 184.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Martin, *Literary Garveyism* (Dover, Mass., 1983) p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York, 1967) p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Damas, *Pigments* (Paris, 1962) P. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Ba, *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (Princeton, 1964) p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> H.H. Bell, "Negro Nationalism: A Factor in Emigration Projects, 1858-1961," *Journal of Negro History* (January, 1962) pp. 42-53.

<sup>19</sup> Martin, *Literary Garveyism*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Imamu Baraka, "Needed: A Revolutionary Strategy," *The Black Scholar* 6 (October 1975) p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Baraka, *Black Arts* (Newark, 1966) p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Baraka, *Home* (New York, 1966) p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Baraka, "The Pan-African Party and the Black Nation," *The Black Scholar* (March 1971) pp. 24-32.

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd Brown, *Amir Baraka* (Boston, 1980) p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979* (New York, 1984) p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Baraka, *Black Arts*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Tyler, *Black Radicalism in Southern California 1950-1982* (Diss. UCLA, 1983) p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Werner Sollors, *Amir Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism* (New York, 1978) p. 226.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> Ron Karenga, "Black Art: A Rhythmic Reality of Revolution," *Negro Digest* 3 (January 1968) pp. 5-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Tyler, *Black Radicalism* p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 11; also see Jerry Cohen and William Murphy, *Burn, Baby Burn: The Los Angeles Race Riots August 1965* (New York, 1966).

<sup>35</sup> Tyler, *Black Radicalism* p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Editorial, "Watts Festival Deserves Support," *Los Angeles Times* (August 4, 1970, pt. II, pg. 1, col. 3).

<sup>37</sup> Tyler, *Black Radicalism* p. 401.

<sup>38</sup> Karenga, "Which Road: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, Socialism?" *The Black Scholar* 6 (October 1974, 21-30) p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Imamu Halisi, "Maulana Ron Karenga: Black Leader in Captivity," *The Black Scholar* (May 1972) pp. 12-16.

<sup>40</sup> John Henrik Clarke, "Pan-Americanism," a lecture sponsored by the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church (Atlanta, December 2, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Baraka, "The Congress of Afrikan People," *The Black Scholar* (March 1971) pp. 24-32.