

Embracing Change :: Transforming for Tomorrow

by Kwasi Akwamu

"i, believe in the Community as more important than the individual."

~New Afrikan Creed

"i believe in the family and the Community, and in the Community as a family, and i will work to make this concept live." ~New Afrikan Creed₂

Change isn't always easy. Without vision, it is a move into the unknown, the unpredictable. We become comfortable with the status quo, even as We complain about how our needs aren't being met, or how hard life is for us. It is the devil We know. We know he kills, but We kinda think that We will somehow slide by unscathed. If We manage to escape the police bullet, or to even keep some semblance of a decent job, that utility bill, and grocery bill – that keeps going up – is guaranteed to terrorize us on schedule.

Despite all that We know from our experience on this earth, We ignore the heaviness of it for the sake of trying not to be driven stone crazy by it. Oppression is oppressive. And it aint going anywhere, until We slay the beast once and for all. That is what liberation is supposed to be about: freedom from and the freedom to. Yet, the best We can seem to do is act like it doesn't exist and hope it doesn't cause any major complications in the days ahead.

We avoid change because it seems impossible. Daunting. We can't even get along. Can't trust one another. We're afraid of being betrayed once again by someone (or someones) We wanted to believe in. Folks can't even be on time, or do what they say they gon' do, how are We supposed to believe in change?

The pain We feel is real. It isn't abstract, it exists. It is a living thing, and was borne somewhere. It was here when We arrived, so it seems organic to our existence in this lifetime. But it wasn't always this way, this bad.

Humanity became cruel, and is getting worse. Humanity lost its humanity, forgot the social basis for its existence. Ubuntu₃. *i am because We are and because We are therefore i am*. Some simply say, *i am We*.

Rather than cooperate, We compete. The greater good is sacrificed for greed and personal gratification. *Me, myself and I*. Toxicity at its ugliest.

Rather than share, We hoard. And flex on those who don't got. Those who has historically had the least flex the hardest. Materialism becomes a central part of our identities. Relationships are commodified. No romance without finance.

How does one even begin to create change in the face of this madness? How is it even imaginable that We could do anything that would leave a noticeable impression on the future? Where do We even start? And what exactly is it supposed to look like? How will i notice it when it appears?

All real change starts with self. It doesn't end there, but it absolutely starts there. It is complemented with vision.

Liberation for New Afrikan₄ people is ultimately about restoring our humanity. It is about putting the pieces back together that were deliberately broken so that We might be more easily taken advantage of. We are both oppressed and degraded to facilitate our exploitation. And as simple as this sounds, it is true.

That is how capitalism took root, that system that is adamant about ownership and private property, and being an individual separate from society. It started with owning us, Afrikan captives. Then they said We were less than beasts of burden. We were said to be good for nothing, but charged with doing everything. Cognitive dissonance – that notion of acting like We don't know We did all that made this land prosper, and doubting that We could do it again for ourselves – dogs our trail.

Restoring our humanity is remembering *ubuntu*, the social basis of our existence. Knowing that if We are not our brothers and sisters keepers, then We are not yet ready to be free. Indeed, liberation is a collective enterprise that only start with us as individuals but ends in togetherness.

When Fanon says “it is the liberated individual who undertakes to build the new society,”⁵ he means you must be the change that is to come, *now*. A living example of the kind of people that will populate the new society that comprises liberation. This requires transformation of the self. That is the first and most important change. It sounds challenging in the face of everything swirling around us. But it isn't an endeavor to be undertaken alone. Only *you* can change *you*, but the process is best and most effectively achieved communally, with others. Like starting a new diet or exercise routine, it is easier to do so with companions. No one can determine the food you eat but *you*; no one besides *you* can run the laps *you* need to run to lose those unwanted pounds. But someone who shares the vision can help keep us on course. We, in fact, help each other. And the more others, the more change.

Change is hard mostly because it seems you are swimming against the current. And, for the most part, that would be true. But if you are modeling a better tomorrow, unlearning false narratives, discovering your wildest potential, and working with others then liberation is just over the horizon. This is why vision is so important. We must envision the change that We wish to see and move towards it. Without change in ourselves, there can be no true change in the world around us. We must empty our carrying bags of all germs and toxins that might pollute the new society.

When We rediscover our humanity, We find it easier to share, to work with and on behalf of others. We find value in the old value systems that carried us over during difficult times. Like the mutual aid societies after the end of colonial bondage (enslavement). Or the rent parties of previous generations. We used to show up and show out for one another. We cared for each other, and knew that without one another We would not have made it as far as We have. This is what it means to go back and fetch it (sankofa)₆.

We were our best selves when We functioned as a community. Transformation requires

unlearning many of ways that We currently think, of the ways We currently relate to one another. We must cast away our aspirations and expectations of yesterday if they don't fit squarely with the vision of tomorrow. *Re-learning* how to work together is liberation work. Yet all of the value systems We say We cherish point to cooperation, reciprocity, sharing. None advise us to endlessly accumulate that which nature has allotted for all of us.

The *New Afrikan Creed* exhorts us towards collective struggle, to fashion victory in concert with our brothers and sisters. The *Nguzo Saba*, encourages us to practice *ujamaa*, to build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together. This is one of the ways by which We begin to reclaim our humanity.

NOTES:

1. Author intentionally utilizes an intentional style of grammar that includes using a lower-case “i” and upper-case “We” to reinforce the notion of the Community as more important than the individual. Additionally, spellings of Afrika with a “k” versus a “c” derives from the realization that the “c” is rarely utilized in anglicized Afrikan grammar, and that use of the “k” spelling suggests a liberated cultural orientation, freed of eurocentric connotations.
2. The *New Afrikan Creed* is a set of social, economic and political values, beliefs and commitments that originated in 1969 with the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, and is recited below in full:

i believe in the spirituality, humanity and genius of Black People, and in Our new pursuit of these values.

i believe in the family and the community, and in the community as a family, and i will work to make this concept live.

i believe in the community as more important than the individual.

i believe in constant struggle for freedom, to end oppression and build a better world. i believe in collective struggle; in fashioning victory in concert with my brothers and sisters.

i believe that the fundamental reason Our oppression continues is that We, as a people, lack the power to control Our lives.

i believe that the fundamental way to gain that power, and end oppression, is to build a sovereign Black Nation.

i believe that all the land in America, upon which We have lived for a long time, which We have worked and built upon, and which We have fought to stay on, is land that belongs to us as a people.

i believe in the Malcolm X Doctrine: that We must organize upon this land, and hold a plebiscite, to tell the world by a vote that We are free and Our land

independent, and that after the vote, We must stand ready to defend Ourselves, establishing the nation beyond contradiction.

Therefore, i pledge to struggle without cease until We have won sovereignty. i pledge to struggle without fail until We have built a better condition than the world has yet known.

i will give my life, if that is necessary. i will give my time, my mind, my strength and my wealth because this is necessary.

i will follow my chosen leaders and help them.

i will love my brothers and sisters as myself.

i will steal nothing from a brother or sister, cheat no brother or sister, misuse no brother or sister, inform on no brother or sister, and spread no gossip.

i will keep myself clean in body, dress and speech, knowing that i am a light set on a hill, a true representative of what we are building.

i will be patient and uplifting with my brothers & sisters, and i will seek by word and by deed to heal the black family; to bring into the movement and into the community, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters left by the wayside.

Now, freely and of my own will, i pledge this creed, for the sake of freedom for my people and a better world, on pain of disgrace and banishment if i prove false. For i am - by the inspiration of Our ancestors and the Grace of Our Creator — a New Afrikan.

3. Ubuntu is South Afrikan term that in its basic meaning translates to *humanity*, however it embodies a deeper cultural/philosophical worldview that is often translated as *i am because We are and because We are, therefore, i am*. It alludes to human interconnectedness.
4. New Afrikanas a reference of identity refers to those Afrikans of different ethnicities who arrived in amerika as a result of human trafficking, and having evolved into a new single people as a result of their struggle against oppression and for freedom over the course of 246 years of enslavement, and for many generations after slavery ended, til today. The term itself was coined by Queen Mother Audley Moore in 1968 during the Black Government Conference held in Detroit.
5. Fanon, Frantz. “Decolonization and Independence,” in *Towards the African Revolution*, 1967. Monthly Review Press. He elaborates: “The liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation. An authentic national liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his [or her] own liberation.”
6. *Sankofa* is a symbol in the pantheon of West Afrikan adinkra symbols; it is depicted as a bird, that is reaching its beak backwards to retrieve what it has left behind it. Sankofa is roughly translated as “go back and fetch it,” referring to the history, culture, values that sustained us across time.
7. The Nguzo Saba is the value system, consisting of seven principles, that serves

as the foundation for the cultural observance of Kwanzaa, and is recited below in full:

Umoja (Unity) *To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.*

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) *To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.*

Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) *To build and maintain our community together and make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together.*

Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) *To build and maintain our own stores, shops and other businesses and to profit from them together.*

Nia (Purpose) *To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.*

Kuumba (Creativity) *To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.*

Imani (Faith) *To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.*