

Fertile Ground

by Nilima Mwendo (February 2018)

We, as African American people, have been fighting for liberation since being kidnapped from countries on the continent of Africa. While our struggle has been continuous it emerges in periods of peaks and valleys. The 1960s and early 1970s was a particular peak in the Liberation Struggle.

During the '60s and early '70s, the time was once again ripe for revolutionary struggle and organizations with varying philosophical perspectives saw a significant increase in active memberships. Collectively, African American people both within organizations and as individuals fought for liberation of our people. We inspired, motivated, whether positively or negatively, each other by our acts, and in varying degrees supported each other's activism. In doing so, we learned the power of organizing.

If we can make a similar more current comparison, we point to the people of Tunisia, who, in mass, stood up against government corruption, brutality and oppression and for their own liberation, peaking in January 2010 after Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor, set himself on fire. Just as the Tunisian Revolution was the catalyst to the Arab Spring, where government after government toppled in the midst of the people's fight for a more fair, representative and just state, so it was throughout the continent of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. Revolutions were forged in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Angola, South Africa, where African freedom fighters drove out European rulers and took back their country from European domination. Although we see European and now Chinese strongholds in many African countries today, the fight was for self-determination and self-rule.

In the United States, the next wave of revolution took hold during the same time. Solutions to the injustice, discrimination, oppression, genocide of African-American people varied among the leading U.S. organizations in 1960s, ranging from integration and civil rights to separation and self-determination. Some of these leading organizations were the Nation of Islam, the Black Panther Party, The Organization US, The Organization of Afro-American Unity, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, NAACP and the Republic of New Afrika (RNA). The Republic of New Afrika's Provisional Government claimed 5 states within the United States to establish its own separate nation for the New Afrikan.

Around the country, African American students on college and university campuses joined the groundswell and made demands on the administration for equality, justice and civil rights for African Americans.

In New Orleans, the Consumer's League fought for employment of African Americans in retail stores and to be served at lunch counters in Woolworth's, McCrory's and other white establishments that forbade by law African Americans to work there or eat at their lunch

counters. They won this fight in the late 1950s. Oretha Castle Haley and Rev. Avery Alexander, both civil rights activists, were among its members.

The Nation of Islam was growing in New Orleans in the 1960s. They had purchased a building to house its mosque in 1968 and later another building for the Sister Clara Muhammad School.

In 1970, the Black Panther Party, New Orleans chapter, established their nationally successful tutoring and food programs near the Desire Housing Development. New Orleans police made several attempts to oust them, with one incident leading to a gunfight as Panthers fought back in self-defense. In an incident a month or so later, 250 heavily armed police confronted the Panthers, but residents of the housing development stood between police and Panther members, forcing police to withdraw.

Students at Southern University in both New Orleans and Baton Rouge staged demonstrations from 1968 into the early 1970s. Two students on Southern in Baton Rouge's campus were killed by an East Baton Rouge deputy sheriff in 1972 during one of many peaceful student demonstrations against administration officials to force a change in university policies and a stronger curricula. No one was ever charged with the deaths.

Public and private elementary and high schools did not teach African history, culture, principles, values and if so, it was distorted or skewed in ways that represented a white cultural perspective. A small collective in New Orleans, made up of educators, lawyers, artists, and revolutionaries espoused a philosophy of education that would promote self-determination and self-reliance for African people wherever they are in the world. In 1970, this small collective, led by Tayari kwa Salaam and Kenneth Ferdinand, started Dokpwe Work/Study Center. Dokpwe was an independent Black school focused on teaching pre-school age children. Children were taught the history and culture of African people, science, math, reading, and writing from an Afrocentric worldview. The school operated out of a house and a two-lot-sized yard owned by Kenneth's parents. Tayari kwa Salaam, Kenneth Ferdinand and other students suspended their college education to develop this kind of education Dokpwe Work/Study Center in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. They governed and operated the school as a collective, sharing responsibilities, cooperative buying for the school and their respective families as well as co-creating a new kind of curricula for the African American preschooler.

But later within Dokpwe's collective, there was a philosophical difference in direction. One segment of Dokpwe believed that our focus should be solely on running the school. The other segment believed that the school was one aspect of our broader work toward liberation for our people. After much discussion, some heated, the group split. In 1973, those who believed that we needed an organization to fight for our liberation on various fronts, including education, started Ahidiana. Ahidiana was a Pan-African nationalist organization that used the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles) and the organized ideology of [Kawaida](#) as a large part of its fundamental ideology.

Ahidiana's purpose was "to strive for and maintain the national liberation of African American people by working unceasingly for the unification, liberation and independence of a.) African American people, b.) all people of African descent, and c.) the continent of Africa as a whole." To build on this fundamental mission, we maintained a circular practice of *study, practice, analysis, then back to study*. We studied and discussed works of Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Amiri Baraka and Maulana Karenga, to name a few; then applied what we learned to our practice. We critiqued and evaluated the work that we did and in the context of the political climate; then made changes and adjustments in our practice as we continued to learn, analyze, develop and grow.

Ahidiana first consisted of *Ahidiana Work/Study Center*, an independent Black school and *The Black Community Organization*, a political body whose objective was to politically educate the African-American community, wage struggle against exploitation and oppression, and aid in the process of national liberation. Later we opened *New Afrika Books*, a bookstore specializing in books about the Black Liberation struggle of African people worldwide and the Third World; and also *Ahidiana Habari*, our publishing company, where we published books, pamphlets, our position papers, our quarterly magazine, called *NKOMBO*, posters; flyers; and other works. Members of Ahidiana ran each of these entities, based on skill sets, profession, and time. Everyone fulfilled a role. Ahidiana was a commitment. There were no salaries or stipends but a group of African Americans dedication to Ahidiana's mission and purpose.

In this online publication, we have included a number of Ahidiana's published works and position papers written by members of Ahidiana that came out of our collective circle process, *study, practice, analyze, and back to study*. We hope that these writings will inspire you to organize, study, practice/act, analyze, then complete the circle by going back to study for the liberation of African American people wherever we are. The first publication is our fundamental and foundational document, Ahidiana's Operating Principles.