

THERE WAS A TIME

by Kalamu ya Salaam (2019)

We used to proudly say Afrikan people. That was after the civil rights movement, in the midst of the black power movement. We said: we paid our dues, now we want our change! Not simply a name change but the whole shebang. We called it nationtime. As Haki said: moving from plan to planet.

Ah, you could literally hear us coming round the corner, early in the morning, young men and women jogging through the downtown New Orleans Lower Nine neighborhood. "Practice the values and love revolution" we sang as we ran.

So bold were we. Human beings united and on fire to effect conscious struggle. To create revolution in America. For truth. Not fantasy or only dreams. We worked at it. It was not easy but we did it. We built schools and bookstores. Food co-opts and deep study sessions.

And we were not alone. We had comrades all across the country. And even contacts around the world. Visitors from Africa. We went to China. Nothing human was foreign to us. We really, really believed in ourselves. In our capacity to make change, just as was happening everywhere on the planet in the tumult of the seventies.

Some people have forgotten how momentous those moments were, but we will never forget. Always remember. Our vows that we could always do more. Literally up at dawn or well before. Begging no one for nothing. We put our nickels and dimes together. Created our own currency of shared struggle.

We celebrated Kwanzaa and Marcus Garvey Day. Taught our community to be proud of who we were. Who we wanted to be. To face down the police as well as work with each other. Christians and black muslims. Non-believers and hangers-on. The bow-ties and the dashiki wearers. Oh, what a glorious time it was.

The Isley Brothers sang: 'now write that down'. And we did. These papers testify to our determination. Our insights, opinions, visions and aspirations.

Some may think we failed. For surely nationtime ended with us still American citizens. But what we did and who we were changed America. Changed New Orleans. As an extended family, we and our children confronted the establishment in the streets, in front of banks and in the face of the police. We were part of the movement that gave birth to Obama and helped create the conditions that led to his election, although that was not our intention.

We wanted the new world. And, on a real tip, that is exactly what we got. What we helped bring into existence. A new world. Not the same-old, same-old America.

In a very important way we got what we wanted. We wanted change. We hoped for a nation and although what we received was not exactly what we wanted. Was not a nation of new afrikans. Nevertheless, we were no longer negroes, and all our sacrifices and struggle was not in vain.

Our youth was not wasted.

As we read today what we wrote yesterday. As anyone can see: our ideas of a new world was then and remains now the aspirations of conscious people everywhere on the planet. We wanted a better life. A more beautiful life. And look at the world now. Not quite in full bloom but a long, long way from what it was.

And Ahidiana was one of the important levers of history that moved our world and ourselves to become better than we were. Yes, there was a time. We remember and are inspired by who we were. And the way we shaped our world.